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DAUGHTERS OF THE STAGE:  
CONSTRUCTING THE MODERN WOMAN IN THE THEATER IN THE LATE  
OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND EARLY TURKISH REPUBLIC (1914-1935)

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**Daughters of the Stage:  
Constructing the Modern Woman in the Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire  
and Early Turkish Republic (1914-1935)**

**Sahnenin Kızları  
Geç Osmanlı ve Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Tiyatrosunda Modern Kadının  
İnşası (1914-1935)**

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- 1) Devlet feminizmi
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- 4) Bedia Muvahhit
- 5) Türk Milliyetçiliği

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- 1) State feminism
- 2) Women in the theater
- 3) Afife Jale
- 4) Bedia Muvahhit
- 5) Turkish Nationalism

# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY	3
PRIMARY SOURCES	3
SECONDARY SOURCES	8
<b>DAUGHTERS OF THE STAGE PART 1: CHANGING EXPECTATIONS FOR TURKISH WOMEN.....</b>	<b>14</b>
WOMEN IN PUBLIC	22
TANZIMAT THEATRE	26
TULUÂT TIYATROSU	30
CENSORSHIP & THEATRE AFTER THE REVOLUTION	33
<b>DAUGHTERS OF THE STAGE PART 2: FEMINISM STEPS ON STAGE.....</b>	<b>38</b>
ESTABLISHMENT OF DARÜLBEDAYI	50
IN SEARCH OF THE PROPER ACCENT	52
THE FIRST TURKISH WOMAN ON STAGE	57
PIONEER & VICTIM: AFIFE STEPS ON STAGE	61
<b>DAUGHTERS OF THE STAGE PART 3: THEATER IN THE NEW REPUBLIC.....</b>	<b>75</b>
THEATER IN THE NEW REPUBLIC	77
BEDIA MUVAHHID: THE FIRST TURKISH ACTRESS OF THE NEW REPUBLIC.	83
BEDIA ON FILM AND STAGE	87
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>100</b>

## **ABSTRACT**

According to Afife Jale, the first Turkish-Muslim woman to act on stage, it was easier to be a prostitute than an actress in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. However, with the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923 women's symbolic value in public was an example of the modern nation and a source of pride for its government. However, art and beauty could only be publicly displayed if the woman was also pure and chaste or the ideal wife and mother. This study examines the pressures put on female actresses and how their artistic public display was seen by the society in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic (1914-1935). Moreover, this study will attempt to give agency to these actresses in their navigation of intellectuals, the State, and the public at large and examine how they understood this paradox and the pressures of state and society. This is done through an examination of the lives, times and careers of two Turkish actresses, the aforementioned Afife Jale and Bedia Muvahhit. It would make for a simple analysis to say that Afife represented the experiences of an Ottoman actress between 1914-1922, and Bedia represented the experiences of the Early Turkish Republic (1923-1935), but this is not the case. Their careers cannot be reduced to the nationalist periodization. This is, in fact, fitting, as there was a great deal of continuity between these periods. However, there was a distinction between the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic and this meant that Afife's life and career would meet with tragedy due to her activities in the Ottoman period and that Bedia's life and career would see success due to her work in the Republican period. In conclusion, this study argues that Afife and Bedia were celebrated for their pioneering work as Muslim Turkish women, it was only in the context of male approval and Turkish nationalism.

### **Keywords**

1. State feminism
2. Women in the theater
3. Afife Jale
4. Bedia Muvahhit
5. Turkish Nationalism

## ÖZET

Sahneye çıkan ilk Müslüman Türk kadını olan Afife Jale'nin nazarında, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son yıllarında bir hayat kadını olmak aktris olmaktan daha kolaydı. Ancak, 1923'te Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin ilanıyla birlikte, kadınların kamuoyunda sembolik değeri, modern ulusun bir örneği ve hükümet için bir gurur kaynağıydı. Bununla birlikte, sanat ve güzellik ancak kadın aynı zamanda saf ve iffetli ya da ideal eş ve anne olduğu üzere herkese açık bir şekilde sergilenebilirdi. Bu çalışma, kadın aktrisler üzerine uygulanan baskıları ve onların sanatsal kamu görünümünün toplum tarafından geç Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Cumhuriyetin başlarında (1914-1935) nasıl ele alındığını incelemektedir. Dahası, bu çalışma entelektüeller, devlet ve kamuoyu nazarında bu aktrisleri temsil etmeye çalışacak ve bu paradox içinde devlet ve toplumun baskılarını nasıl algıladıklarını incelemeye çalışacaktır. Çalışma, yukarıda belirtilen Afife Jale ve Bedia Muvahhit'in, iki Türk aktrisinin hayatları, zamanları ve kariyerleri incelenerek şekillenmiştir. Afife Jale'nin 1914-1922 yılları arasında bir Osmanlı aktrisinin deneyimlerini temsil ettiğini ve Bedia Muvahhit'in erken dönem Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin (1923-1935) deneyimlerini temsil ettiğini söylemek basit bir analiz belirebilir, fakat konu tam olarak bu değildir. Kariyerleri milliyetçi dönemlendirmeye indirgenemez. Aslında, bu durum ancak dönemler arasında büyük bir süreklilik olduğu için uygun görülebilir. Ancak, geç Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile Cumhuriyetin başlarında bir ayrım vardı ve bu, Afife'nin hayatının ve kariyerinin, Osmanlı dönemindeki faaliyetleri nedeniyle trajediyle buluşacağı ve Bedia'nın hayatının ve kariyerinin, Cumhuriyet dönemindeki çalışmalarından dolayı başarı göreceği anlamına geliyordu. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, Afife Jale ve Bedia Muvahhit'in sahneye çıkan ilk Müslüman Türk kadını olarak öncü hareketlerinin, sadece erkek onayı ve Türk milliyetçiliği bağlamında onore edildiğini savunmaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

1. Devlet feminizmi
2. Tiyatroda kadın
3. Afife Jale
4. Bedia Muvahhit
5. Türk Milliyetçiliği

“It’s free for a Muslim woman to work as an officer, as a clerk; you can even work as a prostitute as long as you have your license but the Theatre is forbidden! Forbidden!”<sup>1</sup>  
-Afife Jale

## Introduction

When I was 22 I had the opportunity to attend the conservatory but my parents did not allow me to do so. Being an actress was considered undignified for a woman of my time. However, I have a number of female friends who became successful theatre actresses and today are more highly regarded by society than I am today. I think my father’s disdain for actresses was due to the public display of a woman’s body to society, this and the fact that not long ago being an actress was considered immoral. In fact, in the words of the first Muslim Turkish actress quoted above, Afife Jale, in the final years of the Ottoman Empire prostitutes were more recognized than actresses.

However, Afife was part of a modernist movement that sought greater recognition of women in public, and an actress was perhaps the ultimate symbol of public feminism. With the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the progressive modernist movement of the late Ottoman era was co-opted and redefined into the Turkish nationalist agenda of the Republic. After 1923 women’s symbolic value in public was an example of the modern nation and a source of pride for its government. However, there was a paradox between a woman’s symbolic value and the physical display of that symbolism. In other words, an actress could be celebrated for her skill, beauty, and eroticism, which were essential to her profession, while simultaneously criticized for the display of these traits. Art and beauty could only be publicly displayed if the woman was also pure and chaste or the ideal wife and mother. In the late Ottoman period this paradox was being discussed and negotiated by intellectuals and women themselves, but when we consider these ideas in the context of the extreme nationalism of the Early Turkish Republic, this paradox becomes more explicit. Turkish women represented not only their professions but also the nation itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Selim İleri, “Hürriyet Gösteri,” *Hürriyet Gazetecilik Matbaacılık A.Ş.*, 1987, 31.

In this study, I propose to look at the pressures of intellectuals and the state on female actresses and how their artistic public display was seen by the society in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic (1914-1935). Moreover, this study will attempt to give agency to these actresses in their navigation of intellectuals, the State, and the public at large and examine how they understood this paradox and the pressures of state and society.

This will be done through an examination of the lives, times and careers of two Turkish actresses, the aforementioned Afife Jale, and Bedia Muvahhit. However, the purpose of this thesis is not to provide biographies of Afife and Bedia, but rather to use their lives and careers as a lens to discuss the time-period and struggles that workingwomen like them experienced. It would make for a simple analysis to say that Afife represented the experiences of an Ottoman actress during the years of the First World War, the subsequent occupation of Istanbul, and the Turkish War for Independence (1912-1922), and Bedia represented the experiences of the Early Turkish Republic (1923-1935), but this is not the case. Their careers cannot be reduced to the nationalist periodization. This is, in fact, fitting, as there was a great deal of continuity between these periods. However, there was a distinction between the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic, and on a more personal level, we will see the tragedy of Afife's life and career because of her activities in the Ottoman period and the success of Bedia's due to her work in the Republican period. Finally, while I will argue that both women serve as good representatives for the themes in this thesis, they should not be considered good representatives for Ottoman or Turkish women in general as both were born and raised in Istanbul to elite families. In fact, their elite status and chosen profession made their lives and experiences very unique for their times.

There is surprisingly little scholarship on the developments of Ottoman/Turkish theater from the Second Constitutional Period into the early Republic Period (1908-1935) What little scholarship exists is highly didactic and nationalistic. Moreover, writer of the period have strong criticism of folk theater, dismissing it and only focusing on elite theater<sup>2</sup>. Scholarship comparing folk and elite theater in the late Ottoman period is needed but beyond the scope of this study. However, the purpose of

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<sup>2</sup> Elite here means urban and intellectual, also modern and nationalistic.

this study is not even to provide a history of elite theater, but rather to examine the role of Turkish Muslim women in the theater as part of a larger discussion the public perception of the morality of female Turkish Muslim performers.

#### Note on Terminology

Writers of in the Second Constitutional Period into the early Republican Period (1908-1935) used the terms Ottoman, Turkish, and Muslim interchangeability. Vasfi Rıza Zobu went as far as to use the phrase '*İslam dinine mensup kadınlar*' (women actresses as members of the Islamic religion).<sup>3</sup> However, it is clear that what these writers mean was 'Turkish speaking Muslims.' Therefore, in this study, I will use the term 'Turkish' to describe Turkish-speaking Muslims, as it was the term the early republican nationalists used to describe Turkish-speaking Muslims.

Moreover, while many of these authors wrote about their experiences in Ottoman theater during the Young Turk period, when writing from the perspective of the 1930s or 1940s, modernist movement within Ottoman theater become Turkish, therefore Ottoman theater was often referred to as Turkish theater.

#### Primary Sources

The primary sources used in this research are mostly magazines and newspapers published in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic. Most of them were selected due to my search on theater and women in the Second Constitutional period and the early Republic.

This study includes numerous articles from magazines like *Temaşa* (published between 1918-1920), *Süs* (published between 1923-1924), *Resimli Ay* (published between 1924-1931) and *Darülbedayi* (published between 1930-1935, changed its name to *Türk Tiyatrosu* in 1935 and is still being published). All of these magazines were published in Istanbul and most of the authors were intellectuals of the time who used their publications to express their ideology about feminism and women in the theater. *Temaşa* magazine included important authors and figures in theater and literature such as Muhsin Ertuğrul (1892-1979), İ. Galip Arcan (1894-1974), Reşat Nuri Güntekin(1889-1956)<sup>4</sup>, and M. Kemal Küçük (1901-1936). Moreover, the

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<sup>3</sup> Vasfi Rıza Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne* (İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1977), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889-1956) was a novelist, storywriter, and playwright. He also worked as a teacher and administrator in high schools, and as an inspector at the Ministry of National Education in 1947. After his retirement he served at the literary board of the Istanbul Şehir Tiyatroları (Istanbul



magazine included news of newly established theaters and made comments on the issue of Muslim actresses through anonymous authors.

Some of the aforementioned intellectuals, like Muhsin Ertuğrul, who published *Darülbedayi*, will be discussed in detail shortly, but some authors remain anonymous to me. It is difficult to know how widely read these Ottoman era magazines were, but most seem to have been written by intelligentsia for the intelligentsia.

Later in the early years of Republic, magazines such as *Resimli Ay* and *Süs* reflected the Republican view of women and had interviews with and articles about actresses. I also used republican newspapers such as *Büyük Gazete*, *Tan*, *Akşam*, and *Vakit* which included various articles on the process of development of the Turkish State Theater and Conservatory between 1923 and the late 1930s. These publications were aimed at a wider audience than their Ottoman counterparts and were infused with state ‘propaganda.’ In other words, these newspapers and magazines were from the period of the construction of the Turkish nation, both politically and socially, and were highly nationalist. Therefore, while they celebrated the achievements of Turkish artists, they were quick to downplay and disparage Armenian and other ‘non-Turkish’ actresses and theater.<sup>5</sup>

*Büyük Gazete* started a series of interviews with first Muslim actresses of the Republic such as Bedia Muvahhit (1897-1994), Şaziye Moral (1903-1985), Necla Sertel (1902-1970)<sup>6</sup>, Münire Eyüp (Neyire Neyir, 1903-1943).<sup>7</sup> Apart from

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Municipal Theaters) He was known as one of the most productive writers in the Republican era. He narrated his impressions of the Anatolian people with his journals titled *Anadolu Notlarım* (Notes on Anatolia) of his visits to Anatolian cities and towns. He was best known with his novel *Çalıkuşu* (The Wren), a story of a young schoolteacher and her struggle to reform and elevate the countrymen during the War of Independence. Işık İhsan, “Güntekin, Reşat Nuri,” in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 499.

<sup>5</sup> *Resimli Ay*, February 1, 1924

<sup>6</sup> Necla Sertel (1902-1970) was a theater actress started her career in Ziya Theater Troup. Later she joined Muhsin Ertuğrul ve Arkadaşları Topluluğu (Muhsin Ertuğrul and His Friends Group) and then she continued her career in *Darülbedayi* in 1925 until she died in 1970. Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoğlu, “Sertel Necla,” in *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş., 1970), 253.

<sup>7</sup> Neyire Neyir (Münire Eyüp-Ertuğrul, 1903-1943) was a success story in Turkish cinema and theater. She graduated from the Teachers Academy for Girls in 1921 and in 1923; she joined *Darülbedayi* as a trainee. She got her first acting role on stage in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In the same year she was chosen to be one of the first Muslim Turkish women acting in a film of Halide Edip’s novel *Ateşten Gömlek* (Daughters of Smyrna) adapted by Muhsin Ertuğrul. In 1929, she married the actor, director and a filmmaker Muhsin Ertuğrul and continued acting in his films. She learned about Russian theatrical styles in 1920s. In 1930, Muhsin Ertuğrul started publishing a journal *Darülbedayi*, and Neyir became the editor and wrote articles under the name of Münire Eyüp. In 1941, together with Ertuğrul, she began publishing another journal entitled *Perde ve Sahne* (Screen and Stage). Eylem Atakav, “Bedia

introducing these actresses to the Turkish readers, articles were based on topic indicating the development of women's freedom compared to the Ottoman system prior to the Republic.

Although again we cannot draw a line between the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic, for example, a couple weeks before the Republic was declared, *Vakit* published a survey including various discussions about women's situation in public places and their career choice as actresses. I found the survey very important to observe public opinion on women's limitations and freedom while the Ottoman system was still effective in Istanbul.

Finally, while it is the goal of this study to give voice to the Turkish actresses who are the subject of this scholarship their voice is very faint in the sources. What we know about their lives, careers, and their wants, needs, and desires mostly come to us second hand. The scholarship and interviews of these actresses were done by men like Muhsin Ertuğrul or Refik Ahmet Sevengil. In other words, these women's voices come to us through the voices of male colleagues and journalists.

While there are a few interviews with both Afife and Bedia, their authenticity and reliability must be questioned. As will be discussed, interviews with Bedia promoted a symbolic representation of her rather than the woman herself. While it is likely that Afife's deathbed interview with Nusret Safa Coşkun (1915-1971)<sup>8</sup> (which will also be later discussed) was authentic, it was obviously not timely to her career. According to her half-sister, there were numerous letters written by Afife, but her family threw them out and she did not write a memoir. Likewise, Bedia did not write a memoir despite being asked to by her son.

“They told me to write down my memories. I started to write, but it's troublesome. It's hard to write with new letters. If I write in old letters, they will have to transcribe. It's easier to write in French. I want to record in a cassette but it's not happening. My son Sinâ also tells me to hurry up .”<sup>9</sup>

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Muvahhit and Neyyire Neyir,” in *Women Film Pioneers Project*, ed. Jane Gaines, accessed January 5, 2019, <https://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu/pioneer/bedia-muvahhit-and-neyyire-neyir/#citation>.

<sup>8</sup> Nusret Safa Coşkun (1915-1971) was an author, journalist and a politician. His works of articles was published in several newspapers and magazines between the years 1930 and 1950. He was also a politician and was a parliamentary deputy of Erzincan in 1957-60.

<sup>9</sup> Yener Süsoy, “Bedia Muvahhit ve Vasfi Rıza Zobu'yla Tatil Sohbeti,” *Milliyet Gazetesi*, March 15, 1987.

This quote, from 1987, which was recorded a few years before her death is symbolic. Bedia lived a long and full life but like Afife was never able to escape her Ottoman past.

Muhsin Ertuğrul was an important witness for many of the events described in this study. However, he was also an author and commentator on said events making his work an important secondary source as well. Ertuğrul was born in İstanbul February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1892. His father Hüsnü Bey was a foreign treasurer (*hariciye veznedarı*) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Due to his business, he was often in relations with intellectuals such as ambassadors, undersecretaries, and consuls from Europe. Ertuğrul's interest in the theater began at a young age when his father often took him to theater performances. He started acting in the Second Constitutional period as an actor in Burhaneddin Bey's (*Burhaneddin Tepsi, 1882-1947*)<sup>10</sup> company in 1910. However, his theatrical career started after his father's death, his family disapproved and he was forced to leave his family home and continued his career on his own.<sup>11</sup> Over the years he found both struggle and success in the theater world. He undertook many professions in the theater, such as teaching, directing, criticizing, acting and translating, often at the same time. He was both appreciated and highly criticized by his colleagues and went through cycles of dismissals and reacceptance within the theater. Whatever circumstances occurred during his career, he never lost faith in the importance of the theater and was key to the establishment of the Republican theater. Metin And called him “the father of the modern Turkish theater,” but also considered Ertuğrul to have been an autocratic of the Republican theater.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Ertuğrul was an authority on theater, but also authoritarian in the theater. His career on carried into early cinema as well, he established the Turkish cinema and pioneered a Muslim Turkish woman appearance on the silver screen for the first time.

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<sup>10</sup> Burhaneddin (Tepsi, 1882-1947) was an actor, director and a theater owner. He was educated in France and after the Second Constitution (1908) he returned to İstanbul to continue his theater career. He joined Sahne-i Milliye-i Osmani (Ottoman National Theater) and established Yeni Tiyatro Kumpanyası (New Theater Company) and Burhanettin Bey Kumpanyası (Burhanettin Bey Company). He taught and helped actors such as Muhsin Ertuğrul, Vasfi Rıza Zobu in their careers, and worked with Afife Jale in Anatolian tours after her dismissal from Darülbedayi. Burhanettin Tepsi, “Perde ve Sahne,” *Cumhuriyet Matbaası*, August 1941, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Muhsin Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın* (İstanbul: Dr Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı Vakfı Yayınları, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Metin And, *A History Of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey* (Ankara: Forum Yayınları, 1963).

As a writer, Muhsin Ertuğrul shared his comments, criticism, and opinions with the public through his writing in magazines like *Temaşa*, *Darülbedayi* which he managed publishing with his wife Münire Eyüp, and in *Perde ve Sahne*. All these publications were used in this study. Moreover, Ertuğrul left long journals about his theater career that he planned to publish in six volumes. After his death, a committee of scholars comprised of Murat Tuncay, Efdal Sevinçli and Özdemir Nutku edited his writings. Özdemir Nutku had a leading role in publishing these writings under the name *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın* (Hope There Will Be No Deluge After Me), a work which is often referenced in this study. Muhsin Ertuğrul died of a heart attack shortly after he was given an Honorary Doctorate by Ege University on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1979 in recognition for his contribution to the Turkish Theater and Cinema. He was buried next to his first wife Münire Eyüp (Neyire Neyir) in Zincirlikuyu Cemetery. His name was honored in three-theater buildings, İstanbul Harbiye Muhsin Ertuğrul Theater, Bahçeşehir Muhsin Ertuğrul Theater and the Muhsin Ertuğrul stage in Ankara.

Muhsin Ertuğrul is an important but complicated source. He was an active participant and critical eyewitness to the persons and events of this thesis. For many of the critical events in the history of modern Turkish theater, he is among the few eyewitnesses who left us a written account. Moreover, he is a valuable source because his accounts were written at the time rather than in hindsight. Furthermore, as an intellectual, he debated and helped to construct the very paradigms of modern Turkish theater. He played a critical role in promoting Turkish women on stage and providing an intellectual and moral nationalist framework for their presence on their stage. However, as previously discussed he self-consciously saw himself as an authority both intellectually and professionally in the theater, and there is no doubt that his writings shared this bias. With this in mind, while his writings are valuable because they were written as an eyewitness in the heat of the moment, they are also colored by his personal and professional rivalries and conflicts with other intellectuals and theater professionals. In conclusion, where possible this study endeavors to use sources and perspectives which differ from Muhsin Ertuğrul, but in the end, it is often difficult to escape the shadow he casts on the history of modern Turkish theater.

Vasfi Rıza Zobu's memoir *O gündenden Bu Güne* has been another important source for this study. He was born on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1902 and started his career as an actor by attending Darülbedayi in 1917. He continued his career as an actor, director, and

administrator in the same institution until he retired in 1984. After 1923, he began to write down his thoughts about theater and published several interviews and biographies of his colleagues in newspapers and magazines such as ‘*Perde ve Sahne*’ (Screen and Stage), ‘*Darülbedayi*’, and in 1977 he published his memoir. He was also a lifetime friend with Bedia Muvahhit.<sup>13</sup> Zobu was honored with the title of State Artist by the government in 1987. He died in İstanbul at age 90 in 1992.

As an eyewitness, his account read like an oral history of the time. He, in fact, stated that his work was not to be considered history, but rather as a memoir. As a memoir, it undoubtedly suffers from his personal perspective and bias. However, the bigger issue I found with his work is that a lot of it was written decades after the events described. With this in mind, it is difficult to use his memoir to give a voice to actresses like Afife and Bedia who did not write their own versions of events.

Finally, I have tried to gain other perspectives and verify the account given by the above sources through research in the Ottoman National Archives (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*) in Istanbul. Nevertheless, while I have uncovered a number of interesting documents related to Ottoman theater, it was difficult to find documents directly related to the central events discussed in this study. However, I have found at least one key document related to police raids that helped to end Afife's career in *Darülbedayi*.<sup>14</sup> I will discuss this in more detail later, but it is important because it provides documentation for events that have been told in so many different ways that I feared they might be apocryphal.

### Secondary Sources

A great deal of what we know about and many of the writings of Muhsin Ertuğrul come to us thanks to Özdemir Nutku who edited his writings and journals. Nutku is one of the most important Turkish theater authors, having translated numerous works of Shakespeare into Turkish, as well as a famous director, critic, and teacher of the Turkish theater. He wrote numerous articles, theater dictionaries and the histories of the world theater. In 1976, he established the Department of Performing Arts (*Sahne Sanatları Bölümü*) in the Faculty of Fine arts at Ege University in İzmir, and he

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<sup>13</sup> Süsoy, “Bedia Muvahhit ve Vasfî Rıza Zobu’yla Tatil Sohbeti.”

<sup>14</sup> BOA. DH.KMS / 59-38-0 date: H 19-01-1339 / October 3 1920

worked as a chairman of the Department and The Stage in Faculty of Fine Arts at Dokuz Eylül University for a long time.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to his work as an editor of Ertuğrul's writings, I found two of his work on Turkish theater history particularly useful.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, with his interview of Afife's sister Behiye Hanım, Nutku remains the only author that wrote about Afife Jale among people who actually knew her. However, despite the value of his works, his love for the theater and nationalist perspectives leave his work lacking critical analysis. I am confident that I can rely on the facts and figures that he provides as well as the depth and breadth of his histories, especially his history of Darübedayi, but his work is more didactic than analytical.

In the analysis of the history of Ottoman and Republican theater, the pioneers of my research were mainly Refik Ahmet Sevengil (1903-1970)<sup>17</sup> and Metin And(1927-2008)<sup>18</sup>. They both left volumes of books on Ottoman and Republican history, which dealt with performances and entertainments in both traditional Ottoman entertainments and later in the modern process of theater through the Republican period.

As a journalist, Sevengil published five series of books which related to the traditional Ottoman entertainments and festivities and later the process of introducing modern theater towards the Republic. The books were publications of Istanbul Conservatoire,

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<sup>15</sup> Işık İhsan, "Nutku, Özdemir," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darübedayi'nin Elli Yılı (Darübedayi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Yayınları, 1969); Özdemir Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu* (ONK Ajans Ltd Şti/Özgür Yayınları, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil (1903-1970) worked as a teacher in foreign schools and was a member of the Literary Committee at Darübedayi later named as İstanbul City Theaters (1927-1928), and he was a member of the City Council in 1938. He was elected parliamentary deputy for Tokat in 1943, and worked as the Director General of Press and Publishing. He was also a member of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation Management Board (1964-68). He was well known for his research on theater history. He also produced literary talk shows on radio. Işık İhsan, "Sevengil, Refik Ahmet," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 923.

<sup>18</sup> Metin And (1927-2008) was a researcher and writer graduated from İstanbul University, Faculty of Law (1950), and from King's College at London University. Accepted as an authority on the Turkish Theater, Metin And received the Turkish Language Association Science Award in 1970 with his book *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu* (The Traditional Turkish Theater). He conducted researches in the United States and Europe on stage arts, on the scholarship provided by the Rockefeller Foundation (1956-57). Following year, he worked as a lecturer at Ankara University, Faculty of Language, History and Geography; Ege University, Faculty of Fine Arts (1976-77); at Ankara University, School of Press and Publication (for ten years), and at the universities of New York (1984), Tokyo (1986), and Justs Liebig-Giessen (1987) Işık İhsan, "And, Metin," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 106,107.

however, they were never translated which would give a chance to discuss its content with international specialist working on the branches of performing arts.<sup>19</sup> The first volume of his book included ways of entertainments through festivals and performances in the early Ottoman period, which was out of the scope of this research. The second was about opera and operetta, which Ottomans newly introduced. The third volume focused on the Theater of the Tanzimat Period, which Sevengil described as the introduction of the European style theater that served an important part of this research to focus on the background of the theater institution and the community. Here, Sevengil introduces major authors of the nineteenth century such as İbrahim Şinasi(1826-1871)<sup>20</sup>, Namık Kemal(1840-1888)<sup>21</sup>, Ahmed Vefik Paşa (1823-1891)<sup>22</sup>, and Ziya Paşa(1829-1880)<sup>23</sup> with their plays, which influenced the beginning, and the development of European style Ottoman theater. Moreover, Sevengil examined the establishments of Ottoman theater and influence of the first plays written in Ottoman Turkish, as well as the establishment of Gedikpaşa and Naum theaters that were established by Armenians. There is also important

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<sup>19</sup> Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, 2014, 46.

<sup>20</sup> (İbrahim) Şinasi (1826-1871) was a poet and writer who was known to be one of the founders of Tanzimat Literature. He was also known as one of the pioneers of introducing Western Literature to Ottoman readers by translating poetry from French. Moreover, Şinasi was known as the author of the first Ottoman Turkish theater play, and he published the first Ottoman Turkish newspaper with Ağâh Efendi (1832-1885). Işık İhsan, "Şinasi," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 973.

<sup>21</sup> Namık Kemal (1840-1888) as an author of the famous play Vatan Yahut Silistre (Motherland or Silistra), he is considered as one of the most important figures of the Tanzimat (Reform) period. In his works and newspaper articles he asserted a constitutional government based on Islamic law, the equality of the individual within the law, the dominance of law and benefiting from Western science and technique without breaking from Turkish culture. He remained faithful to Divan poetry in his poems with a powerful voice. In his poetry, anecdotes, articles, play and letters, he gave precedence to the problems of society. Işık İhsan, "Kemal Namık," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 773.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmet Vefik Paşa (1823-1891) was a statesman and writer. He worked as a secretary at the embassy in London (1840), and later as the ambassador to Tehran and France. He was the grand vizier in the period of Sadrazam Mahmut Nedim Paşa (1878). His theater works are based on translations and adaptations. He is also famous for his studies on language and history. Some of his works were including, Salnâme (Almanac, 1846-47, 1848-49), his adaptations Zoraki Tabib (Unwilling Doctor, 1869), Dekbazlık (Fakery). Işık İhsan, "Ahmet Vefik Paşa," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 30.

<sup>23</sup> Ziya Paşa (1829-1880) was a poet, translator and politician in 19th century Ottoman Empire. He was devoted to the old poetry such as Divan even though he supported renovation in poetry. He defended that spoken language had to be written language and to utilize folk poetry. His anthology of Harabat (Ruins), which is collections of Divan poetry, was criticized by Namık Kemal. Işık İhsan, "Ziya Paşa," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 1146.

information on the combination of old and new style performances, which was created under the name of *Tulûat* Theater. Sevengil also indicates the discussion of Hamidian period and its effect on literature and the theater world of the Empire. Due to the overall perspective and his use of primary sources, this volume was mostly referenced in this research. The fourth book focuses on the theater in the Ottoman Palace underlining the effects of Sultans Abdülaziz, Abdülmecid and Abdülhamid II on Ottoman music and the stage. The last volume deals with the period, which Sevengil titled as the theater in the Constitutional Period between 1908 and 1923. Sevengil focuses on the censorship, which temporarily disappeared, the actors and directors and playwrights, which served to the era politically rather than artistically. This volume was highly necessary for this research as it contained many sources including writings and publications of the time, eyewitnesses, interviews and personal letters between him and the actors and playwrights. Another focus on the book that helped during the research was the appearance of the nationalistic view and concern on the Turkish language and pronunciation of the majorly Armenian actresses that created the discussion of the demand of Muslim actresses in the Ottoman theater, that is the main focus on this research.

As Suraiya Faroqhi points out, Sevengil mainly divided his volumes according to political periods rather than artistic. It was nevertheless the necessity to make this division as the theater in the Ottoman era, which Sevengil focused on, changed and developed around political events. First, the theater was a useful tool to impose the ideals in the military, politically, administratively reforming period of Tanzimat. As an artistic genre, the theater was reformed through the idea of westernization policy in Tanzimat. Then the policy of censorship around Abdulhamit II period made it almost impossible to develop originally written plays in Turkish, therefore, it was an aftermath of the political effect on the theater. Then, in the reinstatement of the constitution in 1908 allowed playwrights and actors to make a new beginning in the development of the theater, and the institution and the literature were transformed and developed through administrative influence until the Republic. These events made a definite change in the theater that Sevengil made a choice to categorize the periods politically.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Faroqhi and Öztürkmen, *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, 48.



It should be considered that Sevengil was a product the extreme nationalism of the early Turkish Republic and his books are infused with this nationalist spirit, which is apparent in his comments on the events noted in his books. The most apparent example was from another book of his about the entertainment lifestyle of Istanbul, which was published earlier in 1927.<sup>25</sup> Here Sevengil wrote in a critical manner of the Ottoman entertainments while making periodical comparisons. Nevertheless, in his series of books in theater history, Sevengil appreciated the influence and leading role of Armenian directors like Mardiros Mınakian, Naum and Hagop Vartovian. He emphasized their important role in the education of the Turkish actors and the process of staging Turkish plays.

Another leading reference of this research was the series of books in Turkish history by Metin And. Besides the pioneering role of Sevengil on the history of Turkish theater, Metin And's work on Turkish theater and performing arts has a major role in theater studies. In this study, his series of publications on the History of Turkish Theater, Turkish Theater in the period of *Tanzimat* and Autocracy (*Tanzimat and İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*), History of Republican Theater (*Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Tiyatrosu*) and a History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey were mainly used as a reference. After first a degree in law, Metin And continued his career as a theater critic and worked as a professor of Theater department in Ankara University. Due to his personal interest and his Ph.D. thesis on the subject, And wrote a great detail on *Tanzimat* and *Meşrutiyet* Theater<sup>26</sup> in his books with a collection of materials and list of information on the theaters including unsuccessful ones. His book on *Tanzimat* contained discussions of the different factors in the period and in comparison to Sevengil's book, Metin And's information on the *Tulûat* Theater is more detailed and narrated in a more artistic view rather than a political. And's description of the *Tulûat* theater and the traditional performing arts such as *Karagöz* and *Ortaoyunu* was overall discussed in the sociological and cultural perspective that helped to understand the public influence in the development of the modern theater.

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<sup>25</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil and Sami Önal, *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu?: (1453'ten 1927'ye Kadar)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> Although the *tanzimat* (reform) period is most commonly dated 1839 to 1876 and the *meşrutiyet* (constitutional) period between 1908 and 1913, And periodizes 1839-1908 as *tanzimat* theater and 1908-1923 as *meşrutiyet* theater.

In conclusion, while Sevensil and And generally covered the same topics and periods, I would argue that the key difference between them was their focus, the former focused more on the history and politics and the latter on art and culture.

However, regardless of their differences, Metin And and Refik Ahmet Sevensil are key to the historiography of late Ottoman and the Early Republican theater. Moreover, Nalan Turna makes a point that while both were influenced by nationalist historiography, and treated late Ottoman theater through a Turkish nationalist perspective, they were also ahead of their time in seeing the Ottoman roots of Republican theater. Writing in the 60s and the 70s, they were decades ahead of political historians who established the continuity between the Ottoman political movements and the Turkish Republic.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Nalan Turna, “The Ottoman Stage: Politicization and Commercialization of Theaters, 1876-1922,” in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theater in the Ottoman World* (India: Seagull Books, 2014), 319–43.

## **Daughters of the Stage Part 1: Changing expectations for Turkish Women**

Afife and Bedia were both elite Istanbul Ottoman women who experienced a radical transformation in the way state and society imaged the role of women. And it was in the Ottoman Empire of the Second Constitutional period (1908-1913) and First World War (1914-1918) in which these changes became most radical and where this study should start. However, it is easiest to see the intellectual debate and pressures on women in the early Republican period. This is because the policies of the Turkish Republic were very much rooted in the policies of the late Ottoman Empire. Just as Afife and Bedia were Ottoman women who became Turkish women, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his government were products of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* and the Second Constitutional period. Therefore, we can't discuss theater in the early Republican period (1923-1935<sup>28</sup>) without discussing theater in the late Ottoman era. Moreover, while this is a general survey about some of the forces, which impacted Turkish women, a more detailed discussion of the development of Ottoman/Turkish Theater and in relationship to Turkish actresses will follow after this section.

Between 1908 and 1923 Istanbul saw a revolution which overthrew the Sultan Abdulhamid II (r.1876-1908) and established a constitution, the collapse of the constitutional government and the rule by the Young Turks (1912-1914), the First World War (1914-1918), the occupation of Istanbul by the French and British (1918-1923), and finally the victory of the Turkish Nationalist in Anatolia, the end of the Ottoman Empire and the declaration of a new Republic in 1923. The country saw a mass transition after years of war, occupation, and revolution. This process of change came along with social, economic, political, juridical transformation and later a change of the alphabet and educational system. Through this society was transformed under modernization. This brought new values to individuals in the country. The position of women was visibly changed as a result of rights they were given with the new system. With the new Republic, women gained a series of benefits on the road to modernizing the country. They were freed from inequality and prohibitions from

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<sup>28</sup> This periodization is arbitrary, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and the first president of the Republic died in 1938, however, theater in the Republic was monopolized by the state in 1935, therefore I am periodizing the early Republican theater between the years 1923 -1935.

Islamic legal code, had equal benefits in with the change of civil code in 1926, they were equalized to men as citizens, they could have a chance to get an education, later in 1934, they gained suffrage, and eventually, they could have an active role in society. However, this freedom was like freedom on paper. Women were supposed to serve for the interest of the state and were expected to express their freedom in certain ways.

In other words, feminism was a part of a modernist agenda, the goal was to educate and liberate women so that they could be better wives and mother for the sons and husbands of the nation.

According to Ayşe Durakbaşa, early feminism in Turkey shared a great deal with social feminism in Western societies of the nineteenth century. Kemalists (the former Ottoman modernists and nationalists) fought for the “new woman” who would no longer be defined by their traditional roles of being mothers and wives but defined by their public role in society. Their professional skills would be publicly valued in addition to their role as a wife and mother.<sup>29</sup> However, Zehra Arat, who interviewed women who went through the formational educational system of the 1920s and 1930s, argues that the primary function of educating women during this period was to create educated, modernized, and enlightened women who put their home and children first.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, studies of “girls’ institutes.” have shown that these institutes main purpose was raising good mothers and wives to be totally absorbed into the new character of the nation.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the curriculum for these women was “feminized as a rational strategy to raise competent mothers and modern housewives.” Women were not enlightened, modernized and educated for their own sakes, they were meant to be servants of the new republic, wives and mothers to the new nation. In other words, the results of the Kemalist reforms were that Turkish women were “emancipated but not liberated.”<sup>32</sup>

Modern women were social women who were highly educated in both culture and industry. However, their biological need and as well as their duty as women was to

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<sup>29</sup> Ayşe Durakbaşa, “Kemalism as an Identity Politics in Turkey,” in *Deconstructing Images of “The Turkish Women,”* ed. Zehra Arat (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 143.

<sup>30</sup> Zehra Arat, “Educating the Daughters of the Republic,” in *Deconstructing Images of “The Turkish Women,”* ed. Zehra Arat (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 175.

<sup>31</sup> Elif Ekin Akşit, “Girls’ Institutes and Public and Private Spheres in Turkey,” in *A Social History Of Late Ottoman Women,* ed. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden ; Boston: BRILL, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Arat, “Educating the Daughters of the Republic.”

bear children. Therefore, state and society ask them to be educated in both a public and private role. As this movement was largely driven by the needs of state and society the best term to describe it is state-feminism. Women were free to serve the needs of the nation, this freedom was given and therefore the state was the promisor of their freedom.

State feminism considered men and women equal, and in such an ideal system women should participate in social and professional life. However, in reality, the women who participated “fully” in social and professional life were, in fact, symbolic representatives of the new modern state. They were presented to both the Turkish nation and the wider international community as proof of a modern and egalitarian Turkish state. Therefore, women of different professions were chosen as symbols of their freedom and progress.<sup>33</sup> As we will discuss, Bedia Muvahhit’s life and career was a perfect example of this, a celebrated actress who served as both a literal and figurative ambassador for Turkish women. Bedia was well aware of this and knew both her accomplishments and her beauty and style were critical to this role.

Durakbaşı also argued that female beauty and health were also considered important to the “new women.” The image of “new women” should be well representatives of the nation. Therefore, the importance of health and sport was emphasized in school.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, we can see examples of books to encourage women to do sports. One of the examples was examined in Arzu Öztürkmen’s book called *Rakstan Oyuna*. The book that she indicated in her study was a physical education guidebook called “*Kadında Terbiye-i Bedeniye*” (*Physical training for a Woman’s Body*) published by Mehmet Fetgeri Şoenu (1890-1931) and *muallim* (teacher) Mehmet Sami (1886-1930)<sup>35</sup> who was thought to be Ali Sami Yen (1886-1951) founder of *Türkiye İdman Cemiyetleri Vakfı* in 1923 and Galatasaray Sports Club. Mehmet Fetgeri’s book was also important to the healthy living style and physical appearance for women with

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<sup>33</sup> Durakbaşı, “Kemalism as an Identity Politics in Turkey,” 144.

<sup>34</sup> Durakbaşı, 145.

<sup>35</sup> Muallim (Teacher) Mehmet Sami (1886-1939) was also known as Turhan Tan. He worked as a literature teacher for some time that gave him the title Muallim (Teacher). He also worked as a district chief official and a sub-district governor. He was also a parliamentary deputy for some time. He was a columnist in Cumhuriyet newspaper, and wrote many articles in Hayat Ansiklopedisi (Hayat Encyclopedia) with signature M.S His poems were under the influence of “New Literature Movement”. Işık İhsan, “Tan Turhan,” in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 1038.

exercises they could easily practice even in their homes. It is interesting to see how Mehmet Fetgeri stated that the “combination of exercise resulting a healthy body, a healthy body to a healthy fertility, a healthy fertility to a healthy generation, and a healthy generation to a prosperous nation.” According to Öztürkmen, the exercise book was also a good indicator to see the stereotypical opinions of men for how women should look.<sup>36</sup>

Another example to the consideration of the image of “new woman” could be given for later in the 1930s. Turkey participated in the international beauty contest for the first time. Keriman Halis was chosen a representative and given the last name “Ece” by Atatürk meaning queen in authentic Turkish.<sup>37</sup> Later in 1932, she became the queen of the Miss World beauty contest. Here is what newspaper *Cumhuriyet* commented about Keriman Halis success event:

“Turkish women have been exalted to the status of equality with their sisters in the liberated countries of the whole world. Being beautiful is not disgraceful; beauty is something that the entire world bends before with respect and admiration . . . In the civilized world, we know that great attempts are being made to shape the bodies of children, especially girls, according to certain physical diets. Gradually beauty is becoming twins with health.”<sup>38</sup>

The image of Turkish women were not also transforming their role in society or in professions, it was also transforming in their physical image as mentioned above. Moreover, they are pioneers of modern Republican ladies by reshaping their physical appearance. Now, even “in night events or balls, they were attending in their modern gowns and holding the arm of their cavalier.” Yet again, the female image was a combination of conflicting images. An educated woman who would be social and would take part in public life was also expected to be responsible reproductive mother and wife at home. Moreover, as they were expected to look beautiful and dressed up and be a healthy looking citizen. On the contrary, they were expected to be dressed up manly, as in manly suits or uniforms to look modest and formal in men’s world. In

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<sup>36</sup> Arzu Öztürkmen, *Rakstan Oyuna Türkiye’de Dansın Modern Halleri* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Durakbaşa, “Kemalism as an Identity Politics in Turkey.”

<sup>38</sup> (Cumhuriyet (Newspaper) 13 Kanun-i Sani 1930) “Güzellik Ayıp Birşey Değildir” (beauty is not a disgraceful thing), Quoted in Durakbaşa.

other words, “They adapted a new form of ‘femininity’ and acquired the skills to ‘veil’ their sexuality in their relationships in the male world of public affairs.”<sup>39</sup>

Kemalist feminism was, in fact, collective feminism, so it required modernity and supplied emancipation. On the other hand, it required defense of individual morality under Islamic social standards. Moreover, women themselves were left alone to protect their morals in men’s world.

According to Nazan Maksudyan, feminist historians of the Republican era have argued that despite all the given laws and rights in terms of social status, education, and power, women were still expected to be modest, serving at home for their husbands and their children to form a modern nation. In addition, they were given a chance to be well-educated and empowered citizens with the fact that they were still supposed to be mothers and wives to create a modern future. This, as Maksudyan argues, created a paradox in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century of Turkish women as we saw a large number of suicides happened around the 1920s to 1930s. Suicide was the only form of true freedom for some women in the earlier Republican period.<sup>40</sup>

However, the idea of state feminism and putting women in an equal social position, or society with men was also criticized by writers of the time and even women in public status. While pioneering women were showing their duty as good examples of the project of the emancipation of women and state feminism, some other women who were ordinary housewives took advantage of the freedom and they could end up putting themselves in inappropriate situations in men’s territory. These women ended up being both critics and criticized. An educated and professional woman was highly prized over the traditional housewife. However, the domestic duties of women were also given a new character. Mothers would be modern mothers who were educated also in home economics and child-care.

In her article, Fatma Türe analyzes the changes in women’s behavior and illustrated the morality through the transformation to a nationwide modernization. Türe argues that as during the French and British occupation after World War I women were welcomed into new lifestyles. They were given the opportunity to become freer in

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<sup>39</sup> Durakbaşı.

<sup>40</sup> Nazan Maksudyan, “Control over Life, Control over Body: Female Suicide in Early Republican Turkey,” *Women’s History Review* 24, no. 6 (November 2, 2015): 861–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2014.994858>.

public. However, this turned out to be a debate in the media to remind social responsibilities, behavior, and their relation with men. Despite the debate, popular press was introducing the new apparels, fashion, and hair and make-up styles as women of Istanbul were in demand for it. On the other hand, there was a major belief that it was the women who degenerate social behavior and orders. Republican era was taking responsibility towards change and transformation through modernization, and the women were carefully observed not to misunderstand the term “change”. Modernization should not be only accepted as no more than adopting western entertainment and pleasure. Being modern in the eyes of the Republican elite was not just about western apparel, change of physical appearance; it was more about mental change. In one hand, they were against the traditional roles of women so it means that women should work, be educated and dress liberally and be more visible in public; on the other, they must be a good mother who raised well-behaved children for the future of the nation. They must support their husbands but should suppress their sexuality in public and be devoted to republican reforms. These were considered of the “contemporary” women.<sup>41</sup>

On the contrary, women who followed the style of modern physical appearance looked sexual, took advantage of the freedom given without serving the nation were considered “parasites”. Here, it should be noticed that women who dressed modern were not always considered in a negative light. One was required to both dress and act modern.

Türe points out that in the erotic popular literature of the 1920s distinguished the rights and wrongs in modern life of women and their relationships with men. In her article, magazines consisted of erotic stories in the 1920s were categorized into two topics as didactic stories and humorous ones. The main topic included in both categories was about the changing values of society. In didactic stories there were always lessons to learn about as results of right or wrong by carrying tragic messages; while humorous stories had pedagogic style but they were serving for entertaining the reader. The female main characters of the stories were displaying all the features that were against the discourse of Islam and nationalism. They were fully aware of their

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<sup>41</sup> Fatma Türe, “The New Woman in Erotic Popular Literature of 1920s Istanbul,” in *A Social History Of Late Ottoman Women*, ed. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden ; Boston: BRILL, 2013).



sexuality and were ready to use it even though the social manners would be disapproval and upset about it. Immoral women types were displayed in the atmosphere of the environment where women sexuality was obvious. The aftermath of the situation was displayed in the didactic stories ending with mostly suicide, while the humorous stories were ending in a similar result but in a more humorous way of comedy. Especially after 1924, these women according to Türe were seen as more degenerated and destructive, “and they have become the embodiment of late Ottoman and Early Republican Turkish societies’ contradictory feelings about modernization.”<sup>42</sup>

National clothing and women’s physical appearance were also under discussion of women writers in magazines of the period. Ottoman state had long regulated women’s dress and clothing prior to Tanzimat, the state had guidelines about fabric types and how tight the *ferace* (women’s coat) could be. These regulations were often in reactions to the concerns of the *ulema*. By the Tanzimat and the Young Turk period, the *ferace* was no longer in favor, and now state society and women were debating the proper use of *peçe* (veil) and *çarşaf*. Some women’s groups along with male intellectuals argued against the use of *peçe* as impractical for a modern working woman. The debate over the *peçe* intensified after World War I as many more women entered the workforce. Moreover, women started wearing other styles of clothes such as overcoats instead of *çarşaf*, this debate continued until the establishment of the Republic when *peçe* and *çarşaf* were banned. The new Republic aimed women’s participation in public life as asexualized public subjects.<sup>43</sup> The following example indicates that, in the Republic, the image of women’s clothing was shaped by male-centric ideology. In 1925, Mustafa Kemal gave a speech at İnebolu Turkish Hearth (*Türk Ocağı*) about women’s clothing.<sup>44</sup> He emphasized that men needed to responsibility equip women with national morality and understanding, and to fill their minds with divine light and clarity and if so women could be trusted to be both practical and pure.

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<sup>42</sup> Türe.

<sup>43</sup> Sevgi Adak, “Women in the Post-Ottoman Public Sphere: Anti Veiling Campaigns Anf the Gendered Reshaping of Urban Space in Early Republican Turkey,” in *Women and The City, Women in The City: Agendered Perspective on Ottoman Urban History* (Berghahn Books, 2014), 36–71.

<sup>44</sup> “Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri-Şapka, Giyim Üzerine Konuşma,” in *Yakın Tarihimiz*, vol. 4, 4 vols. (İstanbul: Vatan gazetecilik ve Matbaacılık T.A.Ş, 1962), 29–30.

Writers like Halide Nusret looked at the new style clothing as a decline in moral values and erosion social unity. She warned the public in “*Genç Kadın*” magazine, published in 1919, that “...throwing away the *çarşaf*” was like running towards a cliff with closed eyes. On the contrary, another woman writer like Zehra Hakkı defended new modernized clothing, and women entered the public should be modernized in clothes along with their ideas. Wearing ‘*çarşaf*’ was nothing to do with Turkish nationality. However, there should be limitations to change in clothing. Muslim Turkish women were supposed to create their own national fashion because copying a total European style would not suit Turkish women. Even for the current styles like ‘*çarşaf*’, ‘*veil*’, and ‘*yaşmak*’ were all not related to Turkish but were taken from other civilizations, which are not even related to the west. Muslim Turkish women had the potential of adopting western styles in their own nation.<sup>45</sup>

There is an interesting study by Francis Georgeon about the representation of women through cartoons in the satirical press of the period. Georgeon indicates attention to find an answer for people asked and thought about the emancipation of women especially after all the transformation they had been through. At the time there was abundant material to use for satirical press such as women’s new fashion in clothing, the segregation of the sexes, behavior, romance, marriage and their place of the public life and also the equality between men and women. They mostly reflect their answer by representing a character that is not yet experienced the change of the status of the women. These characters mostly represented by an Anatolian peasant or a traveler coming from a small town, or even an immigrant from Balkans.

An example of this can be found in a cartoon published in *Karagöz*<sup>46</sup> a young lady dressed in the latest fashion with short skirt and shoes walks by two characters Karagöz and an Anatolian peasant. The peasant asks his friend, “My dear Karagöz, is that lady Greek, Russian, Turkish or Jewish?” Karagöz replies: “Nothing of the kind my friend; she is an Istanbulite!”<sup>47</sup> Cartoons of the period were also reflecting the rapid transformation of women appeared much more often and visible in public spaces. However, by the 1920s Georgeon found that cartoonists now reflected the

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<sup>45</sup> Elif İkbal Mahir Metinsoy, “The Limits of Feminism in Muslim-Turkish Women Writers of the Armistice Period (1918-1923),” in *A Social History Of Late Ottoman Women*, ed. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden ; Boston: BRILL, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> *Karagöz* (No 1702) July 1924

<sup>47</sup> This cartoon must be understood in the context that various ethno-religious communities in the Ottoman Empire could traditionally be identified by what they wore.

equality of women in society with cartoons of women filling a traditionally male role, or men doing “women’s work.” Moreover, the women in the satirical press were not Levantine, Greek, Jewish or Armenian, they were Turkish Muslim women. The so-called public view observed and criticized all these women for any kind of emancipation they gained.<sup>48</sup>

#### Women in Public

During the Late Ottoman period, many women contributed to their household income by doing work that perceived by society as a "woman's work" such as *bohçacı* (woman who sells women’s garments) cookery, wet nurse, nanny, nurse, midwife, servant.<sup>49</sup> However, some elite Ottoman women, who did not need to work, saw the opportunity to work as a path to economic freedom. Their efforts to apply to a newly opened telephone company constitute a good example of this.

The feminist women of the period gathered under the magazine '*Kadınlar Dünyası*' (Women's World) and published news and articles related to women’s situation, movements between the years 1913 and 1921, and in 1913, a new job advertisement in the *Kadınlar Dünyası* magazine was published. A French-British associated company, The Istanbul Telephone Company, (*Dersaadet Telefon Anonim Şirket-i Osmâniyesi*) which was established in 1911 was in search to recruit Ottoman women to work in the central office. At first, with the encouragement of the magazine, four women applied for the company.<sup>50</sup> However, these women were rejected as they were put in condition to be able to speak French and Greek.

The recruitment of Ottoman Muslim women was quite challenging and the stipulation of the company for Ottoman women to speak French and Greek created a long discussion.

In his book, Karakışla examined this discussion in two main sections; the first one as the struggle amongst women who only spoke one language and the discrimination created between Muslim and non-Muslim women.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, this discrimination also created inequality among the Muslim Ottoman ladies in the labor market. We

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<sup>48</sup> François Georgeon, “Women’s Representations in Ottoman Cartoons and the Satirical Press on the Eve of the Kemalist Reforms (1919-1924),” in *A Social History Of Late Ottoman Women*, ed. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden ; Boston: BRILL, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı Kadın Telefon Memureleri (1913-1923)* (İstanbul: Akıl Fikir Yayınları, 2014), 11.

<sup>50</sup> Karakışla, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Karakışla, 36.

could observe from Karakışla's book that the *Kadınlar Dünyası* magazine thoroughly reviewed this issue.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the paradox was that the Muslim Ottoman elite women dominated these two languages, but they did not need much to work, so they were much hesitant rather than considering their financial independence. On the other hand, the Ottoman women with lower socioeconomic standards were the ones who needed the work but they would not be able to do this job because of the language barrier as their education was insufficient and they could only speak Ottoman Turkish. Moreover, although Karakışla emphasized that the language issue was not explicitly stated in the official documents of the company, according to the *Kadınlar Dünyası*, a company that earned money from the Ottoman state should do the business in the Ottoman language, which is the language of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>53</sup> In this case, the company's terms of conditions were discussed as a problem in every respect, and the language problem was turned into both feminist and a nationalist struggle.

It is interesting to see that the feminist writers of *Kadınlar Dünyası* emphasized the language requirements of a company as a serious form of discrimination.

However, the early twentieth century Ottoman Istanbul population was very cosmopolitan. According to Karakışla, a majority of the population of Istanbul spoke Ottoman, French, and Greek, and that the population that would use the telephone would be from the elite who were fluent in these languages. It is therefore quite natural to have the need to speak to these languages. Interestingly, the language problem in the recruitment process had created a similar argument, which I discussed later as to be one of the most important reasons for the recruitment of Muslim women to the theater.

After all these arguments and struggle, the company recruited seven Ottoman women as telephone operators, and Bedia Muvahhid (at the time she was Bedia Şekip) was among the recruited ladies. Much later in the 1980s, in one of her interviews, she made a brief comment on the multi-language requirement of the company. In her view, the reason was very simple: "The telephone operation language was French, not Turkish. So, the company looked for girls who could speak French".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Karakışla, 80.

<sup>53</sup> Karakışla, 89.

<sup>54</sup> Süsoy, "Bedia Muvahhit ve Vasfi Rıza Zobu'yla Tatil Sohbeti."

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women had limited access to public places of entertainment, such as bars or theatre. In neither the late Ottoman nor earlier Republican period was the entertainment industry seen as a proper or good place for a woman. It was the domain of non-Muslims. When so modern women entered into the entertainment industry it created a great deal of controversy.

Murat Can Kabagöz argues that modernization was a reaction to change and this can be seen in the entertainment industry. The process of modernization could be seen when a woman left the home and went into the public. However, in the same environment, the old and new co-exists at the same time. So the traditional woman and the new woman walked on the same streets and occupied the same spaces. Modernization was not the destruction of the old by the new, but the reaction of the old to the new.<sup>55</sup>

After the defeat of the camp they had supported during the Russian Civil War (1917-1922), thousands of White Russian émigrés came to Istanbul. Many White Russians fled to Istanbul with their wives and families. The new arrivals were mixed, common soldiers, nobles, and officers; these men took any job they could find in Istanbul, regardless of their prior social class. Similarly, their wives and daughters found whatever work they could, often as barmaids, singers, dancers, and prostitutes. Moreover, many opened bars and clubs, which employed Russian women. These women came from both higher and lower classes. Some Russian women of previously high social status could find no option than to become a barmaid, singer, dancer or prostitute, but at the same time, women who had been prostitutes in Russia continued their trade in Istanbul. However, as many of these women had been of high social status, Turkish men generalized the social status of all working Russian women as of high social status.<sup>56</sup>

Despite their ‘immoral’ professions as barmaids, singers, dancers or prostitutes, these Russian women had an important effect on both Turkish men and women. For the first time, many Turkish men were able to interact with a woman in public. Therefore, these Russian women became a model of women in public. Turkish men saw these

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<sup>55</sup> Murat Can Kabagöz, *Eğlenirken Modernleşmek* (Ankara: Heretik Yayıncılık, 2016), 186.

<sup>56</sup> Kabagöz, 23–27.

women as elegant, elite and erotic. Very different from their female relatives' Turkish men were used to interacting with.

According to Zafer Toprak, the biggest blow in the Russian occupation was in 'Direklerarası' where the heart of traditional theater was beating. Now skinny blond and blue-eyed Russian dancers replaced the chubby plump canto dancers.<sup>57</sup> These women were with no hesitance revealing all of their physical beauty and offering all kinds of excitements and entertainment to the eyes of their men audience. At this point, the idea of the woman who performed on stage was further shaped, and the influence of the woman performing on the stage, acting on the men, was only turned for the purpose of enthusiasm and fun.

Women, on the other hand, blamed these Russian women for destroying the morality of their sons and husbands. They did not like the fact that Turkish men spent time around these women in public. These Russian women were not only hidden away in bars and nightclubs, but they were also waitress in restaurants and cafes and every day on the streets. Societies of Turkish women held a press conference, wrote articles in newspapers and magazines and wrote complains the *vali* (the governor) of Istanbul demanding that these Russian women be expelled. They complained that these women were responsible for the moral decline of their sons and husbands.<sup>58</sup> However, while everyone agreed that consorting with Russian women led to immorality, not everyone agreed that it was the fault of the Russian women. A survey held in the newspaper *Vakit* concluded that it was the responsibility of Turkish men to keep themselves away from these women and to maintain their own morality. Despite this women's groups continued to petition the *vali* of Istanbul to expel the Russians.<sup>59</sup> However, despite Turkish women's protest, Kabagöz argues that it was not the threat to Turkish men, which so upset Turkish women, but the change that Russian women affected on Turkish women. Young Turkish women and girls began to imitate the Russian style of dress, hair, and manner, however, this seemingly modernist change was not approved of by Turkish women but rejected as it came from these immoral Russian women. Moreover, as much as Turkish men converted the style and freedom

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<sup>57</sup> Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Kadın Özgürlüğü ve Feminizm (1908-1935)* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015), 277.

<sup>58</sup> Kabagöz, *Eğlenirken Modernleşmek*, 130–149.

<sup>59</sup> Kabagöz, 139.

of Russian women, they likewise were upset to see their wives style their hair and dress like Russian women. They wanted their mothers, wives, and daughters to remain moral; they wanted them to be good housewives and mother, and not the immoral women of the bars and nightclubs they attended. Finally, Turkish feminists were unhappy about this experience, as the change they desired had not come from their own efforts to educate their own society, but from foreign refugee women<sup>60</sup>

Russian women would soon leave Istanbul, but this experience opened a door to Turkish women as to what modernity looked like. They saw an unhappy paradox, freedom seemed to be a path to immortality and their own struggles for change was now compared to the foreign immoral other. Furthermore, Turkish men desired the new woman in the social realm Turkish women were forbidden to enter. Turkish men wanted the new woman to be free and fun, but only in the tavern or nightclub, in the home, men still wanted a traditional woman.

However, while polite and formal society was now required to celebrate Turkish women on the stage and the Turkish women in the audience, past prejudice meant that unofficially society continued considered these women immoral. The blessing of Atatürk and the Turkish press did not protect these women from the fact that most people in early republican society, both men and women, continued to consider and treat these women as immoral, a fact that these pioneering women clearly understood.

#### Tanzimat Theatre

In 1847 an Armenian theatre group called '*Naum Tiyatrosu*' (Naum Theater)<sup>61</sup>, began to present western style theatre shows to the public for the first time.<sup>62</sup> Before that, the modern theatre was an entertainment activity promoted within imperial occasions.<sup>63</sup> The non-Muslim population of the Empire such as Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Italian contributed to the introduction of western theater to the public view. According to Metin And, the first foreign troupes to visit Istanbul came to entertain the non-

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<sup>60</sup> Kabagöz, 141–147.

<sup>61</sup> Naum Tiyatrosu was named after their owners Michel Naum and Joseph Naum of Syrian Catholic background. It was established in the mid nineteenth century Ottoman Empire's Beyoglu district. It served as both theater and an opera house and performed Italian plays and operas from Donizetti and Rossini. The theater remained active until it was severely damaged by the fire. Naum Tiyatrosu is considered as the pioneer to introduce western style theater to the Ottoman audience. Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası, 1934).

<sup>62</sup> Sevengil and Önal, *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu?*, 165.

<sup>63</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*.

Muslim minority community.<sup>64</sup> Apart from the minority population, public entertainment for Ottoman Muslim majority was through traditional entertainments such as *Ortaoyunu*, which was an Ottoman form of Commedia dell'Arte acted on streets by live actors with improvisational themes, and *Karagöz* which was a shadow theater performed with puppets on a piece of cloth with a light behind it.<sup>65</sup>

In the early years of modern western theatre, plays were performed in Italian, and primarily in Armenian until late 19<sup>th</sup> century since the theater was a major occupation for the Armenians. However, it was hard to get enough audience, as the Armenian population was less than Ottoman Turkish speaking majority. Therefore, it was a high necessity to perform translated plays<sup>66</sup>. In 1858, Naum Theater Company showed a performance in Turkish for the first time to the public then French and Italian plays began to be translated and adopted into the Turkish language. Nevertheless, it was not the best solution to attract the Turkish-speaking majority as the content and the style of the plays were far away from the culture of the audience that was trained in traditional style performances. Hagop Vartovian (known as Güllü Agop, 1840-1891)<sup>67</sup> and Mardiros Minnakian (known as Minakyan, 1837-1920)<sup>68</sup> were popular other names in this period. According to Sevengil, this attempt by Armenians to attract audience was quite casual and continued irregularly until the 1860s, and with the establishment of Gedikpaşa Theater, plays began to be performed with more discipline.<sup>69</sup> An Ottoman Armenian theatre actor and director Hagob Vartovian, later became Muslim and was named as Güllü Agop founded the first theatre that

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<sup>64</sup> Metin And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1972).

<sup>65</sup> And, *A History Of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi 3 (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1961).

<sup>67</sup> Hagop Vartovian (Güllü Agop, 1840-1891) was an Armenian theater director and actor who was known as the founder of the Ottoman theater in the late 1860s. His venue Gedikpaşa Tiyatrosu was the largest of his kind until it was demolished by the Abdulhamit II government. Later he was recruited in the palace and was given the military title lieutenant. Later, he converted to Islam and changed his name to Yakup. Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoğlu, "Güllü Agop," in *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş., 1970), 142.

<sup>68</sup> Mardiros Minnakian 1837-1920 was an actor, director and one of the founders of Ottoman theater. He acted in Maghakian and Vortovian (Güllü Agop) theaters in 1872-78. He worked in Armenian theaters in İzmir, Adana, Edirne, Selanik (Thessaloniki), Tiflis and Egypt. In 1885, he founded the Osmanlı Dram Kumpanyası (Ottoman Drama Company), which continued performances until 1904. For these services to Ottoman culture Mardiros Minakyan was decorated by the sultan in 1912, and between 194-1916, he worked as a teacher at the Darülbeydi. Selcuk Aksin Somel, *The A to Z of the Ottoman Empire* (Scarecrow Press, 2010), 142.

<sup>69</sup> Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*.



performed plays in Ottoman Turkish under the name of Gedikpaşa Theater.<sup>70</sup> The theater was also known Ottoman Theater (*Osmanlı Tiyatrosu*) as he carried the name of his previous theater company. Later in 1870 Güllü Agop took a ten-year monopoly from the government to perform only plays in the Turkish language. It was presumably after a failed attempt of the government to open an Ottoman state theater, and Gedikpaşa Ottoman Theater was left only without a rival after Naum's Theater was shut down due to fire. Agop also got an order to open theater buildings within the borders of the Imperial capital İstanbul.<sup>71</sup>

The history of western theater in *Tanzimat* period and the influence of Armenians are outside the scope of this study. However, there are some formations in this period that are worth mentioning in order to indicate the backgrounds of further discussions. First of all, the Ottoman elites gave great importance to western theater. According to the Tanzimat elites, theater should be preferred to all harmless entertainments, because it served not only entertainment but also morality and literature in a condition of perfectness and order.<sup>72</sup> Thus, it could be considered that the Tanzimat era was the foundation of the theory that the theater was also an institution to educate and enlighten the public, and as a result, it was often under close inspection. As I noted above, in order to attract the audience, companies began to perform the plays in Ottoman Turkish. With the official monopoly that he gained, Güllü Agop took it as a duty to perform performances with a hope to attract more Ottoman Muslim audience. However, there was strict censorship, and it became almost impossible to write an original play in the following years. Presumably, having the idea of a didactic and educating side of the theater, the famous Ottoman playwrights such as Namık Kemal, Abdülhak Hamid (1852-1937)<sup>73</sup>, Ahmed Mithad (1844-1912)<sup>74</sup> and İbrahim Şinasi

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<sup>70</sup> Sevengil and Önal, *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu?*, 165.

<sup>71</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 164.

<sup>72</sup> Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*.

<sup>73</sup> Abdülhak Hamit (Tarhan, 1852-1937) was a diplomat and an ambassador in Ottoman Empire and was known to be the greatest poet of the Tanzimat (The Reform 1839) period and was titled as “Şair-i Azam” (the greatest of all poets). He introduced new verse styles and a Western way of looking at Turkish poetry; however, he couldn't refrain from using complex and sophisticated language in his poetry. He wrote a majority of his plays in verse, yet, since he was not meticulous enough with his style, his plays were not staged. Işık İhsan, “Trahan Abdülhak Hamit,” in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 993.

<sup>74</sup> Ahmet Mithat (1844-1912) published Tercüman-ı Hakikat newspaper, which was one of the most long-published newspapers of the Turkish press. He wrote many of his works on his exile in Rhodes for three years during Abdülaziz period. Then he returned the country and stayed away from writing

continued writing plays mostly about criticism of social and political institutions, and extreme conservatism that would be an obstacle for the modernism and development of the empire. However, they either faced with persecutions or the plays never had a chance to meet the audience. Namık Kemal's famous play *Vatan Yahut Silistre* (Motherland or *Silistra*) would probably be the first example. Ottoman writers such as Namık Kemal, Şemseddin Sami (1850-1904)<sup>75</sup>, Ali Suavi (1839-1878)<sup>76</sup> and Ahmed Mithad were the members of the Gedikpaşa Ottoman Theater committee. In 1873, after the first performance of the play, it was found highly provocative so the play was banned from the stage, then the author Namık Kemal was deported to Cyprus. Later during the Hamidian period, the censorship got even more intense that after Ahmet Midhad's play *Çerkes Özdenler* (Circassian Truths) Gedikpaşa Theater was shut down and demolished.<sup>77</sup> After this event, the inspectorate of the theater was decided to be defective, and the responsibility was passed on to Police Departments.<sup>78</sup> Many of the authors such as Namık Kemal, Ahmet Midhad, and Mehmet (Ebü-z Ziya) Tevfik (1848-1913)<sup>79</sup> were either deported or were prisoned until 1876 when

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political articles during the Abdulhamit II period. He prioritized being didactic in his works. For instance, he described the characteristic of women that should be predominant in society in his work *Felsefe-i Zenân* (Philosophy of Women). Işık İhsan, "Ahmet Mithat," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 31.

<sup>75</sup> Şemseddin Sami (1850-1904) was a writer and a columnist in Ottoman era. He was known with his translations of Western classics such as *Sefiller* (Les Miserables) and *Robinson Crusoe*. He also translated *Orhun Yazıtları* (Orhun Inscriptions) and did the first research on *Kutadgu Bilig* (Wisdom of Royal Glory). He prepared the largest dictionary of Ottoman Turkish Language *Kamus-i Turki* (Turkish Dictionary, 1900), and the largest encyclopedia of his era *Kamusu'l A'lâm* (Dictionary of Proper Nouns). Işık İhsan, "Sami Şemseddin," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 958.

<sup>76</sup> Ali Suavi (1839-1878) was a contradictory writer of his time. He attempted to lead the "Çırağan" coup to take down Abdulhamit II and enthrone Murat V, but was killed by the Commander of Beşiktaş Police Station, Hasan Paşa. Even though he studied Islamic science, he lived as a westerner and supported Turkism and he was one of the first supporters of the Latin alphabet, the usage of Latin scientific terms. Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924) later reiterated his ideas on the purification of the Turkish language. Işık İhsan, "Ali Suavi," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 87,88.

<sup>77</sup> Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, 106.

<sup>78</sup> DH.MKT./1408-101-0 H06-07-1302- April 21 1885

<sup>79</sup> Ebüzziya Tevfik (1848-1913) published the newspapers *İbret* (1872), *Hadika* (1872) and *Sırac* (1873) with Namık Kemal. As a member of the Young Ottoman Association, he was exiled to Rhodes with Ahmet Mithat Efendi after the incidents that arose after Namık Kemal's play *Vatan Yahut Silistre* (Motherland or *Silistra*) in 1873. He returned to İstanbul after the death of Sultan Abdülaziz. After his return, he was again exiled to Konya in 1890 by the Abdulhamit II administration on the grounds that he wasn't suitable for a civil service post. After the announcement of the Second Constitution in 1908, he was elected as Antalya parliamentary deputy to the parliament in 1908 and continued his political career until his death. Işık İhsan, "Ebuzziya Mehmet Tevfik," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 380.

Abdülaziz was dethroned.<sup>80</sup> As the plays written by Ottoman playwrights were under intense control, there had been more preference to adaptations and translations of French, Italian and English classics. However, these translations were so roughly done that it was hard for the audience to understand. Furthermore, the content of the plays were culturally different and foreign that it caused a distance between the theater and Turkish speaking audiences. For example, word for word translations of Moliere were difficult for audiences to understand without knowledge of French history and culture. Moreover, Armenian actors and actresses who had difficulty in pronunciation performed these plays.<sup>81</sup>

This created a long-term discussion as the modern theater progressed in the empire and later in the Islamization, Ottomanization, and Turkification of the theater. While the Pan-Turkist agenda after 1908 can be debated, I would argue that there is no doubt that the Ottoman intellectuals in the final years of the empire were motivated by a form of modernist nationalism which promoted both female actresses and proper Turkish on stage. Naturally, with the end of the Empire and the establishment of the Republic, Turkification was intensified. The language and correct pronunciation was also one of the main concerns that was often discussed by nationalists when it was time to argue about Turkish Muslim women's position in the theater later in the years until the early years of Republic.

#### Tuluât Tiyatrosu

While the western theater was welcomed by the *Tanzimat* elites and supported by the government, the cultural and stylistic differences between the new theater and Muslim majority created a new method of performance under the name *Tuluât Tiyatrosu* (Improvisational Theater). It was sort of a synthesis between the traditional *Ortaoyunu* and modern western theatre primarily led by traditional performers. Metin And argues that topics were borrowed from plays in the western theatres and then changed to suit the particular style of the traditional theatre with its improvisational acting.<sup>82</sup> The *Tuluât* theater is basically a form of improvisation on the theme of western plays including the main characters of *Ortaoyunu*. According to Sevengil, the

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<sup>80</sup> Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, 97.

<sup>81</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*.

<sup>82</sup> Metin And, "The Turkish Folk Theatre," *Asian Folklore Studies* 38, no. 2 (1979): 168.

themes of the western plays were destroyed by this way. The purpose of *Tuluât* theater was to attract the attention of the public and entertain them casually rather than create and serve for the art.<sup>83</sup> The only similarity to the western theater, in this case, is that the plays were performed in the theater hall and not on squares of neighborhoods as it was in *Ortaoyunu*. The final of the performances always ended with a *kanto* show which was performed by a female dancer who sang songs and danced by acting the lyrics. Although *kanto* took its name from Italian *chansonette*, it was another traditional show in Ottoman entertainment culture, and it developed within the *Tuluât* theater.<sup>84</sup>

Refik Ahmet Sevengil severely criticized these *tuluât* companies for being ordinary and the lacking art, talent and aesthetic. Sevengil wrote, that during the reign of Abdülhamit II, western style theater was oppressed, while the *tuluât* disgrace had full freedom.” The *tuluât* groups “under the name of theater” would go on tours in Anatolia and Rumelia with two or three fake actors, three prostitutes, and a chest of props and costumes, and with these, they would collect “tribute” from the people.<sup>85</sup>

Ottoman intellectuals were critical of *tuluât* theatre and saw it as an unworthy competitor to their purer modern western style theater, I would argue that *tuluât* theatre should be considered as not only modern but also as one of the basic entertainment elements for the public during *Tanzimat* period, a perhaps more popular form for introducing to some extent, western style theatre. When questioning the criticisms of the Ottoman intellectuals about the *Tuluât* theater, it is necessary to first look at how they interpret the traditional theater. According to critics and intellectuals, contents of *Ortaoyunu* (*Commedia dell'Arte*) and Shadow theater (*Karagöz*) were highly immoral and primitive. For example, shadow puppets would display phallic objects and perform acts that live actors could not. Moreover, the language of the shows was so obscene and immoral that it was not suitable for performing even in any of the public coffee houses. Since these shows were open to the public, women and children could watch these immoral shows.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Sevengil, *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu*, 283.

<sup>84</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 283.

<sup>85</sup> Sevengil and Önal, *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu?*.

<sup>86</sup> Daryo Mizrahi, “Language and Sexuality in Ottoman Shadow-Puppet Performances,” in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theater in the Ottoman World* (India: Seagull Books, 2014), 275–93.

On the other hand, argued And and Sevengil, the modern theater served for art, it was sort of a didactic method to teach morality and literature and it would be a proper example for public values.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, it was possible that there was an effort to protect the monopoly that was given to Gedikpaşa theater for promoting modern Ottoman Theater, the *tuluât* theater seemed to look like a threat in political terms. According to Metin And and Sevengil, it was obvious that while Ottoman intellectuals were against and criticized traditional theater, it was difficult to attract Ottoman audience to the new theater due to the cultural conflict of the plays in the new theater. Therefore, it was inevitable for traditional theatricians to take advantage to create a synthesis like *tuluât* theater. Even if there was destruction in terms of style and content, the method seemed to help, and the interest of the people for both institutions multiplied. In addition, as the language problem of the players in the western style theater began to draw attention, the successful players of the traditional theater were recruited in the future.<sup>88</sup> This situation created a sort of rivalry between *tuluât* actors and the western theater performers. The reason of Sevengil's comment on the freedom of *tuluât* theater during Hamidian period could be interpreted as follows; theatrical performances were authorized to be performed through a strict inspection of the written texts. As the nature of the *tuluât* technique, there were only randomly written scripts of the performances, and these scripts were easily changed right before the show, according to the interest and insight of the auditor who would be watching amongst the audience.<sup>89</sup>

Regardless of the reasons suggested, *tuluât* theater could be accepted as an on-point method for an introduction to western style theater. The audience was acquainted with western-style theater by finding familiar pieces from their culture and tradition. *tuluât* Theater was purely a form of entertainment without a positivist agenda, therefore it lacked support from the intellectuals and in time most of it's most successful members transferred to the modern theaters.

Theater continued to develop and attract more and more audience during the Abdulhamit II's reign. This increased intense censorship and the authors were under

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<sup>87</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 269.

<sup>88</sup> And, 277.

<sup>89</sup> And, 284.

threat for persecutions so the most plays did never have any chance to be performed or published. Plays even contained a single word that was used to arouse the attention of the public awareness, or the use of a word that would discomfort Sultan could be easily banished or the author could be easily prisoned. Due to the situation of highly limited freedom of Ottoman plays, the modern theater sort of failed to follow the duty of educating and enlightening the public as intellectuals hoped. Instead, there were mostly comedies and vaudeville without a literal aesthetic.

#### Censorship & Theatre After the Revolution

Theatre advanced even further with the beginning of the Second Constitutional period in 1908. In order to give important messages about westernization and modernization, the press and art was seen as an effective means of reaching the public. With its privilege transferred from the *Tanzimat* era, once again, the theater was an important element to influence the public, a place to show them what was right or wrong or even to take the pulse of the public.

The theater of the Second Constitutional period of 1908 transformed from entertainment to space where the public could show their reactions. The society that thought to be freed from the oppression of the previous Abdülhamid II administration found the theatre as an institution, once again, which they could express, their reaction of every sort of aspects. For this reason, the theater spread rapidly and numerous theater groups appeared in a short time. The number of Muslim Turkish actors and Turkish Companies run by Turkish Muslims rapidly increased as well but the idea of having Muslim Turkish actresses was still a utopic thought. Intellectuals and nationalists of the period; The Party of Union and Progress, the ruling party of the era, welcomed theatre as one of the basic means to reach and educate the public.

As Metin And pointed out in his volumes on the history of Turkish Theatre, theatre plays and shows turned into living posters that would show the audience what was socially and politically happening around in a highly didactic style. The plays were written in such short times according to what aroused the attention of the public. Themes were including, for example, the proclamation of the Constitution, the occupation period, and the administration of Abdülhamid II.

Nevertheless, this created numerous casually written plays that were produced in such a short time by anyone who had an opportunity to establish a stage and a group of

actors to perform. An actor of the period Ahmet Fehim (1857-1930)<sup>90</sup>, complained that anyone who had an opportunity to set up a stage exploited the passion of the public with roughly written propaganda notes like “Long Live Motherland!, Long Live Liberty!”<sup>91</sup>

However, while plays written by Namık Kemal or Şemsettin Sami, which were either banned or censored during the Abdulhamit II period, were performed after 1908,<sup>92</sup> there was still close control on everything related to theatre. The era of freedom, believed by many writer and intellectuals was not to be, the theater was still under heavy censorship. There are thousands of documents starting from the 1860s up to 1920s in the Ottoman Archive about censorship for the topics and the content of the plays, most of them either were banned from publishing or ordered to be changed according to the moral, religious and political decrees (*Ahkâm-ı diniye, şair-i islamiyye*). Looking at documents listed between the years 1860s to 1920s also indicates different political era, but little change in censorship.

It is worth illustrating this continuity. It can be observed that state surveillance mechanism worked beyond the borders of the empire, they became a diplomatic concern. Plays performed in London, France, and even the USA were monitored and requests were made to have them canceled. These plays were targeted because they were about the prophet Mohammed, or about historical events in the Ottoman Empire. There are numerous reports between Ottoman and British government for the concern of plays named ‘*Haremın Sırları*’ (Secrets of Harem) and ‘*Haç ve Hilâl*’ (The Cross and The Crescent) written and performed in London Theater.<sup>93</sup> The play was about Hamidian massacres of Armenians in Eastern Anatolia and it was eventually banned due to diplomatic concerns between two governments. Obviously, there was state

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<sup>90</sup> Ahmet Fehim (1857-1930) started his acting career in Güllü Agop’s theater but continued his career with Ahmet Vefik Paşa in Bursa in 1880. He acted in Ahmet Vefik’s adaptation of Moliere. After his return to İstanbul, he attended MinnAkian’s Ottoman Dram Company. He was entitled his acting career as a comedian and taught in comedy department in Darülbedayi. He started directing and acting in films including Mürebbiye Teacher, 1919), Binnaz (1919). A. Madat, *Sahnemizin Değerleri*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: A.B Neşriyatı, 1943), 23–28.

<sup>91</sup> Metin And, *Meşrutiyet döneminde Türk tiyatrosu <1908-1923>*, 1971, 115.

<sup>92</sup> Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*, 26.

<sup>93</sup> BOA HR.SFR.3... /499-8-0 Date: 02/04/1900, HR.SFR.3... /499-9-0 Date: 03/04/1900, HR.SFR.3... /499-11-0 Date: 29/04/1900, HR.SFR.3... /499-12-0 Date: 01/05/1900, HR.SFR.3... /499-13-0 Date: 03/05/1900, HR.SFR.3... /499-15-0 Date: 03/07/1900.

surveillance outside the empire<sup>94</sup> during the reign of Abdulhamit II,<sup>95</sup> however this surveillance was continued right up until the end of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>96</sup>

Although the censorship was on duty with mostly political and governmental purpose, there was some sort of arbitrary act as well; in 1904, Istanbul Mayor Rıdvan Paşa forbade Turkish plays in Istanbul to prevent his son from acting in the theater. This ban continued until he was murdered on March 26, 1906.<sup>97</sup> However, this act could not prevent his son from becoming one of the successful actors of the Constitutional period known as Reşad Rıdvan. He disconnected from his family and devoted himself to acting and the theater; moreover, he had a pioneering role in establishing the theater *Sahne-i Milliye-i Osmaniyye* (Ottoman National Theater) associating with Burhaneddin Tepsi.<sup>98</sup> He was also known as one of the most notable actors of Darülbedayi. Reşad Rıdvan's troubled relationship with his father is telling. Like many actors of his day, his career choice was not taken well by his family. This is, for example, the reason why Muhsin Ertuğrul changed his name (to Ertuğrul Muhsin) due to a conflict in his family.<sup>99</sup> The desire of these high-status men to devote themselves to art was scandalous, not because they could be accused of being prostitutes or being in the theater for the money, but because acting was so looked down upon. Considering the struggle of these Ottoman men, for a high-status Ottoman woman like Afife it was a far greater challenge.

During both the Young Turk and Allied Occupation period auditing of plays, theater performances continued intensely. This duty was mainly carried out by the police department (*zabıta*) and censorship centers (*sansür merkezleri*), and later on, starting from the year 1915, this duty was transferred again to police administrations.<sup>100</sup> It can be easily observed from these documents that the control and censorship system

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<sup>94</sup> The two footnotes below contain examples of state surveillance I found during my research, however while related to the topic of this study, it is outside the scope of this thesis, but for more on this topic see: Merih Erol, "Surveillance, Urban Governance and Legitimacy in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Spying on Music and Entertainment during the Hamidian Regime (1876–1909)," *Urban History* 40, no. 4 (November 2013): 706–25, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926813000187>.

<sup>95</sup> Y.PRK.EŞA./18-12-0 H/29/12/1310/M1893, HR.SYS./216-9-0 Date: M/18/06/1890, Y.A.HUS./237-50-0 Date: H/14/12 /1307/M1890, Y.A.HUS./240-4-0 Date: H/1/3/1308/M1890, Y.A.HUS./233-11-0 Date:H/06/06/1307 M/1890

<sup>96</sup> HR.SYS/2758-11-0

<sup>97</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 197.

<sup>98</sup> Efdal Sevinçli, *Meşrutiyetten Cumhuriyete Sinemadan Tiyatroya Muhsin Ertuğrul* (İstanbul: Broy Yayınları, 1987), 18.

<sup>99</sup> After his family saw his name associated with the theater, Ertuğrul was forced to leave home and spent at least one night on the street as a result. See: Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*.

<sup>100</sup> BOA DH.EUM.KLU / 15-23-0, February 15 1915/ H 08-04-1333.



towards theatre were effectively active during these years and in fact, the observation and the censorship continues until today. For the purpose of this thesis, the importance of this surveillance is its relations to Muslim women on stage.

A couple of documents can be found indicating the situation of women of Islam titled as *İslam Kadınları* between the years 1900 to 1920 in the archives. Two documents from May 1909 from the police department (*zaptiye*) shows that it is inappropriate to perform music and theatre performances for Muslim women.<sup>101</sup> In addition, there are also documents about censorship for non-muslim women actresses. An Armenian actress and dancer named ‘Miniyon Virjini’ once prohibited from working in Ottoman theaters due to not following the dress code and manner, she could only be back to work if she promised to follow the orders.<sup>102</sup>

Interestingly, since the theatre was under intense surveillance, it also generated revenues for the government. There are numerous reports in the archive about ten percent tax for the benefit of the poorhouses (*Darülâceze*). These reports continued until 1939 as far as I researched in the archive.<sup>103</sup> In 1920 and 1922 *Darülâceze* taxes began to be taken not only from theater but also from other institutions related to entertainment such as cinemas, concerts.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, it was also noted that one of the biggest financial problems in the theatre was due to a great amount of tax payments were collected from the income of each performance. The tax was not only limited to *Darülâceze*.<sup>105</sup> In addition to *darülâceze* payments, there was another 10 percent tax for Ottoman Public Debt Administration (*Duyun-i Umumiye*), 5 percent for Hedjaz Railway (*Hicaz Demiryolu*).<sup>106</sup> While theater institution was both politically and financially beneficial for the empire and later for the Republic, it was also kept under intense observation and control due to its close relation to public view.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> BOA ZB. / 628-91-0 date: R-22-02-1325 / May 5 1909).

<sup>102</sup> DH.MKT. / 1217-78-0 date: H-5-01-1326 / February 8 1908

<sup>103</sup> BOA DH.MKT./2372-50-0 H-13/03/1318, M-July/11/1900, DH.MUİ./32-12-0 H-17/11/1327 M-November/30/1909, DH.UMVM / 81-21-0 H-24/7/1338 M-May/16/1921, DH.İ.UM.EK 89-36 H-16/12/1332/1914

<sup>104</sup> BOA MV. 218/114 (1338/1920)

<sup>105</sup> Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*.

<sup>106</sup> Ertuğrul, 95.

<sup>107</sup> For more on the politicization and commercialization of the Ottoman theater and on the archival documents mentioned here see Turna, “The Ottoman Stage: Politicization and Commercialization of Theaters, 1876-1922.”

However, conservative and reactionary groups were against the theatre and they claimed that the plays, which were promoted by intellectuals, could never be used to show what was right or what was wrong. The theater was a waste, what a play aimed to lecture in two-hour performances could easily be done in a five-minute speech from a pulpit.<sup>108</sup>

It can be argued that the reason for this reaction towards theatre was because in the eyes of the public, it was still an act of entertainment and as it was originally taken from the west, the new theater was not related to social or religious tradition.

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<sup>108</sup> Metin And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 116.

## Daughters of the Stage Part 2: Feminism Steps on Stage

In Autumn 1920,<sup>109</sup> at the Apollo Theatre in Istanbul,<sup>110</sup> Afife Jale, aged 18, stepped on stage as the first Muslim Turkish woman in theatre.<sup>111</sup> Afife played the character Emel in a play called ‘*Yamalar*’ (*Patches*) written by Hüseyin Suat (Yalçın, 1867-1942)<sup>112</sup>. She was substituting a character originally acted by the famous Armenian actress of the time Eliza Pinnemejian (1890-1981) (known as Eliza Binemeciyan). Eliza was a well-known actress of and she was famous for her ability to speak Turkish with correct pronunciation. The talent for speaking Turkish with a correct pronunciation was highly important, an issue I will later discuss. Eliza went to Paris during the season so there was a demand for an actress who could speak Turkish properly. Just as modern Turkish theatre was pioneered by Ottoman-Armenians, Ottoman-Armenian women led the introduction of Ottoman women to the stage. However, the road from them to Afife was a long and tangled one. In this chapter, I will trace the development of feminism in Ottoman theater and look at how ultimately put Afife on stage but also destroyed her.

As discussed in the introduction, the feminism of this era was not necessarily directed by women from the bottom up but rather by intellectuals from the top down. This is not to say that women did not have agency or interest in promoting their involvement in the theater, but that the movement in the Ottoman Empire to see a representation of Turkish woman on the stage was pushed by a small group of Turkish nationalist intellectuals.

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<sup>109</sup> There are conflicting dates about when exactly Afife first stepped on stage. According to *istanbulkadınmüzesi.org* the date was April 22<sup>nd</sup>, but Refik Ahmet Sevengil wrote in his book as autumn 1920. According to chronological order of Afife’s start of acting, I consider this date as accurate.

<sup>110</sup> Now the Rex movie theatre in Kadıköy district of İstanbul.

<sup>111</sup> The first document Muslim Turkish women, as I will discuss below there were certainly other Muslims on the stage before her.

<sup>112</sup> Hüseyin Suat (Yalçın, 1867-1942) was brother of the writer Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın, 1874-1957). He worked as a doctor in Anatolia during the War of Independence served at State maritime Lines after the Republic. He was famous for his lyric poems on love and women, and he wrote several plays, translations and adaptations of western plays such as *Çürük Temel* (Rotten Foundation, Les Maison D’Argille, 1916), *Yamalar* (Patches, 1920), *Kirli Çamaşır* (Dirty Laundry 1911) Işık İhsan, “Yalçın Hüseyin Suat,” in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 1086.

However, to understand this development, it is important to try to escape the intellectual perspective and discuss the situation of women both as audience and as a worker in the theater. To consider women's agency and the social and political situation of the women in the theater, it is necessary to start with the early laborers who were mainly Armenian women. In the early years of Ottoman theatre (around 1850), working as an actress in the theater for an Armenian girl was not acceptable. Actresses of Italian origin or men disguised as women were recruited. Only Armenian girls under the age thirteen were allowed to perform.<sup>113</sup> In 1856, the theater company *Aramyan*, recruited the first Armenian actresses, and according to the sources, the first professional actress was Arusyak Papazyan who acted around the 1860s.<sup>114</sup> Until Turkish Muslim actresses with the progress and the propaganda of national theater displaced them in the Republic, the Armenian women had an important role in the establishment of the modern theater in the Empire. Moreover, these women had an influence on the interest of Muslim women towards the theater as they represented to be the first role model for their interest in a career.

There is a very interesting essay by Hazmik Khalapyan about an autobiography of an Armenian actress, Azniv Hrachia, who was a pioneering actress in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Empire.<sup>115</sup> Azniv Minassian, later took a stage name Hrachia, (meaning fiery-eyed) was born in İstanbul to a middle-class family and went to a French Catholic School in Beyoğlu district. Her classmate Aghavni Pinnemejian who was secretly acting in Petros Maghakian's theater group influenced her. Azniv started her acting career first in Maghakian's Company. He persuaded Azniv's mother for her to act in the Company. She later continued her career with Hagop Vartovian's theater group in 1870. Not any different than in the later years, actresses were called as 'theater girl' and were considered as a *'fallen woman'*.<sup>116</sup> The article suggests reasons to choose theater as a job option for Armenian girls even though it was a socially indecorous occupation. Khalapyan argues that until 1915<sup>117</sup>, job options for Ottoman-Armenian women were extremely limited; however, acting was an exceptional career

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<sup>113</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 147.

<sup>114</sup> And, 147.

<sup>115</sup> Hasmik Khalapyan, "Multiple Ramifications: Azniv Hrachia's Autobiography as a Source for the History of the Theater and the World Beyond," in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theater in the Ottoman World* (India: Seagull Books, 2014), 377–93.

<sup>116</sup> Khalapyan, 376.

<sup>117</sup> With the outbreak of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 employment was no longer a key issue.

due to the fact that theater had an importance in the cultural history of the Armenians.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, the theater was beneficial for political propaganda and financial income for Armenian community. Especially for Armenian intellectuals, development of theater was seen as a concept of modernization, national awakening and adoption of the Armenian constitution that required a strong commitment.<sup>119</sup>

According to Hrachia there was something like gender equality in the theater that sometimes actresses made even more income than the actors. According to her chronicles in Khalapyan's article, she considered herself much luckier than her contemporaries in other professions since theater often offered her an equal pay or even sometimes higher than her actor colleagues.<sup>120</sup> She emphasized that the actors and actresses salary was based on the talent and success on stage rather than being a man or a woman. Despite the economic benefits, there was a class concern in the women's labor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and women working to be paid were considered as a lower class family member amongst both Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Azniv Hrachia's mother accepted her daughter acting only after the theater manager agreed to not to pay her a salary. In fact, she secretly accepted the salary and it was the savior for her family after her late father's inheritance ended.<sup>121</sup> Although the intention was stated to be for the love of acting, it surely gave financial benefits to the women.

Azniv Hrachia's political view on the theater culture is worth mentioning. She defended an opinion that the nation and the theater should be working for each other mutually. In this statement, we should consider that the nation and national perspective she defended was to speak for the Armenian nation. Armenians were the founder of the Ottoman theater and served a pioneering role for the establishment of the Modern Theater of the Empire. According to the essay, Azniv was displeased at the interest of the Turkish intellectuals towards theater and she thought that it destructed the progress of the Armenian culture in the Armenian community. The

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<sup>118</sup> Khalapyan's argument, like that of the Turkish nationalist, was that theater helped to educate the Armenian nation.

<sup>119</sup> Hasmik Khalapyan, "Theater as a Career For Ottoman Armenian Women, 1850 To 1910," in *A Social History Of Late Ottoman Women*, ed. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden ; Boston: BRILL, 2013), 39.

<sup>120</sup> Khalapyan, "Multiple Ramifications: Azniv Hrachia's Autobiography as a Source for the History of the Theater and the World Beyond," 381.

<sup>121</sup> Khalapyan, "Theater as a Career For Ottoman Armenian Women, 1850 To 1910," 37.

plays began to be performed in the Turkish language after Namık Kemal and Ali Suavi's request or, in eyes of Hrachia, 'forced' Vartovian to perform plays in Turkish. This both led to the establishment of Turkish theater and created a rivalry between Armenian and Turkish actors and actresses. Like all other popular actresses on stage, Hrachia had to take Turkish courses to improve her accent. This is an important point to indicate the concern on the Turkish pronunciation of the non-Muslim actresses, which was one of the main topics of criticism later in the establishment of a national theater in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Republic.

Hrachia was a rising star of the Armenian theater in Ottoman Empire then she left for the Russian Armenia in 1881. She worked as an actress, a director in Baku, Batumi, and Tbilisi until she died in 1920 in Russia. She was also a wife and a mother that had to put her into a gender struggle within the community. Since she started her career as an actress, the social viewpoint of an actress transformed from being a 'theatre girl' into an actress whose material income and prestige got higher within the years, Hrachia still had to behave according to the gender norms for women within the community she belonged. There is an example from the essay, that after one of her performance, she was invited to a dinner with a group of men and she rejected the invitation as her status as a wife and mother could not condone being in a mens-only event.

Whatever nation or ethnicity they belonged to, women's maternal duties and the responsibility of building a family imposed on them made it hard to accept their position in serving for art. It was presumably due to the reason that bearing and raising a child were serious time-consuming efforts and it could not be interrupted by the complexity of art.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, the interest of women in the art of theater and beyond that, choosing it as a profession created a concern for the social responsibility and moral position given to women in society. Because, even though intellectuals in the modernization process saw the theater as a means of education and civilization, the public opinion was that the theater was a means of entertainment in the first place. On the basis of this, it could be considered that the performances presented to the public during the Ottoman period were for largely by entertainment purposes rather than a literary one. Back to Hrachia's autobiography, an interesting anecdote proves

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<sup>122</sup> Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu*, 167.

the image of Ottoman theater by European artists. Sarah Bernhardt, who was a famous French actress of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century theater world, was occasionally visiting Istanbul on tours. According to Hrachia, Bernhardt was deliberately changing the scenes and even cutting them short especially for the Istanbul performances in order not to tire herself much. The reason for this simplification was due to her thinking that people of Istanbul would not understand much as such performance would be more than enough for them.<sup>123</sup> It is inevitable that as a member of theater art, Hrachia took this act as a sign of insult to the level of the theater culture in public especially developed by her own nation in the Ottoman capital.

The appearance of women on stage was a physical manifestation of a woman, especially in the eyes of a predominantly male audience. This could be exemplified by the fact that the *Kanto*<sup>124</sup> performances in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century traditional theater addressed a mainly male audience. Nevertheless, the art of theater was an interest for women. Women wanted to be recognized as both active member and spectator this institution.

Women's interest in the theater as an audience was with limited access in the development of the modern theater in the Empire. Women, significantly, Muslim women were unable to go along to the theatre with men in accordance with the laws of the period. The performances were shown only to women during the day and to men only during the night, or theater companies were showing some performances for women only. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the government did not welcome the idea of women audience positively. In 1860, with an addition to the regulations of theater dated in 1859, a document issued on 4 Ramazan 1276 (*March 26, 1860*) prohibited women from entering theater as an audience.<sup>125</sup> Güllü Agop, who was concerned about the increasing the audience, found a solution, he built 'cages' which were reserved for women. There was even a discount offered for women.

However, residents of several neighborhoods did not approve of this solution. Women, they reasoned, could not attend the mosque without special arrangements, so

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<sup>123</sup> Khalapyan, "Multiple Ramifications: Azniv Hrachia's Autobiography as a Source for the History of the Theater and the World Beyond," 385.

<sup>124</sup> Kanto was a performance of song and dance that was performed before or after a play by a female dancer. It often included humour elements and eroticism.

<sup>125</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 100.

to have them freely attend the theater was unthinkable.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, children were encouraged to accompany their fathers to see traditional street performances which contained sexual and immoral jokes.

Intellectual commentators argued that plays were literary texts, and the theater taught manners and morality, so there was no harm for children to go see these plays. The shadow and puppet theater of the traditional Ottoman entertainment had an advantage representing sexuality through puppets in a way that was not possible with live actors.<sup>127</sup> They could even show an unveiled woman or a phallus on a scene that shows the privacy of men and women in their bedroom or bathhouses.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, the street performances *Ortaoyunu* was performed with live actors, sexual jokes and stories were in speech, which was not based on a written script, therefore, it was impossible to censor during the shows. The literary contrast between the traditional performances and the modern style theater created a long term discussion among intellectuals and traditional performers, and eventually, the old style lost the popularity while the new style was praised by elites.<sup>129</sup>

In other words, the intellectual elite argued, in anonymous articles, that the modern theater was a remedy to the immoral and unprofessional street theater. Women did not need greater freedom and fathers did not need to take children to see raunchy shadow plays. Rather, women and children need to be exposed to the modern theater to be taught moral truths and to learn modern manners. However, despite this modernist mission, traditional Ottoman society did not see modern theater in that way and objected to attempts to include women and children.

In *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (Newspaper for Ladies), there are a number of comments and opinions about Ottoman elite women who were going to the theater. The newspaper was published between 1895-1908 and has the reputation of being the longest publishing Ottoman women's newspaper. It was published to reflect the daily lives of upper and upper middle-class Ottoman women in a rather didactic manner, promoting an idealized Ottoman woman.<sup>130</sup> According to the authors of the

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<sup>126</sup> And, 101.

<sup>127</sup> Mizrahi, "Language and Sexuality in Ottoman Shadow-Puppet Performances," 283.

<sup>128</sup> Mizrahi, 284.

<sup>129</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 101.

<sup>130</sup> Ayşe Zeren Enis, *Everyday Lives of Ottoman Muslim Women- Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete (Newspaper for Ladies) 1895-1908* (İstanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık San. ve Tic.Ltd.Şti, 2013).



newspaper, activities such as reading novels and going to the theater should avoided by Ottoman Muslim women.<sup>131</sup> Novels and theaters were on the same scale because both were known to present stories in which traditional marriage and family values were challenged.

Women's involvement in art and entertainment would create a discussion over women's boundaries and visibility in public. For more traditional and conservative elements of Ottoman society, the theater was contrary to the goal of moral education for women and children, but for a new modernist and nationalist intellectual elite theater was the ideal realm.

As has previously been mentioned the intellectuals of the theater saw theater as an important tool to educate the people and promote the nation. While we cannot say that all intellectuals who supported the theater were nationalist, most, or at least those who transitioned from the late Ottoman period to the early Republican period were. For them, the theater was a superb didactic tool. The theater was designed to teach.

Such an argument came from Halide Edip (1884-1964)<sup>132</sup> on her article in *Tanin* newspaper published on August 25, 1908. Edip portrays the reality of the women going to the theater in contrast to the ideal image.<sup>133</sup> In her article, she describes her dream of women going to the theater performance while on her way to a women's matinee in Bakırköy district. Her dream was women going to the performance in their fashionable dress, without their children. The children were sent to the acrobats' show, a cinema or a *Karagöz* performance instead. However, the reality she witnessed was in total contrast than her dream; it was a 'hammam like atmosphere'. The theater hall was ragged, and inside was overcrowded and chaotic. Women had no choice but to bring their children along, so nearly half of the audience was children moving around the hall, there were nut sellers and mothers were bargaining on water and nuts.

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<sup>131</sup> Enis, 395.

<sup>132</sup> Halide Edip (Adivar, 1884-1964). Besides her writer figure she was known as her political and nationalist struggle during the Turkish War of Independence and after. She worked as a sergeant during the War of Independence and her speeches in gatherings in Fatih, Kadıköy and Sultanahmet districts, which were held in protest of the occupation of İzmir, became influential. During the Constitutional period, she published her first articles in the newspaper *Tanin* under the name of Halide Salih. She was influenced by Western literature. She wrote novels of psychological analysis, war of independence novels such as *Ateşten Gömlek* (Daughters of Smyrna), and morality novels such as *Sinekli Bakkal* (The Clown and His Daughter). Işık İhsan, "Adivar Halide Edip," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 19.

<sup>133</sup> Halide Salih (Edip), "Açık Sözler- Besa Oyununda," *Tanin*, August 25, 1908.

It was so noisy and crowded that the actors on the stage found themselves shouting their parts at each other. We see from this article that women had chances to go to the theater as a segregated audience but in contrast to a nationalistic idea. Edip's complain also focused on the ignorance of the audience. The play she watched was *Besa Yahut Ahde Vefa* written by Şemseddin Sami and it contained highly patriotic content, and Halide Edip was complaining that even though the actors managed to keep the silence and some women were in tears by the end, the overall image that the audience were ignorant.

Moreover, the segregation that Edip described was not women and men but women with children and men. In her previous article published a couple of days before,<sup>134</sup> Edip emphasized the need for a nationalistic theater and the women should be included in this. Moreover, women should have all the rights to see the arts and beauty as they were capable of understanding and this right should be legitimized. She also emphasized that women should be going to the theaters without their children and the performances should be shown for them in big pristine theater halls like men did, rather than old wrecked building reserved for women. She defended the idea that political effects of the theater such as a performance of Namık Kemal's '*Vatan Yahut Silistre*' should be shown to women as well in big halls like Tepe Başı Theater as our nation's women had all rights to see the beauty in such an important play. She stated that not only men should see the beauty that would fulfill their minds and hearts but also women, as wives and daughters of the nation should go to these plays that their soul would grow in doing so.<sup>135</sup>

Edip's concern was aspirational; she wanted a society in which women would be able to attend theater as men did-without children and with other women. But she must have known that the only women who could possibly attend theater in this way would be young elite and most likely unmarried Ottoman women. She believed that theater was important for raising the intellectual and moral state of the nation, and therefore it was necessary that the women attended. Moreover, she believed that women had the intellectual capacity to understand and analyze theater. However, she lived in a world where such an ideal state was impossible. Perhaps as a pragmatic solution to this, she

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<sup>134</sup> Halide Salih (Edip), "Açık Sözler- Vatan'ı oynayacak sanatkarlara," *Tanin*, August 20, 1908.

<sup>135</sup> Salih (Edip).

wrote and produced a children's play based on a religious story, which was successfully staged for a mixed audience of Muslim men, women, and children.<sup>136</sup> The success of this production was due to the uncontroversial religious message of the play, which was Edip's intention. This first successful integrated theater succeeded because it did not criticize the existing social order as feared by the authors of *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* as discussed above.

One other point that should be observed was one of Edip's criticisms among others was the female audience and the audiences, in general, did not behave properly in the theater. Moreover, this combined with the poor quality of the actors led intellectuals like Edip to push for a more elite style of theater. In other words, it was not just Edip who wanted women to attend theater but to attend the right kind of theater; the purpose was not for women to be entertained but for them to be educated.

Nevertheless, women continued going to theaters either with a chance to see performances for women only or in the reserved cages within the hall.<sup>137</sup> In future, they even found other different ways to be part of the theater as audiences.

The Party of Union and Progress struggled to get women to the forefront, however, the effort to bring women together at the same place as men did not produce good results. For example, when the Party of Union and Progress of İzmir organized a theater play at Sporting Club, one of the most important theaters of İzmir at the time, women also wanted to attend the theatre in the audience. Managers of the party accepted this request, but the reactionaries already surrounded the theater with knives in their hands and told that they would kill the women who came to the theater.<sup>138</sup> This situation continued until the end of the constitutional period. A newspaper of the time even states that the idea of women going to cinema or theatre along with men is a contrast to Islamic and traditional values, moreover, the newspaper complains about women going to these places along with men in the disguise of men or of Christian women.<sup>139</sup>

The opposition to women in the audience of the theaters was still applicable on in later years. The manager of Police Academy of Istanbul Mustafa Galip Bey prepared

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<sup>136</sup> Skylstad, "Acting the Nation Women on the Stage and in the Audience of Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic" (University of Oslo, 2010), 54.

<sup>137</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 101.

<sup>138</sup> Metin And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi*.

<sup>139</sup> Metin And, 116.

a report, which was published in 1920. He associated the increase of illegitimate relations (*fuhuş*) during the Second Constitutional period to an increase in women's freedom, which he defined as 'arbitrary freedom' of going to the theater. According to his report, women who were going to cinemas and theater strayed from the moral direction, as the content of the plays and films were morally inappropriate for the culture that women were poisoned with the display of immorality of these entertainment places.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, according to the newspaper *Volkan* (1908-1909), women who were going to the theaters leaving their household responsibilities behind was a sign of degeneration, and it was a pity that their husbands were even allowing this situation. The article strongly suggested that women of İstanbul should draw a lesson from their Anatolian sisters, and bounce back immediately; otherwise, their household would turn into a public venue (*lubiyat*).<sup>141</sup>

However, since *Volkan* was a conservative religious journal, which was shut down and number of its authors and readers were arrested after an attempted counter-revolution against the constitutional government in April 1909 we can't assume that this view was the dominant opinion of the general public, but it at least was a reflection of a more traditional view of women in the theater.<sup>142</sup>

According to Toprak, people that defended this idea were the ones who were criticizing Ottoman feminism. It should also be considered that the term '*fuhuş*' was used in the meaning of illegitimate relations during the constitutional years. Prostitution was considered as part of *fuhuş*.<sup>143</sup>

Women's limited access as an audience to the theater continued until later in the early years of Republic. Shortly before the Republic was declared, women had slightly more freedom in the theater as an audience. They were able to sit upstairs in the lodges separated from men. Soon after the Republic was declared, women of mainly İstanbul audience had the freedom to watch performances accompanying men.

We can see here two opposing points. On the one hand, modernist 'theater intellectuals' who wanted to raise up women and saw theater as a useful instrument in

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<sup>140</sup> Toprak, *Türkiye'de Kadın Özgürlüğü ve Feminizm (1908-1935)*, 151.

<sup>141</sup> Found in "Dünden Haberler- Kadın Tiyatroya Gidemez!," in *Yakın Tarihimiz*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (İstanbul: Vatan gazetecilik ve Matbaacılık T.A.Ş, 1962), 250.

<sup>142</sup> M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ, "Volkan - TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi," accessed January 7, 2019, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/volkan>.

<sup>143</sup> Toprak, *Türkiye'de Kadın Özgürlüğü ve Feminizm (1908-1935)*, 125.

this task, and on the other hand, a society that saw theater as being incoherent to serve that need. At the heart of this conflict was the general belief that it was immoral to allow Muslim women to participate in the theater.

There was an interesting article reflecting the situation of Muslim women in entertaining and theatre from *Darülbedayi* magazine, which was published in 1930. In the magazine, an actor M.Kemal (Küçük)<sup>144</sup> wrote an article titled ‘Turkish Woman in our Theatre’. He critically expressed that women before the Republic were sunk under the system of religious authorities in the Ottoman Empire. “The influence of conservatism in the Ottoman Empire crushed the woman the most. Women were considered only harem residents, and was sold for a long time as a commodity.”<sup>145</sup>

In fact, in the article, it states that Ottoman aristocrats were supporting women in such organizations and they were allowing women to participate in entertaining with limited access; moreover, the women of the time were eager to be members of the entertaining world. M. Kemal gives examples from women dancers like ‘Çengi’ groups, and how they were performing in large groups in entertainment events for women or maybe secretly in front of men.

Kemal argued women were ‘fatigue and lethargy’ due to their struggles with religious authority such as *mufti* and *sheikh ul-islam*; because of the way she dressed, the way she walked, moreover, how she lived were controlled and guided with *fatvas* (religious decrees). Above all, confusion between the old and a new mentality of the whole nation had completely confused woman’s minds and distracted her from social life.

However, M. Kemal also states that the Ottoman aristocrats continued including women in the art of performance behind closed doors. He gives an example from AbdülhamitII’s reign that the chief commander Sadettin Pasha used to send forty of his female servants (*halayık*) to the theatre groups like *Minakyan* (Minnakian) and

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<sup>144</sup> Mehmet Kemal Küçük was born on 26 May 1901 in Crete Island of Greece. He started his acting career by playing in amateur communities. He worked as a trainee at *Darülbedayi* in 1920. Then he worked in *Sahir Opereti*, *Raşit Rıza*, *Muhsin Ertuğrul* and *Friends Company*. He returned to *Darülbedayi* in 1926/1927 theater season. He taught drama classes at the *Alay Mansion*. He collected these lessons in his book *Theater*. In 1922 he began acting as an actor in on silver screen. He appeared in films such as *Leblebici Horhor* (1923), *The So-Called Girls* (1924) and *Ankara Post* (1928) directed by *Muhsin Ertuğrul*. He died on April 23, 1936 in *Istanbul Heybeliada*. *Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoğlu*, “Küçük, Kemal (1901-1936),” *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş, 1970) my translation

<sup>145</sup> M. Kemal, “Temaşamızda Türk Kadını 1,” *Darülbedayi Dergi*, January 1932.

*Fasulyeciyan* (Fasoulajian), and he would have them trained for performances. He even turned one of the large rooms of his mansion in Çemberlitaş into a theatre hall.

Ottoman theater before the *Tanzimat* period had found a solution for female characters of the performances by having male actors in disguise of women. These male actors dressed as women were known as *Zenne* coming from the Arabic rooted word *Zen* meaning ‘woman’ used in Ottoman Turkish.<sup>146</sup> These actors were basically acting through the imitation of a woman in traditional performances of *Ortaoyunu*. So, their profession was only limited in representing woman characters in *Ortaoyunu* when women physically acting was far away from the consideration. In the *Tanzimat* period, non-Muslim women, especially from Armenian population of the empire, were recruited as actresses. Nevertheless, intellectuals and nationalists of the constitutional period saw the absence of having Muslim Turkish women on stage as a major problem. With the establishments of new theatre companies of the constitutional period, Turkish Muslim men started acting in these groups and having Muslim women as performers still could not be an issue to discuss. As mentioned above, the theatre was one of the most important methods to educate people and indicate them what required to be a civilized and modernized nation of the time. It was considered a great deficiency to not to include Turkish Muslim women as part of this institute.

Izzet Melih (Devrim)<sup>147</sup> gave a speech at a ceremony held at the Tepebaşı Theater after the declaration of Constitution in 1908. He spoke about the necessity of an Ottoman theatre and a theatre school and most importantly, the lack of Turkish women on stage. The problem he pointed out in his speech was that there were no women on the stage that could speak Turkish properly. At the time, the only women on stage were from the Armenian or Greek community who spoke Turkish with an accent. He talked about the need to establish a theatre school and recommended educating Armenian, Jewish and Rroma girls between the age of eight and ten. He emphasized that Rroma girls pronounced Turkish properly. He also stated that having

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<sup>146</sup> Çiğdem Kılıç, “Men Acting as Women: The Zenne in Nineteenth- Century Popular Theater,” in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theater in the Ottoman World* (India: Seagull Books, 2014), 304.

<sup>147</sup> İzzet Melih (1887-1966) was a writer, who worked as a civil servant, general secretary and director at the İstanbul State Management Office between the years 1906-1925. He was given an honorary literature doctorate by the Paris faculty of Literature in 1938 for his etude on Henry Metaille and works for the French Language. He was selected as a member of the Writers Union of Paris (1957) Işık İhsan, “Devrim, İzzet Melih,” *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005)

Muslim women on stage was unfortunately not a topic of conversation as it was prohibited in the time.<sup>148</sup>

As previously discussed, authors use the term “Turkish” to refer to Ottoman Muslims, however, such tendency became further complicated by the fact that they were grappling with constructing of a “Turkish” identity at the time. Their concern for a proper Turkish accent was perhaps rooted in a form of early Turkish nationalism.

#### Establishment of Darülbedayi

Whether or not Melih speech was effective, *Darülbedayi-i Osmani* was an important vehicle for the vision of the nationalists of the period towards art, theatre and the position of Muslim women.

Since it was founded in 1914, *Darülbedayi* undoubtedly had a significant influence on the development of Turkish theater. It is obviously seen that the institution had an impact on the public as well. Despite its numerous struggles and need to be reestablishing several times, the institution always had a fair amount of audience and prestige that helped to carry on in the new Republic and beyond. Later in 1931, with a municipal law which delegated the management of theaters to the municipalities, the *Darülbedayi* was officially incorporated into the Municipality of Istanbul. Following this, this institution was extended by the addition of a Children’s Theater which remains active to this day, and a musical comedies and operettas division.<sup>149</sup> Later in 1934, it took the name *İstanbul Şehir Tiyatrosu* (İstanbul Municipality Theater) and remains until present with its eleven theater buildings located within İstanbul.

As intellectuals and nationalists saw theatre as a good school to educate the public on the new ideas of modernization, the need for the establishment of a national theater was desired. Until then, the theater was monopolized by non-Muslims. The mayor of Istanbul, Cemil Pasha (Cemil Topuzlu, 1866-1958) was supporting the idea of establishing a Western-style theater school. He called André Antoine, a famous man of theater from France to establish a western-style theater and music school, a conservatory, in Istanbul. André Antoine was well known by the audience of the time as he had come to Istanbul several times for performing.. He established *Darülbedayi-*

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<sup>148</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbedayi'nin Elli Yılı (Darülbedayi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*, 141.

<sup>149</sup> And, *A History Of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey*, 92.

*i Osmani* (the Ottoman House of Beauties) on October 27, 1914,<sup>150</sup> with a committee including authors and theater men of the time such as Reşad Rıdvan, Mardiros Minakyan, Burhanettin Bey (*Tepsi*), Ertuğrul Muhsin (known as Muhsin Ertuğrul). After the start of the World War, André Antoine did not stay longer in Istanbul and returned to his country. *Darülbedayi* continued accepting students to the conservatory until 1916, and then it started its first stage plays on January 20, 1916<sup>151</sup> with a play titled '*Çürük Temel*' (Rotten Foundation). The play was an adaptation by Hüseyin Suat (Yalçın) from a French play called *La Maison d'Argile*. Rıza Tevfik (Bölükbaşı, 1869-1949)<sup>152</sup> who was a Turkish philosopher, poet, a liberal politician and community leader of the late-19th-century and early-20th-century, refers to the understanding of the theatre of the period in his preface of the booklet which was published for the first show:

“In our time the theater is considered to be the most important institution. So important that European audiences can take pride in the perfection of municipal theaters, and their operas. The public influence of the theater life is perhaps more than it was in the past.”<sup>153</sup>

Although *Darülbedayi-i Osmani* was founded as a music and theatre school, over time it faced many financial, artistic, and management problems then in 1916 the school was transformed into another form which operated solely as a theater institution.

During this period, intellectuals visited Europe to observe and learn about how art and theatre was presented, how it influenced people and what the state policy towards theater in the European countries worked. Upon their return, they would work to spread their ideas through publications and meetings. For the majority of these

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<sup>150</sup> Metin And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi*, 122.

<sup>151</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbedayi'nin Elli Yılı (Darülbedayi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*, 34.

<sup>152</sup> Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı (1869-1949) was a poet and writer and was active in introducing philosophy to the high school curriculum. He became the Minister of Education in 1918, and then he became the chief of the council in the government of Damat Ferit Paşa. Due to his opposition to the National Struggle and being one of the delegates to sign the Treaty of Sevres he was exiled aboard for twenty-one years. Some of his works are Abdülhak Hamit ve Mülâhazât-ı Felsefiyesi (Philosophy of Abdülhak Hamid), Estetik (Aesthetics), Biraz da Ben Konuşayım/Yakın Tarihimize İlgili Anılar (Let me Talk a Little/Memoirs about Contemporary History). Işık İhsan, “Bölükbaşı Rıza Tevfik,” in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 271.

<sup>153</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbedayi'nin Elli Yılı (Darülbedayi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*, 35.



intellectuals, the basic problem and handicap of the Turkish theatre was not having Muslim Turkish women on stage. Before he returned to his country, André Antoine left a report to the city government with a hundred and twenty items of declarations consisting of the necessities and problems of establishing the Turkish theatre, and one of the major issues in this declaration was the problem of not having Turkish- Muslim women actresses. This issue was even mentioned in the foreign press, as we can see an example from a German magazine article written in 1914.<sup>154</sup>

“( . . ) one of the most important obstacles (for the theatre) is that the Muslim Turkish women cannot be on stage even with their veil on; ( . . ) It is hard to find a solution to this; in fact, a solution was found; and that is to bring Christian Rroma from Aleppo, who are said to know Turkish quite well and more likely to have the talent to act, and educate them for the stage. . . ”<sup>155</sup>

### In Search of the Proper Accent

According to Refik Ahmet Sevengil, the idea of training Roma girls for theater had been under consideration for a long time. Even before Izzet Melih Devrim’s speech and his recommendation the hiring of young Rroma girls to train for the theater. There was an early recommendation from a magazine called *Hadika* on January 27, 1876. The magazine wrote a review about a play performed in the district of Beşiktaş by two Armenian actresses, and it suggested that it was better to hire a couple of Muslim Rroma (*kıpti*) girls. The authors of *Hadika* argued that irrespective of their immorality, Muslim Roma girls would be better than Armenians because their accents were more compatible with the Ottoman Turkish accent.<sup>156</sup>

This reputation even included the Muslim Roma. Roma including the Muslims were the ones involved in prostitution, apart from our common vision of them as flower sellers, they had public visibility without veils in the late nineteenth century Ottoman Empire. Boyar gives an example from Ahmed Rasim (1864-1932)<sup>157</sup> that he described

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<sup>154</sup> Fritz Köhler, *Die Deutsche Bühne*, August 3, 1914. Cited and translated from Nutku, *Darülbedayi'nin Elli Yılı (Darülbedayi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*

<sup>155</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbedayi'nin Elli Yılı (Darülbedayi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*, 141.

<sup>156</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 118.

<sup>157</sup> Ahmet Rasim (1864-1932) worked as a civil servant at the Ministry of Post and Telegraph. Later, he earned his living by writing and working in newspapers. He used a pen name Leyla Feride too. He was the İstanbul parliamentary deputy in 1927-32. He worked for *Vakit*, *Tasvir-i Efkar* (Presentation of Opinion), *Yeni Gün* (The New Day) and *Cumhuriyet* (The Republic) newspapers. He wrote more than a hundreds works of novel, short story, anecdote, memoir and research. The most important of his works is his research *Resimli ve Haritalı Tarih-i Osmani* (Ottoman History with Pictures and Maps,

the Roma he met on an excursion to Büyükdere. He wrote how openly and colorfully they were dressed, wearing an explicit makeup which was not permissible for an ordinary Muslim Ottoman woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and according to Cenap Şehabettin, they were simply nothing other than “woman who sell their bodies”, moreover, they should not be a permitted to wander among Muslim women. Whether or not we should believe this story, Ebru Boyer makes the point that marginalized communities like the Roma were able to act outside of the normal expectations of honor and morality.<sup>158</sup>

It is possible that following Melih Devrim’s suggestion, when it was first established, Darülbedayi attempted to hire Roma girls and informed the minister of domestic affairs (Dahiliye Nazırı) for this attempt. However, without any reference, Sevengil states that this plan was rejected since Roma girls had similar names to Turkish Muslim girls and this would create problem to the government.<sup>159</sup> It seems likely that Sevengil misunderstood the situation and thought the plan was to use Muslim-Roma rather than Christian-Roma young women.

Özdemir Nutku comments on this issue differently, he claims that the idea of having Roma girls to educate faded away, because “our intellectuals understood that the only solution would be having Turkish Muslim women on stage who spoke Turkish properly.”<sup>160</sup> A journalist named Mahmut Sadık wrote about the issue on Sabah newspaper on July 12, 1914. In his article, he stated that it was impossible not to consider the conservatory without the issue of women (Muslim women). The modern national theatre would not differ from old traditional habits while there were not any Turkish women of the nation.<sup>161</sup> He was simply emphasizing that Turkish theatre would only be considered as Turkish with the existence of the Muslim Turkish women.

Another interesting comment on the issue could be seen in the article written by Muhsin Ertuğrul in *Temaşa* magazine published September 12, 1918. The comment seems to be an end to the discussion of which should be representing the nation’s

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1910-12) He was also known with his memoir Fuş-i Atik (The Old Prostitution Life) which was about prostitution in the Otoman Empire. Işık İhsan, “Ahmet Rasim,” in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 35.

<sup>158</sup> Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *Ottoman Women In Public Space* (Boston: BRILL, 2016), 198–200.

<sup>159</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 1:113.

<sup>160</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbedayi’nin Elli Yılı (Darülbedayi’den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*, 141.

<sup>161</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi 5 (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1968), 297.

theater. In his writing titled '*Acting among Us*' (*Bizde Tiyatroculuk*) he openly criticized the government decision to train Roma girls to act in the Turkish theatre. He was afraid that incorporating these girls into its structure would ruin the image of Turkish theatre he promoted. He wrote:

“Having no women (actresses) in theatre is still an issue, the government suggests that the destitute Roma girls should be recruited for the theatre. There are still people, who do not understand that theatre is organized as a school, and what content is sort of a mentor, and they do not understand that we want to be a Turkish theatre, not a Roma theatre.”<sup>162</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned arguments presented for not recruiting Roma women to the Turkish theatre, the image that Roma women signified at the time was also problematical. For Muhsin Ertuğrul they were seen as immoral (women with loose morals) and their appearance and representation on the Turkish stage would be a false example and ruin the image of the Turkish woman on stage. Otherwise, the morality of the Turkish ladies would be sacrificed for the sake of representing the language correctly.

Another German magazine named '*Theater Courier*' published an article titled '*Turkish Acting*' (*Türk Oyunculluğu*) issued on May 24, 1918, tells about Turkish women not being on stage:

“One of the correspondents of *Neue Orient* points out that one of the major shortcomings (of Turkish theater) is not yet having a real Turkish woman on stage and this is one of the main problems. Nevertheless, this problem is soon to be solved. Especially after the World War, Turkish woman started to be seen in almost all professions it strengthens the possibility of having her (Turkish woman) on stage in near future. Surely, Turkish actors and actresses must first learn the Western art of theatre in a fundamental way.”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ertuğrul Muhsin, *Temaşa* September 12 1334- 1918 issue 8 page 6-7) my translation

<sup>163</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbeydi'nin Elli Yılı (Darülbeydi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*, 142.

During World War I, a majority of the male population was involved in the war and as a result, there was a need of female population to substitute the absence of men, and women started to work in various institutions. They were officers in the state, teachers at schools, sellers in the streets, and workers in factories. However, in the eyes of intellectuals, women were not allowed to serve as a performer in one of the prestigious institutions of art.<sup>164</sup>

Muhsin Ertuğrul was passionate about theatre, and he always took responsibility to speak up on the concerns of the theatre institution. According to Ahmet Sevensil, Muhsin Ertuğrul was the most accomplished artist who made the most effort to bring the theater to the level of European standards, and the history of Turkish theater owes much to him.<sup>165</sup> He was dismissed from Darülbedayi several times due to his conflicting ideas with his colleagues and the administration of the theater. Today he is considered to be a giant of the Turkish theatre, and his principals and discipline are still valued in the theatre of Turkey. His name is honored with the largest İstanbul City Theatre building.

Muhsin Ertuğrul stayed in Europe several times to observe the methods of the modern theatre of the time. Interestingly, he often wrote about problems of Turkish Theatre was so much related to not having “Turkish Woman” on stage. One of his significant comments about the issue can be seen in the magazine named ‘*Temaşa*’<sup>166</sup> (Show) on issue number eleven:

“I haven’t been acting quite a while. The only reason for this is: There are no actresses. One day, when I said this in a gathering, someone asked: “Do you want women to act on stage unveiled?”. Amongst which I had a look, were mostly people who were in my opinion.

“No.” I said. “We will put a cage in front of the stage. Behind, there will be women in veils, yashmaks and dressed in a long full coat (ferace)!

This sentence followed the laughs. This time I responded to the person furiously, "Of course unveiled!. " I started a bit more fervent. If we want to become a real man after such a disaster, we have to accept the principles of a civilized nation . . . .”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Women, War and Work in the Ottoman Empire: Society for the Employment of Ottoman Muslim Women 1916-1923* (İstanbul: Ottoman Bank Archive and Research Centre, 2005).

<sup>165</sup> Sevensil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 149.

<sup>166</sup> Muhsin Ertuğrul, “Mösyö Segenin Keçisi,” *Temaşa*, November 9, 1918.

<sup>167</sup> Ertuğrul.

In his writing, he stated that it would be impossible for a nation to have their own theatre unless they had women on stage. In this case, he obviously emphasizes women from the Muslim community, as there were already several non-Muslim actresses sharing the stage with him.

“Without women, we cannot have our own theatre. Our hypocrisy against ourselves raises our social ills. As soon as we go to Europe, we wear hats, which is the headgear of all the world nations other than us; Even our ambassadors (*sefaret imamları*) in Europe wear hats instead of turban, they take their wives, their children with them and go to cafés, pubs, restaurants, and theaters but there is none of our women dare to sit somewhere in public, eat or go to the theatre even in her veil. Why? Is that because she is religious? No; is her husband bigoted? No; does she not want herself? No! Why? Because they were afraid of the sanctimonious people and the central commander!

I know so many Turkish ladies yearn to be on stage. They do not have the courage though. This is an example that we have never been able to escape, the influence of ingrained tradition.

On one side, the crowd of intellectuals who are eager to the progress of the century fights with the crowd of idled, bigoted gossipers on the other side. One day, we (intellectuals) as representing the right and righteousness will beat these bigoted crowds and leave them devastated. I wish there was one of a great soul amongst the virtuous Turkish women, who thought to be in eternal sleep, would become a member of the theatre and break down this old bigotry!

That woman, that lady is sure to be followed by hundreds of more Turkish women.

This is the only desire of my life: To see that bigotry comes to an end, and so Turkish women would act on stage with their beautiful harmonic Turkish accent to the crowd of an audience of again Turkish women who came with their husbands or brothers...<sup>168</sup>

A year later, in January, he wrote another reproach in his writing titled ‘*Hemen Vazife Başına*’<sup>169</sup> (Back to Work), and he again interprets the fact that Turkish women are not on stage. “To tell you the truth, I would not be looking for the future in my country because of the complaint and the absence of Turkish women on the scene.”

These two examples of the absence of Turkish women on the stage are quite definite. Here, Muhsin Ertuğrul shows how intellectuals, more specifically nationalist intellectuals see the absence of women being on stage. It was emphasized that the absence of Turkish identity was a great problem in theatre which was a form of art as a representative for educating and preparing the nation for modernity. Theatre was,

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<sup>168</sup> Ertuğrul Translation mine.

<sup>169</sup> Ertuğrul Muhsin, “Hemen Vazife Başına,” *Temaşa*, January 16, 1919.

unfortunately, a place where the Turkish language was not spoken properly and this was a great handicap for its duty to educate the masses. Because of this idea, they even ignored the existence of non-muslim actresses who devoted themselves to the theatre. According to their view, theatre is without women at all. Although the famous actresses like Eliza Pinnemejian (Binemeciyan), Kınar Sıvacıyan<sup>170</sup>, and had taken literature and speaking courses from Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil (1866-1945)<sup>171</sup><sup>172</sup> they were obviously not considered as Turkish for the nationalists. Another reason as we see again from Muhsin Ertuğrul's writing is that the Turkish Muslim women could not perform on stage due to their conservative stance represented by their dress code. It was an obstacle for women to be on stage wearing their *veils* (yashmak) and *long coats* (ferace) on. However, as he stated in his writing, the freedom in clothing was also a necessity of the modern nation and representatives had already experienced it while on their visit to Europe.

In this case, we can see that women exist in the theatre with their national identity rather than their own agency.

#### The First Turkish Woman on Stage

Muslim women had begun to be active by substituting the lack of working men during and after the war. Turkish women began to work in shops, post offices and even as cleaning staff in official buildings. They still followed the dress code as they were supposed to wear their veils on street, but for some families it slowly became acceptable women and men sit together and chat.<sup>173</sup>

According to Sevengil, as the number of Turkish actors increased in the theatre, the difference in the accents between the Armenian actresses, including Eliza and Mina Hanım, who spoke Turkish well, and Turkish male actors was painful to listen to.

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<sup>170</sup> Kınar Hanım (Sıvacıyan) 1876-1950, was one of the first Armenian women to start her own theatre in the Ottoman era in 1912. Later, she joined Darülbeydi and performed in the first opening play 'Çürük Temel' (La Maison D'Argile. Cited from: Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoglu, "Kınar (Hanım) Sıvacıyan," *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş., 1970).

<sup>171</sup> Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (1866-1945) is regarded as the greatest novelist in the Scientific Wealth Literature and the pre-republican period. In his novels, he depicted in a realistic style and with a psychological analysis of the intellectuals and upper class people of his time. He translated some of his works into modern Turkish himself. After his death, his novels and stories were simplified and re-published by various literature writers and researchers. Some of his famous novels were *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love, 1900), *Mai ve Siyah* (Blue and Black, 1897). Işık İhsan, "Uşaklıgil Halit Ziya," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 1057.

<sup>172</sup> Metin And, *Türk Tiyatro Tarihi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1992), 118.

<sup>173</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 230.

However, despite this, the majority of people would not tolerate seeing a Muslim-Turkish woman on stage.<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, as already mentioned above there were supporters within the intellectuals to encourage Muslim women to this act.

Such encouragement could be seen in October 1918 when Darülbedayi accepted Afife and four other Muslim Turkish girls as candidates.<sup>175</sup>

In fact, as referenced above in *Temaşa* magazine which Muhsin Ertuğrul was criticizing his writing about not having Muslim women on stage, there was an interview on the same issue of the magazine<sup>176</sup> with Savni Rıza who was a vice chairman of Darülbedayi. He was also the manager of the district of Beyoğlu Municipality and he answered the questions of the reporter about accepting Turkish women as acting students in the theatre:

“Reporter: What is your opinion about Turkish ladies who applied to Darülbedayi? Will these ladies be able to avoid an assault from the majority that exists in all developing civilizations?”

Savni Rıza Bey: For now, we do not see any problem allowing them to take classes, however when the time comes for them practice on stage they will only perform in front of a female audience.”<sup>177</sup>

We could consider that Savni Rıza was one of the administrators in Darülbedayi to support Muslim women on stage, however, his response to the reporter is rather political. He was hopeful that in time the existence of Muslim women as trainees would be accepted, but on the other hand, he was obviously cautious at the reaction of the majority that would not accept the idea of emergence of Muslim women being part of an institution of entertainment. Muslim girls would not show themselves in front of men. Furthermore, and perhaps speaking for the prevailing opinion of the time, the reporter suggests that a Muslim woman on stage would be assaulted and violated (*taaruz ve tecavüz*) by the majority of the presumably male audience.

*Temaşa* magazine announced about first Muslim girls attended Darülbedayi in January 1919. According to the magazine, the number of girls registered was reached up to five or six. Each of these girls was from prestigious families of the city. The author was kindly emphasizing and reminding the girls once again that it was highly important that they were expected to be hardworking and serious as they constituted

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<sup>174</sup> Sevengil, 298.

<sup>175</sup> Sevengil, 298.

<sup>176</sup> “Bir Mülakat,” *Temaşa*, November 9, 1918, 12.

<sup>177</sup> “Bir Mülakat,” 12 Translation mine.

all the hopes of Turkish theater. In other words, these girls would have a high duty to be representatives of the nation's reputation.

The girls who were registered in Darülbedayi were Afife, Behire, Beyza, Memduha and Refika.<sup>178</sup> Many months passed and the nation's first theatre Darülbedayi could not dare yet to let these girls appear on stage. Some of them lost their hope and did not continue later on. Afife and Refika held out hope for a time. Refika was employed as a prompter with 600- *kuruş* stipend. A position she held until the advent of the republic, after which she had a long acting career. However, Afife did not want to wait any longer, she left her 500 *kuruş* stipend as a trainee and left the theatre.<sup>179</sup>

There was an ongoing debate on media and discussions about how Muslim women could be included in the theatre. As mentioned above, Muhsin Ertuğrul was constantly writing about the issue at every chance to attract attention, meanwhile, other intellectuals who supported this idea continued to write.

Again in *Temaşa* magazine, actor İ. Galip (Arcan)<sup>180</sup> was publishing his interviews with authors about the concerns of Turkish theatre. On his interview with Mehmet Rauf<sup>181</sup> under the title of '*Mehmet Rauf Bey ve Temaşa*' (*Theatre with Mehmet Rauf Bey*) could be another example.<sup>182</sup> Mehmet Rauf states in a long discussion with a very nationalistic tone that one of the most important conditions for the success of Darülbedayi is to open the stage for women. He argued that there would be no

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<sup>178</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 300.

<sup>179</sup> Sevengil, 301.

<sup>180</sup> İsmail Galip Arcan was born in Istanbul in 1894. He started his Theatre career in Ahmet Fehim Efendi Group, leaving his education at the Military High School. In 1910 he joined Burhanettin Theater Company with Raşit Rıza and went on tours with them. Later in 1914, he joined in Darülbedayi as a trainee and then took place in the administration. In 1921, he went to France and worked with Andre Antoine. He returned to the country in 1923 and worked with Muhsin Ertuğrul's Ferah Tiyatrosu. Between 1932 and 1942, he taught at conservatory and wrote, and translated many plays. He also acted in various films such as 'Leblebici Hor Hor', Nur Baba. He wrote two theoretical books *Tiyatroda Makyaj (Make Up in Theater) (1941)* and '*Tiyatroda Diksiyon (The Elocution in Theater) (1947)*'. He died in Istanbul on 8 August 1974. – my translation from: Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoglu, "Arcan. İ. Galip," *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş, 1970).

<sup>181</sup> Mehmed Rauf, born in Istanbul on August 24th 1875. His career in literature began when his short story *Düşmüş* (Fallen), which he had sent to Hait Ziya Uşaklıgil, was published in the newspaper *Hizmet*. His short stories were published in *Resimli Gazete* (with the pen name Rauf Vicdani) He wrote several novels, stories and theater plays, and gave great importance to psychological analysis in his works. He continued his stories in various magazines, and he was the publisher of two women's magazine '*Mehasin*' '*Süs*'. (İhsan Işık, *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors*, Volume 2 page 734-735). Apart from that, he undertook the publishing of series of erotic book '*Binbir Buse*' (*Thousand and One Kisses*) which was published in 1923-24. (1923-24 İstanbul'undan Erotik bir Dergi '*Binbir Buse*', Irvin Cemil Schick-Ömer Türkoğlu, İstanbul Kitap Yayınevi. 2005)

<sup>182</sup> İ. Galip (Arcan), "Mehmet Rauf ve Temaşa," *Temaşa*, May 1, 1920.



progress (*terakki*) without women, and there would be no existence of a splendid theatre of the nation without the existence of women. He supported his argument with examples from non-Muslim actresses and the situations of the playwrights by drawing attention to the use of the Turkish language. He argued that the current (non-Muslim) actresses learned Turkish casually from their Turkish neighbors in their neighborhood; therefore, these actresses were lack of understanding the art of theatre. Moreover, the only way of revolution and progress in playwriting would be possible with the existence of young passionate Turkish performers who spoke the language beautifully. Seeing these Turkish performers acting their parts passionately with their beautiful Turkish would also encourage the playwrights to progress at their art.<sup>183</sup>

Mehmed Rauf's focus on language was the nationalist construct in which he made in his argument. However, it was clearly more than just an issue of language, Rauf denied the agency and success of Armenian actresses, who it should be noted studied Turkish with Ottoman luminaries such as Namık Kemal and Ali Suavi. These Armenian actresses' attempts to learn the language of the masses 'of the nation' was incompatible with Rauf's nationalist perspective. Therefore, we can see that the discussion around proper spoken Turkish was both a literal concern but also a proxy to delineate who was in and who was out in the modern nation. In other words, the Turkish speaking Armenian could not be the muse of a Turkish speaking Muslim playwright.

As mentioned before in Muhsin Ertuğrul's writing in the *Temaşa* magazine, another obstacle for Muslim women to perform in the modern theatre was the Islamic dress code. A couple of months after the interview above, there was another article by an anonymous writer again in *Temaşa* magazine. In 1920, Darülbedayi was having a hard time keeping the institution alive due to financial problems and conflicts between the actors and the administration. A group of artists separated from Darülbedayi established a theater company named *Yeni Sahne (The New Stage)*, and the author in the magazine was suggesting the new company by offering positions for the Muslim women actresses. The article suggested that the Yeni Sahne could be a pioneer and succeed at what Darülbedayi could not dare to achieve in five or six years by letting Turkish women on stage. According to the author, Muslim women worked in banks

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<sup>183</sup> (Arcan), 1.

and hospitals, side by side with their male colleagues and it was necessary to allow women who were serious in their jobs and with their passion for art, to work side by side with their male colleagues in the theater as well. The author, who was probably either a member of Darülbedayi or Yeni Sahne, was careful with his words in order to keep the balance between traditional values and the modernizing community. According to the author, in the process of modernization, some of the young women went astray; moreover, they were hiding their immorality under their veils. As the theater was known to be the mirror reflecting our lives, it was a great responsibility to put the modest, hardworking and serious women on stage in order to introduce the right path to those who were on the wrong path.

“...Theater should show what is right... we can assure you that only modest and serious women whose only loves is art will be put on stage. [Such a women] ... could save her sisters from the wrong path. This is why we want these kinds of women on stage.”<sup>184</sup>

The author suggested that *Yeni Sahne* could lead this duty by accepting talented girls with second or third part roles (like playing maids) in their headscarves and long open-fronted cloaks (*maşlâh*). Then the new company would have signed its name with gold in Turkish theater history.<sup>185</sup>

Considering the limits of freedom and the boundaries on Muslim women in 1920s which was created by patriarchal government, traditional and religion based society, the suggestion of this author might have seemed to him quite innocent and logical, however, he was aware of the fact that the dress code could only allow women to stay on the side not so visible in the front. Regardless of the intention, it was thought to be a balancing act to try in the national and traditional ideals. Nevertheless, there is no record of the Yeni Sahne putting this suggestion into practice.

#### Pioneer & Victim: Afife Steps on Stage

The attempt came from Darülbedayi. In the theater season of fall 1920, Darülbedayi put the play *Yamalar* by Hüseyin Suat (Yalçın) once again in the repertoire.<sup>186</sup> The leading character ‘Emel’ was performed by Eliza Pinnemejian as she was the unique actress of the theater with a correct Turkish accent but she had left

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<sup>184</sup> “Temaşada Gençlik ve Türk Mümessileleri,” *Temaşa*, August 1336.

<sup>185</sup> “Temaşada Gençlik ve Türk Mümessileleri.”

<sup>186</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 303.

for Paris and Darülbedayi had no one to substitute the role. It might have been due to the tight situation of Darülbedayi as there was financial and management problems around that time, they decided to call Afife back to the institute to substitute the role. Afife was one of the five acting students in Darülbedayi. Afife was only 15 years old when she started working backstage as a *trainee actress* (mümessile) with a stipend of 500 *kurus*.<sup>187</sup> Three years passed until the time she was called to substitute the role on that fateful day.

In 1977, the professional actor of Darülbedayi Vasfi Rıza Zobu published his memoirs as an eye witness about the period of Darülbedayi. In his book, he carefully emphasizes the situation of Muslim women in theatre as ‘women actresses as members of the Islamic religion’ and he indicated that the situation of Turkish Muslim Woman led to a lot of concerns of the Turkish theatre history. According to Zobu, taking Muslim girls for education at Darülbedayi was a daring act. Their attendance at school was not heard by ‘ungodly trackers’ (*günahkâr takipçileri*) so no one seemed to notice or said anything until right after Afife’s first performance on the stage. Afife steps on the stage with a nickname *Jale* (dewdrop), which was an uncommon name to a Muslim Turkish girl. She had to hide her real identity. She was now on the stage and her audiences were not women only. She was on the stage but not abided by the Islamic a dress code, she used the character’s costume, wearing a red dress, white stockings, and white shoes and wearing a white ribbon decorating her hair.<sup>188</sup> She successfully acted her part in the play. Six years later, she told about the night to Ahmet Sevengil as follows:

“ . . . It was the first night I had been happy in my whole life . . . I was in a wonderful exhilaration of the art given to my soul. There is a beautiful scene in that play; a crying scene . . . I cried with ecstasy. I really cried . . . Applause, applause, applause . . . The curtain closed; then opened, they brought me flowers. The curtain closed again. The playwright (Hüseyin Suat Bey) was waiting for me offstage; he stopped me as I was leaving, kissed me on my forehead and said: “We’ve needed a hero for our theater and you’ve become the one”.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 1:115.

<sup>188</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 301–303.

<sup>189</sup> Sevengil, 303.

Later on, she was known as Afife Jale but used only Jale on cast lists<sup>190</sup>, and continued acting in several plays such as *Tatlı Sır* (Sweet Secret) and *Odalık* (Concubine).

Although Afife Jale was considered to be the first Muslim woman to be on stage, there was another example of a woman in the earlier period secretly worked as an actress. Again in the article that M. Kemal wrote in *Darülbedayi* magazine, he mentioned about a Turkish woman acted on stage for the first time in Abdülhamit's period. According to M. Kemal, the actor and director Ahmet Fehim (1856-1930) had first mentioned about this woman in his memoir. M. Kemal refers to the women's name as (K) as she was still living at the time he was writing his article and we could consider that he did not want to reveal her identity. Ms (K) had appeared on stage first time in the town of Nazilli with a nickname Amelya. She was both actress and a Kanto singer and due to her nickname, she was considered as *Greek* (Rum). Later on, she and her husband went on tour in Ankara. While speaking or acting, Ms (K) used specific Turkish terms such as '*fesuphanallah*' '*La havle velakuvvete*', '*innalahi maassabirin*' quite often and so she aroused suspicion. One day, eventually, she coincided to a wife of a family friend in a public bath and she had to leave her fake identity.<sup>191</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil also mentioned about this woman in his book *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu* that was first published in 1927. Although the story of this woman is more or less the same, according to Refik Ahmet, Amelya's original name was Seniye and she was the daughter of a *Kazasker* (a military judge in Ottoman period) and was married to her a *Çubukçubaşı* (title of the person who was responsible for the tobacco of the sultan).<sup>192</sup> Surprisingly, Refik Ahmet wrote about this woman again in his another book published in 1934, however, the story seems to be the same except, this time, her name was noted as Kadriye.<sup>193</sup> Özdemir Nutku also tells about this woman in his book about the history of *Darülbedayi*. He refers to both sources of information.<sup>194</sup> It is highly questionable whether or not Kadriye or a woman like her actually existed. It is suspicious that the same writers who advocated putting a Muslim woman on stage also knew of a successful Muslim actress

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<sup>190</sup> Sevengil, 110.

<sup>191</sup> M. Kemal, "Temaşamızda Türk Kadını 2," *Darülbedayi*, 1939.

<sup>192</sup> "Temaşa," November 9, 1918.

<sup>193</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 1:112.

<sup>194</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbedayi'nin Elli Yılı (Darülbedayi'den Şehir Tiyatrosuna)*, 144.

performing decades before without any social consequences. Kadriye's tale is so innocent that it seems like something that was told to reassure readers that a Muslim woman on stage would be easy and without consequence.

Özdemir Nutku gives another example from *Temaşa* magazine issued on January 1, 1920. There was another Turkish woman named Perihan acted in a small part of the play which Afife also acted, named 'Tatlı Sır' but we cannot be sure if Afife and Perihan were on the stage at the same time.<sup>195</sup>

However, soon after her first performance, Afife's real identity was revealed. She was often faced with a police raid and she was sneaked out behind the stage after every performance until one night she was finally caught and got arrested.

Afife Jale was questioned several times at the police station and each time she faced several insults. We can read from her own words when she talked to author Refik Ahmet Sevengil on how she was once treated. She was accused to be dishonorable to deny her customs of her own nationality and her religion. She was accused to be an evil example for a modest Turkish Muslim woman. She was crying in front of the police chief claiming that the act she was doing was nothing related to any of the accusations. The chief was insisting to teach her moral values, how she was supposed to live as a Muslim girl, moreover, he reminded her Islamic customs and so forth.<sup>196</sup> According to Vasfi Rıza Zobu, who was an eyewitness to these events, Afife's situation turned out to be an issue of a first the municipality, ministry of internal affairs, then the police department. Finally, it involved the *Şeyhülislam*, who issued a *fetva* declaring 'muslim women cannot be on stage.'<sup>197</sup>

Interestingly, Afife also claimed that even though the policy of the government was to stop her, that there were supporters within the community. They thought she was a brave hero to dare to step on this innovation. She was able to continue to act for some time with the help of a friendly police chief named Tahsin Bey.<sup>198</sup> Zobu confirmed this. He wrote that Tahsin Bey, nicknamed the 'Albanian' was a reformist officer who supported the idea of a Muslim woman being on stage and he even sent an order to Kadıköy central officer in support of Afife. According to Zobu, he said: "Turkish woman must be on the stage, I support your struggle. I would help as much as I can."

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<sup>195</sup> Özdemir Nutku, 145.

<sup>196</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 304.

<sup>197</sup> Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne*, 75.

<sup>198</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 304.

Zobu wrote that he along with others in the theater were quite shocked at this response. It was hard to believe that such liberal chief worked in such conservative period (conservative from the point of view of Zobu). “This support turned us into warriors, and Afife was like a fireball turned into John of Arc.”<sup>199</sup>

Therefore, it was announced that Afife would be on stage again. It was either during the play ‘*Tatlı Sır*’ (Sweet Secret) from Reşat Rıdvan or ‘*Odalık*’ (Concubine) from İbnurrefik Ahmet Nuri that Zobu was witnessing at that night. According to Zobu, The theatre building was surrounded by police officers and they had to help Afife runaway from the back door of the building from where she was able to flee to Üsküdar (a district of the Anatolian side of Istanbul).

As the police officer could not find Afife, they took a couple of actors Hüseyin Suat and Celâl Sahir (1883-1935). Zobu went with them out of curiosity. They were taken to the central chief in his office, he was quite furious, walking up and down. He was not denying that he had taken the order from Tahsin Bey but he did not care at all. Zobu claims that he, later on, heard from people that the chief was yelling at Hüseyin Suat and Celâl Sahir in his office “I feel as if I see my own wife (*avrat*) on stage! I destroy you all!”<sup>200</sup>

As we can see in the memory above, there were opposing ideas and actions towards change and innovation. Moreover, these opinions may result in arbitrary treatment of the authority. On one side we see an opinion that promotes the existence of Muslim women in a changing environment, on the other, we see an opinion defending that this is absolutely dangerous and objectionable and that they were afraid of family and moral values would be destroyed. In particular, from the eyes of opposing thoughts, it is a difficult situation to be absorbed to see a Muslim woman performing on the stage as an entertainer for men moreover they were to be in a costume and manner out of their conservative profile within the community. However, it is not even the case that on either side the woman may have a word or give an opinion. All we read is a show of mercy after tears fall down on Afife’s cheek trying to prove she was not doing anything shameful.

As a result of numerous police raids and investigations that followed, Afife's career in Darülbedayi, which many people have interpreted as a courageous act did not last

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<sup>199</sup> Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne*, 75. Translation mine.

<sup>200</sup> Zobu, 75.

long. An official order dated October 3, 1920, was sent from the Interior Ministry to both *municipality* (şehremaneti) and the *police headquarters* (polis müdüriyeti). This was the only document I could find in the Ottoman archives indicated the relation to Afife. Moreover, it is unlikely that other documents will be found as the Darülbedayi archives have been victim to both fire and plunder. It is reported in this order that Muslim women (*islam kadınları*) attempted to act on theater stages. This situation was incompatible with religious decrees and Islamic rules (*Ahkâm-ı diniyye ve şcair-i islâmiye gayri kabili telif olma*). In addition, if the situation reoccurred, immediate attention was required otherwise the *police* (zabita) would be held responsible.<sup>201</sup>

Refik Ahmet Sevengil noted in his book that the theatre received another order later on March 8, 1921. This time, it was a direct order to dismiss Afife Jale from the stage committee.<sup>202</sup>

Moreover, Afife was struggling with family pressure. She was the daughter of Hidayet Bey and her grandfather was Sait Pasha who was a physician at the time. She was from a good family and was educated at İstanbul Kız Sanayi Mektebi (*Istanbul School of Arts for Girls*)<sup>203</sup>. Based on her background, it could be assumed that she would be an excellent representative of the nation and the national theater. However, she found herself on the wrong side in the eyes of her family.

According to Özdemir Nutku's interview with her half-sister Behiye Hanım in 1977; Behiye hanım told that the family was quite upset at her acting in the theatre.

“We were so surprised. How could that be possible to have such a member from a morally upright family had chosen to become an actress. We stopped talking to her afterwards. Only her mother Methiye Hanım was beside her. She never left her alone in tours. We then started talking to her after she married Selahattin Pınar in 1929”.<sup>204</sup>

Apart from the interview above; we do not have any primary source to indicate family's opinion about Afife's career. In her play, Nezihe Araz (1922-2009)<sup>205</sup> wrote

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<sup>201</sup> BOA. DH.KMS / 59-38-0 date: H 19-01-1339 / October 3 1920

<sup>202</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 1:117.

<sup>203</sup> Now called Selçuk Kız Teknik ve Meslek Lisesi

<sup>204</sup> Özdemir Nutku, *Darülbedayiden Şehir Tiyatrosuna 100. Yıl* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2015), 343–346.

<sup>205</sup> Nezihe Araz (1922-2009) graduated from Ankara University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Psychology and Philosophy (1946) She worked as a reporter in the magazine Resimli Hayat (1953) and as a columnist in the newspapers Havadis (1957), Yeni Sabah (1957-62), Yeni İstanbul (1970), Milliyet and Güneş newspapers. She was one of the chief editors of the Turkish language edition of the Larousse Encyclopedia. She received the Best Play Writer Award by the review İnanç in 1994 with Savaş Yorgunu Kadınlar, and Avni Dilligil Theater Play Award with Afife Jale in

a scene of dialogue between Afife and her father Hidayet that while not factual likely expressed the feelings of her family.

Hidayet: . . . My daughter cannot be an actress; cannot be a whore; cannot be openly and officially labeled as a whore. Never, never . . .

Afife: I am sorry, please don't aggravate yourself. I will not be a whore!

Hidayet: (Terrified) So, you want to be an actress?

Afife: Yes! And nobody can stop me.<sup>206</sup>

It is not certain whether or not the conversation actually happened between Afife and her father, but it well indicates the conflicts of the era. Afife's family represented a family, which had certain moral values and opinion towards the theatre shaped by a traditional view of morality. The family was brought up by a state doctrine enforced by decrees and Islamic rules that forbade a Muslim woman act on stage. On the other hand, we see a woman who innocently cared about only to follow her desire to be a member of the art of performance just like the actresses she admired. There is every reason to believe that she was passionate about the art of theatre and she dreamed of the day she could be on stage like Eliza Pinnemejian or Kınar Sıvacıyan. She probably did not think of or did not care about the obstacle of the religious identity that was a great matter in her time. She received a family acceptance only after her marriage with Selahattin Pınar, a composer, in 1929, long after these events. She was no longer a single woman; she was now a part of a well-respected marital union in the eyes of her family. This is a marked difference from Bedia Muvahhid who was married and encouraged by her husband when she first stepped on stage.

However, while there is likely truth in Nezihe Araz's apocryphal dialogue, we should be careful to not to treat it as fact. A number of authors including Skylstad. Skylstad's cited Araz's play in her dissertation<sup>207</sup> as a primary source for her research. As I have suggested, Afife's choice to become an actress may not have concerned her family, but the fact that she was an unmarried actress might have worried them.

After her dismissal from Darülbedayi, Afife continued acting for a while with several other theatre companies. There were theatre groups supporting the idea of having

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1988. Işık İhsan, "Araz Nezihe," in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 115,116.

<sup>206</sup> Nezihe Araz, Afife Jale, page 18

<sup>207</sup> Skylstad, "Acting the Nation Women on the Stage and in the Audience of Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic."



Muslim Turkish women on stage, and some even promoted their companies advertising the existence of Muslim Turkish actresses with them. One of the prestigious theatre company owners Burhanettin Bey (*Burhanettin Tepsi*) hired Afife. He applied to Ottoman police department for permission to perform a play with a Muslim Turkish girl but he received warnings and rejection. However, as Istanbul was under allied occupation following armistice that ended World War One, Burhanettin Bey was able to request permission from British administration, however, they did not allow the performance either. He eventually requested protection from the French administration for the play. The play was called '*Napoleon Bonaparte*' about the French military leader of the French Revolution. French government accepted the request and Afife and Burhanettin Bey finally could perform the play under the French protection, however, the protection was applicable only within the building where the performance took place. The police officers of Prime Minister Damat Ferit Paşa were waiting outside the building and after the play, Burhanettin Bey accepted the greetings from the French government and they had to escape from backdoors.<sup>208</sup>

This incident shows us that although the theatre was also under the supervision of the occupational powers, theater companies were sometimes able to use this to their advantage as the aforementioned examples demonstrate.

Afife continued performing with Burhanettin Bey's Company until 1922. We see from the records in Sevengil book that her name was Jale, on the cast list of adaptation of Moliere's play 'The Miser' which was put on stage for the playwright's 300<sup>th</sup> birthday. Afife encouraged another Muslim girl called Perran and they worked together until Burhanettin Bey moved to Egypt.<sup>209</sup>

Later on, she joined '*Yeni Tiyatro*' established by Ibnurrefik Ahmet Nuri and '*Milli Sahne*' companies then traveled to Anatolia with several tours. That was the time after the Republic was found and Turkish Muslim women had freed from restrictions as actresses. There is an interesting detail given from her half-sister Behiye that Afife was traveling the tours hiding her identity with another nickname '*Marika*'.<sup>210</sup>

After numerous warnings and orders to the theatre committee, numerous oppressive treatments from the police, Afife was left alone. She was a teenager, and at a very

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<sup>208</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 1:118.

<sup>209</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 110.

<sup>210</sup> Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu*, 184.

young age, she was faced with emotional breakdowns and as a result suffering from severe headaches. Eventually, she found a disastrous solution to ease her pain by using morphine which was prescribed by her doctor but led to her becoming an addict. Behiye hanım stated in the interview that after the first police raid, she was so scared that this caused her to have severe headaches and a doctor eased her pain with morphine. She was cured again with morphine after she experienced another crisis with her mother beside her, this time the chaos was caused by a difficult audience while she was on tour with Burhanettin Bey's Company.<sup>211</sup> The possible reaction Afife faced with from the audience could indicate how public opinion was towards this innovation in the theater. Until then, Afife was fulfilled with applause from İstanbul audience who were experienced with theater; on the other hand, the audience of Anatolia was not ready yet to see this innovation happening to a Muslim woman. It was obvious that not only the government had conflict arguments about the women's position in the changing world; also the public seemed to unsure. That is probably the reason Afife covered herself under a non-Muslim name during the tours in Anatolia. In the short period of time she was active on stage, Afife also supported some other Turkish Muslim actresses. While she was acting in Burhanettin Bey's company she encouraged Perran and Seniye Hanıms. Later on, Seniye Hanım married Burhanettin Bey and continued her carrier both in Egypt with Burhanettin Bey and back in Istanbul. Others were Mebrure and Lem'an who became members of *Milli Sahne* (National Stage) went on tours to Anatolia after the Turkish War of Independence and triumph of the Republic in 1923; and else there were Huriye and Hikmet from Izmit and Ruhut from Trabzon who joined the troupes from Istanbul.<sup>212</sup> Necla hanım (Sertel, 1901-1969) would be another example. According to Sevengil, Necla hanım met Afife once and got interested in acting, everyone else stood against it. She was then introduced to Burhanettin Bey Company but could not continue with him as he left the country. She, later on, joined Ziya Bey's troupe and finally was accepted in Darülbedayi in 1926.<sup>213</sup> Many of them continued their career after the Republic since the new regime gave them the freedom to act on stage.

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<sup>211</sup> Nutku, 184.

<sup>212</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 311.

<sup>213</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, "Necla Hanım," *Büyük Gazete*, March 10, 1928, sec. issue 81.

Soon after she struggled here and there to be on stage, Afife never returned to Darülbedayi; there is a strong likelihood that she was never called back. Eventually, she had to withdraw herself from theatre because of her worsening health problem. She succumbed to the challenge that she made to be on the stage, she was insulted, even she was slapped on her face once by the police chief.<sup>214</sup>

In 1923, the newly proclaimed Republic had lifted the ban of Muslim woman on stage, however, Afife no longer had the strength and she had to retire herself from the theatre of the new nation. After years of devastation and ill conditions, Afife Jale died on July 24, 1941, in Bakırköy MDiseases Hospital. She was buried in an unmarked grave in Kazlıçeşme cemetery. At the time, few mourned her death.

Afife Jale's doomed end is worth discussing. She was simply ignored, and her courage and attempt were not given importance as deserved in the history of national theater. As Özdemir Nutku emphasized in his book<sup>215</sup>, the reason of Afife's neglect from Darülbedayi after the Republic remained a mystery. She was shortly mentioned but her importance was not recognized. Nobody mentioned about it in his memoirs. It is worth to discuss the reason for her exceptional position.

It is interesting that although Muhsin Ertuğrul continuously complained about problems of Turkish woman not being on stage, it was not possible to locate any comment he had written about Afife or others even in his memories, published under the title *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*. We could only see the names of one of the first four women Turkish Muslim trainees in Darülbedayi, Refika, who worked as a prompter at the backstage until a much later time. He mostly wrote about either Armenian actresses, especially about Kınar Hanım (Kınar Sıvacıyan), or actresses in the later Republican period. We could estimate the reason partly because as in the years when Afife was in Darülbedayi, Muhsin Ertuğrul had already been in Germany. He left as he lost his belief in making theatre in his homeland partly because of his conflicts with the theatre committee, as it is stated in his memoir

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<sup>214</sup> (Memory told by Afife Jale's nephew in law Altın Pınar in documentary: *Yüzyılım Aşkları*, Selahattin Pınar Afife Jale).

<sup>215</sup> Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu*, 186.

With the signing of Mondros Armistice Agreement of 1918, Istanbul had opened its doors to the enemy and a gloomy era began for the country. Therefore, most people did and not think about theatre, there were other through on men's minds.<sup>216</sup>

We can make an assumption for the reason Muhsin Ertuğrul kept silent about Afife Jale by his comments on the actors' stance on the society. He stated that the daily life of the performer was of special value in the eyes of the audiences. The audiences was highly curious about their private lives. It was important for an actor to protect his/her prestige in society and could only be succeeded by keeping him/herself off of the public view. However, this required great discipline and maturity otherwise his/her career would come to an end.<sup>217</sup>

Another reason of Muhsin Ertuğrul kept his silence about Afife that he may have written his memoir from a nationalistic perspective, and did not want to promote an Ottoman era actress who not only performed under occupation but also she was a drug addict. In other words, she was not an ideal candidate for the first Turkish actress for moral and nationalistic grounds.

Afife Jale would be a false representative of this discipline that is commented above. She was already devastated fighting with the order of her period. The drugs she was taking to ease her pain defeated her and she could no longer stand on the stage. A director, writer, and a theater critic Aşot Madat (1884-1935)<sup>218</sup> wrote a critical two-volume book "*Sahnemizin Değerleri*" (The Merits of Our Stage) published in 1943, commemorating the 85th-anniversary<sup>219</sup> of the Turkish theater. In his first volume, Afife was the first actress of the introduction. While honoring her position as a pioneer to Turkish actresses, he on the other hand, strictly criticized her opioid condition without giving much attention to the circumstances. According to Madat, Afife had the sole responsibility of her early retirement from art and her death at a young age. She was on stage with her own will and conviction. Moreover, her courageous step was a sign that showed Turkish woman what she was capable of on

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<sup>216</sup> Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*, 123.

<sup>217</sup> Ertuğrul, 74–75.

<sup>218</sup> Aşot Madat began his theater career in Reşat Rıdvan and Minnakian Company. He worked as an actor for a while, then continued his career as a director. He met many people in the field of theater, collected information, made investigations. He left behind a book titled *Sahnemizin Değerleri* (The Merits of Our Stage), a two-volume collection of critics of theatrical art and artists. Burhan Arpad, "Türk Tiyatrosunda Dün Bugün," n.d., 5, Taha Toros Arşivi.

<sup>219</sup> Aşot Madat accepted the founding of the Naum Theater in 1858 as the beginning year of the Turkish Theater.

the path of her freedom. She could have promoted herself with her delicate and artistic spirit. However, Afife was fascinated by the killer pleasure of her remedy, becoming a morphine addict, so her energy weakened, her talent diminished, her health crushed; from then, she became a pathetic being and turned herself into a soul that deprived of consciousness.<sup>220</sup> Afife's imprudent act turned into a disease that damaged her, the theater, moreover the potential to the community.

As seen above, Afife was an addict in the eyes of the art circles and she could no longer be a representative for the Turkish theatre. She already crossed moral boundaries. As a nation's daughter, her act to be on stage was courageous and revolutionary. She was a hero and a pioneer of the desired modern Muslim Turkish woman in the eyes of intellectual and a nationalist community above all a male-based power. On the other hand, we see a woman's agency to be a member of an institute of art and entertainment. It was an innocent attempt in the eyes of a young girl to follow a dream of becoming one of the actresses of the time she admired and serve only for the art without thinking about nation's needs, customs or religious orders. Afife's passion to become an actress was out of political causes that she interpreted the reason of her dismissal from Darülbedayi was due to a career contention. According to the interview between Afife and Sevengil, she stated that after Eliza Pinnemejian came back to Istanbul, Darülbedayi wanted to hire her back but she stipulated that she would only return if Afife was dismissed from the committee. That followed a man from the administration of the theatre committee talking to Şeyhülislam and then a definite order was sent to the theatre for dismissal of her position.<sup>221</sup>

Whether or not how it exactly happened, this is an interpretation of a woman serving for her passion rather than the nation. Part of the reason may not have been career competition, but rather the reputation and notoriety of Afife. Forcing her out of Darülbedayi end controversy in Darülbedayi. When we go back to the interview with her half-sister Behiye, she responded to the question which if Afife was ever called back to Darülbedayi;

“Q: After the declaration of the Republic, Atatürk said that he wanted to see Turkish women on stage, soon after, Bedia hanım appeared on

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<sup>220</sup> Madat, *Sahnemizin Değerleri*.

<sup>221</sup> Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 1:117.

stage and in films in 1923. Did Afife get any proposal back from Darülbedayi?

Behiye: I don't know, but if ever did, she would probably run back there. Everyone left her outside."<sup>222</sup>

Afife was obviously left behind. She could not continue her marriage with Selahattin Pınar and got divorced. Only a few friends from the theater were helping her to survive. Whenever chance she had, she was sending letters of complaints, or letters to ask for help to her friends and family. She was taken to Bakırköy Mental Hospital so as to be taken care of. She was physically incapable but her mind was still bright and clear as noted by author and journalist Nusret Safa Coşkun. He visited Afife several times and wrote in *Perde ve Sahne* Magazine. He reported of her last days and her death at the hospital. Even from her ill bed, she was asking about Darülbedayi and was curious about all the new actresses there, and then she was complaining about how she was forgotten;

“. . . They all forgot about me,... the author who kissed me on my forehead when I first stepped on the stage, the great men who encouraged me, my fans, my audience, and my friends. . . They all forgot about me. How fast!... There is no one knocking on my door to ask how I am... They all, all of them forgot about me."<sup>223</sup>

Today Afife is honored, there are at least two plays, *Hayali Temsil* by Ahmet Sami Özbudak performed in the İstanbul Municipal Theater (İstanbul Şehir Tiyatroları) since the season of 2016, and the aforementioned play *Afife Jale* by Nezihe Araz. Two films *Afife Jale* by Nezihe Araz and Selim İleri, and *Kilit* (The Lock) directed by Ceyda Aslı Kılıçkırın, a ballet about her named *Afife* directed by Beyhan Murphy, performed during 2014 ballet season in Istanbul State Opera and Ballet, and above all else there are annual theater awards, the Afife Jale Awards (the Oscars for Turkish theater) named after her.<sup>224</sup> However, in her own time and in the early Turkish Republic she was mostly forgotten, upstaged as it were, by Bedia Muvahhid.

Fahriye Dinçer has reached similar conclusions about why Afife was neglected in the republican period. While her analysis is less detailed than my own, I like how she framed the transition between Afife's times in the late Ottoman Empire to the early

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<sup>222</sup> Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu*, 185.

<sup>223</sup> Nusret Safa Coşkun, "Perde ve Sahne," *Cumhuriyet Matbaası*, September 1941.

<sup>224</sup> Since 1997, with more than 15 categories of awards.

Turkish Republic. She writes of the Republican effort to “tame” the actress. Dinçer believes marriage and motherhood had a crucial taming impact of over the Turkish actress.<sup>225</sup>

When looking at this issue from a religious perspective we should not think of Muslims as averse to female performers, female singers and actresses were popular among the Turkish Muslim population, so it was not a rejection of female performers, it was a rejection of seeing women who belonged to their religious denomination/community. In line with this, Armenian or other non-Muslim performers were not thought to be part of their milieu, community, or national culture they belonged, therefore, their performances could be enjoyed, not critiqued. However, to see a Turkish Muslim woman on stage was to see a member of their own community employed in a profession that they associated with the “other”. Their sense of nation, their sense of political identity was wrapped up in this Muslim Turkish woman onstage. Therefore, Ottoman men did not see her, but rather they saw their wives and daughters. This might explain the agony of the police chief when he said: “it’s as if I see my wife on stage.” Afife’s crime was not her desire to be an actress, but her naïveté. Her remarks after her first performance demonstrated this, ‘. . . it was the first night I had been happy in my whole life... I cried with ecstasy.’ Afterward Hüseyin Suat Bey, the playwright, told her that she was the hero the theater needed.<sup>226</sup> Afife went on stage for herself, but for the intellectuals and the greater society around her, she was a symbol to be promoted or criticized, not a young actress enjoying her art and fame.

Her inability to see what she represented, or to not recognize what she symbolized to the men who wished her on stage was part of her downfall. Not as a woman or actress but as a symbol of the Turkish nation, this was her crime that this perhaps was different with Bediâ as she understood what she represented. A Turkish actress acting for the Turkish nation, a wife and mother who acted for the nations, not for herself.

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<sup>225</sup> Fahriye Dinçer, “Afife Jale On the Stage,” in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theater in the Ottoman World* (India: Seagull Books, 2014), 393–409.

<sup>226</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 303.

## Daughters of the Stage Part 3: Theater in the New Republic

Darülbedayi was the project of the Turkish nationalists in the late Ottoman Empire, but it was a private organization, with a modernist mission. However, under the new Turkish Republic, it and the actresses Darülbedayi put on stage were instruments of state policy. In other words, feminism in the theater during Ottoman times was a project promoted by intellectuals, but in the new Turkish Republic, state feminism was showcased through the theater and Bedia Muvahhit a willing advocate.

This fact became clear even before the Republic had been declared. The Turkish Nationalist fighting in Anatolia did not consider a Turkish Muslim woman on stage a crime.<sup>227</sup> In the Summer of 1923, with the war for independence near an end, a group of actors from Darülbedayi along with three Muslim Turkish actresses went on a tour to perform in front of Mustafa Kemal with a play called *Hisse-i Şayia* (A Share of the Rumor) written by Ibnurrefik Ahmet Nuri.<sup>228</sup> There was a very important purpose for this tour as they were planning to get permission from Mustafa Kemal and the new government to open doors to the stage for Muslim women. However, they had no assumption of what reaction they were going to encounter. There is a very interesting comparison by Zobu that reflects the situation of the time. On one side there was an Anatolian city of İzmir that waved a Turkish flag, and hosted Mustafa Kemal who was the leader and the commander of this victory, and on the other side there were Ottoman subjects from the city of Istanbul, the city still ruled by its sultan, the grand vizier, and its *şeyhülislam*<sup>229</sup>. Moreover, according to Zobu, there were two important reasons for this tour. The first reason was that the actors along with them Turkish Muslim women were going to perform in İzmir which was under control of the Turkish Grand National Assembly and having Mustafa Kemal within the audience would have been a sign of approval for Muslim actresses, and none of the Ottomans would have objected to it. The second reason was more about the theatre politics that

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<sup>227</sup> Sevengil and Önal, *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu?*, 120.

<sup>228</sup> Ibnurrefik Ahmet Nuri (1874-1935) was an actor, playwright and author. He worked in Darülbedayi in 1915 in the administration. He is also the writer of *Odalık* that Afife acted in. During the breaking of Darülbedayi in 1923 he gathered another theatre company 'Yeni Tiyatro' and continued his active career in theatre. He is also one of the publishers of the humour magazine 'Kelebek' with Reşat Nuri Güntekin and Mahmut Yesari. Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoğlu, "Ahmet Nuri Ibnulrefik," *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş., 1970).

<sup>229</sup> Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne*, 77.



gives us an interesting fact about the political side of Darülbedayi. According to Zobu, Darülbedayi administration was a group of writers who spoke French with each other and they were devoted to the sultanate. Some of them were even members of the opposition party named *Hürriyet-i İtilâf Fırkası* (Freedom and Accord Party) that was against the Turkish revolutionaries (*Kuvayi Milliye*) and the movement in Anatolia. Therefore, a tour of an Anatolian city would be unacceptable. Moreover, the administration had already sent a letter of refutation to the newspapers in İstanbul, telling that the group in İzmir was not related to Darülbedayi. In this case, there was no one to argue that the group in İzmir was the opposite side of the committee but they were still representatives of Darülbedayi. An appreciation and approval of the new government would have been another victory for them. Finally, the group met Mustafa Kemal on July 26 1923<sup>230</sup> days before their first performance.<sup>231</sup> Zobu pointed out that, surprisingly, Mustafa Kemal already knew that they were on tour with Muslim actresses. Moreover, he had already known what happened to Afife. He, without giving them a chance to ask, expressed his approval in the subject matter. According to Mustafa Kemal, Darülbedayi had a very important role in the art society of the nation, and once again he emphasized on the fact that having Muslim Turkish actresses would be important for the correct pronunciation of the nation's language. This is similar to the refrain of previous intellectuals, and their concern for a proper Turkish accent. Zobu reports that Mustafa Kemal said,

“I am very pleased that you came with Turkish ladies. Listening to them on the stage with their beautiful accents will be a great pleasure . . . Darülbedayi is a very delectable and a much favorite flower in the life of art in this country. . . With the participation of Turkish ladies, this flower will sprinkle more and become more delectable.”<sup>232</sup>

The tour of İzmir for Darülbedayi actors was recorded as an important event for the history of the theater in the Turkish Republic. Giving freedom to Turkish Muslim actresses was an important indicator of how the innovative and modernist the new

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<sup>230</sup> Although Vasfi Rıza Zobu wrote exact dates of the events in his memoir proving with newspaper writings, there is a confliction of the dates. He noted the date of their first performance as July 29 1339 with Rumi calendar and August 11 1923 with modern calendar. However, according to the newspaper he showed in his book gives the date July 26 1339 (1923) for their meeting with Mustafa Kemal and July 29 1339 (1923) for their first performance. This could be due to confusion in converting the dates.

<sup>231</sup> Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne*, 81.

<sup>232</sup> Zobu, 82.

government was. Moreover, it was evident that there was no resemblance to the old system. This was also the day of the first steps of Bediâ Muvahhit as one of the first Turkish Muslim women on the stage of the Republican era.

#### Theater in the New Republic

Two months after this event, there was a proclamation of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923, and the effect of the Ottoman era on the country and the nation started to fade away. Around the same time, Darülbedayi was collapsed due to conflicts at the administration, and the actors were trying other ways to survive and hoping for the new system would bring more renovations to the theatre community. Soon after, several actors including the ones from The New Theater gathered together under the name of *Darülbedayi Temsil Heyeti* (Performance Delegation of Darülbedayi) and this was almost a born out of ashes.

In 1926, the government established a Directorate of the Fine Arts (*Sanayi-i Nefise Müdürlüğü*) and a Committee of Fine Arts (*Sanayi-i Nefise Encümeni*) affiliated to the Ministry of National Education to increase the interest in the arts. A law was issued on 25 June 1927 with the recommendation of the Committee of the Fine Arts. "It was accepted by this law that the concerts and performances presented by educational institutions shall not be entitled to taxation".<sup>233</sup> This was a considerable relief for the theater institutions as they were smashed by numerous taxations in the previous government. It could be considered that the new Republic followed a policy to expand the theater institutions all around the country. In the process of nation-building and introducing the new idealism and a nationalistic system of the government, the theater was a promoting method to reach public; ideals, values of the nation, patriotism were main topics of the plays.<sup>234</sup> The principals of the Republic were aimed to spread in a sort of didactic and integrative method by the promotion of the theater. Mustafa Kemal gave close attention to theater and performances. Plays were under his observation and edited mostly by him. He was even attending the rehearsals as much as he could to observe and the plays were performed after his approval. Metin And stated, Atatürk was the first dramaturge of the Turkish theater. He summarized

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<sup>233</sup> Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu*, 48.

<sup>234</sup> And, *Türk Tiyatro Tarihi*, 120.

Atatürk's overall edits of the scripts in three categories.<sup>235</sup> These were linguistic edits that required each word to be selected from modern Turkish such as the example of changing the word *Begüm* into *Bayan* (lady/woman), literature edits that were considered necessary to the development of Turkish literature and the last was notional edits that would serve the educational duty of the theater scripts. There is an example to indicate Atatürk's idea of nation's woman; one of the scripts of the play named *Taş Bebek* (Doll) represented women as unreliable creators that should only be attracted as an ornament. Atatürk's correction to the related lines was as follows:

“. . . We can not represent women in this way! A woman's existence is the base of a nation at all respect! It is no longer right to repeat the idea of seeing a woman as an ornament. . . . It (the lines) must be changed!<sup>236</sup>

Metin And also noted that the establishments of *Halk Evleri* (Public Houses) and theater performances in these places had a great impact on this mission. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior Affairs considered taking benefit from the old tradition, which was *Tulûat* companies. These companies and their performances would be observed, instructed and assisted by Public Houses during their tours to Anatolia. However, this project was not successful.<sup>237</sup> In order to carry out this mission, it was necessary to gain support from the wider intellectual community, and Muhsin Ertuğrul was again the initial choice for it. In 1927, the mayor of Istanbul Muhittin Üstündağ assigned Muhsin Ertuğrul to Darülbedayi in order to maintain order and continuity in the theater.<sup>238</sup> According to Muhsin Ertuğrul and his colleagues, the order and discipline of the theater would also go through the education of the audience. With this inspiration, he published a standing order including stage discipline. In addition, Ertuğrul prepared a two-page brochure under the title of '*Tiyatro Adabı*' (Theater Manner)<sup>239</sup> The first item stated to the audience that the theater was a school, not an entertainment center, and it followed up with items of various rules including punctuality, the dress code that the audiences were supposed to come to the theater

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<sup>235</sup> Metin And, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Tiyatrosu(1923-1983)* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1983), 9.

<sup>236</sup> And, 9.

<sup>237</sup> And, *Türk Tiyatro Tarihi*, 120.

<sup>238</sup> Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu*, 49.

<sup>239</sup> Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne*, 121.

neat and clean, and behavior during the performances which they were not allowed to eat or drink, smoke cigarettes or even talk out loud. Zobu emphasized that the brochure was carefully titled as *'Tiyatro Adabı'* (Theater Manner) with a subtitle in parenthesis *"Bilmeyenler İçin"* (For the ones who do not know).<sup>240</sup> While in the attempt of educating the audience, the institute was careful about not offending its devoted viewers. In fact, there was already another list of codes for the audience published in the establishment of Ottoman Theater in the *Tanzimat* period.<sup>241</sup> The public still had the background of having the manner of the audience as in traditional street performances, and once were warned and trained in the past; there seemed to be a demand of a reminder. Another reason to publish this brochure was to educate young audience who just began to come to the performances with the help of opening 'student matinee'. It was another innovation from Muhsin Ertuğrul in order to introduce students to another education institute named theater. Students were invited to see performances on Friday mornings at eleven with a very low cost of tickets.<sup>242</sup> As seen in these examples, the idea of educating the public through theater still survived and the intellectuals and nationalists of the theater were still eager to be part in nations developmental process. Moreover, the theater institutes, significantly Darülbedayi actors had continuing support from the new government. Later in 1930, Muhsin Ertuğrul started the publication of a theater magazine called *'Darülbedayi'* in order to reach masses. He often wrote his criticism and opinions about the institution and the theater with a nickname *'Perdeci'*.<sup>243</sup>

On the same year, Muhsin Ertuğrul and his company went on a tour to the capital Ankara and the actors had an opportunity to meet the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü at the Marmara Pavilion. In the meeting, there was a discussion about the idea of establishing a subsidized government theater appropriated to the Minister of Education.<sup>244</sup> Since the beginning of the Republic, the theater was considered to be the civil service and the idea of establishing a state theater would be supporting this ideal. The meeting ended with a promise to establish a theater school requested by Muhsin Ertuğrul and Mustafa Kemal's famous quote about actors. "Gentlemen, you

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<sup>240</sup> Zobu, 120.

<sup>241</sup> And, *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu 1839-1908*, 85.

<sup>242</sup> Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne*, 120.

<sup>243</sup> Perdeci: a person who opens and closes the curtains of a stage.

<sup>244</sup> Nutku, *Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Tiyatrosu*, 49.

may all be deputies, attorneys, and even a president but you cannot be artists . . .”<sup>245</sup> However, the government could not supply the finance at once and Muhsin Ertuğrul initiative opened a theater school within Darülbedayi in the same year with the support of the mayor Muhittin Üstündağ. He decided to increase the numbers of attendees by offering fifty Lira travel allowance to the students while the instructors were basically not even paid salaries. However, the plan did not work and there were never enough registries. Muhsin Ertuğrul stated that due to the difficult economic condition of the country, the theater was treated with contempt.<sup>246</sup> Nevertheless, he argued that the main reason was rather economical than the prestige.

It seems that the money offer had been effective for some time however the school was eventually closed due to lack of interest and financial support from the government.<sup>247</sup> It took six more years to establish a fully-fledged theater school in the country, and the low number of registrations occurred as a problem once again. In 1936, a German director and arts administrator Professor Carl Ebert(1887-1980) was assigned to found a conservatory in Ankara.

This was a solid step to establish the state theater and educate instructors who would educate players/artists with State discipline. Despite all these efforts, there were only six students for the theater department and according to Muhsin Ertuğrul’s journal, there were no girls attended. It was surprising to see the lack of girls interested in the theater while the Republic and the state policy gave great support comparing the system of the old. The newspapers and magazines of the time were pointing at the issue to find a solution to the subject matter. One of the newspaper articles reported by an author and a journalist Selami İzzet Sedes (1896-1964) about the discussion shows that there were differences in opinion between Muhsin Ertuğrul and Carl Ebert.<sup>248</sup> According to the article, the German director suggested that the reason of the women’s lack of interest to the theater was the outdated traditional mentality. On the other hand, Sedes suggested with the reference of Muhsin Ertuğrul that the reason was overall related to economic concerns. Since the Republic opened doors of career to Turkish women, there had been more than thirty women started their career in theater.

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<sup>245</sup> Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*, 467.

<sup>246</sup> Ertuğrul, 467.

<sup>247</sup> Metin And, *50 Yılın Türk Tiyatrosu / Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları* (İstanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1973), 107–119.

<sup>248</sup> Selami İzzet Sedes, “Kızlarımız ve Tiyatro,” *Akşam*, February 1, 1937.

The writer listed the names of the women starting from Afife and indicated these names as controverting to Ebert's argument. According to Sedes, when Darülbedayi trained students in the past, they acted in plays with small parts and they were paid for their acting. Muhsin Ertuğrul suggested that the State Theater School should do the same to keep the continuity. According to the article, it was how the first opera singer of the Republic, Semiha Berksoy (1910-2004) started her career in the theater. However, Sedes also stated that the institution could not guarantee their career and income after they graduated.

Therefore, the government policy towards acting as a career should be revised; the number of students would increase when the government had a policy to protect these students and provide them jobs in the government theater after graduating. Another article on the newspaper suggested wage payment to young female students attending theater school as these girls were not from rich families, some of them even had to maintain their families without any help.<sup>249</sup> Whether or not the discussions of newspapers made an impact on the decisions of the theater school, soon after, this article, the same newspaper announced that from Ankara and İstanbul, educated girls from notable families started to register the theater school and there was an increase in interest.<sup>250</sup> The next day, there was another announcement that the school was a boarding school and the government would subsidize the students' needs. Moreover, they were to be given 4.50 Lira pocket money, and the monthly payment was also under consideration.

Despite the government promotion and support of the theater, the public appreciation was still quite at meager. Even though stage life and the theater were a magical world in young girls' dreams<sup>251</sup> the public view was an argument between the idea of theater as a career and morality. Again in 1937, another newspaper did a survey by interviewing with numbers of fathers including well-known public figures. They were asked if they approved the idea of their daughters becoming an actress. A few said they would allow their daughters to be actresses but wished that the conditions of the theater would improve. Others said they would only allow their daughters to be actresses after the theater became more accepted and prestigious. However, there

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<sup>249</sup> H.F Es, "Genç Kızlarımız Neden Tiyatroya Rağbet Etmiyorlar?," *Akşam*, January 28, 1937.

<sup>250</sup> "Tiyatro Mektebi/Kızlarımız Kaydedilmek Üzere Müracaata Başladılar," *Akşam*, February 7, 1937.

<sup>251</sup> Es, "Genç Kızlarımız Neden Tiyatroya Rağbet Etmiyorlar?"

were still others who refused to allow their daughters to be actresses pointing out that the theater was a place for the entertainment of men, a place unsuited for their daughters.<sup>252</sup> Their response reflected the public opinion which was more according to the moral values that put acting in a simple career only served to entertain people, predominantly men.

Moreover, the conditions of the theater needed to be rehabilitated in order to consider it as a prestigious job. In addition to this survey, we can observe from the biographies of the actresses posted later in the magazine *Perde ve Sahne* (Curtain and Stage) that the major opinion towards theater was still negative among the families.<sup>253</sup> As public opinion was reflected in the survey, there was a noteworthy increase in interest in the theater. Presumably, the financial support and giving a guarantee for the future, which was advertised with the help of the press, had an impact on an increasing number of students including girls. This situation helped the school survive and become a great step for opening the government theater.

The state has included stage performers in professions, which the state has officially recognized and provided for its future. The State also ensures the future of stage artists and trains the artists for state theater and opera.<sup>254</sup>

In the late fall of 1937, the number of candidates to register the state theater school was 350 both from İstanbul and Ankara and twenty-eight of them succeeded to be accepted. Interestingly, there was only one girl out of sixteen students from Ankara while the number of girls and boys registered from İstanbul was even.<sup>255</sup> This could be seen as a consequence of İstanbul being the capital of theater for a long time, and people were more familiar with the theater. Three years after their education, on April 20, 1940, there was an enactment for both regulations of the State Conservatory and the establishment of the *State Theater* (Devlet Tiyatrosu).<sup>256</sup> The first students graduated in 1941, and they were assigned to work in the first State Theater under the name of *Tatbikat Sahnesi* (Practice Stage).

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<sup>252</sup> “Kızımızın Sahnede Rol Almasına Razi Mısınız? (Survey),” *Tan*, April 12, 1937, 5.

<sup>253</sup> See for example, *Perde ve Sahne*: November 1941 ‘An Interview with Perihan Yanal’, p 8, March 1942 ‘An interview with Nevin Akkaya’ p 3, January 1942 ‘Interview with Samiye Hün’ p 6.

<sup>254</sup> “Tiyatro Mektebi, Sahne Sanatkarlığının İstikbalini Temin Ediliyor,” *Akşam*, September 30, 1937.

<sup>255</sup> “Devlet Tiyatrosu/ 350 Talebeden Yirmisekizi Muvaffak Oldu. . .,” *Akşam*, October 21, 1937, 2.

<sup>256</sup> And, *50 Yılın Türk Tiyatrosu / Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları*, 129.

Later with the establishment of the foundation law in 1949, the State Theater was officially founded.<sup>257</sup> Since 1949, the students graduated from the State Conservatory are accepted as trainees for one year then they are recruited after a performance examination. The ones who succeed the exam are recruited as contracted art officers connected to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and they begin their official employment in one of the twenty-one branches located in various cities of Turkey.<sup>258</sup>

Bedia Muvahhid: the First Turkish Actress of the new Republic.

With a big step taken in İzmir, breaking the obstacle of Turkish Muslim actresses should have been a great relief that İbnurrefik Ahmet Nuri wrote an interesting article on the woman's magazine 'Süs',<sup>259</sup> during the period of disintegration of Darübedayi. In the previous issue, dated December 1 1923, the magazine published a full-page photo of Afife Jale and underneath; she was introduced as 'the Turkish leader of the Turkish stage'. However, there was no other information about her rather than this sentence. In this regard, Ahmet Nuri reproached about it on the later issue and felt responsible for reminding Afife to the female readers. He once again emphasized how beautifully she spoke Turkish on the stage. However, his main purpose was encouraging Turkish women. According to Ahmet Nuri, Darübedayi was dead and the responsibility of such a fate fell upon the mentality of the theatre administration. Moreover, they were also responsible for Afife's dismissal from the institution.

Ahmet Nuri addressed the women as mothers of humanity and he was inviting them to become mothers of theatre. Moreover, he was asking women to decorate the literature of the theatre with their elegance, purity, and softness like they would decorate their household. For him, men always failed in their artistic attempts and it was the artist that they admired rather than the art itself. However, the women would never patronize this feeling and would focus only on the continuity of the Turkish art. Following these compliments, he offered women to take over the task and even educate more Turkish actresses for the future of Turkish theatre. Ahmet Nuri finishes

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<sup>257</sup> And, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Tiyatrosu(1923-1983)*, 314.

<sup>258</sup> "Devlet Tiyatrosu Kuruluşu Hakkında Kanun," Pub. L. No. 5441 (1949). item 6

<sup>259</sup> Ahmet Nuri İbnurrefik, "Jale Afife Hanım," *Süs*, December 15, 1923.



his article with an interesting sentence; he asked women to never let a loose woman (*orta malı bir kadın*) on the stage, otherwise, it would destroy everything.<sup>260</sup>

Ahmet Nuri's article is quintessential to the paradox of Muslim Turkish women in public life. As with all the modernist reformers he wants women to step out from the Ottoman shadow and become vibrant and active members of the Turkish nation. He wants them to have agency, but not for their own sake, rather for the sake of the new republic. In other words, women should be active to serve the nation. They should be educated and active wives and professionals, mothers who will raise the future generations and represent the best of Turkish femininity.

There was no border between the home and the theater, or any other profession; the ideal Turkish woman will act in her household as she acts in public. Yet, despite the necessity of the new Turkish woman Ahmet Nuri was still influenced by traditional opinions on theater. Therefore, his warning to not let 'loose' woman on the stage reveals a prejudice about traditional actresses. The new Turkish actresses would be virtuous wives and mothers, unlike the old Ottoman actresses who were little better than prostitutes. Despite his personal support for Afife, this construct between the new and old already existed, and Afife had represented the old while new actresses like Bedia stood for the new.

The Izmir tour of the Darülbedayi actors was a hope for the women's future in the theater. Meanwhile, there were still conflicting opinions in İstanbul about approving the new steps taken for the Muslim women in Anatolia. Muslim actresses were still forbidden in Istanbul theaters. However, the encouragement and support that Bedia received from Mustafa Kemal and the new government were quickly heard in the theater community. While the new formation movement continued in Anatolia, the theaters in Istanbul had started to take the opportunity to incorporate Muslim actresses into their performances. Şaziye Moral(1903-1985)<sup>261</sup> was one of these. In 1923, for the first time in her acting experience, she started acting in a play titled '*Kırık Kalp*'

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<sup>260</sup> İbnurrefik.

<sup>261</sup> Şaziye Moral (1903-1985) was a theater and cinema actress started her career in with the play called *Kırık Kalp* (Broken Heart) before the Republic was declared, after a police raid prohibiting Muslim women acting on stage, she traveled with several theater troupes in Anatolia, and then she came back and joined Darülbedayi in 1924. She continued her acting career with numerous plays including *Machbeth*, *Romeo Juliet* and films such as *Son Gece* (The Last Night), *Küçük Hanımefendi* (Little Lady) until she retired in 1977.

(The Broken Heart) in Yeni Sahne Company. Before the Republic was declared, four Muslim actresses had a part in this play and Afife was among those actresses.<sup>262</sup>

The prohibitions of the old government were still active in Istanbul, and the police administration reported on “prohibited act” in the theater. Therefore, the play was stopped before it ended and these four actresses who dared to act on stage were taken to the police department. They were prosecuted and relieved with a warning of not repeating this action. Şaziye Moral made an important point when she told the same event in her interview with Vasfi Rıza Zobu. A few days later, Şaziye, Afife, and two other women were taken to court. The lawyer exemplified Bedia Muvahhit’s act in İzmir in his defense, and the women were acquitted on this point, but with the condition of not appearing on the scene again.<sup>263</sup> After this incident, Şaziye Moral found a solution by escaping to Anatolia with other theater groups and acted in several cities. She could not dare to return to İstanbul until the new Republic replaced the old system. She was back around 1924, joined Darülbedayi, and continued her career with numerous plays and films until she retired in 1977.

There was a newspaper report related to this incident published in *Vakit* newspaper dated October 16, 1923. According to the news, the chief of the police department Asım Bey noted that *Yeni Sahne* had not informed the police department about the women actresses as they were supposed to. Otherwise, it was not right that Turkish women should not be allowed on stage in İstanbul. Names of the Turkish actresses were supposed to be given to the police department in advance, and they would be allowed to perform after an investigation about them.<sup>264</sup> It is observed from the newspapers that the innovation and freedom given to Muslim women in Anatolia created an argument about the situation of women in İstanbul.

On the same issue of the newspaper, a survey was published to the reader to ask about their opinion on women’s freedom or limitations in the public places including acting.<sup>265</sup> The survey included questions about allowing women to attend dance courses, which was popular at the time, to go to bars like non-Muslim families, and to act on the stage as actresses. The comments on the survey and arguments published

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<sup>262</sup> “Şaziye Hanım,” *Büyük Gazete*, March 8, 1928.

<sup>263</sup> Sevengil, *Meşrutiyet Tiyatrosu*, 313.

<sup>264</sup> “Türk Hanımları İstanbul’da da sahneye çıkabileceklerdir,” *Vakit*, Teşrinivevvel/October 16, 1923.

<sup>265</sup> “Karii’lerimizden Soruyoruz,” *Vakit*, October 16, 1923, 1.

until the exact result were declared on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1923, the day after the declaration of the Republic.<sup>266</sup> According to the survey results, collected from letters of readers from various cities, the majority approved women to be on stage, however, there was another majority who were against women to dance or go to bars. Some of the comments from readers including intellectuals such as Reşad Nuri Güntekin and Hasan Ali (Yücel, 1897 1961)<sup>267</sup> were published in the newspaper, and they are worth mentioning. Reşad Nuri supported Muslim women to become actresses, however, he was hesitant about dancing. Hasan Ali supported women dancing as long as they were amongst women. Moreover, some readers were strictly against women to be on stage; according to them, if Turkish women chose to become an actress, they would not be able to become good mothers and wives at home. In addition, an Ottoman noble (Silahdar Ağası) Mehmet Hayreddin noted that Turkish women should not be allowed on stage unless they officially changed their given names.<sup>268</sup> Another comment from a woman comes from a school manager *Selçuk Sultan Sultanisi müdiresi* Sadiye Hanım. Either dancing or acting on stage, she was against women to participate in such activities. She believed that a woman with high moral quality and manner (*terbiyesi ve seciyesi yüksek bir kadın*) would never morally fail in any circumstances, and could certainly be arty and talented, however, these values could never make them a good family wives.<sup>269</sup>

In conclusion, I would argue that based on this survey, there were two approaches regarding Muslim actresses in the late Ottoman and in the very beginning of the Republican period. The first based on modernist intellectual trends of the Second Constitutional period which in the early republican period we could term as state feminism advocated for a more public role for women. This role imagined women working in many previously closed off sectors of society such as in the theater. This modernist agenda combined the traditional role of wife and mother with a new public role that would together serve the nation. On the other hand, what we might consider a more traditional view, was that the role of actress was simply unfit for a Muslim

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<sup>266</sup> Some of the letters from readers as exemplified above were published everyday on the issues dated from 17<sup>th</sup> of October until the 30<sup>th</sup> 1923.

<sup>267</sup> Hasan Ali Yücel was a Turkish writer, teacher and a politician. He was also known for his reforms of the education system, and the foundation of Village Institutes.

<sup>268</sup> "Anketimizin Neticesi," *Vakit*, October 30, 1923.

<sup>269</sup> Sevinçli, *Meşrutiyetten Cumhuriyete Sinemadan Tiyatroya Muhsin Ertuğrul*, 72.

woman. An actress was little more than a ‘licensed prostitute.’<sup>270</sup> To be clear, many that held this view still wanted a more public role for women but believed that a good wife and mother could not have a job that required her to perform romantic scenes on stage with male actors. Therefore, we can see that there was still a tension in the desire for the modern women. It was agreed that she should serve state and society as a wife and mother. Moreover, this role would be in public, not hidden at home, but the extent and options for this public life was a contentious issue. And to be an actress was still a step too far, a role to the public to be accepted by many.

### Bedia on Film and Stage

Two days after the declaration of the Republic, Muhsin Ertuğrul planned on promoting Muslim women on a play and asked for advice from Halide Edip and her husband Adnan (Adivar, 1881-1935) and soon on December 6, 1923, he performed Othello by W. Shakespeare in *Varyete Tiyatrosu* (Vaudeville Theater) Bedia Muvahhit and *Münire Eyüp* (later known as Neyyire Neyir and Neyire Ertuğrul<sup>271</sup>) performed in the play without any interruption by the police. Muhsin Ertuğrul’s plan turned out to be a success. Newspapers and magazines wrote about the performance, significantly about women actresses for days. One of the newspapers issued on December 8 stated that participation of two Turkish women in Othello with their beautiful Turkish had a great impact that the entire theater hall was full with an audience; moreover, it had been a signature to show the nation’s revolution for the new ideas.<sup>272</sup> Halide Edip also wrote in *Akşam* Newspaper issued on December 9, 1923, about the performance. She emphasized that although Othello was performed with several errors, seeing Turkish women performing on stage was a great hope for the future of Turkish women.<sup>273</sup>

The change from the imperial system to the republican regime brought in a rapid change in terms of the mentality in the management system of theater companies. At this point, an anecdote by Vasfi Rıza Zobu regarding the situation of the female

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<sup>270</sup> Sevinçli, 76.

<sup>271</sup> Future wife of Muhsin Ertuğrul.

<sup>272</sup> Gökhan Akçura, *Bedia Muvahhit: Bir Cumhuriyet Sanatçısı* (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Dairesi Başkanlığı, 1993), 40.

<sup>273</sup> Akçura, 41.

audience and the changing reaction of the official authorities is worth mentioning here;

After the Republic, Darülbedayi went on tour to the city of Trabzon on the Black Sea coast. Here, Muslim actresses as well as non-Muslim ones covered their heads to be cautious for the public reactions. It was not yet to be expected that the influence of the new system in Istanbul would immediately reflect in the small Anatolian cities. Despite this idea and cautiousness, the Governorate reflected a very positive reaction to the Muslim women in the theater group.<sup>274</sup>

However, the most striking point was the reaction of the police head official, as Vasfi Rıza stated in his anecdote. According to the central officer (*merkez memuru*), the duty that the actors were in was a state duty. Moreover, the presence of Muslim women among the actors was admirable. The officer went even further and asked them to arrange the seating order of the audience just as in İstanbul, without separating women and men. In this way, the theater would bring civilization to the city that it was supposed to come a long time ago. As a matter of fact, Vasfi Rıza and his players were amazed at the speech of the central officer. Because the central officer standing right in front of them who was at the same time wearing a fur cap represented *Kuvayi Milliye* was no one other than the conservative central officer who had previously scolded and arrested Afife in Kadikoy, Istanbul.<sup>275</sup>

Bedia Muvahhid the wife of Muvahhid Refet(1893-1927)<sup>276</sup> Bey, who was a successful actor in *Darülbedayi*, already tested her talent by acting in a silent film called *Ateşten Gömlek* (Daughter of Symrna) produced by Muhsin Ertuğrul. The film was originally a novel written by Halide Edip (Adivar). The story was about the Turkish patriotism, the struggle of the public during the War of Independence, and women's struggle during the war for independence. With Halide Edip's recommendation, Muhsin Ertuğrul had purposely chosen Turkish Muslim women for the two leading character of the movie. Both because, in their opinion, the topic and the message of the film could be best interpreted and expressed by Turkish women,

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<sup>274</sup> Zobu, *O Günden Bu Güne*.

<sup>275</sup> Zobu, 132.

<sup>276</sup> Muvahhit Ahmet Refet (1893-1927) left school at age 15 to search his career in theater. He joined theater companies including Reşad Rıdvan, Minnakian and Burhaneddin Tepsî. He stayed in Paris during the World War I and then after the war, he returned to İstanbul and joined Darülbedayi. He married Bedia Muvahhid in 1923 and continued his acting career in Darülbedayi until he died in 1927. Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoğlu, "Muvahhit Ahmet Refet," in *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş, 1970).

and it would also be a chance for them to move their career hopefully towards the theatre stage in the future.<sup>277</sup> Neyyire Neyir who later became the wife of Muhsin Ertuğrul performed the second female role.

Just like she said in her own words, Bedia was the lucky one.<sup>278</sup> She was the daughter of Mısırlızade Şekip Bey who was a public prosecutor (*müddeiumumi*) at the Court of Appeal (*İstinaf Mahkemesi*). Unlike Afife, she was better educated; she went to Saint Antoine French School on *Büyükada* (Prince's Island) and later to Dame de Sion in İstanbul. Growing up with Greek nannies and French tutors (*mürebbiye*) Bedia was already fluent both in Greek and French languages. After starting the school, she also took Turkish tutoring from the educator, sports official and a politician Selim Sırrı Tarcan<sup>279</sup> who was Bedia's family neighbor in *Büyükada*. Before she became famous for being the first Turkish Muslim actress of the Turkish Republic, she was noticed as one of the first Turkish Muslim operators of a newly established English-French and American associated telephone company in 1914. As previously discussed, Bedia was one of the pioneers for the occupation of a telephone operator. Besides the aforementioned concerns of the language issue had to be argued during the process of recruitment, the difference in the dress code of Muslim girls was of another problem. One of the papers of the time announced the news as a new career option for Muslim girls, however, it was noted that it would be difficult for these girls to wear headphones while they were wearing their veils.

These female telephone operators were supposed to leave their veils aside and find alternative dressing, which they did. They wore loose headscarves or hats to help them easily wear headphones.

She moved to Istanbul and continued her education at a French school after her father's death. She once told a magazine about how she hated wearing *çarşaf*.<sup>280</sup> When she was thirteen and attending *Dame de Sion* she had not yet started wearing *çarşaf*. She eventually had to put on due to neighborhood pressure. One day a man told her off for not wearing it properly as she was walking on the street. She was so

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<sup>277</sup> Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*, 304.

<sup>278</sup> "50 Yıl Kalbim Aşk ve Sanat İçin Çarptı," *Hayat*, August 2, 1973.

<sup>279</sup> Selim Sırrı Tarcan was also known for his contribution to the establishment of the National Olympic Committee of Turkey and the introduction of volleyball in Turkey.

<sup>280</sup> Akçura, *Bedia Muvahhit: Bir Cumhuriyet Sanatçısı*, 19.

angry at this reaction from the stranger that she pulled her *çarşaf* off and threw it on the ground.<sup>281</sup>

There are two things I would like to point out about this story, Bedia told this story much later in her life after the *çarşaf* was out of fashion in urban Istanbul, but this does not mean that the story was fictional. Rather, it demonstrates Bedia clever use of a story to conform to current cultural currents. Based on everything I have read about her I think it was probably true that she did not like wearing the *çarşaf* and was a headstrong young woman who would have been angered by a stranger criticizing her for how she wore it. But the point is that it was to Bedia's advantage of a middle-aged woman in the Turkish Republic to portray herself as a modernist young-woman oppressed under Ottoman society in the past. As I will discuss, Bedia was driven and ambitious, but also clever in how she achieved her ambitions.

Bedia later worked as a French teacher at Erenköy Girl's School and Kadıköy Middle School (*Kadıköy Rüştüyesi*) in 1920 until she married actor Muvahhid Refet Bey. She was again the rule breaker and going to school wearing a suit rather than the coat and a headscarf. She stated that the director of the school was never able to visit her classroom while teaching, as she was not wearing a headscarf so she found a solution to keep a scarf on the table to put on her head for an emergency.<sup>282</sup> Eventually, on the big night of her first performance in İzmir by the order of Mustafa Kemal, she was on the stage again without the mandatory clothing. After the performance, Mustafa Kemal asked her to continue acting in their tour to Manisa and Nazilli but he advised her to wear a headscarf matching with her costume on the stage. He told her that it was the first time they would see a Turkish woman on stage and it was beneficial to let the public get used to this at a slower pace.<sup>283</sup> Presumably, this cautiousness lasted until the reform in the change of headgear and dress (*Şapka ve Kıyafet Devrimi*) in November 1925.

Just as Afife was alone in the first steps of her career and afterward, Bedia was surrounded by the right kind of people. The authors, intellectuals at the time including Muhsin Ertuğrul, Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu, 1889-1974) and Yahya Kemal (Beyatlı, 1884-1958) were family friends that they promoted her for the new image of

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<sup>281</sup> Akçura, 19.

<sup>282</sup> Akçura, 19.

<sup>283</sup> Süsoy, "Bedia Muvahhit ve Vasfi Rıza Zobu'yla Tatil Sohbeti," 4.

the woman of the nation. Muhsin Ertuğrul had advised her to work as a French teacher at school before she was advised to act in his movie *Ateşten Gömlek*.<sup>284</sup> She was a young well-educated girl, reading literature and following the plays at the theater. It was inevitable for a young girl to be a fan of a movie or a theater actor at her age and Bedia was a great fan of Muvahhid Refet Bey. She often saw his plays sitting at the same seat in the theater until one day she dared to ask for an autograph. Shortly after, the meeting resulted in their marriage.<sup>285</sup>

Even in a liberal family, an actor as a future son in law was not approved of. It was a scandal for the family, and the second scandal was when they found out Bedia was on the stage as an actress. Bedia's family did not have contacts with the couple for a while. Both Bedia's and Muvahhid Refet's mothers refused to go to the theater from then.<sup>286</sup>, but later on, they got used to and appreciated her success.<sup>287</sup> Being married to a popular actor already opened doors to a career in the theater for Bedia. The couple had a son named Sinâ in 1922, and by 1924 she was promoted as a Darülbedayi actress. She was now a well-educated Turkish Muslim woman, a wife and mother, and above all, a perfect representative as a nation's daughter. Newspapers and magazines of the time started publishing news and articles about women's newly accepted career of the new nation. There were continuous promotions and propaganda writings from the press, which are worth looking at. Women's magazines such as *Süs* and *Resimli Ay* celebrated this innovation as a step towards women's independence. In 1927 and 1928, a newspaper called *Büyük Gazete* published a series of articles introducing Muslim actresses to the readers<sup>288</sup> Apart from emphasizing the importance of Muslim women made a big step to be included in the theater world, another major concern of the theater that was the importance of Turkish pronunciation on the stage; this issue was often pointed out for a comparison with the past. It should also be remembered that many of the successful actresses had already taken Turkish courses from Turkish litterateurs; however, they seemed to never escape from criticism.

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<sup>284</sup> Akçura, *Bedia Muvahhit: Bir Cumhuriyet Sanatçısı*, 24.

<sup>285</sup> "50 Yıl Kalbim Aşk ve Sanat İçin Çarptı."

<sup>286</sup> Süsoy, "Bedia Muvahhit ve Vasfi Rıza Zobu'yla Tatil Sohbeti."

<sup>287</sup> "Bedia Muvahhit Hanım Sahneye Çıkan İlk Türk Artistidir," *Resimli Ay*, April 1928, 2-3.

<sup>288</sup> See for example, 'Büyük Gazete': December/Kanunuevvel 22 1927, Bedia hanım, February 9 1928, Fahriye hanım, March 8 Şaziye Hanım, March 15 1928 Nebahat Hanım).



On its first issue, the magazine *Resimli Ay* had an about both Bedia Muvahhit as a representative of the (Turkish) woman on the stage and for Münire hanım (Neyire Neyir) as a representative of a (Turkish) woman in the cinema.<sup>289</sup> The article described the Turkish accent represented by Armenian actors in Minakian Company as ‘an accent sounded like a reminiscent of a sound of a saw re-thooter’, moreover it stated that the Armenian Turkish pronunciation “massacred” the Turkish language. The article reminded the readers what happened to Afife in the past to support its striking statement. The magazine also stated in another article that Armenian women invaded the Turkish theater for a long time until Bedia Muvahhit made a great effort to open the path for Turkish women.<sup>290</sup> The article also emphasized the current fact that the Turkish girls were losing interest in acting and Bedia Muvahhid had a brief comment about the issue. Her idea was that a woman should be devoted on stage not considering the financial benefit of it, which was not a satisfying amount anyways; this was a job that someone should do with the passion to the art, not to the interest of money. Moreover, according to Bedia, women thought that the image of acting was a job to entertain was, in fact, a difficult job, which many sought to escape. The new way of criticism could be considered both as part of nationalist propaganda and as an overthrow the old while glorifying the new. Even though the magazine created a false image of non-Muslim actresses, the reputation of old and loyal Armenian actresses was appreciated in the past and present history of the theater world in Turkey. Three years earlier, in 1925, a memorable event was posted in ‘*Akşam*’ newspaper. Eliza Pinnemejian was back from Paris for one season, and she was acting in an adapted play called ‘*Rakibe*’ (The Rival) written by Tahsin Nahit (1887-1919)<sup>291</sup>. Her partner was Bedia Muvahhid. At the end of the play, the two actresses were standing hand in hand, saluting their audience, and someone from the audiences shouted out “Always together, that’s what we hoped for!”<sup>292</sup> It is an uncertain fact that Afife once accused

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<sup>289</sup> “Sahnede Kadın/Bugünkü Türk Kadınları,” *Resimli Ay*, February 1, 1924.

<sup>290</sup> “Bedia Muvahhit Hanım Sahneye Çıkan İlk Türk Artistidir.”

<sup>291</sup> Tahsin Nahit (1887-1919) was a poet and writer. He joined İttihat ve Terakki Partisi (The Party of Union and Progress), and worked in the food supply division during the World War I. He later devoted himself to literature. He wrote several books and plays however his plays under the influence of Ahmet were not particularly successful. He is the author of the play *Rakibe* (The Rival, 1919). Işık İhsan, “Tahsin Nahit,” in *Encyclopedia of Turkish Authors - People Of Literature, Culture and Science* (Ankara: Elvan Publishing, 2005), 977.

<sup>292</sup> Akçura, *Bedia Muvahhit: Bir Cumhuriyet Sanatçısı*, 50.

Eliza Pinnemejian of being responsible for her dismissal from *Darülbedayi* as I noted earlier, on the other hand, Bedia Muvahhid always admired her and Kınar Hanım, showing respect to their talent and success at every turn. She once refused to replace a role that was previously acted by Kınar Sıvacıyan.<sup>293</sup>

As I discussed above, during the establishment of theater school, there was a noticeable decline in the number of girls' registry to the theater school and the intellectuals suggested that the reason was due to financial benefits rather than serving for the art. On this point Bedia said:

“ I think the woman who works at the theater should be educated first and then I think, she should not come here to make money. Because the money we earn is so unimportant that any of my fellows would earn more money in any institution that would work outside”.<sup>294</sup>

However, in the process of promoting theater and the commercializing the acting for women, the nation's pioneer actress was suggested a completely opposite reason. In this case, we should be aware of the fact that Bedia's social status was far different than the girls who were seeking a job to maintain their life and family. Since her childhood and later in her career, she never had to face with financial difficulties. To follow the process of how Bedia Muvahhid was chosen to become a pioneer of Muslim women performers in the Republic, it is necessary to take a closer look at the newspapers and magazines and in which way she was promoted. Following her steps in her career, many of the newspapers and magazines were taking a chance to introduce and promote her as an ideal example of a Turkish actress. In addition to her ability and contribution to the Turkish theater, she was introduced as a role model of an ideal mother and a housewife. At work, Bedia was a serious hard working actress, and especially after her husband Muvahhid Bey's death she was a devoted mother to her child at home residing in a quite simple life, and never had a nightlife unless there was a foreign play to see to take benefit for her job.<sup>295</sup>

There is no doubt that Bedia Muvahhid was a clever woman. After the death of her husband in 1927, she understood the fact that her life would not get any better unless she continued her life and career as a married woman. In 1933, she married with an

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<sup>293</sup> Akçura, 51.

<sup>294</sup> “Bedia Muvahhit Hanım Sahneye Çıkan İlk Türk Artistidir.”

<sup>295</sup> “Bedia Hanım,” *Büyük Gazete*, Kanunvevvel 1927.

Austrian pianist of the theater Frederich (Ferdinand) von Statzer (1906-1974).<sup>296</sup> Although she had a quite comfortable lifestyle after this marriage, she got divorced with him after eighteen years of marriage and later she bluntly stated that marrying someone from a different culture was the biggest mistake she had ever made.<sup>297</sup> This reflects a few important attributes of Bedia, her intelligence and cultural survival instincts and pragmatism. She understood that to be a successful actress and cultural symbol in early Republican Turkey marriage and motherhood were a prerequisite.

Moreover, as someone in tune with the nationalist inclinations of her country she could see the value to being married to a European musician in the 1930s, and likewise, the value of attributing divorce to a clash of culture in the 1980s. This is not to say that I believe her marriage and divorce were completely cynical and self-serving ventures, reading interviews with her, it is clear that she was an emotionally complex character, but I would still emphasize whether conscious or subconscious Bedia was fortunate to make decisions that aligned with the prevalent social-political trends of the country.

This was the sharp contrast to Afife whose decisions while moral were not always very timely. For example, when she married, it was after she had courted controversy on stage. Furthermore, in the depths of opioid addiction, she divorced her husband to the detriment of her career because she did not want to drag him down with her. This, according to her, Altın Pınar and Mustafa Alabora (who is now well-known actor, producer, and a theater instructor), who claimed that Afife forced Selahattin Pınar to divorce her so that he was not also brought down by her drug addiction.<sup>298</sup>

Another interview in 1943 with Bedia Muvahhid from the magazine *Perde ve Sahne* is interesting to look at. The author İsmet Hulusi was sharing his impressions in his interview after a visit from Bedia and Frederich Statzer's home. Bedia was represented as an impeccable housewife at home; she was displaying her embroideries

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<sup>296</sup> Frederich (Ferdinand) von Statzer (1906-1974) was an Austrian pianist, conductor, and a composer. Statzer came to Turkey in 1932 as a faculty member in İstanbul Municipal Conservatory (İstanbul Belediye Konservatuvarı) that is now named as İstanbul University State Conservatory (İstanbul Üniversitesi Devlet Konservatuvarı). Later he was recruited by İstanbul Şehir Tiyatroları (İstanbul Municipality Theater) former named Darülbeydi as a composer and a pianist. Yavuz Turgul and Ayşe Azizoğlu, "Statzer Ferdi," in *Sanatçılar Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Tifdruk Matbaacılık Sanayii A.Ş., 1970).

<sup>297</sup> Süsoy, "Bedia Muvahhit ve Vasfi Rıza Zobu'yla Tatil Sohbeti."

<sup>298</sup> Can Dündar, *Yüzyılın Aşkları: Selahattin Pınar-Afife Jale*, Documentary, 2013.

of which she made on her own, serving tea and snacks that she made by herself and she even continued her housework, ironing her husband's and her son's clothes during the interview. Overall, the interview was sort of a commercial of how to be the ideal Turkish professional housewife.<sup>299</sup> It would be interesting to know who staged the interview this way, Bedia or the reporters. Perhaps, it was a mutual staging as both parties saw the efficacy of presenting an actress as a model homemaker. However, we must remember that *Perde ve Sahne* was not a 'women's magazine', it was a magazine that was devoted to theater. Yet, nowhere in the entire interview did İsmet Hulusi ask Bedia about her career, or the theater, or her thoughts about acting. There were clear moments in the interview when both Bedia and her husband make an effort to show off Bedia's homemaking skills, emphasizing both her talents in the home and her humility. At one point, Bedia talks about the duty of a wife and mother to her home and the importance of teaching this to the next generation of Turkish girls. So it is clear that Bedia was pushing this portrayal. However, İsmet Hulusi chose to focus on this representation published these aspects of the interview and completely omitted any discussion, if there was one, of the theater.

This raises the argument as to whether or not we should understand Bedia's life and career success as molded by the forces of her time and social status or as Bedia's shrewd navigation of her time and culture. In other words, how much agency should we ascribe to Bedia? When Bedia stepped on stage, she was a married woman with high social status and important political connections (i.e performing in Halide Edip's novel '*Ateşten Gömlek*' and her performance for Mustafa Kemal).

I would argue that we must give a great deal of credit to Bedia. Undoubtedly, she was seen and used as a symbol of the modern woman of the modern Turkish Republic. In 1930, she acted as a guest actress in a Greek theater company that visited İstanbul. She successfully acted her part in Greek that the following year she had an invitation to accompany İsmet İnönü and his companions during a visit to Greece. This was an important event that was highly publicized in both the Turkish and Greek press.<sup>300</sup> She was even invited to lunch with the president of Greece. The event was published in Turkey in great detail; the Greek president stated how much he admired this clever,

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<sup>299</sup> İsmet Hulusi, "Bedia'nın Evinde," *Perde ve Sahne*, August 1943.

<sup>300</sup> Akçura, *Bedia Muvahhit: Bir Cumhuriyet Sanatçısı*, 58.

intelligent and highly literate Turkish woman as compared to European women. Bedia took this compliment well and replied that she was honored to represent the woman of her nation and the theater of her nation. This was to be the purest and the most valuable inheritance to her son. This shows that her social class, cultural and political connection made her a superb ambassador for the new Republic. However, this did not mean she was a puppet of the powerful men surrounding her. In numerous interviews, Bedia discussed the importance of taking care of herself as a woman who was ordered to act by the founder of the Republic; she said she was responsible for following the fashions in clothing and hairstyle. This is evident in the many photos of her wearing the latest European fashions. However, she said that was her own responsibility as an actress, not something to be expected from all women.<sup>301</sup>

It must also be stated that Bedia was more than just a pretty face, so while she understood the importance of her appearance she was also literate in multiple languages as previously discussed and translated French and Greek plays into Turkish. This is one area of the above-mentioned 1943 interview that Bedia seemed to try to display. After showing off her homemaking skills, she made the point of showing off her book collection and her desk where she wrote and translated scripts.<sup>302</sup>

This self-perception and understanding along with her aforementioned role as both a figurative and a literal ambassador lead me to argue that she was a willing symbol of the Turkish Republic. Therefore, while she was promoted as a said symbol, she also engaged in her own self-promotion and was very adept at keeping up with current events in Turkey. She was perhaps a greater representative of Turkish actresses than an actress. One of her contemporary critics, the aforementioned A. Madat said that Bedia does not play the role, she plays herself.<sup>303</sup> Tragically for actresses like Afife who seemed to lack such a stance, this was the greater virtue in the new Republic and actress who was judged by how she played her part in society, not her dramatic performance on stage.

As she often described her position in the theater world, Bedia was given a duty by Atatürk to become a pioneering actress for the future of women in modern Turkey.

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<sup>301</sup> "Bedia Muvahhit Hanım Sahneye Çıkan İlk Türk Artistidir."

<sup>302</sup> Hulusi, "Bedia'nın Evinde."

<sup>303</sup> Madat, *Sahnemizin Değerleri*, 1:34.

Having the full support from the founder Mustafa Kemal and the new government helped her successfully carry this duty until she died following an accident at the age of 97 in 1994.

Her name is honored since 1995 with “Bedia Muvahhit Theater Award” organized by Istanbul Municipal Theater (*İstanbul Şehir Tiyatroları*) and Union of Turkish Women to young stage actresses for their debut. Following this, two private theater organizations (ArmaKatre and İzpek) from İzmir honored her name as Bedia Muvahhit Theater Awards since 2010.



## Conclusion

Throughout her life, in articles and interviews, Bedia was often proclaimed to be the first Turkish actress, a claim she would always reject by reminding her admirers that Afife had been the first.

But of course neither was first, they were representatives of a new Turkish woman, living symbols of intellectual and nationalist movements. Not to take anything away from either actress, I think their lives and careers are best understood not as theater actresses but as representatives of a Turkish nationalist intellectual in the late Ottoman Empire and the propaganda of the Turkish State. In reading all of the accounts of their careers, there was a level of dishonesty by the writers who described the events in which Afife and Bedia were involved.

An excellent example of this, and the one that helps us to return to some of the themes discussed earlier in this study, let us consider one of the first films in Turkey and Bedia's first role *Ateşten Gömlek*. This film based on Halide Edip's popular book was, of course, a silent film. For its time, it is not surprising that it was a silent film, but this fact is highly relevant to the debate about Turkish actresses speaking in proper Turkish as previously discussed. However, in a silent film, the accent of actors and actresses is completely irrelevant. Therefore, the desire of Halide Edip and Muhsin Ertuğrul to have a Turkish actress in the film could have had nothing to do with her ability to speak Turkish. It is not surprising that Halide Edip, a Turkish nationalist would, for political and social reasons, want Muslim Turkish actresses, but the idea that this was so their fellow Turkish women would be inspired by hearing a woman on stage speaking proper Turkish was clearly false. Therefore, Bedia represented the ideal of the modern Turkish nationalist woman. Even though this film was produced in the late Ottoman period the fact that it was under the auspices of the rising Turkish nationalists rather than the collapsing Ottoman establishment meant that the film was not met with scandal upon its release.

As I have argued, this is the key difference between Afife and Bedia, had Afife stepped on stage a few years later or Bedia a few years earlier, their lives and careers would have turned out radically different. This is not to say that within a few years the society and moral framework in which they lived had so radically changed, but rather the power structures under which they operated had. As previously noted, a survey in

1937 in Akşam newspaper revealed that most families still disapproved of their daughters being actresses, but since the state approved actresses like Bedia who maintained social respectability were able to flourish as examples of the modern Turkish woman. This point must be reiterated; this thesis was not a study of a late Ottoman or early Republican Turkish woman from ordinary/modest backgrounds/. Because such women, who did not have higher social status and connections through marriage and family to the political and social elite were not celebrated and showered with success like Bedia. The lower class women of the Turkish Republic who were actresses and performers in a male-dominated environment suffered the same disdain and humiliation that Afife did when she, a middle-class Ottoman woman first stepped on stage.

Afife Jale and Bedia Muvahhit were two women born into Ottoman Istanbul families experienced and represented a transformational period for the opportunities and representation of Turkish speaking Muslim women between 1914 and 1935. While neither left behind their own accounts of this period, this thesis has tried to accurately explain their importance and what they represented and has tried to give them agency in their own story.



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