

The Destiny of a “Baby” Industry: Turkish Animation

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Abstract

The word “destiny” is rooted in the word “destination”, the place where someone is going. In order to draw a map for our journey we have to know where we are standing and we have to have a groundwork. Animation in Turkey dates back to the first animation experimentations of Turkish cartoonists and the first public screening of Disney’s “The Skeleton Dance” in 1932. The pioneering animations are either unfinished, lost or obscure. Just like the doomed faith of the first -unfinished- animated feature film project “Once Upon a Time” that has been carried out for almost 9 years or the questionable and -sued- authenticity of the first highly popular domestic cartoon character on Turkish TV, animation in Turkey have so many low points. Nevertheless there is a growing number of domestic feature films with record breaking number of audiences. Animation education is only 30 years old with little number of departments devoted to it, -yet- the numbers are growing. “Design Centers” are established by the encouragement of Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology to support animation studios, professional associations are forming, intellectual property rights are the talk of the day, the academy and industry interaction is getting stronger, little festivals flourish... These are indeed turning points for the -baby- animation industry in Turkey. We need to study this map in order to get to our destination: a mature industry with established work ethics, high artistic standards and rich economic outcome and make a good destiny out of it.

Keywords: Turkey, Animation History, Industry, Domestic, Animation.

Introduction

Although, shadow play, a visual storytelling tradition with immense impact on animation goes back to centuries ago we can state animation in Turkey started with the first animation experimentations of Turkish cartoonists and the first public screening of Disney’s “The Skeleton Dance” in 1932. Although Karagöz is 700 and animation in Turkey is almost a century old, it’s described as a baby industry - or even a “market” rather than an industry by industry people themselves. What may be the reason for this developmental disorder? And how can we find a treatment for it?

A baby -in this case animation in Turkey- is born into a condition, a family, a destiny. The word “destiny” -the irresistible tendency of certain events to come about- is rooted in the word “destination”, the place where someone is going, an aim, a target. In order to get ready for a life’s journey to reach a destination -in this case a mature industry with established work ethics,

high artistic standards and rich economic and cultural outcome- certain things need to be known, established and done. Such as health conditions (the conditions of animation related and affiliated industries such as game, advertising, cinema), climate (Turkey’s cultural, political, social agenda), luggage (legal structure, human resource, technology, education), currency (economy), communication skills (world citizenship, global network), faith (government support), will (good leadership and professional organizations) and a map (vision, ideals and dreams).

So, -obviously- this journey also meant a rite of passage and the process of getting mature for the animation industry, with many turning points. But some things should have gone wrong here: The pioneering animations in Turkey were either unfinished, lost or obscure - just like the doomed faith of the first -unfinished- animated feature film project Evvel Zaman İçinde (Once Upon a Time, Turgut Demirağ, 1951) that has been carried out for almost 9 years. Furthermore, the questionable and -sued- authenticity of the first highly popular domestic cartoon character on Turkish TV, Pepee (Ayşe Şule Bilgiç, 2007) is at first praised but then intentionally forgotten bump on the road. Nevertheless there is a growing number of domestic feature films with record breaking number of audiences. Animation education is only 30 years old with little number of departments devoted to it, -yet- the numbers are growing. “Design Centers” are established by the encouragement of Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology to support animation studios, professional associations are forming, intellectual property rights are the talk of the day, the academy and industry interaction is getting stronger, little festivals flourish... But why animation industry is still a baby? Is it predestined to be a little one? What are the inexorable forces that shape and control its life? In order to prescribe a treatment, let’s look closer.

Symptoms

Unfortunately there are not so many archival work or written material on animation history in Turkey. And the existing ones we have some misleading information or blurred facts. Başak Ürkmez’s book chapter titled “Turkish Animation: A Contemporary Reflection of the Karagöz Shadow Play” in Animation in the Middle East: Practice and Aesthetics from Baghdad to Casablanca (2017) offers a beneficial historical chronology. Kayra Kerî Küpçü’s A Book of Cartoons (2012) is an archive of all the animations that were broadcasted in Turkey. My archival project on women of animation in Turkey (animasyonkadinlari.org) is yet another example of online archival documentation in the form of interviews with women who are in

different fields of animation such as scriptwriting, voice acting, editing, character design, animation, education, production, etc. BEBKA's (Bursa, Bilecik, Eskişehir Development Agency - Ministry of Industry and Technology) animation reports are also unique contribution to the field with numerical information regarding animation production, companies and educational institutions. The methodology to reach more information is through meetings with industry professionals, government officers, academics, educators, independent creators. There has been two consecutive animation industry colloquiums in BAU University in 2017 and 2019, several BEBKA Animation Industry Meetings and TRT Çocuk (Turkish Radio and Television Kid's Channel) conferences and workshops in the recent years where the information in this article is gathered from.

According to 2018 BEBKA Animation Industry Report, animation industry in Turkey is classified as baby industry. Although Turkey has a great number of young audience, children and youth population is 27,5 % of Turkey, and education, game, advertising industries are growing; Turkey is not known as an animation country. Or we may flip the statement and better put it this way in order to understand the reasons for the previous statement: Animation as an industry or profession is not known in Turkey. Animator is still associated with animators at the hotels.

The pioneering animation productions Cemal Nadir Güler's short experiment *Amcabey Plajda* (Uncle on the Beach, 1932), short animation *Zeybek Oyunu* (Zeybek Dance, Vedat Ar, 1947) or *Evvel Zaman İçinde*, first colored and animated feature film, are lost. It seems our baby has lost its ancestors or the memory of it like a family photo album at the very beginning. It's hard to build a strong structure when you don't have the footing. But what animation in Turkey lacks is not limited there: Good scripts and original, authentic characters are also an issue. *Pepee* is a preschool animation series created by Ayşe Şule Bilgiç and aired in 2009 on TRT Çocuk. It was embraced by many viewers. It was indeed one of the first national popular animation series, unique with the use of folkloric dances and Turkish cultural motives and Bilgiç, describes *Düşyeri Studios* and *Pepee* brand, as a "huge success story (Oktay, 2018). But it was sued by Spanish *Zinkia Entertainment* for copying *Pocoyo* (2005) for two times. The second law suit was limited to the episodes released between 2009 and 2014. The character was then changed and become less questionable but the damage was done. *Allah'ın Sadık Kulu Barla* (God's Loyal Servant Barla, Esin Orhan, 2011) is an animated feature film with the second highest box-office. It was clearly a propaganda film and its quality and box-office success were questionable by many.

Animation films have been developing at a speed that has increased over the past 20 years. Many movies are produced every year. The market volume of the Turkish animation industry is about 95 million dollars with more than 100 large and small studios. So the share received from the world market is below

0.1 percent. The number of workforce is about 2000 people. In 2008 TRT Çocuk started broadcasting. It became the only buyer and initiator of children's animation series in Turkey and boost the industry in a different direction other than commercials and vfx,. Disney Channel Türkiye, Planet Çocuk, MinikaÇocuk, Minikago and Cartoon Network Türkiye follow it. But, although TRT is still the biggest catalyst for the production, on the reverse side, it's also criticized for being the monopoly with the limitations and control. RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Board) Law on Establishment and Broadcasting Services of Radio and Televisions dated 15.02.2011 and 6112 states general and thematic TV channels broadcasting in Turkey, should at least have 20% of animations in Turkish and from Turkish culture. But the TV channels prefer to pay the fines instead of paying for local content because it's cheaper.

In Turkey, children's magazines like *Doğan Kardeş* (1945-1993) and *Milliyet Çocuk* (1970's - till today) were popular and they dropped the seeds of imported drawn content for many generations to follow. TRT broadcasted imported animations from different geographies with a variety of stories and styles: USA, France, Belgium, Japan, Italy, Canada, Korean Republic. For a long time there have been no local character on TV although there is a deep storytelling tradition in the culture. After TRT Çocuk started broadcasting, it initiated and reinforced local and historical characters. But this reinforcement had a downside with the understanding of animation as solely as educational material. The productions become didactic and conservative with little originality and entertainment aspect. The difficult realities of life or variety of characters and topics like death, abuse, divorce, bullying, gender are still found problematic. Nevertheless, recently, there is a transition from historical characters to original characters with more universal and emotional sensitivity. Although they are with local flavor, projects like *Kral Şakir* by Varol Yaşaroğlu could reach a vast audience in MENA and south American as well as Turkey in the recent years. *Kral Şakir* is the first Turkish production in Cartoon Network and one of the first examples of 360 degree approach in Turkey with animation series, two feature films, games, toys and other merchandise. *Salih Memecan's Limon* and *Oli* is Turkey's first cooperation with Disney Channel Turkey. And *ISF Studios* production in partnership with TRT Çocuk, *Rafadan Tayfa Göbeklitepe* (Ismail Fidan, 2019) is Turkey's biggest box-office hit animation. It's the 26th in the most watched Turkish films list. Number of production of feature films and the record breaking number of audiences is promising (boxofficeturkiye, 2020).

Film	Year, Producer	(Weeks) Audience
Rafadan Tayfa Göbeklitepe	2019, CGV Mars D.	(12) 3.437.595 55.663.287,85 TL
Allah'ın Sadık Kulu: Barla (religious/political)	2011, Özen Film	(25) 2.227.113
Kral Şakir Korsanlar Diyarı	2019, CJ Entertainment Turkey	(13) 2.107.663 34.299.286,00 TL
Rafadan Tayfa Dehliz Macerası	2018, CGV Mars D.	(31) 1.802.339
Kötü Kedi Şerafettin (adult)	2016, Kare Kare Film	(7) 359.176
Köstebekgiller: Perili Orman	2015, Arzum Film, Siyah Martı	(14) 409.407
Kral Şakir Oyun Zamanı	2018, BKM, CJ Entertainment Turkey	(15) 346.964
Fırıldak Ailesi (adult)	2017, BKM	(7) 314.939
Köstebekgiller 2: Gölge'nin Tılsımı	2015, Arzum Film	(9) 218.438
Pepee: Birlik Zamanı	2016, Düşyeri	(12) 151.249

Animation industry is linked to and supported by Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Industry and Technology: Development Agencies, KOSGEB (The Administration of Development and Support for Small and Medium Enterprises). Animation industry is included into an economic organization system called "Design Centers" initiated by the Ministry of Industry and Technology enforcing R&D, communication between academy and industry, bringing out the design aspect in creative industries. Only graduates of related disciplines can work for Design Centers. This system is criticized for not supporting the little and independent studios and unschooled workers for the industry. There are many unschooled people in the industry who has been in the core of production for many years. But the design centers' regulations demands for university graduates from related fields. The industry obviously want to keep these people as well as the tax reduction and governmental support coming within the design center package. But this needs to be resolved by Professional Competence Institution applying some evaluation and giving out certificates.

Creative industries' legal definition is still in the process of formation, so as its authorized professional organization. The government treat animation as a profession under cinema although its conditions can be different and unique. In order to get funds and tax reductions you have to have specific NACE Codes, but animation code was given very recently and it still is not recognized in some cases. So animation producers have to jump from one code to another to be able to get funded by the government. NACE Code (59.12.01) covers these areas: Motion picture, video and television programs post-shooting activities (audio-image editing, transfer of original copies, color correction,

digital improvement, visual effects, animation, subtitle, captioning, graphics, etc.

Between years 2005-2020 only 21 projects out of 627 were supported feature animations by Turkish Ministry of Tourism and Culture Cinema Fund and only 4 of them were adult animation genre (Okur, 2020). Government supports and funds contracts have such articles like mortgage, guarantor very hard to fulfill especially for independent filmmakers, startups and small scale companies who needs these funds the most. But animation pioneer countries like Canada and France have different kinds of supports, funds and loans those protect the creatives and their companies. Sadly creative industries are still are treated as dispensable or, seen as ephemera, not art enough, not mature enough, not adult material. Therefore, they are economically sensitive and breakable. Artistic rights and justice are fairly new concepts for creative industries. Theory and practice very recently started to work together in copyright issues with the immense effort of professional organizations, academic and government. Animation industry workers are young and are less experienced. The moment they have experience they move abroad, there has been an important number of brain migration in the last decades.

Turkey has been going through some political, economic and social turbulent times. These recurring crises caused the population to develop certain character traits and abilities: Problem solver, adapter, practical, undismayed, patient. But we also developed short sightedness- not being able to see far, not being able to plan, develop, pre-produce and organize ahead of time. Therefore we see no long term projects, no risk taking or artistic experiments on commercial production and very little independent production with little budgets. Instead of 52 episodes, 13 episodes are

ordered from the animation production companies and many problems follow for this very reason.

In Turkey, the first animation class started in 1984 in Graphic Design Department of in Anadolu University, the first animation department was established in the same university in 1990. There are 12 universities offering undergraduate and/or graduate programs in Turkey. The number of animation departments has increased especially in recent years, nevertheless the number of graduates are far from feeding the human resource need. Animation departments are mostly under fine arts faculties and a few from communication faculties. The academic structure educates and graduates generalists. Education on variety of techniques and styles or stop motion are few. Due to short budget and deadlines, use of 3D is promoted. Therefore, we see little aesthetic abstraction, similar looking 3Ds everywhere and animators using 2D technique is very rare. There's a great demand for them.

There is also a need for animators, artists with academic background and PhDs to serve for the regulations set by YÖK. Since it's hard to find, the academic staff is build with people with academic titles but little experience in the field and they usually come from other fields like painting, educational sciences, graphic arts, etc. University teaching staff with academic titles and practical experience are very rare to find.

Yök (Council of Higher Education) recently changed the university admission exam regulations for animation departments. The transition from the special talent exam to the central exam is on the agenda. It's seen as a very negative and harmful decision by many academics and prospective students since central exam is a test and for a creative and talent based discipline like animation portfolios will play no role in selection process for the schools.

Animators Association was established in 1993. Another association Canlandırılar was established in 2012 and became a member of ASIFA. And Animation Producers Association is established very recently in 2018. Nevertheless, we need more animation producers and what we need more is animation producers with global vision and experience who are willing to and capable of doing coproductions.

Animation as adult content become visible in popular music videos for popular singers like Selami Şahin and Sezen Aksu.

There are only a few animation festivals like ANİMİST, BEBKA and Canlandırılar.

Turkey is not Creative Europe Media member anymore, and does not have treaty agreement with some countries, therefore, in some cases, it's hard to find co-producers and apply to international funds.

Diagnosis

The "baby" industry's diagnosis is development disorder due to the lack of roots, private sector support, international and national visibility, human resource, artistic vision, aware policy-makers and poisonous bureaucracy.

Treatment

Animation industry first, should be recognized by law makers and the conditions of an industry should be established by medium and long-term policies.

TRT should leave its persona as the sponsor and therefore the partner and beneficiary of the animation projects behind and solely be the broadcaster of these projects. More broadcasters, VOD's should pitch in and adult projects besides children's content should be produced.

The industry has to keep up with the latest artistic developments and new technologies, new forms of storytelling, new possibilities like AI and VR via in-house or online educations.

Game is seen as the most promising discipline to get supported either as a start up enterprises or incubation centers in Turkey at the moment. Animation could and should become like it.

Animation is highly an international discipline. Knowing different languages means being a global citizen and being open to the global market. Visionary festivals and animation film markets should be organized where co-productions and international partnerships and investments could be made.

Stories with global sensitivity, vision and feeling should be told.

Although we have international success stories like Ayce Kartal who is the winner of grand prize at Clermont-Ferrand, César Awards and 2017 Jury Award at Annecy Animation Festival for Wicked Girl and scriptwriters Kaan Kalyon working for Pixar, vfx supervisor Arslan Elver working for Frame Store, concept designer Tuna Bora receiver of 2017 Annie Award; the essential common denominators of all these individual success stories are, they are individual and they take place abroad. Will they be able to "make it" if they were in Turkey? I wonder... Therefore, we need to seek the rich ground that make these talents flourish in order to make Turkey become and known as an animation country. And these fertile condition should be promoted and explained nationally and internationally.

Animation education should be increased at all levels including primary or high schools. Ministry of National Education and TÜBİTAK (The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey), development agencies, municipalities may play a big and constructive role in this.

University and industry partnerships have increased, but its sustainability must be ensured.

Determining areas of specialization in different branches of animation in undergraduate programs can make the goals for graduate profiles more realistic and satisfactory for the industry. The importance of the humanities and social sciences for art, design and communication should be recognized and emphasized. There may be more critical thinking, concept development, script writing, pedagogy, media literacy and media ethics courses.

The perception of the departments that accept students with special talent exam is different in the eyes

of families. In order to change this perception, there is a need to allocate more space to the departments that accept students with a special talent exam in both on-campus and off-campus promotional activities.

There may be a national award for creating awareness about the profession and for motivation and constructive competition among creatives with categories like best character design, concept art, animation, feature, commercial film, short, animation producer, vfx, etc.

Professional associations should voice their achievements and earnings to the public. They should play a more active role in creating awareness and scrutiny of copyright, the employee rights. Recently the voice actors rights of the application are on the agenda.

RTÜK Law on Establishment and Broadcasting Services of Radio and Televisions detailed at the introduction should be applied and penalties should be increased.

Success stories are increasing but they need to be promoted and public knowledge.

Creative Industries' importance has started to be understood, but in the field of animation, more research projects should be developed and supported.

Animation Producers Association is planning to have two centers in Ankara and İstanbul devoted to animation industry in 3-4 years time. They will be named as Animation Valley and be used as a location for networking, training and incubation center.

Conclusion

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's famous quote "A nation devoid of art and artists cannot have a full existence" underlines the fact that all arts are vital. Animation is needed. A rich, colorful ecosystem like animation itself should be seeded. But it also demands growing in good health and happily. The time of Covid 19 made us all see: If we want health and happiness, we are all in this together. If one is sick, one way or the other, we will all get affected by that. Culturally, socially, economically, personally, creatively we all have to keep in mind: All for one and one for all.

End Notes

¹ Prof. Dr.

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