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Art in the early republic period: the example of theatre

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Abstract

In the introductory chapter, I want to study on the sample of theatre, art in the early republic term. Shortly, the significance of Ottoman art role is received consideration. After that, the assesment is especially on the development of theatre as a modernaziton contribution being on two or three theatrical presentation in Ottoman Term.

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Art is a cultural element that can provide an agreement among people by going beyond the boundaries of time and country with the eloquence of languages and keeps this effect from the emergence of human until today. Because art that makes belief, joyful emotions and thoughts in transferable for people within concrete forms is performed by reasons over daily-practical objectives, it is a field that represents the mental contents and levels of people and community at most. In this regard, Fine Arts constitute one of the most important evaluation criterions for our nation and country as every society in yesterday and today.

Art is a cultural reflection of a nation and it is a measurement of its level of Civilization. Theater is one of these art branches and the most important tool that provides the level of culture and civilization rises.

Theatre was born with humanity. Living is a theater. Theatre was born with humanity. Worship, creation, lovemaking, pity, envy, strife, deceit, murder, death… Briefly, all events having thousands of faces and colors in life are always the art, and the actors are we people. Everyone sees himself in it. Either he feels pleasure, relaxes, laughs or feels distress and sorrows, cries or remains within fascination and excitement; it rises (Tor, 1963:5).

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Art has been for the realization of various objectives in every society. In any case, it has contributed to the culture of society and formed culture. Attenuation and suppression of the studies in cultural and artistic fields and its lost in communal relations bring the cultural and artistic decline. A civilization cannot be considered without art (Erbay, 2006:10).

The start of the first acts is based on the history of mythology. The beginning of the first theatrical arts goes back to the ceremonies that are arranged in honor of Dionysus, which is god of wine of Anatolia. The first theater was born by the dramatic elements in these religious ceremonies gradually develop (Tokin, 1958: 2).

Although we have no precise information about the past of dramatic form in Turkish history, it is possible to take the past of theater up to four thousand years[*]. A Serbian Researcher, Nikolic has found a theatrical text that was written in a primitive form and belonged to Turks. But the Turks, who had converted to Islam in the 11th century, have moved away from the living theater under the influence of the new culture. Nevertheless, the Turkish theater, until the Tanzimat, continued in the forms of acts of (public) storyteller, Karagoz and finally central shadow (imagination) acts.

The Westernization movements in the Empire that increased by the Tanzimat has also affected the traditional theater. A significant portion of the intellectuals who met with the Western world started to be undervalued and despised because the traditional theater had not relationship with real and living life and realities and not any educational side in the period after the Tanzimat, and it was offered a theatrical life similar to the one in the West to be established instead of traditional theater as well as in many other areas (Kudret, 1994: 94-98). In this respect, the theater in the Western sense in the Ottoman Empire is started by the Tanzimat (Sevengil, 1959: 15) [**]. The then administrators of the State thought that the theater would be an important tool for the Turkish society to be gotten acquainted with the Western civilization.

It is known that some theater communities, which came to the Ottoman State from Europe before the Tanzimat gave several representations in Istanbul. These communities started to stay in our country for a long time since 1838 and build their own theater buildings (Sevengil, 1959:17). In the first year when Italian and French groups operated mostly, almost every type of theater was presented to the Turkish audience. Since 1844, theaters were followed under the leadership of the non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. The first of them was the Bosko Theater in Beyoglu, which was established by Mihail Naum, who was in the Arab descent and member of a Christian family (Keskin, 2006:22,23). The first act in this place was the theater that was played Belisario Opera, which was the first dramatic study and published as an Ottoman Turkish translation. The first theater was followed by the "Haskoy", "Shark", and "Ortakoy" Theaters and the the "Tiyatro-i Osmani", which was built in Gedik Pasha in 1867 by Gullu Agop.

The first Turkish act in the Ottoman Empire is "Sair Evlenmesi" (*Poet's Marriage*), which was a one-act play that was ordered by the Palace to Sinasi for playing in the Dolmabahce Theatre (And, 1983:21, (Şener, 1981:5). *Sair Evlenmesi* was followed by such works that were written with the influence of Europe but more simple and monotonous as "Zavalli Cocuk" (*Poor Child*), "Vatan Yahut Siliste" (*Home or Silistre*) and "Akif Bey" (*Mr. Akif*).

After the Paris travel of Sultan Abdulazez, who ascended the throne after Sultan Majid, art and theater in particular were given more importance in the Ottoman Empire. When Sultan Azez returned from Paris, he was going to watch an act in Naum Efendi's theater several times together with his crowded entourage. People lined up to the hall during the days when Sultan went to the theater, but could not find a place (Nisan, 28.12.1950).

However, during the Tanzimat period, the Turkish theater could not go beyond its infancy, the Constitutional Era Theater could not show huge variations in terms of sociological data though showing some differences in terms of the theater of the Tanzimat Period in art. Because, it continued seen as an extension of the Westernization trend in the Constitutional Period as in the Tanzimat Period. That's why, it received criticism at times saying, "*Yes! Theaters*

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[*] There are some people who take the past of theater in the Turkish history up to four thousand years. The paper cited from a lecture given in Bulgaria in 1936. 'Dort Bin Sene Evvelki Turk Tiyatrosu', Cumhuriyet, 8 Birinci Kanun (Aralik) 1936.

[**] However, it is known that some ones of the ambassadors sent abroad under the reign of Selim III transmit information to the Emperor about theater and opera. In the light of the information given to the Sultan, the first opera delegation gave a representation in the Topkapi Palace in 1789. But the privy secretary of the Sultan, who was accustomed to the Orient entertainment and did not speak a foreign language, did not the representation given. Refik Ahmet Sevengil, **Opera Sanati İle Ilk Temaslarimiz**, Istanbul, Maarif Basimevi, 1959, p. 15.

are entertainment places. Nevertheless, it is not for us more. Because how we can say 'let's have fun' despite we cannot take steps in the way of progress/Modernization (Tarik-i Terakki)" (And, 1971:25). But in the Constitutional Period, it began to be received the results of efforts to draw the interest of the Turkish youth who were candidate for new political cadres, the numbers of the Turkish players (actors and actresses) increased besides the numbers of the players who had the origin of non-Muslim. Most of the young people who were interested in theater were the children of writer, civil servant, officer, and pasha that graduated from a high school or a higher education institution (Sevengil, 1968: 2).

In the theater of the period, it was tried to display the contradictory situations of all ones who were Eastern but tried to live like Westerners, and it was tried to stage the adaptations, which were made from writer Moliére, who introduced the Western lifestyle in theater, in addition to such history-contented acts as Namik Kemal's "*Vatan Yahut Silistre*" and "*Celalettin Harzemshah*", Abdulhak Hamit Tarhan's "*Tarik Yahut Endulus Fethi*" and "*Yadigar-i Harb*", and Ahmet Mithat Efendi's "*Furs-i Kadimde Bir Facia Yahut Siyavus*". Everyday life adapted from the West was tried to introduce by the theater plays that were adapted and translated from Moliére. So all the adaptations made by Ahmet Vefik Pasha, who was one of the most important intellectuals, from Moliére both introduced the Western-style everyday life and showed the humor coming with superficiality. The adaptations of Moliére were one of the people's most visited plays among the Western theater acts in the period of renewal because they were appropriate to the character of the traditional theater plays (Keskin, 2006: 92). With such works as Sinasi's "*Sair Evlenmesi*", Huseyin Rahmi's "*Hazan Bulbulu*", and Ahmet Mithat Efendi's "*Eyvah*", the traditional family structure was criticized.

One of the most important developments in the Turkish theater before the Republican period was the Istanbul Municipality City Theaters and the State Theaters. The City Theaters were limited to Istanbul as a field of activity, but they were considered important in terms of institutionalization by the time of *Dar-ul-Bedayi* in the Republican period (Katoğlu, 2003:464). *Dar-al-Bedayi*, founded in 1914, introduced its first show with "*Curuk Temel*" on Thursday evening of January 20 of 1916, and the foundation of the first European-style theater was laid in this way. In 1918, the Turkish girls were accepted to acting with a title of student (Refik, 8 Nisan 1940). Among the first names accepted to acting with the title of student, Afife Jale, Bahire, Memduha, and Beyza Refika are worthy of mentioning (Güntekin, 7).

One of the theaters, which was established in the Constitutional Period and survived to the time of the Republican Period, was 'the National Stage' of Sadi Fikret (Keskin, 2006:105).

Even in the most critical days of the Turkish National Struggle, it was not abandoned the theater, seen as an important step on the way of modernization, and Bulbul-u Neva Ihsan Bey, a mobile theater in Eskisehir at that time, came to Ankara and gave representations in Tashan in 1920. Although the initial interest desired could not be provided, it was not abandoned, and a group consisting of Otello Kamil, Riza, Sadri Ertem, writer Nizamettin Nazif and poet Munir Bey decided to establish a theater, and the acts written and played mostly by them were staged with the support of the Municipality. However, the desired success could not be obtained because of the brutality of war years.

The Early Republican Period

When it comes to the early Republican period, this period is remembered with Ataturk with no doubt. All the developments in this period were carried out by Ataturk's ideas and directives. It was surely unthinkable that Ataturk, who wanted to raise the Turkish nation up to the level of contemporary civilization, neglected the art in the reforms that were repeatedly performed in all areas of the country.

Ataturk focused on fine arts. Because, a human community who has no fine arts and works cannot be a "nation". Such a community cannot have a history (Velidedeoğlu, 1970:5).

The main objective of Ataturk was to raise the Turkish nation up to the level of civilized nations. For this, it is natural, it was necessary to advance in the field of art besides the progresses and developments in science and technology.

Ataturk, who stepped in art as well as the fundamental changes made in all institutions on the one hand by the Republic, assessed art and theater as a public service. The opening of a conservatory with the assistance of state, the establishment of the State Theater, and the transformation of the Istanbul Municipality City Theaters into the subsidized theater are a result of such initiatives in addition to the theater to be tried to reach public by the community centers.

We see the interest of Ataturk in theater at the times when Izmir was withdrawn. The Istanbul City Theater (*Dar-al-Bedayi*) asked to invite Gazi (Ataturk) for their shows when they went to give a representation in Izmir.

Nevertheless, because it was not known Gazi's perspective on art and artists, Behzat Butak, Sadi, and Muvahhit decided to invite Ataturk for their acts with a dare after a long-term hesitation. Not any Ottoman Sultan after Abdulazez I went to the theater. Those times are the periods when Turkish woman artists did not come onto the scene until then and those coming were prosecuted by the police. The first Muslim woman on the stage in 1920 in Istanbul is Afife Jale. But Jale was removed from the scene by the fatwa of Shaykh al-Islam. While the case in Istanbul is so, it is wondered what would be the viewpoints of the government of T.N.A. (the Turkish National Assembly) and Gazi on the theater and moreover a representation in which the artists of Dar-al-Bedayi and Muslim women have a play.

While the delegation was living the excitement for how they would begin the word, they breathed a sigh of relief with the words of Gazi saying, "*I'm glad that you came along with Turkish women. It will be much fun to listen to them on the stage with their beautiful accents.*" Thanks to the revolutionary leadership of Ataturk, who participated in the representations of Dar-al-Bedayi, and the value that he gave to art, our female artists began to emerge on stage. Mrs. Bedia Muvahhit and Mrs. Neyyire Neyir with the *Othello* representation and Mrs. Nazire Sedat with her musical act called "Balo Kacaklari" appeared on the scene in the true sense.

Ataturk, who congratulated the players after the act, said the ban continuing for centuries against women even as a spectator should be ended anymore. He pledged that the state would support the art of theater (And, 1971:287). In the same year, Ataturk decided to develop, laying the foundations of the Turkish Theater along with his some close friends like Yunus Nadi and Falih Rifki Atay (And, 1971:287).

Ataturk had wanted the following features to be in the acts that would be on stage.

1. Especially, it will amplify the love of nation and patriotism and the excitement of Reformism,
2. It will recall the greatest moments of the Turkish History and introduce the heroisms of the National Struggle,
3. It will portray the country's largest cities, towns, villages, and natural beauties and it will promote and popularize each corner of the country separately,
4. It will put forward the ugliness and ridiculousness of bigotry, superstition, and bad customs,
5. It will show morality and courage in each field with great examples,
6. It will instill the love of populism and bear the qualities that guide spirits to that major path (Onberk, 1982:91).

By means of this opinion, the Teachers' College for Music was founded in Ankara in 1924. The first branch consisting of two branches included 'painting, decorative arts, architecture, and sculpture', and its second branch contained 'music and contemplating' arts.

When the Republic was founded, Dar-al-Bedayi had been dispersed. A part of artists in Anatolia and a part of them had worked in Istanbul separately. The artists who did not come together for a long time could come together in 1926. They had begun their first representation with a play, which was translated from French and called "*Kir Cicegi*" (wild flowers), on the evening of November 14, 1926, in the Odeon Theater in Beyoglu. In 1927, Dar-al-Bedayi moved to Tepebasi and transformed into an art institution with the participation of Muhsin Ertugrul, who recently returned from Europe, in becoming more efficient.

While Turkey was living a big improvement with the reforms carried out in sequence on the one hand, Ataturk was watching theaters and plays together with the people as long as he founded an opportunity and he was conducting interviews with artists.

On 02/02/1923 at night, he watched the play called "*Ucurum*" (the Cliff) in the Bahribaba Theater with his wife. In Samsun on 16 February 1924, he watched a play along with the people. Five days later, he watched the act about the Independence War in Sarikamish with his wife again. On 05/10/1924 in Bursa, he participated in the play showed by the Istanbul City Theater. On 19.01.1931, he watched the play, called "*Akin*" (Raid), of Faruk Nafiz Camlibel in the Istanbul City Theaters. Additionally, he watched Aka Gunduz's play called "*Mavi Yildirim*" (the Blue Lightning) in the Ankara Community Center on 04/03/1932 and Behcet Kemal Caglar's play called "*Coban*" (the Shepherd) in the Ankara Community Center on 11/02/1932 (Erbay,2006:155).

It attracted attention of the environments in Ankara Government because Sadi Fikret's community called "*The National Scene*" made a trip to Anatolia, and Ataturk appreciated the contributions of artists in the reforms, addressing to the theater community in June 10, 1926, and wanted that they kept on their tours to tell our people about art. "*I appreciated you very much. You have important services in our reformation too. I have not watched the being uniform and full of art such your representations among representations that I have seen so far. I would recommend particularly that you determine to do your art as you accept it as a profession and get along with your*

friends in sincerity. Your greatest service for home is going to tell our people what the art is, wandering Anatolia through and through. Please continue your tours in regular" (Atatürk, 1997:258).

Ataturk's interest in the performing arts intensified in the 1930s more. He makes one write a play, edits the written plays, gets one compose, and watches. Meanwhile, the idea of establishing a state theater increasingly matures besides (Ozakman, 1988:1059).

Metin And identified Ataturk as "*He is the first dramaturge of Turkey*" while treating Ataturk's interest in theater, because Ataturk bespoke a play to writers, offered a subject, and made corrections by reading the written texts. These studies of Ataturk are the acts of "*Bay Onder*" (Mr. Leader), "*Tas Bebek*" (Stone Baby), and "Bir Ulku Yolu" (A Way of Ideal). He meticulously stood on the issue of language in works. He wanted the words to be Turkish and made some amendments in the original names. He wanted "Bayan" to be used instead of "Begum", and extracted the hackneyed words from the text. He wanted to exchange the sentence in the text of "*Tas Bebek*" about "woman should be loved like an ornament" with "*the existence of woman is the foundation of a nation in thousands of points*." Ataturk removed the author's words in "*Tas Bebek*" saying "*Love is a fun!*" and wrote on the opposite "*counting love as a fun is not to take it seriously.*" In addition to various changes that he made in the play called "*Bir Ulku Yolu*", he made this one more suggestion: "*If it needs to kill a man, he can be one of those who do not succeed*." Furthermore, the first two of these three plays staged on the opera with the recommendation of Ataturk again. "*Bay Onder*", one of them, was composed by Necil Kazim Akses, and "*Tas Bebek*" by Ahmet Aydan Saygun (And, 1983:9).

In 1927, the first serious step was taken to establish the funded theatres under the Ministry of National Education. To this objective, it was given the opportunity to build a theater building and establish a theater community in 1930 by Article 15 of the Law on Municipalities. Thus, Dar-al-Bedayi also became an institution affiliated to the Istanbul Municipality in 1931. Another significant improvement in the field of art in the same year was the establishment of the Turkish Union of Fine Arts. The objective was to educate artists in the fields of literature, painting, theater, music, and sculpture. Muhsin Ertugrul was brought in the head of department of theater, besides.

Ataturk, who invited the theater artists to the House on 11/04/1930 and chatted with them for a while, honored the artists with the compliments and expressed the value that he gave artists with these words. "*Ladies and gentlemen… You all can be a deputy, minister, even a president, but you cannot be an artist… Let's like these children devoted their lives to a great art."* Meanwhile, Muhsin Ertugrul had said to Ataturk, "*We want a theater school, Dear Pasha!*" They had received a letter not to do assistance in the next few days about the issue in which Ismet Pasha personally involved (Ertuğrul, 1989:467). Perhaps the situation of country was not suitable for the conditions of that time. Nevertheless, on 19 November 1930, a Vocational School for Theater was opened in Dar-al-Bedayi at least.

The life of this school, which was opened with the grant given by the Ministry of National Education, was two years. Among its first and last graduates, there are such important names as Samiha Berksoy and Sami Ayanoglu (Ay, 1948:3). The theater after 1930 had the task of instilling the republican spirit into community and new generations under the light of Nationalist, Populist, and Republican principles that draws Turkey's destiny.

When talking about the artistic developments of the Early Republic Period, it should not be forgotten the great contributions of community centers that were founded in 1931. They were the establishments that performed the art dissemination efforts and fulfilled the duty of bringing them forward the people. 478 community centers and 4322 public rooms, which kept on their studies in various branches for fifteen years between 1932 and 1951 served in common and effective as the most important houses of culture and art of the young Republic of Turkey on the way of modernization (Karadag,1988:135).

Ataturk, in the 10th Year Speech, did not neglect to mention about fine arts and stated that the rational and scientific way of walking towards national goal would be possible with loving fine arts and advancing in this field: "*The historical qualification of the Turkish nation is to like fine arts and advance in them. It is for that, it is our national idea to feed and develop continuously our nation's high character, untiring diligence, innate intelligence, loyalty to science, love of fine arts, and feeling of national unity with all means and measures*" (Ataturk, 1997:318,319).

In 1934, the Academy for National Music and the Academy for Representation were established in Ankara. Nevertheless, the department of theater of the school could start to work hardly in 1936 (And, 1983 :12-14).

There was no sufficient number of trained artists in Turkey to make them. Such young talents as Ulvi Cemal Erkin, Ekrem Zeki Un, and Adnan Saygun, who would make important contributions to the Turkish music in the

later period had been sent to Europe for a better education (Makal, 2000:86-87).

On the other hand, the State decided to bring foreign guides in Turkey to catch the contemporary level in theater. For this aim, German Prof. Carl Ebert was invited to Turkey by the Ministry of Education for the department of representation of the conservatory of which foundational work continued in Ankara. On the letter of invitation, it was written that the theater life in Turkey could not develop sufficiently, the government wanted to make reforms in this field despite there was a city theater in Istanbul that had several good staffs, the Ministry aimed at giving the work of theater in the hands of an expert, and this expert would be in Ankara as an adviser of the Ministry for all theatrical matters (Yucel, 1986:473).

To protect Fine Arts, '*the New Law for Income Tax*' was issued on 22/03/1934. (Zobu, 1949:2).

Republic of Turkey has been entrusted to young people. Therefore, because today's children would be tomorrow's elders, it has been required the establishment of child's theaters. Our child's theater, opening its first curtain in October 1935, has continued its representations regularly and also benefitted from small audiences on its scene (Balkır, 1947:15).

Ebert, who began to work coming in Ankara on 22/02/1936, was appointed to set up the music branch of conservatory in the School of Teacher for Music in Ankara by the second agreement signed in the same year.

Ataturk announced these studies at the opening of T.N.A on 1 November 1936 with these following statements: "*Relevance and labor Kamutay (the Assembly) will show for each branch of fine arts are very effective to increase the efficiency of civil life and diligence together with the human of nation*" (Atatürk, 1989:405).

However, Ataturk have not found the studies done sufficient, he stated to be worked more for this matter during the opening speech of the Third Convening Year of Fifth Period with these statements:

"*It would be appropriate for more effort and sacrifice to bring the Conservatory, which was founded in Ankara in the last year, in a situation that it is able to be served for music and stage in a desired technical rapidity*" (Ataturk, 1989:420).

This warning of Ataturk was immediately taken into account. Celal Bayar, appointed to the Prime Ministry on 08/11/1937, made the following statement on the subject: "*We will approach our theater of nation as a reflection of the most aesthetic and plain statement of the Turkish culture and our beautiful Turkish language. The national theater will be the most efficient source of our national art in this manner. We need to emphasize on the adaptation of modern techniques to achieve our goal*" (And,1983:288).

Bayar accelerated efforts at the request of Ataturk. Ebert was given the authority to complete the theater and opera organization of the Ankara State Conservatory, manage its education, and administer any kind of technical works related to the activity of representation and opera of the practicing scene of the State Conservatory. Although the work was begun immediately, the aim of establishing a State Theater was hardly reached after the death of Ataturk (And, 1999:287). The opening of the State Conservatory with its all departments as a modern education institution lasted until 1940s. Nevertheless, Ataturk could not see the results of the study that he prepared all its kinds of infrastructure.

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