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Film Reviews

New York'ta Beş Minare (Five Minarets in New York). Dir. Mahsun Kırmızıgül. Perf. Haluk Bilginer, Danny Glover, Gina Gershon. Boyut Film, 2010. Film.

Turkey's national cinema has spent the better part of a decade angling for a bigger share of its domestic market, which it has achieved, and for greater international recognition. While Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Semih Kaplanoğlu have garnered a strong international following through the festival circuit, popular cinema's lack of auteur branding makes it difficult to attract foreign audiences. Still, some mass-market filmmakers have taken the rising cultural cachet (and the concomitant funding) of these domestic film projects as an opportunity to reach beyond Turkey. In this vein, writer-director-star Mahsun Kırmızıgül filmed *New York'ta Beş Minare*, a bilingual production that divides the action between the Republic of Turkey and New York City with a cast that combines Turkish and Hollywood stars. While *Beş Minare* topped the Turkish box office in 2010 with $20m., it remains too confined by local conventions to appeal to a potentially global audience.

After several Turkish journalists are killed in targeted acts of terrorism, an investigator named Fırat (Mahsun Kırmızıgül) identifies Haci Gümüş (Haluk Bilginer), an imam based in New York, as the mastermind. Sent with his partner, Acar (Mustafa Sandal) to apprehend and repatriate him, the Turkish cops confront a post-9/11 New York, where they must deal with FBI chief David Becker (Robert Patrick), a caricature of an anti-Muslim bigot. Fırat and Acar also - rather improbably - confront gangs of Harlem thugs with ties to Haci's friend and fellow religious leader Marcus (Danny Glover), who - even more improbably - uses these street connections to orchestrate an ambush that rescues Haci from extradition. Casting Danny Glover as an American-born Muslim nods toward an Islam whose roots are domestic rather than foreign, but this welcome nuance fails to compensate for a broader tendency to allow racial and national stereotypes to stand in

for much-needed character development, a weakness that affects Turkish and American figures alike.

When the Turkish cops split from the FBI to undertake their own search for Haci, they find themselves captured by Marcus' henchmen, but the fugitive insists on treating his pursuers as guests. They learn about the well-liked imam's life, including his American wife Maria (a dreadfully underserved Gina Gershon) and their daughter Jasmin (Justine Cotsonas), who is engaged to a young WASP. They begin to question Haci about his faith, presuming some latent extremism, but his religious tolerance - his wife is a Christian, and he celebrates Jasmine's interfaith wedding - and his commitment to pacifism soon convince Acar that they have the wrong man. Worried that the Turkish police would refuse to recognize his innocence, Acar suggests that they return without him, but Fırat insists on bringing Haci to justice, a mission the FBI helps carry out. After returning with Haci to Turkey, the plot quickly disposes of the political and turns instead to the personal, with a conclusion that hinges on a family vendetta whose twists and tragedies would be better suited to a television soap opera than an ostensibly transnational feature film.

Almost as dismaying as *Beş Minare's* screenplay are its technical misfires. Early sequences set up pointed parallels between religious extremism, Turkish ultra-nationalism, and the Turkish police, but the editing is heavy-handed, and these parallels are only intermittently addressed thereafter. In New York, several superfluous, lingering shots of the city skyline and other aerial shots punctuate the action and show off the film's budget; however, the cinematography generally suffers from an inability to control lens flare and an inexplicable predilection for wide-angle framing of interiors and exteriors alike. This approach creates obvious distortions that feel at times like an attempt to refract the impossibly straightforward characters and the spaces they inhabit, but such efforts fail to amount to something other than superficial visual manipulation.

Despite overt but overly simplistic efforts to comment on the so-called "War on Terror," the politics of *Beş Minare* ultimately revolve around the Republic of Turkey. As Haci faces his accusers, the flaws in the Turkish legal process become clear. Significantly, even the representation of torture revolves entirely around Turks, with Fırat repeatedly relying on violent methods of extracting information that, not incidentally, turns

out to be false. While this core national focus makes the film's descent into interpersonal melodrama seem inevitable, future projects seeking transnational credentials would do well to transcend such narrowly appealing conventions by eschewing stale archetypes and building a more layered portrayal of complex international connections.

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