

Acting the Nation

Women on the Stage and in the Audience of Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic

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Abstract

In the first decades of the 20th century, the public position of actresses underwent a radical transformation in Turkey. While the acting profession had long been commonly regarded as unsuitable for Muslim women and had been monopolized by women belonging to the non-Muslim minorities, in the 1920s the Muslim actress was not only legitimized but in fact embraced by the state as a model for Turkish women. In the works of Turkish and Ottoman theatre history, the emergence of Muslim actresses has been given some attention, but it has not been studied from a critical perspective inspired by theoretical questions. Moreover, the process of legitimization of Muslim women as theatre audience, which took place prior to the legitimization of the actresses, has been ignored. The present thesis seeks to develop a better understanding of these developments by approaching them as part of social and political history, while drawing inspiration from an interdisciplinary field of scholarship on gender and theatre. The time period studied begins with the late era of the Ottoman Empire and ends with the early years of the Turkish Republic, covering a time span of more than fifty years. In order to capture the complexities of the subject, a wide array of written sources, including memoirs, interviews, theatre reviews, books and a theatre play, are included in the analysis.

This thesis challenges historical narratives approaching Turkey's transition from Empire to Republic as one of total rupture, and instead emphasizes continuities and the complexity of factors influencing the position of actresses in Turkey. Although rapid changes did take place in the first years of the Republic, the legitimization of Muslim Turkish actresses relied on transformations of both national identity and norms of feminine behaviour, and none of these were realized overnight. An analysis of original debates suggests that the legitimization of Muslim actresses also entailed a process of Othering of non-Muslim actresses, and that the Muslim actresses were summoned to the stage not primarily to represent femininity but to properly represent Turkishness. By showing how theatre has been perceived as simultaneously a reflection of and producer of modernity, this thesis highlights the role of theatre in Turkish nation building.

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This thesis would never have come into being in its present form without the inspiration I enjoyed as an exchange student at the *Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History* at Bo aziçi University in Istanbul. I am particularly grateful to my professors Duygu Köksal, Ahmet Kuyya and Berna Yazıcı for constantly presenting me with intellectual challenges, and to my fellow students for our endless and enlightening discussions.

My research is the result of academic wanderlust and has profited from material found on three continents in various departments. I am very grateful to the *Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul* for awarding me a one-month research scholarship for the spring of 2010 which allowed me to access dearly needed material while living right off Istanbul's old theatre district. During my research stay in Istanbul I profited from the help of the staff at *Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi* (Women's Library), *Yapıkredi Sermet Çifter Kütüphanesi* (Yapıkredi Research Library) and the Near East department of the *Bo aziçi University Library*. I would also like to thank the librarians at the *Boston Public Library* and the Outreach Centre at *Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies* in Cambridge, Massachusetts for helping me fill in blanks in my bibliography.

As I believe that ideas are often better developed through exchange of thoughts than in absolute solitude, I am also grateful to a number of colleagues and friends, whose feedback and opinions I appreciate dearly. You are too many to mention. I thank Barı for being my first Turkish teacher and for all of his support. And lastly, I thank my parents for letting me grow up surrounded by books, and for encouraging me to be ever more curious and critical.

A few Remarks on Turkish Pronunciation and Transliteration

The orthography of modern Turkish is very phonemic compared to that of most languages. Turkish vowels are mostly short; in older language extended length or stress is sometimes marked through a circumflex for the letters *â*, *î* and *û*. Here is an outline of the standard pronunciation of the most significant letters:

a as in *bath*

c as in *June*

ç as in *change*

e as in *Mecca*

g as in *gap*

ğ is called ‘soft g’ (*‘yumu ak ge’*) and is normally silent. Its main function is lengthening the preceding vowel as in the word *bağ*, but it also appears as a voiced postvelar fricative.

h as in *hat*

i as in *infant*

ı is an unrounded high back vowel which does not have an equivalent in English but is somewhat similar to the vowel sound in *plus*

j as in French *Jean*

o as in *horse*

ö as the first vowel sound in *murder*, like the German *ö*

r is mostly close to the fricative *r* in Norwegian or Italian but softer

u as in *move*

ü has no complete equivalent in English but is similar to German *ü* or the French *u* in *tuer*

In this thesis I cite all Turkish words, including terms borrowed from Persian and Arabic, as they are spelled in Turkish. The only exception is ‘Istanbul’, which I spell as in English, omitting the dot over the initial ‘i’. I have also chosen to follow the Turkish way of spelling Armenian names, since this is how these names appear in my sources. In my study I make use of primary sources written before the Turkish language reform of 1928, when the Ottoman script was abandoned and a modified Latin script was introduced. However, I have not transliterated this material myself but rely on the transliterations from Ottoman Turkish into

Latin script found in my sources. I quote these transliterations as I have found them, and have thus not made use of diacritics in this thesis.

In Turkey, only a few people used surnames prior to the surname reform in 1934, which obliged all Turkish citizens to adopt a surname. In most Ottoman sources people appear only with their personal name(s) followed by a title such as '*Bey*' (Mister) or '*Hanim*' (Miss or Mrs).¹ Women were often identified by their father's name until they took their husband's name upon marrying. In older sources the order of personal name and surname is sometimes inverted, i.e. Muhsin Ertu rul is in Ottoman sources often referred to as Ertu rul Muhsin. These facts all add up to a very confusing situation where Halide Hanım, Halide Edip (father's name), Halide Salih (first husband's name) and Halide Edip Adivar (second husband's name) are all the same person, as is Mustafa Kemal, Mustafa Kemal Pa a and Atatürk (name given by the Turkish Grand Assembly in 1934). In order to make this thesis as reader friendly as possible, and to minimize confusion and anachronisms, I have chosen to cite names consistently throughout the thesis with surnames adopted at a later time in square brackets, i.e. Halide Edip [Adivar] and Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk].

Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Turkish are my own. The original Turkish quotes are given in footnotes.

¹ Other common titles include '*Efendi*' (Sir), '*A a*' (Lord, commonly used for landowners) and '*Pa a*' (Pasha, also used for generals and admirals).

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1. Introduction

In January 2010 a new theatre stage was opened in Istanbul in honour of the legendary director and actor Muhsin Ertu rül. But when Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdo an, spoke at the opening ceremony, his speech was not only dedicated to praising Ertu rül's contributions to Turkish theatre life. Instead, he spent much of the speech defending his government's view of the arts. "There were even those who claimed we would erect a mosque here instead," Erdo an said, "as if we are an enemy of theatre. As if we are against the visual and performative arts" (Anadolu Ajansı 2010).² The very fact that a prime minister feels the need to point out that he and his party are neither enemies of art in general nor of theatre in specific, might seem strange to someone unfamiliar with Turkish history. And to those well familiar with it, the irony in hearing a representative of an Islamic political party publicly praising theatre, and even wishing it to further extend to the countryside, is striking. The speech would surely have baffled Muhsin Ertu rül himself, popularly known as the father of modern Turkish theatre, had he been able to listen from his grave. In his lifetime, Ertu rül suffered many attacks for engaging in what was perceived by religious conservatives as sacrilegious activities, namely theatre and cinema production. And at that time, the establishment of countryside theatres and nationwide theatre tours were very important vehicles for the project of secularization and Westernization undertaken by Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]'s party CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), which is the largest political rival of the present party in government. Many decades later, in Turkey the theatre stage continues to carry ideological connotations as an institution, regardless of what content is presented through its plays. This is worth keeping in mind while reading this thesis.

As its title suggests, the main interest of this thesis lies with women in theatre in the late Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic, which was founded in 1923. Until that year, Muslim Turkish women were prevented from appearing on the theatre stage by both state regulations and social norms. Female theatre roles in European-influenced theatre in Turkey had, with a few unofficial exceptions, only been played by men, non-Muslim actresses belonging to the Armenian and Greek minorities or by women of foreign European origin. In traditional Turkish theatre all female parts were played by men. However, in the course of few years the public discourse on actresses in Turkey underwent an

² "Buraya cami in a edece imizi bile iddia edenler oldu. Ciddi ciddi kö elerinde, sayfalarında, ekranlarında bunları yazdılar, ifade ettiler. Sanki biz bir tiyatro dü manyız. Sanki biz görsel sanatlara, gösteri sanatlarına kar ıyız."

astonishing transformation. While in 1919 the Muslim Turkish actress Afife Jale was arrested for appearing on stage, ten years later the Muslim Turkish actress Bedia Muvahhit accompanied prime minister *nönü* on a diplomatic visit to Greece as a celebrated symbol of the New Turkish woman, not only unveiled, but adorned with pearls, make-up, a low-cut dress and a flapper haircut that any fashionable European woman would envy her. Only years after the time when the theatre was regarded by most as an unsuitable space for a good Turkish Muslim woman to appear as audience, the actress was presented by the state as a female model for all Turkish women. In the same period, actresses belonging to the Armenian minority, who had earlier enjoyed great popularity, started disappearing from the stage, and their previously applauded achievements were for a large part forgotten. How and why did these radical changes take place?

1.1. Research Questions

In the works of Turkish and Ottoman theatre history, the emergence of Muslim Turkish actresses and the dramatic change in their public status is mentioned. However, the process is almost treated as an inevitable development and as far as I can see, the subject has never been studied critically as part of social and political history. This is surprising, considering that the early Muslim Turkish actresses lived in deviance from not only one, but a number of social norms. Not only were these women unusually visible and active participants in the public sphere for their time, they also earned their own living, they did not wear the veil, many chose not to marry or they divorced and remarried, and they were among the first groups of women receiving a professional education. Before Bedia Muvahhit became an actress, she was among the first Muslim Turkish women working at the telegraph, in itself a controversial matter which was met with public protests. The negotiations the early actresses had with the social norms of female behaviour on issues such as public visibility, work, personal income and independent mobility through travels have largely been ignored. Instead, the story of the early actresses has been framed as one of many examples of the success story of the Republic.

Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] is often given all the credit for the emergence of the first Muslim Turkish actresses, and their appearance is popularly presented as an emancipatory feminist project. Although his role in this matter cannot be denied, my study of selected debates and events spanning from the late years of the Ottoman Empire until the early years of the Turkish Republic shows that this popular narrative by no means fully reflects the actual debates. In the time period where the demand for Muslim Turkish actresses grew in the public, important

changes took place in the view of national identity, the role of women and the position of theatre. It is with these developments in mind that I chose the title of this thesis, which plays upon the double meaning of the verb ‘act’: I approach the actresses as both actors in theatre and as agents on the political scene. My work has been guided by four research questions:

1. *What were presented as the key obstacles to Muslim Turkish women attending theatre as audience and acting on stage?*
2. *What kind of intellectual, cultural, social and political changes made possible the transformation in status of the Muslim Turkish actresses?*
3. *What was the relationship between the legitimization of female audience and of female performers?*

And finally:

4. *What characterized the public image of the early Muslim Turkish actresses?*

In this thesis, I use the term ‘Muslim Turkish’ to refer to actresses whose mother tongue was Turkish and religion was Islam. In the original sources, these women go by a variety of names. In Ottoman sources they are most frequently referred to as ‘our women’ (*‘hanımlarımız’*) and ‘women of Islam’ (*‘slam hanımları’*), while the expression ‘Turkish women’ (*‘Türk kadınları’*) is most commonly used in the Republican sources I have investigated, although ‘Muslim’ and ‘Turk’ is often used interchangeably. I prefer using the term ‘Muslim Turkish’ above the terms ‘Muslim’ or ‘Turkish’ for two reasons. Firstly, as will be understood after reading chapter 3.2 on national identity in Turkey, in the Turkish context, ‘Muslim’ often signifies a group identity rather than being an expression of individual piety. Using only the term ‘Muslim’ might make it seem as though religion is a key issue, while I argue that religion is only relevant to the extent that it is a criterion for being defined as a Turk. Furthermore, not all Muslims living in Turkey are perceived as Turks; this is particularly the case for Arabs. Secondly, due to the confusing and inconsistent use of the term ‘Turk’, which is also explained in chapter 3.2., as simultaneously the term for an ethnic group and for all citizens of Turkey, I find it too vague a concept to be a tool for analysis. For example, Armenians are Turks through being citizens of Turkey, but they are not Muslim Turks. However, although I prefer the term ‘Muslim Turkish’, the reader should be aware that other terms sometimes appear in quotes.

1.2. Situating this Thesis within the Wider Literature

The place of theatre in modern Turkish history has been given remarkably little critical attention by general historians. Although always mentioned, the topic is rarely referred to in more than a few sentences, and the same points are often repeated. On the subject of actresses, even less is written. As a result, I have mainly had to turn to theatre historians in my readings. Among these we can identify three different groups. Firstly, there are the historians concentrating on theatre as text, such as Alemdar Yalçın, Enver Töre and Niyazi Akı. Although clearly valuable, the work by these historians has been the least relevant to this thesis as it is closer in character to literary analysis than history. Secondly, there are the theatre historians who approach theatre both as text and as performance, while also placing importance on historical and social context. In this group we find two giants: Metin And and Refik Ahmet Sevensil. I call them giants not only because of the astonishing pile of work they have left behind, but also because they have been extremely influential in the development of Turkish theatre historiography.

And thirdly, there is a handful of contemporary researchers that we may best describe as revisionist. The leading figure among these is Fırat Güllü. While recognizing the meticulous and breathtaking amount of research undertaken by the prolific Metin And, Güllü (2008) criticizes him and other Turkish theatre historians for basing their research on a nationalist history paradigm. He is especially critical to the way that the term ‘Turkish theatre’ (*‘Türk tiyatrosu’*) is applied in this scholarship, and he argues that it conceals the heritage from the Ottoman theatre world and especially the contributions of Armenians. Although the Ottoman Armenian Hakob Vartovyan, or Güllü Agop as he is known as in Turkey, is recognized as a father of Turkish theatre, his Ottoman Armenian colleagues have more often been ignored. Güllü proposes three measures for a new historiography of Ottoman theatre. Firstly, that researchers implement a multicultural perspective, secondly, that further efforts are made to utilize and make sources written in other languages than Turkish accessible to other scholars through translation, and lastly, that political and social circumstances are taken more into account (Güllü 2008: 17-22).

Through the course of my own work, I have observed the weaknesses that Güllü points out in the existing historiography, and I have been greatly inspired by his work. Much theatre historiography on Turkey is structured around a narrative of linear progress. The historical development I have found is more complex, and full of fluctuations and contradictions.

Within Turkish Ottoman historiography the search for continuities has become quite widespread among revisionist historians, but it has not yet become as commonplace in the study of cultural history, and theatre in specific. This thesis is written in an attempt to change this.

1.3. Methodological Considerations

The topic of this thesis does not fit neatly into neither the discipline of history, theatre studies, Turkish studies or gender studies, but is found somewhere at the intersection, and I have been inspired by all these fields of research. Working in this field has forced me to face two main sets of methodological problems. Firstly, there are the problems that any researcher concerned with theatre as performance rather than as text would be familiar with. Theatre is by definition ephemeral. My aim has been to find out as much as possible about how theatre and actresses were perceived in late Ottoman and early Republican society, not only by theatre critics but also by political movements, the various people that together formed the audiences, as well as how the actors viewed their own position. But while theatre reviews and writings by intellectuals and critics are abundant, other voices are harder to retrieve. Secondly, I have faced the difficulties that any scholar looking for material on women's history is familiar with. Turkish theatre historiography has long been written by men, about men with a male reader in mind, and the few studies written with a consciousness when it comes to gender are interested with theatre as an art rather than as a historical phenomenon. Although I have made an effort to search for and include the voices of women where they are relevant to my study, it is an undeniable fact that all of my female sources are upper middle class and elite women, some of them even foreigners and some exile Turks writing to a foreign audience. We know very little, for example, about how lower class women experienced theatre or what they thought about actresses. The perspective to which it has been hardest to gain access is that of the actresses themselves. Unlike their male counterparts, the early actresses did not leave behind any memoirs. Fortunately there are some interviews available, although scarce, and I have made an effort to include these in my research material.

My response to both of these categories of difficulties has been privileging memoirs as a source. It is here that we find the most vivid descriptions of performances, that we get an idea about how theatre was perceived by others than newspaper critics, and also that we see how the segregated theatre was perceived by women. I am fully aware that the use of memoirs as a source entails certain complications. Not only is human memory in itself hardly a reliable

archive, but we also need to keep in mind that memoirs differ from diaries in that they are written and published for an audience, and that sometimes it is in the author's interest to tell history a little differently from what he or she actually remembers. As a consequence of this, I have attempted to remain cautious when faced with surprising or new information in these sources, and, as far as possible, to compare with other material to ensure its validity. In addition to memoirs, I have used primary sources belonging to a variety of genres spanning newspaper articles, interviews, theatre reviews, reports, and books. My secondary sources are mostly in English, even those written by Turks. I have attempted to use Turkish sources whenever possible, but ultimately many of the best and most relevant sources have been in English. In order to avoid a too Eurocentric perspective, I have made an effort in looking for secondary sources on the history of actresses in the Middle East. I regret to say that the outcome of my hunt has been very poor, but it is my hope that scholars will discover this interesting field in a not too distant future.

Rather than doing micro history, my aim has been to analyze changes over a longer period of time. This has implications for how I selected my empirical material. Firstly, I have had to limit the scope of sources scrutinized. A systematic review of all relevant newspaper and magazine articles published in Ottoman Turkish would doubtlessly be interesting, but the work of reading, transliterating and navigating within such an abundance of sources published in Ottoman script would demand much more time than what I have had at hand for this master's thesis. Therefore, I have chosen to concentrate on the material already available in transcription, which proved to be more than large enough for my purposes. Secondly, I have, with a few exceptions, chosen to concentrate my thesis on theatre life in Istanbul. Although cities such as Izmir and Thessaloniki were important in late Ottoman and early Republican theatre history, Istanbul was still at the centre of the events I describe.

By singling out Muslim Turkish women as my object of study, I might be criticised for approaching a multicultural site, namely Ottoman theatre, with the mindset of the *millet* system. I do support the recent initiative taken by researchers such as Güllü in calling for a multicultural approach to Turkish and Ottoman theatre historiography. But to my defence, a study of actresses belonging to all ethnic groups in Ottoman and Turkish theatre would require knowledge of Armenian language that I am not in possession of, since the translation

of material into Turkish so far has been next to non-existent.³ Unfortunately, as a result of this, research published in Armenian, which would definitely have been of interest to this study, has not been among my sources. My hope is that by directing the researcher's gaze to Muslim Turkish women in theatre in this study, I contribute to stimulating more research in this field and that in time the history of the Armenian actresses will be given the scholarly attention they deserve.

1.4. Structure of Thesis

This thesis is organized both thematically and chronologically. In the second chapter, I present my theoretical framework and raise some central theoretical questions regarding the relationship between theatre and politics, and concerning the position of actresses. Without an understanding of the ideological and cultural tensions attached to theatre as an institution in Turkey, it is difficult to understand the process and significance of the legitimization of Muslim Turkish actresses. Although some parallels can be drawn to the experiences of other countries, the Turkish case is also unique in many aspects. I have therefore found it necessary to devote chapter three to contextualizing and explaining some central intellectual, political, cultural and social developments in the period studied in this thesis. Firstly, I show the importance of the so-called woman question in Turkish history and its relationship to the national question. Secondly, I present the main changes in the perception of cultural and national identity in the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Lastly, I discuss the changing political importance of theatre in Turkey. In the fourth chapter, I trace the debates on Muslim women as theatre audience and actresses from their early beginnings in the 1870s and until the 1930s. Why was the appearance of Muslim women on the stage of Turkish theatres judged important and by whom? What view of the nature of women and of theatre did they rely on? I then further discuss the public image of the Muslim Turkish actress through analyzing writings on the two women competing over the status as the first Muslim Turkish actress. In the fifth and last chapter, I summarize my findings and suggest their implications, and finally I indicate some questions for further work.

³ The lack of translations of relevant material from Armenian in particular is a major obstacle for Turkish theatre historiography, which will hopefully be addressed little by little in the coming years. An important step in this respect is the recent translation from Armenian by Boş Çalgıcıoğlu of Araslan's overview of Ottoman Armenian theatre history written in 1914. See Araslan (2008).

2.1. Theatre, Politics, and Nationalism

Orhan Pamuk was not a first among Turkish authors when he selected theatre as a key element allowing him to talk about politics in his novel *Kar (Snow)* (2002). The same was previously done by the great author Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar in his novel *Sahnenin Dı indakiler*.⁴ This book was translated to English as *Offstage*, but a more precise translation would be *Those outside the scene*, a title capturing the alienation experienced by people in Istanbul from the nationalist struggle fought in Anatolia after World War I. Without embarking on a literary analysis of these two novels, let me note two interesting points they have in common, which raise some questions relevant to our discussion. Firstly, both books use the theatre stage as a metaphor for the political stage. Pamuk's novel has been read as a reference to the so-called post modern coup in Turkey in 1997, while Tanpınar's work deals with the events of the War of Independence from 1919 to 1922 culminating with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. Secondly, both authors place actresses at the centre of attention.

In Tanpınar's account we follow the female character Sabiha, a nationalist whose dream of becoming the first Muslim Turkish actress is finally realized in the last pages of the novel (Tanpınar 1973: 371). Her initial exclusion from the stage as a Muslim woman parallels the political exclusion felt in occupied Istanbul, offering us at least two possible interpretations of the book's title. In Pamuk's *Kar* young women in the Eastern city Kars are fighting for the right to wear the headscarf in the performance of a theatre play which bears clear reference to the most famous theatre play in Turkish political history.⁵ This play turns out to have further political agenda than its contents; in fact the fictional coup in the script is followed by a factual political coup executed from the stage (Pamuk 2002: 140). In this way, both Tanpınar and Pamuk link political liberation and revolt with actresses. Through these common points the two books not only reiterate Shakespeare's heavily circulated idea that "all the world's a stage", but more specifically present politics as a theatre and political actors as, indeed, actors.⁶ At the same time, they also demonstrate the political importance of theatre. But why is theatre thought to be politically powerful? And what is the relationship between theatre and

⁴ *Sahnenin Dı indakiler* was first serialized in the newspaper *Yeni stanbul* in 1950 and published as a novel in 1973, 11 years after Tanpınar's death.

⁵ Pamuk's fictional play is called *Vatan yahut Türban (Fatherland or the Headscarf)*, an obvious reference to Namık Kemal's *Vatan yahut Silistre (Fatherland or Silistre)*. The political significance of Kemal's play is explained in chapter 3.2 and 3.3.

⁶ The quote originates from one of the monologues in Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*.

nationalism? These questions are of course too complex to be fully answered in a few pages, but they deserve being raised. In this chapter, I will look at how theory of the public sphere can help shed some light on our understanding of theatre's relation to politics.

2.1.1. Theatre at the Intersection of the Literary and Political Public Spheres

Any discussion of theatre and politics would be incomplete without a clarification of the concept 'public sphere', and thus some occupation with the scholarship of the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas is inevitable. His analysis *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* published in 1962 has had tremendous impact on all later debate concerning the public sphere. It has also been subject to extensive criticism, in part deriving from the fact that Habermas simultaneously employs the concept 'public sphere' as an analytical tool, an ideal type and a particular moment in history (Davis 1996: 399). In the following, I will use the term as an analytical concept. Habermas (1991) envisioned the private sphere as that of the household, including the family, the home and its domestic life and economy, and the public sphere as that of the arena of the *polis*, typically including spaces such as the plaza, the salons and the parliament. He argued that a fully political public sphere first grew out of the voluntary assembly of bourgeois individuals in 18th century coffee houses and literary salons in England, France and Germany. This new public sphere was simultaneously perceived by Habermas as an important means of social integration and as a counterweight to absolutist and arbitrary rule. The counterweight consisted in holding the state accountable to society via publicity, implying that the only legitimate governments would be those that listened to public opinion.

In Habermas's theory, what he calls the 'political public sphere' is described as separate from and interdependent with a 'literary public sphere' (1991: 160). Where does theatre, the synthesis of text and performance, fit within this framework? Habermas points out that the literary and political public sphere have been perceived as a single unified public sphere by the educated classes who participated in both of them, but he dismisses this as no more than useful fiction. As he demonstrates, historically some groups have been excluded from one sphere while active in the other. For example, Habermas (1991: 56) shows that while women were still not entitled to participate in the political public sphere to the same degree as men, educated women could at least be part of the literary public sphere as readers and, to a lesser

extent, writers. As we will see in later chapters, this is a quite accurate description of the situation for women in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 19th century.

In this context, could it be that theatre has facilitated a transition from the literary to the political public sphere for women? Scholarship investigating the connection between theatre and politics in the suffragette movements in the United States and England seems to support such an idea, showing that theatre provided many women with the first opportunity to speak in public. The public skills acquired by actresses were so valuable that the British suffragettes hired actresses to give speeches at their meetings and also to give lectures on public communication (Glenn 2000: 141). At the historical moment where they were still excluded from party politics, we might say that theatre provided women with a first education in public appearance and expression. At the same time, with their rising status at the turn of the century, actresses helped legitimize the political activity of the suffragettes by adding a touch of glamorous femininity to a movement dismissed by critics as “unwomanly” (Buszek 2006: 133-34). So in this case, theatre actually both helped women gain the necessary skills to participate in the political public sphere and it legitimized their participation. This experience fits well with Habermas’ argument that the literary and political public spheres were interdependent because “the humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm” (Habermas 1991: 56).

On the other hand, making a sharp division between the two public spheres might be impossible and presenting their use on a linear historical axis not very fruitful. As Friedland (2003: 53) writes, “Habermas traces the origins of public sphere laying out the argument that public opinion developed initially with respect to the arts, the theater and literature and only later came to assert itself in the political realm”. But for example in the Ottoman Empire, using the literary public sphere for political discussion seems to have been a conscious intellectual survival strategy even after the establishment of a political public sphere. In times of political censorship the arts constituted the most legitimate space for exchange of political opinions.

2.1.2. Audience and Political Mobilization

In later years there has appeared a good amount of scholarship dedicated to the relationship between theatre and politics, some works pointing out the theatrical character of politics, others studying the political aspects of theatre, and yet other even arguing for an inherent

connection between the two.⁷ Most of these studies rely on a hidden assumption about a connection between audience participation and political empowerment. As we will see, in the Turkey of the period studied in this thesis, theatre audience seems to have been perceived by both playwrights and state authorities as a political public just as much as a literary public, as reflected in both the production and censorship of theatrical content perceived as political. If we consider who the audience actually consisted of, this is hardly surprising. In fact, the late 19th century audience of European-influenced theatre in Turkey carries a striking resemblance to the ideal participant in the political public sphere described by Habermas: It is dominated by educated, male intellectuals belonging to the middle or upper class, many of them writers active in discussions on the common good. The theatre was an important space for these individuals to gather, almost an extension of the salons, and many of them had boxes at the theatre which they attended regularly. But, as I will explain in later chapters, theatre was also the preferred medium of expression of many late Ottoman writers because they thought theatre alone had the potential to reach uneducated non-elite audiences and mobilize them politically. Although traditions such as loud readings for the illiterate at local cafés helped the influence of newspapers to extend further than to the small literate minority, there is little doubt that theatre had the possibility to reach a wider audience than written text.

However, theatre has not only been thought to be politically powerful because of its potential to reach the masses, but also because of *what* it would present them and *how*. Scholarship concentrating on the special importance of theatre in revolutionary periods points out the similarities between theatre as a genre and revolution as a phenomenon (see Rudnitsky 1988). Where literature can only describe, theatre has a unique possibility to actually act as a social laboratory where roles are reversed and impossibilities made possible, class and gender positions reshuffled, pretty much like a revolution. Could it be that theatre has been perceived as politically powerful because it consists of the enactment of imagination, the biggest fear of any power-holder interested in preserving the status quo?

2.1.3. Theatre and National Identity

We have mentioned how Habermas thought of the public sphere as a means of social integration. If he is right, could the public sphere also be a useful vehicle for social integration taken to the level of nationalism, and could theatre play a particular part in this process? Print

⁷ A good example of the last category is Friedland's study (2003: 3) which argues that "representative democracy and modern theatricality are not merely related; they are conceptual siblings".

culture has been said to be one of the essential factors allowing the formation of a modern public sphere in the Habermasian sense. In his famous work on the origin of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) sees the development of what he calls “print capitalism” as a precondition for the emergence of national consciousness. According to Anderson, books and newspapers made readers see themselves as part of an imagined community among other readers and writers with whom ideas were exchanged. They also encouraged a fixation of language as well as debates on language, its history and what should be the common language of a given community (1991: 44). What Habermas and Anderson share, is the idea of literacy as fundamental to the creation of new group consciousness, whether it is that of the political public or of the nation. But maybe theatre possesses additional qualities facilitating the rise of such consciousness?

Some scholars emphasize how theatre relies on a collective reception which also entails a unique reactivity. While disagreement with the representation found in a book at best can be countered in text, the theatre audience has the opportunity to give instant feedback to the performers through supportive applause or disapproving silence, laughter or angry objections. In this way, it might be true that “the theatre can serve as a microcosm of the national community, passing judgment on images of itself” (Wilmer 2002: 2). Kruger (1992) argues that the relationship is dialectic: theatre both legitimizes national identity and criticizes it. She writes that:

The debates about theatre to represent the nation-states of Britain, France, and the United States are remarkable for the extent to which they not merely draw connections but also assume a natural affiliation between theatre and public politics on a national scale. In the official no less than in the critical discourse, the theatre is invoked as the appropriate site for nation building, as a legitimate public sphere (Kruger 1992: 6).

For the state, which is often its sponsor, the theatre is an attractive site for nation building because of its capacity to represent identities and moral values to the masses. Without denying theatre’s artistic autonomy, it is clear that theatre has been important in the shaping of collective memory so essential to nation building through historical plays which outline what should be thought of as the common heritage of a given community. Moreover, theatre also has an essential symbolic value in the process of nation building independent of the contents it presents. In the 19th century the institution of national theatre became an indispensable symbol, and establishing a “house of the nation” was a mandatory station on the trajectory to international recognition as a modern nation state.

2.2. Women and Theatre

Turkey is by no means the only country where women have been unwished for both in the audience and on the stage of the theatre. In ancient Greece and Rome, all female roles were written with male actors in mind, and in most European countries female roles were played by adolescent boys until the 18th and even the 19th century.⁸ Although the first actress stepped on stage in England in the 1660s, two centuries later the Victorians were still not at peace with women in theatre and discussed whether theatre attendance for women could be morally defended. With their economic independence as working women, their unusual public visibility, their at times strong intellectual involvement, and at times scandalous love life, it is perhaps not surprising that actresses have been a source of social tension and public debate. In this chapter, I will present scholarship on women and theatre exploring four questions. What is the origin of negative attitudes towards the actress, and what assumptions do they reflect about the relationship between performer and audience? How do these attitudes relate to attitudes towards women in society in general? And lastly, what have been the reasons when the attitudes towards actresses have changed?

2.2.1. Anti-theatricality and *Mimesis*

Opinions on women in theatre both imply a certain view of the power of theatre and of the nature of women. Therefore, in order to understand how actresses have been seen by society, we need to understand how theatre in general has been perceived, and what Jonas Barish (1981) calls ‘the antitheatrical prejudice’. Barish argues that the reappearance of negative prejudices against theatre in different locations and under different circumstances is a consequence of the complicated relationship between reality and illusion essential to theatre as a genre. As he notes, whereas references to other forms of arts in today’s English are mostly laudatory, as seen in words like ‘poetic’, ‘lyric’, ‘statuesque’ and ‘melodic’, vocabulary and expressions from the theatre world, such as ‘theatrical’, ‘acting’, ‘making a scene’ and ‘playing to the gallery’, are used as pejoratives (Barish 1981: 1). Barish argues that the fear of theatre is linked to deeply-rooted universal fears of “impurity, of contamination, of ‘mixture’, of the blurring of shifting boundaries” (1981: 87). In his analysis, the status of the actor and actress appears to be dependent both on the prevalent views of the role of art in society and on developments in the theatre genre itself. According to Barish, acting, which was highly valued in ancient Greece, significantly lost its esteem in Roman culture. The reason for this was that the Romans wanted a more realist spectacle than the rather religiously

⁸ However, improvised and other non-text based theatre traditions seem to have included female performers to a greater extent than text-based theatre, but of these much less is known.

affiliated Greek drama. So big was the hunger for realism in the Roman Empire that in some plays criminals were used as actors in order to represent actions that nobody else was willing to commit, or even executed when the plays called for it. In this way, the distance between action and representation of action, between the actor's private self and stage persona, decreased, resulting in a negative public image of actors. The reputation of actresses, who as far as we know only appeared in theatre of lower status, was especially coloured by the blending of boundaries in the representations of sexuality. Rather than acting symbolically, actresses were in this theatre seen to be factually "committing sin" on stage, and the idea of the actress as a prostitute was born. With time, actors came to join the ranks of the *infamia* along with prostitutes and some types of gladiators. They were accepted only as a necessary evil and in practice constituted a hereditary social caste without the right to vote, change profession or even let their children choose a different profession (Barish 1981: 42).

Ever since antiquity the concept of *mimesis* has been central in theories on the relationship between art and reality.⁹ Plato is often said to be one of the first thinkers voicing antitheatrical attitudes, as well as the provider of a philosophical framework often returned to in criticism of theatre in later centuries (Barish 1981: 5). In Plato's ideal city-state, the Republic, actors and poets would be unwished for. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, Plato held copies and imitations strongly in contempt, and he viewed theatre "as the quintessentially mimetic art" (Freshwater 2009: 38). Secondly, he believed that imitation could produce reality, and that the ridiculous figures of the comedies and the flawed characters of the tragedies encouraged corruption in the spectators. To Plato *mimesis* is formative; the imitator risks becoming what he imitates. Therefore he emphasized that virtuous people should only represent virtuous characters, and he particularly warned "good men" against imitating women, slaves and madmen (Plato 2003: 90). For this reason, tragedies, in which sin is quite inevitable, were to him morally unacceptable. As Freshwater writes: "For Plato it is nearly as terrible to imagine that one has married one's mother as it would have been to do so in earnest. The first can lead to the second and must be prohibited" (Freshwater 2009: 39). The flip side of this coin, that the display of morality on stage might stimulate morality in the audience and contribute to a positive metamorphosis, is never addressed.

⁹ The Greek term *mimesis*, which is often translated as representation or imitation, is an important philosophical concept first dealt with extensively by Plato and Aristotle.

In following centuries the Church put forth similar arguments against theatre, and alienated actors by refusing them the sacraments. Given that theatre was still somewhat linked to pre-Christian religious practices, an important reason for this animosity was doubtlessly that theatre was seen as a threat to the spiritual monopoly of the church, as well as a cultural space where satire and criticism of the church occurred (Barish 1981: 43). One of the frequent accusations against actors was that they were professional liars. Bearing this in mind, it is maybe not a coincidence that the ancient Greek word for actor, ‘*hypocrites*’, is the etymological origin of today’s ‘hypocrite’. The image of the actor as untruthful because of his imitation could also be met in the Middle East. People adhering to Orthodox Islam have regarded theatre with suspicion for the same reason they banned depictions of humans or animals in the fine arts, viewing it as a sacrilegious imitation of the creative act of Allah. For this reason, verbal recitals and storytelling traditions came to dominate the local traditions in Muslim areas, although representative drama also existed.¹⁰

A more recent philosophical attack on theatre was penned by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who in 1758 criticised a proposal to create a public theatre in Geneva, in part for bringing men and women together in both audience and on stage.¹¹ In Rousseau’s criticism we see a clear example of antitheatrical attitudes especially targeting women. So harsh was his judgment of actresses that in the French context the discourses negative to women in theatre are often simply described as ‘Rousseauist’. More than anything, Rousseau regarded the actress as a threat to public morality. She represented everything opposite of the female ideal and nature, being vain, artificial and corrupt rather than modest, homely and self-sacrificing. Furthermore, Rousseau accused the actress of having a corruptive influence on men in the audience by seducing them from the stage. But worst of all, on stage women were “shown as exercising a wisdom which they do not in truth possess, and wielding an authority they have done nothing to deserve“(Barish 1981: 271). In this way, the actress is accused of a double *mimesis*. Not only does she imitate reality; on top of that she defies her nature by imitating men (Barish 1981: 282). The positions “women cannot act” and “women should not act” are often entwined. In the history of women and theatre, the question of female abilities has been as important as that of morality. Lesley Ferris (1990) shows that the idea that women were by

¹⁰ However, the geographical and historical variations in the relationship between Islam and theatre should be noted. For example, the *ta'ziyeh* theatre in Iran can be described as an Islamic drama with similarities to the Christian passion plays, according to Malekpur (2004). For a convincing argument that there also existed a live profane Arabic theatre tradition in the Middle Ages, see Moreh (1986).

¹¹ The criticism found in “Letter to d’Alembert concerning Spectacles” sparked debate, but was finally successful in preventing the construction of a public theatre in Geneva for more than a generation.

nature incapable of acting has been recurrent, and that is has been a common belief that “women cannot in principle act a character, but can only perform aspects of themselves” and are thus incapable of *mimesis* (Ferris 1990: 44). To Rousseau, imitation means the loss of authenticity, and he therefore assigns the actress a particularly unfortunate place in the dichotomy between authentic and inauthentic.

2.2.2. Agency and Power

Rousseau judges the acting woman because she goes against her own nature and transgresses the boundaries between male and female agency. It would however be a mistake to think that only active agency is perceived as harmful in debates on theatre. The blurred boundaries in the theatre genre can also be said to be present in the relationship between actor and audience. Who is really active and who is passive? Debates on theatre and morality are always structured by certain assumptions about the power relationship between performer and spectator. In the last decades, the theory of the male gaze, a concept originating from semiotic film research, has often been referred to in performance studies. The fact that European theatre for a long while was financed, written, played and consumed almost exclusively by men is of course a crucial backdrop to any research on the subject. However, simplistic readings of the theory of the male gaze might obscure another important fact: the complexity of agency in theatre. The etymology of the words ‘audience’, from Latin *audire* (“to hear”), and ‘theatre’, from Greek *theatron* (“place of seeing”), reminds us that theatre is more than a visual art. In her study on the position of actresses in Japan, Kano (2001) emphasizes how this makes agency in theatre ambiguous:

In theater two semiotic modes of communication overlap: One is the linguistic mode in which the speaker/sender of the message is active and the listener/receiver of the message is passive; the other is the voyeuristic mode, according to which the viewer/receiver of the message is active and the viewed/sender of the message is passive. In theater ... the performer speaks and is also the one being seen, while the spectator is a listener who is also the one who looks (Kano 2001: 227).

In this way, the actress is both active and passive, and at the same time subject and object. Both positions have been dismissed as unsuitable for a woman. The actress appearing as an active subject on stage has been seen as a threatening agent, trying to fill artistic shoes too big for a woman, and also as a seductive creature possessing an improperly active sexuality. Meanwhile, the actress passively exposing herself and allowing herself to be object of the gaze of the audience, has been seen as a disturbing example of sexual availability. In the first case, the actress is criticized for becoming a man and losing her femininity. While in the second case, the actress is criticized for becoming a whore by putting herself on display for

money. Curiously, because of the complex agency of the theatre, the actress can be accused of both at the same time. Similarly, in morality debates on theatre, the audience is variously represented as active and passive. And again, both the active and passive positions have been dismissed as harmful, especially to women. While being in the role of an active spectator can translate as being in the position of an immoral voyeur, being a passive listener means leaving oneself more vulnerable to corruptive influences. Identifying which semiotic mode of communication is emphasized can therefore be a fruitful way of analyzing and understanding debates on the actress.

2.2.3. The Actress and Other Women

One might think that the appearance and acceptance of women on stage per se indicates greater emancipation among women in general. Scholarship has shown that historical evidence is more complex. In his study of actresses in France, Berlanstein (2001) hesitates to label the actresses as feminists or emancipators, and rather argues for a two-way relationship between the position of women in general and actresses in specific. On one hand, he argues that the position of theatre as an art had to change before the actresses could be welcomed (2001: 7). For example, at the turn of the 19th century, both actors and actresses gained more accept as there took place a transition from the troupe system to the star system. On the other hand, Berlanstein points out that public admiration for the actresses spilled over onto other women, who took the careers and charitable activities of the actresses as a model. All in all, Berlanstein hesitantly presents the actresses as door openers for women in general, but also as followers passing through doors already opened ajar. A somewhat similar position is chosen by Glenn (2000: 3) who approaches actresses as both "agents and metaphors of changing gender relations".

Kano's study of actresses in Japan has a more pessimist thesis: "That the increased importance of women on stage parallels the increased objectification and even repression of women in society" (2001: 9). As Kano writes, the same conclusion is drawn in other studies of great actresses in the late nineteenth century. These emphasize that as the actress became a star, theatre was also commoditised, and the actress was objectified more than before through photographs and other visual representations (Stokes, Booth and Bassnett 1988: 3). Of course, in these same time periods we find progress on issues such as legal and social rights, and I do not read Kano's statement as a denial of these, but rather in line with feminist criticism of the

assumption that "going public" is necessarily synonymous with liberation for women.¹² Also, as indicated by the word "parallels", Kano does not make an argument for causality. She claims that as long as women were excluded from theatre and idealized femininity was represented by men on stage, the female image was also under male control. The feminine had become a sign system, as argued by Sue Ellen-Case and Lesley Ferris, to the extent that it was thought that it "took a man to properly act a woman".¹³ When women were allowed to act and femininity was connected to the female body, the result was both liberating and repressive. On one hand, women were given a voice on stage. But at the same time grounding all gender qualities in the physical also laid down the foundations for new essentializations of gender, according to Kano.

2.2.4. Cyclical or Repressive Acceptance

This ultimately leads us to the question: How and why did the position of actresses change? The history of the social acceptance of actresses in Europe has often been told as one of steady and gradual progress. Berlanstein counters this representation. In his study of the perception of actresses in France from 1715 to 1914, he finds no slow linear movement of progress towards greater freedom and acceptance, but rather what he calls "cycles of fear and sympathy". In some periods, actresses were presented as threatening, unruly women, while in other periods they were depicted as closer to the ideals for women at the time (Berlanstein 2001: 3).¹⁴ The changes were sudden, as was the collective amnesia about previous representations. Interestingly, Berlanstein argues that "the cycle of fear and sympathy had little to do with changes in actresses' actual conduct" (2001: 3). Instead, he claims that the shifts in representation have coincided with political change and new forms of political organization. He finds that the periods in which actresses were regarded as a danger to French society through their power over men, were also the periods in which belief in male reason were the lowest. This again corresponded to a specific form of political organization: authoritarian rule. And vice versa, the periods where actresses were regarded with sympathy rather than fear, were the periods where the belief in male reason and self-discipline was stronger, such as right after the 1789 revolution. From this Berlanstein deduces that actresses were "tolerated when civil society functioned and demonized when it failed" (2001: 8). His

¹² For an example of such criticism see Thompson (2003).

¹³ This argument is by no means unique to the Japanese experience. Even Goethe wrote of male actors portraying women more skilfully than female performers on stage according to Ferris (1998: 167).

¹⁴ Berlanstein uses the somewhat vague expression 'theatre women' which includes not only actresses but also ballet dancers, opera singers, popular singers and so on. In order to avoid confusion I here stick to the term 'actress' since it is the more narrowly defined concept that is the subject of this thesis.

final argument is that the state of civil society can be used as a key to understanding the representations of actresses, and that political empowerment of male citizens makes women and actresses appear as less threatening.

Relying on universal theories might not be enough to understand the history of actresses in Turkey, or indeed anywhere else. We should also take into account the historical specificities of each case. Berlanstein's study is controversial, and one might argue that it is too country specific to be used as basis for generalization. A significant background for his theory is that actresses were the most sought for mistress material among the French elite from the late 17th century until post World War I (Berlanstein 2001: 17-21). Given this context, the fear of women's influence on men and politics and only to a very small extent the fear of their influence on other women is more understandable. However, the way that he suggests that the changing understanding of masculinities is relevant to the position of actresses, might be fruitful.

Moreover, while social understanding of gender clearly has an importance, we should not forget the changes in the theatre institution itself. Towards the end of the 19th century a gradual shift took place in the public attitude towards theatre in most of Europe. Three factors clearly contributed to this, all related to the growth of the bourgeoisie. Firstly, a growing proportion of women in the audience helped make acting more socially acceptable. As actresses were no longer performing for a mostly male gaze, the sexual connotations to their profession somewhat faded. Secondly, acting became increasingly professionalized. The status of actors inevitably changed as many of them became educated citizens. Lastly, a process of increased separation between high and low forms of theatre took place. Gardner (1998: 75) notes that the movement in England in the 1850s to separate theatre from *variétés* and music hall was mostly led by women, something that is not very surprising considering that they had more to gain from such a change than men. The actresses could argue that they were respectable artists only by being able to identify a separate group of non-respectable ones, such as cabaret stars and revue actresses. As I will later argue, in the Turkish case this meant that the actresses had a certain interest in keeping the image of the "bad" actress alive in order to differentiate themselves as "good".

3.1. The Woman Question

The image of the crumbling Ottoman Empire as the sick man of Europe is somewhat misleading; maybe not so much when it comes to sickness, but concerning gender.¹⁵ While the Ottoman nation in Europe was identified with the image of a male autocrat, in late Ottoman political cartoons, the nation was most often depicted as female, and in public debates women were presented as both the root of and solution to many of the problems of the Empire (Brummett 2000: 235-41). Since women were thought to simultaneously constitute a source of and a reflection of morality, it is hardly surprising that in the late Empire the rights and duties of women, as well as ideals for female behaviour, were subject to an ongoing discussion. Would women's education be of benefit to the nation? Should women be allowed to board an airplane? Was the upper class fashion of Parisian corsets a threat to public morality? The discussion on women and theatre was only one of many cases where concerns with Turkishness and gender roles intersected. In the following, I will try to give a brief and concise historical overview of the main issues commonly referred to as 'the woman question', and I will discuss how they relate to questions of national identity in the period of our interest.

3.1.1. The Young Ottomans and the Woman Question

Since the 1990s there has been a continuous discussion on to what extent we can talk about an Ottoman Women's movement or even an Ottoman feminism, sparked by Serpil Çakır's (1994) book *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi (The Ottoman Women's Movement)*.¹⁶ Without entering far into this debate, let me state that Çakır clearly demonstrates that political and intellectual activity campaigning for women's rights did not first come into being with the Republican era, as claimed by nationalist historiography. Additionally, Çakır's work has been important in showing that the emergence of women's rights was not only the result of the efforts of great men. Despite this, it cannot be overlooked that male intellectuals in Ottoman Turkey showed a remarkable interest in the range of topics concerning women bundled together in the expression 'the woman question'.¹⁷ The feminist intellectual and nationalist Halide Edip [Adivar] traces this interest as far back as the early 19th century. Sultan Selim III (1789-1807), she writes, was "the first man in the history of Ottoman reform to express the belief that unless women were placed on an equality with men and enlightened as to national ideals, the

¹⁵ The Russian Czar Nicholas I is commonly believed to have first introduced this expression in 1853.

¹⁶ For a further discussion see Demirdirek (2000).

¹⁷ The term 'the woman question' was first coined in Victorian England and later found widespread use in the United States and Russia in debates concerning women's nature and changing social position. This somewhat vague expression particularly came to refer to issues such as women's suffrage, education, legal rights and marriage. See Helsinger (1983).

empire could not be saved” (Adivar 1930: 65).¹⁸ Edip (1930: 85) suggests that by the time of the great reform period known as the Tanzimat (1839-1876), the idea that the progress of a nation is measured by the status of its women, was already widespread. The basic philosophy behind the Tanzimat was that the Empire could be saved through the adaptation of Westernizing reforms. The movement of educated urban intellectuals known as the Young Ottomans (in Turkish called *Yeni Osmanlılar*, the New Ottomans) are often presented by historians as the first feminists in Turkish history. Through essays, newspaper articles, novels and eventually theatre plays, prominent writers such as Namık Kemal, İbrahim İnâsi, Cemal Paşa, Mehmed Sâmî and Ahmet Mithat attacked marriage practices considered harmful to women and called for reforms in women’s education. Although actual census statistics shows that polygyny was a rare practice in Istanbul households in the 19th century, this was one of the most widely discussed topics of the late Ottoman Empire along with teenage marriage (Duben and Behar 2002). The woman question was also a recurrent topic in Tanzimat literature. For example, the first script-based theatre play in Turkish, İnâsi’s satirical play *air Evlenmesi* (*The Marriage of the Poet*) written in 1859, is estimated to be one of the period’s most powerful criticisms of arranged marriages.

Without denying their historical importance, I would like to somewhat nuance this image of the Young Ottomans as feminist. First of all, it should be underlined that although progressive, the Young Ottomans were essentially conservatives. Şerif Mardin (1962) has analyzed their ideology as a combination of Ottoman nationalism, Islamism and constitutionalism. The Young Ottoman movement emerged in criticism of the Tanzimat reforms and frustration over what they perceived as an excessive and superficial state-led Westernization which was too materialist and not accompanied by the import of Western intellectual concepts such as freedom and constitutionalism. Rather than a total embrace of everything European, the Young Ottomans called for selectiveness in what to appropriate from Europe, and Namık Kemal famously wrote “there exists no difference between dancing and flirting with the devil” (quoted in Göle 1996: 34). Secondly, it would be wrong to interpret the Young Ottoman’s engagement in the woman question as a sheer wish of female emancipation in the same sense as the contemporary suffragette movements in Europe. In the writings of the Young Ottomans we find two sources of legitimization for women’s emancipation: Islam and the common good of society. Their approach could easily be defined

¹⁸ Halide Edip [Adivar] frequently treated the woman question as a writer and journalist; moreover she was a founding member of the *Teali-i Nisvan Cemiyeti* (Society for the Elevation of Women) in 1909.

as instrumentalist as it was not very concerned with women as individuals – women and the family are often treated as synonyms. Thirdly, we need to take into account the political context of these writings. As Kandiyoti notes, in the debates on the woman question, the Ottoman family could at times be read as a metaphor for the Ottoman state. Calls for democratization of the family could thus be understood as a way of uttering a wish for democratization of the state during the authoritarian rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1909) (Kandiyoti 1998: 278). For the young Ottomans, she writes, “the amelioration of women’s status was a tenet of Ottoman patriotism that required the mobilization of society in attempt to salvage the state” (Kandiyoti 1998: 273). What would have happened to the interest in the woman question if the Empire had been saved, remains an open and intriguing question.

3.1.2. The Woman Question after 1908

The debate on the woman question intensified after the Young Turk revolution in 1908, which turned the Empire into a constitutional monarchy and lifted the veil of censorship that had been stifling the public sphere during the despotic reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (Brummett 2000: 248-49). With an abundance of new organizations and a more active and diverse press, the public sphere expanded, and the interest in women’s rights moved from the writer’s desk and outside. On one hand, a number of women’s associations were founded and activity in civil society increased. On the other hand, the ruling party of the Young Turks, *Ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (The Committee of Union and Progress), took a growing interest in the woman question, which maintained throughout the following years. In a book first published in 1915, the British journalist Grace Ellison expresses astonishment over the degree to which male intellectuals of the Young Turk period were engaged in the woman question, especially compared to the situation in her suffragette homeland. “Was there ever, I wonder, in my country a feminist meeting conducted only by men and where the men urged the women to rebel and strike for freedom?” she asks after attending a weekly feminist meeting in Istanbul where all four speakers were men (Ellison 2007: 71). Apparently men were even contributing articles to women’s magazines under false female pen names to make up for the deficit of educated female writers, in order to work for women’s cause (Ellison 2007: 5). According to Ellison, the prominent Young Turk leader Cemal Pasha identified himself as a feminist, and she praises him as a feminist reformer after talking to him at another meeting:

This meeting, which celebrated the foundation of the Ottoman Empire, was under the patronage of Djémal [Cemal] Pasha, now General Pasha and Minister of Public Works, to whom I have so often referred as the Military Governor of Constantinople. When congratulating him on his new appointment, I asked him if, in

his new capacity, he would still be the “feminist” Minister. “Most certainly,” said he; “this whole Eastern question, is it not a woman’s question?”

He it was who gave women the opportunity of visiting the warship *Hamidieh*; he who allowed a Turkish woman, Belkis Chekhet Hanoum [*Hanim*], to go up in an aeroplane, and then had her portrait placed in the Military Museum beside the heroes of Turkey; he it was who had the State Treasury and old Serail opened for the first time for Turkish women. They have now sold at a charity bazaar; they are organizing a concert, at which they will be allowed to perform. It seems hardly comprehensible to Western readers that these favours should be a question to be decided by a Government, or that such elementary every-day occurrences should be counted as steps towards freedom; they should have been in Constantinople under the régime of Hamid, then they could take these “reforms” at their proper value (Ellison 2007: 82).

As we can see from the last paragraph, it would be an anachronism to read Cemal Pasha’s accomplishments as feminism in today’s sense, although the improvements compared to the Hamidian era were great. Also, we should be cautious to remember the tensions and ambiguities of the Second Constitutional period rather than conceptualize it as an era of consistent linear progress. According to Zehra Arat (2000: 7), the increased public presence and visibility of women after 1908 actually resulted in increased criticism of reforms concerning women on grounds that they were sacrilegious. Furthermore, as the Ottoman elite did not all agree on the woman question, it also deepened cleavages within the elite (Kandiyoti 1991: 26).

Although we find some writings on the suffragette movements in Europe in the Ottoman press, political rights and suffrage for women were not among the questions awarded serious debate in the Young Turk period. These issues did not receive much attention in the writings of the most progressive Ottoman women either. For example, the women’s journal *Kadınlar Dünyası* (Women’s World), first published in 1913, stated that its purpose was “promoting women’s legal rights” (Demirdirek 2000: 67). Suffrage, according to its writers, was a utopia that had to wait for the time to be ripe and was only included as a goal to be promoted by the journal in 1921. In the meantime, the female writers of *Kadınlar Dünyası* wrote articles concentrating on three areas of female emancipation, which might give us an idea about the feminist agenda of the period. Firstly, the magazine was promoting women’s education and employment. The writers argued that this would legitimize the situation of women who were already forced to work due to economical hardship, that it would serve the common good of the nation, and that it would also secure women economic independence from men (Demirdirek 2000: 69). A second recurrent theme was marriage, and the writers of *Kadınlar Dünyası* were particularly critical of polygyny and the practices of arranged marriages and teenage brides. A third theme was the norms of female dress and modest covering (*tesettür*) which the writers wanted to reform either through smaller modifications or by altogether

abolishing the veil. In the early years the writers concentrated on arguing that such a reform would be compatible with Islam, later they turned to the secularist argument that unveiling was a necessary measure to bring health and participate in the '*medeni diinya*', the civilized world (Demirdirek 2000: 72).

As will be clear from the following chapters, Cemal Pasha was by far alone in defining the woman question as an essential part of the national question, which both encompassed saving the Empire and reforming its identity. I suggest two implications of his statement. Firstly, we can deduce that solving the issues implicit in the woman question was viewed as a precondition for progress in other areas. For example, primary education of women came to be seen not only as important for women as individuals, but crucial to their ability to be qualified educators of their children, fit to raise them as good citizens. With the rising ideal of the conjugal nuclear family, education was also seen as a prerogative for women's ability to be satisfactory intellectual companions to their husbands. In this way, the debate on women's education had a moral dimension which concerned the whole nation; an idea that was both used by the reform friendly, defending that women's progress was necessary for the nation's progress, and by their adversaries, arguing that the defence of women's honour was necessary for the defence of the honour of the nation. Secondly, the woman question can be said to have functioned as a vocabulary to discuss other issues, and as an outlet for anxieties, especially concerning the cultural integrity of the Empire in the face of social change. In this way, discussing the woman question also meant discussing the relationship to the West and to the Ottoman past.

One of the big social transformations of the 1910s was that certain sectors of professional working life opened up to women. Doubtlessly, an important factor behind this change was the Balkan Wars and World War I which produced a large deficit of male workforce and a war economy that made women's work indispensable. At this point, women's presence in new public spaces could easily be legitimized through reference to the common good since it did not threaten the jobs or income of men.¹⁹ Surprisingly, the religious segments of society did not utter objections against women entering working life as long as the work could be defined as respectable – a category that included garbage collectors and barbers, but not actresses (Criss 1999: 26). The textile industry and professions such as teaching, nursing and

¹⁹ Also, payments were not equal. At most, women earned three-quarters of a male worker's wage in this period (Türe 2007: 113).

medicine were the first to accept female employees. The Allied occupation of Istanbul from 1918 to 1923 also introduced new working sectors, including public brothels which employed a significant number of prostitutes and led to new calls for women's education (Türe 2007: 103). Parallel to the changes in work life, the doors of higher education also opened to women. Women were able to attend university in segregated classes, but even in 1919 this was faced with protest by Islamic conservatives on grounds of morality (Criss 1999: 26).

Several factors can help us understand how these changes were possible. Many of the early female professionals came from upper class or upper middle class backgrounds, and the professions they entered, as teachers, doctors, nurses and lawyers, were also of high social status. On one hand, their "decent" background might have made the transition more acceptable to society. On the other hand, Kandiyoti argues that in this sense "women's education may initially have acted not so much as a means of mobility as of class consolidation, since recruiting women may have been less threatening than admitting upwardly mobile men from humbler origins" (Kandiyoti 1997b: 125). Other scholars assert that promotion of the modern bourgeois family was the real concern of reforms concerning women rather than emancipation (Toprak 1991). In Turkey, like in Europe, the promotion of the post-war New Woman went hand in hand with a new domesticity glorifying the enlightened housewife. The creation of the modern nuclear national family (*Millî Aile*) was a great concern for the Young Turks (Kandiyoti 1991: 36). As they adopted the view of the family as the germ-cell of the state, matters previously considered as private were politicized, and women became an important target for nation building (Toprak 1991: 441).

3.1.3. The *Alafranga* Woman

As Abu-Lughod (1998: 14) notes:

It is difficult for anyone thinking about 'the woman question' today, as at the turn of the century, to escape the language of accusations and counter-accusations about cultural authenticity. Are attempts to transform the condition of women indigenous or foreign?

Indeed, it is hard to think of any debate related to women in Turkey in the period of our concern which does not in one way or another involve such accusations or invoke an explicit or implicit notion of what is culturally authentic. We might say that the Turkish intellectuals and reformers were exploring their cultural identity by simultaneously holding up two mirrors. On one hand, they tried to identify the Ottoman self by establishing distance to what they perceived as the materially superior but somewhat morally degenerate Europe, and on

the other hand by expressing difference from the increasingly despotic and weakened *ancien régime*. The exploration of the relationship to this double set of Others can especially be observed in literature. The condemnation of the West was articulated through the satirical critique of what was considered to be ‘*alafranga*’ (from Italian ‘*alla franca*’), while the term ‘*alaturka*’ (from Italian ‘*alla turca*’) was used to describe the local, traditional practices as backward and preventing progress.²⁰ A set of dichotomies are associated with these terms, such as excessiveness/modesty, knowledge/ignorance, entertainment/hard-work, and promiscuity/faithfulness.

Women are often at the centre of these complex debates of what could be domesticated and what were foolish imitations, of what was valuable heritage from the Empire and what was not. The excessively Europeanized Turk is a frequent character in literature of the Tanzimat period, in the male form as an Ottoman dandy or snob (‘*züppe*’) and in the female version as the *alafranga* woman. Superficial, self-centred and blindly obsessed with everything European, the Ottoman dandy was in essence accused of mindless imitation. A classic example is the protagonist Öhret Bey in Hüseyin Rahmi [Gürpınar]’s novel *İk* (*The Handsome One*) published in 1887. In his desperate struggle to be regarded as a Westernized Ottoman, Öhret Bey parades in the fashionable European-like streets of Beyoğlu in Istanbul with his foreign girlfriend, ridiculously dressed, citing French authors who never existed and mispronouncing foreign expressions (Sönmez 1969: 60). These literary figures change over time as do the portrayals of what it means to be Western. In literature, depictions of the *alafranga* woman “start out as portrayals of upper-class idleness and frivolity in the post-Tanzimat novel, culminate in accusations of treachery and collaboratorism by the time of the occupation of Anatolia by foreign powers and the War of National Liberation” (Kandiyoti 1998: 277). The women belonging to the non-Muslim minorities were particularly at risk of accusations of being *alafranga*, through their closer contact with European culture and education.

3.1.4. Feminism as Culture and Civilization

Against this backdrop we can understand that the New Woman was walking a difficult path full of traps in Turkey. How could she avoid being labeled as a ridiculous and dangerous

²⁰ It should be noted that while these terms often carry a negative connotation, they sometimes appear as neutral synonyms for ‘Turkish-style’ and ‘European-style’. For example, in popular use, the traditional squat toilet is described as *alaturka* while *alafranga* describes the European type water closet. The terms are also commonly used to differentiate between local and European food and music.

alafranga? Deniz Kandiyoti argues that an important discursive shift took place in the debates on women between the Tanzimat and the Republican era, involving a “progressive distancing from Islam as the only form of legitimate discourse on women’s emancipation, in favour of a cultural nationalism appropriating such emancipation as an indigenous pattern” (Kandiyoti 1991: 23). The most famous theorist of this cultural nationalism is the sociologist Ziya Gökalp, known as the father of Turkish nationalism. Although he died in 1924, only a year after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Gökalp is considered an important influence on Republican ideology.²¹ Aspects of his thinking were notably reproduced in the 1930s and 40s through what is known as the *’Türk tarih tezi’*, the Turkish history thesis, by historian Afet nan, who was Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]’s adoptive daughter. Two aspects of Gökalp’s thinking are relevant to our discussion of the woman question. Firstly, Gökalp escaped accusations that reform concerning women would be an imitation of the West through introducing a new source of legitimization: an ancient pre-Islamic Turkish past where genders were equal. He argued that Turkish culture was inherently modern, and blamed Arab, Persian and Byzantine influence for the later corruption of this initial ideal state of harmony:

Turkists are both populist and feminist, not only because these two principles are valued in our age, but also because democracy and feminism were two bases of our ancient Turkish life. Other nations, in their efforts to adapt themselves to modern civilization, have had to keep away from their past, whereas for the Turks it is enough to turn and look at their ancient past for inspiration (Gökalp 1972: 169-170).²²

Secondly, Gökalp introduced an influential, though at times self-contradictory, analytical distinction between the concepts of ‘culture’ (*’hars’*, a term crafted from an Arabic root by Gökalp himself) and ‘civilization’ (*’medeniyet’*). He argued that while the category of culture is national and contains phenomena such as morality and language, civilization is international and contains scientific knowledge and technology (Gökalp 1972: 30). To Gökalp, civilization is the sum total of concepts and techniques created consciously and transmitted from one nation to another by imitation, while culture consists of sentiments which cannot be created artificially and cannot be borrowed from other nations through imitation (1972: 39).²³

²¹ Gökalp’s main works were written between 1911 and 1918 while he was associated with *ittihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (the Committee of Union and Progress).

²² “Türkçülerin hem halkçı, hem de kadıncı olmaları, yalnız bu yüzyılın bu iki mefkûreye kıymet vermesinden dolayı de ildir; eski Türk hayatında demokrasi ile feminizmin iki ba lıca esas olması da, bu hususlarda büyük bir âmindir. Ba ka milletler, ça da medeniyete girmek için, mazilerinden uzakla ma a mecburdurlar. Halbuki Türklerin, modern medeniyete girmeleri için yalnız eski mazilerine dönüp bakmaları yeter.”

²³ “Görülüyor ki millî kültür ile medeniyeti birbirinden ayıran, millî kültürün bilhassa duygulardan, medeniyetin bilhassa bilgilerden mürekkep olmasıdır. nsanda, duygular usûle ve irâdeye ba lı de ildir. Bir millet, ba ka bir milletin dinî, ahlakî ve estetik duygularını taklit edemez.”

Since Gökalp separates religion from civilization, importing civilization does not pose a threat to religious morality. He argues that Western civilization is not Christian and Eastern civilization is not Islamic, and emphasizes Japan as a role model proving that successful import of civilization is possible without the loss of culture (Gökalp 1972: 66). The failure of the Ottoman Empire, according to Gökalp, was that it did not fully concentrate on embracing the superior Western civilization. With this construct, Gökalp achieves a double legitimization of reforms to expand the rights of women. Through his use of the concept of civilization, women's emancipation can be detached from the geography of Europe, and through the concept of culture Gökalp roots women's liberation in the Turkish tradition. By introducing the national past as a point of reference, Gökalp also avoids accusations of Western imitation or *alafranga* artificiality. Halide Edip [Adıvar], who was intellectually greatly inspired by Gökalp in this period, made a similar argument that equality already existed among the lower classes of the Turkish population, assumed to be closer to the ancient past. She criticizes Sultan Selim III for copying Europe instead of drawing inspiration from his own people:

Had he studied the conditions of Turkish women in the simpler classes of society, as well as in the Turkish past, he could have seen that it was the easiest thing in the world to carry out if handled properly. As it was, all his ideas appeared as innovations or imitations (Adıvar 1930: 65).

This nationalist discourse following 1908 gave a new legitimacy to the calls of female emancipation. This discourse was reproduced by the “state feminism” of Atatürk's Turkish Republic, which brought a cascade of new rights.²⁴ Of particular importance was the adoption of a new secular civil law in 1926, in which women's rights to divorce were extended, polygamy was abolished, and a minimum age for marriage introduced. Women were enfranchised in local elections in 1930 and national elections in 1934. The veil was never legally outlawed, but Atatürk strongly encouraged the appropriation of a “modern”, European-style way of dressing for both men and women. These reforms were important for the state as women were treated as both indicators of and producers of modernity. As is clear from this chapter, one of the challenges for the Turkish intellectuals wanting to see Muslim Turkish women on stage was creating an imaginary space for an actress that did not make her a ridiculous and threatening *alafranga* but accepted as culturally authentic. It is therefore hardly surprising that the first Muslim Turkish actresses were legitimized through nationalism.

²⁴ This term was first introduced by İrin Tekeli in an influential essay published in the mid-1980s.

3.2. National Identity from Empire to Republic

As the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire was transformed into the nation state of the modern Turkish Republic, national identity underwent big changes. Elites were reshuffled both within and across identity divides, and the contact with Europeans increased and changed over time. These factors combined with war and political instability in surrounding regions created fertile soil for new political movements and discourses, most importantly the rise of Turkish nationalism. The changes in cultural, social and political life in the late Empire were shaped by what we might call the Ottoman identity system. This identity system permitted the coexistence of cultural products within almost separate spheres, as well as the existence of separate norms for gender behaviour. Discussing some of the transformations this identity system went through is therefore helpful in understanding the changing status of the actress in Turkey and the discourses finally legitimizing her emergence.

3.2.1. Late Ottoman Era: the *Millet* System and Ottomanism

Any exploration of changes in national identity from the late Ottoman Empire to Republican Turkey rests upon an understanding of the *millet* system, which divided society conceptually and legally into different religious communities into which one was born.²⁵ Each confession constituted a *millet*, and as a result of the complex ethnic structure of the Empire most of the *millets* contained individuals speaking different languages and belonging to different ethnic groups. For example, what in Ottoman censuses was defined as the Muslim *millet* contained both Shiite and Sunni Muslims, and Arab, Kurdish and Turkish speakers. Likewise, the Greek *millet* (*Millet-i Rum*) contained all Orthodox Christians, whether they spoke Bulgarian, Serbian, Arabic, Turkish or Greek. An exception to this ethnic blindness was the Armenian *millet*, which until the mid-19th century contained all Armenians regardless of confession. As a result of foreign pressure, it was then divided into Apostolic, Catholic and Protestant *millets*, the latter two religious groups mainly having emerged as a result of the influence of French, British and American missionaries.

The ethnic diversity of the Ottoman Empire is astonishing, yet the Muslim *millet* was always in clear majority, at least on the national level; and the state religion was Islam.²⁶ Although they were all subjects of the Muslim Sultan-Caliph, each *millet* fell under the authority of its

²⁵ However, one's *millet* could change with conversion.

²⁶ According to official census, by 1897 the Muslim *millet* made up 74,07 percent of the Ottoman population, the Greek 13,49 percent, the Orthodox Armenian 5,47 percent, the Bulgarian 4,36 percent and the Jewish 1,13 percent (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 240).

own leader and enjoyed the right of free worship. The leader was often also the religious authority of the *millet*.²⁷ For example the Orthodox patriarch was both the religious and legal authority for the Ottoman Greek. The *millets* enjoyed a limited legal autonomy within the Empire, most notably in the domain of personal law which was regulated by legal courts unique to each *millet*. In this way, the different *millets* could maintain different legal practices on issues such as marriage, divorce and inheritance. In addition to this freedom and protection, however, there also existed a number of discriminatory laws privileging Muslims. This has led some scholars to assert that the non-Muslim minorities were treated as second-class subjects in the Empire (Zürcher 2004: 10).²⁸ During the 19th century the Ottoman state introduced several reforms aiming at preserving the unity of the Empire by modifying these laws, both to the eventual joy and frustration of the minorities. With the secularizing reforms of the *Tanzimat*, introduced with the Decree of Gülhane in 1839, all Ottoman subjects were made equal before the law regardless of their religious affinities, while their purely religious privileges were kept. In theory, at this moment the old separation between the ruling, Muslim millet (*millet-i hakime*) and the ruled non-Muslim millet (*millet-i mahkume*) was abolished. With the Imperial reform edict of 1856, the notion of the equality of all Ottomans citizens was brought further. This edict abolished the old law stating that only Muslims could become civil servants, and the civil and military schools opened up to citizens of all religions. However, to the discontent of many non-Muslims, they were now also included in the general military conscription.

Further modifications to the *millet* system came with the first Ottoman constitution, declared in 1876. Although the constitution was in effect for only two years due to the despotism of Sultan Abdülhamid II, it had a lasting effect in helping the ideology of Ottomanism take root. Article 8 declared that: “All subjects of the Empire are, with distinction, called Ottomans whatever religion they profess.” And according to article 17: “All Ottomans are equal in the eyes of the law. They have the same rights and duties toward the country without prejudice regarding religion” (translated and quoted in Shaw and Shaw 1977: 177). The emphasis on the term ‘*Ottoman*’ (‘*osmanlı*’) is interesting, both considering that this had not earlier been a very important identity, and because the term had mostly been employed to refer to the Muslim majority. Until the late 19th century, Turkish-speaking Muslims would identify

²⁷ However, historical research in the last decades has shown that the *millet* system appears to have been more locally organized than previously assumed (Zürcher 2004: 10).

²⁸ For criticism of this claim, see Quartet (2000: 141).

themselves as Muslims or Ottomans, not as Turks. This practice can be linked to another concept deeply rooted in the Empire, namely the idea of the global Islamic community, known as *'ummah'* in Arabic and *'ümmet'* in Turkish, which emphasized shared faith at the expense of other markers of identity, such as language and ethnicity. We might say that while Ottoman was the supra-identity, the *millet* was the infra-identity. One of the aims of Ottomanism was strengthening this supra-identity in order to encourage unity and a new conception of citizenship.

3.2.2. The Ottoman Armenian Minority

The Armenians had a special cultural position in the late Ottoman Empire, which can be understood by taking two factors into account. The first of these is the socio-economic status of the Armenians. The Armenian *millet* was of course not homogeneous; especially considering it was more widely dispersed across the Empire than the other *millets*. But many Armenians worked as merchants, bankers and jewellers, and in the 19th century they came to constitute the commercial bourgeoisie along with the Greek and Jewish minorities (Zürcher 2004: 61). The second factor is the interest foreign missionaries came to take in the Armenian *millet*. Although their initial intention was to convert Jews and Muslims, the Western missionaries found themselves more occupied with converting the Armenians, originally adhering to Gregorian Christianity, to Protestantism and Catholicism. Some of the missionaries published bibles in vernacular Armenian and provided teaching material encouraging Armenians who only knew Turkish to learn Armenian (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 126). In this way, the missionaries helped stimulate an Armenian ethnic identity and they contributed to the cultural revival that took place among the Armenians in the early 19th century (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 202). As a product of these two factors we find a third, which is the high level of education among the Armenians. Like the other non-Muslim minorities, the Armenian *millet* established its own schools. Furthermore, there existed a number of schools run by missionaries across the Empire. Their main purpose was conversion, but an important side-effect of their existence was that European ideas were introduced to their students. However, in part because none of these schools provided a secular education, many wealthy Armenian families chose to send their children to study abroad, particularly in Paris and Venice (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 126).

Taking these facts into account, it is not very surprising that the Ottoman Armenians can be given the honour for introducing much European culture to the Empire, or even described as

its cultural elite. The first Ottoman opera companies and orchestras playing polyphone music were all founded by Armenians, who also wrote the first Ottoman novels and dominated the field of architecture far into the Republican era (Hanıo lu 2008: 98). However, the influence of the Armenians was not limited to a number of firsts. From the mid-19th century, the Ottoman Armenians were also key agents in the creation of a new Ottoman public sphere through founding the first Ottoman newspapers and greatly contributing to the development of print culture in the Empire. Between 1850 and 1890 nearly a hundred periodicals were published in Istanbul and fifty-four of them were partly or wholly published in Turkish in Armenian script (Budak 2008: 70). It might seem astonishing how slowly culture often penetrated the *millet* boundaries. As noted by Mardin (2006: 96), “the cultural products of one millet had the tendency to be restricted by *millet* boundaries. ... This was the consequence not only of language differences but of the separateness of cultural worlds that increased with time.” An increasing promotion of Ottoman Turkish as a lingua franca in the Empire towards the turn of the century, somewhat changed this situation, as well as the Ottomanist reforms. Despite the above mentioned differences, it seems like the Armenian *millet* was long considered as the *millet* closest to the Muslims in character, by foreigners even referred to as “Christian Turks” (Ça aptay 2006: 32). Politically, the Armenians were known as the ‘*millet-i sadıka*’, ‘the loyal *millet*’, and indeed, compared to the other nationalist movements eventually emerging in the Empire, Armenian nationalism appeared quite late. There was also a significant number of Armenians among both the Young Ottomans and the Young Turks.

3.2.3. Turkish Nationalism: From *Millet* to Nation

Although originally religiously based, the concept of ‘*millet*’ gradually took on the meaning of nation. The Young Ottoman writer brahim inasi is claimed to be the first person to employ the term in this sense (Berkes 1999: 198). The usage of *millet* in the sense of nation gained speed with the revolts of the Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian subjects of the Empire and the subsequent establishment of nation states in the Balkans. Interestingly, these new national identities were all based on religion, something that led to the expulsion of a large number of Muslims from these areas, in turn feeding Turkish nationalism in the Empire. Around the same period, the concept ‘*vatan*’, which can be understood as a Turkish version of the French term ‘*patrie*’ (fatherland), was introduced and popularized by Namık Kemal, certainly under the influence of French political thought.²⁹ This concept was at the centre of the theatre play

²⁹ Although the term translates into English as fatherland, in Turkish ‘*vatan*’ is a feminine concept, as can be seen in the prefixed version ‘*anavatan*’ (‘motherland’). A very persuasive analysis on how land and soil are

Vatan yahut Silistre (The Fatherland or Silistre), which advocated love of the fatherland as the biggest of all virtues, but was found so dangerous by authorities that Kemal was immediately sent into exile.³⁰ It became increasingly difficult for the Young Turks to reconcile the idea of the Muslim *ümmet* and the concept of nation, and they ultimately privileged the latter. Ziya Gökalp argued for the possible co-existence of these concepts, saying that he himself simultaneously belonged to the Turkish nation because he spoke Turkish, to the Muslim *ümmet* because he prayed in Arabic, and to Western civilization because he was communicating and even thinking in French. In his groundbreaking study, Niyazi Berkes argues that the rise of Turkish nationalism was closely related to the collapse of the *millet* system and the decline of the idea of the *ümmet*. This he also links with the increasing influence of secularism. According to Berkes, “the beginnings and development of nationalism were conditioned by the degree to which the concepts of *millet* and *ümmet* were secularized” (1999: 318).

As the idea of the nation gained ground, a new question arose as an important subject of discussion: What should the language of this nation be like? This issue had been raised by intellectuals like Namık Kemal in the late 19th century, doubtlessly out of genuine interest. But considering the omnipresent political censorship of printed publications in the era of Abdülhamid II, discussing language could also be a coded way of discussing issues of national identity (Lewis 2004: 74). The question of the national language really became a hot topic in the period following the Young Turk revolution of 1908 with the growth of nationalism. While the advocacy of a purified Turkish as the national language might at first glance seem like an obviously nationalist effort, we can also observe Ottomanist motivations in these debates. Notably, Ömer Seyfettin and other writers of the magazine *Genç Kalemler*, founded in 1911, suggested simplification and purification of Ottoman Turkish partly in the hope that this would help secure the survival of the Ottoman Empire through spreading literacy among the population (Arai 1992). Gökalp (1972), on the other hand, argued that Ottoman Turkish could not be given the status of a national language without reform because it was an artificial amalgam which would never be accepted by the people as a spoken language. Interestingly, he compared the linguistic situation to a political one; the continued dominance of Persian and Arabic words and constructions in the Turkish language would

linked with femininity and motherhood in Turkish culture is found in the ethnography *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society* by Delaney (1991).

³⁰ Both terms have survived to the present day and are the origins for the current Turkish terms for ‘nationalism’ (*milliyetçilik*) and ‘patriotism’ (*vatanseverlik*).

mean both a linguistic and political capitulation. In this way, the idea of cultural authenticity was tied to perceived linguistic purity, a bond that was to be even further strengthened with the language reforms in the early Republic.

When secularism was adopted as one of the ideological pillars of the Turkish Republic, we might think that it would bring a territorial national identity solely based on citizenship rather than religion, but history is more complex than that. When it comes to identity, the Turkish Republic has always carried important legacies from the *millet* system. According to Baskın Oran (2009), although abolished on paper so long ago, the *millet* system is still “the operating system of the mind” in today’s Turkey. Although the state is secular, religion is still at the centre of national identity. We can speak of two main changes. The first is that while the infra-identities such as ‘Armenian’, ‘Jewish’ and ‘Greek’ have remained as they were in Ottoman era, the supra-identity of ‘Ottoman’ has been replaced with the supra-identity of ‘Turk’. A second change is the rise of the infra-identity ‘Turk’, defined as a Turkish speaking Sunni Hanafi Muslim, replacing the wider Muslim identity in the *millet* system. This has led to the alienation of Muslim groups such as the Alevis and Kurds, the first for not being Sunni, and the second for not being Turkish speakers, and because although most of them are Sunni Muslims, they are not of the Hanafi school. In short, the situation is confusing as the term ‘Turk’ thus both signifies the ethnic infra-identity of a Turkish-speaking Sunni Muslim, and the citizenship-based supra-identity common to all citizens of Turkey (Oran 2009). As a result, the minorities are simultaneously excluded from the identity of ‘Turk’ and forced to identify themselves as Turks.³¹

³¹ In an attempt to resolve this problem, in recent years some Turkish intellectuals and minority individuals have started to identify themselves by the newly coined term ‘*Türkiyeli*’ (‘from Turkey’) instead of the standard term ‘*Türk*’. However, this term is controversial, and has been met with suspicion and criticized as unpatriotic. See Altınay (2004: 129).

3.3. Theatre at the Scene of Politics

It would be a mistake to think that theatre life in Turkey was apolitical before the introduction of European-influenced script-based theatre. The traditional shadow plays known for centuries in the Empire often had a political edge, and in times of strict press censorship improvised performances constituted a cultural space more open to the articulation of political criticism and satire than printed publications. The Ottoman elite writer Melek Hanım wrote that the traditional theatre was “often employed as the means of communication to the Sultan or some other great personage what no one would dare to tell them openly” (1872: 123). Yet, the European-influenced theatre had an additional link to politics in Turkey: It was simultaneously a medium open to political content and in itself a political symbol of European modernity, independent of what content it presented on stage. In this chapter, I will discuss the changing perception of theatre in Turkey and its relation to politics in the late Empire and early Republic.

3.3.1. The Transformation of Ottoman Theatre Life

In the late Ottoman era there existed a rich variety of different forms of theatre. These might roughly be divided into two categories: improvised theatre and script-based theatre.³² The improvised theatre has a long history in Turkey. The most famous type is the shadow puppet theatre often simply referred to by the name of its main character, *karagöz* (*black-eye*). Another important genre of theatre is the *orta oyunu*, a form of largely improvised open-air plays with a stage gallery based on a fixed set of types and close in content to the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*. With the influence of European script-based theatre, in the Tanzimat era the *orta oyunu* was written down and brought to indoor stages, creating the new genre of *tuluat* theatre which synthesized the traditional content with Western costumes and stage technology. As theatre we might also count the tradition of the *meddah*, a theatrical form of recital performed by a single story-teller impersonating various characters, found in many Muslim countries. The *meddah* performed with the help of only a few props in public places such as coffee houses. Secondly, there is the script-based theatre which became increasingly popular in Istanbul throughout the 19th century. This can again be divided into two subcategories. One is the European theatre plays performed in foreign languages, mostly

³² I say ‘roughly’ because the theatre life of this period is marked by an astonishing hybridity and variety. Genres of lower status such as café concerts, vaudeville and canto were often merged with script theatre, and the presentation of European-style plays with performances of *alaturka* music in the intermission was not unusual. In this context, a strict dichotomy is neither possible nor meaningful, but I maintain a rough one for pragmatic purposes.

French, Italian and English, by foreign theatre troupes visiting Istanbul. According to Richard Davey, the first foreign theatre in Istanbul was opened early in the eighteenth century by a Genoese company, playing opera, tragedy and comedy, “generally in Italian, occasionally in French, and even in Greek” (1907: 249). The second subgroup is the performances of Ottoman or translated European plays performed by Ottoman actors, which is the form of theatre of our interest in this thesis.

These different types of theatre were associated with different areas of Istanbul. After the Tanzimat, a theatre life with two main centres started emerging in Istanbul.³³ One centre was in Stamboul, the old part of Istanbul, in a neighbourhood with a predominantly Muslim population but also with a significant amount of Ottoman Armenians. This used to be the main location for traditional theatre performances. The second centre was the neighbourhood of Beyo lu, at the time known by its Greek name Pera, which was largely populated by Levantine merchants and members of the non-Muslim Ottoman minorities. It was in Pera that most foreign theatre groups gave their performances, attracted by the eager foreign theatre-goers as well as elite Ottomans educated in foreign languages and thus capable of understanding the performances. The first movie theatres were also located in Pera (Bali 2007: 29). These two city districts have significantly different positions in what we might call the urban mythology of Istanbul. In the Tanzimat novels, the transgression of characters from one part of the city to the other was a common metaphor for embracing, or rejecting, Westernization.³⁴ Stamboul was depicted as the place where old mores and traditional life survived, while Pera was represented as the centre of the modern *alafranga* life, bustling with entertainment, fashion and consumption, as well as moral corruption.³⁵

The Ottoman Armenians played a crucial role in the domestication of the script-based European theatre in Turkey. The first European plays performed by Ottomans were staged in Armenian schools and private homes in the early 19th century (Arasan 2008: 17). In 1859 the first professional Armenian theatre, the short lived *ark Tiyatrosu* (Eastern Theatre), was founded in Pera. One of the amateur actors emerging from this theatre, the Armenian Hakob

³³ However, there were also some theatre groups acting in Üsküdar and Kadıköy on the Asian side of Istanbul.

³⁴ An excellent example of the same urban symbolism is Peyami Safa’s novel *Fatih-Harbiye*, where two neighbourhoods of Istanbul are used to represent different cultural types already in the title. Although this novel was published in 1931, well after the Ottoman era, the symbolism is very similar to the one found in the Tanzimat novels.

³⁵ According to Reina Lewis (2004: 76), Ottoman writers publishing in English were even using a separate term, ‘perote’, to identify the non-Muslim Ottomans living in Pera.

Vartovyan, in 1868 founded the *Asya Kumpanyası* (The Asian Theatre Company), quickly renamed as *Tiyatro-i Osmanî Kumpanyası* (The Ottoman Theatre Company), which transformed theatre life in Istanbul in several ways.³⁶ One of Vartovyan's great contributions was that he started staging performances in Turkish as well as Armenian. According to arasan (2008: 21), he did this partly in the hope of greater incomes through widening his audience, and partly in the hope of receiving state protection. The performances took place at the *Gedikpa a Tiyatrosu* (Gedikpa a Theatre) in Stamboul. In this way, Vartovyan brought script-based European-style theatre to what used to be the centre for traditional Turkish theatre and entertainment, and this hardly happened by coincidence. The great Ottoman actor Ahmet Fehim (2001: 15) writes in his memoirs that Vartovyan first staged a one act play in Turkish in a theatre in Beyo lu, but received a complaint from playwright Âli Bey that the environment was too 'kozmpolit' (cosmopolitan) and that he should rather perform in Gedikpa a. Little by little, Vartovyan's company went from exclusively presenting translated European plays by writers like Molière and Corneille to also staging plays written by the emerging Ottoman playwrights. In 1870, Vartovyan obtained a special permit giving him the sole right to produce plays in Turkish in Istanbul for ten years, and in this decade he enjoyed great success (Menemencio lu 1985: 52). Metin And (1999) describes Vartovyan as a master for managing to satisfy both Armenian and Turkish critics, actors and audience. Every week the same plays were staged in Armenian and Turkish in the same number.³⁷ The only exception was during Ramadan, when there were only Turkish plays, while during the Christian religious holidays plays in Armenian were on priority. Due to their knowledge of both languages, the Armenian population was also attending performances in Turkish, while the opposite was rarely the case.

3.3.2. Abdülhamid II and the Fear of Theatre

The reformist sultans of the 19th century Ottoman Empire all displayed great interest in European theatre. Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) enjoyed the private performances of French artists in his palace, while Mahmud II (1808-1839) was said to have a collection of over 500 French plays in his library (And 1999: 216). Abdülmecid I (1839-1861) was known to make frequent visits to the theatres of Pera. He had his own theatre built in his new palace in

³⁶ Hakob Vartovyan is commonly referred to in Turkish scholarship as Güllü Agop, which is a Turkified version of his original name. Historian Fırat Güllü argues that Vartovyan is the only personality in Ottoman Armenian theatre life who is easily remembered, because he converted to Islam and said he "felt like a Turk" (Güllü 2008: 19, 38-40).

³⁷ The number of plays acted in Armenian was however not recognized in the Turkish press of the time according to And (1999: 21).

Dolmabahçe, and it was for this theatre that the first play in Turkish was written.³⁸ Although less interested with theatre, his successor Abdülaziz I (1861-1876) played the piano, “was extremely fond of the opera, and used to attend the Verdi Theatre as often as twice a week” (Davey 1907: 357). The conditions for theatre gravely deteriorated during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, which is known as the period of ‘*istibdat*’ (‘autocracy’). Sultan Abdülhamid also had his private theatre at the Yıldız palace, but his dislike for theatre is evident from sources. Richard Davey made the following summary of the changed conditions with Abdülhamid in power:

At one time the opera season in the Turkish capital was the great event in the social life of the place. The singers were not only well paid, but made much of, and often received splendid presents from the Sultan and the principal Pashas. It is otherwise nowadays. The present Sultan has never set foot in Pera since his accession to the throne, although he occasionally follows the example of our gracious Sovereign, and "commands" a private performance of any remarkably successful play or opera, at Yıldız Kiosk. He hates tragedy in any case, and only enjoys opera bouffe. Some years ago, the Italian Ambassador induced him to "command" Salvini to recite one or two of his great tragic scenes in his presence. His Majesty was so dreadfully frightened that he got up in the middle of the performance, and hastily left the theatre. He absolutely refused to see Sarah Bernhardt, saying he did not care to witness the acting of a woman who mimicked death to such perfection (Davey 1907: 250).

Considering what we have said about the urban mythology of Istanbul, it is worth noting the criticism that Abdülhamid had never set foot in Pera, unlike his precedents. The claim that the sultan was scared by events on stage, whether because he was unable to separate between fiction and reality, or because he disliked the imitation of reality, might be valid. However, Halide Edip [Adivar] proposes a different explanation. She describes Abdülhamid’s negative attitude and measures towards theatre as a result of jealousy, in one specific case towards the famous Ottoman actor Abdurazzak, popularly known as Abdi:

Abdul Hamid feared the popularity of two men, Osman Pasha and Abdurazzak. He kept Osman Pasha away from the public by attaching him to his royal person, and he followed the same tactics with Abdi. The famous comedian was taken into the royal Music and Amusement Department and was forbidden to play in public. A despot is not a real despot if he is not jealous of every popular talent not exclusively used for his royal pleasure, and permitted to the public only through him. It is not perhaps political supremacy that has the greatest influence on the people. Art has a still greater power, and once it has gained sway, it cannot be dethroned from the public heart. Nero’s theatrical caprice was only a despot’s natural desire for lasting power (Adivar 1926: 124).

The Sultan’s antitheatrical attitude resulted in measures that did their best to cripple theatre life in Istanbul. Edip writes that although the actor Abdi was restored after the Constitutional Revolution of 1908, “the interval of his absence corresponded with such a poor and imitative period in our theatrical life that the public taste was utterly perverted” (Adivar 1926: 125).

³⁸ The play in question is İbrahim Sinasi’s *air Evlenmesi* (*The Marriage of the Poet*) performed in 1859 (Menemencioğlu 1983: 50).

Censorship was especially tightened after the performance of Namık Kemal's nationalist play *Vatan yahut Silistre* in 1873. This play was so enthusiastically received by the public that Kemal was sent into exile in Cyprus, the play was banned and Vartovyan arrested. Censorship in the following years appears to have been arbitrary to the degree of absurdity. The Gedikpa a theatre was ordered demolished by the Sultan in 1884 after the performance of Ahmet Mithat Efendi's play *Çerkez Özdenleri (Circassian Nobles)*, which was thought to promote Circassian independence. Not only did the censors scan theatre manuscripts for improper words such as 'Cyprus', 'Macedonia', 'constitution', 'dynamite', 'strike', and 'freedom', even the term 'nose' was enough to provoke them. In 1901 the performance of the play *Cyrano de Bergerac* was banned because it was thought that the legendary big-nosed character might be a reference to the far from delicately nosed Sultan Abdülhamid (And 1972: 246-48). The American writer Jerome Alfred Hart described the situation in this period as exasperating:

While we were in the Levant, French artists were playing in some of the principal cities — Coquelin, for example, in Athens, and Sarah Bernhardt in Constantinople. Sarah brought with her six plays, three of which were by Sardou. To her amazement she found that all were prohibited by the Turkish authorities; the reasons given were eminently Turkish and eminently peculiar. "La Tosca" was prohibited because a prefect of police is killed in the play. "Fedora," because it hinges on Nihilism and the overthrow of government. "La Sorciere," because the Koran is mentioned in the text. Of the other three plays, Racine's "Phedre" was tabooed because it is a Greek drama, and the Greeks are notoriously the most rebellious subjects of the Sultan. Rostand's "L'Aiglon" was forbidden because it satirized the treatment of Napoleon's son by Austria, and therefore was calculated to give offence to a friendly government. Thus of the six only one piece passed the Turkish censors, and that, oddly enough, was Dumas's "La Dame aux Camelias", which for years the Lord Chamberlain has forbidden in England on account of its immorality! (Hart 1905: 114).

The censorship, which affected theatre both produced by Ottoman subjects and visiting foreign theatre troupes, is relevant to our discussion; firstly because it shows that theatre was viewed by the Ottoman state as a potent political instrument; and secondly because, contrary to the case in many European countries at the time, preventing the spread of certain political ideas seemed to be of greater concern than searching the scripts for immoral values.

3.3.3. Theatre as a School of Morality

There is one common point between Abdülhamid and his worst critics: they shared a perception of theatre as a medium of political importance. The group of politically engaged intellectuals that came to be known as the Young Ottomans authored a number of theatre plays and also wrote essays and newspaper articles on theatre. According to Ahmet Evin, the Young Ottomans and other reformist intellectuals regarded theatre with growing interest because they considered it the most didactic of all mediums (Evin 1983: 14). Of course, these

thinkers did not have a totally shared vision of theatre, but as suggested by Evin, I also consider them to have three views in common. Firstly, they thought of literature in general as a useful instrument to spread and popularize ideas, and theatre was considered as particularly efficient considering the low rate of literacy at the time, an argument of somewhat limited validity as theatre was still mostly attended by the already literate upper classes.³⁹ These intellectuals did not stop at putting content above form; they even compared theatre to a civilizing institution. Author and playwright Ahmet Mithat Efendi wrote: “Every nation has a need for theatre. But our need is much bigger than any other nation’s. While theatre to other nations is the most tasteful and nice form of entertainment, to us it is equivalent to some kind of school.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Namık Kemal described theatre as a “school of morality”. According to Kemal, “If a man of letters can set up a few nice theatres, he can educate a whole people.”⁴¹

Secondly, the reformist intellectuals viewed theatre as a medium for social mobilization. In his essays, Kemal underlined the direct connection between patriotism and theatre, writing that “the greatest of patriots have been educated thanks to authors of drama”.⁴² Given this, it is hardly a coincidence that he chose to write *Vatan yahut Silistre* as a theatre play rather than as a novel. Thirdly, to these reformists the spread of theatre, like the Western novel, implied an adoption of Western institutions. According to Berna Moran (2004: 18), these intellectuals chose to express their ideas through theatre because the genre itself was a symbol of their ideology. For them, attending a theatre performance was a performance of modernity.

3.3.4. Theatre after 1908: Pushing the Public Sphere

After the Young Turk revolution in 1908, a veritable theatre epidemic broke out in Istanbul. In the course of only a few months, an abundance of new amateur groups were formed, and a number of plays were written and performed, many of them praising the Young Turks, Ottomanism and the constitution. The revolutionary plays emerged as a result of the expansion of the public sphere and loosening up of censorship, but at the same time, theatre itself contributed to the transformation of the public sphere (Seçkin 2007: 18). The plays were taken out of the theatre buildings and performed in squares, gardens and other public spaces, bringing theatre to new, non-elite audiences. Some of these plays had the character of “living

³⁹ Even at the time of the 1927 census, the literacy rate for people above 7 years of age was only 8 percent and less than 2 percent for women (Türe 2007: 148).

⁴⁰ “Tiyatroya her milletin ihtiyacı vardır. Bizim ihtiyacımız ise her milletten ziyadedir. Milet-i saire için tiyatro en kibarane, en lâtif bir e lence ise bizim için adeta bir mekteb hükmündedir. Quoted in And (1971: 25).

⁴¹ “Bir edip bir kaç güzel tiyatro tertib etse bir milletin umumunu terbiye edebilir.” Quoted in Ünlü (2006: 117).

⁴² Quoted in Evin (1983: 14). The translation is Evin’s.

newspapers”, as they were written and performed right after an incident. An extreme example of this phenomenon was a play listing all former spies of the Empire from the stage (Seçkin 2007: 20). Seçkin argues that there existed a symbiotic relationship between political actors and theatre life in 1908 and 1909. On one hand, political figures such as members of the Committee of Union and Progress attempted to use theatre to legitimize and spread their views, while controlling the theatre groups through patronage, and if needed, by force. On the other hand, the theatre groups obtained a legitimization of their activities by having important political figures in their audience (Seçkin 2007: 17). This is another reason why attending theatre became a political act, particularly for women, as we will discuss in later chapters. With the growth in theatre life, the demand for a national theatre education grew. In 1914, on the brink of World War I, the conservatory *Dârûlbedâyi-i Osmanî* (literally ‘the Ottoman house of beauty’) was established by the Istanbul Municipality. This institution was created to provide music and theatre education, with theatre legend André Antoine invited from Paris to help. Although theatrical activity was somewhat hindered in the war years, theatre became a subject of more intense debate than ever in this decade.

3.3.5. Theatre in the Early Republic

In the years from 1908 to the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, an *art pour l’art* view of theatre was rejected by the leading figures in theatre life. However, rather than a reflection of their ideals, this stance was often founded on a view that the Turkish public was still not educated enough to handle a wider spectrum of plays and would confuse theatre with reality. In 1922 the extremely influential director Muhsin Ertu rul wrote that moral plays should be preferred in a transitory phase until the new, European theatre culture was domesticated in Turkey:

I am one of those who does not support the making of theatre for a moral end in other countries. But when it comes to the homeland I think exactly the opposite. Considering that we do not possess neither the writers, the artists, nor the prosperity to be able to produce art for art’s sake... And until now we have proven this with the works that we have composed and performed. In this situation, let us at least use the theatre, which we perform for something else than art’s sake, in a beneficial way. I only find this beneficial way in the plays written for a moral or social end (Ertu rul 1993: 2).⁴³

⁴³ “Ben, di er memleketlerde tiyatronun bir netice-i âhlakîyye için yapılmasını ho görmeyenlerdenim. Fakat mesele memlekete gelince tamamıyla aksini dü ünüyorum. Madem ki biz sanatı, sanat için yapabilecek mertebede ne muharrine, ne sanatkâra, ne refaha malikiz... Ve imdiye kadar tahrîr ve temsil edegeldi imiz eserlerle bunu isbât ettik. u halde, sanattan ba ka bir ey için yaptı mız tiyatroyu hiç olmazsa müfîd bir tarzda kullanalım. Ve ben bu müfîd tarzı ancak bir netice-i ahlâkîyye ve ictimâfiyyeli eserlerde buluyorum.”

In the same essay, Ertu rul writes that a “new life demands a new theatre”(Ertu rul 1993: 3).⁴⁴ This seems to have been a view shared by Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk], who took an interest in theatre early as a reformer. He scrutinized the contents of theatre plays, and some were banned or modified if they did not promote the right values. *Vatan yahut Silistre* which had been forbidden by Sultan Abdülhamid II for instigating revolt, was again banned unless it was performed omitting statements such as “Long live the Ottomans!” and “Long live the Sultan!”. Theatre was even used by Atatürk in foreign policy, especially to strengthen ties with Greece through the exchange of theatre troupes in the early 1930s (Landau 1984: 216). In national policy, theatre increasingly became a vehicle for nation building, particularly by bringing theatre to the villages. Central in this process was the nation wide network of People’s Houses (*halk evleri*), a form of cultural clubs for the ruling political party originating in the Turkish Hearth (*Türk Oca ı*) of the Turkish nationalists. The People’s Houses offered the villagers education in the fine arts, crafts and sports, while dispersing Kemalist values and creating a more unified culture in the country. In 1937 the state started ordering plays written on specific and quite political themes and then made them performed across the country (Landau 1984: 219). In this way, the early Republican regime combined the late Ottoman intellectuals’ view of theatre as a civilizing school with a touch of Sultan Abdülhamid’s wish to control theatre to prevent unfortunate political messages. Fundamental to both was a strong belief in theatre’s political power.

⁴⁴ “Yeni hayat, yeni tiyatro ister.”

4.1. *Women in the Audience: The Semantics of Honour*

My only wish in life is this: To see the backwardness and reactionism in this country vanish like soap foam and to act before an audience of Turkish ladies who have come together with their husbands and brothers, in a theatre troupe in which Turkish ladies also will participate with their pleasantly sounding Turkish.

*Muhsin Ertu rul, 1918*⁴⁵

According to historian ükrü Hanio lu, theatre audiences in the Tanzimat and late Ottoman era were “microcosms of the Ottoman elite, representing the high society of the Empire in all its ethnic and religious diversity” (2008:100). Within this diversity, however, certain groups were in greater numbers than others. Since the audiences reproduced the proportions of the elite, it follows that women appear to have been attending theatre less than men and Muslim Turkish women less than women belonging to other *millets*. In part due to the general Armenian dominance in Ottoman theatre life and in part due to social norms, most of the female audience of the Ottoman theatre of the late 19th and early 20th century was Armenian (And 1999: 111). As the above quote by Muhsin Ertu rul indicates, although rarely awarded with much attention by historians, the debates on Muslim Turkish women’s place in the theatre audience should not be regarded as isolated from the debates on Muslim Turkish women’s appearance on stage – by contemporaries they were certainly not. While it might be easy to assume that the second issue emerged only after the first was resolved, reality turns out to be more complex.

It is true that the debate on female audience made its first appearance earlier than that on actresses, but as this chapter will show, social tensions related to Muslim Turkish women as audience in theatre, as well as in cinema, did not vanish overnight. The issue continued to be publicly debated at least into the 1930s, years after the first actresses appeared with the state’s blessing. Still, instead of assessing these two debates as a whole, historians have mostly seen nothing but the “firsts”, devoting almost all attention, if any, to the first actresses. It is silently assumed that the emergence of these firsts corresponds to discursive turning points in the debates. This thesis argues otherwise. Instead, the over-emphasis on firsts appears to be ideologically rooted, and even if it is not, it ultimately supports a nationalist narrative of Turkish history. The historiography consolidating the idea of 1923 as a pivotal turning point for women in theatre and of Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] as the main, if not only, agent behind

⁴⁵ “Hayatımda tek dile im budur: Bu memlekette gerili in, gericili in sabun köpü ü gibi sönüp gitti ini görmek, kocaları ile karde leriyle gelmi Türk hanımlarından seyirci kütesinin önünde yine Türk hanımlarının kula a pek ho gelen Türkçeleri ile katılacakları bir tiyatro toplulu unda oynamak” (Ertu rul 1993: 161).

the transformation, leaves two things obscured: the positive efforts made prior to Atatürk's time and their agents, and the continuing struggle to recruit actresses as well as morality attacks on audience after 1923. Evidently, the silence on both subjects serves to idealize the Republic. In the following analysis, I have attempted both to widen the scholarly perspective on this subject by looking at periods before and after 1923, and to deepen it by studying a wider range of material more critically.

Scrutinizing the narratives in defence of female audience, and particularly of Muslim Turkish women as audience, alongside the narratives in defence of actresses is important for two reasons. Firstly, the two subjects carry great similarities not only as issues of the public sphere that reflect a variety of perceptions on the function of theatre, but also because the resolution of both matters relied on a redefinition of what was considered proper behaviour for women and for Turkish Muslims. Secondly, there exists an important bond of mutual legitimization between the two. My argument is that the Turkification of female audience was essential to the acceptance of Turkish actresses on stage. Since the main immorality of the actress resided in being object of the gaze, the increasingly mixed character of the audience helped make the agency of the actress become regarded as less sexualized. And vice versa, the appearance of the Muslim Turkish actress also helped further legitimize Muslim Turkish women in the audience. The meaning ascribed to theatre-going, which had long been considered an *alafranga* activity, was somewhat redefined with the appearance of nationalist plays where the Turkishness of the actresses was not only tolerated but even used as an asset. In this chapter, we will study how and why these changes took place. To the extent that is possible given the methodological challenges described in the introduction, I have tried to integrate the experiences and opinions of Muslim Turkish women, who were not only objects of debate, but also subjects and agents in the debates.

4.1.1. The Segregated Audience

In morality debates on women as audience in European countries, theatre's influence on women rather than women's public presence was often, though not always, the key concern.⁴⁶ Building on a narrative of female vulnerability, in Germany of the 1910s theatre and cinema attendance was constructed as a threat to women's mental and even physical health, especially thought to lead to neurosis and hysteria (Haller 2004: 4-5). Early silent cinema was perceived

⁴⁶ However, particularly in the United States, narratives constructing women's presence alongside stranger men in the darkness of the cinema and theatre as immoral and using it as the main rationale for warning against women's participation in the audience, were also significant. See Thompson (2002: 204).

as even more harmful than theatre because it was a visual medium relying totally on spectatorship, if we leave music out of the discussion. This spectatorship was by critics framed as voyeurism. In the Ottoman Empire, however, the potentially harmful effects inflicted by theatre on women seem to have been of somewhat lesser concern. Instead of arguing that women's immorality resided in *seeing*, the negative attitudes towards women's theatre attendance in the years leading up to the Republic and even in its early years were mostly rooted in the idea that women's immorality resided in *being seen*. This narrative approached theatre as a physical space rather than as an artistic entity, as a visual space rather than a literary public sphere. Attending theatre was perceived as contrary to the norms for accepted gender socialization, and more specifically as a violation of the practice of segregation.

In Ottoman Istanbul social life and interaction were highly structured by the concepts of '*harem*', which designated the spaces reserved for women, children and close male relatives only, and '*selâmlık*', which referred to the spaces reserved for men. When Bediâ Muvahhit appeared as the first legitimate Muslim Turkish actress in 1923, public transport in Istanbul was still segregated. It is worth noting that this segregation in practice was neither totally rigid nor absolute, but subject to constant negotiations and challenges. Similarly, state control over women's veiling appears to have been by no means complete, even in the times of the strictest autocracy. According to Halide Edip [Adivar], during his time of reign, Abdülhamid II was regularly submitting orders for the police to inspect women's way of dressing and veiling, but these orders were never enforced for more than three days at a time (Brummett 2000: 260). Still, the biggest obstacle to women's theatre attendance was that it entailed visibility. By going to the theatre, women were not only appearing in a public space, they would also be visible – however veiled – to stranger men in the audience. In neighbouring Syria, the argument even appeared that women should not go to the theatre because they would be visible to the male actors on stage. In 1919 a theatre play in Damascus with an all-female audience was cancelled in the last minute and substituted with a film after heavy protests by some *ulama* (Muslim clergy) who argued that women's theatre attendance was immoral because male actors could see their faces in the audience (Thompson 2002: 202). I have not found any evidence that this extreme argument appeared in the morality debates on theatre audience in Istanbul, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. The violation of segregation implied the loss of '*namus*', the collective honour rooted in the protection of female sexuality, not only for women, but also for their husbands and fathers. According to this logic, a man

“allowing” his wife or daughter to attend theatre was a collaborator guilty of exposing a woman whose honour it was his duty to protect. A mild exception to women’s absence from the public sphere was the month of *ramazan* (Ramadan), which appears to have functioned as a liminal space in late Ottoman society in which the increased public activity and visibility of women was socially accepted. The elite Ottoman woman Zeyneb Hanım describes *ramazan* as a time of the year where Ottoman women enjoyed a greater participation in the public sphere.⁴⁷ She underlines that this was especially welcomed by upper class women, whom she claims were more restricted from attending public entertainment than women of the lower classes in the late Ottoman era:

You ask me to describe the life a Turkish woman leads during Ramazan. The evenings of Ramazan are the only evenings of the year when she has the right to be out of doors; the time when she seizes every opportunity of meeting her friends and arranging interesting soirées; the time when she goes on foot or drives to the Mosque to hear the Imams explain the Word of the Prophet. Need I remind you, unlike the women of the lower and middle classes, who go out *every* evening, the more important the family to which a woman belongs, the more difficult is it for her to go out. It is for the evenings of Ramazan that most amusements are arranged, and our husbands, fathers, and brothers usually patronise the travelling circus, Turkish theatre, performances of Karakheuz [*Karagöz*]. The women on their side have their dinners, Oriental dancing, and conversation which lasts deep into the night. (Zeyneb Hanım and Ellison 1913: 171-2).

As we see, she presents theatre as a realm closed to elite Muslim Turkish women even during *ramazan*. This does not totally match the descriptions by other elite Turkish Muslim women of the same period, but without doubt it is true that the situation of upper-class Ottoman women was highly paradoxical. On one hand, they had access to education, they enjoyed the rare privilege of literacy and knowledge of foreign languages – Zeyneb Hanım herself knew eight – , and they were thus capable of following the abundance of theatre performances in foreign languages which Turkish women of lower classes would not be able to understand. But on the other hand, their physical mobility and independence was restricted. The amount of fear women’s increased movement in the public sphere unleashed is even more obvious if we look at other forms of entertainment that were dismissed as immoral in this period, such as roller skating, a big fad in the early 20th century. In Izmir an entrepreneur obtained a special permit in 1910 for building a combined cinema and roller skating rink, where women would be able to attend two afternoons a week. According to the Ottoman princess Emine Fuat Tugay this was enough to create a stir in the Ottoman press: “Articles appeared every day, one after another, to the effect that the sanctity of the home was being endangered, and that

⁴⁷ Zeyneb Hanım and her sister Melek Hanım were daughters of Sultan Abdülhamid II’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nuri Bey. They befriended the famous French Orientalist Pierre Loti and figured as models for the unhappy but highly cultured Ottoman heroines in his novel *Les Désenchantées*.

women would lose all sense of decency if allowed to view immodest pictures or, worse still, disport themselves on wheels”.⁴⁸

Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the first measure to attract women to the theatre was the creation of segregated performances, something that happened in two ways: First in the form of a physical segregation realized through the construction of latticed boxes in the theatres, which made the female audience invisible to everybody of the opposite sex; then through a temporal segregation consisting of the scheduling of special performances for women only. Most performances for women were matinées, while performances at night were invariably for men. The time slots were by no means a coincidence, but a reflection of the perception that no decent woman goes out at night, which was read as an advertisement for sexual availability. As remarked by a Turkish-born American author in 1915:

While there are Turkish theatres which ladies attend in daytime, it is contrary to custom for ladies to take part in public entertainments at night. Consequently the European ladies who sometimes penetrate Stamboul during the nights of Ramazan make themselves more conspicuous than is likely to be pleasant and the objects of comment which it is well that they do not understand (Dwight 1915: 272).

4.1.2. Attracting Female Audience

Although he himself was Armenian, Hakob Vartovyan was the first person in Ottoman Istanbul to make significant efforts both to attract female audience in general to the theatre and to attract Muslim Turkish women in particular. To a certain degree, he succeeded. In 1879 he installed ‘*kafesli localar*’, a form of latticed boxes in which women would be hidden from the gaze of men, a novelty regarded as controversial enough by some (And 1999: 111). Shortly after, the newspaper *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* reported:

Although the director of the Gedikpa a Tiyatrosu Agop Efendi lately announced in a proclamation which he disseminated that he has had latticed boxes constructed in the aforementioned theatre in order for women, too, to come and view the plays, according to what we have learned, seven to eight young men living in the neighbourhood have submitted a written petition to the government requesting that women’s attendance of these lattices boxes should be prohibited, with the statement that not only should women not be permitted to go to the theatre, they should not even go to the sacred mosque except when necessary by need.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The quote is taken from Tugay’s book *Three Centuries: Family Chronicles of Turkey and Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), as quoted in Brummett (2000: 214).

⁴⁹ “Gedikpa a Tiyatrosu müdürü Agop Efendi geçenlerde ne reyledi i ilannamede mezkur tiyatroya kadınların dahi gelip oyunları tema a etmeleri için kafesli localar yaptırmı oldu unu ilan eylemi idiye de haber aldı ımıza göre tiyatroya civan olan yedi, sekiz mahalle ahalisi kadınların tiyatroya de il camiii erifeye bile lüzum-i zarurinin haricinde gitmeleri için cevaz olmayaca ndan bahsle bu kafesli localara kadınların gitmeleri men olunması hükümet-i seniyyeden istida eylemi lermi .”

As we see, the morality or immorality of what was staged at the theatre seems not to have been a key concern for those provoked. If women should not even attend the holy mosque, the main issue was not the institution itself, but the immorality of women's public appearance in general. As an additional measure to increase female theatre attendance, Vartovyan allowed women free entrance for a while, and later he gave them a greatly reduced price. For example, the price of tickets for a play in 1882 ranged from 50 *kuru* for a lodge to 15 *kuru* for a chair in the first class for men, while the prices for a place in the lodge was 30 *kuru* for women, and 5 *kuru* in the first class. Even among children there were two prices. Girls were given a reduced price of 3 or 2 *kuru*, while the price for boys was 5 or 3 *kuru* (And 1999: 112). Vartovyan did not consider the discount a threat to the economic income of the theatre, stating that women would rarely come without male company (And 1999: 114). In fact, according to And, one of Vartovyan's main motivations for wanting more women in the audience was that this would help increase the number of male theatre goers. This view is interesting because it presupposes that women were even more interested in going to the theatre than men.

Although Vartovyan's efforts were met with some negative reactions in the neighbourhood, a much more extensive public debate on women's theatre attendance first began to appear after the declaration of the second constitution in 1908. This debate was largely sparked by The Young Turks, who seem to have had a more liberal attitude on the issue than what public opinion was ready to tolerate. A historical event occurred in February 1909 when *ttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (the Committee of Union and Progress) staged a theatre play in Izmir. Since there was only to be held one performance, some women asked if they could watch the play alongside the men, and they were actually given the permission by leaders of the party. However, after this became publicly known, religious fanatics surrounded the theatre with knives in their hands and threatened to kill any woman who entered the theatre (And 1971: 17). As a result, no women dared to step inside, a disappointment which led the Izmir-based francophone newspaper *Le Temps* to write a comment underlining the importance of women and men attending theatre together (And 1971: 21).

4.1.3. The Segregated Theatre as Experienced by Muslim Turkish Women

The system of segregated performances turned out to be a temporary solution that satisfied neither conservatives nor progressives. To the conservatives, the way in which women attended was irrelevant; theatre in itself was harmful and particularly so for women. As late as in 1918 Muhsin Ertu rül compared the attitudes towards theatre in Europe with those in

Turkey, “where theatre means immorality, shamelessness and dishonesty” (Kaynar 1968: 204). The female intellectual Halide Edip [Adivar] on the other hand, complained that the segregation in theatre left the female spectators no peace of mind to enjoy the performances.⁵⁰ The reason was that the segregation was not organized purely by gender, but according to the Turkish concept of ‘*aile*’ (family) in which women and children are seen as one single unit and men as another. In an article published in the Young Turk organ *Tanin* on August 25th 1908, Edip juxtaposes the theatre of her dreams with the reality of the time. As she sits on the ferry on her way from the Anatolian side of Istanbul to a women’s matinée performance in Bakırköy on the European side, Halide dreams of going to a theatre performance where fashionably dressed women attend without their children, who they have instead sent to *karagöz* performances, to the cinema or to watch acrobats (Seçkin 2007: 67). The real performance she attends is described in total contrast to this dream. Since women have no choice but to bring them along, one fifth of the audience consists of children. The theatre is shabby, over-crowded and in chaos, ruled by “a *hamam*-like atmosphere” with children constantly moving around, mothers hushing and bargaining with water and nut sellers; and there is so much noise that the actors find themselves shouting from stage (Seçkin 2007: 68).⁵¹

It is worth noting that rather than dreaming of attending theatre together with men, Halide Edip dreams of going to a theatre free of children. How should we understand this attitude? There are two main differences between the theatre of Edip’s dreams and the performance she actually attends. One is that while the audience in her fantasy is well-mannered, serious and disciplined, in the real theatre the atmosphere is disorganized and the women in the audience seems busier with taking care of their children than with understanding the play. The other is that the theatre in Edip’s day dream has a strong nationalist dimension which is not successfully brought into reality. In her fantasy, the theatre would have a silver crescent and star on the stage curtain, an intermission where the orchestra would play patriotic songs, and the audience would all stand up while singing the *Hürriyet Marşı* (*March of Freedom*). The

⁵⁰ Halide Edip [Adivar] (1884-1964) was among the few female Ottoman intellectuals who participated in the activities of the Young Turks. Along with writing novels, she contributed articles to influential journals such as *Vakit* (Time), *Aksam* (The evening) and *Tanin* under the name Halide Salih. She started using the second name after marrying her first husband Salih Zeki Bey. In 1910 she divorced him in objection to his taking a second wife, and in 1917 she married the Turkish politician Adnan Adivar and took his surname. In order to avoid confusion for the reader, I refer to her as Halide Edip [Adivar] in the following, although she signed these early texts as Halide Salih.

⁵¹ “Bir hamam cavıltısı aktörleri seslerini i ittirmek için ba ırmaya mecbur eden üçyüz a zın birden fındık kırığı vardı.” The transliteration of this and following excerpts from this article are Seçkin’s.

play she actually attends, *Besa yahut ahde vefa* by emsettin Sami, was one of the most famous patriotic plays of the era. But although Halide Edip describes how the actors managed to silence and move some people to tears towards the end, the overall impression she gives is of an ignorant audience. She is particularly upset that some women did not stand up while singing the March of Freedom, which she considered an unforgivable lack of respect. In sum, the conditions of this theatre seem insufficient for the patriotism she envisioned (Seçkin 2007: 68). In this way, Halide Edip's dream of attending a theatre without children appears to be an expression of a dream of attending serious, political theatre as a woman, and of the education of the audience necessary to realize this. To her, making theatre and audience civilized, making women less ignorant, and spreading patriotism all seem to be related – an attitude not unlike what we later see demonstrated by Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk].

Another Turkish Muslim female intellectual who was unsatisfied with the conditions of theatre in this period is Nigâr Hanım. Although she is most famous for her poems, Nigâr Hanım was also the first female Turkish playwright and a proclaimed theatre lover.⁵² While she declared that cinema bored her, she described theatre as “one of her delights”, and in 1917 she attended almost every play staged at the Dârülbedâyi (Bekiro lu 1998: 166).⁵³ Yet, in her memoirs she laments about the low quality of acting in many plays as well as the poor standard of the venues. She has similar complaints as Halide Edip with regard to audience behaviour. In her memoir she describes how she in 1916 left a play in the middle, after having been frustrated with the unruly audience smoking, eating nuts and snacks, as well as with the “bad voices” of the performers (Bekiro lu 1998: 167). A parallel description is also given by Selma Ekrem, the granddaughter of Namık Kemal, who grew up in a very liberal, elite Muslim Turkish family.⁵⁴ She recalls being taken to *karagöz* performances in Stamboul as a child with much enthusiasm, although she portrays the quality of venue and audience as low. For example, she describes one place as “a little dirty hall filled with women, children and noise. Of course no men were there for this was a theatre reserved for women. Some of the women brought tiny babies who tore their throats in lusty cries” (Ekrem 2005: 127).

⁵² Nigâr Hanım (1856 – 1918) was the first Ottoman woman to publish European style poetry. She wrote the play *Tesir-i Aşk* (*The Influence of Love*) in 1883, making it the earliest work by a female playwright in Turkey. However, the play was never performed and first published in 1978 (Bekiro lu 1998: 296).

⁵³ “Ezvakımdan birisi de tiyatro temâ âsıdır.”

⁵⁴ Selma Ekrem (1902-1973) spent many years abroad since her father was a governor in Jerusalem and Greece and returned to Istanbul just as the First World War broke out. She was one of the first Muslim girls attending the American College for Girls in Istanbul. In 1923 she moved to the United States, where she in 1930 published her memoir *Unveiled* which was a best-seller for its time, appearing in four editions.

Interestingly, her description of the atmosphere in theatres staging European-style performances bears a striking resemblance to her impressions of this *karagöz* venue:

The theater was another dirty hall littered with shells. The same kind of audience, composed solely of women and children, attended it. As for the stage, it was so primitive that even I laughed at the crude attempts at houses and stairs. The plays were not really plays, but who cared? “Bald Hassan” jumped and looked stupid, fooled the other players and got the best of each. The actresses were all Armenian as Turkish women could not act. How could they when they were not even allowed to show their faces to men? (Ekrem 2005: 127)

As pointed out by Seçkin (2007: 69), the serious, educated and disciplined European audience which the Turkish intellectuals longed to see in their own country, was to some extent a fiction. In fact, at the turn of the century, theatre critics in Europe too spent a large proportion of their reviews complaining about the bad manners of their audiences, with reference to an ideal audience. What distinguishes the writings quoted above from such critiques, or from the abundant complaints made by male writers in the same period, is the frustration over not being addressed as an independent subject, but as part of the women-and-children. Halide Edip was without doubt the most active and outspoken female voice attempting to change this situation. In another article published in *Tanin* August 20th 1908, she emphasizes both the need for a national, patriotic theatre and the special need for women to be included in this theatre. Her argument is: “It is not only the minds and hearts of men that need beauty. The mothers, wives and daughters of the nation must also see these great things and their spirits grow in so doing” (quoted in Seçkin 2008: 88).⁵⁵ There are several interesting aspects of this argument. With the reference to “beauty” in the first sentence, Edip approaches theatre as an aesthetic, artistic realm. The final goal of the “spirit growing” is quite ambiguous – it might be read as an aim of education, refinement of taste, personal development or as a more politically charged *mission civilisatrice*. In this article, Edip also underlines women’s capability of understanding theatre, but the most important source of legitimization is not women’s intelligence. Instead, she legitimizes women’s right to “see great things” through their relation to the nation as mothers, wives and daughters. In her writings, the nation appears as a new source of honour separate from religion, helping to free the theatre from its reputation as *alafranga*.

One of the major political events of 1908 was the resurrection of Namık Kemal’s *Vatan* and its performance at the *Tepeba ı Theatre*, which was so popular that tickets ran out days in

⁵⁵ “Dima ları kalpleri güzelli e muhtac olanlar yalnız erkekler de ildir. Milletın anaları zevceleri genc kızları da bu büyük eyleri görmeli, bu büyük eyler ile ruhları büyümeli!”

advance. However, this performance was only open to men. In an article published the day before the performance, Halide Edip proposed that the play should also be staged at the *Tepeba ı Theatre* once for women only. “We do not want to see these works in the broken barracks of Kadıköy. We want to see them again in a good theatre building with good décor so that the effects and beauty of it are not decreased and its literary quality not reduced”, she wrote (Seçkin 2007: 89).⁵⁶ Thus, it appears like she regarded the poor physical conditions as an obstacle to the reception of both the literary (“beauty”) and political (“effects”) aspects of the performances. To this she added a patriotic argument with a more pragmatist twist, namely that a special performance for women would result in higher incomes for the organizers that could be used for patriotic means (Seçkin 2007: 89). In this way, Edip justified women’s theatre attendance arguing that it would both serve women and the common good.

Was the segregation of the audience ever challenged by women except in ink? Actually we do know that some Muslim women tried to sneak in to performances arranged for a male audience, although we cannot determine how widespread this phenomenon was. As late as in 1921 a Turkish newspaper complained about Muslim women going to the theatre together with men, either disguised in men’s clothes or dressing up like “Christian women” (And 1971: 18). According to a 1931 report by the U.S. government on cinema attendance in Istanbul, the situation was similar for cinema audience:

Following the Young Turk revolution of 1908, special afternoon performances were often given for women in the Stamboul section of Istanbul, but tradition was still too strong to permit mixed attendance. A few liberal westernized Turks sometimes took their womenfolk to the movies disguising them as Europeans. This practice, however, was both rare and dangerous as detection meant scandal and possible arrest (Bali 2007: 30)

Judging from such occurrences, violations of the segregation practices by non-Muslim women seem to have been somewhat tolerated. Why else would a Muslim woman try to sneak into a performance for men disguising as a non-Muslim? In this period it seems like the solution for Turkish Muslim women was either to pretend they were not Muslim, or that they were not women. Pretending to be a *gayrimüslim* (non-Muslim) was a strategy also adopted by the previously mentioned Selma Ekrem, who described her resistance against the norms for veiling in her memoir *Unveiled* (later published in Turkish as *Peçeye syan*). As a young girl in the 1910s, Ekrem was harassed a number of times for appearing in public in Istanbul wearing a European-style hat instead of the veil, which she loathed. The logic behind these

⁵⁶ “Fakat biz bu parçaları Kadıköyünde kırık barakalarda görmek istemeyiz. Tesir ve güzelli ini gaip etmemek, kıymeti edebiyesi tenzil etmemek için onu yine iyi dekorlar ile iyi bir tiyatrodaki görmek isteriz.”

harassments was clearly expressed by an old man, who called Ekrem's aunt a "sinner" when he spotted her in the street accompanying Selma and her sister, both wearing a hat, and he shouted: "Your children are wearing hats as the Christians do. Are you not a Moslem?" (Ekrem 2005: 194). Ekrem started using this logic to her advantage. When appearing in public, she switched to speaking French with her mother and English with her little sister instead of her mother tongue Turkish, in the hope that people would assume her to be a non-Muslim. She writes that it was even easier to avoid her real identity being revealed after she had her hair cut into a short bob, provocative enough in the rest of Europe and unthinkable for a Muslim girl of the time (Ekrem 2005: 168).

4.1.4. Desegregation and New Social Order

Mixed theatre attendance represented a new form of socialization, which in itself became a symbol of modernity and a politically charged matter. Of course, attitudes towards the European-influenced theatre had served as one of the characteristics separating the "New" and "Old" Turks long before the Republic was founded. In 1896, three decades before Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]'s 1925 reforms prohibiting the *fez* and encouraging European-style clothes, the Italian journalist Edmondo de Amicis had described two categories of Turk separated by their choice of attire: the Turks wearing the traditional *kaftan* and those wearing the European frock-coat:

Between these and those, the wearers of the caftan and the wearers of the coat, there is a deep gulf fixed. They no longer have anything in common but the name of Turk, and are in reality two separate nations. He of the turban still believes implicitly in the bridge Sirat, finer than a hair, sharper than a cimeter, which leads to the infernal regions; he faithfully performs his ablutions at the appointed hours, and at sunset shuts himself into his house. He of the frock-coat, on the contrary, laughs at the Prophet, has his photograph taken, talks French, and spends his evening at the theatre (de Amicis 1896: 170-71).

Similar caricatures appeared in the early 20th century too. The difference was that while the modern Turkish man of the late 19th century was the one who himself went to the theatre, the modern Turk of the 1910s was the one who not only "permitted" his wife or daughter to go to the theatre, but even "took" her there. In the late Ottoman Empire, if a woman was caught dressed immodestly, it was the fathers and husbands who were kept responsible by the state rather than the woman herself (Brummett 2000: 227). Therefore, the acceptance of women in theatre audience did not only imply a change of the norms for female behaviour, but also entailed that the expectations towards masculine behaviour were transformed. Particularly central was the redefinition of the man's duties in protecting women's honour, and even a redefinition of the concept of honour itself.

We see a good example of this in the writings of Halide Edip [Adivar], where she relates the emergence of mixed audiences to the activity of the *Türk Ocakları* (*Turkish Hearths*), in which she was a central personality. These were a kind of cultural clubs created in 1912 with the cultural development and education of Turks as their main purpose, offering frequent public lectures to both women and men. It was here that Edip gave her first lectures to a male audience, something that according to herself came to be regarded as normal within a year. In 1914 Edip wrote a theatre play for children based on religious material called *Kenan Çobanları* (*The Shepherds of Canaan*). It was staged in front of a large audience at the *Türk Ocağı* in Istanbul with the help of Muhsin Ertuğrul and writer Yahya Kemal. This is the earliest example I have found of a performance realized for a mixed theatre audience without attacks. Edip explains the success in this way: “Thanks to the discreet and really perfect manners of the young men then in the Ojak [*Ocak*] the event passed without any gossip or criticism.” In this way, she emphasizes not women’s, but men’s “new” behaviour as the prerogative for progress. The religious content of the play was also tolerated according to Edip, despite her initial worries: “It had caused us some hesitation to put a prophet and a passage of sacred history on the stage, but there was no public displeasure over this,” she wrote (Adivar 1926: 369-70).

The following years, from 1914 until the early 1920s, seem to have been marked by a plurality of practices revealing that norms were already under strong pressure. By 1918 going to the cinema seems to have become popular among Istanbul women. That year a female writer complained in the magazine *Türk Kadını* (*The Turkish Woman*) that cinema, with its intrigues and amorous scenes, was corrupting young women. She claimed that she saw all kinds of women going to the movies: “chic, elegant, dressed-up, young girls; middle aged women covered in their veils; students with sarcastic looks, grave looking widows, rich, poor, the knowledgeable, the ignorant... In short, there were people of all kinds in society”.⁵⁷ However, the writer argued that while intelligent, educated women might avoid being negatively influenced by these films, more ignorant women would confuse what they saw on the silver screen with reality:

⁵⁷ “Akamları tramvaylar hemen hemen sinema meraklılarını ehre tevzi’ye balarlardı. çlerinde ik, zarif, giyinmi genç kızlar; peçeleri kapalı orta ya lı hanımlar, müstehzî bakılı mektebliler, a ır tavrılı dullar, zengin, fakir, malûmathı, cahıl...velhâsil cemiyetin her ferdine mensûb olanlar vardı”. Nezihe Rikkat, "Sinemalara Dair Bir Temennî," *Türk Kadını*, no. 15 (26 December 1918), p. 225. Quoted and transliterated in Türe 2007: 137).

Many young girls have lost control because of these screenings. If you pay attention, you see the influence of the cinemas in their laughter, in their way of walking. The disasters striking these poor souls, who think that the real pleasure of life is found in these adventures, are not few (quoted in Türe 2007: 137).⁵⁸

As a solution, the writer suggested the construction of a separate movie theatre for women only, showing movies selected particularly for a feminine audience (Türe 2007: 137-8). This article is a testimony both of how quickly women of different classes had started appearing in the public sphere, and of how women by some were thought to be more vulnerable than men and in need of special protection. The young girls described in this article are essentially accused of an imitation of a world of imitation, revealing a view of fiction as the opposite of truth and therefore a source of corruption.

One of the important external influences on public life in this period was the arrival of ten thousands of Russian refugees in 1920 and 1921, many of whom created a living in Istanbul opening bars, restaurants and casinos. The liberal conduct of Russian women, working in bars at a time when barely any Turkish women worked at all, resulted in mixed reactions; they were accused of being “moral poison”, but also admired and taken as role models by Muslim Turkish women, while regarded as rivals by the non-Muslims. According to Toprak (1993: 22), semi-naked shows performed by Russian women acrobats at the *Millî Sinema* (National Theatre) and Russian women wrestlers were among the novelties in Istanbul's entertainment life. And by 1925, Russian women sunbathing in swimming suits had launched a new fad among local women (Türe 2007: 98).

A very interesting testimony of this transitional period is given by Demetra Vaka [Brown], an Istanbul woman belonging to the Greek Ottoman minority.⁵⁹ She describes going to the *Théâtre des Petits Champs* in Pera to see a French play given in Turkish, where she and her husband shared a box with a patroness and three Muslim Turkish women. No date for this event is given in the memoir, but we know that Vaka first returned to Istanbul after twenty years of self-imposed exile in 1921. Also, we understand that the performance takes place before the foundation of the Republic since “Armenian women played the feminine rôles, Turkish women not yet having reached that point of freedom, though our hostess assured us it

⁵⁸ “Bir çok genç kızların bu temâ âlarla sınırları bozulmuş. Dikkat ederseniz gülüşlerinde, yürüyüşlerinde sinemaların te’sirini görürsünüz. Hayatın asıl zevkini bu meselsel maceralarda zann eden zavallıların başlarına gelen felâket az değildir.”

⁵⁹ Demetra Vaka [Brown] (1877-1946) was born and raised in Istanbul. As a young adult she left Ottoman Turkey for the United States, where she established herself as a journalist and married the writer Kenneth Brown. After twenty years abroad she returned to Turkey she barely recognized, about which she wrote both fiction and the autobiographical book *The Unveiled Ladies of Stamboul*.

would come soon” (Vaka 2006: 127). To the returned Vaka, “the novelty of going to the theatre to see a play given in Turkish, in company with Turkish ladies and with my husband, was tremendously exciting.” In one of the boxes, she even observed a Turkish lady sitting together with a French officer, and the news that the two were husband and wife greatly shocked Vaka.

The play, *Servir* by French playwright Henri Lavedan, although foreign, was staged for local patriotic purposes. According to Vaka, “it had been written during the World War, to arouse the French mothers to a frantic pitch of patriotism, so that willingly they would give their sons to the cause of battle. And it was now being given in Constantinople with exactly the same object, for the Turkish war against Greece” (Vaka 2006: 127). The play reflects an interesting historical moment, particularly as a play staged for a Turkish audience with patriotic intentions, but still performed by an all Armenian female cast. Vaka does not articulate her own opinion on political plays in general, but she seems to prefer the performance that followed afterwards, which she describes as “a delightful Turkish farce, far superior to the French war concoction”. The event is a good example of the hybrid performances of the era, and of how they were used to stimulate patriotism. Between the two plays a little girl recited a poem addressed to the Turkish flag, urging its crescent, which looked “cold and sad”, not to be discouraged. Then followed “an intermission when Turkish men visited Turkish ladies in their boxes – a great innovation”, according to Vaka. It might thus seem that some people preferred to stay seated segregated by gender while others shared boxes. Judging from Vaka’s account, not all Turkish women appreciated the patriotic plays. She recounts a conversation after the play between two Muslim Turkish women married to French men. One of them, Azize Hanım, dismisses the play as “French rot”, and declares that she detests foreign plays: “It is good enough for French dolls who coddle their males, but Turkish women don’t have to be made to give up their men for the salvation of their country by cheap sentimentality” (Vaka 2006: 130).

4.1.5. Continuing Problems in the Republic

One of the most important male public voices perpetually arguing for the desegregation of theatre audiences was actor and director Muhsin Ertu rul, whose dream of seeing women in the audience alongside their husbands and fathers introduced this chapter. His efforts on the subject continued long after the first Muslim Turkish actresses appeared, in part as a reaction to the reality he faced on theatre tours in Anatolia. In May 1925 his theatre company *Ferah*

made a tour of the Black Sea province. For the first time they were not scheduling plays at separate times for women and men as they usually did in Anatolia, but instead acted in front of a mixed audience, although segregated with women sitting in the balcony and men in the orchestra. After a performance in the city of Trabzon where many women turned at the door as they learned that they would be watching the play in the same room as men, Ertu rul was severely disappointed. Reactions in the media were mixed. The newspaper *Yeni Yol* published the following harsh judgement of the women's conduct in September 1925, after the end of the tour:

In a very short time from now, the women who come to the theatre but withdraw hastily because 'there are men present' will have understood on their own what an ugly and shameful thing their escape is. Are these fleeing women of ours more civilized and well-mannered than those who stay present among us [men]? I wonder, are they demonstrating better behaviour? Honour [*namus*] does not lie in being afraid and escaping. Honour is found in being capable of protecting one's chastity in civilized clothing among men. Those who do not accept this, be they men or women, are obliged to forever live worthlessly and despicably in this era. This means that this society, which scares women and of which women are afraid, lives a most unhappy life (Ertu rul 1993: 193-94).⁶⁰

What we see in this article is an attempt to take the concept of 'honour' out of the hands of conservatives and redefine it, rather than dismiss it. The new concept is anchored in the concept of 'civilization', which is inherently linked to the idea of the new Turkish nation. The writer's emphasis on "civilized clothes" is also interesting. If going to the theatre in civilized clothes appears as a goal in itself, is the importance of female audience their inner experience of theatre or the outer performance of the idea of the new Turkish woman? It might seem like this text draws upon the earlier mentioned narrative of theatre as a school, as does Ertu rul himself in a letter he wrote to an Istanbul newspaper grieving about the event. He was answered in print by a man who argued that all new art movements had to be confined to Istanbul and that, since the economic conditions of Anatolia compelled women to work for their bread in the fields, it was insulting to expect them to understand theatre. Ertu rul wrote a furious reply:

Art which does not have contact with the masses is not my kind of art... I want my art to serve humanity, to serve the people. If it cannot go to the obscurest corners of Anatolia, what shall we use as weapons against lies, duplicity, intolerance and false religiosity? The only podium which will teach that the turban

⁶⁰“Tiyatroya gelip de ‘erkek var’ diye geri kaçan hanımlar, çok yakın zamanda kaçılarının ne kadar çirkin ve ayıp bir şey oldu unu bizzat anlamı olacaklardır. Bu kaçan hanımlarımız, aramızda bulunanlardan daha mı medeni ve terbiyelidirler? Acaba daha mı iyi bir harekete bulunmuş oluyorlardı? Namus; korkmakta, kaçmakta değil. Namus; medeni kıyafetiyle erkeklerin arasında iffetini muhafazaya kadir halde bulunmaktadır. Bunu böyle kabul etmeyen gerek erkek ve gerek kadın, bu asırda daima hakir ve zelil ya amaya mahkûmdur. Kadını korkutan ve kadının korktu u bu cemiyet, en bedbaht bir hayatı ya ıyor demektir.”

is a three-yard white cloth which covers every head, that the long robe is only a length of material which covers the dirt inside, is the theatre.⁶¹

In this text, Ertu rül also reveals a very political view of theatre, defending the idea that women should attend theatre in order to become educated and proper citizens.

Desegregation seems to have taken place slowly and not without complications in Istanbul as well. This is especially apparent if we look at the development in cinemas. While original sources on theatre attendance in late Ottoman Istanbul have their shortcomings and leave many questions unanswered, an American state report from 1933 investigating the behaviour of cinema audience to determine the potential market for American cinema in Turkey provides us with some exceptionally detailed information. According to this report, mixed attendance in cinema appears to have begun after 1919 (Bali 2007). During World War I, cinemas were physically divided with a curtain or wall segregating men and women. According to the report, the first mixed cinema attendance occurred in the armistice period, not as we might assume in the more Europeanized Pera, but in Kadıköy on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. The report explains the phenomenon in this way:

Strangely enough, Kadiköy, largely because it was considered a suburb and a countryfield, showed the way to Pera and other parts of Istanbul in breaking down old customs during the early years of the Republic. Turks seemed freer and less conspicuous in Kadiköy than in European Pera (Bali 2007: 31).

The report links the process of desegregation to that of unveiling, explaining that in the first years of the Republic, “during 1924, 1925 and 1926, at the same time that the *çar af* and the veil began to be abandoned by women and Ankara began to put through its reforms, women felt freer to go to public places in the same manner as Europeans” (Bali 2007: 31).

Considering that immorality was so much linked with women’s public appearance, we can understand why unveiling and theatre attendance accompanied each other. This also supports our argument that visibility was the main issue in the debates. But the story does not end here. Then what happened? By 1930, cinema attendance in Istanbul was estimated at 2.633.300 for that year, which was not bad for a city with a population of less than one million (Bali 2007: 77). However, according to the report, women and Turkish Muslims continued to be under-represented:

⁶¹ I have not been able to get hold of the original version of this article, and here rely on the translation by Kaynar (1968: 40-41).

Istanbul movie owners estimate that an average audience is composed of from 60 to 65 per cent men, 20 per cent women and 15 per cent children. The low percentage of women is undoubtedly explained by the traditions of the country where all those except a few Europeanized Turks continue their traditional ways, not allowing their womenfolk to go to public amusement places, even when accompanied by their husbands and relatives. Certainly the large percentage of women attending the movies in Istanbul can be considered as non-Moslem. Male Moslems on the other hand both married men and bachelors are very enthusiastic about movies and go during the evenings as well as immediately after office hours (Bali 2007: 78-79).

Of course, we cannot guarantee whether the assumptions of the report's author are correct. However, the report provides some concrete data indicating that cinema was not only a socially accepted place for inter-gender mingling but also a scene for *rendezvous* of the less innocent kind. Or put more bluntly, "there are considerable numbers of professional women who find the movie house a very good place in which to pick up customers" (Bali 2007: 81). In a study of audience behaviour in the six leading movie houses in Pera in May 1932, it is noted that a lot of flirting and kissing occurred during the screenings. "The average number of love making couples at each performance was slightly over 6, while the total number for the 27 performances was 177. In three cases professional women were involved" (Bali 2007: 81). At a time where the amount of spaces where women and men could meet more freely was still very limited, it is understandable that the cinema and theatre became magnets for behaviour that represented both tiny and huge transgressions from the contemporary social norms. It goes without saying that this phenomenon helped keep the reputation of theatre and cinema as sexually charged spaces.

In sum, it seems that the debates on women's theatre attendance were less concerned with immoral contents than with appearing in the public. Interestingly, this is not only true for the enemies of women's attendance, but also its proponents. From late Ottoman times, the act of theatre going was not only a matter of personal enjoyment of art, but a politically charged public spectacle. As much as the actresses, the audience was encouraged to perform, and what they were encouraged to embody, through mixed attendance, unveiled and in "civilized" clothes, was the new ideal citizen. Another common point for progressives and conservatives in the debates is their tendency to argue through reference to the common good rather than to the good of women as a group or as individuals. From Vartovyan's argument that women's theatre attendance would increase revenues and attract more male audience to Halide Edip's argument that a performance of *Vatan* for women could help collect money to use for patriotic ends, we see attempts to rationalize support for women's attendance without speaking of theatre's importance for women. But we also find an inherent repetition of the idea that women's ignorance blocks the progress of the nation. At the core of the debates,

what took place was a kind of semantic wrestling: A struggle over the power to define concepts. The acceptance of Muslim Turkish women in the audience implied a redefinition of honour as rooted in the nation rather than in religion, as well as a redefinition of men's duties in protecting this new honour. We also see a struggle between narratives of different "Others". While the enemies of Muslim Turkish women as theatre audience frequently conjured the image of the *alafranga*, the progressives referred to the "backward" Ottoman.

4.2. Women on Stage: Performing Turkish Modernity

In traditional Turkish theatre, all female roles were performed by men (And 1973: 95). In the script-based Ottoman theatre, all actresses either belonged to the non-Muslim minorities or they were settled or visiting Europeans. The majority of them, like of the male actors, were Ottoman Armenians. The first Armenian amateur actress, Agavani Hamoyan, appeared on stage in 1856 under the artist name “Fani”, followed by the first professional Armenian actress, Arusyak Papazyan, in 1861 (And 1971: 34). It is, however, worth noting that there was a resistance within the Armenian community against women appearing on stage until the middle of the 19th century, voiced by both the Armenian patriarch and conservative individuals. As a result, only Armenian girls of 12 to 13 years were put on stage in the first years of the Ottoman Armenian theatre (Graham-Brown 1988: 181). But within few years, a number of Armenian women of different social backgrounds found their ways to the Istanbul stages. In their time, some of these actresses rose to great fame and enjoyed considerable public admiration. Interestingly, many of them even played so-called breeches parts impersonating male characters on stage, and this was very popular with the audiences. In fact, arasan writes that for the Armenian actress Yeranuhi Karaka yan bringing male characters to life was the greatest source of success: “She had a special talent for animating male roles. ... A natural strength within her helped her in this type of roles” (arasan 2008: 91).⁶² The gap between the norms of behaviour for Muslim and non-Muslim women in the late Ottoman era is thus remarkable. At a time when Muslim Turkish women were accused of ‘becoming like men’” (*erkeklike mek*) simply for being present in the theatre audience, the Ottoman Armenian actresses were accepted and applauded even when impersonating male roles on stage. While the first Turkish actress awarded the male role of Hamlet appeared in 1954, the Armenian actress Siranu acted the role of Shakespeare’s famous prince of Denmark in a production by Vartovyan in as early as 1901 (And 1999: 133).

Yet, despite their success and significance as models for a new kind of public presence for Ottoman women in their time, more than a century later, if we disregard scholarship specializing in Ottoman theatre, any mention of the Armenian actresses is mostly limited to complaints about their broken Turkish accents. Moreover, the emergence of Muslim Turkish actresses is often presented as a natural consequence of the insufficiencies of the Armenian

⁶² “Erkek rollerini canlandırmada da özel bir yetene i vardı. Bu tür rollerde kıyaslanmayacak bir başarı kazanmıştı. Neden kazanmasın? Onun içindeki doğal bir güç, bu tür rollerde ona yardımcı oluyordu.”

actresses. How and why did this transformation take place? In this chapter, I will argue that the legitimization of the Muslim Turkish actresses was mostly a negative process in the sense that it relied on the creation and criticism of certain Others. Göl (2005) has argued that the Armenians were the primary group that went through a process of Othering in the formation of the modern Turkish identity, and this chapter appears to support such an argument. The calls summoning Muslim Turkish women to the stage were based just as much on negative judgements of the Armenian actresses' performance as on arguments emphasizing the positive potential of the Muslim Turkish actresses. To the extent that it also was a positive process, the legitimization of the Muslim Turkish actresses was justified through reference to the progress of the nation and the common good rather than by underlining the emancipatory effect for women as a group independent of this. In this chapter I will also examine the tensions inherent in the Republican actress image and the resulting problems with recruitment of actresses, which continued into the early 1940s. Before returning to a discussion of later events, let us first take a look at how the Ottoman Armenian actresses were viewed in their time.

4.2.1. Othering the Armenian Actresses: The Importance of Broken Turkish

The position of Armenian theatre people in the Ottoman public, and especially among the Turkish Muslims, seems to have been ambiguous, ranging from admiration and respect to mockery and jokes at the actors' expense. We see a good example of this spectrum in arasan's description of the public reactions following the sudden death of the popular Armenian actress Mari Nıvart in 1885. Nıvart died on stage at the end of the play *La Dame aux Camélias* following a failed abortion attempt, and her funeral was a big public event in Istanbul:

More than five thousand people accompanied her coffin. Once we also witnessed a crowd this big at Atamıyan's funeral. The Turkish press described the pain felt due to the loss of this great artist in a particularly sarcastic way. Among these writers, only Ahmet Mithat put on paper with heartfelt feelings the real sorrow he felt following this death, in the magazine *Masis*. But we can sincerely say that the Turkish people shed countless tears in the deep sorrow it felt at the loss of this artist whose spirit would never return (arasan 2008: 128).⁶³

⁶³ "Tabutuna be bin ki iden fazla insan e lik etti. Bu kadar büyük bir kalabalı ı bir sefer de Atamıyan'ın cenazesinde gördük. Türk basını bu büyük sanatçının kaybindan duyulan acıyı özellikle i nelyici bir ekilde anlattı. Bu yazaralar arasında, sadece Ahmet Mithat *Masis* dergisinde bu ölümün arkasından duydu u gerçek üzüntüyü samimi duygularla kaleme aldı. Ama Türk halkının bu sanatçı ruhun geri döndürülemeyecek kaybindan duydu u derin üzüntünün sonucunda, çok fazla gözya ı döktü ünü samimiyetle söyleyebiliriz."

Of course, since the sarcastic newspaper writings are more readily available to the historian than the tears of the people, we cannot know to what extent Arasan's description is correct. But the examples of both negative and positive portrayals of the Armenian performers are many. Ahmad makes a wrongful statement in one of his rare comments on Turkish theatre in his central work *The Making of Modern Turkey*. He claims that theatre had long "been monopolised by Armenian actresses simply because they alone among the non-Turks could speak flawless Ottoman Turkish" (Ahmad 1993: 32). Although he might be right that the Ottoman Armenians generally spoke better Turkish than the other minorities of the Empire, their reputedly flawed pronunciation was actually used as one of the main justifications for introducing and educating Muslim Turkish actresses. We see many references to the bad accents of the Armenians in the writings of both Turks and foreigners. Harrison Griswold Dwight, an author born to an American family in Istanbul, was not polite in his description of the Ottoman actresses in 1915:

Women do appear on the stage, but they are never Turks. They are usually Armenians, occasionally Syrians or Greeks, whose murder of the language is condoned by the exigences of the case. (Dwight 1915: 271-72).

According to Metin And, in late Ottoman newspapers there frequently appeared comments, jokes and criticism concerning the Armenian actors' pronunciation of Turkish words, i.e. how they said "*baryam*" instead of "*bayram*", "*çılpak*" instead of "*çıplak*" and "*he efendim*" instead of "*evet efendim*" (And 1999: 119). Historian Menemencio lu (1983: 13) argues that the problem with the accents of the Armenian actors was that it added an unintended stroke of comedy to plays that were supposed to be watched and interpreted in a serious manner, underlining that "the variety of accents in the Empire was an important element of humour in both the puppet theatre and the ortaoyunu". She therefore describes the Armenian accents as an "unfortunate feature" of Ottoman theatre. However, other historical sources suggest that the situation was not as singularly depressing as the impression given by Menemencio lu. In his 1914 book on the Ottoman Armenian theatre, Arasan emphasizes the good and educated language of many of the actors. On actress Mari Nıvart he wrote that "her language was pure and fluent", while he stated that actress Koranik İrinyan quickly won the hearts of the audiences with "her pure, clear and joyful voice, which emerged from an educated throat" (2008: 127, 68).⁶⁴

⁶⁴ "Konu ması temiz ve akıcıydı." "E itimli bir gırtlaktan çıkan taze, net ve ne eli sesi."

One who did not forgive any “murder of the language” through insufficient diction and faltering pronunciation, was Namık Kemal. He appears to have been one of the first Ottomans to publicly address the so-called “language question”, as a proposed target of reform in some of his many essays on theatre in the 1870s. In Kemal’s writings, the education of actors and the education of the audience appear as two expressions of a single large project: the institutionalization of a theatre that would not only entertain individuals but benefit the nation. This is doubtlessly an important backdrop to the importance he gives to language. However, his concern was not only with the spoken language of the Armenian actors, but also with that of the Muslim Turks. Kemal and contemporary Turkish playwrights such as Abdülhak Hamid wrote their plays in an elaborate, literary Ottoman Turkish which was very different from the styles that had been common in traditional forms of theatre. To some extent, consciously differentiating their works from these old styles might have been a goal in itself for these authors. But in the late 19th century, at a time where all actors were still autodidacts, their sophisticated scripts found at least the less educated Muslim Turks mispronouncing difficult words (Faroqhi 2000: 269). To make up for this situation, in 1873 Vartovyan appointed a committee to his theatre consisting of several renowned *hommes de letters*, among which Kemal himself. In addition to translating, adapting and writing new plays, the committee followed rehearsals and gave the actors lessons in elocution.

What appears to have been an additional and more acute problem in the late Ottoman theatre than diction was that due to the controversy of the actress profession there existed only a limited number of actresses to choose from, which made casting difficult. What is more, not all the women acting under these circumstances were very gifted to begin with. The shortage of talented actresses is clearly hinted to by arasan in his book. For example, he gives the following laconic judgement of the Ottoman Armenian actress Maryam Dza ikyan, who spent years acting in Vartovyan’s theatre:

In her first years, she was much sought after by the troupes because it was very difficult to find female actors. Therefore she played several important leads. But it cannot be said that she was very successful (arasan 2008: 181).⁶⁵

There is no doubt that this shortage of actresses affected how the Ottoman theatre was experienced and perceived. But according to Richard Davey’s description of a performance in

⁶⁵ ” İlk yıllarında ekipler arasında kapanın elinde kalmı tır. Çünkü kadın oyuncu bulabilmek oldukça zor. Bu nedenle birkaç önemli ba rol oynamı tır. Ama fazla ba arılı oldu u söylenemez.”

the 1890s, the Ottoman audience was not too disturbed by what appeared to him as unintended comedy:

The curtain rose upon a Turkish version of *La Dame aux Camélias*, Marguerite Gautier being played by an Armenian lady, not at all a bad actress, but almost the size of the famous fat woman at Olympia. It was a very funny performance. The Armand Duval was so diminutive, that when he had to kiss his Marguerite, he was forced to stretch on tip-toe. The audience, however, took everything very seriously, and applauded rapturously each time the curtain fell (Davey 1907: 247).

However, he continues with a positive judgement of the performance of the Armenian lead actress:

The Armenian actress must have seen Sarah Bernhardt's performance of Marguerite Gautier, for she rendered her saccharine accents perfectly, in the soft Turkish language. I was assured she had been, some years before, a remarkable artist, popular from Stambul to Trebizond [Trabzon] and Van (Davey 1907: 247).

Of course, we cannot know how well Davey mastered Turkish and whether he was a qualified critic on pronunciation. But it is still worth noting that he emphasizes the good voice and language of the Armenian actress as a positive trait. The British writer Grace Ellison is harsher in her complaints about the lack of qualified Armenian actresses in her book originally published in 1915. Interestingly, not only does she complain about the “farce” character this situation gives the Ottoman theatre, she even describes the absence of Muslim Turkish actresses as an obstacle to realizing the political and feminist potential of theatre in the Empire:

Unfortunately for the women here, the theatre at present is too primitive to be of any practical assistance. I do not mean, of course, the poor French companies which visit Pera almost weekly, but the little native theatres to be found right in the heart of Stamboul, and which my friends have visited since I have been staying with them. Whatever piece is played at these little theatres became ridiculous by the mere fact that when an Armenian cannot be found to play the part of a Turkish woman, a man has to supply that need, and that in itself turns any play into a farce. It is not easy either to find an Armenian to play the part of a young Turkish girl. Her accent is not pleasant, so I am told; her voice exceedingly disagreeable; and I personally saw a woman whom no theatrical manager would have accepted in my country, except for the rôle of a stout, elderly matron, playing the part of a coy maiden of fifteen.

This, of course, made the piece worthless except as an amusement, and a form of amusement a trifle too primitive for thinking women to-day. ‘How can I convince these people?’ one day a Turk asked me. ‘Have you ever tried the theatre?’ I asked in reply. ‘In our Western countries it is from the stage that most of our important messages are given to the world – the stage has been magnificent in the cause of women’ (Ellison 2007: 74-75).

Ellison’s perspective is that of an outsider, and it is doubtlessly coloured by her personal political views and experiences in her native England. Her emphasis on theatre’s function for women, rather than the opposite, is rare in the Turkish debates. But we will see that the idea that a theatre lacking Muslim Turkish women would be no more than an “amusement” and

not convincing enough to be of political use, seems to have been shared by the proponents of Turkish actresses who appeared in the following years.

Although there is no doubt that the problem with diction was substantial and at times an obstacle to realizing the artistic and educative ideals of the Ottoman theatre, the appearance of the language issue as the single rationale for the encouragement of Muslim Turkish actresses, which has been given remarkably little critical attention by historians, is worth questioning for several reasons. First of all, it is not obvious that replacement of Armenian actresses by Turkish Muslims should be the solution rather than education of the Armenian performers, as proposed and initiated by Namık Kemal. As we have seen, education and diction training of Muslim actors was also regarded as necessary for further development of the Ottoman theatre. Secondly, the complaint for some reason always appears with regard to Armenian women and rarely when it comes to Armenian men. And lastly, if pronunciation was the only issue, why then would Halide Edip [Adivar] insist that all the actresses in the 1922 silent movie based on her novel *Ate ten Gömlek (The Shirt of Flame)* should be Turkish? After all, as long as their voices could not be heard, it would be difficult if not impossible to discern an Armenian actress dressed up as a Turk from a Turkish actress. Taking these three points into account, the language issue appears as an insufficient explanation for all the major transformations that were to take place with regard to the status of the actress in the late Empire and early Turkish Republic.

4.2.2. 1908: The Rise of the Actress Debate

Like the debate on theatre audience, the “actress question” appeared on the public agenda after 1908. Most newspaper writers of the time defended the need for Muslim Turkish women to go on stage, although some were arguing that this could only be realized after liberation in other areas of women’s lives had been accomplished. The question was given a much-discussed solution by poet and writer Zeynep Melih (Devrim) in a speech he gave at a ceremony in the *Tepebaşı Theatre* right after the declaration of the 1908 constitution. In this speech he underlined the importance of educating performers of both genders for the Ottoman theatre, but educating Muslim Turkish actresses was unthinkable to him. Instead, Melih’s suggestion was the following:

Place Armenian, Jewish and Gypsy girls of eight to ten years in the school; when their general education reaches a certain level let them continue with theatre lessons. Supporting the Gypsy girls would especially

be reasonable. You know that they speak better Turkish, and besides artistic talent is in the creation of the Bohemians (quoted in Sevengil 1968: 112-13).⁶⁶

This idea was never realized, and by a curious twist of fate, Melih's own daughter İrin Devrim would years later become an actress herself. In the meantime, several influential personalities argued for the importance of raising Muslim Turkish actresses. Halide Edip [Adivar] was engaged in the issue from an early moment. Still, she much preferred Armenian actresses to men acting as women. Before a performance of *Vatan* at the Naval Academy in 1908, she wrote that she wished that they had let the Armenian actress Kınar Hanım fill the female lead of the play rather than a man or even worse a soldier, which was what finally happened.⁶⁷ An important foreign influence on the subject was the legendary French actor and theatre manager André Antoine, who in 1914 was brought to Turkey to help in the establishment of the country's first conservatory, the *Dârülbedâyi-i Osmaniye*. Unfortunately, his work was left half-done as he was forced to leave Turkey at the outbreak of World War I, but before leaving he gave the municipality a list with 120 pieces of advice. One of Antoine's most central recommendations was for the government to begin educating Muslim Turkish actresses (Nutku 1969: 16).

A particularly great effort to summon Muslim Turkish women to the stage was made by director and actor Muhsin Ertuğrul, although he worked regularly with Armenian actresses for many years. From 1918 and throughout the years leading up to the foundation of the Republic he wrote extensively on the subject. Ertuğrul had personally suffered from the anti-theatrical attitudes in the country, and he later worked hard to subvert them. As a young man he had first acted in secret, but after he was recognized on stage by a family friend, he was kicked out from home and cut off from all family ties (Kaynar 1968: 13). It is not unlikely that examples from the years he spent abroad in Paris, Berlin and Russia contributed to Ertuğrul's burning wish to see Muslim Turkish women on stage. In a letter to the theatre periodical *Temâ â* in 1918, he presented his thoughts in the following way:

I have not been acting for some time. My sole reason for this: there are no Turkish actresses. And I will not act again until a Turkish woman shows the courage to act together with me. When I presented my thought at a meeting the other day, I asked, 'Do you expect them to act with uncovered heads?' My answer was 'No' I said, 'We will place a lattice in front of the stage, and behind it there will be women

⁶⁶ "Sekiz on ya larında Ermeni, Musevi ve Çingene kızları bu mektebe konulur; tahsil ve terbiye-i umumiyeleleri (genel e itimleri) bir dereceye kadar ilerleyince temâ â (tiyatro) derslerine devam ettirilir, bahsus (özellikle) Çingene kızlarını iltizam etmek makul olur. Türkçe'yi daha güzel konu tuklarını bilirsiniz; sonra da, sanatkârlık bohemyenlerin yaradılı ında vardır."

⁶⁷ Reported in *Tanin*, 6 September 1908; *Tanin*, 2 September 1908 (Seçkin 2007: 113).

acting in veils, headscarves and overdresses.’ ... Because of this absence of women, we do not have a theatre and for the same reason we do not have theatre plays. (Ertu rul 1993: 161-2).⁶⁸

As we see, for Ertu rul theatre is closely interrelated with the woman question: women appear to need theatre as much as theatre needs women. On one hand, he argues that theatre as an art is incomplete without Turkish women on stage. On the other hand, he views the absence of women on stage as evidence of women’s lack of freedom to participate and be visible in the public sphere. In this way, he treats the question of actresses as belonging to both the literary and political public sphere. It is also striking how he considers the absence of Muslim Turkish actresses as directly related to the lack of female audience. He does not mention or defend women’s ability to act, but instead places going to the theatre and appearing on stage in the same category as eating in restaurants and appearing unveiled. It is less clear how he perceives the link between Turkish identity and women in theatre. But if we cast a second glance at Ertu rul’s dream of seeing Turkish Muslim women on stage and in the audience, quoted in the previous chapter, we can note that he also makes reference to the language issue. A part of his dream was hearing “the melodic language of Turkish women” from stage. But except for this, Ertu rul’s argument does not explicitly Other the Armenian actresses or suggest that they should be replaced.

It is easier to trace down testimonies of the proponents of Turkish women in theatre than of the enemies. But Ertu rul’s arguments give us an idea about which ideas he was arguing against. It is worth noting that in this text, which appeared in one of the biggest theatre journals of the time, Ertu rul is not addressing conservatives, but his fellows in the Europeanized intellectual elite, who take their wives to France and wear hats abroad (1993: 162).⁶⁹ Instead of criticising his adversaries, he attacks the hypocrisy, superficial Westernization and cowardice within this elite. Judging from this text, it seems as though the necessity to appear without a veil on stage was widely presented as the major problem preventing Muslim women from acting. But to Ertu rul, who writes that women are not

⁶⁸ “Epeyce uzun middetten beri oyun oynamıyorum. Bunun için yegâne mani Türk aktrisi yok. Türk hanımlarından biri ibraz-ı cesaret edip de benimle oynayınca kadar da oynamayacağım. Bu fikrimi geçen gün bir mahfelde söylerken biri bana ‘Sahne üzerinde baş açık mı oynanmasını istiyorsunuz?’ dedi. ‘Hayır’ dedim. ‘Sahnenin önüne kafes koyacaksınız; arkasında baş maklı, feraceli, çarşaflı hanımlar oynayacak.’ ... Kadınsızlıktan tiyatromuz yok ve yine kadınsızlıktan tiyatro eserimiz yok.”

⁶⁹ “Avrupaya gider gitmez, hayır Avrupa’ya değil, Sirkeci’den trene, Galata rıhtımından vapura biner binmez bizden baş ka bütün dünya milletlerinin serpuşu olan başkayı başımıza geçiriyoruz. Hatta yalnız bizim ve kadınlarımızın geçirmesi kâfi değil. Avrupa’daki bütün sefaret imamlarımız üç gün evvel çıkardıkları sarı baş yerine güzel güzel başkalarını giyiyorlar, zevceleri ve çocuklarını yanlarına alarak, kahve, birahane, lokanta, tiyatroya gidiyorlar da, burada kadınlarımızdan biri çıkıp da, çarşafıyla olsun zararı yok, bir yerde oturamıyor, tiyatroya gidemiyor.”

accepted even in the audience even if they veil, the veil is only a superficial argument and not a substantial obstacle. In the same article Ertu rül writes that he knows several Turkish women who are burning with the wish to go on stage. Interestingly, although he is addressing men in this article, he is encouraging women's active agency. He is not waiting for men to give women the permission to go on stage, but for women to show courage and simply act by his side.

4.2.3. 1918-1923: Years of Transition and Negotiation

We have seen that with regard to the desegregation of theatre audiences, the period from 1918 to the mid-1920s was a time of transition. These years were filled with ambiguities, tension, fear and competing definitions of morality, particularly of the notion of honour. Was the situation the same when it came to the actresses? It certainly seems so, and Ertu rül's request for courage is a testimony of this. In this period, there were not only tough battles fought in ink; even physical attacks on women transgressing normative borders occurred. By the end of World War I, we see the first traces of Ertu rül's dream of Muslim Turkish actresses coming true. On October 10th 1918 five Muslim Turkish girls - Behire, Memduha, Beyza, Refika and Afife - were accepted to the Dârülbedâyi as apprentices. Three of these girls left the theatre after a while. But two stayed, and December 8th the same year, Afife became the first Muslim Turkish apprentice actress in history to be employed, while Refika was employed as a prompter. Afife first appeared on stage in Hüseyin Suat's play *Yamalar (Patches)* on April 3rd 1919, under the artist name Jale, in the *Apollon Tiyatrosu (Apollon Theatre)* in Kadıköy. November 30th 1919 she appeared again in the play *Tatlı Sır (Sweet Secret)*.

Even though the audience of both performances was all female, Afife Jale's appearance on stage was met with strongly negative official reactions. The police attempted to arrest her one week after she first appeared on stage, but she managed to escape through the theatre back door. The following week Afife Jale escaped the police a second time, this time disguised in a black *çar af* and *peçe*, but the police caught her on the street and brought her to the police station.⁷⁰ Shortly after, a decree banning Muslim women's appearance on the theatre stage was announced by the Istanbul municipality. Following a second decree in March, Afife Jale was forced to leave her job at the theatre. The director of a Turkish theatre company was among those publicly protesting this. He criticized the logic of the state, which did not

⁷⁰ The *çar af* is a long piece of clothing covering a woman from head to toe designed to hide her body from the view of men, while the *peçe* is a veil made of light, black cloth worn covering the face except for the eyes.

consider the theatre as a suitable workplace for Muslim women, but at the same time allowed hundreds to work in brothels:

The authorities grant permits to women who lead a loose life, and these are even countersigned by physicians of the public health administration. Under such circumstances, I do not see how they can refuse to art what they allow to vice.⁷¹

The police and the local municipality were not the only ones representing an obstacle to progressives in theatre in this period; violent sanctions by conservative individuals also occurred. The situation was much the same for cinema. Muhsin Ertu rul experienced many difficulties when shooting his first movie, *stanbul'da Bir Facia-i A k (A Love Tragedy in Istanbul)*, in 1922 while Istanbul was under allied occupation and control. However, a bigger challenge than the political circumstances was the mindset of local conservatives who did not tolerate the filming of actresses, even though the women in question, the Russian actress Andreyevna Mariyeviç and the Armenian actress Aznif, were both non-Muslims. In his memoir, Ertu rul describes the events in the following way:

In a period like this, when Turks were not yet given opportunities, it was difficult to shoot a movie wherever you wanted in Istanbul. At the same time, some fanatics leaned on these difficulties and carried on their cursedness. During the shooting of the first movie we were met with extreme attacks in several locations. Filming a woman in *çar af* was regarded as the biggest sin, so much that even though it was determined that the women playing the roles in *çar af* were the Armenian actress Aznif Hanım and the Russian actress Andreyevna... Even their wearing *çar af* was a sin that could not be overlooked. That black piece of clothing was a holy symbol in its own right. Therefore we were met with attacks and stoned several times (Ertu rul 2007: 300).⁷²

Ertu rul's film team was attacked again while filming a second movie. However, this time the reason was not the use of actresses. This movie, which was based on Yakup Kadri [Karaosmano lu]'s novel *Nur Baba*, was controversial from the beginning among the Turkish public because it told the story of a Bektashi *tekke* or dervish lodge, which was considered a sacred space that should not be exposed:

To be let into the private space of a *tekke* which was regarded as holy, and to indecently reveal its rites was opposed by a certain group of people. Transferring this way of life to the silver screen and showing it to the people was considered a great sin. Not only committing the sin, but also bringing a committed sin into the open, was considered as unsuitable by some communities ... One day as we were shooting a movie in the courtyard of the Eyüp mosque, we came under a horrible attack. Hundreds of people attacked the camera, perhaps with the intention of breaking it to pieces. The famous actor Vahram Papazyan, who

⁷¹ Quoted from *The Orient* 7: 46, October 13, 1920 in Criss (1999: 453).

⁷² "Türkler'e göz açtırılmayan böyle bir dönemde, stanbul'un urasında burasında film çevirmek güçtü. Öte yandan, kimi ba nazlar bu güçlere dayanarak, mel'unluklarını sürdürüyorlardı. İlk filmin çekili i sırasında birkaç yerde a ırı saldırılara u radık. Çar aflı kadının filme çekili i en büyük günah sayılıyordu. Ta ki, çar aflar içinde rol almı kadınların Ermeni sanatçısı Aznif Hanım ya da Rus sanatçısı Andreyevna oldu unu saptayınca kadar... Onların bile çar af giymeleri göz yumulacak günah de ildi. O siyah giysi, ba lıba ına kutsal bir simgeydi. Bu yüzden birkaç kez saldırılara u radık; birkaç kez de ta landık."

in that moment was acting in a dervish costume, barely saved his life by escaping. We left the place without having been able to film. I was forced to take over the role of the dervish Figani, which became unfilled with Vahram's escape. ... With the aim of escaping reactions from the religious communities, they changed the name of the movie and presented it to the audience as *Bo aziçi Esrarı (The Bosphorus Mystery)* (Ertu rul 2007: 301).⁷³

Both these events have a shared core; the morality attacks were a reaction to what was perceived as exposing the inexposable. As we see, women's appearance in front of a camera was unacceptable to conservatives both with and without the veil; unveiled women were regarded as immodest and the veil as a sacred religious symbol. Furthermore, as the second example shows, the film medium was controversial even without women, especially if it presented religious content. In this way, actresses in cinema were twice problematic. The solution to this dilemma came with the transformation of national identity.

4.2.4. Ate ten Gümlek: The Actress as National Heroine

Of special concern to this thesis is the movie *Ate ten Gümlek (The Shirt of Flame)* which was shot and launched in 1923, based on a novel by Halide Edip [Adıvar] which was published the year before, and directed by Muhsin Ertu rul.⁷⁴ This movie is historically pivotal and very relevant to our discussion for several reasons. First of all, with their roles in this movie Bedia Muvahhit and Neyyire Neyir became the first Muslim Turkish women in history to appear on the silver screen.⁷⁵ And as we will soon discuss, it was after seeing this movie that Atatürk encouraged Bedia Muvahhit to also become the first Muslim Turkish actress to step onto the theatre stage with official blessing. In this way, *Ate ten Gümlek* was a gateway to the acceptance of Muslim Turkish actresses in theatre, as well as fundamental in creating a new actress image. Secondly, complaints about the broken Turkish of the Armenian actresses, which as we have seen had been the main argument used to legitimize Muslim Turkish women's appearance on the theatre stage, could not be used in the case of *Ate ten Gümlek*

⁷³ "Kutsal diye bilinen tekkenin mahremiyetine sokulup açık saçık ayinlerini açıklamak, belirli bir zümrenin aleyhine oluyordu. İmdi bu ya amı beyazperdeye aktararak halka göstermek, büyük bir günah sayılıyordu. Günahı i lemek de il de, i lenen bir günahı açı a vurmak bazı çevrelere uygun dü müyordu ... Bir gün Eyüp Camisi'nin avlusunda film çekerken, korkunç bir saldırıya u radık. Film çekme makinesini parçalamak amacıyla belki yüzlerce ki i kameranın üstüne saldırdı. O aralık dervi kıyafetiyle rol yapan ünlü aktör Vahram Papazyan ancak kaçmak suretiyle yakasını ve canını kurtardı. Biz de film çekmeden oradan uzakla tık. Vahram'ın kaçmasıyla bo alan dervi Figani rolünü ben yüklenmek zorunda kaldım. ... Filmi, dinci çevrelerin kar ı tepkilerinden kurtarmak amacıyla, adını de i tererek *Bo aziçi Esrarı* diye seyirciye sundular."

⁷⁴ *Ate ten Gümlek* was one of the first movies made by Muhsin Ertu rul, who in 1923 established Turkey's first private film studio, Kemal Film. The influence of Ertu rul on early Turkish cinema can hardly be overestimated. From 1923 to 1939 he was the only film director in Turkey and directed 29 movies, spanning adaptations of plays, operettas, Turkish novels and foreign films. Among the actresses he introduced to Turkish cinema is Feriha Tevfik, who in 1929 was selected as the first Miss Turkey in history in a beauty contest initiated by Atatürk.

⁷⁵ In the 1910s, cinema met with a similar obstacle with regard to actresses as theatre. Female characters were portrayed by men, and later by non-Muslim women, mostly of Armenian and Russian origin.

since it was a silent movie. The fact that the presence of Muslim Turkish actresses was still judged to be so important in the reception of this movie, points to the limited validity of the language argument. Lastly, *Ate ten Gümlek* was the first movie about the Turkish War of Independence, which came to an end the same year. The movie was launched in an environment marked by the recent success of the Nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] in saving what became the Republic of Turkey from the partition agreed upon by the Allied powers after World War I. Halide Edip [Adivar], who had penned the novel on which the film was based, was a significant figure in the Nationalist Movement, and even the first Turkish woman promoted to the status of *onba ı* (corporal). Keeping all these factors in mind, we might ask: To which extent did the nationalist circumstances facilitate the acceptance of the first Muslim Turkish actresses in this movie?

There is no doubt that Halide Edip [Adivar] was influential in the choice of using Muslim Turkish actresses and that this was a deliberate decision. Although I have not been able to retrieve any statement of her own on the subject, a number of sources report that she publicly declared that only a Turkish woman could play the female lead of the movie.⁷⁶ Neyyire Neyir and Bedia Muvahhit were given their roles after an explicit call for “Muslim actresses” in the newspapers (Kaynar 1968: 29). As we know, Ertu rul was already a strong proponent of bringing Muslim Turkish women to the stage, and Edip and Ertu rul were friends sharing many political views, so we should assume that he also had a certain influence in this matter. The advertisement of the movie underlined values such as independence and self-sufficiency. In one flyer the Turkish flag fills the entire background, and the text proudly presents the movie as “the magnificent Turkish film, shot on Turkish land with Turkish money, Turkish intention and the work of Turks”.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the flyer suggests: “Every Turk must watch this masterpiece, which has been made into a movie by the Dârülbedâyi artists, and swell with pride.” It is maybe not surprising that a film telling the story of how the country was saved is advertised by appealing to nationalist sentiments in a country that has just escaped partition. Yet it is interesting that this backdrop to the acceptance of Muslim Turkish actresses has never been pointed out.

⁷⁶ In an interview Bedia Muvahhit says that Halide Edip specifically wanted a Turkish and not Armenian actress to play in this movie (Süsoy 1987).

⁷⁷ “Türk parasile, Türk azmîle, Türkün çalı masile ve Türk topraklarında çekilen Muazzam Türk filmi”. A photograph of the flyer is found in nano lu (2004).

While there is no space in this thesis for an in-depth study of the stage roles played by the first Muslim Turkish actresses, it is worth awarding the subject some attention. The book on which *Ate ten G mlek* was based, was translated into English twice, first as *The Shirt of Flame* and then as *The Daughter of Smyrna*, a title that points to the importance of its female heroine.⁷⁸ Smyrna is the old Greek name for the city of İzmir, which became a powerful symbol of the new Turkish Republic after it was re-captured from the Greeks in 1922, which was one of the turning points in the War of Independence. The “daughter” of İzmir is the heroine Ayşe, in the movie played by Bedia Muvahhit. Ayşe leaves İzmir for Istanbul after her husband and son are killed by the Greeks in the war. She later joins the Nationalist movement in Anatolia as a nurse, like Halide Edip did herself. Both through her İzmir background and her selfless service for the nation, Ayşe is presented as the ideal new Turkish woman. The other female part, played by Neyyire Neyir, is that of Kezban, a traditional young girl from the countryside who wears a long head-scarf and baggy pants and whose character mainly serves to highlight the strengths of Ayşe. The two women nurture a mutual scepticism towards each other, but eventually Kezban is also convinced to join the Nationalist movement as a nurse. At first glance, the two female characters of Ayşe and Kezban have nothing in common except their green eyes. However, there is another more important shared trait: as characters they do not pose a threat to men. Instead, they represent what Kandiyoti calls the ‘*yolda kadın*’, ‘the comrade woman’, an idealized woman type whose feminine traits and sexuality are toned down. Kandiyoti explains this heroine figure, which appears in several of Edip’s novels, in the following way:

The comrade woman who sacrifices herself is at the same time an asexual comrade in arms-sister. Adivar’s novels are a metaphor that express under which conditions women can be accepted in the public life of Republican Turkey: without sexuality and deprived of their womanhood (Kandiyoti 1997a: 145).⁷⁹

To better understand the incredible novelty of this female image in Turkish cinema, we can compare it with the main female character in the film *Murebbiye (The Governess)* launched in 1918, which was the first movie starring an Ottoman actress, the Greek Madame Kalitea. The woman portrayed in *Murebbiye* is a flirtatious French governess who seduces the men in a Turkish mansion one after the other. In this role Madame Kalitea appears in her underwear and is also the first woman in Turkish cinema history to kiss on screen. This movie was

⁷⁸ *The Shirt of Flame*. New York: Duffield, 1924; *The Daughter of Smyrna*. Lahore: Dar-ul-Kutub Islamia, 1933.

⁷⁹ “Kendini kurban eden kadın-yolda , aynı zamanda cinsiyetsiz bir silah arkadaşı-bacıdır. Adivar’ın romanları Cumhuriyet Türkiye’si’nde kadınların kamusal hayata hangi koşullarla kabul edilebileceklerini ifade eden bir mecazdır: cinsiyetsiz ve kadınlıklarından sıyrılmış olarak.”

actually banned, not by Turkish authorities, but by the French officers in occupied Istanbul, on grounds that it was representing French women in an unsuitable way (Özgüç 2006: 18). The contrast between the vamp played by Madame Kalitea threatening the sanctity of the family through her sexuality and the comrade played by Bedia Muvahhit selflessly sacrificing herself for the common good of the nation is striking and significant.

Interestingly, although *Ay e* is the first example of a patriotic comrade heroine in Turkish cinema, a similar character had already appeared years earlier in theatre: Zekiye, the heroine of Namık Kemal's groundbreaking theatre play *Vatan*, which as we have seen was at the centre of the theatre epidemic in 1908, who even appears in soldier clothes on stage. When the play's male hero leaves for Silistre to volunteer as a soldier for love of the fatherland, Zekiye, who is madly in love with him, disguises in men's clothes in order to follow him. She heroically fights by his side pretending to be a boy until her gender is revealed towards the end of the play. The plot of *Vatan* is maybe even more transgressive with regard to gender than that of *Ate ten Gömlek*. Yet, *Vatan* was never performed with a Turkish actress in the lead, but most famously with the Armenian actress Kınar as Zekiye. Since the play's main message was a defence of Ottomanism, Kınar's Armenian identity was not perceived as problematic, but by 1923 the political circumstances were very different. *Ate ten Gömlek* was a great novelty in that it used the Muslim Turkish background of the lead actresses to argue for its own authenticity and legitimacy.

Ate ten Gömlek was not only important due to its cast and script, but also because of its effect on the audience. The movie was first screened in Istanbul while it was still under occupation by foreign armies, on April 23rd, 1923, only six months prior to the founding of the Turkish Republic. A positive result was that it inspired many Muslim Turkish women to pursue a theatre career. Metin And cites several concrete examples of this, such as Ay e Nigah, who worked as a nurse and tailor in Ankara. After watching the movie she decided to become an actress and applied to Muhsin Ertu rul. She was accepted to his theatre company and joined it on tour in Samsun, and two years later she joined the *ehir Tiyatrosu* (City Theatre) (And 1983: 109). However, the reception of the film was not all rosy. In an interview with a magazine from 1925, Neyyire Neyir recalls the negative reactions the movie provoked:

As soon as the film was finished, the gossip about it began. And what long gossip, I cannot describe ... The fact that a Turkish girl appeared at the cinema for the first time created such a stir in Istanbul that

almost every mother whose daughter bore the name of ‘Neyyire’ was told: ‘We didn’t find this appropriate. What a shame! Was that your daughter?’⁸⁰

In the press, however, reactions were very positive. In 1924 the popular Republican magazine *Resimli Ay* gave *Ate ten Gömlek* the honour for paving the way for Muslim Turkish actresses in theatre:

Since it addresses both the ear and the eye, the stage is twice as risky an area as the cinema. The “Manakyan” theatrical company’s squeaky way of pronunciation which reminded one of saw grinding in the ears, left sensitive ears shuddering. The ambush that the Armenian dialect set up to massacre Turkish, looked like it would continue eternally with the guard and protection of the hypocritical Sharia guard. At last, thank God, the world entered another age. The real and true nature of the religious truths that were used as a sword rusty with wrong and ignorant interpretations were revealed. And the Turkish woman rose to the horizons of the Turkish stage which had never been opened. If political revolutions each has their hero, the social movements also has such objects of honour. ‘Kezban’ and ‘Ay e’ are among these.⁸¹

There are two things especially worth noting in this excerpt. Firstly, in this text Kezban and Ay e, or Neyyire and Bedia, are not primarily presented as important for cinema as an art, but as heroines representing a larger “social movement”. This is a radical redefinition of the position of the actress. In this text, the actresses appear as emancipators and active figures in the construction of a new female image, essential to help the emergence of *the* Turkish woman. Secondly, we see that the Muslim Turkish actresses are identified with the new, whereas the Armenian performers are identified with the old. The dichotomy between the two is established justified by the flawed language of the Armenians, and their so-called massacre against the Turkish language. Both these points contribute to the establishment of a new paradigm of authenticity. From the idea that script-based theatre is *alafranga* and alien to Turkish culture, the situation is reversed: Turkishness gives theatre its authenticity.

4.2.5. The Early Republic: The Actress as Role Model and Educator

There are several versions of the story of how Bedia Muvahhit first appeared on the theatre stage. What is sure is that August 11th a theatre troupe from the Dârülbedâyi which was on tour in Izmir had a meeting with Atatürk, and during this meeting Atatürk encouraged the

⁸⁰ “Film biter bitmez dedikodusu ba ladı. Hem ne kadar uzun dedikodular tarif edemem... Bir Türk kızının ilk defa sinemaya geli i İstanbul’da öylesine çalkantı yaratmı tı ki, kızlarının adı ‘Neyyire’ olan hemen her anneye gelip gidenler ‘Yakı tramadık, ayıp, ayol sizinki mi?’ diye söylenip duruyordu.” The full interview was reprinted in Co ar (1968).

⁸¹“Sahne kula a ve göze hitap etmekle sinemadan iki defa daha tehlikeli muhittir. ‘Manakyan’ kumpanyasının kulaklarda destere bileni lerini hatırlatan gıcırtılı telaffuz ivesi hassas samiaları [kulakları] ürpermeler içinde bırakmı tır. Fakat Ermeni lehçesinin Türkçeye kurdu u katliam pususu, mürai eriat bekçesinin muhafaza ve siyaneti ile ilelebed devam edip gidecek gibi görünüyordu. Hele ükür dünya bir ya a daha girdi. Yanlı ve cahilane tefsirlerle paslı bir kılıç haline getirilen dini hakikatlerin asıl mahiyetleri meydana çıktı. Ve Türk kadını, Türk sahnesinin bir türlü açılmayan ufuklarına do du. Siyasi inkılapların birer kahramanı varsa, içtimai hareketlerin de öyle mazhariyetleri vardır. ‘Kezban’ ile ‘Ay e’ de bunlardandır.” From “Sahnedeki Kadın” in *Resimli ay* number 1 February 1924, transcribed and reprinted in Akçura (1993: 36).

troupe to make a Muslim Turkish woman appear on stage. According to Bedia Muvahhit herself, Atatürk asked the head of the troupe, actor Ahmet Refet Muvahhit, why he did not make his wife Bedia appear on stage, adding that he had seen her in *Ate ten Gömlek* and enjoyed her performance (Süsoy 1987). Another version of the story puts more emphasis on language and that Atatürk was underlining the necessity of making Muslim Turkish women who spoke Turkish without accent appear on stage (Akçura 1993: 35). What is sure is that the following day Atatürk's wish was granted as Bedia Muvahhit appeared on the theatre stage for the very first time in the play *Ceza Kanunu (Criminal Code)*. We do not know much about the reception of this performance, but actor Vasfî Rıza Zobu writes in his memoir that it was heavily applauded by both Atatürk and other military commanders in the audience:

It was a success, the Muslim Turkish woman had passed the test with success, and in this way she got established on the Turkish scene and possessed it with the "will of the nation".⁸²

Zobu's use of the concept '*irade-i milliye*', which means the 'will of the nation', is very noteworthy. This concept was deeply connected to the nationalist movement in Turkey (Zürcher 1999: 87).

The first performance where the appearance of Muslim actresses on stage was publicly announced in advance took place on December 7th 1923. This time Neyyire Neyir and Bedia Muvahhit appeared in the parts of Desdemona and Emilia in Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* directed by Muhsin Ertu rul. The performance was acted under heavy guard for fear of riots and attacks, but except for a burst of applause at Othello's strangling of Desdemona, it seems like the performance was received peacefully (Kaynar 1968: 29). A newspaper gave the following review of the event:

Last night's performance of Shakespeare's "Othello" in Turkish with the participation of two Turkish ladies, is worthy being estimated as an important event. Without any doubt, our people considered it this way. A great many of them were not able to find a seat and were forced to return home. At the theatre there were citizens belonging to all classes and professions. Everyone you can think of was there. The amount of ladies was no less than that of men. Moreover, quite a lot of foreigners considered the performance of 'Othello' in Turkish with the participation of Turkish ladies a remarkable event, and they filled the theatre. Some foreign newspaper journalists who wanted to report the great news to their newspapers, were also among them. ... In the first parts of the play people liked the actors a lot and applauded. Listening to a pure Turkish in the voices of the artistic ladies on stage pleased everybody and greatly contributed to the dimensions of the great excitement. The tolerance and satisfied consideration of an event such as these women appearing on stage, which seemed divergent to everybody only a couple of years ago, is a sign that the country has silently passed through a silent/ revolution of thought.⁸³

⁸² "Davayı kazanmı , Müslüman Türk kadını, imtihanımı muvaffakiyetle vermi ve böylece Türk sahnesine "rade-i Milliye" ile yerle ip sahip olmu tu." Quoted in Akçura (1993: 35).

⁸³ "Evvelki ak am ekspir'in 'Othello'sunun Türkçe olarak iki Türk sanatkâr hanımının i tirakile oynanması mühim bir hadise addedilmeye layiktir. Halkımız hiç üphesiz bunu böyle telakki etmi ti. Tiyatro birbiri üstüne

Once again we see an emphasis on the “pure Turkish” and a view of the actresses as agents of social change as much as artists. Among the women in the audience was Halide Edip

[Adivar], who wrote the following commentary for the paper *Ak am*:

In the last days Othello has become a real art event among the Turkish public in Istanbul. The way that the Turkish artists jumped from vaudeville to one of the world’s masterpieces, the way that the Turkish people responded to such a work of art with unequaled approval, and the participation of Turkish female artists made this an event worth congratulating. Othello was acted in a very flawed way; but starting flawed with the beautiful and great plays striving to perfect them little by little, to elevate the taste of the people, to present beautiful plays to the people in our Turkish, is anyway better than playing the European style *ortaoyunlar*, which are always simple and do not have any connection with art, in the most perfect manner. ... I sincerely congratulate Bedia Hanım’s courage to play Desdemona.⁸⁴

Edip here draws upon the narrative of theatre as a school and places the actresses in the position of educators. Their task is to refine the taste of the people little by little, and to teach the audience how to appreciate high art. This pedagogic view unites with the nation-building purposes of theatre: To Edip it is better to act flawed than not in “our Turkish”.

In Ertu rul’s eyes, the main obstacle to the emergence of Muslim actresses was the lack of state support and the fear of violence. In one of his articles, he rhetorically asks why the Turkish woman was afraid of acting: “Is the obstacle religion? No! Is her husband fanatical? No! Does she not want it herself? No? Why then? Because she is afraid of fanatics and the Central Commander!” (Ertu rul 1993: 162).⁸⁵ The position of the central commander was however to change. Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]’s importance in Turkish theatre history is undeniable, both as a politician and as Turkey’s first dramaturge (And 1983: 7). According to Atatürk, Turkish women’s entrance on stage was imperative in order for the theatre to evolve (And 1983: 6). In the first years of the Republic, he ordered a number of theatre plays written,

dolmu tu. Pek çokları yer bulamayarak avdete mecbur kalmı lardı. Tiyatroda her sınıf ve mesle e mensup vatanda lar vardı. Kim aransa orada idi. Hanımların miktarı erkeklerden az de ildi. Bundan ba ka pek çok ecnebiler ‘Otello’nun Türk hanımlarının i tirakile Türkçe olarak oynanmasını ayanı dikkat bir hadise addemi ler, tiyatroya dolmu lardı. Gazetelerine havadis vermek isteyen bazı ecnebi gazete muhabirleri de bu meyanda idi Oyunun ilk kısımlarında halk oyuncularını çok be enmi ve alkı lamı tır. Sahnede sanatkâr hanımlar a zından temiz bir Türkçe i itmek herkese ho gelmi ve yüksek heyecanların ebdana çok yardımı olmu tur. Hanımların sahneye çıkması gibi daha bir iki sene evvel herkese aykırı görünen bir hadisenin ho görülmesi ve memnuniyetle telakki edilmesi, memleketin gayrı merî bir fikir inkılabı geçirdi ine alamettir.” From “Türk Sanat Hayatında Bir Hadise” transcribed and quoted in Akçura (1993:40).

⁸⁴ “Otello son günlerde stanbul Türk âleminin hakiki bir sanat hadisesi oldu. Türk sanatkârlarının vodvilden dünyanın büyük bir ah eserine atlamaları, Türk âleminin emsalsiz bir ra betiyle böyle bir eseri kar ılaması, Türk kadın sanatkârlarını i tiraki bunu ayanı tebrik bir vaka haline soktu. Otello çok kusurlu oynandı; fakat daima basit ve sanatla münasebeti olmayan Avrupaî ortaoyunlarını en mükemmel bir sürette oynamaktansa, güzel ve büyük eserleri kusurlu ba layarak yava yava tekemmül ettirmek, halkın zevkini yükseltmek, halka güzel eserleri Türkçemizde tanıtmak için çalı mak her haldemürececahtır. ... Bedia hanımın Desdemona’yı oynamak cesaretini samimiyetle tebrik ederim.” Transcribed and quoted in Akçura (1993: 41).

⁸⁵ “Dindarlı ı mı mâni? Hayır! Kocası mı mutaassıp? Hayır! Kendisi mi istemiyor? Hayır! Ya neden? Mutaassıp kimselerden, bir de Merkez Kumandanı’ndan korkuyormu !”.

and through this he was promoting women's cause in two ways. Firstly, he was editing and censoring parts of these theatre texts that he considered to carry a negative message on women (And 1983: 9). For example, in the play *Ta Bebek* he crossed out a line stating that women should be loved as an ornament, from a distance, and wrote the following comment: "We cannot think like this about women! The existence of women is fundamental to the nation in 1001 ways! It is not right to renew the idea of thinking of women as ornaments ... It has to change" (And 1983: 9).⁸⁶ In the same play, Atatürk erased the phrase "love is amusement" and commented that considering love an amusement means not taking it seriously. Secondly, Atatürk demanded that there should be at least one important female character in each of the plays he ordered written. This character had to incarnate "the superior virtues of Turkish women" (And 1983: 9). This demand signalizes an important shift. Not only did Atatürk introduce the actress as a role model, the actress became a symbol of the new Republican woman.

Atatürk regarded the actresses as educators not only through the characters they represented on stage, but also through their physical appearance. In a matter of few years the actresses went through a revolution in appearance. In *Ate ten Gümlek* Bedia Muvahhit appeared both with a scarf loosely covering her hair and bareheaded (Akçura 1993: 79). Her clothing was long, wide, unrevealing and modest, but she did wear some make-up and fashionable long earrings. In a press photo from her first theatre appearance in *Ceza Kanunu*, Muvahhit wears an elegant, dark dress, which is short-sleeved and much more daring than the clothing in *Ate ten Gümlek*, but still modestly covering the shoulders. Also, her head is left uncovered with her hair tied neatly back in a bun (Akçura 1993: 33). Bedia Muvahhit recalls that after this performance Atatürk came to greet her and kissed her forehead. He then suggested that she in the future should wear a light fashionable scarf in order to acquaint the people in the provinces with the new Republican look step by step:

'I congratulate you, my girl. You did what I wanted you to. Don't quit it, continue. After this you will travel to Manisa, Nazilli and places like that. However, you will not go on stage with your head uncovered. ... For the first time the Turkish woman is appearing on stage. Your head must not be uncovered', he said. 'What should we do, dear Pasha?' I said. He turned to me and said: 'Whatever the colour of your clothes, wrap a headscarf of that colour around your head. Let us make people get used to it little by little.' I wore the headscarf in a few places, but then people got used to it so quickly that I threw

⁸⁶ "Biz kadınlar için böyle dü ünemeyiz! Kadın varlı ı ulusun bin bir noktadan temelidir! Artık kendini süs tanımak fikrini tazelemek do ru de ildir... de i meli."

the headscarf off my head. I was received in such a good way, not a single person reacted against me (Süsoy 1987).⁸⁷

By 1925 Muvahhit has the look of a stylish European flapper. In a press photo from the play *Kır Çiçe i* this year, not only is her hair uncovered, it is even cut into a boyishly short bob. Along with her earrings, pearl necklace and the sleeveless dress exposing her shoulders, Bedia Muvahhit perfectly conforms to the androgynous yet feminine European ideal of this time (Akçura 1993: 25). Although only two years had passed, this female image is profoundly different from the comrade woman she represented in *Ate ten Gömlek*. By the mid-1920s, the actress does not appear as “deprived of her womanhood”, to use Kandiyoti’s expression.

What happened to the Armenian actresses in this period? Sevengil seems to suggest a connection between Turkish women stepping onto the stage and Armenian women leaving it: “When Turkish women found the opportunity to go on stage, Eliza Binemeciyan shortly after left the stage and went to Belgium” (Sevengil 1968: 340).⁸⁸ Meanwhile, Faroqhi (2000: 260) claims that some of the most well-educated and “culturally Ottomanized” Armenian actors and actresses had departed for the Caucasus much earlier because of the tense environment that developed when Armenian nationalists appeared in the late 19th century. We should also assume that some of the Armenian actresses left the profession for non-political reasons, for example that they stopped working altogether as they got married. Some of the actresses continued in theatre, but they often used their Armenian background as an asset and exaggerated their accents for a theatrical effect. With the transition from empire to a nation state where ‘Turk’ replaced ‘Ottoman’ as the national supra-identity, it became difficult for Armenian artists to represent the collective. Combined with poor recruitment, this left the Armenian actresses marginalized.

4.2.6. The Actress and Other Performers

The Armenian actresses were not the only group that the Muslim Turkish actresses marked difference from in their quest for acceptance. In the 1920s there took place a process of differentiation between various types of performance which previously had all been dismissed

⁸⁷ “Sonunda, Atatürk sahneye geldi. Beni alınımdan öptü. ‘Kızım tebrik ederim. Benim istedi imi yaptın. Sakın bırakma, devam et’ dedi. ‘Bundan sonra Manisa, Nazilli filan gezeceksiniz. Yalnız, sahneye ba ı açık çıkmayacaksınız’ diye devam etti.’ Ama Atatürk, ‘İlk defa Türk kadını sahneye çıkıyor. Ba ınız açık olmasın’ dedi. ‘Ne yapalım Pa am?’ dedim. Bana dönüp, ‘Ne renk elbise giyiyorsan, o renkten bir türban sar ba ına’ dedi. ‘Böyle böyle alı tıralım’ dedi. Bir kaç yerde taktım, ama sonradan o kadar çabuk alı tılar ki... Türbanı da ba ımdan attım. O kadar iyi kar ıldandım ki, bir ki i aleyhime tepki göstermedi.”

⁸⁸ “Türk kadınları sahneye çıkma imkanını buldu u zaman Eliza Binemeciyan kısa bir süre içinde sahneden ayrılarak Belçika’ya gitti.”

as immoral professions for Turkish Muslim women. We might say that to be able to argue for the respectability of the “good” performer, a “bad” performer was needed. And the incarnation of this performer was the woman singing *kanto*, known as the *kantocu*. This rather eclectic genre of music, named after Italian ‘*canto*’ meaning ‘song’, was often sung between theatre acts in the *tuluat* theatre, but also often in the *meyhanes*, the Turkish tavern, or even at the *gazinios*, nightclubs. *Kanto* combined Eastern musical modes with Western instruments, and although it was not theatre, it relied heavily on performative aspects. Until the 1920s, both actresses and *kantocus* were linked to the image of the *femme fatale*. The boundaries between these types of public performance had been quite fluid and engaging in both was not at all unusual. In his novel *Fuh -i Atik (An Old Whore)* published in 1924, author Ahmet Rasim writes of the Armenian *kantocu* and actress Peruz that not only did men get into fights rivalling over her, her seduction even caused knife-stabbings and gun fights. In her memoir, Halide Edip [Adivar] describes how she as a child used to attend a theatre opposite her house where she sometimes spotted the same Peruz, sixty years old at the time, and one of her many admirers:

I used to see a dried-up old man at the door of the theater... Perouse Hanum bought him *simids* (rolls) and gave him money as she left the theater and entered her carriage in state. Ahmed Aga’s explanation of this proceeding was that she had eaten his money and burned his heart and thus reduced him to this state. ‘He was not her only victim,’ he would add, ‘thanks to her lovely eyes.’ Her eyes after this made me very uneasy. I imagined her literally burning people’s hearts with fire which she held with tongs, and eating, even chewing, their gold with her white teeth (Adivar 1926: 152-53).

While the actress and the singer were able to achieve some, although very ambiguous, accept, the *kantocu* and the *dansöz* (belly dancer) continued to be dismissed as loose women, and their shady reputation remains to this day.⁸⁹ How can we explain that the actress was able to rid herself of some of this reputation? After all, both the actress and the *kantocu* transgressed a number of norms for female behaviour, such as appearing in public alone and late at night, working and on top of that working alongside men. Both groups often wore considerable make-up, and they distinguished themselves from most other women through their hair styles and European way of dressing. One explanation might of course be found in the genre itself, since *kanto* always relied on certain seductive elements while theatre roles covered a larger spectrum. But I also suggest three additional explanations. Firstly, the venues where the *kanto* artists performed were never feminized like the theatres were. While the theatre was gradually redefined towards the Republican era as a gender-neutral space, the taverns and night clubs

⁸⁹ However, *kanto* has experienced a certain revival and can today be frequently seen in entertainment programs on Turkish television.

have remained a male space. And as a result of the absence in the audience of women in general and Muslim Turkish women in particular, the agency of the performers has continued to be perceived as sexualized. Secondly, the professionalization that the actress went through was not realized for the *kantocus*. And lastly, the *kanto* sphere was never Turkified. Almost all *kantocus* were either Greek or Armenian, and the *meyhanes* were mostly owned by Greeks, sometimes by Jews or Armenians (O'Connor 2006: 290). Although a large proportion of the audience consisted of Muslim Turkish men, *kanto* was a nostalgic reminder of the Ottoman past that was never embraced or redefined as a part of Republican culture. By the 1930s, the *kantocus* were mostly linked with prostitution. *Kanto* fell out of fashion and was for many years mostly enjoyed on the gramophone (Dobben 2008: 132).

4.2.7. 1930s and Problems of Recruitment

A much later debate can shed some more light on the meaning attributed to the Turkish actresses. In general history scholarship, it might seem as though the debate on actresses ended with the revolutionary first Muslim actresses appearing in public. But in fact, not only in the 1920s, but even 1930s and early 1940s there was a continuing problem with recruitment of female students both to the various theatre schools established in Istanbul and to the State Conservatory in Ankara. This issue was much discussed in the national press (And 1983: 112). In 1937, 14 years after Bedia Muvahhit's first theatre appearance, Carl Ebert, a German director who was invited to help found the department of Theatre in the Conservatory, complained that the shortage of aspiring actresses was so grave that if it continued in the same way, theatres would be obliged to start giving female roles to men. According to Ebert, the reason for the poor enrolment to theatre school was that the profession was held in contempt (And 1973: 107). Muhsin Ertu r ul, on the other hand, gave a more pragmatist exclamation, highlighting the difficult economic situation for theatre artists. He claimed the main reason for the lack of recruitment was not the bad reputation of the actress profession, but that it was badly paid and that women were not willing to work for free (And 1973: 107). Of course, the explanations might also be seen as interrelated. Poor wages might have nurtured public suspicion that honest work was not enough to make ends meet, and increasing professionalism and higher wages have clearly been important to elevate the status of the actress. Still, a recurrent theme in Ertugrul's defence of women in theatre in earlier periods as well as in the 1930s, is an insistence on theatre's cleanness and even purifying function. In an appeal for female applicants to the State Conservatory in 1938 following Ebert's complaint, Ertu r ul writes: "There are no base professions, there are base human beings, whereas the

fountain of art cleans even the vile human soul” (quote in Kaynar 1968: 11, the translation is Kaynar’s). By asserting that theatre has a purifying function, Ertu rul makes it obvious that he is arguing against people who claim or hint to the opposite. We saw the same purification theme earlier when Ertu rul wrote that only theatre can show that the *çar af* was “only a length of material which covers the dirt inside”. But Ertugrul’s argument is not gender-specific. In an article from 1942, “Tiyatroda ahlak” (“Morality in the theatre”) he takes his argument even further:

The theatre stage is like soap. Just like how soap does not get dirty easily, in the same way immorality does not stick to the stage. Just like how soap is a cleaning instrument which cleans some person’s dirty hand, some person’s clean face, some person’s unblemished forehead, the stage is also a space which reveals the lowest characters and the highest personalities just in that way (Ertu rul 1993: 56).⁹⁰

A final evidence of the lack of recruitment and the continuing difficult status of the actress profession many years after the founding of the Republic, is the following advertisement published in the cinema and theatre magazine *Perde ve Sahne* in 1941:

We have set up a competition among those of our educated young girls who are eager to become film artists. Amateurs who are competent with regard to physical built, language and intelligence to play the lead in the films made by Ertu rul Muhsin, and who want to choose being a film and theatre artist as their profession, can participate in this competition.⁹¹

The following criteria were listed in the advertisement: The applicant must be between 20 and 25 years of age with at least secondary school education. Her pronunciation and accent must be ‘*düzgün*’, which can be translated as ‘smooth’ or ‘correct’. Her face must be suitable for photographs and her voice suitable to the microphone. And lastly: “Her family must have given her the permission to act in films.”⁹² As we see, through the requirements concerning education and language in addition to good and healthy looks, the ideals for the actress established in the 1920s were continued. Meanwhile, the fact that the family’s permission was requested as late as in 1941, both points to a social system where the collective’s approval and

⁹⁰ “Tiyatronun sahnesi sabun gibidir. Sabun nasıl kir tutmazsa, sahneye de öylece ahlaksızlık kondurulmaz. Sabun nasıl kiminin kirli elini, kiminin temiz yüzünü, kiminin ak alnını yıkayan bir temizlik vasıtasıyla, sahne de en yüksek seciyelerle en alçak karakterleri öylece berliyen bir meydandır.”

⁹¹ “Tahsil görmü genç kızlarımızdan sinema sanatkarı olmaya hevesliler arasında bir müsabaka tertip etmi bulunuyoruz. Ertu rul Muhsin’in çevirdi i filmlerde ba rolü oynamaya bünye, lisan ve zekâ itibarile kabiliyetli olup da, sinema ve tiyatro sanatkarlı nı meslek olarak seçmek isteyen heveskârlar bu müsabakaya i tirak edebilirler.” Quoted in Milliyet (1979).

⁹² “-Ya ları 20-25 arasında olmak.

-En az orta tahsil görmü , telaffuz ve ivesi düzgün olmak.

-Surati foto rafa sesi mikrofonu elveri li olmak.

-Ailesi sinemada oynamasına müsaade etmi olmak.”

permission is necessary and to the idea that such a permission might often not be given, despite the new position of the actress in the public and the huge popularity of cinema.

Taking all these things into account, it seems clear that the narrative of the position of actresses in Turkey as a success story of a female figure moving from outcast to role model is overly simplified. Still, Berlanstein's theory of fluctuations in the actress position does not fit very well with the Turkish experience. In the Turkish case, acceptance does not appear to be cyclic, but rather we might say that the Republican actress ideal is ambiguous and loaded with tension. An interesting meta-phenomenon that testifies for this is the fact that stories of the village girl who revolts her family and goes to the city to become an actress or singer, always ending in suffering and tragedy, came to be one of the classical plots of Turkish movies in the Republican era. The actress question, like the woman question, was framed by both proponents and adversaries as a national question. But while the Muslim Turkish actress was embraced by the state as a showcase for its modernity and gained increasing public admiration, in personal life she still faced difficulties and she had to continuously prove herself to be a good woman and a good Turk. This doubleness will be further explored in the next and final chapter.

4.3. Afife and Bedia: Narratives of Two Firsts

Two women can be said to be competing over the public status as the first Muslim Turkish actress in Turkey: Afife Jale (1902-1941) and Bedia Muvahhit (1897-1994).⁹³ As we have seen, chronologically speaking there is no doubt that Afife Jale was the first to appear on the theatre stage, with her stage debut in Kadıköy in 1919. However, she only appeared a few times before she was removed from the stage through police intervention. Following an order from the Municipal Council of Istanbul stating that no Muslim woman should be allowed to act issued in February 1921, her performances were not only found provoking, they were in fact illegal (Araz 1992: 45). Bedia Muvahhit, on the other hand, first appeared on stage in 1923 upon the encouragement and with the permission of Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk].⁹⁴ Contrary to Afife Jale, who ended her days at the mental asylum at the age of 39 suffering from an addiction to morphine, Bedia Muvahhit enjoyed a career of more than 50 years on the theatre stage, and earned the position as a highly respected Republican artist.

Both of these women contributed to a relative “chastening” of the theatre profession for Turkish women, to borrow Berlanstein’s expression. This is very interesting considering their personal backgrounds and life trajectories. Afife Jale, a drug addict who married twice, and who revolted against her father as well as state laws by choosing to become an actress, hardly lived in accordance with the moral standards for women of her time, but she is today remembered as a heroine. Bedia Muvahhit, too, lead an unusual life in a number of ways. She also married twice, the first time with an actor and the second time with a non-Muslim Austrian pianist, and before becoming an actress she was among the first Turkish Muslim women working at the telegraph, a controversial matter at the time. She grew up in a well-off family surrounded by a non-Muslim environment highly influenced by European culture, and as a child she spoke Greek and French before she learned Turkish. Although we might think that the gap between her lifestyle and that of the average Turkish woman would have led to accusations of her being a dangerous or ridiculous *alafranga*, Bedia Muvahhit was from her first theatre appearances presented in newspaper reviews as an incarnation of the New Republican Turkish woman. How was this possible?

⁹³ However, evidence suggests that Afife Jale was not the very first Muslim woman appearing on the Ottoman stage, but that the others hid their identity. According to the writer Kemal Küçük, in 1890 a Turkish woman named Kadriye appeared on stage in Nazilli under the pseudonym ‘Amelia’. The audience assumed that she was Greek, and was impressed by her good accent. But after a Greek couple staying at the same hotel as her suspected that she was Turkish, Kadriye fled to Ankara and changed profession (And 1971: 144).

⁹⁴ Neyyire Neyir, who acted together with Bedia Muvahhit in *Ate ten Gömlek* and *Othello*, has not achieved the same iconic female status as Bedia Muvahhit, probably much due to her early death in 1943.

For the acting profession to become regarded as acceptable for Muslim Turkish women, two main changes had to take place: The public image of the actress had to be reconciled with the norms of womanhood, and it had to be reconciled with the perception of Turkishness, encompassing the Turkish interpretation of Muslim values. In this chapter, I will explore how these two reconciliations have taken place through studying the image of Afife Jale and Bediâ Muvahhit communicated in the available publications about them.

4.3.1. Afife Jale: The Turkish Jeanne d’Arc

For many years, Afife Jale was all but forgotten. Ironically, while theatre is often said to have killed her, it was also theatre that granted her eternal life, through the theatre play *Afife Jale* written by author and journalist Nezihe Araz in cooperation with writer Selim İleri in 1987. To present date, this play remains the only publication of any size dedicated to Afife Jale. Although Jale was already mentioned in books on theatre history and known among scholars, Araz deserves credit for making her publicly remembered again. This play probably had an influence on the 1996 establishment of the *Afife Tiyatro Ödülleri (Afife Theatre Awards)*, which has come to be one of the most prestigious theatre awards in Turkey, a good manifestation of Afife Jale’s elevated position. But at the same time, Araz’s play also merits scrutiny. As a source, it differs highly from the others used in this thesis; firstly because the text is fiction, and secondly because it was written many years after the time period discussed in this thesis. However, although it is a work of historically based fiction, *Afife Jale* is the most commonly used reference and source of information on Afife Jale’s life, and it is often treated as a source of facts by Turkish newspapers. It is limited how much this play can tell us about Afife Jale’s life. But given the scarcity of easily available material on the early actresses, this theatre play interesting because it is one of the main influences on the contemporary understanding of not only Afife Jale’s life, but of the character of the resistance and support for Muslim Turkish actresses in late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey. Therefore it may be worth asking: How does the understanding communicated by this play compare with the findings in my study of the actress debates? Of course, we should beware of confusing the fictional Afife with the historical Afife, although it is not always easy to differ between the two in this play. My interest with *Afife Jale* is with the text as a primary source, not as a secondary source. In the following analysis I approach the text not as a reconstruction of Afife Jale’s life and thoughts, but as a testimony of how she is remembered and imagined.

Nezihe Araz's manuscript has not only been realized on stage a number of times, it has also inspired two movies. The first movie, simply titled *Afife*, was launched in 1987 directed by ahin Kaygun and starring the legendary actress Müjde Ar in the lead. In 2007 *Kilit (The Lock)*, a second movie concerned with Afife Jale's life story, was released. This movie, directed by independent film maker Ceyda Aslı Kılıçkiran, tells two parallel stories at the same time: One of Afife Jale's life, and one of the struggles of Berna, a Turkish actress living in the 2000s, who faces similar prejudices and difficulties as Afife Jale did. As a post-modern reference to the 1987 movie, Afife Jale is once again acted by Müjde Ar, who in interviews has said that there are similarities between the life of Afife Jale life and her own. Departing from Araz's script, in this movie Afife Jale does not die a natural death. Instead she is killed, an artistic choice that well supports the image of Afife Jale as a martyr, which also dominates Araz's text.

4.3.2. Portrayals of Resistance

In Araz's play, right after Afife has appeared on stage for the very first time, playwright Vasfi Riza Zobu encourages her to continue acting telling her: "You'll be the Joan of Arc of Turkey" (Araz 1992: 26). The reference to the famous war heroine of French history, who was finally burned at the stake, is worth noting.⁹⁵ From the very beginning of the play, the story of Afife Jale is framed as one of a true martyr, both victim and heroine, selflessly serving a greater end than her personal ambitions. In the first scene this framework is established by the aged Afife, who, tied up in a mental asylum, addresses the audience declaring that in the play "I'll speak to you as a woman who was a pioneer, a first but also a victim" (Araz 1992: 2). This rhetoric of martyrdom leads us to an important and interesting question: How is the resistance against Muslim Turkish actresses portrayed in Araz's play? And if Afife Jale is a martyr, then who is the perpetrator responsible for her final tragedy?

Throughout the play, Afife Jale faces various kinds of resistance against becoming an actress, represented by mainly three characters. The first source of resistance is her father, who is portrayed as a despotic patriarch defending traditional values. In his reaction to learning that Afife has been accepted as an apprentice actress through the newspaper, he identifies acting with sexual availability: "My daughter cannot be an actress, cannot be a whore; cannot be openly and officially labelled as a whore" (Araz 1992: 18). When Afife counters this

⁹⁵ The reference to Jeanne d'Arc might have been particularly typical for this period. Marilyn Booth (1998) notes the proliferation of writings on Jeanne d'Arc in Egyptian women's magazines during the period of nationalist struggle, as an anti-imperialist figure and a symbol of legitimate female agency.

statement, he slaps her, threatens to kill her and kicks her out of the house. An almost identical attitude is displayed by a police officer who arrests Afife after one of her performances in Kadıköy. He slaps Afife, calls her a whore, and accuses her of not only blasphemy, but also of insulting her nation: “You forget about your religion, your nation and your honour and perform on the stage” (Araz 1992: 41). He then voices a traditional view of honour and the male duty in guarding it, by attacking Afife’s male actor colleagues:

“It is among the duties of the police to prosecute those who behave against the precepts of Islam. You shameless men, when you make the females go on stage, I feel as if my own mother and my own wife are exhibited there” (Araz 1992: 42).

An important common point between the reactions of these two men is that they both feel personally disgraced by Afife’s appearance on stage. They refer to Afife’s honour, but actually they also feel that their own honour is threatened, since they fail at the task of guarding the honour of a woman which it is their duty to protect. The second character representing resistance is Tahsin Bey, the director of the Istanbul police. He explains Afife why acting is improper for a Muslim woman in the following way:

TAHSIN: Don’t you know that a Moslem woman cannot go on stage – with her head uncovered, improperly dressed, moving around freely. Don’t you know that this is against the sacred laws of Islam? Don’t you know you create trouble for the Ministry of the Interior, for the Office of Religious Affairs, for the Municipality and for the Supreme Head of Religious Affairs? There are so many non-Moslem women waiting at your door to go on stage and you dare to do this! You long-haired and short-brained woman! What makes you behave with such impudence and let yourself be debased like this?

AFIFE: But...Sir...

TAHSIN: Shush! You are not ashamed to talk like this, as if you are a man – and your head uncovered too. (Araz 1992: 27)

Rather than problematic as a literary public sphere, Tahsin Bey approaches theatre as dangerous because it entails visibility, unveiling and “moving around freely” in the public sphere, which he defines as a violation of the rules of Islam. Interestingly, he simultaneously regards actresses as loose women and accuses Afife for behaving too much like a man. Tahsin Bey’s idea of proper Muslim behaviour meets resistance in the following discussion with Afife over the concept of honour where she asserts several times that she is not doing anything dishonourable. Tahsin Bey then says: “To act against the fundamental precepts of Islam is a crime, and if this crime is committed by a young woman it is doubly criminal”. Afife replies:

I did not behave against the fundamental precepts of Islam. I went on stage to perform the art of drama while preserving my honor and my dignity. I don’t see anything wrong with that. You should have attended the performance and seen the people who applauded me with respect (Araz 1992: 28).

Finally Tahsin Bey suddenly feels sympathy for Afife and says:

No, it isn't me. It is the customs and the conventions that are threatening you. It is the backward and thickheaded fanatics that are making you feel debased. You tried to do something extraordinary without thinking about the price you would have to pay ... I, too, believe that Turkish women should go on stage provided that they remain within the rules of proper conduct (Araz 1992: 28-29).

After Afife argues for a moral code in theatre in which she preserves “her honour and her dignity”, Tahsin Bey redefines the matter not to be a question of religion, but of customs and tradition, or rather backwardness, thickheadedness and fanaticism. This is the same strategy as we have seen among proponents of Muslim actresses such as Muhsin Ertuğrul, Halide Edip and Mustafa Kemal. In order to avoid making Islam the matter of discussion, they support the image of a struggle between the civilized new Turk and the backward and ignorant old Turk, while their adversaries conjure the image of an opposition between the infidel Europeanized new Turk and the morally superior old Turk. Once again, honour is detached from piety.

A third example of resistance is Afife's older sister Behiye, who criticizes Afife for not fulfilling her duties as a woman. She reproaches her for neglecting her “true vocation”, namely caring for home and husband and becoming a mother, by choosing a career in theatre (Araz 1992: 73). As a whole, *Afife Jale* does not counter the belief that an artist woman cannot be a family woman, but reproduces it; uniting acting with family life and motherhood is presented as an impossibility. When Ziya suggests to Afife that they marry and paints out a future with children and grandchildren, Afife is hesitant and asks him: “If one day I become an actress like Binemeciyan would you marry me”? (Araz 1992: 16). His reply is avoiding, but later he suggests that she should leave the *Dârülbedâyi* to marry him. Although the play presents acting as morally acceptable for women, it presents the actress as a separate type of woman.

4.3.3. A Moral Morphinist

Despite the tragic fate of Afife, *Afife Jale* seems to argue that Turkish women can remain within the rules of proper conduct while going on stage. When Doctor Suat makes her addicted to morphine, this is not blamed on a lack of morality in Afife, but on those causing her unhappiness as well as the doctor wishing to exploit her. The Doctor is first called to help her because her head aches and she is depressed as a result of the difficulties she has experienced. He gives her morphine, later cocaine, against her will to calm her down, and eventually she gets addicted. In fact, the play portrays Afife both as a good Muslim and as a

kind of Kemalist before her time.⁹⁶ This is mainly achieved by presenting Afife in a number of situations testing her good Muslim values, which she passes successfully by repeatedly refusing attempts at corruption. In the first test, Burhanettin Tepsi, the owner of a theatre company, offers to help Afife by lending her money. But Afife rejects becoming financially dependent on others however good their intentions:

AFIFE: One can't accept money if one doesn't earn it.

BURHAN: You can't think like that in the world of theater.

AFIFE: I believe in the dignity of my profession. I can't live there on charity (Araz 1992: 60-61).

The second test occurs when Afife meets the Minister of the Interior, Mehmet Ali, in the house of a wealthy Levantine around 1920. First the minister encourages her to drink alcohol, but Afife shows her good Muslim behaviour by rejecting an offer of the liquor *raki*. However, at the same time she also makes it clear that she has already had a little wine (Araz 1992: 32). The fact that she is not totally abstinent contributes to portraying her as a modern Kemalist-type of woman. Following this rejection, the minister tries to pressure Afife to accept his protection in exchange for sexual services. He does this by exploiting the image of the actress as sexually available:

When the play is over do you go home innocently? After all that provocation that goes on on the stage? ...

Afife, don't try to act like an innocent and virtuous woman. I don't like innocent and virtuous women, I like the frivolous and naughty ones (Araz 1992: 61).

Afife faces this by insisting on the separation between behaviour on stage and behaviour in private life:

AFIFE: I don't care for your importance or whatever that means. I am not the kind of woman who would say yes to the shameless proposal of a bully like you whom she meets for the first time.

MINISTER: But you are an actress! What's preventing you? Your status is well known anyway, so if not today maybe tomorrow you'll accept my proposal... (*He lets her go as AFIFE straightens herself up.*)

AFIFE: You drank too much...tomorrow morning you'll be ashamed of it. Please, let's forget this ugly incident.

MINISTER: But when you act these ugly scenes in the theater aren't you ashamed?

AFIFE: That is an entirely different thing. You don't understand. It has nothing to do with my personal life (Araz 1992: 36).

This dialogue contains more than Afife's defence of her professional dignity. At a deeper level, what we see is a clash of two different views of *mimesis*. Afife insists on the autonomy of her stage persona, and here argues for a separation between private self and stage persona, private and public spheres, and even art and reality. The minister, on the other hand, is presented as Rousseauist in his views. His statements can be interpreted in two ways. Either

⁹⁶ The principles on which Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk]'s reforms were based, notably secularism, Republicanism, statism and nationalism, are commonly known as Kemalism.

he thinks that *mimesis* per se corrupts, or that *mimesis* is only possible if the actress is already corrupted. But either way he takes for granted that in the end, the actress is always corrupt.

In a number of ways Afife defies the norms of traditional Ottoman society and rather signalizes the values of a modern Kemalist woman. Already in the second scene of the play she shows her resistance against wearing the *çar af*, which her father forces upon her. Afife also confesses that she went to the theatre without male permission and that she has already watched a woman's cinema matinée in *ehzadeba* 1 twice (Araz 1992: 10). Furthermore, she displays an interest in reading and learning, and a modern view of marriage as primarily based on love. One of her greatest supporters is her grandfather, the liberal doctor Sait Pa a. He backs Afife when she shows resistance against wearing the veil. With his European-style home and box at the *Mınakyan* theatre, Sait Pa a appears as a personification of the educated and secularist Turkish elite.

We find a hidden argument for Afife's morality through the example of "the bad actress", personified by the Armenian actress Eliza Binemeciyan. She is portrayed as a self-centred and manipulative diva who, unlike Afife, uses her beauty and sexuality to advance her career. In the play, an actress called Anais describes Eliza in the following way: "She's a beautiful woman, she knows how to talk well with a beautiful voice. Her fame is built on her beauty. She gets along well with the Ottoman big-wigs, in turn they support her" (Araz 1992: 51). Instead of supporting Afife Jale, Eliza Binemeciyan visits the Minister of the Interior and threatens that she will not act at the *Dârûlbedâyi* as long as Afife is there in her "temple" (Araz 1992: 44). The play's defence of the actress resides in insisting that the artist woman can still be moral, modest and refrain from using her sexuality as a weapon. The same point is underlined in one of the rare articles about the historical Afife Jale, which concludes:

As a Turkish woman who revolted against the social order of her time and its bigoted thinking, and who stood tall without using her sexuality against those who got caught up by the enchanted excitement of her recitals, it is certain that Afife Jale's share in the Turkish Theatre's now having reached a certain standard, is large (Altay 1988: 59).⁹⁷

Afife eventually loses her mind and plunges into deep unhappiness because she cannot realize her ambitions within the conditions of her time. Or as she says: "The problem is not the audience, but the higher authorities. Every night we perform with heavy hearts and worry

⁹⁷ "Afife Jale, dönemin düzenine, ba naz dü üncesine tek ba ına ba kaldıran, makamların o büyüğü co kusuna kendisini kapıranlara, cinselli ini kullanmadan dikilen bir Türk kadını olarak, Türk Tiyatrosu'nun u anda belirli bir noktaya gelmesindeki payı elbette ki çok büyüktür."

about whether we are going to be raided” (Araz 1992: 34). This statement invokes the attitude of Muhsin Ertu rül that we saw in the previous chapter. According to this play, what causes Afife’s eventual tragedy is not flaws in her character, but the conflict with the pre-Kemalist society surrounding her. Several places in the play we see nationalist statements that appear as both out of place and anachronistic. For example, early in the play Afife expresses her dream of stepping onto the stage in the following way: “One day if we’re allowed to go on the stage... I too, I would like to enrich our theater with our beautiful Turkish language” (Araz 1992: 7-8). Later on she says: “Every night in my dreams I become Binemeciyan, Kınar or Anais. I play their roles in my beautiful Turkish with my passion and my youth” (Araz 1992: 21). This seems like a historicism, especially considering that Binemeciyan was famous for her good Turkish. In fact, historian Sevengil (1968: 340) writes: “Among all the female artists of Armenian origin who acted in theatre performances in Turkish, the only one who spoke Turkish flawlessly with a smooth and sweet voice, was Eliza.”⁹⁸

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, it seems as if the perpetrator in *Afife Jale* is the Ottoman *ancien régime* and the individuals defending its values. Afife makes all the right choices in a corrupted world, and defends good Muslim values by rejecting alcohol, money and sexual offers, but she is still exploited. Although Afife is finally addicted to morphine, this happens against her will, and it is not morally blamed on her. Likewise, the moral resistance against her acting is not blamed on the people, but on regime. Rather than rejecting the myth of the immoral actress, the play *Afife Jale* reproduces it, but it also creates a space of choice and action. The world of theatre is not completely “chastened”, but *Afife Jale* argues for the moral possibility of uniting proper womanhood and proper Turkishness with acting, although not yet in Afife’s time.

4.3.4. Bedia Muvahhit: A Turkish ‘New Woman’

Despite her long and ground-breaking life on stage, there exists no academic scholarship dedicated to Bedia Muvahhit and her place in Turkish history. However, two books have been published in celebration of her career: *Bedia Muvahhit: Sahnede 50 yıl (Bedia Muvahhit: 50 years on stage)* edited by Refik Ahmet Sevengil and published as a newspaper supplement in 1973, and *Bedia Muvahhit: Bir Cumhuriyet Sanatçısı (Bedia Muvahhit: A Republican Artist)* by Gökhan Akçura published in 1993. Both these books present rich collections of historical

⁹⁸ “Türkçe tiyatro temsillerinde rol alan Ermeni asıllı kadın sanatçılar içinde Türkçeyi yanlı sız, düzgün ve tatlı bir sesle konu an tek kadın sanatçı Eliza idi.”

material such as photos, transliterated old interviews, theatre reviews and excerpts from the memoirs of Turkish actors. However, the material is presented mostly without comment, and there is no attempt to scrutinize it in a critical way. Since both these books are written as celebrations of Bedia Muvahhit's career rather than as academic analysis, they do not give space to the negative criticism facing Bedia Muvahhit when she first appeared on stage, although she herself makes some reference to them in some of the interviews quoted. Such excerpts remain the only access we have to Bedia Muvahhit's own views since she never wrote a memoir. In an interview at the age of 80, she explained that she had tried to write but complained that she found expressing herself in the new Turkish alphabet, which was introduced in 1928, too difficult and tiresome (Süsoy 1987).⁹⁹ In the following, I will look at the material presented by these two books from a critical perspective, supplemented by information found in interviews with Muvahhit, to track down some tendencies in how they present Muvahhit as Turk, actress and woman.

4.3.5. A Republican Torch

If playwright Vasfı Rıza Zobu is right that Afife Jale is the Jeanne d'Arc of Turkish theatre history, with another French metaphor Bedia Muvahhit would be the Marianne. While Afife Jale is portrayed as a character with strong agency, Bedia Muvahhit is often represented as a virtuous statue loaded with meaning rather than as a producer of meaning. In his greeting to Bedia Muvahhit in Sevensil's book, former Istanbul mayor Mühittin Üstünda writes that whenever he thinks of her, he remembers the Monument of Republic in Taksim Square in Istanbul and its two female statues: "The one facing the East represents the old regime of slavery and constraint. As for the face on the Western side, it is unveiled and free, as a symbol of the freedom for the Turkish woman brought about by Atatürk's revolution." He regards Bedia as "the first Turkish woman who brought this ideal to the stage of the Turkish theatre permanently and continuously" and as an important agent "both in our history of art and in our social evolution" (Sevensil 1973: 19).¹⁰⁰ A very similar view of Bedia Muvahhit is dominant in Akçura's book, whose entire introduction is dedicated to presenting Bedia Muvahhit not only as a statist artist but as the incarnation of the Republican woman:

⁹⁹ "Bana hatıralarımı yaz dediler. Ba ladım yazmaya, ama ayol içim sıkılıyor. Yeni harflerle yazmak güç geliyor. Eski harflerle yazsam tercüme ettirecekler. Fransızca yazmak daha kolay geliyor."

¹⁰⁰ "Do uya bakanı peçeli olup eski esaret ve baskı rejimini temsil eder. Batı tarafındaki ise Atatürk inkilâbının getirdi i Türk kadın hürriyetinin sembolü olarak yüz, peçesiz ve serbesttir. te, bu ideali Türk Tiyatrosunda temelli ve sürekli olarak sahneye getiren ilk Türk kadını sıfatıyla Bedia, hem sanat tarihimizde, hem de içtimai tekamül hayatımızda önemli bir hadise sahibi oldu u içintabii bir temayülle bunları birbirine yakla tırıyor ve yakı tırıyorum."

The Republican thought runs like blood through Bedia Muvahhit's veins. She is a person who has totally dedicated her life to that thought. We can compare Bedia Muvahhit to a Republican torch. This torch was lit parallel to the Republican thought around 1923, gained strength together with it, and made new flames lit (Akçura 1993: 9).¹⁰¹

In the same excerpt, Bedia Muvahhit's life story is structured as parallel to the success story of the Republic: "The Republic lived together with her; she came into existence with the Republic. Bedia Muvahhit and the Republic have always stood together as two words that complete one another."¹⁰²

A general tendency is that the political implications of Muvahhit's position as an actress "first" are underlined even more than the artistic consequences. In an article published in the art journal *Yedi Tepe* in 1950, she is presented as an "art veteran" but also as an agent in political and social history:

In her, we are now not only applauding the successful efforts of an art veteran. We are also saluting the most dignified and flawless symbol of the intellectual Turkish womanhood which escaped from under the *peçe* and from behind the lattice and who took her responsibility in social life alongside men (Sevengil 1973: 14).¹⁰³

Bedia is presented as simultaneously a symbol of progress, and as an educator or even civilizer. In his greeting in honour of her 50 years as a state artist, the mayor of Istanbul of the time wrote that Bedia Muvahhit's work had "helped us rise to the level of modern countries" (Sevengil 1973: 8).¹⁰⁴ The view of Bedia as a contributor to social and cultural change also seems to have been shared by Bedia herself. After a 1925 tour together with other actors from the *Dârülbedâyi* of cities and villages of Anatolia where they had acted for mixed audiences, she said: "The *Dârülbedâyi* performances were a beginning to Anatolian men and women living side by side" (Akçura 1993: 45).¹⁰⁵ Bedia Muvahhit was not only a symbol of the Kemalist woman nationally, but also internationally. In 1931, after having acted *Othello* in Greek together with a theatre troupe visiting Istanbul from Greece, Bedia Muvahhit was invited to Athens together with Turkish Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, to much interest in both

¹⁰¹ "Bedia Muvahhit'in damarlarında Cumhuriyet dü üncesi bir kan gibi dola mı tir. O ya amını bütünüyle bu dü ünçeye adamı bir insandır. Bu alandaki öncü niteli ini dü ünerek Bedia Muvahhit'i bir Cumhuriyet me alesine benzetebiliriz. Bu me ale 1923'lerde, Cumhuriyetin kurulu una paralel olarak yakılmı , onunla birlikte güclenmi ve yeni ate lerin ve yeni ate lerin yakılmasını sa lamı tir."

¹⁰² "Cumhuriyet onunla birlikte ya amı , o Cumhuriyetle birlikte var olmu tur. Bedia Muvahhit ve Cumhuriyet daima birbirini tanımlayan iki sözcük olarak birarada durmu lardır."

¹⁰³ "Biz imdi onda yalnız bir sanat emektarının ba arılı gayretlerini alkı lamıyoruz. Peçe altından ve kafes arkasından kurtulup içtimai hayatta erke in yanında vazife alan aydın Türk kadını nın en vakur ve en dürüst sembolünü de selâmlıyoruz."

¹⁰⁴ "...ça da ülkeler seviyesine yükselmemizde bayraktarlı mını bugüne kadar sürdürügelmi tir."

¹⁰⁵ "Anadolu kadınlarının erkeklerle bir arada ya amalarına Darülbedayi temsilleri bir ba langıç oldu."

Greek and Turkish press. In a text where she describes her Greek experience, Bedia represents the event as much more than a theatre event. She seems well aware of the responsibility attributed to her in representing something more than her individuality, saying: “There, I tried to show the woman of my nation, the theatre of my nation” (Akçura 1993: 61).¹⁰⁶

Bedia sometimes appears to be invoked to construct a parallel between political history and theatre history. Much like the national independence won on the political stage, several authors refer to a struggle for national independence in theatre. An example is the following text, which argues that Bedia is as much a national heroine as the “Little Mehmet”, the Turkish soldier:

The little Mehmet who saved the fatherland in the national struggle, is without doubt a monument which becomes divine with his heroism... But still, when we remember corporal Ay e and Fatma who carried ammunition on their backs in the national struggle, a different, more noble and deep feeling rises inside us. Even if we forget corporal Bedia in the national struggle of the Turkish theatre, history will not forget her.¹⁰⁷

When Bedia Muvahhit’s story is narrated as a story of the Republic, two things happen. Firstly, the agents wanting to see Muslim Turkish women on stage that were active before the Republic are discredited. We might ask: What is “Corporal Bedia” struggling to give the Turkish theatre independence from? The hidden enemy in these nationalist narratives seems to be the Ottoman theatre. Secondly, Bedia’s personal agency is to some extent undermined. Comparing her to a torch, which is an object lit by someone else, makes Bedia Muvahhit appear as a medium and a symbol rather than a bearer of a fire of her own. Although most writers emphasize that they admire her intellect, talent and courage, Bedia still appears as more passive than Afife Jale. Some places she is almost presented as a *tabula rasa*. One example of this is a newspaper article with the significant title: “It was the great Atatürk who gave me life” (Erakalın 1990). In the literature on Bedia Muvahhit, we find a persistent naturalization of how she became an actress. Sevengil (1973: XXX) claims that Bedia had no interest in theatre before meeting Atatürk, which hardly seems convincing given that she had already acted in *Ate ten Gömlek* on her own initiative. A more recent article about her simply states that *Ate ten Gömlek*, as a film about the Turkish Nationalist movement, could not be

¹⁰⁶ “...ben orada milletimin kadını, milletimin tiyatrosunu anlatmaya çalıştım.” From “O luma Miras Olacak” in *Artist* 15 October 1931.

¹⁰⁷ “Milli Mücadelede vatani kurtaran Mehmetçik üphesiz kahramanlı ıyla tanrıla an bir âbide... Fakat gene Milli Mücadele’nin sırtında cepane taşıyan Ay e, Fatma onba ılarını hatırladı ımız zaman içimizde bir ba ka, daha yüksek, daha derin bir his kabarr. Türk Tiyatrosunun Milli Mücadelesindeki Bedia onba ıyı biz unutsak da tarih unutmayacaktır.” Article by Cevat Fehmi Ba kut in *Cumhuriyet*, 1950, quoted in Sevengil (1973: 16).

played by non-Turks (Korkmaz 1993: 9). However, we know that nationalist plays had been played with non-Turks in the female roles in 1908 and throughout the occupation of Istanbul.

4.3.6. A “Turkish *Alafranga*” or the “First European Turkish Actress”

Although her family was Muslim, Bedia Muvahhit can be said to have a classical *alafranga* background. Emine Bedia, as she was born, grew up on the island of Büyükkada outside Istanbul upon the advice of a doctor who thought the calm of the island would be good for her father, who was suffering from heart problems (Akçura 1993: 11). Bedia describes her family as fairly wealthy, having French governesses and male cooks at home. Since the governesses were speaking French and the servants Greek, Bedia grew up learning both (Akçura 1993: 19). The language of instruction at her elementary school St. Antoine was Greek, but she was taught Turkish through private lessons given by a family friend. After the death of her father when Bedia was 12, the family moved to Moda on the Asian side of Istanbul where Bedia continued her education at the Turkish school Terakki Mektebi and later at the French Dame de Sion. As we have seen in chapter 3.3., in late Ottoman times the *alafranga* lifestyle was the object of much ridicule, and for Western-style theatre, the *alafranga* connotation was an obstacle to becoming accepted. How could it be that a girl growing up in an upper-class family, “speaking Greek as well as a Greek” did not appear as a cultural and moral threat in a Turkey where national identity was unstable, but instead helped to legitimize the actress profession? In her childhood and young years, Bedia certainly experienced being negatively labelled as an *alafranga* outsider, as she reveals in an interview:

Around the age of thirteen I was attending a French school and of course I was not yet covering my head. In the neighbourhood they were always making gossip about me. They kept saying things like: “She has become a big girl now; it is a disgrace, what kind of *alafranga* are these people, are they *frenk* or something?” My family held out against these sayings for a while, but in the end they “helped me escape from men”, to use the expression of that era. I never came to like the *çar af*. In the first days I was wearing the *çar af*, a man once rebuked me in the street because I was wearing it indecently, what childishness! So I got angry and removed my *çar af* in the middle of the street. It must have been because they saw that a child appeared from under the *çar af* that the police did not arrest me. And nobody stoned me in the street (Akçura 1993: 19).¹⁰⁸

However, in a pivotal turn as she entered theatre in the 1920s, everything “foreign” or non-Turkish about Bedia Muvahhit, such as her knowledge of Greek and French, her resistance against veiling, and her participation in working life, started to be represented as positive. In

¹⁰⁸ “On üç ya larında Fransız mektebine giderdim ve tabii henüz ba ımı örtmezdim. Mahallede hep dedikodu ederlermi ! ‘Artık kocaman kız oldu, ayıp, bunlar ne alafranga eyler, frenk midirler nedirler?’ diyip dururlarmı . Ailem bu sözlere biraz mukavemet etti, fakat nihayet beni de o zamanki tabir ile ‘erkekten kaçırıldılar’. Çar afa hiç ısınmadım. İlk çar af giydi im günlerde bir adam beni yolda açık saçık çar af giydi im için azarladı, çocukluk! Ben de kızıp çar afımı soka ın ortasında çıkardım. Çar afın altından ortaya bir çocuk çıktı ı için olacak beni polis tevfi k etmedi. Ve sokakta ta lamadılar.”

Akçura's book Bedia is portrayed as "an *alafranga* Turkish girl", but here the expression appears to be positive or at least neutral (Akçura 1993: 19).¹⁰⁹ Bedia herself also uses the expression positively in some of the interviews quoted in the book. For example, she describes her wedding with Muvahhit as "a completely *alafranga* wedding", since it contained the serving of alcohol, both Western and Turkish music, and dancing (Akçura 1993: 27). Author Peyami Safa also presents Bedia Muvahhit's European influence at home as a positive rather than corruptive influence. He describes her as the first woman who presented Western wittiness and manners on the Turkish stage, making her the "First European Turkish woman":

When we look for the first Turkish woman who personified Western wittiness and manners on the Turkish stage with the guidance of two foreign languages and the influences from her mother's side, nobody comes to our mind before Bedia Statzer. Ever since her childhood European culture and social etiquette has been rummaging through the veins of her spirit. As an artist possessing the elegant and free movement style of Western actors, she is the first European Turkish woman of our stage (Sevengil 1973: 20).¹¹⁰

However he also reveals that her upbringing among non-Turks had left her with a "curious accent that some of us found strange and others sweet", which is very interesting considering the importance of the language argument in the actress debates that we have seen (Sevengil 1973: 20).¹¹¹ What seems to save Bedia Muvahhit from an outsider role is an increasingly popular understanding of civilization which permits the import of European theatre, and of culture which defines women's emancipation as "modernity" or as an original state among the Turks before the Ottoman time. In *Yeni Sabah* she is described in the following way: "Bedia is an exceptional talent who makes the Eastern mentality fit in with the Western artistry. I always observed this special feature in her way of acting" (quoted in Sevengil 1973: 26).¹¹² This quote echoes Gökalp's separation between civilization, which can be imported, and culture, which should stay native. The combination of "Eastern mentality", which can be interpreted as values and spirituality, and "Western artistry", which can be understood as knowledge of the theatre art, was ideal for the Kemalists. Rather than an impossible

¹⁰⁹ The expression used is "alafranga bir Türk kıızı".

¹¹⁰ "ki yabancı dilin ve ana tarafından aldığı tesirlerin delâletiyle Türk sahnesinde garp espri ve edasını ilk ahıslandıran Türk kadınıni aradı ımız zaman Bedia tatzet'den evvel kimse hatırımıza gelmez. Çocuklu undan beri Avrupa kültür ve mua eretini ruhunun damarlarına karı tırmı .Garp, sanatkârlarının zarif ve serbest kımıldama uslubuna sahip bir artist sıfatiyle, o sahnemizin ilk Avrupalı Türk kadınıdır."

¹¹¹ "Önceleri kimimizin yadırgadı ımız, kimimizin de sevimli buldu umuz garip bir aksanı vardır. Az açılan bir a ızın büzülmü dudakları arasında alt di lerin arkasına yapı ık bir halde kalan dilin sahibine mahsus ivesini talkid eden ahsiyet farikası olan Bedia'nın konu masında orijinal izlerini daima az çok muhafaza etti."

¹¹² "Bedia, ark zihniyetini, Garp sanatkârlı ı çerçevesine sı dıran müstesna bir kabiliyettir. Oynayı tarzında bu hususiyeti daima görmü ümdür."

contradiction, or an immoral imitator of European women, Bedia is presented as a successful synthesis of the best of East and West.

4.3.7. Artist, Working Woman and House Wife

Actually, Bedia Muvahhit was a “first” many years before 1923. Thanks to her knowledge of French, Greek and Turkish, in 1914 she was one of fifteen Muslim Turkish girls who were employed at the telegraph for the first time in history. The French-owned company had previously refused to hire Muslim women claiming that they did not possess the necessary knowledge of languages, which resulted in a campaign of protest in *Kadınlar Dünyası* accusing the company of being negatively biased against Muslim women (Çakır 1994: 292). The social conventions discouraging work participation for Muslim women was not the only obstacle in this matter. Part of the controversy was that the telegraph workers would be exempted from wearing the veil while at work, because using the telephone while wearing the veil would be difficult.¹¹³ Her good knowledge of language later led Bedia Muvahhit into pursuing the teacher profession. According to herself, the reason was that intellectuals such as Muhsin Ertu rul, Yakup Kadri and Yahya Kemal who were friends of her family, encouraged her to become a teacher (Akçura 1993: 24). After finishing school, she started working as a French teacher at a high school for girls, Erenköy Kız Lisesi, while at the same time teaching at the Kadıköy Middle School. But because Bedia did not like veiling, she got into conflict with the school’s more traditionally minded principal:

We had a principal wearing baggy trousers called Rasim Efendi. I used to go to school in a tailor-made suit. I did not wear the *çar af*. Because I was a graduate of a French school he called me “Mademoiselle”. One day he hastily entered my class, but he left as soon as he entered. He told me: “I can’t enter as long as your head is uncovered”. In other words, I wasn’t escaping from him, Rasim Efendi was escaping from me ... For this reason I had to buy a small scarf and in situations like this I would cover my head with it (Akçura 1993: 24).¹¹⁴

Through using mademoiselle as a degrading nickname, the principal is making fun of Bedia as an *alafranga*, and he warns her that her unveiled appearance before male teachers might lead them both into trouble. Her resistance is portrayed as heroic by Akçura, who writes that Bedia showed “very brave behaviour” for her time in her resistance against the veil (1993: 24). After working as a teacher for two years, in 1922 Bedia left working life to get married to

¹¹³ “Ama u da var ki bu genç kızlar ba larındaki geleneksel çar aflar ile telefon kulaklıklarını nasıl kullanabilecekler? Bu durumda çar aftan sarfı nazar edilmesi gerekiyor ve edildi de...” *Servet-i Fünun* 18 April 1914, transliterated and quoted in Akçura (1993: 23)

¹¹⁴ “Rasim Efendi adında alvarlı bir müdürümüz vardı. Ben okula tayyör ile giderdim. Çar af giyme zdim. Fransız okulunu bittirdi im için bana ”Matmazel” derdi. Bir gün tela la sınıfa girdi ve girmesiyle çıkması bir oldu. Bana ” çeri giremiyorum, çünkü ba ınız açık” dedi. Yani Rasim Efendi benden kaçıyordu, ben ondan de il... Bu yüzden mecburen ufak bir e arp almı tım ve böyle durumlarda ba ıma örtüyordum.”

the actor Ahmet Refet Muvahhit, the son of family friends, who had told her: “Stop teaching and marry me.” Although he first made her quit working life, the marriage with Muvahhit encouraged Bedia to strain the borders of female behaviour in the public sphere of the time. He took her to restaurants run by white Russians where there were hardly any women, and they danced (Akçura 1993: 27). In an interview, Bedia confirms that as the daughter of a well-off family, her choice to marry an actor was not well received:

‘Muvahhit and I loved each other. When we decided to get married, hell broke loose in my family. My father’s cousin, Ömer Celal Sarç’s father Celal Bey, my great uncle, was in the Ministry of Education at the time. He went to my mother and said: ‘How can such a scandal take place in our family? I hear you have given your daughter’s hand to an actor.’ But my mother said that he would not be able to make her do as he wanted.’

‘Didn’t they try to stop you from going on stage?’

‘My mother’s cousin Dr. Kadir Pa a came and said: ‘There can be no such scandal in our family. Your daughter both married an actor and went on stage.’ My marrying Muvahhit and going on stage was very badly received in my family’ (Süsoy 1987).¹¹⁵

As opposed to Afife Jale, Bedia Muvahhit tried to unite family life with a theatre career. While Afife Jale never became a mother, Bedia Muvahhit not only had a child, she also lived as a single mother. In an interview with *Vatan* in 1924 she complained about the lack of support in her choice to be a working mother:

For the sake of art I have worked and struggled so hard, and even made so many sacrifices in my feelings as a mother, but I have still not seen as much as a trace of encouragement from anybody, especially the newspapers (Akçura 1993: 42).¹¹⁶

After her husband Ahmet Refet Muvahhit died of tuberculosis in May 1927, Bedia married the Austrian Fredrik von Statzer, who was a pianist and music teacher at the conservatory, who she finally divorced. In interviews with Bedia Muvahhit written several decades later, a large part is dedicated to proving her “correct” femininity despite being a working woman. By underlining that she is a good house wife, Bedia defends that engaging in the acting profession does not mean that she is neither masculinized nor a spoiled, lazy diva. In an interview with the theatre magazine *Perde ve Sahne* from 1943, we find photos of Muvahhit in front of the typewriter, ironing clothes and playing the piano. She proudly declares that she

¹¹⁵ ‘Bedia Hanım, bu kadar dadılı, a çılı büyütülmü sünüz. Nasıl oldu da sizin bir tiyatro sanatçısıyla evlenmenize izin verdiler?’

‘Muvahhit’le birbirimizi sevdik. Evlenece imiz zaman, ailede kıyamet koptu. Babamın kuzeni, Ömer Celal Sarç’ın babası Celal Bey, amcam. O zaman Maarif Vekili’ydi. Gelmi anneme ‘Bizim ailede böyle rezalet olur mu? Kızını aktöre vermi sin’ demi . Annem de, sözünü geçiremedi ini söylemi .’

‘Sahneye çıkmanıza engel olmadılar mı?’

‘Annemin kuzeni Dr. Kadir Pa a gelmi , ‘Bizim ailede böyle rezalet olmaz. Kızın hem aktörle evlendi, hem sahneye çıktı’ demi . Ailemde çok fena kar ılandı benim Muvahhit’le evlenmem ve sahneye çıkmam..’

¹¹⁶ ‘Bakınız, sanat için bu kadar çalı tı ım, çabaladı ım, hatta valdelik, annelik hislerinde bile bu kadar fedakarlık yaptı ım halde kimseden hala bahusus gazetelerden u kadar bir eseri te vik görmedim.’

loves embroidery work and emphasizes that if she had a daughter, she would above all raise her to be a housewife.¹¹⁷ Both statements surprise the journalist greatly. We understand that Bedia was faced with prejudice both from this, and from an interview with her at the age of 80 in which she attacks the perception that an actress cannot be a good housewife and mother:

When I was on stage, my main life was theatre, but I never neglected my home either. They say that the theatre woman does not know how to take care of her household. I do not accept this. I raised a wonderful child (Süsoy 1987).¹¹⁸

The historical fiction on Afife Jale and the factual writings on Bedia Muvahhit show certain similarities. In both, it appears as if it has been more difficult to reconcile the image of the actress with norms of feminine behaviour than with the notion of Turkishness. As Muslim actresses, both women have been embraced as symbols of the nation and regime change, and have been used to Other the Ottoman past. However, there are also notable differences in the way in which the two women are portrayed. Afife Jale is represented as a martyr sacrificing her own life for the benefit of women following her. She is a good, but failed model woman due to the flawed pre-Kemalist government of her time. Bedia Muvahhit is also a heroine, but a heroine supported by the regime. Even though her background is a testimony of Ottoman multiculturalism, she is described as an ideal Kemalist woman. It seems like the two-way relationship between women in general and the actresses in specific that Berlanstein (2001) found in his study of French history, is also present in the Turkish case. There is little doubt that the actresses had an influence as public figures in making the public sphere accessible to other women, by appearing unveiled and in European clothes, and as professional women, in making it easier for other women to enter working life. But on the other hand, the actresses were themselves dependent on the increased freedom of women to move in the public sphere and attend theatre as audience, to achieve such a position. The actresses thus appear, like Glenn (2000) suggests, as simultaneously agents and metaphors of change.

¹¹⁷ “Bedia’nın Evinde” by smet Hulusi, *Perde ve Sahne*, August 1943, reprinted in Akçura (1993: 65).

¹¹⁸ “Sahnedeyken birinci hayatım tiyatroydu, ama evimi de ihmal etmezdim. Tiyatro kadını, evine bakamazmı ’ diyorlar. Ben bunu kabul etmiyorum. Fevkalade bir evlat yeti tirdim.”

5. Conclusion

The debates on women in theatre studied in this thesis, do not only express certain views of gender and art, but are above all testimonies of disputing and changing views of self in a nation undergoing profound change. As Turkey went through the transition from Empire to Republic, discussing Muslim Turkish actresses was impossible without also on some level discussing the country's relationship to the West and to the Ottoman past, and its ideals for the future. As a result, if we return to our four initial research questions, identity emerges as the issue at the nexus of all debate on women in theatre. The narratives of *resistance* against Muslim Turkish women attending theatre as audience and as performers do not appear to have differed substantially from each other. Although the debates on the two subjects did not begin simultaneously, both were structured by similar views of theatre as primarily a public sphere, and of the question of women in theatre as primarily one of women's public presence and visibility. Interestingly, in these debates, the proponents of Muslim Turkish actresses approached theatre much like their adversaries: as a visual and public space rather than as a literary sphere of art. The major difference between the two sides was their differing views of the concept of honour and of the implications of *mimesis*. While the proponents emphasized the educative function of theatre whether it represented virtue or vice on stage, their adversaries appear to have defended the old views of *mimesis* as harmfully formative, and of women as particularly vulnerable to its influence.

The factors permitting *change* in this matter turn out to be incredibly complex; and determining where political and social developments end and cultural and intellectual developments begin, is difficult. Nonetheless, I would like to emphasize two key findings of this thesis. Firstly, the change in the status of the actress appears as a result of new ideas concerning national identity, the position of women and the role of theatre. Although these are separate topics, at the core of all three dwells a shared question of authenticity. The ideas that feminism is essentially Turkish, that Turkish theatre could be inspired and influenced by theatre in Europe without becoming inauthentic, and that a modern Turk could both be a good Muslim and an avid theatre goer, were all supported by a conceptual divide between native culture and international civilization which appeared in the period studied. Secondly, considering the significance of the concept of authenticity in these debates, the nationalist backdrop to the legitimization of Muslim actresses is important. The defence of Muslim Turkish actresses was articulated through a language emphasizing independence and national

self-sufficiency. As the Armenian actresses were accused of not representing Turkishness authentically on stage, a new paradigm of authenticity was established, which protected the Muslim actresses against such accusations.

As mentioned above, the *relationship* between the legitimization of female audiences and of female performers appears to have been one of mutual dependency. Without a female audience, the actress could never have been successfully portrayed as a role model, but at the same time, the narratives presenting the actress as an educator made theatre attendance more accepted for women. Highlighting the audience debates is important because they show that many changes which were fundamental to the emergence of Muslim Turkish actresses had been realized long before 1923. The 1908 transformation of the public sphere particularly appears as an important turning point. Also, the audience debates remind us that discussions on gender norms do not only concern women. As we have seen, the desegregation of audiences not only implied changes in norms of feminine behaviour in the public sphere but also of masculine behaviour. The semantic battles with regard to the concept of honour that we have observed in the years of transition from the Empire to the Republic, also affected the male ideal. Thus, the legitimization of Muslim Turkish actresses entailed a transformation of the male gaze and of men's perception of the agency of actresses.

We have seen that the first Muslim Turkish actresses came to be completely accepted as good Turks, but only hesitantly accepted as good women. The *public image* of the early Muslim Turkish actresses contained an inherent tension which should be understood in light of the process that secured them their public legitimacy. The Muslim Turkish actress was not summoned to the stage to represent femininity, but to replace Armenians in representing Turkishness. And, given that the woman question was regarded as important mostly through being a national question, she was not summoned for the sake of her gender as much as for the sake of her nation. How has the position of the actress changed since? My study ends by outlining some tendencies with regard to the position of the actresses in the 1930s and early 1940s. In the years that followed, great changes took place in the position of the actress, particularly in cinema. With the golden age of *Ye ilçam*, the Hollywood of Turkey, the actress rose to formerly unknown heights of fame and popularity, and in the 1950s and 1960s a variety of new types of female roles appeared on the silver screen. It would be very interesting to see a study of how the position of the actress changed with the emergence of mass entertainment, and how her position was influenced by the interplay of the roles represented

on the screen and the public personas of the actresses in this period. Developments in the last decade are also worthy of scrutiny. Turkey has long been one of the greatest producers and consumers of television entertainment in the world, and is commonly regarded as an important influence in this respect in the Middle East. In later years the television medium has been increasingly embraced by religious communities, resulting in interesting phenomena such as the growing industry of Islamic soap operas. These developments raise many new questions regarding perceptions of both acting and women in Turkey, and their position in discourses on Turkishness and Muslimhood. It is my hope that the opportunity to study Turkish history and society through the prism of theatre will be seized by more researchers in the near future.

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