From Cannes to the Encyclopaedia of Humour
Italo-Turkish Relations in the Field of Cartoon Art[1]

Valentina Marcella

Abstract This chapter is a study of the relations between Turkey and Italy in the field of cartoon art in the mid-20th century. It starts by outlining the changes at political and cultural level that characterised mid-1940s Turkey, and the importance of the international cartoon festivals and contests which began to proliferate in the same period. It claims that these festivals played a major role in promoting social interconnections among artists of different nationalities. Next, the chapter examines the artistic currents that developed as a result of these interconnections in Turkey's and Italy's cartoon tradition. It shows a mutual cultural development, and similar caricature themes and styles. Then, the chapter investigates the encounter between well-known Turkish caricaturist Turhan Selçuk (aka Turhan) and Guglielmo Guastaveglia (aka Guasta), editor of *Il Travaso delle idee* ("The Flow of Ideas"), the longest-running Italian weekly satirical magazine. It finds that in the 1950s this encounter turned into a collaboration that made Turhan widely appreciated in Italy, to the extent that in the early 1960s his name was included in the prestigious 'Enciclopedia dell'Umorismo' ("Encyclopaedia of Humour"). Finally, the chapter analyses the reciprocal representations in the caricatures of each country, detecting the absence of dichotomic representations. It thus concludes that the interconnections whose origins and development were traced throughout the chapter allowed the caricaturists of Italy and Turkey to look at each other in a way that broke down distance and stereotypes.

1 This is a slightly revised version of a study that first appeared in Italian in Rosita D'Amora / Stefania De Nardis (eds.), Alaturka / Alafranga. Interazioni culturali fra Turchia ed Europea mediterranea, Bologna 2025, under the title 'Turchi che non fumano e fanno divertire il mondo. I vignettisti turchi e l'Italia' (109–128). The author wishes to thank cartoonist Kamil Masaracı and Ruhan Selçuk, the wife of the late cartoonist Turhan, for sharing their precious memories and anecdotes in private interviews, and Rosita D'Amora for her insightful comments and suggestions.

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Introduction

Caricatures and cartoons hold a privileged position among the numerous artistic genres. What distinguishes them from other visual artistic expressions is that they carry multiple, layered meanings, from the merely comic to the extremely critical. Their comic aspects are generally self-evident, and thus easily enjoyable; by contrast, criticism may be less easy to detect, concealed under various aesthetic and linguistic devices. Caricatures and cartoons may have short written dialogues, captions, or no words at all; in any case, the goal of communication is achieved by displaying symbols, signs, and visual codes that for the most part belong to a global imagery, and hence are universally decipherable. For instance, a dove stands for peace, a broken pencil means censorship, a cigar reveals that the smoker is an unscrupulous businessman or a crime boss, and a politician with long arms is a corrupt one, who steals from the people to his own advantage. It is precisely the ability to rapidly reach observers across geographic and linguistic borders that earns these illustrations a privileged position within the visual arts.

The universality of caricatures and cartoons is embedded in the terms that refer to them. In particular, 'caricature' derives from the Italian *caricatura*, which means "representation (illustration, engraving or painting) where the distinctive traits of the subject are exaggerated or distorted to generate a comic or grotesque effect".[2] Words that originate from *caricatura* may be detected in a number of languages, not without some regional variation.

Turkish is no exception. The Italian original becomes *karikatür*, which is defined as a "humorous and thought-provoking image on any topic related to people and society that is presented in an exaggerated manner".[3] By extension, *karikatür* is commonly adopted to refer to any comic and satirical illustration.[4]

The similar terminology in the Italian and Turkish case evokes a symbolic closeness between graphic satire in the two countries. Indeed, the same symbolic affinity may be detected between Italy and other areas that

2 Garzanti Linguistica, Dizionario della lingua italiana, https://www.garzantilinguistica.it/ricerca/?q=caricatura (16.1.2024). This and all following translations from Italian and Turkish are by the author.

3 Türk Dil Kurumu, Türkçe Sözlük, Ankara 2005.

4 For further discussion of terminology, see the introductory chapter of this volume. In the following pages, the author of this chapter employs the terms 'caricature' and 'cartoon' interchangeably.

derive their name for satirical representations from the latter; yet, what differentiates Turkey is the importance that it seems to attach to the Italian origin of the word, and of the concept itself. In fact, nearly every piece of writing that contributes to the historiography of Turkish cartoons, consisting of short articles and entire volumes written by Turkish cartoon historians and cartoonists themselves, begins by discussing the Italian roots of the genre. Even though these studies do not always mention the 16th-century Italian painter Annibale Carracci, to whom the birth of modern caricature is often attributed,[5] they always introduce the subject as an Italian practice named *caricatura*. One of the earliest signs of this tendency is found in an article written in 1950 by cartoonist Turhan Selçuk, aka Turhan, who argues:

> To understand what caricature is, one needs to go back to the roots of caricature in the past and follow its historical development. The original word comes from *caricare*, which means 'to attack' in Italian. Initially, caricature had the status of a type of artistic portrait, such a portrait that gained a comic and grotesque aspect by exaggerating all physical defects of the model. [...] So begins the story of this beautiful art.[6]

5 Among others, John Geipel, Attilio Brilli and Mary Vaccaro, who also trace such attribution back to 17th-century sources. John Geipel, The Cartoon. A Short History of Graphic Comedy and Satire, Newton Abbot 1972, 56; Attilio Brilli, Dalla satira alla caricatura. Storia, tecniche e ideologie della rappresentazione, Bari 1985, 209–213; Mary Vaccaro, Carracci's *Ritrattini Carichi* and the 'Origins' of Caricature, in: Lucia Tantardini / Rebecca Norris (eds.), Grotesque and Caricature. Leonardo to Bernini, Leiden / Boston 2023, 103–125, here 105.

6 Turhan Selçuk, Önce Çizgi Vardı... "Çizgide 60. Yıl", Istanbul 2003, 245–246. This passage is part of an article by Turhan that was first published in the newspaper *Yeni İstanbul* ("New Istanbul"). Turhan joined *Yeni İstanbul* in the late 1940s as chief cartoonist and, in 1950, he began to contribute as writer, too, with pieces on the history of caricature. This passage is then quoted in a later article, which appeared in the satirical magazine *Dolmuş* ("Shared Taxi") on 7 March 1956 and is reproduced in Selçuk 2003, 245–246. This article, whose author is unclear, praises Turhan for his pioneering research on the art of cartoon on a national level and quotes his words on the origins of this art to emphasise his merits. A clarification may be appropriate, since *Dolmuş* was published by Turhan himself, along with his brother İlhan. Although the presence of the Selçuk brothers on the editorial team could raise doubts about the impartiality of this anonymous author's judgement, it is a matter of fact that Turkey saw no relevant attempt to scientifically explore the art of cartoon before 1950. These circumstances suggest that Turhan actually was a pioneer in the field, regardless of any partiality that the author of this article might have had in the light of the Selçuk involvement in *Dolmuş*.

The linguistic borrowing and interest in the origins of caricature are but two indicators of the multiple interactions that developed between Turkey and Italy through caricatures. In fact, these connections were neither confined to etymology nor was cartoonists' reciprocal curiosity limited to past styles and techniques, least of all in the case of the above-mentioned Turhan. The following pages provide a first insight into the largely unexplored field of these relationships.

Social Interconnections

Turkey's interest in Italian caricature in the early 1950s, exemplified in the passage by Turhan quoted above, is no coincidence. Since the mid-1940s winds of change had been blowing in the country. On a political level, Turkey had started its process of democratisation with the foundation of the first long-lasting opposition party and the first multi-party elections in 1946. Meanwhile, in the cultural sphere, the country welcomed the innovations introduced by the end of World War II, including the spread of the radio, the circulation of foreign press, and the organisation of international artistic events. The world of cartoons was not exempt from this general openness, which had the two-fold merit of stimulating curiosity toward other cartoon traditions and satisfying such curiosity through exchanges.

Arguably, the Italian model attracted particular curiosity for two main reasons. First, to some degree its representatives were seen as the heirs to Carracci's endeavour. Second, on a general level, the Italian model of society of that time, built on traditional structures and moral values, resembled its Turkish counterpart to a great extent, as Lea Nocera argues in her research on Turkey's mass culture.[7] Predictably, interest turned into research and knowledge; thus, it is no surprise that in the early 1950s, mention of Italian caricature began to appear in articles and essays on the art of cartoons, parallel to the development of these studies themselves.

Research could take various forms; for example, as is easy to imagine, the opportunity to order foreign newspapers and magazines opened new perspectives on editorial cartoons and satirical illustrations from other countries. Yet, it was the mushrooming of international cartoon festivals that marked the real turning point in the interactions among colleagues of

7 Lea Nocera, Sperimentare la modernità. Le relazioni culturali tra Italia e Turchia negli anni '50 e '60, conference paper presented at: La turcologia italiana: continuità e nuove prospettive di ricerca, Napoli, Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale', 12.–13.12.2013.

different nationalities. The nature of such festivals guaranteed freedoms that structural and sometimes political dynamics prevented in the press. They gave cartoonists a chance to show their work to peer experts, in addition to the public, and the venues and programmes allowed artists to share their expertise not only through the two-dimensional surface of their illustrations but also in person. Crucially, these events escaped the scrutiny and control of power more easily than the press, so they secured a freedom of expression that was particularly important for artists who operated under repressive governments. In brief, festivals offered a unique opportunity for visibility, sharing, and learning.

Mutual Cultural Development

Whereas the immediate benefits of internationalism and cultural exchanges consisted of the opportunity for caricature professionals to get to know each other and share different trends, their long-run impact lay in the introduction of the newly acquired innovations to the respective local cartoon traditions. Examining Italian and Turkish cartoons of the late 1940s to the early 1970s, similarities in styles and themes become evident.

To begin with, common habits and large-scale changes that took place in both countries become the object of satire in a quite similar way. For instance, the introduction of the television as a commodity good in the domestic space is a major theme in both Turkish and Italian caricatures. Also, in both cases the most stressed and satirised aspect of this innovation is the addiction that it creates among its users.

Furthermore, comparable habits are turned into witty tools to denounce similar socio-political situations. For example, this is the case with cartoons that represent ordinary people facing the rising cost of *espresso* ("coffee") in Italy and *çay* ("tea") in Turkey. By portraying characters' unhappy reactions, such illustrations exploit the same stereotype (the high, one could ironically say obsessive, consumption of the two national drinks) to denounce the same issue, that is to say inflation, and hence, by extension, economic policies.

Moreover, similar patterns are visible in the representation of events that fell outside Turkish and Italian borders. To mention a few, space expeditions such as the launch of Sputnik and the moon landing are illustrated manifestly more often than, say, the Cuban Revolution or the Vietnam War. Likewise, both in Italy and Turkey the depiction of universal themes appears to attach the highest importance to civil rights. To some extent, this is predictable in the sphere of political satire; nonetheless, what is

surprising is that even within the wide variety of matters that fall under this umbrella the most frequently denounced are the same: censorship and imprisonment.

And to conclude, perhaps the most striking similarity lies in the production of the so-called illustrations 'without words'. These *yazısız*, in Turkish, or *senza parole*, in Italian, were black-and-white cartoons characterised by a clear style and absence of written text, as the name suggests, in which visual language was extremely explicit and clear. These features had the merit of making them enjoyable for different readers beyond linguistic borders; consequently, it is no surprise that in the era of cartoon internationalism these illustrations, which were universal by nature, abounded both in Italy and Turkey.

Considering cartoons more broadly, to a certain extent these similarities may be detected on a larger scale, rather than on an exclusively Italo-Turkish path. This is not astonishing, since the international character of cartoon contests and festivals allowed exposure to and the dissemination of knowledge in multiple directions; after all, this was their primary goal. However, a specific affinity between Italy and Turkey is undeniable. Namely, the caricatures about television consumption were encouraged by parallel sociocultural developments; the same type of comic representation related to coffee and tea was inspired by the same cultural practice; the denunciation of inflation was made possible by similar economic policies; and, as far as civil rights are concerned, common experiences in the recent past and present of the two countries made their artists keener on drawing in the name of political freedom and freedom of speech than, say, issues of immigration and integration. The latter might have well been a major concern in Germany at the time, but not yet in Italy nor Turkey.

An actual limit in assessing the dynamics at the base of these common trends lies in the difficulty in establishing the extent and mode of reciprocal influence. In other words, it is not always easy to discern a casual similarity due to a shared context, an unconscious influence originating with the discovery of another artistic model, or an intentional borrowing from the other cartoon tradition. A thorough analysis of the voluminous cartoon production of the two countries could yield further understanding on these points, but such a task falls beyond the scope of the present study.

In some cases, however, the trajectory of influence appears to be manifest, such as with respect to the cartoons without words. In the history of Turkish caricature, this is the dominant artistic trend of the 1950s and 1960s, one that marked a revolution in the national context insofar as it totally broke with norms for satirical illustrations of the past, both in style

and content.[8] The artist credited with initiating this trend is the already mentioned Turhan, and he remained its undisputed master until his death.[9] As the following section will elucidate, the spread of the *yazısız* matches with the beginning of a close relation between Turhan and *Il Travaso delle idee* ("The Flow of Ideas", from now on *Il Travaso*), the longest-running Italian weekly satirical magazine (1900–1966). *Il Travaso* was publishing the *senza parole* as early as the 1920s, presumably adopting this style from France, judging from the presence of samples signed by French cartoonists like Pierre Henri Cami and Raymond Peynet in the Italian magazine. Turhan's well-known interest in foreign trends and his relationship with *Il Travaso* suggest that the latter might have been his source of inspiration. So, the trajectory of influence in the case of these cartoons may be explained as follows: at least at the beginning, the Turkish cartoonists who turned to this trend were actually inspired by Turhan, albeit indirectly influenced by their Italian (and French) colleagues.

"The Bakunin of Turkish Cartoon": Turhan in Italy

The festivals and broad circulation of print media, whose benefits were discussed in the previous two sections, paved the way for a true golden age of Italo-Turkish connections. In fact, in addition to influencing each other's artistic traditions, they allowed cartoonists to develop direct interchange and specific partnerships, not without some friction.

Mutual interest and discovery would likely not have become so intense and fruitful without the contribution of two fundamental characters, namely Turhan and Guglielmo Guastaveglia, known as Guasta. Turhan (1922–2010) was an established cartoonist in Turkey by the time of the first international festivals due to his long-term collaboration with newspapers and widely distributed magazines. He had a keen interest in the artistic potential of caricature and, at a time when foreign cartoons were almost totally

8 Up to the end of the 1940s, Turkish cartoons revolved around domestic (vs. universal) matters, portrayed local situations, and were flanked with captions. The next revolution after the caricatures without words was marked in the early 1970s by the circulation of cartoons with dialogues in balloons and the return to a certain localism, among other features. Ferit Öngören, Cumhuriyet'in 75 Yılında Türk Mizahı ve Hicvi, Istanbul 1998.

9 For an overview of Turhan's work see, among others, Turhan Selçuk, 140 Karikatür, Istanbul 1959; Turhan Selçuk, Hiyeroglif, Istanbul 1964; Turhan Selçuk, Hal ve Gidiş Sıfır, Istanbul 1969; Turhan Selçuk, İnsan Hakları / Human Rights, Istanbul 1995; Selçuk 2003.

unknown to Turkish artists, he started to purchase catalogues and albums of colleagues from abroad to study their styles and techniques. Turhan was one of the first to adopt foreign cartoon models and styles, as the previous discussion on the illustrations without words has partially revealed. This interest made him a pioneer of internationalism among Turkish cartoonists.

Guasta (1889–1985), meanwhile, was writer, journalist, illustrator, and, last but not least, *direttorissimo* ("supereditor") of *Il Travaso*, where he worked for approximately half of its print life, first as author and then editor. A close analysis of *Il Travaso* in the post-World War II era reveals that his directorship was oriented toward not only "denouncing and mocking corruption, ascribed to the ruling class",[10] but also promoting a marked internationalism. This took shape in spaces that regularly hosted foreign cartoonists, like the page titled *Eppur si ride in...* ("And Yet They Laugh in..."), later renamed *La torre di Babele* ("Tower of Babel"). There were also sporadic publications linked to occasional events, such as the reproduction of a few Spanish illustrations dedicated to Italy originally published in a special issue of the Spanish humour magazine *La Codorniz* ("The Quail").[11]

Tracking Turhan's and Guasta's career, there are strong reasons to believe that the two first met at the first iteration of the Congress of Humourists, held in 1952 in Cannes under the aegis of *Il Travaso* and the French magazine *Ici Paris* ("Paris Here"). This conference ratified the foundation of the International Association of Humourists (also International Association of Humour),[12] established "to tear down frontiers"[13] with a mood similar to the one that led to the birth of many other festivals in the same period. Guasta was appointed vice-president of the association, and with the authority

10 Valerio Zandonà, La satira: uno specchio dell'antipolitica nell'Italia giolittiana, in: Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea: La satira fa storia. Eventi, pratiche, linguaggi 11/3 (2012), 1–16, here 9. https://www.studistorici.com/2012/10/29/zandona_numero_11/ (16.1.2024).

11 The Spanish cartoons about Italy were reproduced in the issue of *Il Travaso* dating 13 January 1958. *Il Travaso delle idee* 2/59, Rome 13.1.1958. Along with them the magazine displayed a short message in which Guasta thanked the Spanish colleagues and made a similar commitment on behalf of *Il Travaso* as a sign of gratitude. The pledge was kept on the subsequent 17th of February, when the magazine was issued with two full pages of caricatures about Spain. *Il Travaso delle idee* 7/59, Rome 17.2.1958.

12 The original name of the association slightly differs in the French and the Italian version. In the first case it is 'Association Internationale des Humoristes', while in the other it is 'Associazione Internazionale dell'Umorismo'.

13 Guglielmo Guastaveglia, Editorial on the First Congress of Cannes and the Foundation of the International Association of Humorists, *Travasissimo* (monthly insert of *Il Travaso*) 58, Rome 6.1952, 2.

bestowed on him by this position he established direct connections between this international organisation and the two magazines that he directed in Italy: *Il Travaso* and its monthly insert *Travasissimo* ("Superflow"). Among various connections were occasional articles related to the association and, every year in January, a special issue of *Travasissimo* titled *Inter-Humor* ("Interhumour"), that was entirely dedicated to the participants of the previous edition of the conference. The publication of a cartoon by Turhan in the first *Inter-Humor*, distributed in January 1953, indicates his presence at the conference of 1952.[14]

Inter-Humor aside, Turhan earned visibility in Guasta's magazines again in 1955, this time with a full page dedicated to him in *Il Travaso*. This was a privilege that Guasta usually reserved for foreign cartoonists who were internationally established and known by the Italian readership at least by name, such as the already mentioned French illustrator Peynet. Since such was not yet the case with Turhan, his page was presented in a different format. Turhan's illustrations were flanked by a photograph of the artist and by a relatively long piece of writing introducing him to the reader. In addition to routine biographical information, conveyed in a neutral tone, the text praised Turhan as a promising artist, announcing him as the "Turkey's no. 1 cartoonist" at the top of the page and describing him as "extremely original and talented".[15]

These positive remarks obviously earned Turhan considerable prestige among Italian colleagues and readers. Perhaps more importantly, their effect extended beyond the realm of Turhan alone.

It must be explained that in the years prior to the publication of this page, Italian cartoonists' opinion of their colleagues on the other shore of the Mediterranean had been overshadowed by a controversy. That controversy consisted of the accusation against Turkish satirical magazines, above all *Akbaba* ("Vulture"), that they reproduced Italian illustrations without permission, often omitting the original signature, sometimes even replacing it with that of a Turkish author.

The accusation was not groundless. According to Raşit Yakalı, cartoonist and director of the Istanbul Centre of Cartoon and Humour, this habit was indeed widespread at that time: cartoons were imported, translated, adapted to local cultural values, and for the most part published without acknowledging the original author and source. The lack of copyright regulations in Turkey facilitated the whole process, allowing this practice to

14 Turhan Selçuk, *Travasissimo* 65, Rome 1.1953, 38.
15 Guglielmo Guastaveglia, *Il Travaso delle idee* 6/56, Rome 6.2.1955, 5.

become a common phenomenon.[16] Yakalı claims that according to some, however, such appropriation was simply an efficient way to spread new cartoon models, rather than plagiarism.[17] In brief, cartoonists had initiated a practice similar to the one that became popular in the same years in the cinema sector with the *Yeşilçam* industry, which launched the trend of remaking foreign movies by adapting them for the Turkish public.[18]

Italian cartoonists were aware of this phenomenon and *Il Travaso* was at the forefront in the battle against it. Accordingly, we should not be surprised to also find reference to *Akbaba* in the 1955 full page dedicated to Turhan. Actually, the purpose of mentioning *Akbaba* there seems to be to extoll Turhan's talent from a comparative perspective; at the same time, Guasta does not miss the chance to emphasise the unfairness of *Akbaba* and define its illustrators as "extremely mediocre".[19]

In the light of this background controversy, it may be claimed that this first space dedicated to Turhan in *Il Travaso* marked a turning point in the Italian gaze on Turkish cartoonists. Even though it did not change Guasta's opinion on *Akbaba*, it definitely shed new light on the panorama and quality of cartoon art in Turkey.

Guasta's words on Turhan's art in the 1955 article disclose an admiration that, predictably, later turned into collaboration. In 1957 Turhan published

16 This phenomenon will be object of a further study aimed at identifying its main trends, above all the themes, subjects, and styles that were reproduced most frequently, as well as the ways in which the cultural transfer that made them more suitable and enjoyable for the domestic readership was achieved.

17 Raşit Yakalı, private conversations with the author, February–March 2015, Istanbul.

18 *Yeşilçam* is a metonymy generally used to describe the booming Turkish film industry of the 1950s–1970s. The name, which literally translates as "green pine", comes from Yeşilçam Street in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul, which used to be populated with studios and where many sector members spent time. Throughout the 1950s the film industry rapidly developed in response to the fast-growing demand on the part of the public, and by the following decade Turkey ranked among the world's largest film producers, with an average of 200 movies per year. Such a high rate was achieved through fast and low-budget productions, which in most cases were remakes, adaptations, or spin-offs of foreign novels, plays, and movies. Since Turkey had no regulations on plagiarism at that time, filmmakers were neither forced to credit the original works nor to pay for the property rights. While this practice could spark controversy among foreign authors whose material was appropriated, at the same time, it was widely accepted within the country. Giovanni Scognamillo, Türk Sinemasında Yabancı Uyarlamalar, in: Yedinci Sanat 9 (1973), 61–73; Ahmet Gürata, Translating Modernity. Remakes in Turkish Cinema, in: Dimitris Eleftheriotis / Gary Needham (eds.), Asian Cinemas. A Reader and Guide, Edinburgh 2006, 242–254.

19 Guglielmo Guastaveglia, *Il Travaso delle idee* 6/56, Rome 6.2.1955, 5.

his first actual contributions to *Il Travaso*, that is to say, the first illustrations created specifically for the magazine rather than being selected from his previous work (as had been the case on the full page of 1955). The following year, his presence on the pages of the Italian magazine intensified, reaching peaks of three caricatures per issue. Finally, in 1960 he became a regular member of the editorial staff.

The illustrations that Turhan made for *Il Travaso* are cartoons without words that denounce facts, problems, and absurdities of the real world through comic and surreal situations. For instance, in a caricature that was published in an early issue from 1958, the author warns about religion's attempt to assert dominance over science by portraying two bishops carrying a robot on a stretcher like a deceased man (Fig. 1).[20]

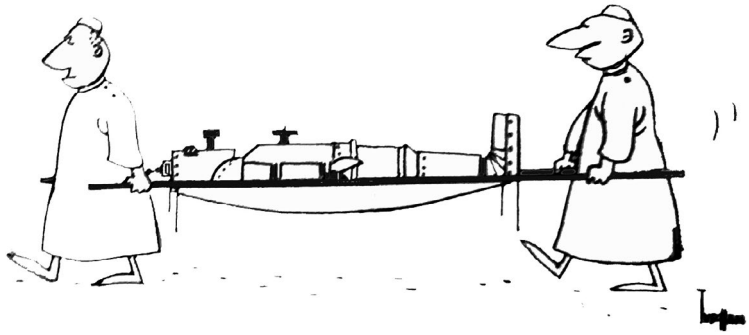

Figure 1. Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee*, 3.2.1958, 2.

On the same page, Turhan derides arrogance in a sequence where two men walking in opposite directions on the same sidewalk are about to bump into each other (Fig. 2). One of them, who is visibly tall and large, stares at the other with a challenging glance that suggests that he expects him to give way in the light of their different body sizes. However, not only does the smaller man continue on his way fearlessly, he even causes the bigger one to fall down in the collision, leaving him on the ground in astonishment—his previous arrogance has disappeared.[21]

In a later issue, Turhan criticises environmental pollution by showing the effects of a steamboat on a whale (Fig. 3). The whale is swimming right

20 Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee* 5/59, Rome 3.2.1958, 2.
21 Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee* 5/59, Rome 3.2.1958, 2.

Figure 2. Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee*, 3.2.1958, 2.

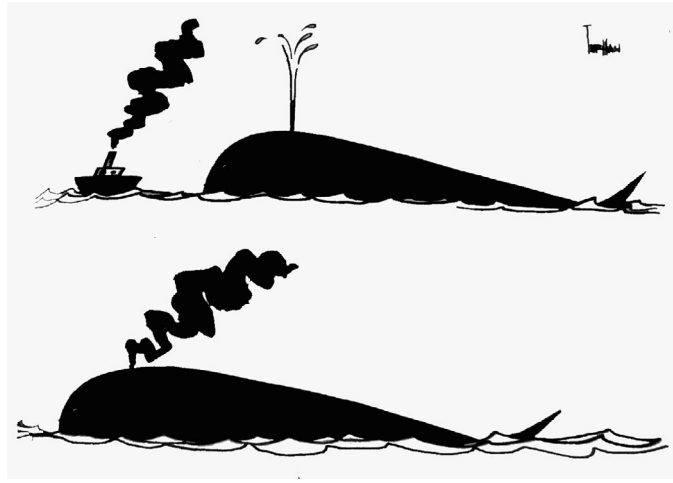

Figure 3. Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee*, 14.4.1958, 23.

behind the boat and, as a result, its blowhole expels a black smoke similar to the one coming out of the funnel.[22]

To mention one last example, the sea appears again in an illustration that condemns war (Fig. 4). In this scene a missile runs into the water at high speed, cutting through a shoal of fishes that are moving in the same direction and whose shape is extremely similar to that of the weapon. The naive fishes, unaware of war technologies, stare at this rapid 'companion' surprised.[23]

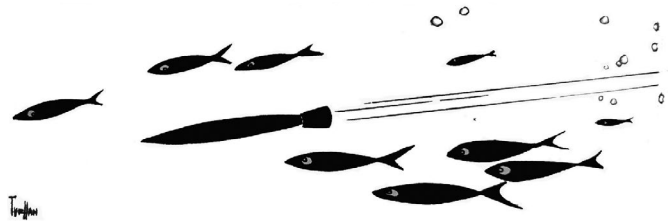

Figure 4. Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee*, 5.5.1958, 6.

Turhan's experience at *Il Travaso*, like the magazine itself, lasted only a few more years. Still, it sufficed to afford him some well-deserved credit. Chiefly, in 1963 his name was included in the prestigious 'Enciclopedia dell'Umorismo' ("Encyclopaedia of Humour"), an Italian publication devoted to the great names of humour, with entries on eminent writers like Oscar Wilde and Mark Twain and illustrators such as Walt Disney and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

This was Turhan's third and arguably most important Italian recognition outside the pages of *Il Travaso*. The first two had come at the International Humour Festival of Bordighera, one of Europe's oldest and most prestigious cartoon contests, established in 1947. Here, in 1956, Turhan received the Golden Palm, the festival's top prize; and, in 1962, the Silver Date, i. e. the third prize.

The Italian experience of Turhan left a mark not only on his career but also on the country, to the extent that years after the closure of *Il Travaso* it was still possible to read about his art. Significantly, in 1970 Enrico Gianeri, one of the most prolific historians and theorists of caricature in Italy and a cartoonist himself under the name Gec, wrote that "the beauty and elegance of the line of Turhan Selçuk, the most famous among Turkey's cartoonists,

22 Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee* 15/59, Rome 14.4.1958, 23.
23 Turhan Selçuk, *Il Travaso delle idee* 18/59, Rome 5.5.1958, 6.

has perhaps no equal in the world." Gec praised the charm of Turhan's style, which he described as making words unnecessary as if the illustrations were speaking Esperanto, and went so far as to assert that "with the revolution that he introduced, Turhan Selçuk has become the Bakunin of Turkish cartoon."[24]

Gaze on the 'Other'

The fruitful exchanges between Italian and Turkish cartoonists that emerged in the previous pages both from a personal and work perspective, at both the individual and collective level, suggest that these experiences contributed to a mutual understanding. Considering the dimensions explored so far, a further one seems to be the natural continuation of this inquiry. That is, an analysis of the representations of the Turks in *Il Travaso* and Italians in Turhan's work will establish more accurately the extent of this mutual discovery.

A panoramic look at *Il Travaso* reveals plenty of illustrations about Southern and Eastern Mediterranean people, but not of the Turks. The common theme running throughout these representations seems to be Islam as the religion of the 'Other'—a single 'Other', referring to the people of the Middle East and North Africa in an encompassing rough perception of Muslims. Accordingly, men wear the fez or the turban; one of them has a busy week ahead of him due to his four weddings; and the female body, completely covered, stimulates the imagination of fictional painters, who imagine sensual curves under the black chador of the models who pose for them. In brief, the gaze in these caricatures is markedly Orientalist. However, Turks are not represented in this large family of Mediterranean Muslims, as they are not to be found in the captions and dialogues of these illustrations, where, instead, 'Egyptians' and 'Arabs' are common.

As a matter of fact, Turkey appears quite rarely, and when it is portrayed, no feature evokes religion. For example, in September 1952, *Il Travaso* presents an illustration about the latest edition of the beauty contest Miss Europe, which had been won by a Turkish woman earlier that month. The scene points to the jealousy of the other contestants and features some of them surrounding the winner.[25] Here, without the caption it would be impossible to identify the winning contestant as a Turk, in exactly the same way as it is impossible to establish the nationality of the others.

24 Enrico Gianeri, *Super Humour* 1, Milan 11.1970.
25 *Il Travaso delle idee* 36/53, Rome 7.9.1952.

Regarding the representations of Italians, then, examples are extremely rare in this case, as well. In the specific production of Turhan, Italians are essentially absent. Equally, if we broaden the scope to other Turkish cartoonists of the same generation who had a relatively close connection with Italy, such as Nehar Tüblek (1924–1994), a range of humourous illustrations of Italian urban landscapes emerges, but not caricatures of the people.[26]

The shortage of specific material in both productions could appear disappointing at first glance, as it does not provide the tools needed to understand what factors were at play in each other's gaze. However, it is exactly this absence that becomes relevant to our inquiry. In fact, what the lack of satirical representations does is to mark the overcoming of prejudice and fears; in other words, the neutrality of the few available portraits proves that commonly known stereotypes are no longer appealing.

Interestingly, on a few occasions stereotypical depictions are evoked, precisely to be disproved. An example is the title of an Italian article about Turhan that, hinting at the widespread notion that Turks are avid smokers, introduces him as "the Turk who does not smoke and who amuses the world".[27]

Turkey and Italy cease to be East and West, Muslims and Catholics, or other dichotomies presented as conflicting differences. In brief, they cease to be 'the Other', both in the cartoons and thanks to cartoons.

Conclusions

This study has examined the interactions between cartoonists of Turkey and Italy in the years 1945 to 1975, the era in which exchanges between the two began to flourish. The birth of the Italo-Turkish connections was placed in the historical context of the post-war years, and relationships were discussed from three perspectives, namely that of the artistic similarities and transfers between the two cartoon traditions, that of the events and collaborations that allowed the cartoonists to strengthen their relations, and that of mutual representations inside their illustrations. The focus was in particular on Turhan and *Il Travaso*, since these were actually the initiators and most active promoters of these exchanges. What has emerged is a clear

26 See, for instance, Tunç İzberk, 10. Yılında Nehar Tüblek, Istanbul 2005, 16.

27 The article in question was allegedly published on *Corriere della Riviera* ("Riviera Courier") and then reported in Turkey in *Milliyet* ("Nationality") by editor-in-chief Abdi İpekçi on 7 March 1960, also quoting the original title. Abdi İpekçı, Milliyet'ten mektup, *Milliyet* 3531/10, Istanbul 7.3.1960, 2.

presence of deep and enduring contacts, which allowed the cartoonists to look at each other in a way that broke down distance and stereotypes, finally discovering shared features and a common identity.

Regrettably, academic studies have long neglected the relationships between cartoonists of Italy and Turkey, but this chapter has attempted to show that this is a fertile ground for research, worthy of scholarly attention. The range of possible further research paths is incredibly rich. Just based on mere content analysis, it includes issues such as the study of aesthetic, linguistic, and editorial influences in specific political eras, including from a historical perspective. In addition, although the study of cartoons unavoidably considers newspapers and magazines to be its main primary material, less obvious sources should be explored, too. These are, above all, the physical spaces inhabited by cartoons, in the form of museums and festivals, with their history and policies. Each research path is likely to lead to the discovery of richer and deeper connections, from different perspectives, in different times, and across eras.

In the past decades, for example, illustrations by Turkish cartoonists were exhibited in Italy at the Museum of Caricature and Satire in Forte dei Marmi and at the Museum of Humour in the Arts of Tolentino. Correspondingly, until its recent relocation the Istanbul Centre (now Museum) of Cartoon and Humour used to welcome the visitor at the entrance of the building with a display of posters of past editions of events such as the International Humour Festival of Bordighera and the International Biennal Exhibition of Humour in the Arts of Tolentino.

Participation in the cartoon contests of each other's country has never been interrupted and since the turn of the millennium an Italian artist, Alessandro Gatto, was awarded 12 times at the International Nasreddin Hodja Cartoon Contest, the most prestigious and enduring cartoon event in Turkey, organised since 1974.[28] More recently, when the Union of World Cartoonists decided to pay homage to the victims of the devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria in February 2023 by issuing a collective cartoon album on the first anniversary, four Italian artists took part in the

28 Various Artists, Çizgi ve Mizahta 30. Yıl. Uluslararası Nasreddin Hoca Karikatür Yarışması / International Nasreddin Hodja Cartoon Contest. 30th Year in Cartoon and Humour, Istanbul 2010; Erdoğan Bozok, cartoonist and former director of the Istanbul Center of Cartoon and Humour, interviewed by the author, 17.2.2011, Istanbul; Karikatürcüler Derneği, Nasreddin Hoca Özel, https://www.karikaturculerdernegi.com/nasreddinhocaozel/2024/ (10.7.2025); Karikatürcüler Derneği, 46. Uluslararası Nasreddin Hoca Karikatür Yarışması 2026 Sonuçlandı, https://www.karikaturculerdernegi.com/46-uluslararasi-nasreddin-hoca-karikatur-yarismasi-2026-sonuclandi/ (27.7.2026).

project: Ciro D'Oriano, Cristina Bernazzani, Enrico Bertuccioli, and Marco D'Agostino.[29]

Evidently, in our time, too, cartoons prove to be an important field in building interconnections that are not only strictly artistic but also social and cultural—in two countries that, as this study has attempted to demonstrate, have developed their culture upon similar practices and values.

ORCID®

Valentina Marcella https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6679-0813

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