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Masculinity Aloft and on the Ground: The Myth of Warrior Nation in Turkey's Cold War Cinema

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the construction of militarized masculinity and nationalist myths in Turkish Cold War cinema of the 1960s through a comparative analysis of two films: *On Korkusuz Adam* (Ten Fearless Men, 1964) and *Göklerdeki Sevgili* (The Lover in the Skies, 1966). Produced and circulated in a period of political realignments as a response to the Cold War and the Cyprus conflict, these films played a role in the popularization of the myth of warrior nation. Hence, relying on theories on the formulation of political myths and gendered nationalism, this study shows how the representation of the Cyprus conflict worked to justify national superiority and heroism of Turks. Close reading and contextual film analysis reveal that these films do not merely reproduce the official nationalist discourse, but they actively shape militarist discourses by inviting viewers to align with the Turkish hero's point of view. Furthermore, the study inserts the films into a broader Cold War cultural corpus through establishing parallels with American and South Korean examples. In doing so, it deepens the analysis of the relationship between politics and culture by stating what role globally played by Turkish cinema in the production and popularization of the myth of warrior nation.

1 | Introduction

“Although we experience anger and our emotions may become rigid, we do not rape women. We refrain from harming innocent children and even show respect to the civilian population,” says Timur, a young Turkish pilot who is on duty in Cyprus during the intercommunal violence of the 1960s. Another soldier responds as follows: “This is our genuine distinction...As Turks, we embody fairness and benevolence.” This dialog originates from the film titled *Göklerdeki Sevgili* (*The Lover in the Skies*), directed by Remzi Jöntürk in 1966. The film is a part of a broader corpus in Turkish Cold War cinema, which presents the Turkish soldier as nationally and morally superior. Such a scene does not only increase the level of drama but also serves as a tool for producing and reproducing nationalist myths—the myth of warrior nation in particular.

This article analyzes how the myth of the warrior nation is represented in cinema during the heyday of the Cold War through two films from the 1960s *Göklerdeki Sevgili* (Remzi Jöntürk, 1966) and *On Korkusuz Adam* (*Ten Fearless Men*, Tunç Başaran, 1964). Both films rely on the warrior nation myth and construct masculinity and nationhood fused into one another. Rather than simply considering these films as transmitters or carriers of state ideology, this study takes them as active producers and circulators of the myths within a period of Cold War realignments. In fact, the 1960s were a significant decade in Turkish political and cultural history, marked by the 1960 military intervention, the liberal yet militarized constitution of 1961, the rise of ideological polarization, and escalating political and military tensions about Cyprus. Against this backdrop, Turkish cinema has emerged as a key medium through which anxieties about identity, sovereignty, and national unity were

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represented. Given that context, films, such as *Göklerdeki Sevgili* and *On Korkusuz Adam*, circulated militaristic values while offering audiences stories of violence and self-sacrifice by constructing archetypes of the idealized male warrior—one modern, aerial, and technocratic; the other grounded, archaic, and tribal. This study then aims to offer a perspective to be able to understand how nationalist messages about militarized citizenship are produced and internalized through cinematic productions, which do not merely reflect the political context but also help in shaping the norms of what should be circulated and not.

The paper has been divided into four main parts. The first part presents a multilayered theoretical framework, relying on essential concepts such as political myth, masculinity, and militarism. This part is followed by a brief methodological discussion that explains the basics of the analytical approach utilized in the paper. The next two parts present detailed analyses of each film —*On Korkusuz Adam* and *Göklerdeki Sevgili*—focusing on their narratives, visual symbols, and ideological messages. Then, in the concluding section, these analyses are allowed to speak to one another in a comparative discussion. Besides, they are inserted within a global context with reference to similar examples from the Cold War period to reveal the films' transnational convergences.

2 | Nationalism, Myths, and Cinema

Nationalism is founded on political myths, which are stories of the past that help define a nation's roots, spatial identity, ancestral heritage, and system of morality and values. These myths serve to justify nations and foster solidarity among their members. They can also be used as powerful tools of propaganda, as they tap into collective emotions. Propagandists often employ mythic narratives to evoke nationalist sentiments or gather support for a specific argument. In this way, narratives, beliefs, and perceptions are shaped and masses could be persuaded.¹ Political myths are simplified but powerful narratives that function to spread nationalist claims and make those claims seem natural. They also work in imagining communities while creating attachments and bonds between different elements as Benedict Anderson rightfully argues.²

One prominent myth within Turkish nationalism is the myth of the warrior nation. It asserts that the Turkish nation is inherently a warrior nation, making the military a crucial aspect of Turkish national identity. This myth considers the military as a symbol for imagining the nation and its identity, existing outside the realm of political debate and immune to questioning.³ Hence, the nation is expected to perform military deeds because it is assumed to be a warrior nation divinely elected to manifest heroism. Since Turkish nation is a warrior nation “all Turks are born as soldiers” with the ability to fight.⁴ It is, in fact, not only soldiers in the military but all members of the nation are supposed to fulfill their duties for the nation. Thus, serving as a soldier is considered as the highest expression of ideal citizenship and the value and legitimacy of the militarized-citizen are connected to the willingness to serve, fight, and die for the nation.⁵ Within such a framework, as embodiments of

the nation, men are bestowed with the responsibility of safeguarding and preserving the homeland as well as protecting women and children. On the other hand, regarded as vulnerable and passive entities, women's prescribed role primarily revolves around fulfilling the innate duty of giving birth and taking care of the household⁶ besides bearing the nation's honor, its values, and identity.⁷

This militarized division of labor is culturally positioned as the norm and history is written accordingly. In this context, the films analyzed in this paper present male characters not as simply gendered subjects but as the legitimate embodiments of Turkish nationhood and its values. What complicates the matter is that there is a hierarchy of masculinities depending on certain criteria. This point is theorized by R.W. Connell, who argues that the dominant socially approvable form of manhood is the hegemonic masculinity, that is, associated with physical and mental strength.⁸ The films also represent this hierarchy through which the nationalist soldier is depicted as the hegemonic one with his discipline and loyalty. Within this context, men do not automatically gain the privilege to engage in fighting. They must first prove their masculinity through previous fights, whereby they attain the status of “manly-men” who possess the ability to actively contribute to the formation and survival of the nation.⁹ Masculinity, in this context, is not simply biologically determined but it is a status, that is, attained with heroic participation in the nationalist fight.

The process of legitimizing hegemonic masculinity does not occur in a vacuum—it is actually a reflection of the political climate mainly shaped by militarism. Moreover, the ways in which this idea is diffused into the public realm are significant in understanding the adoption and naturalization of hegemonic masculinity. Cinema, in this context, is an example of what Alfred Vagts considers “civilian militarism,” which basically refers to the uncritical adoption of military values, principles, attitudes, and the elevation of military institutions. This process involves glorifying military service, promoting a military ethos in different aspects of civilian life, and regarding war as an inevitable and virtuous endeavor to which the nation's primary interests and resources should be dedicated.¹⁰ Here, popular culture could be considered a civilian realm of producing and reproducing the myth of the warrior nation through the depictions of warfare and protagonists epitomizing virtues such as courage, command, and physical prowess. The purpose of these representations is to serve as sources shaping and reinforcing the collective identity of the nation. This means, the propaganda of militaristic ideology extends beyond formal channels, such as educational institutions, museums, or elaborate ceremonial displays, permeating into the informal and unofficial spheres of societal interaction. The cross-fertilization between the formal and informal realms strengthens each other and allows individuals to perceive their fellow citizens as fellow compatriots, gaining an understanding of their shared bonds and nurturing a collective awareness.

In this context, cinema, as a cultural medium with mass appeal and emotional intensity, plays a crucial role in transmitting and reproducing the myth of the warrior nation. From a Neo-Historicist perspective, films are intricate cultural artifacts influenced by social, political, and economic processes. They

bear the imprints of social, political, and economic dynamics, transcending mere scrutiny of their narrative structures and visual aesthetics.¹¹ As Stuart Hall also theorizes, films, being forms of popular culture, bear ideological messages and construct meanings.¹² Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of films necessitates a careful examination of their intricate interplay with the historical and political backdrop within which they were produced and experienced. This contextual framework may provide valuable insights into the films' meaning and significance. Therefore, the present study does not assume an automatic influence of the context on popular cultural products. Instead, it considers the relationship as a tool to understand the ideological universe created by both the context and the films.

3 | Methodology

This article adopts a combination of close reading and film analysis. The narrative structures, dialogs, and visual elements are examined to grasp various layers of meaning in the films in addition to their ideological functions and thematic resonances. Such an approach also encompasses a broader contextual understanding that takes historical and political context into account. Consequently, I aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the films produce and reproduce ideological discourses of nationalism, masculinity, and militarism.

The analysis is centered on two films produced in the 1960s. Both refer to the Cyprus issue and present complementary visions of masculinity and so the myth of the warrior nation. The films construct the idealized Turkish man as a brave, courageous, and virtuous figure—one fights on the ground, the other initially in the skies. In fact, there are several other films from the 1960s depicting the same issue. These include *Kıbrıs Volkanı/Şahlanan Mücahitlerin Destanı (The Volcano of Cyprus/The Epic of the Rising Mujahideen*, Ural Ozon, 1965), *Dişi Düşman (The Female Enemy*, Nejat Saydam, 1966), *Fırtına Beşler (The Furious Five*, Aram Gülyüz, 1966), *Fedailer (The Warriors*, Kayahan Arıkan, 1966), *Kartalların Öcü: Severek Ölenler (The Vengeance of the Eagles: Those Who Die with Love*, Osman Fahri Seden, 1965), *Severek Döğüşenler (Those Who Fight with Love*, Adnan Saner, 1966), *Komandolar Geliyor (The Commandos Are Coming*, Nejat Okçugil, 1968), and *Fedai Komandolar Kıbrıs'ta (The Commando Warriors Are in Cyprus*, Nejat Okçugil, 1968). Among these films, due to access problems and thematic considerations, I have chosen only a small sample. Among the currently accessible films, *Dişi Düşman* is worth mentioning due to its representation of the issue through the identification of the enemy with a *femme fatale* figure. Besides, its multilayered historical narrative beginning with the conquest of Istanbul in the mid-fifteenth century, while offering a rich source of analysis, is not within the scope of this article that solely concentrates on the male figures. Within this framework, *On Korkusuz Adam* and *Göklerdeki Sevgili* depict not only much more focused but also complementary portrayals of masculine heroism within a defined geopolitical frame. Their emphasis on aerial and grounded combats enables a dual reading of militarized masculinity in Turkish cinema. Other films, such as *Kartalların Öcü: Severek Ölenler*, are devoid of

visually compelling and intense scenes and therefore, not included in this analysis.

4 | Turkish Politics in the 1960s: Military, Nationalism and Cinema

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Turkey underwent a transition into the multiparty system, with the Democratic Party (DP) assuming power through nationwide elections. In its propaganda efforts, the DP embraced a populist discourse that encompassed nationalist, Islamist, anti-intellectual, antielitist, and antibureaucratic elements, targeting the Republican People's Party (CHP), the foundational political party of the Turkish Republic. The 1950s ended with the May 27, 1960 coup, which can be characterized as an endeavor by the foundational military/bureaucratic elite to seize political authority from the DP. Certain scholars have suggested the existence of an alliance comprising bureaucrats, urban intellectuals, the industrial bourgeoisie, university students, officers, and academics, all seeking strategies against the DP.¹³

The 1960 coup brought an end to the 10-year rule of the Democrat Party (DP), which had grown increasingly authoritarian. The coup was justified by the military as a defense of the Kemalist republic against perceived political degradation. The subsequent 1961 Constitution introduced significant liberalizing measures—such as freedom of association, strengthened civil rights, and legal space for trade unions and opposition parties. However, it also formalized the military's political role through institutions such as the National Security Council.¹⁴ This dual structure—a liberal legal framework paired with military tutelage—produced an ambivalent political atmosphere in which democratic procedures coexisted with institutionalized military oversight. Moreover, where the boundaries of political legitimacy were increasingly shaped by cultural narratives of national unity and moral order provided and protected by the military.¹⁵

In the meantime, the period witnessed political volatility with the emergence of different ideological factions. Leftist student groups, Kurdish activists, Islamist circles, and right-wing nationalists all emerged as vocal forces, contributing to a climate of cultural and ideological anxiety the military framed itself as the guarantor of stability and integrity as opposed to rising pluralism.¹⁶ This increased role of the military in shaping the dynamics of everyday social and political life. So, the myth of the military nation rooted in themes of sacrifice, discipline, and masculine heroism—was revitalized and deployed as a hegemonic ideological framework. These developments occurred against the backdrop of the Cold War, as the global rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union magnified domestic anxieties over communism, identity, and national integrity. Turkey's NATO membership in 1952, participation in the Korean War, and acceptance of United States aid through the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan linked its political trajectory to broader Western geopolitical interests. Yet, these alliances also exposed Turkey to contradictions—such as growing dependency on the U.S. and cultural anxieties about national autonomy.¹⁷

Furthermore, during the mid-1950s, the Greek-Cypriot resistance movement gained momentum under the leadership of EOKA. In 1958, Turkish Cypriots also established an armed group named *Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı* (Turkish Resistance Organization). A series of violent incidents and intercommunal clashes between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots quickly followed. In the Zurich and London Conferences of 1959, Cyprus became a Republic under the guarantee of Britain, Turkey, and Greece, who maintained symbolic military forces on the island. Despite independence, interethnic conflicts continued. A pivotal event of utmost significance was the incident known as the Bloody Christmas, an outbreak of violence occurring on December 20–21, 1963 that resulted in the tragic loss of over five hundred lives, predominantly among the Turkish Cypriot population. In its aftermath, approximately 25,000 Turkish Cypriots were forcibly displaced from their homes. In response, the Turkish government instituted a series of discriminatory measures targeting Greeks residing within its borders, encompassing the freezing of their property assets, the imposition of restrictions on property acquisition, and the nonrenewal of residence permits for around 9000 Greek citizens residing in Turkey. The government also sought the involvement of the guarantor states and obtained authorization from the Turkish Assembly, empowering its government to undertake intervention in Cyprus should the need arise. Despite adverse reactions from Western powers, Turkey persisted in its cause, even conducting provocative flyovers above Cyprus. Eventually, in June 1964, the Turkish government received a letter from President Johnson of the United States asserting that the United States would not allow Turkey to employ its military resources in any operation in Cyprus. The letter further indicated that NATO might not defend Turkey in the event of Soviet aggression incited by a potential Turkish military intervention in Cyprus. Undoubtedly, this letter served as a turning point, leading to a cooling of relations between Turkey and the United States and fostering a sense of betrayal by Western powers. Turkey found itself increasingly isolated in the international arena despite its alignment with the West. Meanwhile, the resulting violence endured until 1967, disproportionately affecting Turkish Cypriots, who suffered substantial casualties and experienced significant displacement.¹⁸ Therefore, these circumstances engendered a fertile cinematic terrain convenient to the popularization of the myth of warrior nation, which was represented through stories in which nationalists fight in solidarity against the others.

Simultaneously, the 1960s is considered the “Golden Age” of Turkish cinema due to a significant increase in both production and consumption. This was mainly caused by a reduction in municipal entertainment tax, which led to more affordable domestic film production and consumption.¹⁹ This occurred without direct state support and mainly driven by budget limitations and popular demand. As a result, films of this period are characterized by familiar narrative structures and star-centered casting. Within this context, cinema became a crucial medium for circulating militarist ideals and emotionally and ideologically mobilizing the audiences by depicting heroes that embodied Turkish nationhood. In this regard, *On Korkusuz Adam* and *Göklerdeki Sevgili* are far from being exceptional. Yet, they deserve particular attention as two complementary representations of the myth of the warrior nation: the grounded,

archaic warrior, and the modern aerial soldier-lover. In doing so, these films function as cultural texts formed by discursive tools such as national virtue and heroism. Besides, the melodramatic conventions on which the Turkish cinema was built also serve as national allegories through simplified and polarized representations such as “us” versus “them,” “friends” and “enemies.”²⁰ These one-dimensional representations with innocent suffering protagonists against evils,²¹ in a similar way to political myths, left no room for multilayered complex narratives and thus made the films appealing to a broader audience.²²

5 | On Korkusuz Adam (Ten Fearless Men)

On Korkusuz Adam, directed by Tunç Başaran, belongs to the nationalist action/adventure film corpus, in which male heroes defend the homeland against external enemies. The plot is episodic, driven more by battle sequences than by character development. From this perspective, the film presents 10 warriors who risk their lives to death in fighting against an external enemy. This is evident even in the titles themselves, employing plural nouns that symbolize a shared bond and sense of togetherness among compatriots. Rather than elevating a sole protagonist, these films present a group dynamic. The heroism of the group originates from innate patriotism, morality and physical resilience not from professional soldiering.

In general, the film portrays the resistance of Turkish Cypriots against the EOKA in 1964, orchestrated by a group of dedicated volunteers. The group consists of individuals originating from different backgrounds; a Cypriot man from Cyprus, a Kurdish man, a woman, a university student, a fugitive, an infirm man, and an elder from Turkey. This is not a random eclectic composition. Rather, it works as a microcosm of the Turkish nation, an attempt to depict the fight as a collective national struggle that unites various segments of Turkish society across class, ethnicity, and generation. Therefore, the characters are represented as fighting in national solidarity against the enemies regardless of age, social class, and ethnic differences for a great national cause. In this context, the inclusion of a Kurdish character is particularly interesting, since it eliminates ethnic differences within a nationalist framework. The group, in a way, could be interpreted as an “imagined community” with an idealized unity and collective identity in Benedict Anderson’s terms. Within this context, the only female in the movie is represented not as an independent character but in relation to another man as his sister. She is again used to legitimize what is theorized by Connell as the hegemonic masculinity—that is, the dominant ideal of manhood in the society—despite her being one of the 10 fighters.

The setting of the film is initially in Antalya a city in the southwest coast of Turkey and then shifts to the rural areas of Cyprus. This geographical transition from mainland Turkey reinforces the idea that Cyprus is an extension of the mainland. So, it is part of the homeland and according to this vision, the borders are porous, transcends official borders. In doing so, the film constructs the Turkish homeland not as a fixed geopolitical entity but as a flexible and affectively

charged space, encompassing all regions where Turkish identity is perceived to be under threat. Therefore, here, space is never devoid of meaning, but “a social product”²³ that is, constructed in a relational manner by historical, political and ideological forces.²⁴ Therefore, together with the mainland, Cyprus serves as part of the symbolic geography for the Turkish nationhood.

Besides, the setting where the fighting takes place is depicted as an open space that does not have any notable landmarks or recognizable features. This absence of distinctive elements may be attributed to considerations such as the costs of filmmaking or the prevailing popularity of the Western genre during the period in question. However, this particular representation serves multiple purposes that need further examination. Firstly, the emptiness of the land can be interpreted as a symbolic reflection of the enemy’s cruelty, as they have already inflicted terror upon the indigenous population, forcing them to abandon their homes. Therefore, the landscape underscores the severity of the enemy’s actions. Secondly, it contributes to the representation of the enemy as guerilla fighters, thereby delegitimizing the cause of the Greek Cypriots. Lastly, this representation also facilitates the projection of the space as a part of Turkey. Indeed, the arrival of the fighters to the island is depicted in a swift manner, with minimal emphasis placed on their transportation by boat. As a result, the audience is not provided with a clear depiction of this process. Of course, this might be related with the costs of filming a boat in the sea. Nevertheless, one could also mention a blurring or collapse of geographical boundaries and an integration of the landscape with the Turkish territory. To adopt Lefebvre’s framework, in a way, Cyprus is nationalized in favor of emotional unity. Moreover, in fact, this may foster a stronger sense of emotional attachment and identification among the audience with fighters and their cause.

At this point, echoing Mihai Varga’s study on the construction of geographic space in Eastern Europe,²⁵ it could be argued that Cyprus is represented not as a territory under threat but moral frontier separating civilization from the barbarism of the “other.” In this context, the violence of the enemy is depicted through stark scenes. One of them is the dynamic introductory sequence in which an EOKA member brutally murders a woman and her three children, who have sought refuge in a bathtub. Then, newspaper clippings featuring impactful headlines are seen. These headlines include phrases such as “EOKA aims to exterminate Turks,” “Cyprus living under terror,” “We shall not stand by in the face of massacre.” Subsequently, the film portrays a Greek gang storming a Turkish village with the gang leader declaring: “We allow you to dwell upon this land as a favor.” Then Turkish Cypriots, especially children—are depicted as victims of evil acts and this creates a desire for revenge. These scenes provide powerful images and create an emotional impact, that is, beyond what written accounts might have achieved. Consequently, this depiction of the others legitimizes the acts and motivations of the Turkish warrior nation. Furthermore, the members of EOKA are referred to as “filthy pigs” and “flocks of palikaria” by the leading characters as if they are validating the portrayal of the others. At this point, it is crucial to note that this film does not distinguish between the EOKA members and the Greek Cypriot community. Apart from

the armed gang, ordinary Greek Cypriots are entirely absent from the narrative.

Among “the ten fearless men,” the first and only victim of the EOKA attacks is the university student. Remarkably, when the Turkish Cypriot character seeks volunteers to aid him, he does not want the university student to join because he perceives him as vulnerable and lacking experience. The student is not considered a “manly-man” as Nagel would agree. The other Turkish Cypriot character states, “Cyprus is filled with corpses like you.” Ironically, their very student ultimately becomes the initial and solitary martyr among the group members. Hence, the ideal warrior in this warrior nation can be interpreted as someone who embodies aggression and violence, not necessarily education and science. This representation is significant in grasping the link between militarized masculinity and the criterion for the ideal manhood. In this example, men are demanded to prove their manhood through their physical and emotional strength. As Connell argues, this happens not only as opposed to women but also to other men who best fit into the national militarist ideal.²⁶ The university student simply fails to pass this test.

It is also worth noting that these saviors are ultimately unable to single-handedly save the entire village, despite their courageous confrontation with the enemy. The resolution is ultimately achieved through the arrival of Turkish jet planes, which bomb the EOKA shelters as a military march plays in the background. This concluding scene conveys the notion that regardless of civilians’ motivation, they always rely on the armed forces. Such a perspective aligns perfectly with the mindset of the ruling elites during the post-coup period. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the film was released before Turkey’s intervention in Cyprus, rendering the arrival of the planes and subsequent bombings entirely fictional. This cinematic portrayal could be viewed as a rehearsal or a form of propaganda aimed at shaping public opinion. The final scene fades out with a grand aerial display performed by the planes, leaving a lasting impression.

6 | Göklerdeki Sevgili (The Lover in the Skies)

Göklerdeki Sevgili is a melodrama with references to a war narrative. It centers on a young Turkish pilot, Timur, who falls in love with Yıldız, a village girl. The couple has to get separated because Timur has to go on duty in Cyprus without being able to inform Yıldız. In fact, Timur is an idealist soldier and despite his wealthy background, he prioritizes national interests over his interests. Then, the narrative shifts toward a nationalist war film by showing Timur’s fight together with 11 other Turkish soldiers in Cyprus. In this context, *Göklerdeki Sevgili* again depicts a male brotherhood as exemplified by a powerful scene in which he, after almost having an accident, is welcomed and embraced by a group air force man. This scene captures not only the solidarity but also the joy and emotional fulfillment caused by comradeship and the feeling of belonging to the military group.

Similar to other movies depicting the Cyprus issue, the film has a pedagogical side and it uses several methods to teach people

what to think and feel about what is happening in Cyprus at this time. First, the film opens with a map of Cyprus on which the names of the actors are written. This is basically a statement about the film's ideological message—that Cyprus is an undivided whole and it certainly belongs to the Turkish national imagination. Secondly, the story is frequently interrupted with dramatized newspaper headlines and voiceovers referencing real historical events such as the outbreak of violence in April 1964 and the atrocities committed by the Greek Cypriot paramilitary group EOKA. Here, the boundary between melodrama and documentary gets blurred. This strengthens the film's emotional impact while justifying the film's message. In this context, Cengiz Topel was a Turkish Air Force pilot shot down over Cyprus in 1964 and subsequently tortured and killed, becoming a symbolic martyr in Turkish nationalist memory. His story is widely commemorated in Turkey, especially by the military. By referring to him as part of the film's narrative, the filmmakers integrate the actual historical trauma into fiction, thereby create a continuum between the real world and cinema. This strategy, again, strengthens the film's power to convince the audience.

In one of the key scenes in the film, Timur is portrayed as departing for duty in Cyprus. Here, he is in his pilot uniform, clean and sharp and salutes before his aircraft. This image reveals his professionalism and elite status within the army. He goes to Cyprus and that was an institutional decision and Timur sacrifices his personal interests in order to fulfill his national duty. When Timur is in Cyprus, we see him in civilian clothes such as the other fighters fighting together with him. This depiction leads to a blurring of the line between military and civilian forces making the fight a collective national one and also strengthening the myth that all Turkish men are born as soldiers. Therefore, in Cyprus, Timur is not only a pilot but also a Turkish national. Therefore, the fight is not only a national cause but also a personal cause from then on. Within this context, Timur's character reflects the ideal of hegemonic masculinity described by Connell. His elite status as a pilot, professionalism, emotional strength, and unquestioned loyalty to the nation position him as an ideal Turkish man in the nationalist imagination. Unlike the university student in *On Korkusuz Adam*, who does not have combat experience, Timur's masculinity is unquestioned particularly because it aligns well with military discipline and institutional loyalty. This formulation leaves no room for male vulnerability, uncertainty, or disagreement.

Within this context, what distinguishes *Göklerdeki Sevgili* from its predecessor is its coupling of nationalism with technological modernity. *Göklerdeki Sevgili* is rooted in a highly specific institutional setting—the Turkish Air Force—and embodies the ideological values of modernity, rationality, and technocratic nationalism. The protagonist, Timur, is not a warrior in mythical time but a disciplined pilot in a contemporary military context, reflective of Turkey's Cold War stance and its aspirations toward NATO-era modernization. In this context, for Timur, the jet plane is not only a weapon but also a symbol of progress and male domination over space. Moreover again, in this framing, Timur's masculinity depends on rational control and institutional discipline. This is in contrast to the space

described in *On Korkusuz Adam* and the one Timur fights after his arrival in Cyprus.

One of the most striking scenes is the one in which, a young Turkish girl from Cyprus, frightened and shocked with her clothes torn reveals that she has been raped by EOKA fighters. Then, Timur holds her and says: "What did they want from this innocent girl?" This question is actually a description of Timur's perception of the others. Seen through his eyes, the film portrays the enemy as barbaric, irrational, primitive, and uncivilized creating a dichotomy with moral, disciplined, and heroic Turkish soldiers. This message is also reinforced by the visual imagery. The EOKA members are represented not simply as enemies but as morally and culturally corrupt characters surrounded by Greek prostitutes and alcohol. So, they are morally inferior as opposed to clean-shaved and good-looking Turkish soldiers. Here, the woman who got raped becomes a symbol of national suffering as Yuval-Davis would agree with. Therefore, her violation is the nation's violation. Besides, the others are so evil that they even shoot a muezzin during the call to prayer. All these justify Timur's aggression and then heroism. As a result, Timur and his friends, as the embodiments of the Turkish nation, are not only the defenders of the land but also of moral and religious values. This representation, undoubtedly, reinforces the idea that Turkish presence on the island is just. Therefore, Timur, the Turkish nation, is a protector with a civilizing mission intervening to a chaotic and vulnerable space through that woman's body. This intervention is not a military decision but a moral one. This representation also indicates a hierarchy between Turkey and Cyprus, positioning Turkishness as the dominant—"master identity" or "*efendi* identity" in İpek Demir's terms,²⁷ in contrast to the vulnerable Cypriots—symbolized through the figure of the raped Cypriot woman.

Hence, the audience then gets angry and so the violence by the Turkish side is justified. Moreover, in a climactic act of revenge, Timur decapitates an EOKA commander, impales the severed head on a spike, and displays it publicly (1:09:37–57). This is a medieval move not only emphasize the moral superiority of the Turkish hero but also elevates his status to being both an executioner and a martyr at the same time. As René Girard²⁸ would agree with, this type of violence works to restore order by emphasizing national unity and boundaries. This move reestablished Timur's authority not only over the battlefield but also over the symbolic order, where masculinity and national survival are bonded with each other. Then, Timur becomes a mythological hero, who has justly taken revenge on behalf of the whole Turkish nation. This is also revealed when he is later captured and interrogated by EOKA. When he is asked how he came to Cyprus, he says "I came with the people of Cyprus and with God." This response frames the Turkish presence on the island resulted not simply from aggression but it is divinely sanctioned.

Göklerdeki Sevgili ends with a voiceover saying "One day we will return with flowers and marches." At first sight, this sentence seems to be promising peace and celebration. However, the fact that the return is suspended in the future makes it clear that the mission remains unfulfilled. Therefore, the film ends with a promise: the historically determined national mission will be

realized one day. This means, the divinely ordained duty of the Turkish nation as bringing Cyprus under Turkish control continues and the film invites the audience to dream about it. This narrative provides a shared future goal about the future for the viewers who are expected to imagine themselves as part of a national community, that is, unified to fulfill a mission as Benedict Anderson would suggest. Therefore, the film does not simply reflect the context, it even recruits the viewers to think and act in a certain way in realizing the unfinished mission.

7 | A Global Perspective and Concluding Remarks

On Korkusuz Adam and *Göklerdeki Sevgili* offer compelling and contrasting case studies in the cinematic construction of the military-nation myth in 1960s Turkey. Although they are different in genre, both films center a vision of Turkish nationalism, that is, fundamentally gendered and militarized. *On Korkusuz Adam* relies on collective combat to depict a masculine and archaic war. In contrast, *Göklerdeki Sevgili* situates the modern soldier within the institutional order of the Air Force, representing masculinity as technologically advanced and morally disciplined. Yet, both narratives converge ideologically: the nation is protected and defined by male sacrifice, whereas women are assigned the role of being emotional supporters—mourning, waiting, and emotionally investing in the hero's national duty. Besides, to be a citizen means to fight for the nation, to be a man is to die for it, and to be a woman is to support that sacrifice in silence.

Both films share the underlying message: whether archaic or modern, Turkish masculinity must be aligned with sacrifice, loyalty, and military structure. The nation, in both cases, is imagined as a space that only male bodies can define and defend. A significant moment in *Göklerdeki Sevgili* occurs during a scene where the pilot returns from a high-risk mission and is greeted not by personal honor but by a ceremony involving salutes and Turkish flags as the marks of the collectivity of his duty. The absence of personal triumph or reward underscores the prioritization of institutional honor over individual ego—a central argument of military-defined nationalism. In *On Korkusuz Adam*, the final battle sequence further exemplifies this framework. As the warriors die one by one, the film employs slow motion, heroic music, and repeated cuts to the Turkish flag and ancestral symbols, constructing a ritualistic visualization of sacrifice. A particularly striking shot captures a dying warrior holding the flag while whispering “*vatan sağ olsun*” (“long live the homeland”), collapsing in a pose reminiscent of martyrdom iconography. This is the sacred form of citizenship within the national imaginary.

Thus, this study has demonstrated that Turkish cinema of the 1960s operated not merely as a medium of entertainment, but as an ideological tool for producing and reproducing masculinity and the myth of warrior nation. In this context, films, such as *Göklerdeki Sevgili* and *On Korkusuz Adam*, do not passively reflect political conditions; instead, they actively shape politics through militarized nationalism, gendered vision of nationalism, and moral dichotomies. In this regard, Turkish cinema participated in a broader global pattern: the use of film during

the Cold War to render the nation visible, heroic, and explicitly masculine. Therefore, what *On Korkusuz Adam* and *Göklerdeki Sevgili* present was never specific to Turkey. In the 1960s, comparable representations of militarized nationalist masculinity permeated the cinematic productions of other countries. Such a transnational convergence reveals that nationalist myth-making in cinema, though shaped by local contexts, was globally structured—particularly around shared Cold War anxieties and gendered imaginaries. Understanding this does not only make us understand the ideological role of Turkish cinema but also situates it within a broader map of the 20th century nationalism.

At this point, Susan Jeffords' theorization of the “remasculinized” Cold War hero in post-Vietnam Hollywood cinema offers a productive comparative framework. Jeffords argues, this archetype emerged as a response to the emasculating trauma of the Vietnam War in order to restore national strength and reinstall honor through militarized hypermasculine protagonists.²⁹ A parallel representation is visible in *On Korkusuz Adam* and *Göklerdeki Sevgili*, where the male heroes do not only fight and become victorious but also embody fantasies of national superiority and civilizing mission through violent confrontations with the Greek enemy. So, the damaged identity is repaired while responding to the Cold War insecurities.

From this perspective, a globally popular example from the same period is *The Green Berets* (John Wayne and Ray Kellogg, 1968),³⁰ which was produced during which the United States antiwar discourse was growing due to the Vietnam War. In this context, through the character of Colonel Mike Kirby, the film disseminates the myth of the warrior nation as reflected in heroism and military discipline. Therefore, it justifies the war and the United States' involvement against the barbaric and uncivilized enemy. Here, the war is reduced to a simple fight between good and evil similar to the representation of Turkish warrior as morally upright whereas the others as barbaric and immoral. The other strategy used by filmmakers to legitimize the Vietnam War happens through the depiction of the adoption of a young Vietnamese orphan by an American soldier. In *Göklerdeki Sevgili*, a similar emotional function is fulfilled by the raped and traumatized Turkish-Cypriot girl who clings to Timur after being violated by enemy soldiers. In both cases, feminized or infantilized victims are used as narrative tools in order to legitimate masculine violence and militarized intervention. Here, the fact that should not be omitted is that in *The Green Berets*, American imperialism under the guise of democratic benevolence is defended; whereas in the selected films from Turkish cinema, Cyprus is simply represented as an extension of the homeland.

Furthermore, a brief comparison with South Korean cinema of the same period also reveals striking parallels.³¹ In this context, produced under the South Korean military government, which came to power after the 1961 coup by Park Chung-hee, *Five Marines* (Kim Ki-duk, 1961) is a notable example that glorifies fighting and military service as the pinnacle of masculine virtue and national commitment. The film takes place during the Korean War (1950–1953) and basically follows five South Korean Marine soldiers, who are sent on a dangerous reconnaissance mission very close to enemy lines. Similar to the

group in *On Korkusuz Adam*, each marine comes from a different background and has a distinct personality. However, they are united by duty and patriotism regardless of their backgrounds. The narrative focuses on their comradeship, heroism, and eventual martyrdom. Despite the tragic ending, the film celebrates their deaths as heroic and meaningful, reinforcing the idea that sacrificing one's life for the nation is the highest form of virtue.

Thus, as in other Cold War contexts—such as the United States or South Korea—Turkish cinema mobilized gendered scripts of heroism and sacrifice to insert state ideology into popular culture. The myth of the warrior nation, defended by heroic and sacrificial men, was both uniquely local and globally valid. Therefore, across borders, Cold War cinema shares a common ideological architecture, rooted in binary oppositions such as civilization versus barbarism, order versus chaos, and national righteousness versus external enemies. This ideological configuration was particularly pronounced in the Turkish context in the 1960s due to the Cyprus crisis. In this context, Turkish cinema of the 1960s, anticipated the Cyprus issue by staging symbolic victories on screen through highly emotional representations of masculine heroism and territorial defense. Consequently, masculinity, militarism, and myth come together through the narrative not only to describe Turkish nationhood but also convey what it means to feel Turkishness. In this process, *On Korkusuz Adam* and *Göklerdeki Sevgili* offer a hegemonic masculine ideal performed through militarized male protagonists embodying national strength and unity.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Endnotes

- ¹ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); George Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myths and a Taxonomy of Myths,” *Myths and Nationhood*, Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds.), (New York: Routledge, 1997), 19–35.
- ² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2006).
- ³ For the genealogy of the myth see: Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
- ⁴ Suavi Aydın, “Toplumun Militarizasyonu Zorunlu Askerlik Sisteminin ve Ulusal Orduların Yurttaş Yaratma Sürecindeki Rolü,” in *Çarklardaki Kum*, Özgür H. Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları), 2008, 25–48.
- ⁵ Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 138.
- ⁶ Floya Anthias, “Introduction” in *Woman-Nation-State*, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (eds.), (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), 7–8; Neluka Silva, “Introduction” in Part I in *Feminists Under Fire: Exchange across War Zones*, Wenona Giles, Malathi de Alwis, Edith Klein, Neluka Silva (coeditors) with Maja Korac, Djurdja Knezevic, Zarana Papice (advisory editors), (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), 37.

- ⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 1997), 1–4.
- ⁸ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 76–80.
- ⁹ Joane Nagel, “Masculinity and nationalism: gender and sexuality in making of nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21:2, 1998, 242–269, 244.
- ¹⁰ Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Civilian and Military* (Meridian Books: 1959).
- ¹¹ For the Neo-Historicist approach see: Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New-Historicism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).
- ¹² Stuart Hall, “Encoding/decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language*, Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Tillis (eds.), (London, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 117–127.
- ¹³ Aslı Daldal, *Art, Politics, and Society: Social Realism in Italian and Turkish Cinemas*, Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2003.
- ¹⁴ Özgür Mutlu Ulus, *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey: Military Coups, Socialist Revolution, and Kemalism* (New York: IB Tauris, 2011), 10–19.
- ¹⁵ For example: There are many nationalist action/adventure films, which depict the stories of men fighting shoulder to shoulder for a great nationalist goal regardless of their differences. Some of these films are as follows: *Silah Arkadaşları* (*Brothers in Arms*, Şinasi Özönük, 1962), *İsimsiz Kahramanlar* (*Nameless Heroes*, Semih Evin, 1964), and *Çanakkale Arslanları* (*The Lions of Gallipoli*, Turgut Demirağ, 1964).
- ¹⁶ Emin Alper, “Reconsidering social movements in Turkey: The case of the 1968–1971 protest cycle,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 43, Fall 2019, pp. 63–96.
- ¹⁷ Cangül Örneke, Çağdaş Üngör (eds.) (2013). *Turkey in the Cold War: Ideology and Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ¹⁸ Behlül Özkan, “Making Cyprus a national cause in Turkey's foreign policy, 1948–1965,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 15, May 2015, pp. 541–562.
- ¹⁹ For a detailed and nuanced analysis of the history of Turkish cinema see: Savaş Arslan, *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- ²⁰ Nezihe Erdoğan, “Narratives of resistance: National identity and ambivalence in Turkish melodrama between 1965 and 1975,” *Screen*, Vol. 39, Issue 3, Autumn 1998, 259–271; Arslan, 2011. For an extensive discussion of melodramatic genre see: Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised” in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), 42–88; Christine Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation” in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), 5–39.
- ²¹ Karen Wells, “Docudrama and the Agential Child: Treading a Path Between Melodrama and National Geographic,” *Sociology Lens*, Vol. 37, Issue 1, March 2024: 55–68.
- ²² Erdoğan (1998).
- ²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).
- ²⁴ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 19–24.
- ²⁵ Mihai Varga, “Mental Maps of Eastern Europe: States, Mentalities, Modernisation,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 35, Issue 4, Dec. 2022, 372–388.
- ²⁶ Connell (2005).

- ²⁷ İpek Demir, "Humbling Turkishness: Undoing the Strategies of Exclusion and Inclusion of Turkish Modernity," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 27, Issue 3, 2014: 381–401.
- ²⁸ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
- ²⁹ Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).
- ³⁰ There is extensive literature about the representation of the Vietnam War in Hollywood Cinema. Hence, gendered representations of militarism have already been raised by many academic sources. Among those, two stand out. Jeremy M. Devine's (1995) *Vietnam at 24 Frames a Second: A Critical and Thematic Analysis of Over 400 Films about the Vietnam* presents an analysis of a wide range of films from the action/adventure genre to documentaries and postwar dramas. How Hollywood has not only represented but also shaped the understanding of the war as a response to political contexts and cultural anxieties is the central argument of the book. It includes references to themes such as heroism, trauma, masculinity, and guilt. Another study is *Hollywood's Cold War* by Tony Shaw (2007). Relying on archival sources, the authors reveal the collaboration between Hollywood studios and the US government to promote nationalist and anti-communist messages. In this context, the films, according to Shaw, have contributed to the broader Cold War discourses of the Vietnam War with reference to themes such as nationhood, masculinity, and moral righteousness.
- ³¹ There is a considerable body of literature about the ideological role of cinema in Cold War-era South Korea. Hyangjin Lee's (2001) *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Culture, Identity, and Politics* provides a historical analysis of the use of cinema by the state in the 1960s to construct gendered militarism. Expanding the analysis to a transnational level, *Cinema and the Cultural Cold War: US Diplomacy and the Origins of the Asian Cinema Network* by Sang Joon Lee (2020) also explains the influence of US foreign policy on cultural production in South Korea. How nationalist narratives and militarism are shaped in relation to geopolitics is the main theme of the book. Besides, although concentrates on the 1990s Korean cinema, the first chapter of Kyung Hyun Kim's (2004) *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* includes an elaborate analysis of the 1960s and reveals the relationship between trauma and masculinity as reflected in the representations of the Korean War.

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