

## Aviation Themed Films in Turkish Cinema

### Türk Sinemasında Havacılık Temalı Filmler

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#### Abstract

Some researchers describe aviation and cinema as fields developed in parallel timelines (Paris,1995; Crompton, 2007; Carlson, 2012; Ferguson, 2015). Aviation films attract audiences' attention across eras and typically emerge as political productions based on national codes and nationalist discourse. Art, particularly cinema, can be seen as one of the essential ideological instruments in establishing national consciousness. The role of art as a state policy becomes increasingly significant during the founding period of the Republic of Türkiye as a means of national identity. The state-initiated cinema activities shortly after its invention in the Ottoman Empire and continued them during the Republic's early years. Although the events recorded in the early periods were deemed necessary for the state, it cannot be said that the new regime and national identity were effectively constructed through cinema as much as other arts. However, the relationship between art, politics, and cinema was recognized over time, and productions in this field began to be produced. The present study assumes that cinema as a political tool is vital in nation-building. The study aims to examine the political function of aviation-themed Turkish films, with a specific focus on *Hürkuş Göklerdeki Kahraman (2018)* (Hürkuş: Hero of the Sky), a fictional action aviation film directed by Kudret Sabancı. This film serves as a compelling case study for our research. The production was analyzed through ideological and historical film criticism.

#### Keywords:

Turkish cinema,  
aviation, national  
identity, art

#### Öz

Havacılık ve sinema, bazı araştırmacılar tarafından paralel olarak gelişen alanlar olarak tanımlanmıştır (Paris,1995; Crompton, 2007; Carlson, 2012; Ferguson,2015). Her dönem izleyicinin ilgisini çeken havacılık filmleri genellikle ulusal kodlar üzerine kurulu, milliyetçi söylemi temel alan, politik yapımlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Sanat ve özel olarak da sinema alanı, ulus bilincini tesis etmede önemli ideolojik enstrümanlardan biri olarak görülebilmektedir. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin kuruluş döneminde de sanat devlet politikası olarak ulusal kimliği oluşturmada bir araç olarak benimsenmiştir. İcadından kısa bir süre sonra, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda devlet eliyle sinema faaliyetleri başlamış, Cumhuriyetin ilk yıllarında da devam etmiştir. İlk dönemler devlet açısından önemli görülen olaylar kayda alınmış olmasına rağmen sinemanın yeni rejimi ve ulus kimliğini inşa etme sürecinde diğer sanatlar kadar etkin kullanıldığını söylemek mümkün değildir. Bununla birlikte sanat, politika ve sinema ilişkisi zamanla fark edilmiş ve bu alana dair yapımlar üretilmeye başlanmıştır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada, sinemanın politik bir araç olarak ulus inşasında önemli olduğu varsayımından hareket edilmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı havacılık temalı Türk filmlerinin ulus inşasındaki politik işlevini irdelemektir. Bu amaçla ulaşılabilen filmler tasnif edilmiştir. Çalışmanın odak noktasına ise yönetmenliğini Kudret Sabancı'nın yaptığı, kurmaca aksiyon havacılık filmi olan *Hürkuş: Göklerdeki Kahraman (2018)* alınmıştır. Yapım ideolojik ve tarihsel film eleştirisi metoduyla incelenmiştir.

#### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Türk sineması,  
havacılık, ulus kimliği,  
sanat

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## Introduction

The relationship between art and ideology is more complex than defining these two fields. It is also possible to trace this relationship back to the emergence of art. Based on the notion that there is an ideology where the subject exists, it is possible to conclude that art and cinema are highly political acts. Cinema, which involves “selection” and “placement” at every stage, conveys the creator’s view to those who watch it. For this reason, cinema is a field that can function as a means of art, communication, or entertainment, but in every case, it also contains a political approach. Despite being evaluated as a tool of critical attitude in art, mainstream productions often convey the discourse of dominant ideology. Films allow the viewer to comprehend the political trends of the era they were created in and offer valuable information.

Since the early days of cinema, states have recognized the power of cinema to construct ideology, and cinema has been used for this purpose. Similarly, for the Turks, the Ottoman Army was the first field of activity for cinema. However, it is not easy to answer the question of the extent to which cinema entered Turkish lands within a few years of its invention, was valued by the state, or was effectively used politically. Having seen and heard archival footage and academic research in recent years has augmented our limited knowledge.

The study intends to give an idea of the role played by aviation films in strengthening the national consciousness. The study’s underlying assumption is that art, especially cinema, can be seen as one of the tools in the political construction of national consciousness. The focus of the research, considering the limitations of the study, is the most recent aviation movie made in Turkish Cinema, *Hürkuş: Göklerdeki Kahraman* (2018) (*Hürkuş: The Hero of the Sky*) movie. The method of analysis used was ideological and historical film criticism. Ideological criticism helped highlight the overt or covert discourse behind communication texts, while historical criticism was essential to examine the political approach behind the “reconstruction of the past” (Kabadayı, 2013, p. 63). We analyzed the ideological discourse of the film within the framework of the concept of national consciousness. We reviewed the literature to identify the prominent aviation films in the historical process. In this context, we highlight the main political discourses of the films in question. The main themes highlighted by these films are briefly examined. During the study period, the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) launched an aviation series called *Hür* on its international digital platform, Tabii. However, the *Hür* series was not included in the study.

## National Identity, Art, and Cinema

Immediately after the French Revolution, absolute monarchies could no longer survive, and the concepts of nationality and nationalism began to rise. The Industrial Revolution and modernization enabled communities to gather in cities, and new class movements emerged. Especially with the significant changes in French society and Europe, industrial activities developed, the level of education rose, and feudalism weakened.

Gradually, the bourgeoisie gained power (Lefebvre, 2015, pp. 105-119). These new class movements also stressed the idea of the will of the people instead of the government, which derives its power and authority from God and divinity. The nation-state, national sovereignty, and republican structure have become more reasonable societal governance options (Gürkan, 2022, pp. 53-72).

Human communities cluster in specific geographies due to their ties and similarities. A nation, a controversial concept in social sciences and political science, is a group of people with a shared history, the same language, and similar beliefs (Heywood, 2014, p. 150). However, it is also typical for human communities to show differences within themselves. The tolerance of these differences within the community may vary according to sociological and cultural characteristics. People can easily tolerate some differences, while they cannot tolerate others. This shift in tolerance may be due to society's different cultural and social characteristics. While differences are functional for constructing identity and cultural richness, demonizing the other paves the way for conflicts.

According to Gellner, there is a profound link between the rise of the concept of nation and nationalism and industrialization (1983, p. 19-38). Industrialization, which necessitates a centralized education, also brings language and the shared past to the fore as a unifying factor. For this reason, forming nation consciousness in agricultural societies is impossible. Common language, history, and culture are considered unifying elements of the concept of nation. These concepts, which are directly related to nationalism, advocate the intrinsic unity of the nation in terms of shared values. According to Anthony Giddens, nation and nationalism are distinctive features of the modern state. Nationalism is "a phenomenon that is primarily psychological, the affiliation of individuals to a set of symbols and beliefs emphasizing communality among the members of a political order" (Giddens, 1989, p. 116). Although it is a view that is compatible with democratic considerations, nationalism can also lead to authoritarianism in some cases. Those in power prevent political movements under the pretext of the integrity of the state and the nation. Such authoritarian tendencies, such as uniformization, can have consequences far from the goal of unity; in other words, they can lead to the marginalization of the situation.

Reinforcing national identity is essential to nationalism as it helps ensure social cohesion and integration. "The republican conception of the nation, which links entry into nationality to volition as a principle and prioritizes citizenship over cognate kinship, makes it possible to 'nation-build' in the context of differences by basing membership in a nation on characteristics that can be acquired later" (Bilgin, 2007, pp. 261-262). Thus, beyond biological characteristics such as ancestry and blood, shared beliefs and values, norms, culture, and language that can be learned and acquired over time come to the fore. Nation-building, in line with the ideas developed with industrialization and modernization, points to the motivation of a human community to live with common goals and the instruments for achieving this motivation. In this process of formation and adoption, various means of communication and propaganda can be used effectively. According to Andreas Wimmer, the success of nation-building has essential consequences for countries;

“Effective nation-building brings important and positive consequences. Alliances that cut across the entire territory of a country depoliticize ethnic divisions. Politics is not perceived as a zero-sum game in which ethnic groups struggle to control the state. Instead, more substantial policy issues concerning what the state should actually do come to the foreground of the debate. Inclusive political coalitions also foster a sense of ownership of the state and promote the ideal of a collective purpose beyond one’s family, village, clan, or profession” (2018).

In the nation-building process, which is crucial in ensuring unity and integration, cinema wields a transformative power like other mass communication and art fields. With its power to influence the masses, cinema has been employed to promote various ideological approaches during specific historical periods. In modern nation-building, cinema emerges as a potent tool, alongside general education, to bridge social differences and foster a shared national identity.

“Since the beginning of the 20th century, cinema has assumed the function that the novel and the newspaper had assumed in Europe in the 18th century and reinforced the nation-building processes of societies worldwide. In a country like the United States, which received immigrants from all over the world, people who did not know the language of the new land they came from became aware of the new imaginary community they were a part of largely through films and developed national belonging during the first 30-35 years of silent cinema” (Yılmazok, 2018, p. 141).

Many people believe that mass media homogenizes the nation, increasing the sense of harmony and unity. Ensuring permanent unity and harmony is a crucial aspect of nation-building. Thus, awareness, continuity, and dissemination of the consciousness of national identity gain importance. Aksoy and Arslantaş (2010, p. 4) assert that artefacts, such as paintings and sculptures serve as tools with symbolic and solid effects to sanctify the regime by the public and to ensure that its values are adopted and supported. Similarly, the power of cinema, one of the most critical communication and art tools of the 21st century, to influence the masses is undeniable. Cinema is a political tool that receives state support when it aligns with the state’s agenda. For this reason, art and cinema, in general, are of great importance in the formation and permanence of national consciousness. The remarkable monuments, impressive architectural structures, sculptures, galleries, and movies are symbolically essential indicators of the nation-building process of a community.

“Terms such as national or nationalism have appeared in history both in our country after the founding of the Republic of Türkiye and in countries such as India, Algeria, some African countries, and Balkan countries that gained their freedom after their national liberation struggles. Some countries effectively use cinema to create a national identity and collective subconscious” (Vardar, 2006, p. 30).

Most of the time, films are encouraged or directly supported by the state because they are functional in terms of nation-building or the continuation of the unified state of the nation. The state has generally deprived productions with contrary attitudes or ideologies of its support. This situation, which can be considered harmful in terms of cinema developing an independent discourse and supporting a critical environment, is instrumental in the ideological discourse of the state.

## Relationship Between Cinema and Aviation

Aviation has been one of humanity's most significant aspirations throughout history. Numerous studies have been conducted on this topic by researchers. Kites, hot air balloons, zeppelins, and eventually airplanes were developed as vehicles that satisfied humanity's passions and revolutionized the transportation and military fields. Two bicycle-making brothers' enthusiasm and entrepreneurial desire to fly, combined with their engineering know-how in bicycle production, enabled them to produce and fly the first powered airplane on December 17, 1903 (Crompton, 2007, p. 7). This event is considered one of the most important inventions that changed human history. These studies, which started with the desire to fly, fulfilled humanity's passion for aviation. They also paved the way for technological development in many different fields. Aviation vehicles have started to be used effectively in different fields, such as passenger and goods transportation, military purposes, and scientific activities. In addition, developments in aviation have also affected other scientific studies and broadened their horizons.

The development of aviation history and cinema followed similar timelines. Kevin L. Ferguson noted that essential events in aviation history overlap with the history of cinema, emphasizing that a few weeks after *The Great Train Robbery* (directed by Edwin S. Porter), released in December 1903, the Wright Brothers successfully made the world's first powered flight (2015, p. 309). The fact that *The Great Train Robbery*, considered the ancestor of fictional films, and the first motorized flight coincide simultaneously indicates that both fields will have an important place in human history. Similarly, Mark Carlson makes a historical connection between French illusionist and director Georges Méliès' *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) and the flight of the Wright Brothers (2012, p. 12). The film, which depicts a journey to the moon and is considered one of the starting points of science fiction cinema, has an essential place in cinema history. The movie is about an academic committee's flight to the moon with the space rocket they designed. The mission lands on the moon and conducts various research. In this respect, it is possible to place the production among the first science fiction films related to the theme of aviation and astronomy.

France produced the first known work on the aviation theme while pioneering cinematic activities. The thirty-second film *À la conquête de l'air* (1901), shot by Ferdinand Zecca, one of the directors of the Pathé film company, is considered by Michael Paris to be the first French aviation film and the first production to feature aircraft in flight (1995, p. 11). Ferdinand Zecca is piloting a fantastic air vehicle, a mix between an airship and a bicycle, over Paris. The movie, which has no narrative structure, was also released in England and America under *Flying Machine*. The production, which demonstrated a masterful cinematic trick for its time, played a crucial role in showcasing the evolution of cinema effects. It is believed that the filmmakers employed a green/blue screen-like technology to fabricate the flight illusion in the movie.

It is an interesting coincidence that *Wings* (1927), a film about aviation and action, won the Best Film award at the first Academy Awards, one of the most critical events in

the film industry. Directed by William Augustus Wellman, the film focuses on the lives of two young pilots. The movie, which also contains elements of romanticism, has a large production and realistic aerial action scenes for its time. Filmed with the support of the Army, 3500 military personnel and 65 pilots participated in the movie (Tatara, 2007). It was also the first and only silent film to win an Academy Award.

Throughout cinema history, aviation-themed films have garnered significant interest, leading many productions to adopt aviation as the central element of their narrative structure. Similarly, Turkish cinema also features films centered on aviation. Despite being frequently criticized for technical reasons, some productions stand out in terms of their success.

### **Aviation Films in Early Turkish Cinema**

The Turkish individuals have not only shown a profound interest in aviation but also made significant contributions to its history, driven by a pioneering spirit. From historical figures like Lagari Hasan Çelebi and Hazarfen Ahmet Çelebi, whose feats are chronicled in Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname*, to modern contributors like Mahmut Şevket Pasha, Vecihi Hürkuş, Nuri Demirağ, Süreyya İlmen Bey, Bedriye Tahir Gökmen, and Sabiha Gökçen, the history of Turkish aviation is rich with their achievements. The well-known support and interest of Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Founder of the Republic of Türkiye, in aviation further underscores the pioneering spirit of the Turkish people (Tatar, 2021).

As regards the History of Turkish Cinema, the first images related to aviation are not easy to find data. There is probably aviation-related footage in the records of the Gallipoli War. Researchers face an obstacle due to the lack of classification of many of these images. Among the classified footage, the first shots related to aviation are found in the footage shot by the operators of Sascha Film. This Austrian film company depicts the retreat of the Allied forces (“Çanakkale Muharebeleri”, ty). In a few seconds of footage are images of airplanes of the period. In addition to this image, the film includes images from the front, the entry of Turkish soldiers into Seddülbahir Castle, shots of the castle's walls, and images of British ships that had to retreat quickly. The movie also mentions the air raid and states that a paramedic, his wife, and three nurses lost their lives due to a falling bomb.

In August 1917, the Sipahi Quarry organized Fall Races at Veli Efendi Hippodrome and took some documentary aviation images. TRT produced, and Atalay Taşdiken directed the program titled *Tarihin Ruhu-Osmanlı Havacıları ve Havacılık Tesisleri*, which broadcast the footage in 2019. It is estimated that Cemil Filmer, who worked in the Central Army Cinema Department, shot the footage of the race and the planes, possibly accompanied by Sigmund Weinberg (Taşdiken, 2009). The movie states that German-made Albatros CII and CIII airplanes were present. Enver Pasha, the Minister of War, and Talat Pasha were also seen following the horse race and airplane shows. The Central Army Cinema Department took the aircraft footage in Yeşilköy in 1917, as mentioned in

the same program.

After the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, studies on aviation accelerated. As aviation's importance increased worldwide, Turkish administrative staff realized the deficiency in this field. To close the gap in this field, they founded the Turkish Aeronautical Society on February 16, 1925 (Gürer, 2008, p. 305). Eight months after establishing the Turkish Aeronautical Society, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk gave a directive to establish an aircraft factory in Kayseri (Yalçın, 2010, p. 569). The Republic also contacted the German government to develop the institution and establish an aircraft factory in Kayseri in 1925. For this purpose, on July 5, 1925, Şakir Hazım, Cevat Abbas Bey, Hasan İskender Bey, and Vecihi Hürkuş visited the Junkers Aircraft Factory in Dessau, Germany, and made inspections (Gürer, 2008, p. 305). The General Directorate of Cinema of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has a copy of the documentary footage of the visit. German operators allegedly filmed the Turkish Air Commission's visit to Germany in 1925. The film includes footage of workers working on the assembly line, the delegation's visit to the Temple of Venus in Wörlitz and their boat trip, various aerial shots, the take-off and landing maneuvers of the Junkers aircraft models of the period, and Vecihi Hürkuş's test flight with the Junkers Type A20 aircraft ("Türk Hava Komisyonunun Almanya ziyareti", 1925). The visit is an essential part of the history of Turkish aviation. After the visit, the officials established the first aircraft factory in Kayseri, the Republic of Türkiye.

Regarding films with a partially dramatic narrative structure, *Yeşil Bursa* (1932), directed by Vedat Örfi, stands out as one of the first productions with aviation-related shots. The film, which records the liberation day ceremonies of Bursa with actual shots, has an essential place in the history of Turkish Cinema. Tunç Boran emphasizes that although *Yeşil Bursa* does not have a place in the documentary tradition, the film could be an "intermediate form" between actuality film and documentary in the evolution of the history of documentary cinema in Türkiye (2023, p. 58). The other significance of the film for the study is the image of airplanes passing over the ceremony area (Örfi, 1932). The design of the movie does not revolve around the theme of aviation. However, it is among the first films to have data on this subject.

In addition to these images, there are many historical records related to aviation, such as the footage of the Turkish Army's maneuvers in Thrace in 1937, the Parachute Drill in Babaeski on July 7, 1940, and various activities of the Turkish Air Association in the archive of the General Directorate of Cinema of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Türkiye. The production of these films aimed to project a powerful image of Türkiye by showcasing regular military units, parades, delegation visits, and significant events of the era. The production of these films aimed to create a strong image of Türkiye, featuring regular military units, parades, delegation visits, and important events of the period. The films mainly consisted of promotional shots with an actual and partly dramatic structure.

### **Aviation-Themed Fiction Productions in Turkish Cinema**

The first fictional film with an aviation theme in Turkish Cinema was the 1949

film *Kanatlardan Türbe*, directed by Mümtaz Ener, who was also an actor in the Istanbul City Theater (Başar, 1949, p. 5; Özgüç, 2005, p. 383). Reha Yurdakul, one of the most critical actors in Turkish Cinema, played the leading role. The production is also Reha Yurdakul's first feature film. It was impossible to find detailed data about the movie about an unfortunate air accident experienced by Talat, an air officer and pilot. Various period newspapers emphasized that the film was related to the aviation theme (Akşam, 1949, p. 4). Moreover, they reported that the air units in Istanbul, Ankara, Eskişehir, and the Air Force Academy supported the filming of the movie (Başar, 1949, p. 5).

Directed by Halit Refiğ in 1963, *Şafak Bekçileri* stands out as one of the critical aviation productions. Turkish Cinema has produced two movies based on the aviation theme, and this is the second one. It stars Ekrem Bora, Göksel Arsoy, Sami Hazinses, and Mümtaz Ener, the director of the first Turkish aviation movie. The film was shot at the Eskişehir 1st Main Jet Base and supported by the Air Force Command. The movie is about the love affair of an officer who is a pilot in the Air Force with the daughter of a landowner living in the region. Although the production aimed to popularize aviation and military service and was supported by the Army, it was subject to the censorship decisions of the Film Control Commission of the period. The commission requested some corrections about the movie (Lüleci, 2020, pp. 1215-1216). With the positive reference of the then Commander of the Air Force İrfan Tansel, the film was able to be released ("Şafak Bekçileri'ni Anlattı", 2011). Since it was shot in the past years, we can infer that the production had a high budget. The aerial shots are flourishing according to the conditions of that day. The images of the F-100 Super Sabre aircraft, which also took part in the Cyprus Operation, are especially interesting for aviation enthusiasts.

Considering that it was made after the coup and supported by the military, this political atmosphere has led some researchers to associate the film with it. The main conflict point of the movie arises from the tension between the peasants and the landlord, who are depicted as "conservative," and the air officers, who are presented as more "enlightened". According to Nijat Özön, Halit Refiğ emphasizes the role of the Turkish Armed Forces in the May 27 revolution while dealing with the progressive-reactionary conflict in an underdeveloped country (1985, p. 366). Hilmi Maktav also states that the film celebrates the May 27 Coup (2013, p. 13). According to Aslı Daldal, Halit Refiğ, who was part of the "Yön" movement of the period, depicts the officers of the Air Force as a "progressive" force against the "conservative" landlords in parallel with pro-military ideas (2005, p. 105). Many scenes of the movie contain these ideological conflicts.

The 1966 film *Göklerdeki Sevgili* is one of the Turkish films with aviation elements. It was directed by Remzi Jöntürk. Starring Cüneyt Arkın and Selda Alkor. The movie is about the love story of a young man from a wealthy family who serves as a pilot in the Air Force with a peasant girl. A young officer named Timur is later assigned to Cyprus and separated from his beloved. He takes part in the struggle between Turks and Greeks in Cyprus. Timur's plane crashes into Cyprus, and he performs many heroic deeds. Although aviation and military themes are partially present in the movie, melodramatic elements are much more predominant. Adapted from a foreign movie, *Göklerdeki Sevgili* was



protested in Ankara at the time of its release for allegedly discriminating against officers and petty officers (Milliyet, 1966 p. 6). In the film's closing scenes, a reference is made to Captain Pilot Cengiz Topel, who was martyred when his plane was shot down by the Greeks during a Turkish Air Force air operation in Cyprus in 1964. While the character, pilot Timur, is in bed after he is wounded, he is informed that Cengiz Topel, nicknamed "Father", has been martyred. Timur and those around him are very saddened by this news. There are many other scenes of heroism and nationalism in the movie. The film reflects an effort to balance the tension and sense of unity within the country as a manifestation of the tense foreign political situation of the period.

*Gülen Gözler* (1977), directed by Ertem Eğilmez, is a well-known film in Turkish cinema because it features a pilot character called "Vecihi," although it is not directly related to aviation. A family comedy, the film revolves around Yaşar Usta and his family, residents of Istanbul, who are known for their integrity and live with their five daughters. Yaşar Usta, a construction worker, gave all his daughters male names, expecting them to be boys. Now that the girls have grown up, Yaşar Usta wants to marry them off to suitable suitors. Fikret, the eldest of the girls, is a suitor for Vecihi, but Yaşar Usta does not want his daughter to marry Vecihi. So Vecihi flies around Yaşar Usta's house in a small training plane, trying to impress the woman he loves. The character of Vecihi was played by Şener Şen, a very popular actor in Turkish cinema, which made the character even more popular. For this reason, most people first heard of Vecihi Hürkuş, one of the most important names in Turkish aviation, through this film.

Launched in 1993 on television on Channel 6, *Barişta Savaşanlar* is a military aviation series made as a TV series. Ferdi Eğilmez directed the series, and Aytekin Çakmakçı was the director of photography. Nick Alavardo shot the aerial footage and was also the aerial photographer and cameraman in *Top Gun* (1986). The series took inspiration from *Top Gun* and was often referred to as the local *Top Gun* (Milliyet, 1993 s. 29) in newspapers. The plot revolves around the struggles and romantic relationships of young pilots during their training. Arzu Film produced the series with the support of the Turkish General Staff and the Turkish Air Force. The initial episodes focused on aviation and patriotism, while the later episodes leaned more toward melodrama and love. The F-16 Fighting Falcon fighter jets, which were very popular with the Turkish public in the 1990s and functioned as an essential part of Turkish aviation and are still active, appear in the series in abundance. For many Turkish citizens, F-16 fighter jets symbolize Turkish sovereignty in the air. They are, therefore, an essential signifier of the series.

*İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında* is a 1996 historical drama film directed by Mustafa Altıoklar about Hazerfen Ahmet Çelebi and Lagari Hasan's desire to fly in the 17th century. In the movie, Ahmet Çelebi tries to fly with a design like a bat wing, while Lagari Hasan is working on a design similar to a flare/missile. Although the authenticity of the historical events related to aviation at the time is disputed, the film is vital for the history of Turkish Cinema. *İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında* is one of the few Turkish films made in the 1990s. The number of viewers in cinemas is also the weakest in history. However, the movie was watched by 112 thousand people in the first 24 days of its release, surpassing

many foreign films of that period (Milliyet,1996a, s.2). The film succeeded in attracting moviegoers back to the theaters, which had reached the point of extinction. However, there were also controversies about the movie, claiming that Murat IV was represented with the implication of homosexuality (Milliyet, 1996b, s. 23). In Kayseri, the screening of the film was protested, and one of the lead actors, Okan Bayülgen, who played the character of Lagari Hasan, was attacked with a gun by a young man who said that the film demeaned the Ottoman Sultans (Milliyet, 1997, s.1). One of the movie's central themes, which includes political events and debates of the period, is the conservatism-progressivism debate. In many movie scenes, Ahmet and Hasan's scientific studies are interrupted due to conservatism. While Ahmet Çelebi and Lagari Hasan are represented as individuals who desire to make scientific discoveries ahead of their time, some of the politicians of the period are seen as trying to prevent them. This tension creates the central conflict of the movie.

Directed by Bahadır Karataş, the 2009 film *Usta* is about an automobile mechanic with great enthusiasm for aviation who wants to build an airplane on his own. The central tension of the movie is that a patriotic automobile mechanic with high national feelings does not give up on his ideals despite all unfavorable conditions and family conflicts. "The film references the political tension and polarization of the public in Türkiye in the 2000s. This attitude, especially embedded in the dialogues, generally includes an oppositional approach to the economic and political preferences of conservative governments" (Dönmez & Keşaplı, 2009, p. 94). However, the political stance of the film focuses on "national capital and production" against "global capitalism." The importance of national capital and production for a nation's independence and development is emphasized.

*Anadolu Kartalları* (2011), prepared in honor of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Air Force, was directed by Ömer Vargı. A significant part of the film was shot in Konya 3rd Main Jet Base Command and İzmir Çiğli 2nd Main Jet Base, with the great support of the Turkish Armed Forces. The Turkish Air Force also conducts military drills with the same name. Wolfe Air, a well-known company in the world, was used for the aerial shooting of the movie (Özcan, 2011). T-37, T-38 training planes, C-130 tactical cargo planes, F-16, F-4, F-5, F-4, and F-5 planes in the Turkish Air Force inventory are particularly noteworthy. The production also includes footage of Türk Yıldızları, an aerobatic team of the Turkish Air Force, and Solo Türk shows. The story revolves around a group of Air Force Academy students who aspire to become fighter pilots, making it their most prominent dream. The problematic training, they undergo and the emotional transitions they experience during their training constitute the main conflicts of the movie. The film, which emphasizes nationalist and national unity, stands out, especially with its successful aerial action shots.

### ***Hürkuş: Göklerdeki Kahraman* (2018) (*Hürkuş: The Hero of The Sky*) Movie Review**

The 2018 movie *Hürkuş Göklerdeki Kahraman* (*Hürkuş: The Hero of the Sky*) is a production inspired by the life story of Vecihi Hürkuş, an aircraft designer and pilot,

one of the most influential figures in the history of Turkish aviation. The biographical production was directed by Kudret Sabancı, and the director of photography was Tolga Kutluay. Hilmi Cem İntepe and Gizem Karaca Ekmekçi played the lead roles in the movie. Focusing on the story of a young man with a high love for aviation and homeland, the film, which has intense representations of nationalism and heroism, has frequently featured action scenes. It is usual for a production within the dynamics of a mainstream fiction film to exaggerate historical events and move away from reality. The film contains stories of “heroism” in line with the emphasis in its title. For this reason, many film scenes are structured with stylized cinematography and action emphasis following the fictional story method. However, this stylized visual demeanor and the artificiality of the effects lack the fluidity that a mainstream production should have.

The movie’s opening scene begins with the image of older men, women, and children carrying ammunition from behind the front lines during the National Struggle. Vecihi Hürkuş comes to the aid of the civilians who are blocked by the occupation forces. The civilian population and Vecihi eliminate the invaders hand in hand. Like many scenes in the movie, this scene, inspired by some historical events, points to the struggle behind the front lines during the War of Independence. The fact that this event, which constitutes a cornerstone on the road to independence, is included in the opening scene of the movie is essential in terms of discourse. This struggle was later depicted on the Independence Medal of the Republic of Türkiye as the figure of a woman carrying ammunition with a bullock cart. This sacrifice during the National Struggle was represented by the Medal of Independence and given as a badge of honor to those who participated in this struggle. Such symbolic values are also effective indicators for the nation-building process. There is an effort to construct a discourse on this consciousness within the film universe.

After the opening scene, the heroic story of Vecihi Hürkuş is told through a young couple, Mehmet and Selin. Mehmet, one of the young people who like each other, is a model airplane designer. He wants to model Vecihi’s airplane, who is the spiritual father of his grandfather, and participate in the aviation competition that he cares so much. Through flashbacks, Vecihi’s story is also told in parallel. The training airplane that appears with the young people in the first scenes of the film is the locally produced “Tusaş Hürkuş,” named after Vecihi Hürkuş in his memory. This scene also alludes to the advances made by the Republic of Türkiye in aviation in recent years. The Tusaş Hürkuş airplane, which is one of the critical initiatives for the development of aviation with national means, has a symbolic value in the film as it is one of the indicators of progress in aviation.

The mise-en-scene on the train gives substantial clues about the ideological position of the film. In the train scene featuring young people going to the Balkan War, attention is drawn to people coming from different countries but fighting for the exact cause. The efforts of “self-sacrificing” and “patriotic” young people who are trying to keep the Ottoman Empire standing on the eve of its collapse are emphasized with a sense of “unity.” They gave up everything and came together for the defense of the homeland. Similarly, this emphasis is repeated in the dialog between the character Vecihi and Colonel Ratıp, who wants to become an aviator. While the character of Vecihi is described as a

young man with high ideals and a patriotic admiration for his homeland, it is stated with an emotional dialogue and atmosphere that the Turkish people resist the invaders in unity in defense of the homeland, all together, including children, young people, and older adults. These expressions, which are frequently repeated in the dialogues throughout the film, emphasize the “unity” of the Turkish people in defense of Anatolia, regardless of gender, age, and status. Ahmet Ali Çelikten, a historical character portrayed as one of Vecihi’s friends, is referred to as the world’s first black fighter pilot. In his study on Ahmet Ali Çelikten, Halim Gençoğlu emphasized that Ahmet Ali Bey, an Afro-Turkish citizen in the Ottoman Empire, was never discriminated against in the Ottoman Army due to the multicultural, social, and religious understanding that existed in Ottoman society (Gençoğlu, 2021, p. 1). However, Ahmet Ali Bey served during a difficult period in the history of the Ottoman Empire, struggled during the birth of modern Türkiye, and contributed to the establishment of the Turkish Air Force in the Republic of Türkiye (Gençoğlu, 2021, p. 4). After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Ahmet Ali Çelikten became an equal citizen under the laws of the Republic of Türkiye. He continued to work for the Turkish Armed Forces. This call for unity in the film is used similarly in many scenes, sometimes on religious grounds and sometimes emphasizing ethnicity. When the Russians capture Vecihi and his friends, an Azerbaijani Turkish captain helps them in their escape plan. Here, the bond of Turkish identity and kinship is emphasized. Although he is in the Russian Army, the bond of kinship has more weight for the captain. By helping Vecihi and his friends escape, he enables their passage to Anatolia and their support for the national struggle. Similarly, Muslim soldiers of Indian origin under British colonial rule support Vecihi and the others in their passage from Istanbul to Anatolia at the cost of their lives. By building a bridge between religious unity and nationalism, the sense of “us” and “other” is reinforced through “religious unity.” The recent ideological discourse of the government, which centers on conservatism and nationalism, is also manifested through the film. In the nation-state approach, the common language is of great importance; accordingly, even foreign characters in the movie speak Turkish. This approach can be considered a political attitude as well as a mainstream action production.

Regarding the aesthetic texture of the film, Uğur Vardan states that the cinematography, action, and music were inspired by Sergio Leone and a kind of Spaghetti Western style was attempted but without success (2018). He also emphasizes that the messages of “nationalism” conveyed in the film, primarily through dialogues, are “exaggerated.” The author states that, especially in Hollywood productions, it is necessary to examine how “American Nationalism” is successfully integrated into the story (Vardan, 2018). Burak Göral approaches the film with similar criticisms and says that director Kudret Sabancı, a fan of Westerns and comic books, is relatively unsuccessful in bringing this style to the film. He also mentions the inadequacy of the film’s visual effects in supporting the atmosphere (Göral, 2018). Cinema writer Serdar Akbıyık also mentions the inadequacy of the film but states that the film is a well-intentioned effort in terms of national identity, saying, “It is important that we make Turkish films that tell our own identity as well as creating a cinematic language” (Akbıyık, 2018). Thus, it is thought that the Turkish people’s collective identity and sense of belonging can be reinforced. The film, which is generally found to be narratively and technically unsuccessful by

film critics, has a thought-provoking result in terms of quality despite the increasing quantity in Turkish Cinema, especially in terms of historical action filmmaking practices. Unfortunately, many of the successes experienced internationally with independent/art films have not been achieved at the level of mainstream productions. Therefore, how much the purpose of the political discourse of the film can be questioned, or a minimal impact can be mentioned. In such productions, aesthetic structure and technical success are crucial for constructing and succeeding political discourse.

### **Conclusion**

As empires began to collapse in the late 18th century, the concept of the nation-state began to rise. Increasing momentum for nationalist movements led to a rise in the prominence of values such as equality, citizenship, and freedom. The states emerging from the disintegrating empires started the process of nation-building. Nation consciousness, as a phenomenon formed in the individual, is a situation mainly constructed through external processes. The concept of nation refers to the collective consciousness of the individual. The individual's identification with and adoption of the national structure is related to the sense of community. In the construction process of modern nation-states, this feeling is supported and made possible with specific symbolic indicators. At this stage, art and, undoubtedly, Cinema are of great importance.

Following the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, ongoing power politics developed an ideological discourse in support of nation-building. Since the Republic's early years, various works of art have been used to create, reinforce, and sustain national consciousness. Cinema is among these arts. Due to the changing subjects of power and differing ideological positions, different discourses on national consciousness have been developed in different periods. In the transformation process from the Ottoman Empire to the nation-state, it is debatable to what extent cinema has been used to establish collective consciousness. It is difficult to say that cinema, established by the Ottoman Empire state, received sufficient attention in the subsequent Republican period. The economic difficulties of the Republic at its founding are an essential reason for this situation. In addition, the late realization that cinema is a powerful propaganda tool can be another reason.

In historical film criticism and reception studies, the political and sociological situation of the period in which the films were shot is vital in making sense of the film. Political developments and significant sociological events of the time influenced the content of these productions, including aviation-themed films, when analyzed within their historical context. Aviation-related films made in the last period of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic's early years consist of actual images. These are footage of the war, delegation visits, sporting events, parades, or various institutions' activities, marking the period's important events. It is seen that many of these actual films were products of propaganda that were intended to strengthen the image of the young Republic and function in the direction of its adoption.

The first known Turkish aviation-themed motion picture is believed to be the 1949 film *Kanatlardan Türbe*. The Turkish Armed Forces supported the making of the movie. Mümtaz Ener directed the film, and it was impossible to access detailed data about the film. The 1963 film *Şafak Bekçileri*, directed by Halit Refiğ, was made after the coup d'état, which caused it to be politically associated with this event. Halit Refiğ, in the film's narrative, took a pro-Armed Forces stance and defined the officers of the Air Force as "progressive." This situation enabled a reading of the film that the coup d'état was a "positive" act. The 1966 film *Göklerdeki Sevgili* dealt with the Cyprus problem in parallel with the tense foreign policy of the period. It is seen as a production that emphasizes unity and kinship against the conflicts between Turks and Greeks on the island of Cyprus and aims to support the moral elements.

Launched in 1993 on Kanal 6, the series *Barışta Savaşanlar* was based on the US Army-backed Hollywood production *Top Gun*. Similarly, the Turkish Air Force also contributed to the series' filming. In honor of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Air Force, the series *Barışta Savaşanlar* and *Anadolu Kartalları* (2011) created positive image studies of the Turkish Armed Forces, incorporating similar narrative elements and metaphors.

Directed by Mustafa Altıoklar, the 1996 film *İstanbul Kanatlarımın Altında* was a highly controversial production due to its critical attitude. The film focused on the conservative-progressive tension, which attracted a few moviegoers back to the theaters. Another critical production focusing on a similar tension is the 2009 film *Usta*, directed by Bahadır Karataş. The film, which tells the story of an auto mechanic with high ideals, his interest in aviation, and the obstacles he faces, emphasizes the importance of national production and capital in the independence of a nation.

The movie *Hürkuş: Göklerdeki Kahraman* (*Hürkuş: The Hero of the Sky*), which is the focus of the study, is a historical action movie with biographical elements inspired by the life story of Vecihi Hürkuş. Released in 2018, the film features a narrative structure emphasizing nationalist and conservative themes, aligning with recent government policies. *Hürkuş: Göklerdeki Kahraman* (*Hürkuş: The Hero of the Sky*) includes a love theme in its subplot, but it also attempts to reconstruct the existing nation image in favor of the current dominant political discourse with codes of patriotism, heroism, sacrifice, nation, kinship, and religious unity. Especially in mainstream cinema, militarist productions with aviation themes generally serve an ideological function to strengthen the country's and nation's existing image. One of the significant examples is the movie *Top Gun* (1986, Tony Scott), the most prominent production worldwide. The film is widely regarded as one of the most significant examples among the hundreds of productions produced with substantial support from the American government and military that contributed to reinforcing the American dominant ideology. The technical and aesthetic perfection of the film must convey its solid political message. The Republic of Türkiye aims to establish a strong global and regional image and expects such productions to enhance the current national consciousness and promote collective unity within the country. However, its weaknesses in terms of technical competence, narrative, and aesthetic elements, which can be

considered weak for a mainstream film, make the success of the production questionable. Therefore, the film's success in constructing a political discourse is relatively limited.

**Etik Beyanı:** Yazar çalışmanın etik kurul izni gerektirmeyen çalışmalar arasında yer aldığını beyan etmektedir. Aksi bir durumun tespiti halinde Kastamonu İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi'nin hiçbir sorumluluğu olmayıp, tüm sorumluluk çalışmanın yazarına aittir.

**Yazar Katkı Oranı Beyanı:** Çalışma tek yazarlı olup, yazarın katkı oranı %100'dür.

**Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı:** Yazar herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedir.

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