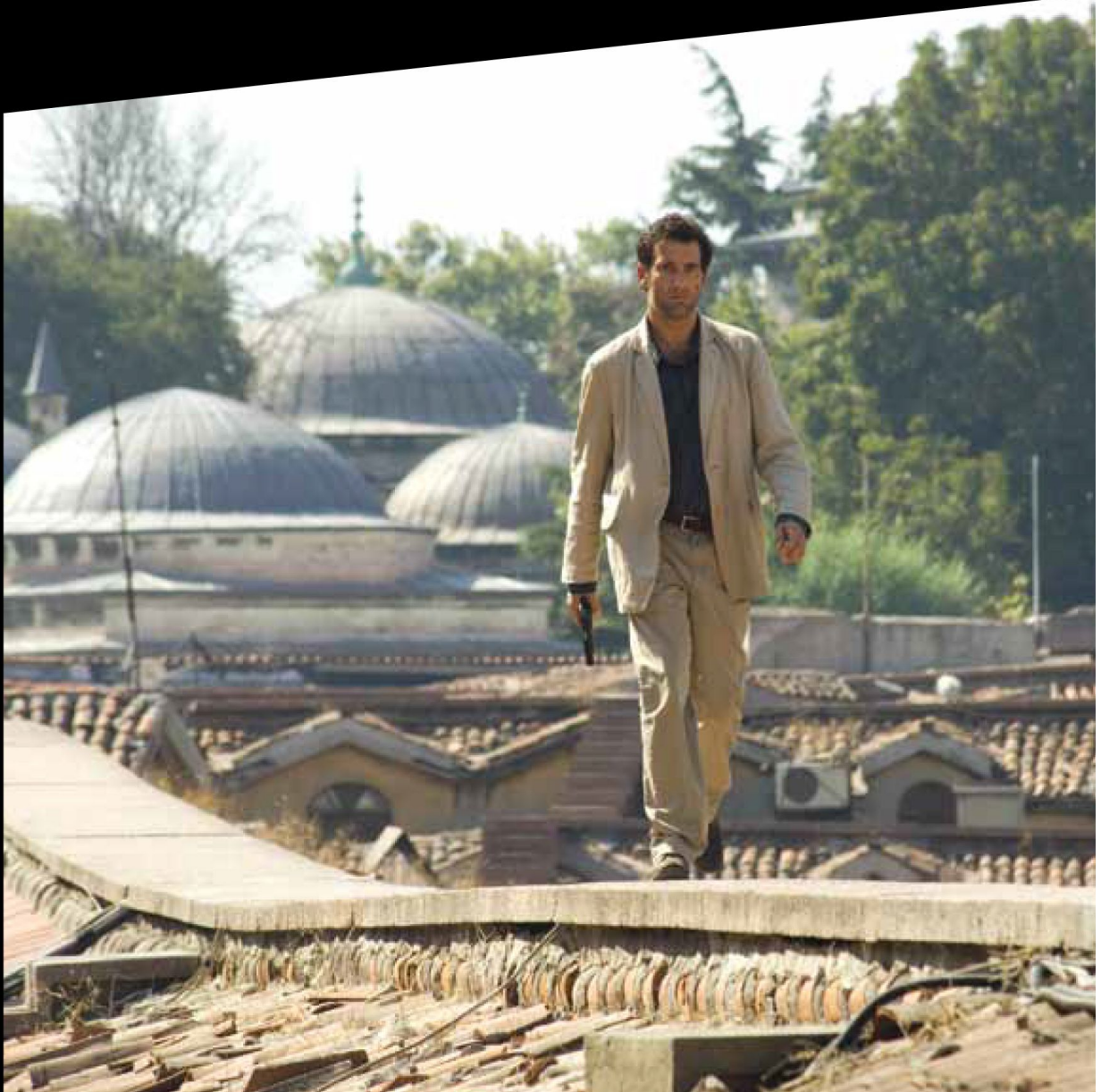


WORLD FILM LOCATIONS ISTANBUL



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BEYOĞLU/PERA

on a cinematic map of Istanbul

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CINEMA HAS PLAYED a special role in Istanbul, helping form the image of the city for both the city's residents and audiences elsewhere in Turkey and abroad. If a 'cinematic map' of Istanbul were to be drawn, Beyoğlu/ Pera would occupy its centre. The district hosted the first film screenings (1896), the first (1908) as well as the most prestigious movie theatres along its main artery Grand Rue de Pera (İstiklal or Independence Avenue). Most film businesses were located here, especially on Yeşilçam Street during the heyday of Turkish cinema (1950s – mid-1970s).

Pera, which means 'on the other side' in Greek, was physically across the historic peninsula, on the other side of the Golden Horn. 'Beyoğlu' which literally means the son of a *bey* (or chieftain/lord), was the name Ottoman Turks had preferred for Pera, and after Turkification, came to be exclusively used. Beyoğlu was originally the diplomatic and financial district; embassies and banks were located there when Istanbul was the capital of the Ottoman Empire. In connection, a vibrant trade, cultural, and entertainment life developed and impressive multistory buildings lined and surrounded İstiklal Avenue.

Predominantly non-Muslim minorities and Levantines (Europeans residing in the Levant, the eastern Mediterranean) lived in the wider district well into the twentieth century. As Zeynep Çelik (1993) also notes, as a consequence of European connections, Beyoğlu was the district subject to the first modernization efforts and municipal reforms of the nineteenth century and came to be often contrasted with traditional neighbourhoods in the historic peninsula in literary and cinematic representations of the city, that dealt with the predicaments of modernization. It was the entertainment centre of the whole city with its European-style arcades, cafes,

patisseries and halls, even before the arrival of cinema. Until the opening of the Atatürk Cultural Center on Taksim Square in the 1970s, the cinemas in the district hosted all sorts of cultural events, including concerts, ballet performance and visiting shows.

Most non-Muslim Ottoman citizens and Levantines left not only the area but also Turkey by the mid-twentieth century. Still, Beyoğlu is marketed as the 'multicultural' or 'cosmopolitan' corner of the city in many contemporary representations produced by local and transnational culture makers. Real estate values in Beyoğlu witnessed a fate paralleling that of film business. After slummization in the 1970s and early 1980s, a conscientious effort was made by local businessmen, public personalities, and professionals to revive the district beginning with İstiklal Avenue. The ironic return of the (truncated and symbolic) tramway, to a now pedestrianized İstiklal Avenue in 1991 marked the official start date of the process in which Beyoğlu was re-created as a landscape of nostalgia. Beyoğlu Municipality and Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Art (IKSV), which organizes the Istanbul Film Festival, are the main actors who have worked, to reclaim the memory of the neighbourhood for the whole city.

Based in the district, cinema was a multicultural enterprise. Many professionals involved in the production, distribution and exhibition of films were of Armenian, Jewish and Greek origins. If actors, they would use pseudonyms on the screen – for example, Kenan Pars who passed away in March 2008, after having played a role in nearly three hundred films, was an Armenian Turk with the given name Krikor Cezveciyan. The memory of cinema and non-Muslim minorities are intimately connected even though the films may not take on the issue



of minorities in an explicit way. One of the interesting accounts of Beyoğlu and cinema is the memoir of Italian Levantine Giovanni Scognamillo (1929–) whose father was the manager of the famous movie theatre Elhamra. Scognamillo began his career writing film criticism for the press, worked in motion picture advertising, and wrote much quoted histories of Turkish cinema. His memoir takes us on a journey along a vibrant İstiklal Avenue. Today, İstiklal Avenue is once again the cultural heart of the city with thousands of people leisurely strolling at any time of the day.

Only second to İstiklal Avenue, and off of it, is Yeşilçam Street on our cinematic map. It was on and around Yeşilçam Street that artists' agencies, advertising, production, and distribution companies gathered along with famous movie theatres, such as Emek, İpek and Rüya. 'Yeşilçam' came to refer to a time

when hundreds of films were hurriedly produced every year, and to the cumulative culture of local film production and consumption. Yeşilçam films consisted predominantly of melodramas and comedies; and its audience of families. They dealt

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moralistically with themes of national identity and modernization, and the relationships between couples from different social and economic classes, only to affirm traditional gender roles and social values. Typically, films tended to straddle a fine line between selling images of Istanbul and participating in a civilizing process, simultaneously training their characters in urban behaviour and showing how they are able to resist to the temptations of the city.

Yeşilçam and its audience practices may be defunct but by no means dead. The 1990s witnessed the return of Yeşilçam films and a matching proliferation of Yeşilçam-inspired TV dramas on private channels, Yeşilçam-inspired block-busters in cinemas, as well as the emergence of revalorizing studies on Yeşilçam films growing out of communication faculties at private universities that have been opened in ever-increasing numbers since the 1990s. Part of the appeal of old films is that they show 'the streets, the old gardens, the Bosphorus views, and the broken-down mansions and apartments in black and white' (Orhan Pamuk 2005: 32–3) and thereby act as memory objects and provoke nostalgia.

In the 1990s, the backstreets of Beyoğlu became the preferred setting of films on marginal lives outside mainstream society, featuring figures such as prostitutes, transvestites, drug addicts and even a dwarf (*Dönersen Isık Çal/Whistle If You Come Back* [1992], *The Night, Gece, Melek ve Bizim Çocuklar/The Angel, and Our Boys* [1993], *Aşk Ölümden Soğuktur/Love is Colder than Death* [1994], *Ağır Roman/Heavy Novel* [1997], *Anlat İstanbul/Istanbul Tales* [2005]). In the 2000s, however, in Turkish-German director Fatih Akin's much celebrated films (*Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* [2005], *Head-on* [2004], and *The Edge of Heaven* [2007]), principle characters all travel from Germany to Istanbul to find a home base at Beyoğlu's Grand Hotel de Londres overlooking the Golden Horn and the historic peninsula. Coinciding with the international success of New Turkish Cinema at the festival circuit, thanks partly to European funding schemes such as Eurimages, this is a decidedly transnational Beyoğlu where once again multiple languages are spoken. †