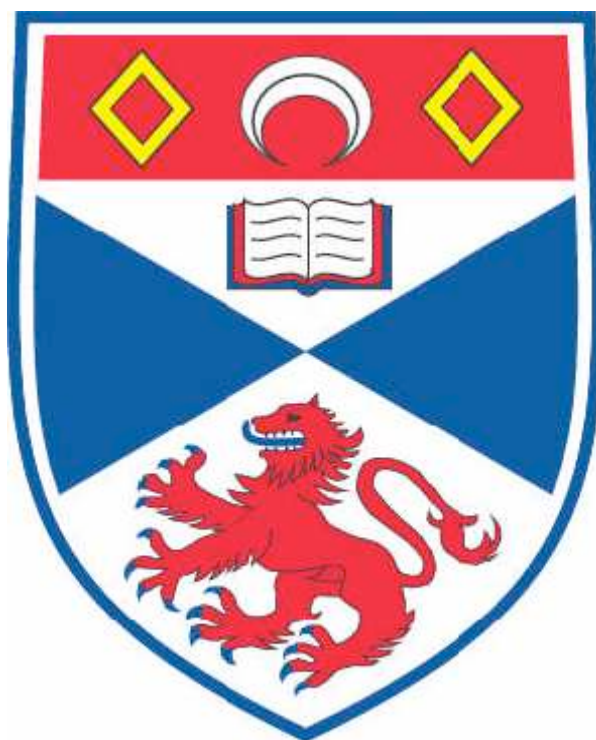


**CHANGING PLEASURES OF SPECTATORSHIP: EARLY AND  
SILENT CINEMA IN ISTANBUL**  
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Thesis Submitted to the University of St Andrews for the Degree of PhD  
in Film Studies



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## **ABSTRACT**

This project explores a curious facet of early cinema that has not been studied as yet: the relationship between Turkish modernity and the culture of spectatorship within the context of the late nineteenth century's viewing habits along with the era of early and silent cinema in Istanbul. The aim of this project is to examine the evolution of viewing habits in Istanbul at a particular period in which a radical cultural transformation was experienced, namely from the 1890s to the 1930s, when the late Ottoman era with its pre-cinematic shows, the cinematograph, and silent films led to the early Turkish Republic and the end of silent cinema. In order to cover the shift in the reception of early cinema, this study makes use of revisionist works on early cinema and on modernity in Ottoman history. To this end, newspapers, novels, memoirs and consular trade records that formed the majority of the primary sources of this project are analyzed. The transformation of Istanbulite spectatorship was initially experienced through a rupture in the late nineteenth century created by the global flow of mechanical images. The cinematograph was viewed by a multi-ethnic public that was accustomed to seeing both traditional and other more widely recognized pre-cinematic shows such as the shadow play, public storytelling, dioramas, panoramas and magic lanterns. At first the early cinematograph displays were haphazard and parts of other shows. Yet, the international influence of the early cinema attracted a curiosity-driven public even if the same public was critical of the imperfect technology of the apparatus. With the outbreak of World War I, nationalist resistance played a role in the reception of popular European films, particularly Italian melodramas. The end of the war caused the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic, after which, cinema started to be seen as an educational tool in the service of nation-building.

## DECLARATIONS

I, Canan Balan, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 85, 000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2005 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in September 2005; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2005 and 2009.

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## NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

I received special help in translating French material into English from my supervisor Graham Petrie and Carmen Cvetkovic. Graham Petrie translated the French newspapers and annual used in Chapter Four and Five: namely, *Annuaire Oriental du Commerce de l'Industrie, de l'Administration et de la Magistrature*, *Le Courrier de Turquie*, *Le Journal d'Orient*, *Lloyd Ottoman*, *Le Moniteur Oriental* and *Stamboul*, published in the years between 1896 and 1920. Carmen Cvetkovic translated reports from *Artistik-Sine*, *Cine* and *Opera-Cine*, published between 1925 and 1927; these materials are used mainly in Chapter Six. Excerpts from Turkish and Ottoman Turkish books, poems, novels and newspapers are my own translations, unless stated otherwise.

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## 1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study aims to explore the relationship between Turkish modernity and spectatorship culture within the context of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century's spectatorship habits and the silent era of cinema in Istanbul. Key issues that will be investigated are the early and silent film screenings and their relevance to public space, the ontology of seeing, and class/gender divisions in *fin-de-siècle* urban culture. The contextual focus is on Istanbul during the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. Therefore, the project includes the period covering the second half of the nineteenth century up to the 1930's, which was an age of massive transition for Istanbulites. The transition on which the study focuses, was experienced through the visual perception owing mainly to two different forms of transformation: firstly, the demographic structure of audiences, and secondly, the visual corpus. Demographic transformation took place from a multi-cultural and multi-confessional empire to a smaller nation state. The second change can be understood in the replacement of local visual delights by the visual entertainment imported from the West due to the country's economic, and hence cultural response, to the global influence of mechanical images.<sup>1</sup> By also covering the pre-cinematic practices I aim to provide a more vivid and broad perspective for the transformation in question.

The introduction chapter of the thesis is divided into two sections. The first section elaborates on methodology, a literature review and a summary of each

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<sup>1</sup> Even though the term 'global' is mostly associated with the current phase of the intensification of connection across the globe, historians have used the term with respect to earlier periods particularly the nineteenth century in which similar processes, partial as they may have been, were at work. See Anthony G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002); Tom Gunning, 'Early Cinema as Global Cinema: the Encyclopedic Ambition', in *Early Cinema and the "National"*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King (London: John Libbey Publishing, 2008), pp. 11-16.

chapter. In the second section, a theoretical framework is provided through revisionist Ottoman history and theories on the reception of early cinema. Throughout the whole thesis, the main arguments are all linked to Turkish modernity; not only because early cinema is a powerful tool of modernization but also because the Turkish modernization process was very controversial. Cultural critics tend to investigate Turkish modernity within a discourse of absence and lack. Hence such a discourse deserves to be the center of attention.

### **1.1. Approaches to Early and Silent Cinema Spectatorship in Istanbul**

Westernization, class/gender divisions and the national/international/transnational aspects of early cinema spectatorship are the core areas that have been reconsidered throughout the whole project. The initial rhetorical questions appear to be the extent to which and in which ways audiences were ‘really’ Westernized. According to Turkish film historians and scholars such as Burçak Evren, Nijat Özön, Burhan Arpad, Nezih Erdoğan, Deniz Göktürk *et al.*, cinema was, by default, accepted as a Western form of pleasure with audiences composed of Western educated elite in Istanbul. Such an argument appears to be debatable and anachronistic, because it does not take into account empirical or historical factors before coming to such a definitive conclusion. Although the cinematograph was seen as a foreign invention, traditional pre-cinematic displays (such as public storytelling and shadow plays) and their reception demonstrate that the cinematic spectatorship had long been functioning as a form of pleasure before the invention of the cinematic apparatus. Furthermore, the relationship between Turkish modernity and Westernization appears to be a very complex one, due mainly to the assumptions that modernity and Westernization became synonymous at the beginning of the twentieth

century. Yet, the question of modernity in Ottoman historiography dates back to the sixteenth century when an early modernization process was initiated by the transformation of public sphere into coffee houses, along with the centralization of the State and thus introducing state control over public spaces. Moreover, the relationship with the West had always been intricate since the Ottoman Empire ruled both the Balkans and the Middle East for several centuries; even though the Empire was unofficially colonized by the Great Powers of the *fin-de-siècle*. Therefore, it would be reductionistic to consider the cinematograph and cinematic spectatorship simply as another tool of Westernization as opposed to some essentialized traditional values and practices.

In the early twentieth century, Western educated Young Turks were the leaders of a national movement. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic (1923) and his followers believed that Westernization, together with Turkish nationalization, would be the initiating progress which would put Turkey on the same level as developed Western countries. Accordingly the second main problematic aspect leading this study to another argument appears to be the extent to which early cinema was Turkish in the Ottoman and Post-Ottoman era. Terms such as ‘Turkish Film History’ and ‘Early Turkish Cinema’ appear to ignore Ottoman cultural and cinematic heritage. Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, was a cosmopolitan, multi-confessional, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic society. However, after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Turkification reconstructed all strata of society. The reasons for identifying Ankara (in central Anatolia) and rebuilding it as the new capital for the new Republic were one of the signs of this process. However, there were no clear-cut boundaries in ethnic identities in the late Empire, particularly in the Balkans, as the French term *salade Macédoine* exemplifies. In the case of cinema, where almost all the entrepreneurs were non-Turkish and the spectators had

diverse nationalities, it seems problematic to use such a term as early Turkish cinema, yet no other terms are available for this research. Furthermore, the cinema industry (as in the case of many other Eastern European or Middle Eastern countries of the period), was to a great extent transnational, since most entrepreneurs in this field were foreigners until the mid-1920s.

The third significant argument of the thesis is based on the class and gender divisions within the spectatorship which is relatively neglected in film historiography. In Turkish film studies, class and gender issues have been extensively problematized for textual analyzes especially in feminist and Marxist film analysis. Yet, in the field of spectatorship and reception studies, it has been almost a tradition either to ignore the divisions among the spectatorship or to declare that there was no such hierarchy in terms of class divisions. It is evident that the seats in movie theaters were arranged according to the price, and the cost of cinema tickets was relatively expensive. ‘Turkish film historiography’ indeed demonstrates some concerns over the gender divisions; however, this issue was reduced to the female presence at the shows. Hence, the role of women in the cultural perception and interpretation of the cinematograph was overlooked particularly in the novels and memoirs that discriminate against and attribute problematic attitudes to female audiences.

### **1.1.1. Methodology**

Focusing on the complex relationship between modernity and the spectatorship culture within an urban context, historicizing the spectators and their collective behaviour in the multi-cultural Ottoman era, this thesis relies heavily on an extensive literature review, archival research, an interpretive historical anthropology as well as a quantitative approach to spectatorship in order to understand early cinema spectatorship as such.

Turkish literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offers the intelligentsia's perspective on the reception of the cinematograph, particularly those referring to gender issues. Therefore a textual analysis is applied to a selected number of novels and memoirs from this period. The analyses focus on discourses criticizing Westernization process and the patriarchal concerns dominant in these narratives. In order to understand the cinematic interest of different segments of the society, from the case of school children to a general middle class audience, I take advantage of newspapers, cinema journals and trade records from this period. These sources reveal film choices of the public, the emergence of stardom, current developments in filmmaking along with an overall panorama of the international and national industry. The process by which cinema-going becomes a matter of taste and cinema's role in transforming the public space are the other main concerns in my reading of such sources.

I tried to conduct my research among the primary sources as systematically as possible. Yet some of my most exciting findings were nearly serendipitous; but this probably is the case for most historical research. The major sources for my research were the weekly magazines and daily newspapers, published in the period between

the 1890s and the 1930s, found in the Istanbul Atatürk Library and the National Library in Ankara. These and several other collections are replete with novels and memoirs from the period that deal with spectatorship along with biographies and autobiographies of filmmakers and distributors. Furthermore, the Constantinople trade annuals printed by the French Embassy are available in the Ottoman Bank Archives in Istanbul and the library of the University of St Andrews holds trade reports printed by the British Embassy. The British Library in London contains travellers' journals and English and French language newspapers printed in Istanbul. Indeed the British Library Newspaper Collections offered a great surprise for this study. During my visit to the British Library in November 2007, when I still had no data on the first public screening in Istanbul, I came across a French newspaper, named *Stamboul*, published in Istanbul, which was not mentioned in any research on Ottoman printed media. While I was still pessimistic about the above mentioned data, I could hardly believe what I saw on the first page of *Stamboul*: 'Hier soir une intéressante séance de projections photographiques était offerte par l'organisateur de ce genre d'attraction aux membres de la presse et à quelques invités.'<sup>2</sup> I had only one day left for my archival research in London, yet the astonishment led me to further my research in Istanbul in the winter. I then visited the French Studies Institute in Istanbul where I was able to gather more issues of this newspaper.

Besides these sources, I visited the film archive in Macedonia in summer of 2006 thanks to the AHRC funding that was provided by the head of the department and my second supervisor Prof Dina Iordanova. The Macedonian Film Archive holds films of the Manakia Brothers, supposedly the first filmmakers of the Balkans and the official photographers of the Turkish Sultan, Abdulhamid II (r.1876-1908).

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<sup>2</sup> *Stamboul*, Istanbul: 12 December 1896.



These films were crucial for me to view as some of them were directly helpful in examining the topic in a broader geography.

The largest obstacle this study faced was the language barrier due to the multi-lingual characteristics of Ottoman society in that period. The primary materials are in a large variety of languages such as English, Armenian, Greek, Arabic, French, Italian, Kurdish, Turkish as well as other languages. The English language newspapers do not appear to be keen on spectacles and entertainment, whereas the consular reports and travellers' journals written in English are helpful since they include some statistical data. French language newspapers appeared to be the most beneficial since this was the most prevalent language amongst the intellectuals and the Christian public. Turkish language newspapers, on the other hand, were written in the Arabic script, which requires a special training for those, such as myself, educated in the Turkish Republic which decided to utilize the Roman alphabet in 1928.

Another obstacle to overcome in this study is the unfortunate loss of the Ottoman/Turkish silent films of the 1950s. The films were printed on nitrate and kept in the National Film Archive in Ankara, which burned down, so very few copies were saved. These copies are now in a university archive in Istanbul, at Mimar Sinan Universitesi Film Arsivi, under very rigid supervision. The administrators of the archive do not hold an open film catalogue and are not keen on showing the silent films to researchers outside the archive. After three attempts to work in the archive, I managed to view only two Turkish silent films, allegedly the total number of the films they hold.

### 1.1.2. Literature Review

Spectatorship analyses of the 1970s, particularly those that are based on textual analysis and apparatus theories, have been revisited and, mostly, refuted by early cinema studies in the later decades.<sup>3</sup> The necessity for such revision appears to be that these theories struck researchers as insufficient in covering the perception of the actual audiences. Moreover, they hardly provide a historical and empirical perspective; and they tend to speculate upon a homogenized spectatorship psyche. There may be an inevitable and acceptable role for a hypothetical reconstruction in understanding communal spectatorship behaviour, but the spectatorship of a particular period needs to be studied, as far as possible, through historical facts. A suitable approach to this project is therefore to establish a historical and empirical context along with the examination of the visual corpus as well as particular cinematic texts (be it novels that deal with spectators or films themselves).

Crucial works on early and silent cinema, for our purposes, are those that articulate and debate the spectatorship theories of Tom Gunning and Miriam Hansen, where they basically investigate the role of silent cinema in vernacular modernism and the globalization of early cinema along with the cinema of attractions.<sup>4</sup> Ben Singer in his work on statistical data on the movie theaters of New York, Yuri

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<sup>3</sup> Especially see Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 6-18; Jean Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 286-298; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans: Celia Britton, Annwyly Williams, Ben Brester and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> See Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectators and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, 8 (1986), pp. 63-70; Tom Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator', in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, New York: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 114-134; Tom Gunning, '“Now You See It, Now You Don't”: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 32 (1993), pp. 3-10; Tom Gunning, 'Early Cinema as Global Cinema: The Encyclopedic Ambition'. See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Miriam Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999), pp. 59-77, Miriam Hansen, 'Early Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?', *New German Critique*, 29 (Spring–Summer 1983), pp. 147–184.

Tsivian in his understanding of cultural reception of the audiences in Russia from the intellectuals' viewpoints, along with Richard Abel's work on the Americanization of French silent cinema, are also essential for this study.<sup>5</sup> Additionally Thomas Elsaesser's approach to early cinema as a mass entertainment culture strengthened my resolve to investigate the entertainment culture in the Ottoman society in a broader context.<sup>6</sup> Hansen's approach to cinema as a discriminatory public sphere shaped my arguments on silent film-going in the 1920s as an elitist public sphere and cinema-going as a lifestyle.<sup>7</sup> Luke McKernan's work on *A Fury for Seeing: London's Cinemas and Their Audiences, 1906-1914* gave me the idea of comparing ticket prices to the other expenses of a middle class audience in chapters five and six.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore Mary Ann Doane's approach to the woman's cinema of the 1940s was helpful to analyze the representation of female audiences in early cinema period.<sup>9</sup>

This study benefits from various fin-de-siècle Turkish novels since they all deal with Turkish modernity and provide a range of spectatorship experiences. Novels by Peyami Safa, Halide Edip Adivar, Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil and Mehmet Rauf are analyzed in different chapters of the thesis according to the periods in which they were written or which they describe.<sup>10</sup> They turned out

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<sup>5</sup> See Ben Singer, 'Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors', *Cinema Journal*, 35.3 (Spring 1996), pp. 3-35; Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, trans. Alan Bodger, ed. Richard Taylor (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard Abel, *French Cinema* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984); Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare. Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, Berkeley, London 1999); Richard Abel (ed), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Elsaesser, *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> See Miriam Hansen, 'Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Permutations of the Public Sphere', *Screen*, 34.1 (Spring 1993), pp. 197-210; Hansen 'Early Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?.'

<sup>8</sup> See Luke McKernan, 'A Fury for Seeing: London Cinemas and Their Audiences, 1906-1914' (Presentation given at Birkbeck University of London, May 2005).

<sup>9</sup> See Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Indiana University Press, 1987); Mary Ann Doane, 'The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the "Woman's Film" of the 1940s', *Poetics Today*, 6. 1/2 (1985), pp. 205-227.

<sup>10</sup> See Peyami Safa, *Sözde Kızlar* (Istanbul: Alkim Yayınevi, 2007); Peyami Safa, *Fatih-Harbiye* (Istanbul: Alkim Yayınevi, 2005); Peyami Safa (Server Bedii, pseudo.), *Sinema Delisi Kız* (Istanbul: Semih Lütfi Matbaa ve Kitabevi, 1932), Halide Edip Adivar, *Sinekli Bakkal* (Istanbul: Atlas Kitabevi,

to be particularly helpful for my purposes, as the number of first hand cinematic observations in memoirs is rather limited.<sup>11</sup> Although a rigid empiricism may consider fictional characters and experiences to be less than reliable witnesses to actual experiences, these sources help to define a general viewpoint of the intelligentsia on cinema-going as a ‘Western form of pleasure’. Additionally, and even more importantly, they demonstrate a bigger picture for the gender factor in spectatorship. In this context, works of Turkish literary criticism are helpful to understand the concerns of various authors in relation to the Westernization paradigm, modernity and the patriarchal structure of the society. In particular Nurdan Gürbilek’s examination in her critique of Turkish literature of the early twentieth century is an appropriate starting point for this project.<sup>12</sup> Her critique of Turkish cultural criticism that saw modernity as a late comer and the female characters of the period as susceptible to Westernization turned out to be a stimulating point to build upon. My analysis of Turkish novels in relation to cinema was also inspired by Grahame Smith who saw stylistic connections between novels and early cinema.<sup>13</sup>

In order to understand the visual corpus of the period and the cultural reception of the audiences, I adopted a phenomenological approach utilized by Kaja Silverman in her analysis of Plato and Heidegger.<sup>14</sup> Plato’s cave parable is a momentous paradigm for this study since it largely inspired the Ottoman Sufi

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1990); Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, *Mezarından Kalkan Sehîr, Eti Senin Kemîgi Benim* (Istanbul: Ozgur Yayınları, 1995); Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Ask-i Memnu* (Istanbul, Ozgur Yayınları; 2005); Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray ve Otesi* (Istanbul: İnkılap ve Aka Kitabevleri, 1965); Mehmet Rauf, *Genc Kız Kalbi* (Istanbul : Arma Yayınları, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> See Ahmet Rasim, *Şehir Mektupları 3-4*, ed. Nuri Akbayar (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1992); Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Eski Günlerde* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001); Cemil Filmer, *Hatıralar: Türk Sinemasında 65 Yıl* (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1984); Ayşe Osmanoglu, *Babam Sultan Abdulhamid* (Istanbul: Güven Yayınevi, 1960); Ercument Ekrem Talu, ‘İstanbul’da İlk Sinema ve Gramafon’, *Perde Sahne*, 7.15 (October 1943), pp. 5-14.

<sup>12</sup> See Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kor Ayna Kayıp Sark* (Istanbul: Metis, 2004); Nurdan Gürbilek, *Magdurun Dili* (Istanbul, Metis, 2007); Nurdan Gürbilek, ‘Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.2/3, (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 599-628.

<sup>13</sup> See Grahame Smith, *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (Manchester, New York, Manchester University Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

understanding that was extensively prevalent among the ‘wondrous’ spectators of the early visual delights in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>15</sup> The relationship between the feeling of wonder and cinematic experience,<sup>16</sup> can be traced back to preceding cultural forms and practices that had been initiated in the depiction of world spectatorship of early modern vernacular literature, at least since the sixteenth century, maintained in the pre-cinematic displays of later centuries and arguably found a role in the age of cinema of attractions. Hence the pre-cinema practices along with the popular poetry of the early-modern era deserve attention in their relation to early cinematic spectatorship. In particular Tom Gunning’s notion of the cinema of attractions along with his analysis of phantasmagoria helped me to see a close relationship between the Turkish shadow play, a spectacle of attractions indeed, and early cinema spectatorship.<sup>17</sup> The texts and the characters of Turkish shadow plays and public storytelling were largely collected by Metin And and Cevdet Kudret.<sup>18</sup> Vanessa Schwartz’s work on the Paris Morgue and Wax Museum gave me the idea to investigate everyday urban life as a spectacle.<sup>19</sup>

The correlation between city and the gaze is materialized through language as well. In Turkish and Arabic, the words *şehir* (‘city’ in English), *teşhir* (‘display and exhibit’ in English) and *şöhret* (‘celebrity’ in English) share the same etymological

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<sup>15</sup> See Cemal Kafadar, ‘Hayretten Hayrete: Osmanlı Seyir Kültürünün Evrimi Üzerine Düşünceler’, in *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler 5*, ed. Deniz Bayrakdar (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2006), pp. 15-39.

<sup>16</sup> This will be investigated in the theoretical framework in detail yet basically this connection attributes a major role to the feelings of wonder and astonishment in spectatorship, especially in the context of Ottoman Fine Arts.

<sup>17</sup> See Tom Gunning, ‘Phantasmagoria and the Manufacturing of Illusions and Wonder: Towards a Cultural Optics of the Cinematic Apparatus’, in *The Cinema, A New Technology for the 20th Century*, eds. André Gaudreault, Catherine Russell and Pierre Veronneau (Editions Payot, Lausanne, 2004), pp. 31-44.

<sup>18</sup> See Metin And, *Karagöz: Turkish Shadow Play* (İstanbul, Dost Yayınları, 2005); Metin And, *A History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey* (Ankara: Forum Yayınları, 1963-64); Cevdet Kudret, *Karagöz* (İstanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayınları, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Vanessa R. Schwartz, ‘Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris’, in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Leo Charney (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 297-320.

root *şhr*.<sup>20</sup> Urban life, in other words, was long perceived as a life of spectacle, yet the gaze offered within the metropol is not only celebrated but is also criticized through the gaze's patronizing and discriminatory attitudes towards the inhabitants. Judith Walkovitz in her work on urban spectatorship illustrates a different urban culture that is outside the fantasy of the *flâneur*, a London with slums; 'dark and noisy courts'; 'foul-smelling swamps' and a black abyss where the poor had to dwell with limited access to spectacles.<sup>21</sup> Modernity and urban spectatorship transformed the city into a landscape of strangers and secrets, where the state needed to intervene. Istanbul in the late nineteenth century was no different, since the state's control mechanisms became increasingly dominant through surveillance devices.<sup>22</sup> Foucault's view of the gaze as a control mechanism in the Panopticon in this context is useful for releasing the researcher from the *flâneur*'s naïve approach to spectacles.<sup>23</sup>

Mainstream Ottoman film and cultural historiography tends to appreciate the older forms of entertainment, such as shadow theater and public storytelling, in relation to cinema. However, they were depicted as traditional, static and hence insufficient, as they were totally replaced by a 'modern form'. On examining each of these forms, the similarities and dissimilarities between cinema and pre-cinema become more evident. Therefore it is vital to look into revisionist Ottoman social

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<sup>20</sup> 'Istanbul was rapidly developing those aspects of early modernity [in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] that we associate with certain concepts that are conceptually related to the word *şehir*. To see and to be seen, as we know is both one of the main aspects of urban existence the *flâneur*, the dandy and the urge to see and to be seen. Those of us who studied the early modern periods see the beginning of this *teşhir* in 16th and the 17th centuries and the coffee-houses plus the urban promenades and public parts eventually have a lot to do with this.' See the paper presented, Cemal Kafadar, 'The City that Râmb Visited: The Political and Cultural Climate of Istanbul in the 1650s' (Lecture given at Cultural Center of the Swedish Embassy in Istanbul, October 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Judith R. Walkovitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> See Palmira Brummet, 'Dogs, Women, Cholera, and Other Menaces in the Streets: Cartoon Satire in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-11', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27 (November 1995), pp. 433-460.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Panopticism', in *The Nineteenth Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 73-79.

history as it helps us to posit cinematic spectatorship in a larger but more closely observed context. The role of coffee houses, first person narratives, vernacular literature, cartoons and the neighborhood in Ottoman urban life reveal that cinema-going was not so revolutionary in the metropolitans' ways of socialization. Cemal Kafadar's investigations on both coffee house as a transformative public space and the notion of wonder in world spectatorship shaped my understanding of the rupture in the public sphere and in the visual corpus. Scholars and historians such as Reşad Ekrem Koçu, Cemal Kafadar, Donald Quataert, Cem Behar and Alen Duben demonstrate the extent to which various devices and methods of secularization and modernization functioned in the everyday lives as early as the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, works by Niyazi Berkes, Feroz Ahmad and Eric Zürcher formed secondary sources for my understanding of the Turkish modernization and the transformation the country underwent from an empire to a nation state.<sup>25</sup>

Study of Turkish film history highlights the lack of information available for the early cinema period. There is almost no academic work on film history that focuses on early cinema alone; the current historiography is based on a large period and sees early cinema as a small segment of it. However, there are a few popular history books on early Turkish cinema; which depend partly on not entirely credible sources. Indeed, film scholarship suffers from a scarcity of works on early cinema

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<sup>24</sup> See Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Tarihte İstanbul Esnafı* (Istanbul, Dogan Kitap 2003); Cemal Kafadar 'A History of Coffee' available at [eh.net/XIIICongress/cd/papers/64Kafadar16.pdf](http://eh.net/XIIICongress/cd/papers/64Kafadar16.pdf) [accessed on 12 February 2007]; Cemal Kafadar, 'A Death in Venice (1575): Anatolian Muslim Merchants Trading in the Serenissima', *Journal of Turkish Studies*, No.10 (1986), pp. 191-218; Cemal Kafadar, 'Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature', *Studia Islamica*, 69 (1989), pp. 121-150; Donald Quataert, 'The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914', in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, eds. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 749-943; Donald Quataert, 'Ottoman Women and Manufacturing', in *Women in Middle Eastern History Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, eds. Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp.161-176; Cem Behar and Alen Duben, *A Neighbourhood in Ottoman Istanbul; Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap İlyas Mahalle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> See Berkes, Niyazi, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998); Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993); Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2004).

spectatorship; furthermore the existing body defines early Turkish cinema only in the context of the westernization narrative. Books and articles by Burçak Evren, Gioavinni Scognomillo, Nijat Özön, Rekin Teksoy, Nezi̇h Erdođan, Deniz Göktürk *et al.* in this sense seem to contribute to the idea of a Westernization narrative, despite their many virtues in shaping Turkish film historiography.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.1.3. Summary of the Chapters

Chapter two places cinematic spectatorship in the context of transformation and modernization related to the economic, social and cultural developments in the late nineteenth century Ottomans. To sum up, the establishment of a Western form of education system in the late nineteenth century helped create a new intelligentsia preoccupied with Western culture. Among them were Young Turks who then came into political power in 1908 and formed a Parliament in an age characterized by the global influence of Nationalisms. In Istanbul, there was a rapid growth in the population and industrialization. Accordingly, these developments reconstituted the socio-economic environment of the city. As the capital of a multi-confessional society, the metropolis consisted of different ethnic and religious communities. According to the 1886 census, 44.9 percent of the working population was Muslim, 22.5 percent Greek, 20.6 percent Armenian and 5.8 percent Jewish.<sup>27</sup> In the 1850s

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<sup>26</sup> See Nijat Özön, *Türk Sineması Kronolojisi 1895-1966* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1968); Nijat Özön, *Karagözden Sinemaya Türk Sineması ve Sorunları* (Ankara: Kitle Yayınları, 1995); Nezi̇h Erdođan, 'Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in the Turkish Melodrama between 1965 and 1975,' *Screen* 39. 3 (1998), pp. 250-271; Nezi̇h Erdođan, Deniz Göktürk, 'Turkish Cinema', in *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 533-573; Giovanni Scognomillo, *Türk Sinema Tarihi* (Istanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 1998); Rekin Teksoy, *Rekin Teksoy'un Türk Sineması* (Istanbul: Oglak Yayıncılık, 2007); Burçak Evren, *Sigmund Weinberg: Türkiye'ye Sinemayı Getiren Adam* (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1995); Ali Özuyar, *Babiali'de Sinema* (Istanbul, Izdusum Yayınları, 2004); Alim Şerif Onaran, *Türk Sineması I* (Ankara: Kitle Yayıncılık, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Zeynep Celik, *Degisen Istanbul: 19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Baskenti* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), p. 34.



there were no novels or theater; journalism hardly existed (and with only a very limited circulation).<sup>28</sup> However, by the first years of the twentieth century there was a flourishing literary and theater culture. This chapter also deals with the transformation of the public sphere as well as the entertainment to be found in the city. Crucial to this issue is an examination of everyday life in the context of work and leisure. Moreover, forms of *flânerie* and idleness as signs of decadence are investigated to further illustrate a larger panorama of the city's entertainments.

Chapter three is dedicated to cinema-like modes of spectatorship encountered before the invention of the cinematograph. It has been considered that shadow plays and public storytelling formed the understanding of 'realism' in contemporary Turkish cinema.<sup>29</sup> Modes of viewing these displays, on the other hand, warrant investigation in their own right. This chapter attempts to explore the pre-cinematic displays and their modes of exhibition/viewing. In order to do so, the attendant role of the spectators, the circumstances and narrative styles of display, the socio-economic situation of the audiences and the roles of the exhibitors will be investigated. The metaphysics of the gaze and its Ottoman understandings, as embedded in learned and intuited but deeply influential forms of Sufism, are further considered in terms of their significance as a dominant factor in pre-cinema spectatorship.

In chapter four, the very first encounters with the cinematograph and the screenings in 1896 and 1897 are the main focus. Première screenings of the cinematograph were arranged for the Sultan within Yıldız Palace in 1896; however, it is still unknown which pictures were shown at this event. The first public display of the cinematograph was at a French beer hall, Salle Sponeck, in Istanbul on 11 December 1896. Focusing on the infrequent and haphazard displays of the

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<sup>28</sup> Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 170.

<sup>29</sup> See Nijat Özön, *Karagözden Sinemaya Türk Sinemasinin Sorunlari*, passim.

cinematograph and the audience reactions in the years 1896 and 1897, this chapter attempts to review the dominant paradigm of Westernization and the related canon in historiography.

The period of 1897 to 1908 was excluded from this thesis due to the lack of significant political and cultural changes during this time. Although the role of traveling showmen during this period is invaluable for early cinema studies, it extends the limits of this study which focuses on the connection between Turkish modernity and cinema-going.<sup>30</sup> Excluding this specific time frame, Chapter Five covers the period between 1908 and the 1920s. It is divided by World War I and focuses on the war's national/international effects on cinema-going. Special attention was given both to gender politics and to the distribution of films from different European countries.

As a consequence of the industrialization of cinema, spectatorship achieved a more stable status in newspapers, magazines and some novels of the period. However, the distribution patterns of the films changed post-1920; European films began to disappear and the Americanization process began. The press was interested in the stylistic aspects of the films, while reporting of the wonder-struck audiences of early cinema began to be replaced by movie star fans. Concerns over the absence of a national industry, or of its insufficiencies, set the agenda of public debate among the intelligentsia, at a time when cinema audiences were associated more with middle classes than the working classes and cinema-going became a matter of taste. Chapter six, therefore, traces the development of the discourse of 'cinema as a public sphere and a lifestyle'.

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<sup>30</sup> Mustafa Ozen's article on the traveling showmen in Istanbul is very helpful to understand the dynamics of the cinematographe shows before cinema's settling down in the city. See Mustafa Ozen, 'Traveling Cinema in Istanbul', in *KINtop Schriften 10*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Frankfurt A.M.: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern 2008), pp. 47-53.

#### **1.1.4. Contribution of the Project to the Field of Early Cinema**

Recently in the expanding field of film studies, early cinema and spectatorship are growing areas of research and analysis. The pleasure of looking and its relevance to the cinematic entertainment in the late nineteenth century, the novelty of cinema spectatorship and early film viewing habits, the acting in early films and the emergence of a star system, the institutionalization process of cinema, the location of first screenings and movie theaters are being reconsidered. These studies do not yet allow for generalizations or comparisons across the globe because they are mostly examinations of the early cinema practices of America and Western Europe. It strikes me that there is much to be gained from investigating the early era of cinema spectatorship culture in countries like Turkey. This, however, is one of the most neglected issues in the available literature on Turkish film history despite the abundance of primary materials. There is a need for empirical research on early Turkish cinema that questions the prevalent paradigms of Turkish modernity. Furthermore, the pre-cinematic practices and experiences of the Ottoman period as well as the philosophy behind their spectatorship deserve particular attention. Thus, this project is an attempt to fill a significant gap and to direct attention to a relatively neglected cinema tradition, namely that of Turkey, with its unique experience of radical cultural transformation of an Islamic society and its peculiar modernization process.

## 1.2. Philosophical Framework

This section introduces the discourse of lack and absence in the Westernization narrative, a discourse which has been dominant in film historiography and mainstream cultural criticism as a reflection of the Ottoman decline paradigm. This paradigm examines Turkish modernity as a consequence of the Westernization movement, which emerged in the nineteenth century at a time when the Empire was weak and susceptible to Western influences and was fuelled by the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Nevertheless, it has been reconsidered by revisionist Ottoman social and literary historiography. These works suggest that instead of focusing on comparative approaches that assume essentialist distinctions between different cultures, one should instead simply examine distinct periods of a chosen country/culture's history and focus upon its unique circumstances. In the case of the Ottomans, looking into the social and political contexts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals the precursors of a contemporary sense of modernity. Such a paradigm shift ('pre-modern' instead of 'Westernization') indeed helps us to see the different forms of modernities that existed outside Europe. However, the mainstream understanding of Euro-centric modernity is still dominant in Turkish film and literary historiography.<sup>31</sup> Such a perspective on the subject assumes a time lag between the West as the norm and the developing countries as aberrant historical experiences. Furthermore, it dismisses the ontological common-ground of spectatorship shared both by the 'Western' and 'Eastern' metaphysics.<sup>32</sup> Hence, this subsection will introduce the notion of absence offered by the Westernization narrative and its criticism in revisionist Ottoman history. It is also with this concern

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<sup>31</sup> See Nijat Özön; Alim Şerif Onaran; Rekin Teksoy; Giovanni Scognomillo; Nezi̇h Erdoğan.

<sup>32</sup> Neo-Plotanic metaphysics forms a common ground with Christianity and Islam.

that in chapter three this study will cover the ontology of the gaze so as to illustrate a cultural perception free from essential cultural distinctions.

It would be schematic but not incorrect to summarize Turkish film historiography as follows: in the very beginning, the traditional Turkish public was not really interested in cinema-going, it was only a Westernized elite and some foreign entrepreneurs who appreciated the cinematograph.<sup>33</sup> Such claims seem to stem from a general notion of absence in Turkish high brow culture, constructed within the Westernization narrative. Following Europe as a role model with the assumptions that it reached a level of cultural and economic nirvana, Turkish cultural and social critics tended and still tend to define the Turkish experience and current circumstances of modernity in terms of belatedness, imitation, absences and lacks.<sup>34</sup> In her analysis of the Turkish novel in relation to the debates over belatedness and authenticity, Nurdan Gürbilek views mainstream cultural criticism as a comparative one that forces itself to reiterate the arguments on what: ‘the “other” has, but “we” don’t have, pointing out the persistent lack, the irremovable deficiency, the unyielding inadequacy of its object: Turkish culture.’<sup>35</sup> According to the paradigm in question, novelties exist mainly in the West and the local culture lacks the avant-garde or originality as it has always been late for both a true progress and an appreciation of (Euro-centric) modernism.

The absence and lacks this study views, take other shapes than this, of course. In addition to the absence in the critical discourse, there is an absence of the ‘fortunate few’ who constituted early cinema spectators and the absence/scarcity of the research on this topic (stemming from the ‘lack’ of primary sources). The alleged deficiency of primary data leads to presumptions, speculations and simplistic

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<sup>33</sup> See Nijat Özön; Alim Şerif Onaran; Rekin Teksoy; Giovanni Scognomillo; Nezih Erdoğan.

<sup>34</sup> See Nurdan Gürbilek, ‘Dandies and Originals’, pp. 1-2.

<sup>35</sup> Gürbilek, p. 1.

generalizations which indeed contribute to a vicious cycle of the absence narrative. The ‘significant lack’ in the body of early cinema spectatorship results from the assumptions that the small fortunate audience was a Westernized, progressive and elite minority, if not merely non-Muslims. Such an aspect of history does not only overlook the country’s own spectatorship heritage; but it also tends to underestimate the role of women, working classes, artisans or ‘traditional’ Muslims in cinema-going. The encounter was examined as an experience of a male public who is ‘open-minded’, ‘Westernized’, ‘well-educated’, and yet ‘snobbish’. Especially growing up in Turkey of the 1990s, one is familiar with the patriarchal criticism of Turkish modernity as a belated modernity or a modernity of lacks<sup>36</sup> and it is therefore easy to give up on attempts to look for the ‘non-Westernized’ audiences.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lack of original novels, films, ballet, opera, classical music, and most importantly, public interest in high brow culture.

<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that lacks in the audience profile in this context is very much relative, i.e. a middle class orthodox Muslim man can be considered ‘subaltern’ in the context of cinema-going yet, he is a dominant figure in relation to women, to the lower classes, to non-Muslim minorities of earlier ages and to unorthodox Muslims.

### 1.2.1. 'Who Was Here Before Us?': Encounters with the Cinematograph/ Encounters with 'Belated Modernity'

'This idea of absence is voiced not only in classical drama but also in philosophy. Thousands of books and articles have been devoted to Aristotle's logic, yet the basic, emotional problems he may have been grappling with seem to have gone completely unnoticed. The famous example of a syllogism, 'All men are mortal - Socrates is a man - Therefore Socrates is mortal', is not simply an abstract logical proposition but a statement about a real, live human being with whom Aristotle had a powerful relationship, even if the two had never met. If today a philosopher wrote a whole book in which the central example concerned the death of his intellectual master, we would surely pick up the emotional subtext. And that this question of morality is at the heart of Aristotle's concerns becomes even clearer if we remember his much-debated claim 'If a thing may be, it may also not be.' Isn't this, in fact, already a formulation of anticipatory grief?'  
Darian Leader<sup>38</sup>

In a developing country's cultural criticism it seems inevitable to conceptualize or analyze the debates over absence and lack of a belated modernity. This is due to, perhaps not obviously but essentially, the insufficiency of wealth and therefore technological advancements. The absolute or universal perception of Euro-centric modernization might form a trap based on these lacks by assuming 'the West' as forward and 'the East' as backward, as such understanding tends to essentialize cultural/territorial differences. This study challenges such a perspective, as applied to the history of early cinema, since these distinctions seem to dismiss historical contexts and anticipate a progressive understanding of time. Moreover, the idea of belatedness by supposed lacks as well as absences posits Turkey, and other 'developing countries', in constant and vain attempts to catch up with the already developed ones. Thus such an approach to Turkish modernity hinges on the notion of a time lag, between the already developed West and still developing East, and thereby it leads the cultural historian to writing a history of grief and mourning.

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<sup>38</sup> Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression*:  
<http://www.markvernon.com/friendshiponline/dotclear/index.php?2008/02/04/850-aristotle-s-grief-for-socrates>. [accessed on 22 November 2008].

Instead of feeling destined to participatory grief one may prefer to disregard, or try to undermine, such cultural prejudices with a more focused and extended research.

The question of the renowned Ottoman folk poet Karacaoğlu (late-16th century) ‘Who was here before us?’,<sup>39</sup> suggests a path that may enable a much more fruitful inquiry by encouraging a curiosity for the traces/fingerprints of those who are absent in the study, namely the early spectators. Therefore the question of ‘who was here before us?’ seems to be more constructive than seeking out ‘what did we lack?’ Dudley Andrew indicates the role of traces in a different context where he explains Bazin’s theory of realism: ‘We are psychologically stunned by such tracings because they have been actually left by the object they make us recall. Thus Robinson Crusoe is terrified by the footprint of Friday, not because it looks like Friday, but because it was really made by him.’<sup>40</sup>

There was Friday on the sands before Robinson Crusoe, and undoubtedly there were audiences before our generation. Hence the main aim is to seek their tracks; in order to identify their genders/socio-economic backgrounds, and to grasp their perceptions and cognitions, or their states of minds. Traces left by early cinema audiences may not always be as visually solid as the photographic images mentioned by Andrew.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, they may not always refer to actual bodies, but they can easily provide clues about the visual corpus as well as the class/gender divisions that defined the general body of spectatorship. Spectatorship, either in the case of Robinson who seeks the owner of the footprints he saw or that of an audience wondering about the mechanisms of the cinematograph they have seen in 1896 in Istanbul, ontologically may be reduced to the nature of visual curiosity provoked by

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<sup>39</sup> For the relationship between Karacaoğlu’s lines in relation to history writing see Cemal Kafadar, *Kim Var İmis Biz Burada Yog İken* (Istanbul: Metis, 2009), p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 140.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



the absence of the presence.<sup>42</sup> If history writing is in search of what is absent in the now (as in Zen), then the history of spectatorship is based on the belief that there is something missing in the present; not in the past as highlighted by the Westernization narrative's presumption of missing spectators.

At the beginning of this project I strongly believed, and still do with some small hesitations, that there should not be a 'lack' of audiences with certain backgrounds, at least not absolutely as the notion of absence implies, and that if researched properly, such discourses would be refuted. Therefore, the cinematograph and the silent cinema could also be seen as friends to the ill-treated; namely gypsies, immigrants from the former Balkan territories, working classes, women with low income, dervishes, street musicians and the like. After reading works of revisionist film historians such as Miriam Hansen and Russell Merritt, who considered silent cinema of the mid 1910s as an exclusive public sphere; my initial idea of silent cinema as a friendly and inclusive apparatus and a public sphere may sound fairly naïve.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, my research identified the exclusion of lower classes, increasingly after the institutionalization of cinema in the 1920s, while the ticket prices of the initial screenings in the late 1890s seem reasonable for lower middle class participants and memoirs along with newspaper reports on screenings few reveal a regulation for gender segregations.<sup>44</sup>

If the correlation between cinema and modernization, as points of reflection and convergence, is taken for granted, we assume cinema to be another modernizing tool and a transformative public sphere. How do we approach cinema as a

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<sup>42</sup> The absence of the presence for an audience in this context refers to the screen objects qualities of 'having been there'; such as a Buster Keaton film or pictures of the Twin Towers for a contemporary viewer. The audience could see the perfect representation of Buster Keaton on the screen but his own actual body was absent in the movie hall.

<sup>43</sup> See Hansen, 'Early Cinema Whose Public Sphere?'; Russell Merritt, 'Nickelodeon Theaters, 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies', in *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Thomas Schatz (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 25-42.

<sup>44</sup> On gender and class divisions in early cinema-going of Istanbul see Chapters Four and Five.

modernizing tool in a country that has long been considered under the umbrella term of belated modernity then? In other words, is a developing country's early cinema study destined to be a study of absences? This question either explicitly or implicitly forms a good starting point in order to challenge earlier film histories and cultural criticisms of and on these countries. If, in the case of Turkey, the researcher was to take the inherited categories of belatedness, absence or lack for granted, and adopt the concomitant sensibility of grief, then she is likely to remain destined to reiterate earlier historiographies.

What lead earlier histories and cultural criticisms to acknowledge modernity as a late comer and their culture as either implicitly or explicitly backwards then? One of the elements at stake here seems to be the scarcity of affluent academic research environments, archives and libraries, as mentioned earlier. However, another much stronger element appears to be the dominant understanding of Euro-centric modernization spreading from the center to the periphery. Such a view implies modernity is a universal and inexorable momentum that belonged to, and emerged in the West and influenced other countries and cultures, helping them to 'develop'. Such views connote 'West' with pioneering, progressive motion while they associate 'the rest' with a position of static narrow-minded, backwards people. However just as in various narratives of cultural influence the Westernization narrative also takes an ambivalent approach to Turkey's concept of West. For some intellectuals 'West' is the unquestionable role model, whereas for some it may create an anxiety of influence since even the word influence can be patronizing and patriarchal. Consequently, there are several historical factors and layers at stake in this narrative; and the core issue of the ambivalence seems to be materialized from the national struggle with Western imperialism during the decline of the Empire and the early Republic.

Revisionist Ottoman historiography plays a crucial role in order to undermine the Westernization narrative. Works on the transformation of the Ottoman public sphere, its vernacular culture and everyday life along with the history of technological advancements in a period called early-modern (between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries), help to eliminate the comparative and timeless approaches established by the Westernization narrative. Reading the poems on ‘free love and appreciation of erotic beauty’ by well-known troubadour Karacaoğlu or his peers<sup>45</sup> it is evident that secularization in the Ottoman everyday life indeed dates back to a century before the French Revolution. Moreover the Ottoman military system during medieval times seems to be ‘progressive’ in a comparative manner; since the use of a professional army who used firearms, named Janissaries, had not yet become a practice in Europe. Furthermore, one of the biggest trends of the Ottomans in the late sixteenth century was coffee and tobacco consumption; one substance imported from Arabia and one from America.

Hence Chinese, Indian, Latin American or Middle Eastern modernities are not destined to follow that of Europe. Indeed, even the notions of West and East are fairly new in the history of modernity. Ottomans, when referring to Western Europe used the term *Frengistan* (literally ‘land of the non-Muslims’ in English) or *Kafirler* (‘Non-believers’) until the late nineteenth century; when the idea of Westernization emerged.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, according to Edward Said the notion of Orient emerged in the eighteenth century and since then it has been used to describe the whole Orient as backward, static and historically unaware, whereas the whole West is seen as developed, progressive, and a pioneering model to be followed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Such as the explicit sexual jokes of both Nasreddin Hoca, who was a public figure known for his funny adventures, and Turkish shadow play.

<sup>46</sup> Such notions also connote a patronizing attitude assuming all non-Christians as non-believers.

<sup>47</sup> Although use of geographical distinctions can be practical they are also confusing in many ways; why would Central Europe be the center of the world?

The Westernization paradigm also refers to the question of authenticity; if the West is progressive, as Orientalists insisted, then other countries need to follow that same path and repeat what the West had already done. Hence these other ‘backward, static, developing’ countries’ modernities are bound to be ‘copies’. This aspect was also posited within Turkish film historiography: from Giovanni Scognomillo to Ali Özuyar, various historians define early cinema spectatorship as a Western form of pleasure in ‘Paris-like’ Pera (a cosmopolitan central district in Istanbul).<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Peyami Safa, a well known essayist and novelist in the early Republican era, indicates in his novels that Turkish women’s enthusiasm for cinema was a mere imitation of European lifestyle, not a genuine passion.<sup>49</sup> Whether Turkish film history celebrates cinema-going or not, what seems more problematic in this context is the approach to cinema-going as a cultural appropriation of a ‘developed’ culture. This highlights hierarcihal positions and insecurity. Additionally, cinema was not an original invention of French or American culture but a diffusion of a more international spectacle-viewing culture. Furthermore, in the case of Turkish modernity as indicated earlier, cinema did not generate a revolutionary rupture or create drastic changes in lifestyles.

Yet, what seems to have been lacking at that time indeed appears to be, not the people who are keen on novelties, but the new level of wealth and technological advancement. If we turn back to the burning question of the project: to what extent did early Turkish cinema lack audiences, industry, and its own film production? According to Turkish film historiographers, it was basically inadequacies that defined the audience profile and cinema life in general.<sup>50</sup> Even as early as 1923, when the Turkish Republic was just founded, screenwriting was dominated by the

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<sup>48</sup> See Scognomillo, *Türk Sinema Tarihi*; Ali Özuyar, *Bab-i Ali’de Sinema*.

<sup>49</sup> See Safa, *Sozde Kizlar*; *Fatih-Harbiye*.

<sup>50</sup> Concrete and detailed examples from historiography’s approach to such lack are given in Chapter Four, pp. 133-140.

insufficiency of Turkish film production.<sup>51</sup> It is well known that the industry suffered from the lack of technological apparatuses, but was there really a scarcity of different social-ethnic classes in the audience body due to a cultural ignorance or a religious prejudice (as was suggested by the historiographers)? How could this fit in the panorama of a multi-confessional, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic empire that ruled the Middle East and the Balkans for over five centuries? In addition to the vast extent of territory with a complex demographic structure and the highly cosmopolitan nature of the capital city, the popularity of pre-cinematic spectacles was a major factor undermining the discourse of lack, absence and belatedness (of ‘non-Westernized’ audiences) during the age of early cinema. Why would the audiences of shadow play, public storytelling, Western theaters, dioramas, panoramas and magic lanterns ignore cinematic spectacles as indicated by the historiography?

The historical facts this study will examine include trade records, newspaper and consular reports, travellers’ journals, novels, memoirs and some state records. However can there really be such thing as pure historical facts? Even if these facts may demonstrate, and they indeed do, the affordability of cinema at that time, they do not comment on the epistemological or ontological reception. These types of reception were neglected in primary sources of the turn of the century. However, they can be tracked down in an earlier period when the cultural divisions (between ‘West’ and ‘East’) were still blurred; in vernacular poetry, in unorthodox religious texts and in the ontological writings of earlier periods. Can matters of technical, scientific or artistic innovations be considered without philosophy and ethics?

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<sup>51</sup> Vedat Örf, ‘Milli Filmler’, *Sinema Postasi*, 1 (December 1923), p. 3.

### 1.3. Conclusion

A study of a developing country's early cinema spectatorship may easily be reduced to a study of lacks and absences. This is merely a consequence of the prevailing Euro-centric modernity paradigm. Current Turkish cultural criticism and film historiography perpetuates the old narrative of Westernization that emerged in late nineteenth century. The Westernization paradigm provided an ambivalent relationship between Turkey and the West due to a susceptible period of decline (Ottoman Empire) and a proto-nation State built on the principles of anti-imperialism. However, the role of Westernization in Turkish modernity was challenged by revisionist Ottoman historians, who revealed a paradigm of early modernization centuries before even the notion of West emerged.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the Westernization paradigm is merely discouraging for the student of a modern apparatus like cinema, and if it is researched properly one encounters a prosperous body of evidence on early cinema spectatorship, not only in the pre-cinema period but also in the age of cinema of attractions. The grief, caused by the discourse of absences and belatedness, in the historiography should not be because a profound spectatorship culture never existed but precisely because it existed but has been lost in the (self)Orientalist labyrinths of film history. This study therefore attempts to provide an extensive profile of spectators who used to take wondrous pleasures in viewing the world; who wondered about the mechanisms of a new invention to project moving pictures; who went to watch cinematograph to see that other worlds existed outside Istanbul; who adored particular film stars and who merely enjoyed their own spectacle as a fashionable presence amongst high society of the 1920s.

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<sup>52</sup> See Reşad Ekrem Koçu, *Tarihte İstanbul Esnafı*; Cemal Kafadar 'A Death in Venice (1575): Anatolian Muslim Merchants Trading in the Serenissima'; Donald Quataert, 'Ottoman Women and Manufacturing'.

## **2. CHAPTER TWO: ISTANBUL IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY: SETTING THE BACKGROUND**

This chapter aims to examine various aspects of everyday life in Istanbul from the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman modernization gained its momentum, up to the Young Turks Revolution in 1908. Considering early cinema and its spectatorship as part of a larger life of spectacle, I will attempt to offer a panorama of the city and the Ottoman state in the context of rapid transformation and shifts in politics, literature, public sphere, and everyday life. Additionally, effects of industrialization and migration waves in urban life will be mentioned. Hence, an attempt will be made to visualise the environment into which the cinematograph arrived, and to map out the state of mind of the future early cinema-going public. Istanbul, at that time, was a city in the process of rapid change caused by both political and cultural transition along with new technologies and ideas. The emergence of cinema-going is certainly among one of these trends, and will be analyzed in later chapters.

It should be understood that the transition from the pre-modern to the modern, as in most other developing countries, was accompanied by pain, anxiety, excitement and scepticism, created by rapid social change and a dependence on the Great Powers. Throughout this chapter, paths of scepticism and anxiety will be traced through cultural transition, whereas the pain of the transition will be inferred through the demographical, industrial and economic changes. Historicising and contextualizing the transformation demands avoidance of establishing binary oppositions and stereotypical perspectives. In a study of modernization of the Ottoman State, where cultural critics tend to reduce modernity to Westernization, the

binary opposition one can easily be tempted to launch is the reputedly essential distinction between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’.

The Westernization narrative was not only dominant in the mainstream understanding of Turkish modernity and culture; it also appeared in the reconstruction of the urban experiences in cultural history. Abu-Lughod, in her work on the Islamic city discourse, reveals the myths of Islamic cities that have been reiterated by Western scholarship within the influence of an Orientalist approach.<sup>1</sup> This discourse covers issues of everyday life, the structure of public and private spaces and the expression of political power in the urban image in a superficial way. The ignorance of the specific cultural and historical contexts of a Non-Western city led such scholarship to establish essential distinctions. As indicated by Abu-Lughod, the underlying reason for the survival of Orientalist scholarship could be defined as the ‘*isnad* of authority’ which in this view signifies a chain of myths repeated by different academic generations.<sup>2</sup> In order to make it clearer, it should be noted that in the Orientalist discourse, once a polarization is established, then, because of the influence of this initial author, it can be reproduced in various narratives. Thus, this study will be aware of the critiques of these myths.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, attention will also be paid to the controversial narratives produced by the Orientalist discourse since the data on urban life recorded in travellers’ journals are invaluable. It is, however, vital to note that the judgemental aspect in these narratives will be disregarded in this chapter. In the case of Istanbul, it is striking that there are two general tendencies in publications on everyday life at the turn of the nineteenth-century. The first tendency is, as mentioned above, the Orientalist approach that appeared in the travellers’

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<sup>1</sup> See, Janet L. Abu-Lughod, ‘The Islamic City — Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19.2 (May 1987), pp. 155-176.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Zeynep Çelik also mentions the influence of Islamic city discourse on works of Ottoman Istanbul. See Zeynep Çelik, ‘New Approaches to the “Non-Western City”’, *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58. 3 (September 1999), pp. 374-381.



journals, in the tourist guides or in the Ottoman history scholarship produced in the same style. The second tendency is far more local, yet it focuses mainly on the entertainment enjoyed by the middle or upper classes.

The Ottoman polity started out as a frontier principality circa 1300 and turned into a major world empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the Sultan ruled a large territory in the Eastern Mediterranean, from Romania and Hungary in the North to Egypt and parts of Arabia in the South and the Middle East. However, the challenge of an industrial Europe and a rising Russia led to significant shifts in the power balances, as Ottoman power and influence gradually diminished during the course of the nineteenth century. From a certain perspective, the Ottoman Empire was marginal and peripheral to a Europe that thought of the future of the Ottoman lands within the framework of the 'Eastern Question'. At the same time, the Ottoman state was a part of the European 'concert of nations', namely Europe's system of interstate alliances (and rivalries, of course) until the First World War. During the Crimean War in 1854-1856, for instance, the Ottoman state was part of an alliance with France and Britain against Russia. European troops were stationed in Istanbul where Florence Nightingale became part of the city's fabric of legends as a self-sacrificing British nurse. Russia lost the war; yet the Ottoman state started external financial borrowing in those years, which eventually implied an even more serious dependence on Western Europe.

Also in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire faced the challenge raised by nationalism and independence movements in the Balkans, initiated by Hellenic and (Pan-)Slavic movements of 'national awakening'. Frustrated by the territorial losses and the commercial control of the Great Powers over the country, the Young Ottomans initiated a political opposition movement, with a number of literary and other cultural manifestations, which led to *Mesrutiyet*, the constitutional

monarchy, in 1876. Although the supremacy of the Sultanate was not restricted by the new regime, where Abdulhamid II held authority to appoint or discharge the grand vizier and members of the Parliament, he was still reluctant to allow any possible restraints to his absolute power. Moreover, the war with Russia seemed to offer an excuse for the Sultan to abolish Parliament and the constitution in 1878. The country was already in political chaos after the establishment and the shelving of *Mesrutiyet I* in 1878. However, the continuing territorial losses and the migration waves from these lands, particularly from the Balkans, from a newly independent Bulgaria (1876), for instance, contributed to this turmoil. Transformations continued in the social life of Istanbulites, including increasing state control over the streets along with a reformation of the education and military systems. Yet this was an era of perpetual tension between Abdulhamid II, who was increasingly notorious for his paranoia and fear of assassination, and the new incarnation of (a much a better organized) opposition in the form of the Young Turks who guided the country until the Revolution of Freedom (Young Turks Revolution) or *Mesrutiyet II* in 1908.

## **2.1. Setting the Political and Social Background of *Mesrutiyet I***

Following the pre-modern heritage (of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), centralizing and modernizing efforts had been initiated by Selim III in the late eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The Ottoman Empire in the next century became increasingly preoccupied with modern reforms, namely *Tanzimat*, ushered by the Young Turks, who usually came from middle class backgrounds with a European style education and who later on became a threat to the Monarchy. The era of

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<sup>4</sup>E. Cyril Black and Carl Brown, *Modernization in the Middle East: the Ottoman Empire and its Afro-Asian Successors* (Princeton N.J.: Darwin Press, 1992), p. 56.

Tanzimat (between 1839 and 1876) is considered to be the period of secularization of education and bureaucracy. Moreover, the issues of human rights and equality between religions and ethnic groups were secured within the official agenda of the State. Technical academies to train officers, administrators, engineers, doctors and other professionals had already been developed in the Empire; but a lack of students trained in the essential elements of mathematics, science, and foreign languages had remained.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, in the age of Tanzimat, a secular elementary school system was established and a new intelligentsia familiar with Western culture was created. The first Ottoman language theater called *Tiyatro-i Osmani* (Ottoman Theater) was founded by a group of actors and the development of a popular Turkish folk theater was encouraged by the State in the same period (1867). By the accession of Abdulhamid II in August 1876, urban life had changed markedly and Istanbul became perhaps the most cosmopolitan city in the world. Many libraries were built and ‘the Ottoman Press flourished with thousands of books, journals and newspapers [placed] into the hands of an eager public.’<sup>6</sup>

It is worth pointing out that the first half of the nineteenth century was momentous for both State recentralization and administrative modernization. However, as indicated before, due to the large territorial losses in the Balkans and the economic dependence on the Great Powers, expectations for a (Euro-centric) modernization remained largely unfulfilled. Çağlar Keyder claims that, if successful, this modernization would have brought the Ottoman entity closer to the centralized, territorial state model of Europe.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as argued by Donald Quataert, the central

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<sup>5</sup> Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume II: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975* (Cambridge, London, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 251.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Çağlar Keyder, ‘The Ottoman Empire’, in *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation Building*, ed. Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 32.

State was more dominant in everyday lives than ever before in Ottoman history.<sup>8</sup> The resurgence of the building of modern schools, the considerable advances in medicine, the import of Western technologies, and the increasing role of women in public life seemed to be the mechanisms which added a new dimension to the evolution of the State from pre-modern to modern.

1876 was a key year as it witnessed both the composition of the first Ottoman Parliament and the promulgation of the first Constitution. The value of the Parliament can be comprehended in its diversity: out of 125 deputies 77 were Muslim, 44 Christian, and four Jewish.<sup>9</sup> Çağlar Keyder argues its uniqueness in the history of multi-ethnic empires. Yet, it is also tempting to pose the distinction of the first Constitution as further evidence of progress of a state in rapid transformation. The most innovative aspect of this Constitution appears to be its role as initiator. Niyazi Berkes underlines this significance not only by indicating that it was the first Constitution in the Muslim world, but also by stressing that constitutions were still novelties in Europe.<sup>10</sup>

However, the abolition of Parliament and the Constitution in 1878, was followed by the absolute monarchy of Abdulhamid for 30 years. In 1889, the Young Turks, frustrated by this situation, founded the Committee of Union and Progress in order to lead a movement to restore the constitution and carry out the ‘Revolution of Freedom’ in 1908. A more secular educational background and prevailing ideas related to it, such as liberalism, materialism and social Darwinism, had shaped the Young Turks’ perception of the state and their main aim was to struggle against the Sultan’s autocracy for the restoration of the parliament.

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<sup>8</sup>Donald Quataert. *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, second edition, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Keyder, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), p. 223.

It would not be inappropriate to argue that rapid pace, speed and anxiety are the key concepts to describe the spirit of the Hamidian and Young Turks eras. The expansion of the means of communication made a significant contribution to these rapid transformations. The telegraph network broadened swiftly, railway constructions extended, and steamships became the norm for overseas travel.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the transformation was also disastrous, since during this period the Ottomans suffered from significant territorial losses due to nationalization movements in the Balkans. By 1906, the territorial loss of the majority of the Ottoman lands in the Balkans demonstrates that the European provinces held only 20 percent of the total.<sup>12</sup> The cession of Romania in 1822, Bulgaria in 1876, Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, Thessalia in 1881 and Serbia and Macedonia in 1912 brought about great financial and political devastation.

Istanbul, in the nineteenth century also witnessed the emergence of new public spaces and the proliferation of existing ones that were endowed with some new functions. Coffee houses and bath houses along with *seyir yerleri* (literally meaning places for ‘public display’) were the public arenas for those wishing ‘to see’ and ‘to be seen’. Located around a river in the old town, *seyir yerleri* functioned as spaces for leisure time activity of Muslims mainly on Fridays and for Christians mainly on Sundays. However in Pera, which would later become a center for cinema shows and which was already the main hub of entertainment, the *Grand* and *Petit Champs des Morts* increasingly surfaced as a fashionable open area and a cemetery to be visited by trendsetters.<sup>13</sup> Other areas for socialization were offered by the Sufi lodges, market places, shadow theaters, public storytelling, religious carnivals, festivals, music halls and restaurants.

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<sup>11</sup> Berkes, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> Quataert, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Quataert, p. 157.

## 2.2. State in Transformation, City in Transformation

'Istanbul is a city that we think we know, but which leaves our questions most of the time unanswered. Even though countless works have been written about it, we are still faced with important blanks when trying to understand the city's world, its face, fabric or daily life at a given period'<sup>14</sup>  
Stefanos Yerasimos

In the year 1634, at the time of Evliya Çelebi the renowned traveller and narrator of the Ottoman lands, Istanbul had already been both destroyed and rebuilt nine times.<sup>15</sup> The city, like a palimpsest, has many layers left from earlier periods as it had always been under construction, and such was the situation again at the turn of the nineteenth century.

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, demographic changes of this period shaped not only Ottoman society, but also the economy. The size of Istanbul's population in the nineteenth century was extremely unstable. There could be a sharp and sudden decline at times: fires in the 1820s for instance destroyed 21, 000 homes.<sup>16</sup> Yet overall, despite the fires, earthquakes, outbreaks of cholera and plagues, the population grew due to varying factors such as migration waves from lands formerly part of the empire and improvements in medicine. By the turn of the century, the population of Istanbul had almost tripled. From the data given by Charles Issawi, in the 1830s and 40s, the number of inhabitants of Istanbul was 375, 000 while in the 1890s it became 900, 000.<sup>17</sup> The migration waves from former territories expanded the Muslim population of the city. In addition, the capitulatory privileges for non-Muslim merchants and investors led non-Muslim Ottomans and

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<sup>14</sup>Stefanos Yerasimos, 'Istanbul and its Westernization Process', in *Istanbul World City*, ed. Afife Batur (Istanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996), p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Evliya Çelebi. *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa*, trans. by Ritter Joseph Von Hammer (London: Parbury, Allen, & Co., 1968), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Quataert, 116.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 34.

European businessmen to migrate to the city.<sup>18</sup> The census in 1885 demonstrated the number of ethnic and religious divisions as follows: Muslims 44.06%, Orthodox Greek 17.48%, Armenians 17.12%, Jews 5.08%, Catholics 1.17%, Bulgarians 0.50%, Latins 0.12%, Protestants 0.09% and foreigners 14.7%.<sup>19</sup>

According to Edward C. Clark, the first half of the nineteenth century presented an Ottoman hope for a true industrial revolution.<sup>20</sup> In this period, Ottoman commercial life was introduced to the political economy of *laissez-faire* and Istanbul became a large market for European manufacturers. Therefore, the relationship between world capitalism and the Ottoman Empire was made stronger. In the 1830s new factories such as the *Feshane* (producing fezzes), copper sheet rolling mills and leather tanneries were established. Before the 1890s there were more than 50 factories in the Empire.<sup>21</sup> Cigarette making also emerged as a new industry and, according to the data given by Quataert, by 1913 in both Istanbul and Izmir, 923 female along with 1071 male workers were employed in the cigarette factories.<sup>22</sup> The state factories, on the other hand, had a total number of 5,000 workers employed in the 1850s.<sup>23</sup> In the period between the 1880s and the 1900s glass, porcelain, metal, paper and chemical industries emerged in the Zeytinburnu and Bakirkoy (Marmara Sea) areas. The enthusiasm for the industrial revolution ignited a new

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<sup>18</sup> Capitulatory privileges were mainly enjoyed by European traders and merchants working in the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the nineteenth century these grants supposedly left local commerce without legal protection; which indeed contributed to the Ottoman decline. See Huri Islamoglu-Inan, *The Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> Zeynep Celik, *Degisen Istanbul, 19. Yuzyilda Osmanli Baskenti* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfi Yurt Yayinlari, 1998), p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Edward C. Clark, 'The Ottoman Industrial Revolution', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 5 (1974), 65-76 (p. 67).

<sup>21</sup> Donald Quataert, 'The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914', in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, ed. Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 749-943 (p. 903).

<sup>22</sup> Quataert, p. 892.

<sup>23</sup> Quataert, p. 900

fashion: the exhibitions of industrial fairs. In 1863, a huge fair displaying various industrial machines hosted a considerable number of international visitors.<sup>24</sup>

The machinery for such industries and the skilled workforce to operate it came from Europe. Most of the laborers in these industries had to work ‘from dawn to dark, six days a week’.<sup>25</sup> Yet, the ‘Ottoman hope for the true industrial revolution’ was crushed by the collapse of various industries, due to the public debt, fires and earthquakes.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the destruction of the Janissaries in 1826 led guilds to a great depression.<sup>27</sup> However, as indicated by Quataert, owing to the non-guild shops in urban areas, Ottoman manufacturing managed to survive into the late nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Such non-guild labor was extremely cheap and mainly composed of women and children. Serious financial troubles had, however, already begun during the Crimean War in 1854, when the government had sold long-term bonds in the European markets. The Ottoman monetary historian Sevk̇et Pamuk perceives this as an indication of prospective ‘recurring budgetary difficulties.’<sup>29</sup>

The non-Muslim subjects of the Empire could benefit from the advantages of being able to acquire the status of European merchants in international trade. They ‘had long been acquiring foreign protection in the form of a certificate (*berat*) that endowed the tax benefits and privileges of a European merchant.’<sup>30</sup> The ‘capitulary privileges’ were significant benefits for the foreign traders. In the late nineteenth century, owing to *berat*, non-Muslim Ottomans had the same benefits as the Western

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<sup>24</sup> Celik, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, p. 74.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> The Janissary Army was an Ottoman military unit which was created in the fourteenth century and which was also largely composed of guilds. Janissaries during times of peace when they were not working in the army were working as artisans or merchants. Hence, they composed a large segment of the Ottoman guilds: ‘In some cities, the Janissaries themselves were the manufacturing guildsmen but in others, such as Aleppo and Istanbul, they functioned as mafia-like protectors of such workers.’

Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 139.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Sevk̇et Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 213.

<sup>30</sup> Quataert, *The Age of Reforms*, p. 839.



traders did under the capitulatory grants. *Berat*, as demonstrated by Quataert, indicated that the Great Powers protected the Ottoman Christians (neither Jews nor Muslims could be successfully dominant in the market) and led them to ‘win the capitulatory-like benefits, tax exemptions, and the lower business costs that help to explain their rise to economic prominence.’<sup>31</sup> It is also striking that, in the account given by Zurcher, over 90 per cent of the industrial establishments with more than ten workers were run by non-Muslims.<sup>32</sup> The significance of *berat* for Turkish film historiography was that it provided the reason why most of the entrepreneurs dealing with photography and cinematography were non-Muslims. A dismissal of these economic factors might lead to cultural reductionisms on Turkish modernity. The Muslim population, for example, was assumed to be against the cinematograph profession for seemingly cultural and religious reservations. Turkish film historiography tends to explain the ‘absence’ of the Muslim entrepreneurs in the early cinema business by a ‘cultural and religious’ reluctance.<sup>33</sup>

The emergence of the ethnic division of labor played a crucial role in the late nineteenth-century Ottoman economy. Keyder identifies this situation as an ‘emergence of non-Muslim bourgeoisie’. Another work of Keyder states that the class formation had already gained its momentum by the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Yet, according to Zurcher: ‘One could speak of a Turkish middle class only with reference to the Turks in the new urban centers after the middle of the nineteenth century.’<sup>35</sup> In Ottoman historiography, the debates around the class divisions do not seem to have come to a conclusion yet. Ultimately, one can claim

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<sup>31</sup> Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> Zurcher, 85. For a comparison with the seventeenth century where Muslims merchants had substantially functioned in the international trade see also Cemal Kafadar, ‘A Death in Venice (1575): Anatolian Muslim Merchants Trading in the Serenissima’, *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 10 (1986), pp. 191-218.

<sup>33</sup> For the approach of Turkish film historiography on this matter see Chapter Four, pp. 133-140.

<sup>34</sup> Keyder, p. 33.

<sup>35</sup> Berkes, p. 142.

that it is still hard to identify the Ottoman middle classes, unlike those in Europe. Non-Muslim bourgeois and the middle class Europeanized lifestyles were relatively new as they are considered to be a consequence of the international/transnational commercial and cultural exchanges.

From the account given by Alan Duben and Cem Behar, wages in Istanbul were relatively higher than those in the provinces. In the 1860s, an Istanbulite agricultural laborer could earn a daily wage of over 6 piastre, which was equal to three to four kilos of beef or six to seven kilos of flour. An example given by Duben and Behar also demonstrates that in the 1870s a textile factory worker could earn four to five piastre a day whereas at the end of the nineteenth century a craftsman could earn seven to thirteen piastre.<sup>36</sup> In 1896, the year the cinematograph arrived in Istanbul, the daily wages of a craftsman was from seven to thirteen piastre.<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that in the same year, the entry price for cinematograph shows was 5 piastre, which indeed could almost equal the daily income of a handicraftsman.<sup>38</sup>

The population growth in the city demanded new regulations and foundations for transportation. Regular steamboat journeys within the city began in 1885, owing to the foundation of the first steamboat company *Sirket-i Hayriye*. There were three main destinations: Galata, Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. By the year 1888, transportation from the European side to both the Asian side and the Islands in the Marmara Sea was already established. The Eminonu (old city center) based laborers took the steamboat to Goldenhorn in order to go to the factories or to the handicraft ateliers, whereas the upper class elite took the steamboat to the Islands to go to their weekend/summer houses. Despite the comfort brought about by the steamboat, the

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<sup>36</sup> Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880-1940* (New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> Issawi, p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> For a further explanation on the affordability of the cinematograph see Chapter Five. On the arrangement of ticket prices for the cinematograph see Appendix One.

traffic within the city still required overland transportation. Therefore, new projects for tramways were developed in the 1860s. The tramways played a role in rapidly shaping the new urban life. Even a carnival was arranged for celebrations of the new rhythm of the city, which exhibited an extravagant tram with passengers composed of fashionable ladies and trendy gentlemen smoking cigars.<sup>39</sup> Trams were used to take passengers from different locations, mainly to the city's amusement center, Pera. But the tramway was not the only transport to Pera: the first metro, consisting of only two stops, was also opened to the public in 1875 and made Istanbul the third city in the world with an underground.<sup>40</sup>

The increase in the crime rate, overpopulation, fires and the epidemics in the center of the old peninsula led its inhabitants to move to Northern Golden Horn where the districts of Pera and Galata are based. Among the dwellers of Galata and Pera were Muslim, Jewish, Armenian and Greek families along with foreign ambassadors as well as bankers. However, Pera as an entertainment center not only attracted bankers, elite people with high incomes and European businessmen, but also sailors, laborers, tramps and drunkards. A historian of the period, Ahmet Lutfi Efendi, accused the government and the inhabitants of being morally corrupt as they allowed the granting of licences for brothels and bars.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the local Turkish police stations, foreign states set up police stations in order to control their own citizens. The developments of long distance transport led more foreign travellers to visit the city. Therefore, the number of fashionable hotels, theaters and parks as well as the number of cheap hotels and restaurants increased.<sup>42</sup> A controversial issue to discuss here appears in the divisions within the residents of Pera. Şerif Mardin repeats the 'Westernization' discourse, indicating that Pera was a Westernized

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<sup>39</sup> Celik, pp. 68-83.

<sup>40</sup> Yerasimos, p. 52.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

district as it was famous for its foreign ambassadors and offered a European lifestyle.<sup>43</sup> While this is true to some degree, it should not be understood as a difference that did not allow for serious levels of communication and permeability between different parts of the city, as one might easily fall into essentializing characterizations based on a linear Westernization narrative. Ilber Ortayli underscores the economic factors underlying such divisions. According to him, it was not the ethnic-religious divisions but the socio-economic divisions that shaped the lifestyle offered by Pera.<sup>44</sup> Pera's role as a trendsetter somehow became synonymous with European lifestyles through the Westernization paradigm, as also exemplified by Şerif Mardin.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, mainstream Turkish film historiography relies on Pera's cultural affiliations with Europe to examine the early cinema spectatorship.

### 2.2.1. Shifts in Cultural life: Literature

Until the age of *Tanzimat* (1839-1876) there were neither newspapers, nor novels in the Ottoman literary tradition. Yet, after the mid nineteenth century, particularly during the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1908), the press started to flourish due to private and public initiatives. At the end of the nineteenth century there were nearly 5,000 state primary schools in the Empire, with over 650,000 pupils. The total number of books and newspapers being published is given as follows:

Before 1840, only eleven books annually were published in Istanbul while the number had increased to 285, produced by ninety-nine printing houses, in 1908.

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<sup>43</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Türk Modernleşmesi Makale Derlemesi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Ortayli, p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> Mardin, p. 36.

Other statistics yield a similar impression of rapidly mounting book production and literacy. Between 1729 and 1829, c. 180 titles appeared in print while during the mere sixteen years between 1876 and 1892, the number increased to 6,357. And, remarkably, 10,601 titles appeared between 1893 and 1907.<sup>46</sup>

Between 1876 and 1888, as many as ten new periodicals appeared in Istanbul each year, but the strict Hamidian censorship created a decline in the number of newspapers in the next decade.<sup>47</sup> The majority of newspapers in the city had circulation figures on the average of 13,000, and 30,000 at their peak.<sup>48</sup> It is crucial here to emphasize the phenomenon of the coffee houses as they collected the core periodicals for their clients ‘to peruse while smoking a water pipe or drinking coffee’.<sup>49</sup> These newspapers were printed in various languages; and in fact, the first newspapers in the Empire were published in French in 1795.<sup>50</sup>

The prohibition of the discussion of political ideas, current political affairs, and concepts related to liberalism, nationalism and constitutionalism (after the abolition of the Constitution in 1878) incited enthusiasm for novelties in science and humanities as an alternative source of interest. This led newspapers and periodicals to concentrate on encyclopedic articles about science, geography, history, technology and literature. After reading some of the articles published in the earlier period, one can effortlessly discern public curiosity for scientific and cultural developments. Sinasi, in *Tasvir-i Efkar*, had already published a series on ancient history and a translation of Vattel’s *Droit des gens*, while Ahmet Vefik Pasa published a series of articles on historiography. Mustafa Behcet Efendi translated Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle*, and Namik Kemal wrote articles on liberty and government.<sup>51</sup> In the 1850s translation of Molière’s *Tartuffe*, an anthology of writings by Voltaire, Fénelon and

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<sup>46</sup> Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 170.

<sup>47</sup> Zürcher, p. 78.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Berkes, p. 126.

<sup>51</sup> Berkes, p. 198.

Fontanelle entitled *Muhaverat-i Hikemiye* ('Philosophical Dialogues' in English) was made by Ziya Pasa.<sup>52</sup>

In the later period in 1897, when the censorship affected news politically, printed articles on lexicography introduced detailed concepts of aesthetics, metaphysics, theodicy, *philosophie de droit* and sociology as alternatives to political discussions.<sup>53</sup> In the year 1896, a selected number of news items related to technology appeared as 'Great American Telescope', 'The Bicycle Tours of the Globe', and 'The Balloon Expedition to the North Pole'.<sup>54</sup> Public interest in current inventions and expeditions of the world in newspaper reports was accompanied by visual illustrations emerging as a new practice. The pictures of factories, banks, machines, cities, apartments, harbors and bridges offered voyages to Europe and America for the readers. 'Turning the pages, one would think that America was a continent of locomotives and banks. Next to locomotive engines, electric machines were favorite objects of curiosity.'<sup>55</sup> The use of illustrations showing developments in foreign lands, like the early newsreels or travelogues, helped readers/audiences fulfill their desire and curiosity to see the world.

The Empire was now peripherally positioned in world politics, especially in relation to Europe. From the perspectives of the intellectuals, the country could still be rescued by faith in progress. However, in addition to Hamidian political pressure, the cultural and economic penetration of Europe seemed to restrain any potential for a new political and social order.<sup>56</sup> The Young Turks Revolution (Revolution of Liberty) in 1908 finally offered a new space for the Istanbulite penmen. By 1908, Ottoman journalistic publications, particularly journals and daily newspapers, were

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<sup>52</sup> Berkes, p. 199.

<sup>53</sup> *Ikdam*, 26 November 1897.

<sup>54</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, June-July 1896.

<sup>55</sup> Berkes, p. 280.

<sup>56</sup> See Palmira Brummet, *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 5.

allowed to flourish. Brummet points out that the ‘democratization of the printed word’ resembled, or was perhaps even more dramatic than, that which accompanied the French revolution.<sup>57</sup> As cited by her, in the Ottoman official yearbook for 1908, an incomplete list of publishers in the city points to the existence of ninety-seven active printing houses.<sup>58</sup> The initial responses of the press to the new regime of 1908 appeared as criticisms of the old one. Such criticisms underscored:

...the lack of political and social freedom, the debilitated economy, the obsolete military, the perceived corruption of officials at all levels of the government, the dearth of opportunity for a new class of Western-educated bureaucrats, the prostitution of the Ottoman economy to European economic interests, and the cultural schizophrenia created by Ottoman reform programs and by European dominance.<sup>59</sup>

The innovations related to literature were not limited to the press; the language was in transition as well. The official language of the State was not called Turkish but Ottoman. In this multi-national and multi-confessional society, different languages were used in public life. Before the Tanzimat, at schools, students had been taught both Arabic and Persian. By the mid nineteenth century a good education would also include French as the first foreign language. The colloquial language, or Turkish, was the language of the people – the ‘low brow culture’ – and the written language, consisting of many foreign words from Arabic and Farsi, belonged to ‘the high brow culture’. The conventional thinking of the differences between the high and low traditions is now reconsidered in the new revisionist literature.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the Empire was intrinsically multi-lingual. Here it is crucial to elaborate more on the term multi-lingualism, as in this context it refers to a multi-ethnic society, which

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<sup>57</sup> Brummet, p. 3

<sup>58</sup> Brummet, p. 4

<sup>59</sup> Brummet, p. 5

<sup>60</sup> For further explanation see Cemal Kafadar, ‘Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature’, *Studia Islamica*, 69 (1989), pp. 121-150.

contained various traditions of storytelling. In one of the early Turkish novels, *Araba Sevdasi* ('A Carriage Affair', 1889) Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem depicts the story of an urban trendsetter, who, in order to meet the fashion, felt obliged to speak Farsi, French and English as well as Turkish.<sup>61</sup>

In the Ottoman context, multi-lingualism cannot merely be reduced to the field of linguistics, since the co-existence of inter-lingual texts and a montage of (multi)cultural traditions all play a part in the language. There was a sharing of the oral traditions and texts related to many folk tales, legends, poems, jokes, fairy tales, songs, cultural icons and bandit tales which were told and recited in various languages within the Ottoman lands. These texts were also written down in different scripts such as Arabic, Greek and Armenian: 'Greek speaking Muslims in Crete wrote in Greek with Arabic letters, while Turkish speaking Christians in Anatolia wrote Turkish in Greek or Armenian letters, according to their Church'.<sup>62</sup> One of the quintessential inter-lingual texts is Eremya Çelebi Komurjian's *The Jewish Bride*, a poem written by an Armenian poet in Armeno-Turkish (Turkish in Armenian script). *The Jewish Bride* narrates the story of a Jewish girl's abduction by an Albanian of Greek Orthodox belief and the troubles caused by this incident in the Jewish community of Istanbul. Written in the seventeenth century, the poem 'enjoyed the respect of all communities' in the city.<sup>63</sup> The language of *Karamanli* (Turkish in Greek scripts), which circulated around the Greek parts of the Empire and in some parts of Anatolia, also deserves attention in this respect. Indeed, the first Turkish

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<sup>61</sup> See Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem, *Araba Sevdasi* (Istanbul: Inkilap Yayınları, 1987), pp. 18-52.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 426.

<sup>63</sup> Avedis K Anjian and Andreas Tietze, *Eremya Chelebi Kömürjian's Armeno-Turkish Poem: 'The Jewish Bride'* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981).



language novel, *Temasa-i Dunya ve Cefakar-u Cefakes*, was written in *Karamanli* and printed in 1872 by a Greek of Istanbul, named Evangelinos Misailidis.<sup>64</sup>

The novel emerged as a literary form in the second half of the nineteenth century and contemporary critics have examined it within two literary movements: *Tanzimat* Literature (1859-1896), and *Servet-i Funun* (1896-1901). The oral literary traditions were less appreciated by the secular Tanzimat intellectuals, as they narrated the legendary stories of ‘irrational’ fantasy worlds and did not address the material world as defined by a progressive rational interpretation of the Enlightenment. The certain denial of the old literary traditions by the new intelligentsia not only excluded fairy tales and folk legends, but also identified them as primitive and naïve.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, the novel emerged as a fashionable urbanite literary form and early Turkish novels began to be published in the late 1870s and 1880s. Neglecting a linear plot with clear causalities, Turkish novelists largely attempted to depict everyday life in places of chaotic intermingling, and illustrated urban scenes such as steamboat travels, encounters at theater halls, fights at beer halls or some attractive women taking the tram.<sup>66</sup> If they had been written after the cinematograph, no doubt film theaters would also have provided a setting for Tanzimat novelists. One of the most influential novelists of the period, Ahmet Midhat, even claimed that he expected his readers to travel through ideas, to wander around the streets of Istanbul, and to be entertained in both *alafranga* (Western) and *alla Turca* (Eastern) ways.<sup>67</sup> Hence in addition to the illustrations of foreign lands in newspapers another form of (imaginary) visual travel was offered in novels.

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<sup>64</sup> See Evangelinos Misailidis, *Temasa-i Dunya ve Cefakar-u Cefakes* (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1986).

<sup>65</sup> See also Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Elestirel Bir Bakış* (Istanbul: İletisim, 18<sup>th</sup> edition, 2005), pp. 9-10.

<sup>66</sup> Moran, p. 27.

<sup>67</sup> Cevdet Kudret, *Türk Romanında Hikaye ve Roman, 1859-1910 Tanzimattan Mesrutiyete Kadar* (Istanbul: Dünya Yayınevi, 2004), p. 34.

The style of Tanzimat novels, despite the risk of being anachronistic, can be described as Brechtian since these authors deliberately distanced the reader from the protagonists. The reader was addressed directly and novels were written to ‘train’ readers and to ‘reform’ society. In order to do so, whenever appropriate in the novel, the author would freeze the line of action and discuss philosophical, theological, ethical or political issues for a few pages; then he would return to writing the action or depiction.<sup>68</sup> Jale Parla, in her work on *Tanzimat* literature, reveals that the intellectuals of this era (1859-1896) aimed to protect the regime from the inner (Young Turks movements, economic crisis and the general restructuring of everyday life) and outer depressions (wars and the European control over the country).<sup>69</sup> This is simply because Tanzimat was based on the idea of *nizam-i alem* (literally ‘the order of the world’, that also implies ‘the public order’), which is accepted as the absolute and ideal order and Tanzimat authors took the initiative to reform public opinion accordingly, even in creative or fictional writing.<sup>70</sup> This was also due to Sultan Abdulhamid II being an adolescent at the time and his inability to impose absolute power. The reflection of this lack of administration was demonstrated in the cultural texts where characters suffered from the lack of paternal authority and required protection to be provided by the penmen. In other words, the abyss caused by the lack of institutional authority led *Tanzimat* novelists to seek ways to define and maintain ‘the cultural truth’ through literature.<sup>71</sup>

The literature of *Servet-i Funun*, the emergence of which coincided with the arrival of cinema in Istanbul (1896), also relied more on ‘showing’, ‘staging’ and even ‘mise-en-scène’ than on narrating. Additionally, as a deviation from linear

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<sup>68</sup> Kudret, p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Ogullar, Tanzimat Romaninin Epistemolojik Kokenleri* (Istanbul: Iletisim, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2004), p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Jale Parla, for example, interprets Tanzimat as an episteme in which the truth is universal, absolute, unquestionable and abstract. For such discussion see Parla, p. 10-14.

<sup>71</sup> Parla, p. 15.

narrative styles, *Servet-i Funun* novels were prominently written in multiple points of view. Both *Tanzimat* and *Servet-i Funun* literatures were mainly set on the streets of Istanbul and depicted stories of middle class *flâneurs*, dandies and the streetwise. Confirming the occupation of *flâneur* as a spectator, these characters are bound ‘to see’ and ‘to be seen’ in the urban setting. Hence, many of them are regular visitors to *café-chantants*, beer halls, parties, balls, theaters, shopping centers, hotels and other entertainment places in the city.

### **2.3. Streets of Istanbul during the *Belle Époque***

Imagining Istanbul households and neighbourhoods may help the reader to locate differences between private and public life. Istanbulites did not usually live in large families composed of different generations in the same house; instead they preferred mainly to dwell in nuclear families. In particular, the Muslims of Istanbul lived generally in small households, with an average of 3.6 persons. According to Donald Quataert, the poorer Istanbul household averaged 4.5 persons while 5.7 persons was the norm for elite households.<sup>72</sup> The majority of households were located in the *mahalles* (neighbourhoods) that were generally composed of ten streets. These streets were centered on a small square, or on religious sites (mosques, churches or synagogues, ‘depending on the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood’). The neighborhood usually contained one or two public fountains, and a few shops catering to basic necessities or services. In a number of cases, these were also accompanied by some public utility buildings such as public baths, dervish convents or primary schools. More central commercial areas, like the big covered bazaar, or

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<sup>72</sup> Quataert, Inalcik, p. 786.

the weekly markets provided more basic goods that a small shop could not supply.<sup>73</sup>

Different ethnic and social classes were not necessarily mixed in a ‘traditional mahalle’:

Residential patterns [of mahalles] usually ran along lines of ethnicity and religion. However, ethnically and/or religiously mixed mahalles were not infrequent either. Recent studies have tended to show that even in the early periods of Ottoman rule, ethnic and religious identities did not necessarily exhaust the definition of a mahalle... In intramural Istanbul, large mansions of *pashas* and *beys* neighbouring the shanty lodgings of beggars or of street-porters were quite a common occurrence. These different groups were not usually clustered in separate parts of the neighbourhood either.<sup>74</sup>

Private life seemed to be the only – relatively - stable asset of the Ottomans in the Tanzimat and Mesrutiyet periods. On the other hand, accompanied by the transformation of education, culture, politics and demography, a shift took place in everyday life, particularly in fashion and lifestyles. Additionally, state control over the streets became more visible.

Proletariat and bourgeoisie in the European sense were a relatively recent development in Ottoman class divisions. It is likely that the migration waves of the 1880s helped this development by highlighting boundaries of different socio-economic classes within the city. Émigrés from the Balkans formed mainly the lower class groups who, later on, would lead to the emergence of nationalist intellectuals under the umbrella of Young Turks. Underlining the role of migration in the transformation of street life, Kemal Karpat claims that the Ottoman modern mass society resulted not from technological progress, but from the alienation created by social mobility along with the collapse of traditions.<sup>75</sup> The heterogenic Istanbul mass society, similar to Walkowitz’s depiction of London or Simmel’s Berlin at the turn of

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<sup>73</sup> Cem Behar, *A Neighbourhood in Ottoman Istanbul; Fruit Vendors and Civil Servants in the Kasap Ilyas Mahalle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Kemal Karpat, ‘The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, No: 3 (1972), pp. 243-281.

the century, was not only vibrant but also chaotic, so that state control over streets became increasingly strictly enforced.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the revolution of freedom in 1908, namely *Mesrutiyet II*, had led to great social expectations, particularly among the intelligentsia. Palmira Brummet in her analysis of the cartoons of 1908 reveals the ideal Istanbul of the streetwise cartoonists. Their imagination of future streets was fuelled by a new sense of urban life created by the transformation of the state. In some cartoons they might have envisaged the streets with a setting of flashing street lights, grotesque traffic police guiding trams and electric trolleys, department stores, a national theater, and a serene woman aviator.<sup>77</sup> Yet, as indicated by Brummet, such a vision of the city is also a 'contrast to a more jaundiced vision of the Ottoman street, found in many Ottoman cartoons, which imagines dark and unsafe streets, a corrupt police force, inefficient attempts to modernize transport, and women and men made ridiculous by forcing them into unsuitable European clothes or contexts'.<sup>78</sup>

The change in street life was inevitably apparent in the dress. Until the late nineteenth century styles of dress were relatively uniform, and would differ basically only in terms of ethnic and religious identification, which was then replaced by eclectic combinations of Europeanized and traditional costumes. In particular, women with high incomes are thought to have become the main consumers of European style fashions.<sup>79</sup> This can be understood in the rise of a new middle class and increased availability of European style education for women. These women, in particular, led new fashion on the streets even if they were still covering every part of

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<sup>76</sup> See Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>77</sup> Palmira Brummet, 'Dogs, Women, Cholera, and Other Menaces in the Streets: Cartoon Satire in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-11', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 27.4 (November 1995), p. 439

<sup>78</sup> Palmira Brummet, *Image and Imperialism*, p. 259.

<sup>79</sup> Brummet, *Image and Imperialism*, p. 226.

their bodies. In the beginning of the twentieth century, long skirted veils turned into ‘something resembling European women’s coats’ and ‘the veil became more and more transparent.’<sup>80</sup> Nancy Micklewright sees the change of fashion as a reflection of the breakdown of traditional social groups, and the growing independence of women.<sup>81</sup> Yet, a larger transformation was indeed responsible for such independence; the widened secularization of public life even at street level, for what was now a more conformist Istanbul society.

## 2.1. *Keyif* and the Life of Spectacle

Istanbul, like most other cities, inherently offers visual pleasure to its inhabitants, sometimes even in a self-reflexive manner. Indeed, looking into the Turkish origins of the word *şehir* (‘city’ in English), it is striking that the word shares the same etymological root (*shr*) with *teşhir* (‘display and exhibit’ in English) and *şöhret* (‘celebrity’ in English). The urbanites, and not solely the privileged *flâneurs*, were there to look and to be looked at.<sup>82</sup>

Demetrius Coufopoulos, in his guide to Constantinople, considers the Turkish word for pleasure, *keyif*, invaluable for the depiction of Istanbul life, as to him it is the Turks’ favourite pastime.

*Keyeff* is somewhat akin to the *dolce far niente* (‘sweet idleness’) of the Italian. This ‘enjoyment’ is attainable by repairing to some picturesque spot, and sitting for hours in listless, thoughtless, vacant contemplation, over the soothing coffee and cigarette. This is *keyif*, downright, pure, unadulterated *keyif*, or whatever one likes to call it, for the word baffles all translation. All his [Turk’s] appreciation of the terpsichorean art

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<sup>80</sup> Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 152.

<sup>81</sup> Nancy Micklewright, ‘Late Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Wedding Costumes as Indicators of Social Change’, *Muqarnas*, 6 (1989), p. 161-174

<sup>82</sup> Flâneur in this regard is referring to middle class urban wanderer who has sufficient income to afford access to specific sites and to develop a certain taste to enjoy them.

is confined to viewing from his cushioned divan, through the fragrant medium of coffee and cigarettes.<sup>83</sup>

The quotation above provides an Orientalist view on the notion of *keyif* as it suggests attributions of a passive idleness to the pastime of a foreign culture. The quotation still remains significant with its stress on a visual pleasure, despite being merely contemplative. Nevertheless it is striking to note that the life of pleasure had a lot to do with the life of spectacle. As described by Edmondo de Amicis in 1877:

We have at our command horses standing saddled in every square, sailboats in every cove, steamboats at a hundred landing stages; the darting caique, the flying talika, and an army of guides speaking all the languages of Europe. Do you wish to hear an Italian comedy? To see the dancing dervishes? Or the antiques *Karagöz* in the Turkish puppet-show? Do you want to hear saucy songs from Parisian music halls? Or see gypsy acrobats? Or listen to a story teller telling an Arabian tale? Or would you prefer a Greek theater? To hear an imam preach or watch Sultan pass by? All you need to do is ask.<sup>84</sup>

Amicis seems to be oblivious, just as were many other writings on the city's 'historical' everyday life, that such views unintentionally exclude the financial availability of these entertainments for the lower middle classes. Notwithstanding this lack of awareness, Amicis manages to demonstrate the wide range of entertainment possibilities that Istanbul offered.

One of the most enthusiastic spectacles for the Istanbul public of the 1850s was the hot-air balloons. In 1844 an Italian eccentric, Comaschi, flew in a large balloon over the city. The show attracted hundreds of people, yet his second attempt concluded sadly: he was lost and then found dead in the balloon. Another speculation related to balloons occurred in the Hamidian era: an unknown hot-air

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<sup>83</sup> Demetrius Coufopoulos, *A Guide to Constantinople* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), p. 23.

<sup>84</sup> Amicis, p. 36.

balloon was seen in the sky and the spies of Abdulhamid identified it as a bomb.<sup>85</sup> Although it was then revealed that the balloon's flight had no political affiliations, it was nevertheless a great spectacle for the Istanbulites.<sup>86</sup>

The arrival of the bicycle in 1890 sparked possibly even more enthusiasm for the urbanites' gaze. The first bicycles were enjoyed by some of the bourgeois elite, yet the viewing of them was also pleasurable for all levels of society, especially for children.<sup>87</sup> Every time a bicycle came around, the children would fill the streets, yet within a decade, with the increase in the number of bicycles, public astonishment began to disappear. The first bicycle race in 1893 also drew a large crowd to the rink. Istanbul's most significant asset is largely considered to be the narrow strip of sea located in the middle of the city, the Bosphorus. There were, and still are, different types of houses and apartments, built to face the sea. One major type of pleasure for the Istanbulites had long been the viewing of moonlight reflected on the water. Particularly in the nineteenth century, Istanbulites enjoyed such spectacles in very small boats on the Bosphorus. Sometimes it could be merely a couple, or sometimes a group of friends along with a small band of musicians and sometimes parties with belly dancers could be organized for a group of four or five small boats.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the fact that it might be obvious to a film studies reader, it is still noteworthy that the 'gaze' in Istanbul was not always as light-hearted as I describe it here. Displaying criminals in public arenas has long been a way for punishment in many parts of Europe and the Middle East. The public gaze could also function as a tool for disgracing the body and thereby to create public fear. 'Display of the criminal in wax' and the 'display of the criminal on the donkey' form two examples

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<sup>85</sup> Abdulhamid, with his fear of assassination, had a great number of spies around the country to watch for suspicious acts.

<sup>86</sup> Resad Ekrem Koçu , 'Balon, in *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi*, ed. Resad Ekrem Kocu (Istanbul: Istanbul Ansiklopedisi Nesriyat ve Kolektif Sireketi, 1961), pp. 2064-2065.

<sup>87</sup> Koçu , 'Bisiklet', *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi*, pp. 2821.

<sup>88</sup> Koçu , 'Gobek Dansı', *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi*, pp. 7059.



from Ottoman lands of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The ‘worth-seeing’ displays are intended to tame the ‘fearful’ viewers and witnesses.<sup>89</sup>

## 2.2. Coffee Houses

Coffee houses have almost always contributed to the transformation of the public sphere and the rearrangement of the ‘measure of leisure and pleasure’:<sup>90</sup> ‘It [coffee] is an amusement and a pleasure of aesthetic taste.’ These words by a coffee addict were recorded by the Ottoman historian Pecevi in his writings on coffee.<sup>91</sup>

The emergence of coffee as a commodity is almost unanimously dated back to the Arab world of the sixteenth century. Two entrepreneurs from Aleppo and Damascus introduced coffee to the Istanbulites in 1555-1556. From these dates on, the number of coffee houses in the Empire multiplied in a decade due to the rising popularity of coffee consumption.

The wakefulness created by the drinking of coffee not only affected the consumer’s state of mind, but it also became one of the elements that influenced the re-arrangement of the time ratio of work and leisure, since coffee as a substance helped to extend the use of night-time. Before exploring further the functions of coffee and coffee houses, the more burning issue that needs to be discussed here is who were the initial consumers of coffee? Many historians agree that the coffee house clientele had various ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. According to Cemal Kafadar, the coffee houses were initially composed of pleasure seekers and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> See Cemal Kafadar, ‘How Dark Is the History of the Night?’, (Paper given at *Performance and Performers in the Eastern Mediterranean: 11th-18th Centuries Conference*, Bogazici University, Istanbul 7-9 June, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Cemal Kafadar ‘A History of Coffee’  
eh.net/XIIICongress/cd/papers/64Kafadar16.pdf, [accessed on 23 January 2007].

idlers along with writers and intellectuals, but then their reputation increased in various parts of the society:

[The popularity of coffee houses] reached such a point that all kinds of unemployed officers, judges and professors, all seeking preferment, and corner-sitters with nothing to do proclaimed that there was no place like it [the coffee house] for pleasure and relaxation, and filled it until there was no room to sit or stand. It became so famous that, besides the holders of high offices, even great men could not refrain from coming there.<sup>92</sup>

As in Europe where they spread after the mid-seventeenth century, coffee houses could, and did, turn undesirable in the eyes of the Sublime Porte. They were closed down in the reign of Sultan Murat IV (1623-1640), as they became meeting places where criticisms of the palace emerged.<sup>93</sup> Coffee houses constituted one of the pioneers of the public spaces in the Empire. They were even used as settings for mobilizing rebellions, as in the case of *Patrona Halil* and his allies in 1730 against the elite layer of the society. This was a significant period with its signs of decadence and corruption and encouraged consumerism and the exhibition of luxury. Signalling attention to the coffee houses' role in the Patrona Halil rebellion, Dana Sajdi claims that if the target of the rebellion was the palace, both physically and symbolically, the coffee house had come to mean the *anti-palace*.<sup>94</sup> As the Ottomans approached the cinematic era, coffee houses began to host newspaper readings. Serdar Öztürk records an old questionnaire indicating that 46 clients out of 120 frequented the coffee houses in order to read the news.<sup>95</sup> The control and the modern state relationship were materialized in coffee houses during the early cinema era. Known

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Serdar Öztürk, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Kahvehane ve İktidar 1930-1945* (Istanbul: Kırmızı Yayınları, 2006), p. 60

<sup>94</sup> See Dana Sajdi, *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyles in the Eighteenth Century* (London: IB Tauris, 2008).

<sup>95</sup> Öztürk, *Kahvehane ve İktidar*, p. 73.

to be paranoid, Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) sent his informers to the coffee houses in order to control the dissident movements of the Young Turks.<sup>96</sup>

Coffee houses functioned not only in terms of politics, but also as a means of entertainment. According to Kafadar, the new modes of sociability facilitated by the coffee houses were secular, or at least outside the control of the religious authorities: 'No such space existed before: the taverns were not shunned by all of Muslim society, but their appeal was much more limited'.<sup>97</sup> Coffee houses were at the same time performance spaces, they hosted *meddahs* ('public storytellers') and *Karagöz* shows (Turkish shadow play). Kafadar also mentions the presence of violinists, flautists and other musicians, who were hired by the proprietor of the coffee house to play and sing much of the day.<sup>98</sup>

Coffee houses with their mise-en-scène offered a spectacle for Orientalist travellers. Amicis, for example, draws attention to the interior designs and the characters of the coffee houses. The mirrors on the wall, the crystal *narghiles* (water pipes), the Turks sitting on a divan and the dervishes being shaved by the shop boys appealed to him. Such scenes were reminiscent of 'a small waxwork display [with] a wooden house, a seated Turk, a lovely distant view, a great light and a vast silence.'<sup>99</sup> The picturesque vein of the coffee houses can be captured in the memoirs of Balikhane Naziri Ali Riza Bey (1842-1928) as well. In his records of Istanbul folklore, Ali Riza Bey seems to have been impressed by the visual depictions of various religious motifs such as Ali's heroic wrestling with demons, Veysel Karani and camels, Haci Bektas-i Veli's miraculous performance where he made large walls

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<sup>96</sup> There was even a film about Abdulhamid's informers, *Pascali's Island* (James Dearden, UK, 1988)

<sup>97</sup> Kafadar

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Edmondo de Amicis, *Constantinople*, p. 49

move, Karaca Ahmet riding a lion with a whip made out of a snake, and the like.<sup>100</sup> Such depictions add another cinematic dimension to the coffee houses along with the reflections of images on the mirrors. Similar to the writings of Demetrius Coufopoulos, Ali Riza Bey mentions the coffee house viewing.<sup>101</sup> The coffee-related gaze appeared, not only in the contemplation of a picturesque corner or in shadow play performances, but also in fortunetelling, which was popular among women. In this context, the gaze belonged to the fortuneteller, who could relate the destiny of the drinker to the shapes created by the coffee grounds in the cup.<sup>102</sup>

### 2.3. Agenda of an Urban Spectator

Tanzimat and Servet-i Funun novels were mainly based on the urban experiences and encounters of a middle class Istanbulite who is generally a pleasure seeker and preoccupied with public displays. These novels help to understand the way urbanites dealt with a wide range of possible visual delights and European style modernity. It is true novels commonly narrate middle class lifestyles, however they manage to illustrate a more vivid atmosphere through individual experiences. *Tanzimat* and *Servet-i Funun* novels are particularly beneficial for grasping the gentrification of public displays and individual experiences with modernity in everyday life.

Carriage riding, for example, can become a way to express urban encounters in a more visual manner as it was one of the main pleasures for the urban middle

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<sup>100</sup> All these images belong to stories of mystics and saints of the Alevi- Bektasi order, an unorthodox religious sect from Anatolia. Balikhane Naziri Ali Riza Bey, *Eski Zamanlarda Istanbul Hayat* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2001), p. 271.

<sup>101</sup> Ali Riza Bey, p. 275.

<sup>102</sup> See Dorina L. Neave, *Eski Istanbul'da Hayat* (Istanbul, Kervan Kitapcilik, 1978). Dorina L. Neave recorded her memories regarding the years she spent in Istanbul between 1881 and 1908. In these memoirs she mentions fortune telling from coffee and the belief in its power.

classes, who wanted to see and be seen, especially before the introduction of the motor car in the early twentieth century. The carriages were initially utilised in the High Porte. By the reign of Abdulhamid II, carriage riding had already become fashionable for the upper classes. As Reşad Ekrem Koçu indicates, the drivers were selected among the handsome young men, who were forced to dress elaborately on the carriages. There were even some poems written and dedicated to the beauty of these drivers.<sup>103</sup> The carriage for the ‘elite’ public signified pleasure, additionally it was part of the ostentatious display of their wealth, beauty and extravagance. Written in 1898, Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem’s novel *Araba Sevdası* (‘A Carriage Affair’) depicts a young dandy, who goes bankrupt for the sake of exhibiting his prosperity to his lover. Bihruz, the protagonist, is mainly depicted on the streets and the gardens or at other public displays. He establishes his identity through his urban image, and transforms his urban experience into a grotesque comedy. Although a carriage would also offer sight-seeing for its owner, it had another purpose for Bihruz: ‘Wherever he goes his intention was to be seen.’<sup>104</sup> He, along with his phallic public image, the carriage, wanders around the streets of Istanbul and seeks beautiful women who are as ‘noble and elegant’ as himself. Finally, he falls in love with one of them in her own landau. Because Bihruz is more preoccupied with his own image than with the woman he falls for, he misunderstands her look, her fashion, and her use of language. Indeed, the woman is neither wealthy, nor well-educated, nor young.

At the beginning of the novel Bihruz is portrayed in one of the popular gardens of the period, as he walks to and fro and watches the *Belle Hélène* opera with an elegant audience. These gardens were meeting places for young men and women, who in the novel are addressed as ‘viewers’ by the author. Yet, the gaze could be misleading and indeed it misled Bihruz, who is also alienated from his own language

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<sup>103</sup> Koçu , ‘Fayton’, *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi*, p. 5586.

<sup>104</sup> Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem, *Araba Sevdası* (Istanbul: Inkilap Kitabevi), p. 18.

and who cannot even communicate properly with his mother. These characteristics allowed Bihruz to be read as an allegory of the Westernized elite in cultural and literary criticisms. However the style of *Araba Sevdası* seems to provide more authentic elements than its criticism of a Westernized dandy. Berna Moran, a Turkish literary critic, argues its uniqueness is the way the novel offers a precursor of the stream of consciousness narrative. Moran acknowledges the fact that novels were more established traditions in Western literature, but he also emphasizes that such a modern narrative technique was still a rare occurrence in Europe at that period.

The novels of the period provide valuable texts for the comprehension of the urban image in the vision of Ottoman intelligentsia. In the context of the urban experiences and the display of culture, these novels seem to be preoccupied by the gender roles defined within the public displays. The male authors tended to represent female protagonists as passive consumers of the latest fashions with their ‘feminine exhibitionist manners’. Two female protagonists confirming this argument can be identified in *Ask-i Memnu* (Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, 1900). This novel opens with a scene in a place called *Seyir yeri*.<sup>105</sup> *Seyir yeri* (literally ‘places of viewing’ in English), located across various streams in the city, were among the major socializing areas for the Istanbulites. Families or group of friends would gather in these places, have picnics, take small boats and enjoy the sunshine. The family at the beginning of the novel is composed of an old mother and two daughters. One of the daughters is already married and the other seeks a husband. They are a famous trendsetter family in the elite society of Istanbul, where the etymological relationship between celebrity, display and the city (*şöhret*, *teşhir* and *şehir*) is manifest. On a boat they take at this *seyir yeri*, they meet a wealthy and elegant man, who later marries the young daughter, Bihter. Adnan Bey sees his beautiful new wife as an

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<sup>105</sup> For the novel see Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Ask-i Memnu* (Istanbul, Ozgur Yayınları, 2005).

ideal mother for his two motherless children. Although his young daughter Nihal initially hates her stepmother Bihter, and is jealous of her, she nevertheless grows to love her as Bihter, a trendsetter, teaches Nihal the latest fashions and ‘female manners’ needed to be used in public display. Her training includes the way a young lady walks in the streets and does window-shopping.<sup>106</sup> Despite the fact that Nihal feels naked and self-conscious in her new clothes, her desire to be seen in the streets of Istanbul leads her to do more shopping. Deserving a more detailed analysis, this novel cannot be reduced simply to the shopping culture, yet it provides an understanding of women as passive consumers and targets of the urbanite gaze. Another facet of the novel that concerns this study is its proto-cinematic style, which can be traced in the various subjective points of view. The narrative is presented through the eyes of three different protagonists who constantly clash with each other. The love triangle between the young girl, the stepmother, and the lover, is therefore expressed in a way in which the reader’s identification slips from one character to another and hence is able to see the same event from the perspective of each character.<sup>107</sup>

An earlier novel in relation to the public displays is *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* (Ahmet Midhat Efendi, 1873), which illustrates and compares two young men, Felatun Bey and Rakım Efendi. Felatun Bey is a stereotype of the super-Westernized dandy who ignores traditional moral values while Rakım Efendi is a Western educated man, but who is still respectful of the ‘traditional virtues’. One of the significant comparisons of the author appears at a theater hall scene. Ahmet Midhat Efendi implicitly underscores the way a young gentleman should behave at a

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<sup>106</sup> On the commodification and gentrification of the mobile and virtual gaze see Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>107</sup> For another novel by the same author with a similar approach to the relationship between females and the public displays see Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Mai ve Siyah* (Istanbul: Ozgur Yayin, 2005).

theater, for ‘the quality of a young gentleman is assessed at the theater hall’.<sup>108</sup> Rakım Efendi, as a true gentleman, merely greets the families in the hall, whereas Felatun Bey sits with ‘frivolous’ ladies and giggles throughout the play. Such judgmental intellectual views on spectatorship manners later will emerge in cinema journals of the 1920s at a time when cinema-going was an institution like the theater of the 1870s. Just as in *Araba Sevdası*, *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* is also preoccupied with public appearances, and in both novels the public spaces connote the display of oneself and viewing of the others. According to Ahmet Mithad, the public displays are not there to enjoy nature, but to see the other viewers and to be seen by them.<sup>109</sup> The female protagonist of the novel, as the lover of the well-behaved gentleman, does not go to these public displays because she decidedly shies away from *exhibiting* her beauty to the public. She could be present among the audience only when she is with her fiancé and she would avoid any possibilities of meeting male strangers. Two decades after the first publication of this novel, and almost two decades before the emergence of modernist poetics in world literature, Ahmet Midhat Efendi wrote an inter-textual and self-referential novel, *Musahadat* (‘appearances’ and ‘observations’). First published in 1890, *Musahadat* intermingled the author’s identity with his characters. In the novel, Ahmed Midhat, by representing himself as the author of the novel, first sees and observes his characters at a steamboat and develops friendships with them.<sup>110</sup> More remarkably, the characters are involved in the process of writing the novel and interfere with the line of action. Therefore a self-reflexive approach appears in the story of writing such a novel with the help of its characters who were seen in the city.

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<sup>108</sup> Ahmet Midhat Efendi, *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* (Istanbul: Iskele Yayıncılık, 2005), p. 98.

<sup>109</sup> Ahmet Midhat Efendi, p. 169

<sup>110</sup> See Ahmet Midhat, *Musahadat* (Istanbul: Ozgur Yayınları, 2006).



A different portrayal of gender roles in public displays is found in a feminist author's novel, *Sinekli Bakkal* (Halide Edip Adivar, 1935).<sup>111</sup> Located in a Hamidian setting in the late nineteenth century, *Sinekli Bakkal*'s main protagonist Rabia is a dissident woman compared to her counterparts discussed above. She not only refuses to display herself in the latest fashion in public, but she also prefers to stay outside the gender boundaries of the period. The reasons for Rabia's resistance to both consumerism and the patriarchal order could be explained by her close ties to the spectatorship culture as she was indeed born into that of the public display. Raised as a musician and a *hatip* (someone who sings hymns from the Koran), and because her father was a shadow puppeteer who runs a coffee house, Rabia is already accustomed to being *in* public displays. Therefore, she does not need to force herself to be accepted by the public, either as a passive fashion consumer, or in obedience to the patriarchal order. Rabia is also in charge of the house, and seems superior to any men around her including her father, her grandfather, her uncle, and her lovers. It could be stated that developing both spectatorship and exhibitionist skills, Rabia, despite 'her femininity', has a dominant image in the public.<sup>112</sup>

The male presence in the public sphere is extensively depicted in the novel constituted by the memories of Evangelinos Misailidis, which was mentioned earlier, with reference to its inter-lingual style. Misailidis, a Greek of Istanbul, wrote *Temasa-i Dunya ve Cefakar-u Cefakes* (literally 'Watching the World and the Torturer with the Tortured') in 1872. As the title of the novel suggests, the novel narrates the adventures of a penniless streetwise character, who identifies himself as a spectator of the world. Born from a Greek mother and a French father in Istanbul,

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<sup>111</sup> See Halide Edip Adivar, *Sinekli Bakkal* (Istanbul: Atlas Kitabevi, 1990).

<sup>112</sup> For more on the situation of women in the literature of the period, see Emel Sonmez, 'Turkish Literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *Die Welt des Islams*, 12. 1/3 (1969), pp. 1-73 and see Emel Sonmez, 'The Novelist Halide Edip Adivar and Turkish Feminism', *Die Welt des Islams*, 14. 1/4 (1973), pp. 81-115.

the protagonist attends a Greek high school in Istanbul and becomes a lawyer. Taking his job far too seriously, Misailidis wants to sue a rooster who defeats another rooster in a fight. This attempt leads him to be taken to an asylum. The author then tells the stories of all the lunatics in the asylum. As one of the stories is related to the spectacle of the city, it needs to be mentioned here. The gypsies of Istanbul used to present spectacles involving monkeys and in this story one of the monkeys escapes to a graveyard. In the evening while a young man passes by the graveyard, the monkey jumps on him, and thinking it is a ghost, the young man loses his mind. In one week in the asylum, Misailidis also learns the secrets of metaphysics, and tries to cast spells when he leaves the hospital. However, he is taken to the authorities by a priest, as he appears suspicious with his magical instruments. Yet, by chance, the Janissary who arrests Misailidis is desperately seeking a way to be united with his love. The Janissary asks help from a famous mirror in Istanbul, as the mirror allegedly has the power to reflect the future to its viewer. Promising the Janissary his assistance Misailidis is released, even though he ends up failing to be of help, and attends a fairground to view the pleasures the city offers. Misailidis takes boats with musicians, enjoys the moonlight, meets 'light-hearted women', and the fair lasts approximately ten days. Following the fair, the carnival time in the city starts, and large crowds take part in masquerade balls and theater shows. Resembling the masquerade scene in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999, UK, USA), the balls are for those seeking pleasure in clandestine sex. These underground parties take places in various music halls in Pera, where at one of them the woman dancing with Misailidis turns out to be his greatest love. Forsaken by her, Misailidis dedicates himself to all the 'fallen' women in various brothels of Istanbul. According to his 'modest' research at these brothels in the years 1871 and 1872, there were 130 brothels and 760 'poor women' working at these places in Pera. The adventures of

Misailidis are somewhat too complex to summarize, yet his narrative style could be posited as pre-cinematic, since he constantly jumps from one location to another and visually depicts the settings. He positions himself as a spectator-narrator, and in several chapters utilizes multiple points of views; for example, the stories of the prostitutes are told in their own words. He, as an adventurous masculine figure, makes use of the opportunity to enter all these places freely, and retains his male gaze on the panorama of the late nineteenth century Istanbul. As the title of the novel suggests ('Watching the World') the character is a world spectator whose adventures and troubles are mainly caused by his curiosity or lust for seeing more.

Ahmet Rasim in his memoirs offers another example of male presence in the public displays. Just like Misailidis, Rasim uses every opportunity to enjoy the various spectacles of the city. Written in the period between 1880 and 1900, *Fuhs-i Atik* ('old prostitution' in English) consists of Rasim's memories of music halls, beer halls, carnivals, brothels and the waters of *Kagithane alemleri* ('the amusements in Kagithane'). Rasim in his high school days portrays himself as an admirer of the pantomimes, theaters, music in Direklerarasi (a district in old Istanbul famous for the Ramadan attractions such as classical Turkish music, shadow play, public storytelling and the like), fashionable costumes, Galata and Pera (parts of Istanbul where school children were punished for entering due to the 'filthy pleasures' it offered), the moonlight tours and parties in small boats. Rasim describes the programs of the theaters he routinely visits. These programs include various spectacles such as pantomime and *canto* (light-hearted songs performed by female singers in cabaret style, a popular musical genre in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). Despite his addiction to such forms of amusement, according to Rasim these theaters in particular were not decent places, since they could host fights

or even killings.<sup>113</sup> A collection of Ahmet Rasim's newspaper columns written in 1910-1911 was also published in a book entitled *Şehir Mektuplari* (City Letters). In these letters, Rasim mentions the overcrowded carnivals, beer halls, coffee houses and balls which provided all types of entertainment. Rasim also portrays the city of the *Belle Époque* in a grotesque manner. For example, he imagines that one day the famous beer brand of Istanbul would distribute beer via channels below the streets, the bicyclists would jump from one roof to another, and the trams would sail on the sea.<sup>114</sup> Rasim, as a critical journalist, offers a self-conscious view on the urban life, with a judgemental perspective on both male and female dandies of the city.

Describing urban spectatorship, these novels may provide an idea of the individual's experiences with seeing and being seen. Additionally, they help us to locate the urbanites, who could presumably become early cinema spectators, in relation to the everyday life and spectatorship beyond the simplistic cultural binary oppositions of the East and the West.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

Until the Young Turks Revolution in 1908, the Ottoman State experienced a transformation fuelled by the dominant understanding of a Euro-centric modernization. This might have been a period of severe transformation, but not a rupture since early seeds of modernization had been initiated in the late sixteenth century through the establishment of coffee houses, an army with firearms (*Janissary*), and a general secularization of everyday life in the vernacular literature. Additionally, Istanbul has always been a city of rapid change, only this time the transformation it underwent contributed to the State's decline. The elements at stake

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<sup>113</sup> For the novel see Ahmet Rasim, *Fuhs-i Atik* (Istanbul: Uc Harf Yayıncılık, 2005).

<sup>114</sup> Ahmet Rasim, *Şehir Mektuplari* (Istanbul: Uc Harf Yayıncılık, 2005), 385

for this transformation varied from the politics to the culture. There was a significant political and demographic instability in the country between 1856 and 1908; meanwhile a growing curiosity about the technological advancements was created by the political censorship of the period between 1878 and 1908. A diverse range of ethnicities became more significant due to migration waves from former territories. Industrialization was also fuelled during this period when a new rhythm of life emerged not only through new factories, but also through new modes of public transport. Additionally, the laborer profile changed due to the employment of many women and children in the new factories. Hence, class divisions became more underlined, yet the abolition of Janiasseries, and also craftsmanship, along with the Western encouragement of foreign traders in the city led to an enormous economic crisis. On the other hand, the new rhythm of life found a place in the public imagination through newspaper illustrations and the novels of the period, where criticisms of Westernization also materialized. Criticisms largely focused on new ways of life and moral values, but not specifically on the very concrete impact of Western imperialism. This was witnessed in the scarcity of local trade and business which indeed explains the lack of indigenous cinema entrepreneurs.

On the everyday life of the city, I have delineated various aspects of two key phenomena that characterized the period before the cinematograph arrived. Firstly, the dependence of the life of pleasure on visual delights and spectacle, through the notion of *keyif* (in open public spaces as exemplified with balloons, bicycles, and so on; and enclosed ones, mainly exemplified through coffee houses, which were also places of resistance towards the authority). Secondly, there was a growing awareness of the complex culture of public display, but also of the reaffirmation of gender roles within it, where women were represented as passive spectators (as exemplified in the popular novels of the period). These two phenomena were explored in order to

facilitate the understanding of the spectatorship culture in Istanbul before the cinematograph, portrayed here by distancing my approach from the dominant Orientalist one.

Among the most significant elements of this period of great changes were the city's demography and the emergence of new lifestyles. Now a new middle class Istanbulite, who is a member of a potential cinematograph audience, began encountering a wider range of diversities on the streets with the increasing number of émigrés from the Balkans, as well as European merchants; businessmen and middle class women in Europeanized fashions. The cinematograph was not only welcomed by this new public, but it was also introduced in an environment of new ideas such as nationalism, parliamentarism and Westernizm that was led by the Young Turks. The cinematograph itself probably did not transform the public, but rather became part of this ongoing transformation in the cultural corpus.

### 3. CHAPTER THREE: PRE-CINEMATIC EXPERIENCES AND THEIR RECEPTION

In order to grasp the spectatorship culture in the age of early cinema, it is necessary to look into the previous spectacles and their reception; therefore, this chapter is dedicated to the cultural reception of Ottoman visual delights in the pre-cinema period. If the initial reactions to the cinematograph are located in a larger life of spectacle, such as the viewing of art pieces, dreams, shadow plays or other ‘traditional’ visual and theater performances, we may have a better panorama of the first encounter with the cinematic apparatus. The main aim of this chapter is not to seek the origins of cinematic spectatorship in the Ottoman Empire but rather to locate it in a broader context so as to grasp the spectatorship culture before the arrival of the cinematograph in 1896. The available primary materials as well as academic works on pre-cinematic spectacles are relatively few and far between; accordingly historicizing this topic may be a great challenge, especially since it is not the primary focus of this project. One means of overcoming the difficulty of covering such a field may be to elaborate on its philosophical outlook or to theorize it in such a way as to penetrate the mentalities of the early cinema audiences. Hence, I will initially describe the ontological aspect of spectatorship which will be followed by an examination of the way this type of spectatorship was offered and materialized in Ottoman pre-cinematic practices such as shadow play, *Orta Oyunu* (‘public storytelling’), *meddah* (the art of mime) shows and the like. *Orta Oyunu* and *meddah* shows are not based on projecting images therefore we cannot examine these shows in the field of ‘screen practices’ as put by Charles Musser;<sup>1</sup> however, through the art of mime and the non-narrative styles they did help audiences visualize curiosity

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<sup>1</sup> See Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: the American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 15-55.

provoking events that are not linked in a linear manner. By examining shadow play, *meddah* and *Orta Oyunu* which demonstrate cause and effect that are not inextricably correlative and that are based on the appearances' playful and illusionary nature, I will argue that they demanded from their audiences a participatory viewing that continued in the age of cinema of attractions. These 'traditional' visual delights, despite their 'secular' subject matter, were strongly linked to Islamic mysticism, namely Sufism, and its ontological visual reception.

Theories of the gaze can be characterized as timeless, structural and synchronic, and they are also inclined to disregard the context of particular moments in history.<sup>2</sup> Still, it may be worth attempting to forge out of them a perspective for individual cultural receptions. Particularly for under-researched areas where the limited number of available primary sources defines the investigations and where scholarly attention has been insufficient to form a body of work, the researcher needs to engage with reception theories in order to fill the gap. Such gaps, as in the case of the Middle East for example, may lead to speculations on spectatorship cultures that are formulated mostly by an outsider's viewpoint through essential distinctions or binary oppositions (between East and West). Therefore it seems necessary to examine the gaze with its specific cultural and philosophical conditions in their own right. The spectatorship theories dominant in the 1960s and 70s, on the other hand, are generally defined by the apparatus theories formulated by Christian Metz and Jean Louis Baudry through psychoanalysis and Platonic paradigms which are seemingly universal. As indicated above, these theories are critiqued for being timeless and for assuming a homogeneous spectatorship. Another criticism of these

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<sup>2</sup> For a criticism of apparatus or gaze theories see Vanessa Schwartz, 'Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris', in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Vanessa Schwartz and Leo Charney (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 297-319; Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).



formularizations is their use of the Platonic thought to explain a secular gaze that was transformed by a modern apparatus emerging in the age of mechanical reproductions. However, in pre-modern Ottoman lands, ancient Greek philosophy (particularly the philosophy of Socrates and Plato) was theorized by Sufi phenomenology which inspired the showmen of the pre-cinematic practices and shaped the relationship between the spectators and the images. Moreover, in Ottoman public culture, even in its later phases, the ideological, cultural and ontological understandings that characterize visual reception seem to be embedded, to a considerable extent, in Sufi notions of phenomenology and metaphysics. Sufism was prominent to a great degree in the vernacular culture. Its traces can still be observed in the everyday life of abstractions; such as the notions of destiny and free will, the perception and the relationship of the self with others, the world spectatorship or the ontological position of the gaze.

A study of the gaze in the Ottoman lands can be efficient in two ways. Firstly, it may help reveal the philosophical and theological background of the early cinema audiences who have internalized this gaze. Secondly, it can redeem the Islamic visual corpus from essentialized arguments, particularly from the one over its alleged aniconism, which is based on a superficial scrutiny and which mystifies the ‘Eastern philosophies’ without further analysis. In the Orientalist and self-Orientalizing discourses such myths about Islamic cultures benefited from the presumption that Islam banned all visual representations. My intention here is not to argue against prejudices towards organized religions; however what I would like to draw attention to is that there are various sectarian or philosophical interpretations that may have affected the cultural receptions of visual representations. It is widely known that Islamic fundamentalism can be intolerant towards visual depictions of the prophet Mohammad, or that figural representations of human beings have rarely been placed

in an Orthodox Sunni Mosque, yet other ritualistic or worshipping venues such as the Sufi dervish lodges or *Cemevis* that belong to Alevis, Shi'is or Bektasis in Anatolia, in Iran, in Syria or some parts of Pakistan, accommodate celestial visual depictions (paintings of holy persons or saints). Furthermore, the restriction of paintings of the prophet can hardly be extended to general restrictions over visual depictions as can be exemplified in the miniature paintings, architectural decorations, shadow plays, public storytelling shows and the like that flourished in many Muslim cultural environments.

In the course of this chapter, I will describe the notion of the Sufi world spectatorship in the early modern Ottomans and connect it to Kaja Silverman's reading of ancient Greek philosophy. Despite the risk of being structural, synchronic and therefore ahistorical, I will be dealing with a hypothetical spectatorship so as to understand the general psyche of the audiences before the invention of the cinematic apparatus. The Sufi spectatorship culture and the pre-cinematic displays I will be examining later in this chapter, both invite and demand a participatory spectatorship that became a common practice in the forthcoming cinema of attractions as formulated by Tom Gunning. For the metaphysics of the gaze section I will also mention the theories of Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry whose works proved to be controversial, yet helpful for the re-consideration of the abstract spectatorship. It may not be academically accurate to compare two different periods: firstly, the period of early-modern Sufism that defines and tries to see the ideal through the feeling of a more or less spiritual wonder and the world spectatorship. Secondly, the period of the turn of the nineteenth-century modernity, a period of consumerism, world-wide capitalism and secularism that aimed at distraction and leisure in viewing the cinema of attractions as a more or less 'scientific wonder'. Nevertheless, the early modern and the modern may not always be drastically different since both contain

elements of the ‘modern’, Moreover examining the two periods together may help to contextualize the early cinema spectatorship of the Ottomans.

### **3.1.The Ontology of Seeing**

Texts on precursors of cinema deserve attention as they seemingly map out the cultural receptions of the pre-cinematic age, help to understand the spectator reactions to the first cinematograph shows and eliminate the essential religious or cultural distinctions. Indeed the unwordly spiritual understanding was influential in these visual delights such as shadow plays and public storytelling as well as in Neo-Platonic world spectatorship. Kaja Silverman’s approach to spectatorship as a visual turn away from the worldly is useful to understand the Sufist approach that dominated Ottoman visual culture.<sup>3</sup> It is crucial to examine Sufism, as it reveals the role of vernacular and relatively secular elements of viewing spectacles in the age of what is called the pre-modern. Such a perception later on inevitably relates its audiences to early cinema as it was also a modernization tool for what was at this time officially a vernacular and secular state.

The spiritual understanding of ‘seeing the world’ or ‘visual turning away from the worldly’ had long dominated the metaphysics of the eye. Of course one cannot deny the crucial role of secularism in the age of mechanical reproduction and therefore it would be naïve to claim that the mystical understanding of seeing still prevailed. Nonetheless, until the age of mechanical reproduction that created a rupture in the Ottoman visual corpus, the relationship between spectatorship and the

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<sup>3</sup> World Spectatorship is formulated by film scholar Kaja Silverman who uses Plato’s cave parable and Heidegger’s phenomenology to explain the characteristics of visual perception and applies psychoanalysis so as to bring a new perspective. For Silverman the former cave prisoner’s journey to the light is a visual event. See Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-5.

spiritual was clearly close. The significance of mysticism in the spectatorship culture indeed dated back to a time when Plato formulated the cave parable. The neo-platonic paradigm was still strong during the early-modern period when boundaries between the secular and the mystical were still blurred. Even though the rupture of the visual corpus happened decades before cinema, we should keep in mind that the feelings of hayret ('wonder' and 'astonishment') and hayran ('wondrous'), which were used to describe the perception of pre-cinematic events, were still relevant to the reception of the cinematograph. A spiritual outlook similarly remained important to Heidegger's phenomenology, thus a metaphysical eye can not only be recognized as relevant to 'the East of the pre-modern age', but also the highly secularized contemporary world of modernity.<sup>4</sup>

The illusionary characteristics of seeing were undoubtedly not peculiar to cinema.<sup>5</sup> Tom Gunning in a lecture given at Collegium 2006 at Pordenone, mentioned the function of early cinema as a replacement for magical attractions in the age of secularism and rationalism.<sup>6</sup> Early cinema utilized magic extensively in the acts of Georges Méliès or Henry Houdini, for example. Gunning's argument indeed seems to support a study of gaze as a spiritual gateway in order to understand the relationship between the visual pleasure (especially in the early cinema period) and ontology as well as the metaphysics behind it. Hence, it seems easier to grasp the reasons why vernacular poetry, shadow plays, public storytelling and their links to fantasy, illusions, dreams and metaphysics demanded a visually self-referential style, just as the cinema of attractions did.

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<sup>4</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being* (London: Vision Press, 1949).

<sup>5</sup> See the theory of persistence of vision at [http://www.grand-illusions.com/articles/persistence\\_of\\_vision/](http://www.grand-illusions.com/articles/persistence_of_vision/) [accessed on 9 February 2009]. Also the cinema of attractions used to play with the idea of optical illusions. See Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction'.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Gunning, 'Magic in Film', lecture given at the Collegium (*Le Giornate del Cinema Muto*, Pordenone, October 2006).

The Sufi viewing culture was not necessarily peculiar to the Ottomans, as Sufism takes its philosophical approach from the Neo-Platonic paradigm. Thus, the essential distinctions between ‘East’ and ‘West’ formulated by the understanding of Euro-centric modernity seem to be far from the ‘truth’ as Plato’s cave parable appears to form the ontological base for both cultural paradigms.

### **3.1.2. Cinema as a Wonderland and the Illusionary First Encounter**

*Hayret* and *hayran* (Wonder and wondrous) were the feelings to describe one’s astonishment towards impressive ocular presentations in the Ottoman visual culture. Such terms were used for viewing not only fine arts, as in the case of miniatures and architecture, but also nature and sightseeing.<sup>7</sup> These were also feelings awakened by the beauty of the universe/the Being/the beloved in Sufism, where one believes the whole universe was revealed or literally ‘appeared’ by the one and whole Being who wanted ‘to be seen’. The Sufi sees the Being wherever she/he looks and the compilation of all the images around her/him recalls the wondrous visual return to where one and all emerged. In Plato’s cave parable which also influenced the Sufi ontology, Kaja Silverman describes the liberating voyage of the cave’s prisoner as an optical revisit to the world of ideas.<sup>8</sup> What one sees in this voyage is just like the description of dreams; a whole world of familiar and joyful images of one’s memory. In this trip, the audience of the world becomes purely receptive and feels the unity of the universe. These feelings find their verbal expression in vernacular poetry of the pre-modern age; in saint-trobadours such as Hacı Bayram Veli, Pir Sultan Abdal or in the lines of Yunus Emre, an unorthodox

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<sup>7</sup> See Cemal Kafadar, ‘Hayretten Hayrete: Osmanlı Seyir Kulturünün Evrimi Üzerine Düşünceler’.

<sup>8</sup> Silverman, *World Spectators*, p. 2.

Sufi troubadour of the thirteenth century: ‘Hak bir gonul vermis bana/ha demeden hayran olur.’ (literally in English: ‘God gave me this heart/a heart that becomes wondrous even before saying the word [wondrous]’).<sup>9</sup>

The wonder in the Ottoman visual corpus may reveal similarities to the understanding of cinema as a wonderland. The first spectators of the cinematograph in the Ottoman Empire were trained to look at the world with wonder. Their gaze was trained by the prevailing Ottoman folk tales or Sufi poetry, shadow play, public storytelling and the like; where one was constantly reminded of the representational characteristics of displays (whether the display of the physical world or the shows themselves). Thereby, the whole universe in Sufi paradigm becomes a spectacle of the Being’s beauty just as in the lines of an influential troubadour from the sixteenth century, Pir Sultan Abdal: ‘go down to see universal spectacle/there is viewing within viewing’ (‘Alemler seyrana iner/Seyir var seyir icinde’).<sup>10</sup>

Just like Freud’s love object was told in ‘mourning and melancholia’ that consists of the heterogeneous collocation of memories where one falls into the wonderland (down the rabbit hole) of all the beauty one has seen in the love interest,<sup>11</sup> the Beloved (in both Freudian and Sufi senses) illustrates/embodies the eclectic montage (just like cinema) of a wide range of different beauties in the same body/universe/time/Being (and cinematic frame) at once. The montage of images is familiar but still unknown to the blurred memory of the lover as she/he would never imagine all this random collage before seeing these familiar images all together. (‘It somehow looks familiar, but I have not seen it before’).

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<sup>9</sup>Yunus Emre, *Hak Bir Gonul Verdi*:

[http://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/Hak\\_bir\\_g%C3%B6n%C3%BCl\\_verdi](http://tr.wikisource.org/wiki/Hak_bir_g%C3%B6n%C3%BCl_verdi) [accessed on 20 January 2010].

<sup>10</sup>Pir Sultan Abdal, *Tevhid*.

[http://www.turkuler.com/sozler/turku\\_1636.html](http://www.turkuler.com/sozler/turku_1636.html) [accessed on 19 January 2009].

<sup>11</sup> See Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in *The Standard Edition*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 239-258.

Even though this research is unwilling to simply assume what was in the minds of the early cinema spectators more than a century ago, it is nevertheless interesting to speculate on such an imaginary mind. Watching moving images on a wall had been a practice for centuries as seen in phantasmagoria, shadow play, magic lanterns, diorama, panorama and the like, as well as the subject matters of early films such as images of trains, Spanish bull fights and workers leaving the factory. Yet, the photographic images of such acts in motion on a big screen had probably not been seen before. Hence the cinematograph was perhaps familiar, but unknown to the unconscious of these audiences just like Freud's or Sufis' visualized love objects. Silent filmmakers must have been aware of the wondrous and astonishing effects of this new medium since they persistently made self-referential films that posited actual viewers or the act of viewing. Indeed, a great example of the wonder in filmic texts appears in the various *Alice in Wonderland* adaptations that were made as early as 1903.<sup>12</sup>

Another noteworthy notion to help understand the Ottomans' first encounter with the cinematograph appears to be the aspect of boredom and entertainment before it became a part of the lifestyle and public sphere. In this regard, one needs to go back to the shadow play, which will be analyzed later in this chapter. In Turkish shadow play, boredom and entertainment were positioned as ontological problems within the form of spectacle. Boredom as an existential state of mind, as suggested by Lars Swendsen, connotes a loss of meaning. Swendson links boredom to philosophy as overlapping in meaning, indicating that if a philosophical problem is characterized by loss of bearings, then so is boredom: 'Is this not also typical of

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<sup>12</sup> *Alice in Wonderland* (Cecile M. Hepworth and Percy Stow, USA, 1903), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0000420/> [accessed on 7 February 2009].

profound boredom, where one is no longer able to find one's bearings in relation to the world because one's very relationship to the world has virtually been lost?'<sup>13</sup>

Boredom is usually challenged by entertainment and games; the leisure time activities that help the creation of meaning or rather new attributions to objects. In Turkish shadow play, *Karagöz*, through the curtain poems, epilogues or in the poetic intervals between acts, felt the need to remind the audience that all the meanings in this 'play' are representational (perceptive signifier) and they were provided by those who are in the illusionary plane of this world. Taking 'world stage' as an already shadowy/dreamlike stage just as Plato did, *Karagöz* hints that art/game/leisure time activities are representations of something that is already a representation itself. What games/plays do is to strip off the initial meaning from the object, neutralize it and give it new meanings just as Eisenstein formulated in his montage of attractions.<sup>14</sup> For children, the meaning of an object is not always internalized; i.e. a pair of socks can easily become puppets, hence for an artist/puppetmaster, *Karagöz*, the main character; can easily be turned into a donkey or a bear or a bucket full of wine as long as its illusionary characteristics were made clear to the audience. Acknowledging one's incapacity to grasp the meaning of life, Turkish shadow play takes an anarchist position and alters the semiology of things. Yet, in a humble way, in the prologues or curtain poems *Karagöz* acknowledges the misleading characteristics of appearances and suggests that there is no truth either in the world or in the game (play). The shadow play with the texts' absurd elements and a constant call for entertainment in the main character's lines ('Yar bana bir eglence medet', literally translated as 'My dear, offer me some entertainment') indeed is related to meaninglessness. On the other hand, as suggested by Swendsen, seeking

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<sup>13</sup> Lars Swendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> On Eisenstein and creation of meaning through the montage of attractions see Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories*, pp. 45-57.



meaning is a metaphysical act, and we can consider that it was done both by the spectators of the cinema of attractions and the shadow play, in which the main purpose was not narrating stories but by being perceptual visual signifiers with their self-referential styles.<sup>15</sup> Hence, those who were accustomed to shadow play could easily relate to the cinema of attractions in theory.

What happened to wondrous gaze after the arrival of narrative cinema then? It could be an exaggeration to suggest that wondrous viewing (in the pre and early cinema years) was actually replaced by another type of seeing in the age of 'classical' narrative cinema. Before the dominance of 'secularism' in modern modes of viewing, displays of attractions (both shadow play and early cinema) perhaps pointed to the tricky nature of the gaze by acknowledging the misleading characteristics of the look. It could be an overstatement to assume these attractions were representational because they intentionally refused to take themselves seriously and be manipulative. Yet, offering a non-cynical world of wonders does not necessarily indicate naïvete.

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<sup>15</sup> A representational approach to the medium was also formulated by Tom Gunning in the cinema of attractions. See Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction', pp. 63-70.

### 3.2. Visual Culture and Daily Life: The Metaphysics of Gaze

In his explanation of the question why metaphysics matter, Peter Coates mentions the role of metaphysics in Western epistemology and ontology posited by great philosophers such as Freud, Kant, Marx, Spinoza *et al*:

Metaphysical questioning has always been directed towards a comprehensive account of the nature of Being (as for example, in Plato or Aristotle), or directed towards the nature of what it is possible for human beings to know (as in Kant or Hume), or what it is possible or desirable for human beings to become (as in Aquinas, Spinoza, Marx or Freud). It is arguable that there is not any major theorist in the Western intellectual tradition, who was not forced to choose in matters of metaphysics.<sup>16</sup>

The ontological common ground between Sufism and ‘Western’ thought can be located in ancient Greek philosophy.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, Coates introduces the metaphysics of Ibn Arabi, one of the most influential Sufi philosophers from the twelfth century and who wrote extensively on causality, time, contingency, epistemology and ontology, to the ‘Western reader’ with ‘Western philosophers’. Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, was prominent in Ottoman lands, not only for the Orthodox and Unorthodox believers of Islam but also for non-Muslim subjects. Additionally, Orientalist writers and travelers had long been fascinated by this ‘near Eastern mysticism’, despite its close ties to other mysticisms of the world. There are some minor distinctions between Sufism and Christian or Jewish mysticism and one of them might have stemmed from the fact that Sufism visibly inspired a whole body of cultural practices in the visual, literary and musical realms, not to mention various aspects of everyday life, as epitomized by the first person narrative writers, folk

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Coates, *Ibn Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2002), p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> On the connections between Sufism and Plato see Titus Burckhardt, ‘Sufi Doctrine and Method’ in *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*, eds Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 1-21 (p. 4).

poets, troubadours and, more crucially for this project, the visual artists (such as shadow theater masters, *meddahs* or miniature artists).<sup>18</sup> Even politically dissenting rebels in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were inspired by Sufism, and its phenomenology was internalized to the degree that its traces can be encountered even in contemporary Turkish cinema.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to examine the Sufi ontology in order to understand the reception of Ottoman visual delights. The type of spectatorship Sufism offered can be made clearer when one considers it under the umbrella term *world spectatorship* as re-formulated by Kaja Silverman. Borrowing the term from Hannah Arendt but adding different meanings to it, Silverman defines world spectatorship as a: ‘kind of looking which takes place *in* the world, and *for* the world – a kind of looking which not only stubbornly adheres to phenomenal forms, but also augments and enriches them.’<sup>20</sup>

### 3.2.1. The Sufi World Spectatorship

The Sufi ontology was preoccupied with a constant state of spectatorship since it was deemed to center on the inspirational words of Mohammad, indicating that God was a secret treasure and with his desire to be known, he created the whole universe. These lines are widely interpreted as God’s tendency to appear and may remind us of the Platonic paradigm as elaborated by Silverman. Although she never mentions Sufism, the spectatorship these prophetic lines define can also be expounded by her approach to Socrates and Plato: ‘to be a world spectator is not to

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<sup>18</sup> On the Ottoman first person narratives that were largely written by Sufi dervishes see, Derin Terzioğlu, ‘Man in the Image of God, in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Diary of Niyazi-i Misri (1618-94)’, *Studia Islamica*, 94 (2002), 139-165 (p. 142).

<sup>19</sup> See *Golge Oyunu* (Yavuz Turgul, Turkey, 1992); *Sevmek Zamani/Time to Love* (Metin Erksan, Turkey, 1965); *Kopekler Adası/Island of Dogs* (Halit Refig, Turkey, 1997); *Umut* (Yılmaz Güney and Şerif Goren, Turkey, 1970).

<sup>20</sup> Silverman, *World Spectators*, 2.

content oneself with seeming to the exclusion of Being, but rather to commit oneself to remaining within the only domain where Being can emerge, the domain of appearance.’ Hence among the main requirements for Sufi devotion were ‘opening the eye to the Truth’; acting upon ‘eye-opening dreams’; seeing through the appearances; wondering about what is beyond the appearances while still remaining entranced by them, yet at the same time staying aware of the illusionary characteristics of their representations. It might seem contradictory, however, if all appearances are divine reflections, then how could a Sufi have reservations about their reliability and call them illusionary? The juxtaposition occurs due to Sufi scepticism about the representations. This scepticism can be clarified by the writings of Seyh Bedreddin, one of the best known Sufi philosophers of the fifteenth-century Ottomans and the leader of a great rebellion against the Ottoman State in Anatolia and the Balkans in the early 1400s. For Bedreddin, like many other Sufis, divine truths cannot be understood according to a literal reading of holy texts, as propagated by scholars of the *sharia* who insisted on exoteric meanings (the outer or the surface of everyday consciousness) and were obsessed with appearances and formal characteristics.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, what Bedreddin offers seems to be that one should acknowledge the representational characteristics of worldly appearances and not take them literally. Such an aspect also affected the understanding of the ‘metaphors’ in the Quran, where notions of heaven and hell or of the apocalypse, for example, might be made clear for the simple-minded, and clarify what the *sharia* law is based on, in order to create fear in subjects and reward them for obedience.<sup>22</sup> To him such notions

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<sup>21</sup> See Seyh Bedreddin, *Varidat*, trans. By Cemil Yener, (Istanbul: Elif Yayınları, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> Here we can consider a distinction between Bedreddin and Tom Gunning’s reading of Augustine that mainly occurs in their different approaches to the idea of ‘sin’. When examining the roots of the cinema of attractions, Gunning mentions the term *curiositas* and its danger of implying distractions and sin for Augustine, while sin is also seen as a pedagogic notion by Bedreddin. See Tom Gunning, ‘An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator’, in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 114-133 (p. 124).

are merely pedagogic, hence functional but not truthful representations of a superior order of the world.<sup>23</sup>

For Bedreddin, even if each being may have appeared different, when considered all together they shared the same essence, since everything in the universe was in a harmonic unity. This seemingly complex relationship between the look and the 'truth' in both Sufism and its philosophical forerunner, the Neo Platonic paradigm, can be clarified in an examination of the visual perception of the 'self' and the 'other'. The subject as spectacle and the subject as spectator both cover a field that is beyond actual sight. Beyond human bodily perception is indeed the ontological or the metaphysical eye seeking ways to perceive the unity.

Sufism, as emphasized above, might be contradictory if one disregards its esoteric and exoteric interpretations. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, it becomes necessary to introduce some of the basic concepts regarding these different interpretations. The exoteric understanding of Islam (namely the *sharia*), by mystics such as Bedreddin, was revealed in the term *zahir*, which is one of the 99 holy names of God in the Quran and which refers to everything that is inevitably seen. Yet if one is merely obsessed with *zahirs* or the pure, basic appearances, one remains formalistic and cannot see the entire picture and thus remain at the level of surfaces; just like Plato's cave prisoners, who were satisfied with seeing the shadows (of the ideas) on the walls and did not dare to look at the source of the light. *Batın* (the esoteric), on the other hand, as another holy name of God, designates the unseen truth originating in the essence. Accordingly, a Sufi dervish dedicates him/herself to appreciating the beauty of the 'shadows' but also tries see their origin, just like the prisoners who need to break off their chains in the cave to see the world of ideas

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Cemal Kafadar in a documentary entitled *Simavnali Bedreddin: Inspirations* (Nurdan Arca, Turkey, 2006).

where the Being appears.<sup>24</sup> A dedicated Sufi, just like the former cave captive who escaped to the world of ideas, is able to see the wonders of the world that can hardly be seen by other human beings since the shadows blinded them. Such desire can be fulfilled by a constant state of world spectatorship.

### 3.2.2. Dreams as the Visual Projection of the Self

World spectatorship demanded a contemplative, wondrous and curious gaze that could be fulfilled by viewing art pieces, landscapes and the beloved both in waking and dreaming life. Therefore, dream interpretations, just as seeing in to the future through fortune-telling, may then be one of the epistemological methods to grasp the truth hidden beyond the appearances.<sup>25</sup> Hence, recording dreams and interpreting them can be a way of life for the dervish, which was indeed a common practice before the invention of mechanical reproductions in the nineteenth century. Moreover, dreams were closely associated with the Turkish shadow play which was also called *the dream curtain* or *the curtain of illusion*.

Keeping dream logs may not have been popular enough to establish its own literature, but the role of dream narratives and interpretations in Sufism is illustrated in the dream diary of a female dervish from mid-seventeenth century Skopje, who recorded her dreams in the form of letters to her sheikh and thus received guidance from him. At the end of her correspondence, we find that her eyes, that is, ‘the eye

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<sup>24</sup> However this ‘turning away’ does not necessarily include staying away from worldly pleasures as was the case for Christian monks. Indeed, it is known that many Sufi dervishes got married; enjoyed eating and drinking; attended dinner parties, post-dinner get-togethers; festivities, friendly walks, coffee parties, visits to shops and the like. See Cemal Kafadar, ‘Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in the Seventeenth-Century Istanbul and First Person Narratives in Ottoman Literature’, *Studia Islamica*, 69 (1989), 121-152 (p. 142).

<sup>25</sup> The dream interpretation here is not used as a Freudian term, but rather a metaphysical term. See Cemal Kafadar, ‘Muteredit Bir Mutasavvif: Uskup’lu Asiye Hatun’un Ruya Defteri 1641-43’, in *Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Yıllık 5* (Istanbul: Tayf Basım, 1992), 168-223 (pp. 180).

of her heart', were opened to see the face of God.<sup>26</sup> Dream interpretation was a method of 'seeing', not only for the dervishes but also for many other members of society who were, in varying degrees, steeped in and shaped by Sufi notions. Minstrels needed assistance through dreams to begin their careers; Asik Kurbani for example, a troubadour from Central Asia in the sixteenth century, saw the 'holy ones and the saints' who showed him the universe in a mirror and pulled the 'curtain' away from his eyes in his life-changing dream. Seeing the universe lying in his own body, Kurbani's eyes were opened and he began writing poetry and singing music.<sup>27</sup> The most well-known traveler through Ottoman lands, Evliya Çelebi (1611-1684), also started his career with a dream he had experienced as a young man yearning to see the world. In his dream, Evliya claimed to have met the prophet Muhammad who asked for Evliya's true wish; Evliya meant to say '*şefa'at*' ('intercession') but, owing to a slip of the tongue, he said '*seyahat*' ('traveling' but it also connotes 'seeing the world'). Naturally, Mohammed granted him his wish to travel around the world and record the wonders he would see, so his never-ending journey started.<sup>28</sup> Dream motifs were also inspiring for sultans; the beginning of the Ottoman polity was mythically initiated by a dream of Osman, the first Ottoman ruler (d.1324). In later and better-documented times, Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-1595) is known to have recorded his dreams for the interpretation of a sheikh, just like Asiye Hatun.<sup>29</sup> It should not be a coincidence therefore that the Turkish word *rüya* ('dream') indeed derives from the word *rey* ('to see' and 'to decide').

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 218.

<sup>27</sup> İlhan Başgöz, 'Dream Motif in Turkish Folk Stories and Shamanistic Initiation', *Asian Folklore Studies*, 26. 1 (1967), 1-18 (p. 1).

<sup>28</sup> See Seyid Ali Kahraman, 'Evliya Celebi Seyahatnamesinin Yazilis Hikayesi', in *Caginin Siradisi Yazari Evliya Celebi*, ed. Nuran Tezcan (Istanbul: YKY, 2008), 205 (pp. 203-216).

<sup>29</sup> Cemal Kafadar, 'Diary of a Dervish'.

One of the reasons for the significant role of dreams might be their organic relation to the self, or seeing into oneself, which is a very basic concern of Sufi metaphysics. Its motto of ‘one can only know God if one knows oneself’<sup>30</sup> can easily be applied to dreams that are projections of the self since all the other images one sees (physically) come from the outer world. Additionally, the same dream can mean and function in different ways for different subjects; yet its interpretation is a condition for how these dreams affect one’s destiny.<sup>31</sup> Dreams were also linked to cinema by Baudry<sup>32</sup> and were examined further by Richard Allen<sup>33</sup> on the illusionary characteristics of the apparatus. Allen claims that cinema can function for the unconscious in the same way as dreams; both of them may work in the identification with the specular image, like a baby, and reveal the desires and fantasies by recalling childhood memories.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand this analogy was well critiqued by Noël Carroll since it seems to dismiss the major differences between seeing a film and a dream.<sup>35</sup> Yet, such an analogy might still be useful for it makes evident how the visual is central to our psychic existence and how thoughts or perceptions can be transformed into subjective visual images.<sup>36</sup>

Wakefulness on the other hand was another religious practice, and it was called the *vigil*, and offers an alternative way of dreaming of God, or getting closer to God, through the self. It is believed that Şah Kirmani (circa 910) stayed awake for forty years and finally fell asleep in spite of his own will and dreamt of God, where he cried: ‘My God, I looked for you without any sleep, but saw you in my dream’.

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<sup>30</sup> On the notion of ‘knowing the self’ and self-annihilation in Sufism see Derin Terzioğlu ‘Man in the Image of God’, *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> Cemal Kafadar, ‘Muteredit Bir Mutasavvif’, p. 182.

<sup>32</sup> See Jean Louis Baudry, ‘Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus’, *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 286-298.

<sup>33</sup> See Richard Allen, *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 121-125.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> See Noël Carroll, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> For a further explanation on the use of dream interpretations see Silverman, p. 88.



God replied: ‘You found me with the help of those sleepless nights. Had you fallen asleep in those years, you would not see me’.<sup>37</sup> The Being, on the other hand appears to Sufi devotees in waking life too. Seyh Bedreddin claims to have seen the same person in different bodies because to him each body refers to the same being.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Yunus Emre (1240-1320) in his poems underlines the unity/uniformity of the reflections in the mirror: even if there were thousands of speculums, the reflections would be the same the reflection of the Being where both the good and evil are hidden.<sup>39</sup> Hence, the eye has a crucial role in the dervish’s unity with the universe, where one can become ‘the eye of the whole’, named *basir*; wherever s/he looks, s/he experiences the wonders of visual unity.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2.3. Illusions, Wonder and Realism

The Sufi way of world spectatorship therefore asks for a curious and perceptive gaze so as to look for ways to identify the wondrous nature of things. In this experience there is an ecstatic encounter within whereby one would lose the self and unite with the universe. In addition to these spiritual encounters, some more ‘secular’ feelings such as *hayret* (wonder) and *hayran* (wondrous) are also at play, which occur when the spectator is astonished by looking at a painting, a miniature, an architectural piece, a beautiful human being or nature itself as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Wonder as a feeling that implies amazement at an encounter or an experience also asks for an explanation or demythification/demystification. Tom Gunning sees this desire for thaumaturgic experience and its demystification as a

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<sup>37</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *İslamın Mistik Boyutları* (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınları, 2001), p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Seyh Bedreddin, *Varidat*, trans. Cemil Yener (İstanbul: Elif Yayınları, 1970), p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> *Marifet Yolunda 11 Levha*:

<http://sufizmveinsan.com/sohbet/marifetyolunda3.html> [accessed on 22 June 2007].

<sup>40</sup> Bedreddin, p. 86.

basis for cinematic spectatorship that can be found at the heart of magic lantern shows.<sup>41</sup> In addition to Gunning's emphasis on the demystification, Charles Musser and Don Slater also individually draw attention to the need for disenchantment or the revealing tricks of an illusion that comes with the feeling of wonder at the viewing of visual illusions.<sup>42</sup> The revealing of the magical effects offers a relief for the skeptical and 'incredulous' eye and facilitates the wondering spectator. Moreover, it helps the audience to be constantly aware of the act of watching which may form another criticism of Metz's application of the mirror stage to the identification with the cinematic apparatus. In the context of Sufi spectatorship that was based on visual wonders and curiosities offered by playfulness,<sup>43</sup> Sufis refused identification with a specular agency since in their view an artificial medium was incapable of reflecting reality as it is. On one hand, we might consider that it was perhaps more difficult to show the real as it was in the age of pre-cinema. On the other hand, as Gunning indicates for the later age, the early cinema period, the 'realist' effects can be alienating for the spectator: 'the more real such illusions were, the more their deficiencies were evident (the lack of sound or color, the disappearance of moving figures at the border of the screen). The more perfect the illusion, the more unreal and phantom-like such illusion seemed, reflecting back on the viewer's sense of her or his deluded perception as much as on the referent portrayed'.<sup>44</sup> As will be mentioned in the shadow play section, in Sufi ontology visual representations are

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<sup>41</sup> See Tom Gunning, '“Animated Pictures” Tales of the Cinema's Forgotten Future: After 100 Years of Film', in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, eds. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York, London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 100-115.

<sup>42</sup> See Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: the American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Don Slater, 'Photography and Modern Vision: The Spectacle of Natural Magic', in *Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 218-238.

<sup>43</sup> On a criticism of the apparatus theory for being a new form of Puritanism that 'set itself against the visual pleasure and playfulness offered by the cinematic illusion', see Tom Gunning, 'Phantasmagoria and the Manufacturing of Illusions and Wonder: Towards a Cultural Optics of the Cinematic Apparatus', in *The Cinema, A New Technology for the 20th Century*, eds. André Gaudreault, Catherine Russell and Pierre Veronneau (Lausanne: Payot, 2004), pp. 31-44.

<sup>44</sup> Gunning, 'Animated Pictures', p. 109.

never capable of showing the real world since there is always the intervention and limitations of a medium (i.e. the curtain in shadow play or the camera and screen in cinema). Hence we can claim the presence of an incredulous audience long before the invention of the cinematic apparatus who would not be fooled into mistaking the projected images for real.

### **3.2.4. Self Reflexivity**

In Sufism, it is repeatedly discussed that self-reflections might be more significant than mere reflections.<sup>45</sup> In order to emphasize this point, Rumi, who is probably the most well-known Sufi poet in the Western world and who lived in twelfth century Anatolia, tells the story of a painting competition between Chinese and Greek painters.<sup>46</sup> Being obsessed with reflecting the formal beauty of nature, the Chinese artists ambitiously painted colorful flowers on a wall; while the Greeks left an empty wall just opposite their counterpart's. Acting as a specular screen, the empty wall reflects the other wall and displays a more mesmerizing illustration for Rumi. Rumi's preference for the movie screen-like wall seems to demonstrate a strong inclination for self-reflexive art in the Platonic sense, where art is accepted as mimicry of the physical world, which itself is mimicry of the world of ideas. On the other hand, there is also an emphasis on the insightful and skeptical gaze of the pre-cinematic spectator who is aware of the illusionary characteristics of appearances, since, for such a gaze, it is almost impossible to mimic the world as it is. Visual texts/representations, just as in 'classical' narrative cinema, can be illusionary in their

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<sup>45</sup> Reflection in this sense refers to mimesis as the reflection and representation of nature and self – reflection as the acknowledgement of the mimesis.

<sup>46</sup> Mevlana, *Mesnevi*, trans. Veled Çelebi İzbudak (Istanbul: MEB, 1988), p. 370.

own rights; hence spectacles need to reveal that they recognize this nature of themselves, just as in the cinema of attractions or in the self-reflexive cinema.<sup>47</sup>

### 3.2.5. Looking and Love

Returning to the cave parable, where the subject is merely a spectator, one comes across a visual depiction of darkness in which prisoners could only watch shadows and miss the real spectacle by avoiding the main source of light.<sup>48</sup> If they turn their eyes to the sunlight, says Plato, they would be blinded initially, but then the real world would appear. An Iranian Sufi's celestial love experience cited by Henry Corbin seems to describe a similar experience to Silverman's reading of the cave prisoner's encounter with the sunlight:

When the circle of the face [of the lover's] has become pure, it effuses lights as a spring pours forth its water, so that the mystic has a sensory perception (i.e. through the supersensory senses) that these lights are gushing forth to irradiate his face. This outpouring takes place between the two eyes and between the two eyebrows. Finally it spreads to cover the whole face. At that moment, before you, before your face, there is another Face [of the beloved, the Being] also of light, irradiating lights; while behind its diaphanous veil a sun becomes visible, seemingly animated by a movement to and fro. In reality this Face is your own face and this sun is the sun of the Spirit that goes to and fro in your body. Next, the whole of your person is immersed in purity, and suddenly you are gazing at a person of light who is also irradiating lights. The mystic has the sensory perception of this irradiation of lights proceeding from the whole of his person. Often the veil falls and the total reality of the person is revealed, and then with the whole of your body you perceive the whole. The opening of the inner sight (*basira*, the visualization of light) begins in the eyes, then in the face, then in the chest, then in the entire body. This person of light before you is called in Sufi terminology the supersensory Guide.<sup>49</sup>

Having such an intense experience with the beloved, where the lover sees the light due to his powerful desire and hence his idealization, the lover becomes the

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<sup>47</sup> Yusuf Çetindağ, *Ayna Kitabı* (Çorum: Karam Araştırma ve Yayıncılık, 2005), p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> Cited by Susan Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 222.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1978), p. 85.

light and realizes that it is indeed his own reflection. This description, not surprisingly, may reveal similarities to the *Middle Dialogues*. In this dialogue, says Silverman, the exemplary cave spectator's journey to the Good would take him to the heavenly beauty that starts with viewing the beauty of an individual body: 'Then comes the beauty of all bodies, the beauty of the soul; the beauty of activities and laws; the beauty of every kind of knowledge; and finally that universal beauty which is synonymous with the Good.'<sup>50</sup> Silverman claims the central topic of these dialogues to be love and asserts that 'looking and loving are virtual synonyms in the *Symposium*.'<sup>51</sup> However, the lover as the spectacle is not an artificial representation of a human (that is projected by a machine) but rather it is the natural representation of the Being. Yet, if we make a quantum leap to the early twentieth century, in spite of the risk of being anachronistic, we can claim that a cinematic likeliness is engaged in the mystic's experience. This encounter can work in relation to stardom and fandom, where audiences would go to see and thereby 'become' their object of desire in particular films, follow and 'imitate' them through fan magazines particularly in the 1920s, at a time when the patriarchal intelligentsia was seriously concerned about the moral values of female fans in pursuit of 'frivolous' film stars.<sup>52</sup> This drive of losing the self in identification with the image of another in Turkish audiences certainly did not emerge - but possibly evolved - from Sufi mysticism. On the other hand, we can claim that world spectatorship has a lot to do with the idealized image of the spectacle and may seem to disregard the elements of 'repulsion' that cause thrills in the viewer of the cinema of attractions such as the Lumière pictures of bullfights, cockfights or an Edison production of the electrocuting of an elephant.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Silverman, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> On Turkish fandom see Chapter Six, pp. 230-233.

<sup>53</sup> On the feeling of repulsion and thrill in the cinema of attractions, see Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment', p. 124.

Pir Sultan Abdal, an esoteric mystic rebel and a saintly troubadour from the sixteenth century, in his poems talks of an idealized spectacle which does not necessarily involve identification. His *tevhid* poems, a certain form of Alevi-Sufi poetry in which the poet mentions the *unity* of the whole universe, exemplify a passionate world spectatorship:

Watch the moon and the sun  
The moon is Ali, the sun is Mohammad  
Recite the eighty thousand holy verses  
While the fish are yearning for the sea  
Whirling in the lake  
In the lake whirling  
Where their chests burn out of thirst  
The worlds descend into the spectacle  
There is spectacle in the spectacle<sup>54</sup>

In these lines the prophet Mohammad and his nephew Ali, who is considered to be the holiest person by many Sufis, generate a divine spectacle for the world spectator. The viewer-poet participates in the display by indicating that the whole world, naturally including himself, exhibits a spectacle within a larger spectacle. He describes spiral-like self-reflective and self-producing spectacles that are comprised of flames and a world whirling for the love of beings. What makes this spectacle more spectacular for the poet seems to be its constant self-reproduction. Since this world of appearances is considered to be the arena where the superior Being appears, the spectator needs to acknowledge its self-referential characteristics in order to appreciate their true beauty. Therefore, in the ‘traditional’ Ottoman visual delights such as the shadow play, *meddah* and *Orta Oyunu*, the showmen constantly interfered in the narration and reminded the audience of the illusionary nature of the shows. This was not a practice peculiar to Ottoman arts and entertainment as

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<sup>54</sup> *Türkü Sitesi*: <http://www.turkuler.com/sozler/turkusozeri.asp?nid=1636&harf=Tevhit> [accessed on 23 July 2007].

Gunning confirms: ‘the illusionistic arts of the nineteenth century cannily exploited their unbelievable nature, keeping a conscious focus on the fact that they were merely illusions’.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.2.6. The Look of the Other and Exotericism

So far, I have tried to outline ‘the gaze of the self’ and the mystical spectator; however I should also mention ‘the gaze of the other’, or how the believer was seen by the Other in Sufism. The appearances one sees in this world are called the *Surets*, which are the concrete features of beings, perceived by the senses. In the Sufi order, the universe is regarded as the *suret*, or the appearance, of the Being. However, it is noteworthy that such a perspective on the visibility of beings, belonged to an unorthodox or peripheral understanding of Islam, or to esoteric mysticism, despite the fact that Sufism was prevalent in society due to its widely known sympathetic acceptance of all types of beliefs. Sufism’s peripheral position was more concrete particularly in comparison to Islamic bureaucracy; since Islamic law, namely the *Sharia*, was the official understanding of the religion and, owing to the nature of laws, it was obsessed with formalities. Thus, *sharia* was exoteric; additionally those who remained in the *sharia* order and never went beyond it lacked a great inner sense of ‘insight’, particularly when considering the relationship between sight and insight.<sup>56</sup>

The absence of insight, as in the case of the exoteric understanding of Islam, results from the incapacity of one’s gaze through which one can see the wonders, as

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<sup>55</sup> Tom Gunning, ‘An Aesthetic of Astonishment’, p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> *Seeing and Hearing: Encyclopedia of the Qur’an: Brill Online*:  
[http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl/subscriber/uid=3277/entry?result\\_number=1&entry=q3\\_SIM-00379&search\\_text=sense+and+hearing#hit](http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl/subscriber/uid=3277/entry?result_number=1&entry=q3_SIM-00379&search_text=sense+and+hearing#hit)  
[accessed on 20 July 2007].

in the esoteric interpretations. A half-blinded gaze, on the other hand, is obsessed with being seen by others more than how it sees them. Therefore *Basir*, another attribution to God, which refers to the ‘all seeing’ or ‘the eye of the whole’,<sup>57</sup> begins to function as the source of fear that creates a constant need for the approval of a patronizing superior Being. If such a distinction between the subject as spectacle and subject as spectator is established, Bedreddin’s criticism of exoteric Islam’s approach on taking the verses of Quran literally (i.e. notions of heaven and hell) can be made clearer.

The ‘look of the other’ inherently helped the controlling gaze of organized religions and modern states. One of the derivations of the Ottoman Turkish word for look, namely *nazar*, might reiterate the close relationship between the gaze and hegemony. *Nazır*, ‘the beholder’, was also a type of security guard who was in charge of control (or the ‘controller’). Another derivative, *nezaret*, was used for ‘prison’. *Nokta-ı nazar*, on the other hand referred to ‘the intellectual power’ and to ‘the point of view’, moreover *nazariye* meant ‘the theory’. *Rey* which is now used to address the ‘vote’ or the ‘judgment’ originally had the meaning of seeing. Wakefulness also refers to ‘control’: the night watchman’s duties were supposed to direct absolute authority.<sup>58</sup> Darkness, as the space for the concealment of the truth (according to the Qur’an), supplies the power of the ability to see within, and this ability was owned by the State’s night watchmen.<sup>59</sup> Another notion of gaze was related to control, which was utilized by the informers/spies of Sultan Abdulhamid II in the age of early cinema. The concealed informers of Abdulhamid II watched and spied on the Young Turks and other threats to the State’s authority. Such concepts

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> *Darkness: Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an: Brill Online:*  
[http://www.pauyonline.brill.nl/subscriber/uid=3277/entry?entry=q3\\_SIM-00103](http://www.pauyonline.brill.nl/subscriber/uid=3277/entry?entry=q3_SIM-00103)  
 [accessed on 15 July 2007]

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



and etymological evaluations seem to reaffirm the relationship of power and the eye or the ideological surveillance mechanisms of the state.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, visual representations, as long as they exposed their illusionary characteristics and playful nature, continued to astonish dervishes like Rumi who were accustomed to seeing art pieces with a wondrous gaze. Therefore, we can assume that the cinema of attractions, as a self-representational visual delight, would leave a dervish or anyone who was influenced by Sufism, namely the majority of the Ottoman subjects, awed.

### 3.3. Shadow Play<sup>61</sup>

Turkish shadow play emerged in the Ottoman lands in the fourteenth century and was named *Karagöz* after its main character. It was influenced by Indian, ancient Greek and Byzantine theaters. The earliest shows were based more on movement and attraction than on the narratives, just as the cinema of attractions are preoccupied with showing scenes of big waves on the sea, a train arriving at the station or electrocuting an elephant rather than narrating dramatic stories. In the early *Karagöz* shows the elements of the proto-cinema of attractions included scenes such as ‘birds flying, wild animals fighting, singers performing, a ship struggling unsuccessfully

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<sup>60</sup> See Louis Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 127-187.

<http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/LPOE70ii.html>

[accessed on 10 June 2009]; Michel Foucault, ‘Panopticism’, in *The Nineteenth Century Visual Culture Reader*, eds. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 73-79.

<sup>61</sup> This section on shadow play is based on my published article, Canan Balan, ‘Transience, Absurdity, Dreams and Other Illusions: Turkish Shadow Play’, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 6.2 (2008), pp. 171-186.

with strong winds, a cat chasing mice, a stork eating a mouse, and finally a monster appearing and eating all the figures on the screen'.<sup>62</sup>

Turkish shadow play has not yet attracted scholarly attention to an appropriate degree, though several art historians such as Metin And and Cevdet Kudret published illustrative descriptions of the exhibition practices and a body of the texts of the plays. However, a historical research on its reception or an overall textual analysis has not yet been the focal point of inquiry, since the primary material available on Turkish shadow play appears to be few and far between. However, after a brief history of the shadow theater, this subsection will adopt the strategy of analysing the representational modes of viewing offered within the shadow play texts that are created under the influence of Sufi ontology and attempt to contextualize this popular art form by revealing its role in everyday life.

Istanbul in the late nineteenth century provided various picturesque alternatives for its pleasure seekers, such as panoramas, dioramas, carnivals, magic lantern shows and the like. Shadow play was perhaps the most popular among them as it targeted nearly all segments of society, the poor and the rich, the uneducated and the intelligentsia, the gypsies and the European tourists, peasants and dandies, Muslims and non-Muslims. The plays could take place in the Royal Palace, or in Ramadan evening gathering attractions; however the most common arenas were the coffee houses. The variety of venues and its popularity does not necessarily indicate that *Karagöz* was ideologically moderate; indeed it had anarchist concerns just as their venues may suggest.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the shows themselves had satiric

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<sup>62</sup> Dario Mizrahi, 'Diversity and Comedy in Ottoman Istanbul: The Turkish Shadow Performances' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 1991), p. 50.

<sup>63</sup> For the role of coffee houses in the political transformation of the public sphere see Chapter Two, pp. 54-57.

characteristics, both in terms of sexuality and politics.<sup>64</sup> In particular, liberated sexual attitudes played a significant role in the humor. This however, might have stemmed from the performances' limited availability for women, who could not enter the coffee houses, and could see the shows only at private performances.

Projected onto a flat screen, the shadow theater in the Turkish speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire was most commonly known as *Karagöz*. The flickering images were created in the middle of a dark curtain with a smaller rectangular aperture covered with white cotton cloth and lit from behind. The puppets were made of extremely thin leather pieces: 'The leather was then perforated, so that the picture projected on the screen was not a uniform black shadow, but rather a cartoon-like image in full colour. The puppeteer manipulated the puppets by means of long sticks, which he hid by placing them at a direct angle to the source of light. He also played all the roles in the play, frequently as many as twenty, and usually sang songs as well.'<sup>65</sup> The show is based mainly on the dialogues of the 'uneducated' Karagöz as a stereotypical Romani and his relatively intellectual friend of no explicit ethnic background, named Hacivat. Karagöz has numerous jobs from which he is regularly dismissed, while Hacivat works as an estate agent and vainly tries to encourage Karagöz to develop intellectual skills.<sup>66</sup> The dialogues between the two are based on misunderstandings, Karagöz usually responds irrelevantly or to some extent absurdly to Hacivat's sophisticated language.

If not dominating wives or witches, the female characters are generally frivolous and seductive. One of the secondary characters is the 'Çelebi', the dandy who is ridiculed for his never ending affairs. Çelebi, unlike Karagöz and Hacivat, is

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<sup>64</sup> For some of the texts of the play see Cevdet Kudret, *Karagöz* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayınları, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> Droor Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2006), p. 217.

<sup>66</sup> Kudret, p. 263.

dressed in European fashions that connotes his higher income, whereas Tiryaki, the opium addict, with his habit of falling asleep in the middle of conversations, snores loudly, and is 'inclined to make mountains out of molehills'.<sup>67</sup> Acting as the *Deus ex machina*, Tuzsuz Deli Bekir, 'the drunkard', represents the authority who often fails to keep public order as he is always inebriated and in close contact with fallen women in the neighbourhood. He sways to and fro as a sign of his relation to alcohol and is extremely proud of having murdered several people including his own children and family. The other characters of the show are commonly the ethnic stereotypes of the inhabitants of a traditional Istanbul street. The naïve woodcutter called Turk is the country bumpkin and who talks about his girlfriend in his village while the Laz, who is a sailor from the Black Sea region, dances *horon*. The Kurd is a night watchman, while the Rumelili, an immigrant from the Balkans, is a wrestler; the Persian is a cloth trader and a poetry expert, while the Arab is a traveller or a beggar. The Albanian is a peddler singing songs about vegetables, the Greek is a tailor or a tavern keeper, while the Armenian plays a Turkish lute, and finally the Jew is a second hand dealer or a money lender.<sup>68</sup> As the shadow theater also had metaphysical concerns and is keen on accentuating its fantasy world, the supernatural characters were therefore not neglected. The jinn, the evil spirits and witches all find a place for themselves in the plays.

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<sup>67</sup> Metin And, *Karagöz: Turkish Shadow Play* (Istanbul: Dost Yayınları, 2005), p. 71.

<sup>68</sup> And, pp. 73-75.

### 3.3.1. The Metaphysical Eye on the *Dream Curtain*

Formed by the shadow reflection of the puppets behind a lit screen, unlike cinema, images of the shadow play were mirrored in front of the audience. This arrangement may bring to mind Metz' speculation on the spectator's primary identification with the projection, yet this theory can hardly be applied to *Karagöz* since it has different projection mechanisms, where the source of light is not behind the audiences but behind the characters. However, such a distinction does not seem to account for the lack of identification in the shadow play as there are stronger factors to alienate the audience from the characters. The prologue of the plays, named the curtain poem, with its Sufi references presents a Neo-Platonic understanding of the *shadowy* mimesis and is thereby a reminder of the cave parable. *Karagöz* was allegedly created by a Sufi Sheikh named Kusteri in the fourteenth century and the plays were imbued with Sufi (particularly *Alevi/Bektasi*) thought. The curtain upon which the images were projected is called *Hayal Perdesi* (indicating both 'the Curtain of Dreams' and 'the Curtain of Illusions') and the images are called *Gölgeler* ('Shadows'), as another allegory reminiscent of the Platonic cave. The curtain poems, under Sufi inspiration, referred to the 'source of creation as one God, that the Creator is manifest through and is one with his creations, and that everything is a shadow of the real thing.'<sup>69</sup> Sufism emerges as a significant school of thought to elaborate on as it seemingly determined the viewing modes of the shadow play. Shadow play, particularly in the curtain poems, constantly reminded the audience of its own limitations by showing the truth as it is. The lines of Hafez, one of the most well known Persian Sufi poets from the late fourteenth

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<sup>69</sup> Mizrahi, p. 95.

century, although not written for the shadow play, seem to confirm the basic concern of the shadow play and its role in visual enlightenment and tells the reader/audience:

I am just a shadow  
I wish I could show you  
The Infinite Incandescence  
That has cast my brilliant image!<sup>70</sup>

The Sufi ontology on the illusionary characteristics of the world is materialized in curtain poems, as follows:

What is visible is the curtain  
But the aim is to apprehend what truly is behind it  
Do not confide in the world  
As it is nothing but shadow and dream<sup>71</sup>

These verses demand an insightful kind of spectatorship, where a Brechtian type audience will not fall into the traps of passive pleasure offered by the Aristotelian narrative. Nevertheless, the lines of action in the plays appear far more materialistic in the sense that they deal mainly with the everyday adventures of Karagöz and Hacivat. However, it is not only the curtain poem but also the interludes that ‘encouraged awareness of the here – and - now of the theater’.<sup>72</sup> The interludes usually occur after an introductory dialogue between Karagöz and Hacivat. Irritated by Hacivat’s refined words, Karagöz ‘the ruffian’ tells Hacivat off and says: ‘I will now go to watch the carnival, the fairground and the beautiful women. Let’s see what the mirror of time will show’.<sup>73</sup> With these words, spectatorship is placed within the text itself again, and indeed refers to the basis of the cinema of attractions, the carnivals and the fairground. Moreover, Karagöz himself frequently plays the

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<sup>70</sup> Hafez Siraz, *I Heard God Laughing: Poems of Hope and Joy*, Trans. Daniel Ladinsky (New York, Toronto, London: Penguin, 2006), p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Kudret, p. 263.

<sup>72</sup> See Mizrahi, abstract.

<sup>73</sup> Kudret, p. 52.

spectator, where he appears to be a *voyeur*, particularly in the love scenes between the frivolous woman and the dandy. In some plays, Karagöz, from his window, listens to the young couple discussing their relationship in the garden and interferes in the dialogues, but, rather awkwardly, he never receives any response. By distortedly repeating what the lovers say, or commenting on their attitude towards each other, Karagöz poses as a humorous interlocutor for the audience. In these scenes, he seems to direct his speech towards the audience without, however, any immediate contact. Such active witnessing might posit him both as narrator and spectator. This voyeuristic position was perhaps strengthened by the medium's limits, where the puppets could appear on screen only in profile without the perspective of a three dimensional space. In the same scene, three characters could hardly face each other and when they converse with one another, for example, they cannot walk past each other or turn around.<sup>74</sup>

What may also be seen as cinematic, or rather early cinematic in *Karagöz* is the magical type of visual attractions similar to the trick films of Georges Méliès. If Karagöz annoys the witches they turn him into an animal or in some scenes 'a snake eats his donkey's head after which Karagöz experiments with the possible uses of a headless donkey'.<sup>75</sup> One main purpose of these attractions can be understood in the understanding of boredom as formulated by Lars Swendsen and mentioned in the introductory chapter. Swendsen considers boredom to be an ontological problem that connotes the loss of meaning.<sup>76</sup> Therefore entertainment appears as a way of searching for meanings through the creation of new meanings. Karagöz, who always begins the shows with a call for entertainment (with the lines: 'Yar bana bir eglence medet' literally translated as 'dear companion provide me some entertainment') and

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<sup>74</sup> See Mizrahi, p. 81

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Lars Swendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 1999), p. 19.

is preoccupied with giving objects new meanings (by using his own leg as a binocular or by using a needle as a fishing hook) may be similar to Eisenstein's montage of attractions where he underscored the role of the original meanings of the objects and attributing new metaphorical meanings to them.<sup>77</sup> Karagöz's replacements of meanings may not seem metaphoric but metonymic; however, both of the new attributions still provide a common ground between shadow play and the cinema of attractions; drawing attention to the spectacle by changing the meanings of objects.

### 3.3.2. The Dreamers/Spectators

However difficult it is to talk of the actual spectators of the shadow play due to the paucity of historical information, it is necessary to historicize this kind of spectatorship as much as possible, particularly in the context of the early twentieth century when the new medium of film was making its way into the world of entertainment for the people of Istanbul. An historian's reconstruction of the diary of an Istanbulite middle class dandy, called Said Bey, constitutes a crucial source of understanding the role of shadow play in everyday life. Paul Dumout's Said Bey recorded in his diary his leisure time activities day by day in the years between 1901 and 1909.

According to this diary, in one single week Said Bey attends *Karagöz* shows twice; whereas he goes to a *meyhane* (a traditional beer hall) three times and to other shows only once.<sup>78</sup> In his other records he also mentions the *Orta Oyunu* (an

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<sup>77</sup> See Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 45-57.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Dumont, 'Said Bey, The Everyday Life of an Istanbul Townsman at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century', in *The Modern Middle East*, eds. Albert Hürani, Philip Khoury, Mary Wilson (Berkeley: University of California, 2004), pp. 276-277.



improvisational theater show which might resemble *commedia dell'arte* stage), opera, balls and Western style theaters. Yet, *Karagöz* shows remain his favorite pastime. In the same diary, as a curious husband, he notes his wife's leisure time activities as well; she devoted much less time to *Karagöz* than her husband but she, too, watched it on occasion.

Another female spectator of *Karagöz* appears to be the protagonist of a feminist novel written in the early 1930s with a setting in the late nineteenth century. Rabia of *Sinekli Bakkal*, is much more liberated than her counterparts in the other novels of the period.<sup>79</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the female characters of other popular novelists were represented in the public spaces merely as passive consumers strolling around the window shops or as objects of desire, whereas written by Halide Edip, the heroine of *Sinekli Bakkal* refuses to be seen as an object of desire, and is known for her musical skills. The underlying reason for Rabia's self-esteem and her upfront attitude in public might be explained by her spectatorship habits. Indeed, her father is a shadow puppeteer who runs a coffee house and who gets into trouble because of the satire of his shows. Raised by a visual artist, Rabia intently observes people throughout the novel and expresses her observations unhesitatingly. In other words, she boldly claims her gaze and does not shy away from seeing and claiming what she sees, or of being seen herself outside traditional gender roles. It would be a bit too naïve to idealize *Karagöz* by accentuating its emancipating role for women. Yet, it can be stated that to an extent *Karagöz* had liberating elements, such as its critical approach to political affairs, its sexually charged jokes, albeit from a male point of view, and its castrating female characters, even if they are witches.

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<sup>79</sup> See Halide Edip Adivar, *Sinekli Bakkal* (Istanbul: Atlas Kitabevi, 1990).

The audience, both male and female, had active roles in the plays. In case they did not like the finale, the puppeteer could change it accordingly. Indeed in some cases the audience had a determining factor even in the plots. According to the memoirs of a professor at the turn of the century, a regular frequenter of the show, Kara Davut Efendi, liked Karagöz to be a card player. In his memoirs, Osman Cemal Kaygılı states that the regular customers of this particular puppeteer (Hayali Kucuk Ali) were mainly composed of the middle or even lower middle classes; such as a soldier, a projectionist, a carpenter and a typesetter.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.3.3. *Karagöz and Other Attractions*

*Karagöz* was already seen as a precursor of cinema in the silent cinema period. In his article entitled ‘Who Did Invent Cinema?’ in 1923, Vedat Örf claims that it was various artistic traditions that led to the invention of the cinematograph.<sup>81</sup> Valorizing the tradition nationalistically, he declares that the oldest cinematic apparatus was the shadow play. An intellectual and writer of the mid-twentieth century, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar also talks of the precursors of cinema.<sup>82</sup> In his view, modern novels with their narratives jumping from one passage to another affected cinema in terms of editing and thus they could be counted as pre-cinematic.<sup>83</sup> Yet, to him the most crucial factor were dreams: in our dreams he says ‘we can see a tree which then would turn into our father’. *Karagöz* with its ‘screen of dreams’ was a cinematic alternative offered to the Ottoman spectators.

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<sup>80</sup> Osman Cemil Kaygılı, *Köşe Bucak İstanbul* (İstanbul: Selis Kitaplar, 2004), pp. 65-66.

<sup>81</sup> Vedat Örf, *Sinema Postası*, December 1923, p. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Dersleri* (İstanbul: YKY 2004), pp. 47-49.

<sup>83</sup> For a detailed explanation on how novels affected the cinema, particularly in the influence of Charles Dickens on D.W. Griffith, see Grahame Smith, *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* (Manchester, New York, Manchester University Press, 2003).

From a contemporary point of view *Karagöz* is now regarded as one of the main inspirations for Turkish cinema. The anti-mimetic representational style of the shadow play, according to Nezih Erdoğan, played a crucial role in the Turkish cinematic tradition.<sup>84</sup> As the shadow play did not have realistic concerns, in the texts *Karagöz* could use his knee as a binocular or as a shovel, for example. Thereby under this influence, Turkish cinema of the 1960s<sup>85</sup>, rather than creating a hyper-realistic sword just as in Hollywood movies, showed wooden swords in a futuristic war scene. Not obsessed with being mimetic, Turkish cinema chose a representational narrative style, which was partly inherited from *Karagöz*.<sup>86</sup>

It seems debatable, however, whether the shadow play should really be understood as a precursor of cinema. Indeed, *Karagöz* itself offers a different point of view on its relation to cinema, as *Karagöz* goes to a cinematograph show within one of the surviving texts. That particular show, not only through the lines of action but also through its curtain poem, is significant in helping us grasp the spectatorship culture and possibly even the cinematic culture of its time. The poem can be paraphrased as follows:

The beauty on the screen consists of the symbols of God's creation. The true screen is nothing but God's infinite reign. There are possibilities to watch inner beauty in the appearances; the curtain watched by the eye of the heart is no obstacle to an understanding eye. True ability is to examine the world that is merely a dream; this curtain of outward appearances ruined many black eyes [*Karagöz* means literally 'black eyed']. What is burnt by the

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<sup>84</sup> See Nezih Erdoğan, 'Violent Images, Hybridity and Excess in the Man Who Saved the World', in *Mediated Identities*, eds. Karen Ross, Deniz Derman and Nevena Dakovic (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2001), pp. 115-131.

<sup>85</sup> This time lapse occurred mainly because of the scarcity of research covering Turkish cinema's characteristics in earlier periods. However, we can observe a similar style in the earlier periods, as in the silent comedic series of a character, named Bican Efendi, resembling *Karagöz*, see *Bican Efendi Vekilharç/Bican Efendi, The Steward* (Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu, Turkey, 1921); *Bican Efendi Tebdili Havada/Bican Efendi, The Cautious* (Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu, Turkey, 1917); *Bican Efendi Yeni Zengin/Bican Efendi, The New Richman* (Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu, Turkey, 1918); *Bican Efendi Para Peşinde/Bican Efendi, Seeking Money* (Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu, Turkey, 1918); *Bican Efendi Mektep Hocası/Bican Efendi, The Teacher* (Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu, Turkey, 1921); and *Bican Efendi'nin Rüyası/The Dream of Bican Efendi* (Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu, Turkey, 1921).

<sup>86</sup> See Erdoğan, pp. 115-131.

candle of love is the representation of your body. This world is temporary; it also renders human beings temporary and mortal. Is there any shadow that does not disappear when you take refuge in it? You should see the master who set the curtain of conversations; you Kemteri [the pen-name of the *Karagöz* master who wrote this particular curtain poem], be true in the Bektasi way. Unity reveals itself when the curtain of plurality disappears.<sup>87</sup>

The mortality of the world that is marked by a preoccupation with appearances for the misguided may lead human beings, even maybe *Karagöz*, to despair; what is more important is to be able to see the essence behind these appearances. That essence unites the multiple in the one. It seems significant for *Karagöz* that these appearances, the physical world of things, are temporary as this understanding actually leads him to a world of absurdity. Such absurd elements, as elaborated in the texts, may be better understood in terms of ontological notions, shaped by Sufism again, that govern the plays. The idea of the mortality of human beings and of the world stage is constantly emphasized in curtain poems, which in the texts' main body reveals itself through absurdity and randomness. The infinite transformability of things, the constant change and metamorphoses on the screen may be a caricature of the flow of the 'real world'. *Karagöz* is not bothered to look for an ultimate meaning in all these; he even makes fun of those who take them all seriously, such as classical narrative cinema perhaps does. The role he offers us, the spectators, is one filled with the awareness that we are only the spectators both of the world stage and the shadow stage.

After this poem, the play opens with a scene where *Karagöz* encounters and converses with his own self. *Karagöz I* is shown as if he is confronting his image in the mirror and asks *Karagöz II* who he is; yet, instead of replying, *Karagöz II* more interestingly repeats what the first *Karagöz* has asked. Then the two *Karagözes* start an argument after each of them claim that *he* is the true *Karagöz*. Each line of one

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<sup>87</sup> Cited in Cevdet Kudret, p. 125

Karagöz is repeated, or echoed, by the other. After this pattern is allowed to repeat itself for a while, they call Hacivat and let him decide who the real Karagöz is. Duality leads to unity, but there is no philosophizing about it in the dialogue, Karagöz faces the dilemma as a practical problem. When it all ends, he simply utters ‘what damn nuisance!’

After getting rid of the nuisance created by his doppelgänger, perhaps inspired by an encounter with the new medium of representation, Karagöz tells Hacivat about his experience at the cinematograph show, which can also be thought as an allegory of the Platonic cave. He says he went to save people from a fire in a dark hall. Since he could not see around clearly in the darkness, he continued, he fell down the stairs and was beaten up by the ‘decent audience’ on account of the noise he made. In the end, it turned out that the fire was only on the screen. From the sarcastic way Karagöz tells the story, it is not clear whether he ridicules himself or the so-called realistic effects of cinema in the play:

‘When I tell you this, you will go mad,’ Karagöz says. ‘In this building I arrived at, I began to walk, swaying to and fro. No matter how far I went, the same things happened. Someone called out: “Hey, bearded guy, come here.” I looked around. All around me there were these red and blue, showily dressed *matmezeller* (‘mademoiselles’), eighty or ninety years old, tugging and trying to seduce me.’ After getting lost in the giant whorehouse, finally he finds his way out and immediately tumbles upon an almost identical institution: ‘Suddenly, I’ll be damned, all these madamlar [madams], müsyüler [monsieurs], matmazeller [mademoiselles], efendiler [sirs], beyler [gentlemen], agalar [patrons], dandies, bums and hooligans. The whole nation is there... all buying tickets. I am not sure, is it called a “sinematograf” or a “minagotoraf”?’ ...<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See Ze’evi.

### 3.4. *Orta Oyunu*

*Orta Oyunu* can be translated into English verbatim ‘the play in the middle’ and refers to an indigenous style of live theater in the Ottoman Empire. There is controversy over the time of its emergence as a popular entertainment as historians did not come to a conclusion due to the lack of primary sources. Mehmet Fuat Koprulu, considers that it was mentioned by the famous Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi in his journal written in the eighteenth century; whereas Metin And finds the roots and influence in the Byzantine theater and dates its emergence in the fourteenth century. On the other hand, some foreign historians such as Turetski Teatr and Adolpho Talasso accept its beginning in the 1790s.<sup>89</sup> One of the primary inspirations for the play is *Karagöz* since many *Orta Oyunu* texts were adopted from the shadow play (but performed by real actors).<sup>90</sup> The parallels with *Karagöz* may also be observed in the play’s structures as both shows were largely based on dialogues of two streetwise characters, named this time Pisekar and Kavuklu, with their endless arguments, verbal jokes and adventures, perhaps similar to the famous characters of late silent cinema Laurel and Hardy or to the funny arguments of two characters that are not necessarily adults or humans such as in Lumière films *Childish Quarrel* (1895), *Cockfight* (1896) and *Lion: London Zoological Garden* (1896). Another influence on *Orta Oyunu* seems to be the Romani language.<sup>91</sup> This might be explained by the main influence of ethnicity in the show; the main character of the

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<sup>89</sup> Cited in Nihal Turkmen, ‘Orta Oyununun Eksikligi’, in *Orta Oyunu Kitabı*, ed. Abdulkadir Emeksiz (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2001), 3-11 (p. 4).

<sup>90</sup> Perhaps as a common practice in the entertainment and artistic business before the prevalence of copyright protections, early filmmakers also freely borrowed subjects from each other.

<sup>91</sup> Metin And, *History of Theater and Popular Entertainment in Turkey* (Ankara, Forum Yayınları, 1996), p. 40

shadow play, Karagöz, is a stereotypical Gypsy. However difficult it is to provide a historically accurate account for the gypsy impact on indigenous Turkish spectacles; it seems that the general anarchic, vagabond-like and ‘entertaining’ attributes of the Romani people might have been at its origins. Just as with Charlie Chaplin’s anarchist, homeless but funny tramp, Karagöz and the main *Orta Oyunu* characters’ accents proved them to be outsiders who are brought closer to society through the spectacles.

The *Orta Oyunu* venues might have been changed seasonally: in the summer the shows were performed in open air, on roofs, terraces or public parks, and in winter they took place in different taverns, inns or theaters.<sup>92</sup> In an *Orta Oyunu* show the performers were surrounded by the audience in a circle. There was no theatrical fourth wall, like a circus ring (a venue for early films as well) and unlike a conventional theater. Such an arrangement of (non-)staging may bring to mind the lack of the ‘aura’ as the actors seemed to be in close contact with the audience both physically and textually (as the actors throughout the play address the audience directly). Such absence of the aura or sublimation in *Orta Oyunu* (as seen in high brow art for example) does not only stem from the non-existence of a mechanical agency and a deliberate refusal to use props, but also from its spontaneity, which strengthens the invitation of a participatory audience. The whole décor of the *Orta Oyunu* was composed of two chairs and one simple wooden construction that might function in the audience’s imagination as the narrative space.<sup>93</sup> The modest use of such décor was self-referentially mentioned in one of the plays in the age of early cinema, with a striking comparison to Vsevolod Meyerhold’s constructivist and non-illusionary style of non-bourgeois theater. After a criticism of the décor by Pisekar,

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Cevdet Kudret, ‘Orta Oyununun Yeri ve Bölümleri’, in *Orta Oyunu Kitabı*, ed. Abdulkadir Emeksiz (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2001), 25-34 (p. 25).

Kavuklu responds: ‘Well, if this décor was in the hands of the famous Russian director Meyerhold, he would display a nine act play with it.’<sup>94</sup> This reproach of Kavuklu seems to have targeted the appreciation of foreign arts at the time of Westernization (along with the constant communal self-criticism of the Ottomans for the ‘lacks’ of their own culture), since to him the non-illusionary nature of *Orta Oyunu* had been practiced for centuries in Ottoman lands, yet it was not valorized by the art critics or lost the center of both public and intellectual attention that was now focusing on a very similar notion of spectacles imported from a foreign culture. Such lines of Kavuklu, can be read as a reproach to the audience: ‘You would prefer the same thing to me just because it has a foreign origin.’

The structures of the texts may seem to contain discontinuities and inconsistencies to a classical narrative cinema viewer. The texts include four parts that are non-chronologically connected as the lines of action in each act do not lead to a climax or a conclusion in causality either. The prologue always begins with the main character Kavuklu, who introduces the title of the play and bows to the audience. A basic function of these sections was to introduce the actors, just as in the credits of a moving picture. The prologues, just like the décor and props, had a self-reflexive nature, as in his traditional introductory monologue, Kavuklu refers to his own role in the spectacle: ‘I am an imitator and will make you watch my play in a harmony’.<sup>95</sup> In the introduction part, the second character Pisekar usually appears as a stranger and initiates an argument with Kavuklu which results in their mutual recognition of each other, where the characters realize that they indeed know each other in the past. Such recognition was thought to introduce the characters and

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<sup>94</sup> Examples from the texts, *Orta Oyunu Kitabı* (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2001), p. 299.

<sup>95</sup> Burhan Felek, ‘Orta Oyunu Nasıl Oynanır’, in *Orta Oyunu Kitabı*, ed. Abdulkadir Emeksiz (Istanbul, Kitabevi Yayınları, 2001), 39-46 (p. 43).



helped the audience to get to know them.<sup>96</sup> It may be similar to an episodic structure, where in a peculiar way, the two main protagonists knew each other from their previous adventures in the shows. Yet in a strange way, they initially do not remember their past relationship, perhaps to indicate that each show is independent and not tightly connected to the former.

The introductory argument and recognition were typically followed by the *tekerleme* ('the tongue twister') where Kavuklu narrates some of the extraordinary experiences he has recently had in an absurd manner, where there is no relationship of cause and affect. In one of the *tekerlemes*, for example, Kavuklu goes to a traditional open air market to shop when a huge storm takes place; scared by the storm Kavuklu hugs the tent of a soap maker. Yet, the tent does not prevent him from flying away; blown by the wind he falls into a giant cabbage in the market. The storm in the meantime passes, but the greengrocer sells the cabbage with Kavuklu in it. A cook buys the cabbage and boils it, with Kavuklu still hidden inside, and eventually it is revealed that the whole adventure was indeed only a dream that Kavuklu experiences.<sup>97</sup> *Tekerlemes* were mainly composed of Kavuklu's dreams, yet Kavuklu would never reveal this until the end. The extensive uses of dreams in Turkish visual delights may also bring to mind surrealism.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Pisekar, who listens to these absurd adventures, seriously asks enthusiastic questions about the incidents in order to generate excitement in the audience. Pisekar's questions could lead to arguments in the audience during the course of the shows where the spectators were allowed to intervene and change the plots.<sup>99</sup> We cannot claim that Kavuklu and Pisekar were trying to convince the audience of the reality of an

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<sup>96</sup> Metin And, p. 41.

<sup>97</sup> Burhan Felek, p. 46.

<sup>98</sup> This analogy does not refer to Surrealism as an artistic movement but surrealism as a philosophical and an anti-aesthetic attitude that makes use of dreams as part of the spectacles.

<sup>99</sup> Felek, p. 48.

illusion, since they deliberately appeared to distance the audience from the illusion while still pretending to be absorbed by their own adventures in order to initiate a riveting effect in the storyline. *Orta Oyunu* also seems to exploit repetitions which carry the risk of boring or tiring the audience, but which can also introduce an element of humor. Repetitions can be seen in jokes and stimulate laughter along with enthusiasm particularly if they include randomness, surprises and fantasy as in the dreams of Kavuklu. The dream sequences with these elements appear to be one of the major attractions and reveal similarities with early cinema. Both of them explicitly underline the representative and illusionary characteristics of their own nature, yet the audience would be provoked by curiosity and enthusiasm due, not to the explicit relationship between cause and effect that is narrated in an illusionary manner (as in classical narrative cinema), but due to the unexpected discourse of the storyline. Another resemblance to the cinema of attractions can be identified in the way the characters constantly disguise themselves just as in *Karagöz* or an early trick film. Kavuklu may suddenly turn into a donkey, a frog, a corpse or even a gravestone.<sup>100</sup> Such a disguise was undoubtedly utilized to provide humor, yet it would not be incorrect to assume that it also provoked a similar type of surprise that can be seen in the temporality of the cinema of attractions where the audience is provoked by the idea of ‘now you see it, now you don’t’.<sup>101</sup>

Returning to narrative structures: in the second act Kavuklu usually looks for a job, an affair or a house to buy and in the epilogue, he proclaims the end of the play, apologizes for any mistakes he might have made in his mimicry and announces the title and the place of the next show, bows to the audience and leaves the stage

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<sup>100</sup> Metin And, p. 42

<sup>101</sup> On the tricks about the ‘irrational’ use of time in the cinema of attractions see Tom Gunning, “‘Now You See It, Now You Don’t’: The Temporality of Cinema of Attractions’, *Velvet Light Trap*, 32 (Fall 1993), pp. 3-12.

with music.<sup>102</sup> Due to the non-narrative structures of the plays, the characters were represented with no psychological depth. Male actors played all the female roles, which may add to the non-illusionary style, perhaps this time occurring accidentally due to these limitations and restrictions. The ‘alienation effect’, if this can be applied to the *Orta Oyunu* context, were various. Kavuklu, out of the blue, could start talking about current affairs in the city or about other types of recent news items. As the show develops with the adventures of Kavuklu, Pisekar could start making comments on the storyline, not in a way to show that this accumulation of incidents involve him as a character in the play, but in a way to show that they are arranged to entertain the audience. In addition to this acting style, the way the characters use the stage highlights a non-illusionary style: when the two characters move from one scene to another, or travel from one location to another, they would draw a circle by walking around a narrow empty space in the middle of the audiences. When they stopped where they had started walking, it would mean that they had reached the destination of their journey.<sup>103</sup>

*Orta Oyunu*, just like the shadow play, may be described as ‘politically incorrect’ as one of the humoristic elements was ridiculing ethnic stereotypes, hunchbacks, dwarfs or women. Women are, again as in the shadow plays, quarrelsome and always keen on gossip and scandal.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, it should also be noted that nearly all the characters were ridiculed and none of them represented as heroic including the two protagonists.

The male and the female audiences of *Orta Oyunu* were seated separately and were composed mainly of young people. As told by a witness from the late nineteenth century the only privileged male audience members in the ladies’ section

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<sup>102</sup> Cevdet Kudret, ‘Orta Oyununun Yeri ve Bolumleri’, in *Orta Oyunu Kitabı*, ed. Abdulkadir Emeksiz (İstanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2001), 25-34 (p. 34).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> And, p. 45

were the sweet or nut sellers who occasionally brought the ladies billet-doux from the male audience. Yet, there were, supposedly, no class segregation: from pashas to cooks, from carriage drivers to curious old gentlemen, spectators would be mingled with different social classes.<sup>105</sup> There seems to be similarities between the *Orta Oyunu* and early cinema as elaborated above, however it is unknown if Kavuklu ever went to a cinematograph show as Karagöz did. It is still noteworthy, however, that in one of the play texts Kavuklu becomes a photographer.

### 3.5. Meddah

The emergence of *Meddah* shows, which are one-man shows, dates largely from the fourteenth century.<sup>106</sup> *Meddah* was a storyteller who narrated various heroic, religious or fairytale stories by imitating different characters. *Meddahs* performed such stories by imitating diverse accents or dialects with simple tools like a stick and a napkin used for various purposes. The sticks were utilized to make different sounds such as knocks on the doors, men in fights, or the walk of an old woman.<sup>107</sup> The napkins could be used as a veil for mimicking a lady or for depicting a sad situation when the character cries. Accordingly, and obviously, such props were used to draw the audience into the story. *Meddahs* created illusion and the feeling of wonder through the help of sudden disguises, through mimicry and by impersonating other people's voices, dialects and gestures. *Meddahs'* skills of mimicking different personalities were so powerful that it is even said that in the

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<sup>105</sup> Ercument Ekrem Talu, 'Orta Oyunu', in *Orta Oyunu Kitabı*, ed. Abdulkadir Emeksiz (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2001), pp. 218-221.

<sup>106</sup> Ozdemir Nutku, 'XIV. Yuzyildan Bu Yana Buldugumuz Meddahlar', in *Meddah Kitabı*, ed. Unver Oral (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2003), 100-106 (p. 100).

<sup>107</sup> Ref'i Cevat Ulunay, 'Ramazan ve Eski Meddahlar', in *Ramazan Kitabı*, ed. Ozlem Olgun (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2000), 224-227 (p. 224).

seventeenth century when a *meddah* was narrating adventures of two characters in constant arguments, the audience divided and started quarrelling as each group took the side of one of the two different characters.<sup>108</sup> Similar to the *Transformation by Hats* (1895) by the Lumière Brothers, *meddah* shows offered the sudden transformation of one actor to keep the audience's attention, with one theatrical difference (*meddahs* would often directly speak to the audience).

*Meddah* stories, unlike *Orta Oyunu* and *Karagöz*, were based on strong lines of action rather than a collage of various short stories or amusing dialogues. However, such characteristics may not be entirely sufficient to indicate that there was spectator identification. The lack of identification may be accounted for by the *meddahs*' storytelling style. During the shows they occasionally stopped the line of action; on one occasion they could relate the recipe of some good dish they had recently tasted; on another they could mention the benefits of waking up early or sometimes they would talk about the new fashions in the city.<sup>109</sup> Such additional information played no role in furthering the narrative. One possible function of these irrelevant details could be that they aided the delay of development of the action (and accordingly the pleasure of a plot resolution) in order to increase the tension or provoke audience curiosity. *Meddahs* also made direct references to the audience watching the shows, which could be considered another way of illusionary mimicking. He might have apologized to the audience, for example, for his imitations of different dialects or accents, in case he might have offended some ethnic groups.<sup>110</sup>

The cosmopolitan elements of the shows could be observed in the variety of characters. The *meddahs* had the skills to speak like a gentleman, an Arab, an

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<sup>108</sup> Metin And, 'Meddah, Meddahlik, Meddahlar', in *Meddah Kitabı*, ed. Unver Oral (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2003), 3-18 (p. 4).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Armenian, a Circassian, a Frenchman, a Jew, a Kurd, a Turk or an old woman and so on.<sup>111</sup> Yet, what is more striking is that the *meddah* could imitate different ethnicities merely by wearing different hats synonymous with certain types of ethnic groups or by changing his accent. Such a minimalist style along with a powerful mimicry may not sound cinematic, yet in some foreign travellers' diaries it appears that the shows did not rely heavily on dialogue. Even though the travelers spoke no Turkish they could follow the storylines and enjoyed the shows.<sup>112</sup> The stories are strikingly rich in plots; one story might have taken place in many different parts of the world and might have included various short stories. One of the shows recorded by John Auldjo is as follows:

‘At Home’ with a series of imitations, in which he personated a Turk from Aleppo. This Oriental John Trot, is represented as setting out on his journey to see the world and making his fortune, and with this intent, he visits various places. On one occasion, being mistaken for a Pasha in disguise, he is every where feasted and treated with the most respectful attention, until, the real truth being discovered, he is impersonated, spit upon, plucked by the beard, and in short, maltreated in a thousand different ways. At last he finds his way to Stamboul, and manages to obtain an interview with his Sublime Highness; after which he visits England, France, etc. and on his way back is taken by a pirate, who carries him to the coast of Africa. During this compulsory voyage, he describes himself as affected with the most horrible seasickness; and here his representation of a person labouring under that detestable malady was so accurate, that I almost fancied myself again in the cockpit of the Actaeon, and all the terrors of the voyage across the Adriatic arose fresh to my imagination. After many adventures he returns safe to Aleppo, his native city, no richer than he set out...<sup>113</sup>

Such a story can be considered cinematic since it jumps from one scene to another and depicts an almost visual journey full of adventures. In another story that is perhaps even more (pre-)cinematic, a young man falls in love with a woman he

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<sup>111</sup> Ozdemir Nutku, ‘Meddahlik Olgusu’, in *Meddah Kitabı*, ed. Unver Oral (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2003), 41-53 (p. 43).

<sup>112</sup> Metin And, *History of Theater in Turkey*, p. 29.

<sup>113</sup> Cited in, Ibid.

sees in a panorama. This also demonstrates a self-referential characteristic where one pre-cinematic source refers to another.<sup>114</sup>

### 3.6. Photography and Other Visual Delights

Exploring the use of photography in an Islamic culture is significant for an early cinema study as Muslim public interest in photography may be useful to challenge the argument that there was a negative reaction to the cinematograph for its life-like/verisimilitudinous pictures. Sultan Abdulaziz (reigning from June 1861 to May 1876) seemed to demonstrate the State's interest in more realistic visual representations than the shadow play when he allegedly said: 'My face and my actual appearance are just as in the photographs of the Abdullah Brothers. I order, from now on, that the Sublime Porte photographs should only be taken by them and their photographs should be distributed everywhere accordingly.'<sup>115</sup>

The Abdullah Brothers were among the first official photographers of the Empire and they were rewarded by the Sultan as the *Ressam-i hazret-i sehriyar-i* (literally 'The Painter of the Master of the City'). Another Ottoman photographer, Pascal Sebah, was also appointed to be an official photographer by the Sultan in 1873.<sup>116</sup> Additionally, in 1839, the newspaper *Takvim-i Vekayi* calls photography a peculiar and weird art and continues: 'The skillful Frenchman, Daguerre, used various arts and sciences to reflect the shapes of objects with sunlight on paper. He spent 20 years working on this project and gained great appreciation.'<sup>117</sup> A few years after its invention, the first news about books of photography was purportedly printed

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<sup>114</sup> *Meddah Kitabı* (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2003), p. 190

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

<sup>116</sup> Ayşe Fazlıoğlu, *150 Yilin Sessiz Tanıkları: Dolmabahçe Sarayı Fotoğraf Albumleri* (Istanbul: TBMM Milli Saraylar Daire Başkanlığı, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>117</sup> Candan Sevgin, *Sanayi Devrimi Yıllarında Osmanlı Saraylarında Sanayi ve Teknoloji Araçları* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat ve Yayıncılık, 2005), p. 55.

in the Turkish newspapers in October 1841.<sup>118</sup> In 1842, one newspaper called *Ceride-i Havadis* announces the arrival of a student of Daguerre, named Monsieur Kompa, in Istanbul in order to take pictures.<sup>119</sup> In the late 1860s, the numbers of photograph studios increased rapidly in the lands of the Ottoman Empire ‘from Aleppo to Beirut and from Istanbul to Cairo’.<sup>120</sup>

The opening of photograph studios, just as with the beginnings of other significant inventions is controversial. Some researchers claim that the first studio was opened in Pera in 1850 and was named *Kargopoulo Fotografhanesi*.<sup>121</sup> Other research claims that it was an entrepreneur of Italian origin, Carlo Naya, who established the first studio in 1845, again in Pera.<sup>122</sup> From the data available in the French Consular reports it seems that there were 14 photography studios in the year the cinematograph was first officially screened in Istanbul in 1896. Moreover, advertisements of three different photography *ateliers* were printed in the same records. In these studios, souvenirs, family momentos, picnics, school pictures and the like were taken.<sup>123</sup> Photography was also utilized for political purposes. One picture of Abdulahmid II and Wilhelm II, for example, was published in an ‘enemy newspaper’ named *L’Illustration* as a representation of the Ottoman and German alliance of 1898. It was, however, very recently revealed that this picture was never really taken, but rather artificially created by the help of photomontage so that the two Emperors were made to appear together in the same room.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Besir Ayvazoglu, *Şehir Fotoğrafları* (Istanbul: Otuken Yayınları, İkinci Basım, 1997), p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> Sezgin, p. 55

<sup>121</sup> Ayvazoglu, .23.

<sup>122</sup> Engin Ozendes, *Abdullah Freres Osmanlı Sarayının Fotoğrafçıları* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayınları, 2006), p. 16

<sup>123</sup> *Annuaire Oriental du Commerce de l’Industrie, de l’Administration et de la Magistrature* (Istanbul: 1896), pp. 724 ; 1483; 1544.

<sup>124</sup> Hakan T. Karateke, ‘100 Yıl Önceki Bir Fotomontaj: II Abdulhamid II. Wilhelm’le Kolkola’, *Toplumsal Tarih*, 28 (1996), pp. 22-31.



The orthodox religious power's reaction to photography in the Empire, however, appears to have been severely hostile to this invention. The head of the religious bureaucracy of the Ottomans, namely the *Seyhulislam*, published in 1899 an official letter of his argumentative thoughts on visual representations of human bodies. According to him, the angels would not go into a room that contains a dog as well as a photograph. He then continues:

Those who take pictures shall go to hell... It is vain, especially for those who look at their picture that were taken when they were 25 years old and now consider themselves as if they were still 25 years old. The pictures merely represent the past but nothing besides. They say photographs might be used for arresting criminals, but it only depends on coincidences and is of no real help. Personally I would be bothered if my photograph was seen by the people I dislike or by my enemies. Those, whom I would not be in touch with, would be in touch with my photographs. One's shadow should only be attached to oneself, not to some strangers. Besides to some extent it might lead to a sort of prostitution. A man who could not possess a certain woman may possess her picture and takes his pleasure through her pictures.<sup>125</sup>

What is striking in his argument seems to be that he does not rely on the Quran or any written *Sharia* law for arguing against a realistic visual representation. It seems that he formulates these disputes as a moralistic opposition to novelties in general. From an Ottoman intellectual point of view on the other hand, photography seems to be significant in their scientific, if not progressive, perspective. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Istanbul a large number of books on the techniques of the apparatus were published. The chemicals used in photography, the practices of developing film, the mixture of colors or the various forms of photography were some of the topics discussed by the intelligentsia. In addition to

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<sup>125</sup> Seyhulislam Mustafa Sabri, *Islamda Munakasaya Sebep Olan Meseleler*, translation from Ottoman Turkish to modern Turkish: Osman Nuri Gursoy (Istanbul: Sebil Yayınevi, 1984), pp. 63-87.

their own research on the techniques of photography, these authors also translated a few French books on the same topic.<sup>126</sup>

In the job market of photography, there was no significant gender segregation as many female photographers worked in Istanbul in the early twentieth century. The female photographers, named 'Turkish Ladies Photo Studio' in English, appeared to be popular as many Muslim women wanted unveiled self portraits but they preferred to be photographed by other women. In the 1910s, they were sending such pictures to their lovers or husbands who were on the battlefields. It was not only Muslim ladies who were enthusiastic about being photographed, but also the wives of some French lieutenants were similarly keen on having been photographed by these female photographers.<sup>127</sup> In the context of war, women's pictures do not seem to be objects of desire. Yet, in the memoirs of Ahmet Rasim it is stated that photography also inevitably functioned as a voyeuristic tool for the male gaze. Some erotic pictures were distributed among the playful inhabitants of Istanbul.<sup>128</sup>

Other Ottoman visual delights in the pre-modern era may appear to demonstrate two major purposeful characteristics that define, determine and affect each other. These purposes may be categorized as attraction and celebration, which indeed might have served the religious-political powers' will to control the public. One of the wide range of visual delights was called *mahya*, the illuminated writings hung in between the minarets of mosques. The illuminations were a type of communal nightly liturgical ritual in which, through illuminated writings, lines about

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<sup>126</sup> See Sadullah Izzet, *Boyali Fotograhy: Pinatypie* (Istanbul: Necmi Istiklal Basimevi, 1919); Sadullah Izzet, *Minali Fotografya* (Istanbul, Hukuk Basimevi, 1917); Sadullah Izzet, *Tabii Renkli Fotograflar ve Autochrome Usulu* (Istanbul, Mahmudbey Basimevi, 1919); Sadullah Izzet, *Kimyayi Fotografi*, (Istanbul: Mahmudbey Basimevi, 1917); Sadullah Izzet, *Fotografin Tatbiki Sinaiyesi* (Istanbul: Askeri Basimevi, 1918); Sadullah Izzet, *Foto Tipi* (Istanbul: Mahmutbey Basimevi, 1919) ; M. Abdullah, *Hadisati Ziyaiye Yahut Fotografya* (Istanbul: Mahmutbey Basimevi, 1907).

<sup>127</sup> Yavuz Selim Karakisla, 'Osmanli Imparatorlugu'nda Kadin Fotografcilar', *Toplumsal Tarih*, 145 (January 2006), pp. 34-39.

<sup>128</sup> Ahmet Rasim, *Fuhsi Atik* (Istanbul: Uc Harf Yayıncılık, 2005), p. 268.

the divine grace of the Prophet were recited.<sup>129</sup> It was a practice that emerged in the sixteenth century and the writings were composed mainly of the messages from the Quran or the celebrations at the beginning of Ramadan. *Mahya* was a spectacle with its lights seen in the sky at night and invited its viewers to the celebrations of Ramadan. The word *mahya* in Ottoman Turkish was at the same time used for 'lively' or 'living'. The living lights, perhaps similar to the cinema of attractions, had a curiosity provoking nature: 'the spectators are always impatient to see what the next message will be. The point is to raise that excitement in the viewer'.<sup>130</sup> The illuminations also accommodated political concerns. On the celebrations of the Sultan's birthday (Abdulhamid II) for example, the major alleys of Istanbul were illuminated extravagantly and the public was invited to enjoy this new cityscape.<sup>131</sup> Another visual delight related to celebrations was fireworks. The practice of fireworks in the Ottoman Empire allegedly emerged in the fifteenth century and was utilized for royal birthdays. One of the first uses of fireworks was for Kaya Sultan's birthday (the daughter of Murad IV), in the early sixteenth century.<sup>132</sup> This technology, according to Fahruqi, was seen as an attraction with illusionary and magical effects, and had no religious implications.

These technological delights were apparently utilized for both attractions and celebrations. Nonetheless, the main purpose in following them seems to be political propaganda, since all of those mentioned above were free of charge and largely

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<sup>129</sup> *Mahya: Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an: Brill Online:*  
[http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl/subscriber/uid=3277/entry?result\\_number=1&entry=islam\\_SIM-4813&search\\_text=mahya#hit](http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl/subscriber/uid=3277/entry?result_number=1&entry=islam_SIM-4813&search_text=mahya#hit) (Accessed on 10 July 2007).

<sup>130</sup> Burhan Eren, 'Minareler Yine Yıldızlarla Şenlenecek', *Zaman Gazetesi*, 16.11. 2001. For the explanation of the way curiosity led spectators to early cinema see Tom Gunning, ' "Now You See It, Now You Don't": The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions', in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 41-50.

<sup>131</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 10 December 1896.

<sup>132</sup> Suraiya Faruqi, 'Fireworks in Ottoman Festivities' (paper given at Performers and Performances in the Eastern Mediterranean: 11<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries Conference, Bogazici University, Istanbul, June 7-9, 2007).

accessible to everyone.<sup>133</sup> They were visually entertaining and pleasurable to watch and accordingly, attracted a large proportion of urban spectators. The living lights were free and part of the spectacle life in the city.<sup>134</sup>

### 3.7. Conclusion

The beginning of this chapter is based on assumptions and a structural analysis of the Islamic mystical perspective on appearances as a prevalent understanding of the Ottoman spectatorship culture. By doing this, I aimed to provide the cultural/ontological reception behind the visual delights that existed prior to cinema. The basic premise of this type of ontology of appearances is that they may provide a gateway to the truth; however, appearances also have the function of entertainment through wonder and astonishment. It might be argued that the emphasis on the illusionary characteristics that were attributed to visual agencies indicates scepticism and a critical view of the visual pleasures. Yet this argument might be an over interpretation since the shadow plays and other pre-cinematic delights were enjoyed and encouraged by a wondrous and a curious gaze. The emphasis on the illusionary aspect of appearances (contrary to the apparatus theories) offered a sense of fascination with visual uncertainty, just as in dreams, in the anti-narrative cinema, in the empty wall that self-evidently reflects its illusions, or in the cinema of attractions. A study on metaphysical perception may carry the risk of idealizations or be based on dogmatism. However, those who tried to grasp the unity of the world through dreams and visual encounters and who were looking for

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<sup>133</sup> Practically similar to the Paris Morgue in the late nineteenth century, see Vanessa Schwartz 'Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus'.

<sup>134</sup> For another use of city lights as spectacle at the turn of the nineteenth century, see William Sharpe, 'New York, and Cultural Mythmaking: The Nocturne in Photography, 1900-1925', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art*, 2. 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 2-21.

wondrous pleasures offered by visual representations could be looking for new possibilities and ways of seeing, which could be offered by the early cinema. Cinematic spectatorship has perhaps been a part of world spectatorship, yet it was certainly not seen as a ritualistic or celestial experience. *Karagöz* and other visual delights demonstrated an emphasis on their own illusionary natures and revealed that the visual representations were there to entertain the public and add new meanings to ordinary reality with the aid of games, tongue twisters, magical disguises, and a constant state of wonder and attraction. Thereby, we can come to a conclusion that the world spectators, as defined by Sufism, who were becoming the spectacle through their visual encounters, indeed offered a participatory spectatorship. This type of active viewing was the main concern of the showmen of the shadow theaters, *meddah* and in public storytelling. If we consider that the early filmmaker appeared as ‘*monstrator*, one who shows, showman’<sup>135</sup> as a continuation of the pre-cinematic showmen, then we can locate the initial public encounters with the cinematograph within the larger life of spectacle.

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<sup>135</sup> Tom Gunning, ‘“Primitive” Cinema: A Frame-Up? Or the Trick’s on Us’, *Cinema Journal*, 28.2 (Winter, 1989), 3-12 (p. 8).

#### 4. CHAPTER FOUR: INTRODUCING THE CINEMATOGRAPH TO ISTANBULITES

Focusing on the years between 1896 and 1898, this chapter investigates the early exhibition practices and the initial public responses to the cinematograph in Istanbul. The spectator reactions are difficult to locate in the newspapers or in other official records since they tend to describe the more general and ‘objective’ conditions of spectacles and overlook the individual states of minds. Yet, novels and memoirs from this period might be beneficial for analyses of the ‘first cinema experiences’ and also for comprehending the cinematic perception of the intelligentsia. Therefore, this chapter initially deals with early cinema memoirs and novels written by middle class authors who were presumably trained by the senses of *hayret* (‘astonishment’ and ‘wonder’) and *hayran* (‘wondrous’) in viewing spectacles.

This chapter will then elaborate on the way Turkish film historiography, which is preoccupied with notions of belatedness and lack, approaches early cinema-going particularly in comparison to Western Europe and North America. This approach is due partly to the economic and political instabilities the country underwent during this period and due partly to the Westernization narrative that still prevails in Turkish cultural criticism. The reign of Abdulhamid II coincided both with the arrival of the cinematograph and *Mesrutiyet*, the first Parliament and constitution in the Ottoman lands. However, owing to Abdulhamid’s insistence on autocracy, this period also witnessed the abolition of the former along with a strict censorship of the press. In particular, the pressure on public opinion led critics to condemn the reign of Abdulhamid as ‘the dark ages of the Ottoman lands’ and as ‘a break in the [linear] story of Euro-centric modernization’. In her analysis of early

cinema in Latin America, Ann López claims a difference between the cultural presumptions in South America, where modernity is accepted as a late comer, and those in the U.S. and Europe, in which cinema and modernity are seen as ‘points of reflection and convergence’.<sup>1</sup> Similar to the presumptions about Latin America, the Westernization narrative among Turkish cultural critics presumes a prevailing role for belatedness and imitation in ‘modern’ Turkish culture. Accordingly, when elaborating on the cultural experiences of the cinematograph in Turkey, this study involves a critical consideration of the role of this discourse as well as the particular dynamics of the reign of Abdulhamid in the 1890s.

After an examination of Turkish film historiography, I will look into spectatorship in the first two years after the first public exhibition of the cinematograph on 11 December 1896. The venues, programs, entry fees, specific conditions of viewing such as music or other accompaniment and the journalistic reviews will be examined so as to understand the extent to which the cinematograph functioned in the entertainment life of the city. The relationship between early cinema and global capitalism has been clarified and formulated by the idea of cinema as a vernacular modernism and by the notions of the national, international and transnational.<sup>2</sup> Tom Gunning questions the extent to which we can assume early cinema as a national cinema since the mechanisms of the apparatus, the display conditions and even the filmic subjects had already been defined by the Lumière Brothers before sending their operators out around the world.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Gunning also asserts a need to locate globalism in the context of world capitalism,

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<sup>1</sup>Ann López, ‘Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America’, *Cinema Journal*, 40.1 (2000), 48-78 (p. 2).

<sup>2</sup>Miriam Bratu Hansen, ‘The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism’, in *Modernism/Modernity*, 6.2 (1999), pp. 59-77.

<sup>3</sup>Tom Gunning, ‘Early Cinema as Global Cinema: the Encyclopedic Ambition’, in *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King (London: John Libbey Publishing, 2008), pp. 11-16.

imperialism and colonialism as well. Here we should also consider the role of French cultural imperialism, as put by Richard Abel, in the context of the late nineteenth century's 'global expansion' or 'colonial conquest' materialized through early French cinema.<sup>4</sup> Assuming already defined conditions of exhibition, on the other hand, does not necessarily lead to arguments for a unified way of seeing.

#### 4.1. The Encounter of the Intelligentsia

##### A Photographic Curiosity:

Last night an interesting séance of photographic projections was offered by the organizer of that genre of attraction to members of the press and some invited people. This is a novelty for Istanbul and we compliment the impresario of this curious spectacle, which was at the first floor of the Brasserie Sponeck at Galatasaray [a district in Pera] where these projections were made. The apparatus consists of a powerful magic lantern lit by 'oxyhydrique' lighting. A strip of negative film is passed very quickly between two very strong lenses, 2 to 3 centimeters in width and 20-25 meters long. Along its length are 800-1000 still photographs of some subject or landscape. This series of stills is projected for the spectators on a screen of white cloth by means of clockwork [early cameras and projectors were often operated by clockwork], but with such speed that the eye cannot distinguish the separate images and the illusion of animated [moving] subjects results. The spectators passed a very agreeable hour watching these curious and interesting scenes, where the movements of the characters were very well reproduced. We were shown a parade of an infantry regiment on an avenue of Bois de Boulogne in Paris. We saw the arrival and the departure of a train at Gare de Joinville, a view from Traville, the movements of the waves flowing back and forth, and a picturesque country scene etc etc. The procession of the Tsar and his equipage at Montjarret particularly interested the spectators who applauded from the heart at that curious diversion. The slight inconvenience of the smell of gas will disappear after a few arrangements.<sup>5</sup>

Treating the cinematograph as an intriguing invention, the first journalistic review of the apparatus in Istanbul seems strikingly, but not surprisingly, preoccupied with the wonders of its mechanism (the clockwork, the rapidity of still pictures and the illusion of moving images). In a period where a considerable number

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Abel, 'Booming the Film Bussiness: The Historical Specificity of Early French Cinema', in *Silent Film*, ed Richard Abel (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), 109-125 (p. 110).

<sup>5</sup> *Samboul*, 12 December 1896.



of new technologies occurred and aroused curiosity, as elaborated in Chapter Two, it should not be a surprise that the technology of this new invention was more significant than its aesthetics. Accordingly, the author preferred to explain the mechanics of the apparatus in detail, emphasizing the attraction's ability to provoke curiosity. Perhaps unexpectedly, special attention is not given to the *L'Arrivee d'un train en gare*, instead we are informed of the audience interest in the *Procession of the Tsar*. Similar to this 'first' journalistic review of the cinematograph, an obsession with the technology of the apparatus can be observed in the memoirs of an upper class member of the Sponeck audience, namely Ercument Ekrem Talu, the son of a *Tanzimat* author whose most famous novel (*A Carriage Affair* by Rezaizade Mahmut Ekrem) has been analyzed in Chapter Two. Talu, when he was an adolescent, attended a screening at the Sponeck, after which he recalls having tried to comprehend and explain its techniques to his friends.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Talu's memory seems to reaffirm the sense of thrill and curiosity of the early cinema audience with an emphasis on understanding a scientific novelty:<sup>7</sup>

A leitmotif with black clouds blown from the chimney is waiting at a train station somewhere in Europe. People are walking to and fro; but what a walk! You would think they were all having epileptic fits. Their movements are so fast, excessive and bizarre... The train has departed, of course, silently. Oh my God! It is coming towards us! I guess those who were afraid that the train would come out of the screen left their seats. Well, I cannot say I was brave; but my curiosity nailed me down on my chair. Thanks God, the train has passed by quickly... Two minutes of intervention... The entire spectacle happened in half an hour. We left but the séance would repeat a few more times until midnight... Then, we tried to explain each other about this new scientific wonder. Our minds could not comprehend its

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<sup>6</sup> Ercument Ekrem Talu, 'İstanbul'da İlk Sinema ve İlk Gramafon', *Perde Sahne*, 7 (October 1943), pp. 5-14.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed analyses on the 'train effect' in the early audience's reaction to the cinematograph see Tom Gunning, 'An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator', in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, New York: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 114-134; Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 134-155 and Stephen Bottomore, 'The Panicking Audience?: Early Cinema and the "Train Effect"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19. 2 (1999), pp. 177-216.

mechanisms... The discussions lasted for weeks at school. The Istanbul public was also frequently speaking about this issue...<sup>8</sup>

The first encounters with the cinematograph from the intellectual's point of view not only seem to be obsessed by the comprehension of its technology, but also to demonstrate a mild cynicism or irony towards its astonishing effects with the hint of another 'weird invention that came from the West'. This approach by the intelligentsia may have been caused by an implicit patriarchal reaction against the *influences* of 'Western cultural imperialism'. 'Cultural influence' implies an inequality between the 'influencer' and the 'influenced' from a perspective conceived in the associations with the act of penetration.<sup>9</sup> This term is analyzed by Nurdan Gürbilek in the approach of *Tanzimat* authors to Westernization where the Turkish novels of the *fin-de-siècle* reveal a patriarchal anxiety towards Westernization. A similar anxiety materialized in the literary depictions of women and feminine dandies who were under the 'influence' of Westernization in *Tanzimat* novels.<sup>10</sup> Particularly in the later period when narrative cinema replaced the cinema of attractions, this aspect of the relationship between women, cinema and Westernization becomes more concrete.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, what is even more significant during this very early period seems not to be a cultural anxiety of foreign 'influences', but rather a sense of wonder and curiosity about its technology. Additionally, a general complaint about its imperfect technology (i.e. the smell of gas or the quality of the screen vision) may be another indication of a critical and incredulous audience as was also assumed by revisionist film historians such as Tom Gunning, Yuri Tsivian, Janet Steiger *et al.*

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<sup>8</sup> Talu, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> For a further explanation on the term cultural influence, see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> See Nurdan Gürbilek, 'Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.2/3 (Spring/Summer 2000), pp. 599-628.

<sup>11</sup> For further analysis on this relationship see Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

One of the most popular Turkish journalists of the turn of the century, Ahmet Rasim, recorded the trends in Ottoman urban life in his newspaper column entitled *Şehir Mektuplari* ('City Letters' in English). Rasim, in a collection of these reviews written between 1897 and 1899, describes a wide range of types of entertainment and various oddities in the city. Some of his writings also mention the cinematograph; for example, when an important carnival coincided with a religious festival in 1897, Rasim claimed that this co-existence of different types of entertainment should have been filmed: '...all these characters are worth seeing in the same location, if one films their witty dialogues with a cinematograph, he would undoubtedly make the funniest film'.<sup>12</sup> Rasim, in a later review, approaches then current scientific inventions, including the gramophone and the cinematograph, with sarcasm and irony:

There is this discipline of science which has nothing to do with poetry and literature and which is called, I am not sure, either cosmology or natural sciences. Well, this science largely benefits from the issues of movement and the law of attractions so as to explain how dust spins around when the sunshine is reflected in a room. Here is the biggest issue! The funny journalist of *Comic-Review* claims that all those melancholic minds that are preoccupied with poetry have a similar way of movement, a movement of the words, in their heads! Ah those Americans, ah those people of the New World! They make *machines talk* [gramophone]! They make *living pictures*! Who knows what else is next! What more clownishness?! Now maybe, one can write in English, think in French, drink in German, sleep in Spanish, wake up in Russian, win in Polish and sing in Italian....<sup>13</sup>

Rasim, reiterating the general style of the *Mesrutiyet* authors, narrated the everyday life of the city, in a humorous and ironic way by utilizing exaggerations such as 'underground channels filled with beer' for describing the large number of recently opened beer halls in the city.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, one should also consider the role of this style in his almost grotesque view of 'Western technology' as well as the

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<sup>12</sup> Ahmet Rasim, *Şehir Mektuplari 3-4* (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, Üçüncü Baskı 1992), p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Rasim, p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Rasim, p. 72.

supposed patriarchal concerns or skepticism of foreign inventions. What seems striking is his obsession with scientific explanations, again as a demonstration of a more general public interest in 'positivism' fuelled by the strict censorship on the politics of the period mentioned in Chapter Two.

Another playful and streetwise journalist from the period is Sermet Muhtar Alus who also positions the cinematograph in the field of modern science rather than the field of aesthetics. Prior to the description of his first experience at the living pictures show, Alus explains how Parisian scientists mocked the apparatus before seeing its effects on the big screen during the earliest screenings of the Lumière Brothers.<sup>15</sup> On his own first encounter with the cinematograph, Alus recalls the police and security guards trying to calm down the public who were waiting impatiently for the show. He describes the pictures and the scenes as follows:

Beginning... the Niagara Falls of the States... Oh, so refreshing for the soul. Alas! All around the screen there were white dots and stripes; then the film strip broke apart... Then came another landscape, the Alps under the hail gleaming like the comets in the sky... this was followed by a comic picture: some fat policemen are trying to arrest a chicken thief in the States. The thief is escaping with the chickens in his arms, he climbs up the high walls, fences and hills.. The fat men are running after him following the same route... After these all ended, we found ourselves walking in a daze on the streets of Pera; with ears buzzing, heads blasted and eyes swollen.<sup>16</sup>

The experience of Alus conveys a fairly intense visual encounter which is provoked by a sense of curiosity and caused by a constant state of visual motion on the screen. Indeed the pictures' contribution to this physical exhaustion is more obvious than that of the 'imperfect technology'. Sublime images of the mountains and the waterfalls, along with another popular early cinema theme, the chase pictures, are undoubtedly correlated to the feelings of astonishment and curiosity

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<sup>15</sup> Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Eski Gunlerde* (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayınları, 2001), p. 54-57.

<sup>16</sup> Alus, p. 58.

offered by the cinema of attractions. Alus, however, expresses an additional sense; a sense of aesthetic dissatisfaction, which did not perhaps extinguish his enthusiasm for scientific inventions; but which seemingly prevented him from a full appreciation of this one.

Written four years after the public introduction of the cinematograph, a renowned novel by Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Ask-i Memnu*, as was mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, tells the story of a love triangle between a young girl, her step mother and her cousin. The cousin is portrayed as a snobbish upper class character, whose apathetical approach to both life and the moral values of the period brought about an unhappy ending to the story. Uşaklıgil, in *Ask-i Memnu*, posits cinema-going neither as a pastime nor as a fulfillment of curiosity, but he utilizes it to epitomize the ultimate cynicism or indifference felt by this unusual character, named Behlul.

He was never surprised by anything, but by those who disagree with his unsurprised manners; he kept the term *hayret* ['wonder' and 'astonishment'] in his lexicon for only these occasions. For example, a new invention by Edison [presumably *kinetoscope*] for him [Behlul] was nothing more than a work of art that people had lost interest in, having seen it many times in the *cambazhane* [circus] and that something had been already expected for a long time. He had familiarity and customs with all novelties in life; he was unimpressed by those who wonder about and are astonished by novelties as if they [these novelties] were already old fashioned and he had been the first to see them all. Those that are new and surprising to anybody else were already history for him.<sup>17</sup>

For Behlul the apparatus was part of a series of inventions, which had been expected for a while, and a work of art which had already become outmoded. Throughout the novel, Behlul is described as an audacious dandy. He could unhesitatingly transgress the social and moral values by tempting both his young cousin and her step mother, who is also Behlul's aunt. Perhaps it was this overt self-

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<sup>17</sup> Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Ask-i Memnu* (Istanbul: Ozgur Yayınları, 6. Basım, 2005), p. 114.

confidence that was at work in relation to his view of the cinema which was considered astonishing and surprising to the ‘ordinary’ public.

Two female writers are also known to have recorded their first encounters with the cinematograph. One of them is, perhaps surprisingly, Ayse Osmanoglu the daughter of Abdulhamid II, who was allegedly antagonistic to the cinematograph shows. Osmanoglu mentions the cinematograph briefly and all we can learn from her experience is that the show took place in the Palace and the royal family was curious about the new invention despite the darkness that took over the screen for a while. The second memoir belongs to an early Republican academic, Belkis Vassaf, who claims that she could not distinguish the images from the real since it was her first time at the moving images. The picture she saw was a slapstick comedy where a young man tries to walk on top of a thin wall across the sea. Being afraid that he would fall into the sea, Vassaf recalls hiding under her seat and asking her older brother about the safety of the man in the film.<sup>18</sup> We should naturally consider that Vassaf was a little girl among the adult audiences and the review was written when she was older, just as in the memoir of Ercument Ekrem Talu. Talu emphasized his attempts to make sense out of the train effect after the experience, while Vassaf portrayed a pure experience of thrill in which one can assume self-doubts in relation to the gender politics of a time when science in particular was considered to be a male occupation.

The world or Sufi spectatorship may not seem to be closely linked to these specific examples since Sufism deals mainly with an idealized gaze. However, we can identify a parallel attitude in the way the feelings of ‘wonder’ were involved. Perhaps we could mention a rough evolution from a ‘spiritual wonder’ to a ‘scientific wonder’. Yet, both of these cases are preoccupied with the sense of curiosity (or ‘the

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<sup>18</sup> Gunduz Vassaf, *Annem Belkis* (Istanbul: Iletisim, 2000), pp. 65-66.

lack of curiosity' as an exceptional situation) along with the awareness of a specular agency, namely the cinematograph. Accordingly, a feeling of *hayret*, or 'astonishment' and 'wonder', was related to the mechanisms of the medium.

The life-like effects of the images were mentioned by the witnesses of these early shows; however, what they mainly underline is the conditions of the exhibitions rather than the striking effects of the illusion of the real. There is also a slightly cynical attitude shown by Alus, Uşaklıgıl and Rasim which we can interpret in the way the Ottoman patriarchy dealt with Westernization. In addition to the feelings of curiosity, wonder, and a minor frustration by the screening conditions, one can draw attention to implicit (or sub-textual) suggestions for an anxiety of influence, which may stem from the cinematograph's foreign status. Particularly male audiences seem to portray themselves not so *impressed* by this 'curious spectacle'. This attitude becomes more concrete at a later period in the 1920s when narratives had already started to dominate filmic experiences, and nationalism (along with anti-imperialism) became more widespread. On the other hand, one should keep in mind that these early memoirs were produced by the street wise middle class writers who were presumably in close contact with all types of urban spectacles offered in Istanbul. Thereby, it may be clearer why such individuals would shy away from exhibiting a great amazement, for such a portrayal could alter their public image into that of a naïve or inexperienced spectator.

#### 4.2. Speculations and Debates over the ‘Archaeology of Turkish Cinema’

Turkish cinema historiography tends to underscore the Sublime Porte’s and the Muslim subjects’ alleged reservations to the cinematograph in order to explain the relatively slow progress of a cinema-going culture. Two obstacles are mentioned in this regard: Sultan Abdulhamid’s fear of electricity and Islam’s so called reluctance toward technological innovations, particularly in relation to visual representations.

Abdulhamid II was notorious for his paranoia and fear of the Young Turks’ movements that demonstrated a threat to his Sultanate. His biggest fear was assassination; hence, the rigid precautions taken against the risk of fires, bombs and the like, created almost grotesque stories about his reign. One of the speculations of Turkish film historiography is Abdulhamid’s alleged restrictions of the use of electricity to prevent possible cases of fires. An early Turkish film historian Rakım Çalapala in his work published in 1947 directs attention to the lack of specialist film venues before 1908 (the year of the Young Turks Revolution against the Sultan). Çalapala credits the limited use of electricity during the reign of Abdulhamid for this ‘belated’ opening. Following this work, Nijat Özön in 1968 recognizes Abdulhamid’s fear to be one of the main impediments for constructing cinema theaters in the city. Similar to Çalapala’s arguments, Özön claims that the first specialist film venue was not to be established until the end of his reign in 1908.<sup>19</sup> Reiterating the same discourse in 1995, Burçak Evren seems to be inspired by these earlier historians in this view.<sup>20</sup> Such recurrence seems to stem from the scarcity of

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<sup>19</sup> Nijat Özön, *Türk Sineması Kronolojisi 1895-1966* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1968), p. 13. See also Nijat Özön, ‘Türkiye’de Sinema’, in *Arkin Sinema Ansiklopedisi*, ed. Rekin Teksoy (İstanbul: Arkin Kitabevi, 1975), p. 451.

<sup>20</sup> See Rekin Teksoy, *Rekin Teksoy’un Türk Sineması* (İstanbul: Oglak Yayıncılık, 2007), p. 10; Burçak Evren, *Sigmund Weinberg: Türkiye’ye Sinemayı Getiren Adam* (İstanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1995), p. 23.



primary sources and resembles the ‘chain of *isnad*’ (or the *isnad* of authority), where the authors reproduced the Orientalist discourse of the initial researcher on the same topic. Yet, the Orientalist discourse is largely produced by ‘Western’ authors, while in this particular context such attributions were made and reiterated by the ‘indigenous’ researchers. However until further research demonstrates a concrete reason for the ‘belated opening’ of specialist film venues, we can only speculate upon it. One major factor can be the economic difficulties the country, particularly felt by the local entrepreneurs, since public interest in the shows was evident and no records of political restrictions on the cinematograph have been found yet.

Considering the obvious benefits from the advances of technology, it may be controversial and even unreasonable to argue that Abdulhamid had a negative view on technology and thereby, on the cinematograph. Part of his birthday celebrations were illuminations in the city by means of electricity<sup>21</sup> and he let the cinematograph be exhibited to his daughter and family in his own palace even before public screenings.<sup>22</sup> Finally, there seem to be contradictions in this regard: if Abdulhamid banned electricity in the spectacles, why did he allow the use of gas? It is also noteworthy that another electrical innovation, the telegraph had been largely used in the Empire since 1855.<sup>23</sup>

The Westernization paradigm and the discourse of lack and belatedness seem to be materialized in the arguments that are based on comparisons with Western Europe. On the other hand, if we compare the founding of the ‘first’ dedicated movie houses in Turkey to other countries, we may indeed come across belatedness, but

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Illuminations’, *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 10 December 1896.

<sup>22</sup> Ayşe Osmanoğlu, *Babam Abdulhamid* (Istanbul: Guven Basimevi, 1995), p. 68. Moreover, if not Abdulhamid himself, his follower Sultan Reşad was filmed by the ‘earliest filmmakers in the Balkans’, Manakia Brothers in 1911. See *Sultan Resad’s Visit to Bitola* (Milton Manaki, Macedonia, 1911).

<sup>23</sup> Kyle Eamonn McEneaney, ‘Powering and Empowering the Provincial Capital: Electricity, Street Lighting and Citizenship in Late Ottoman Damascus’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Harvard University, 2007), pp. 52-53.

nothing excessive. The permanent exhibition sites allegedly started to be established in Bangkok in 1905; in Buenos Aires in 1901, in Peru in 1909, in Paris around 1906 and in Istanbul in 1908.<sup>24</sup> What is perhaps more noteworthy in the opening of the first permanent film theater in Istanbul is that it was founded as a Pathé agency which may indicate French colonial interests in the city.<sup>25</sup>

It is however remarkable, in Turkish film historiography, that researchers outside Turkey demonstrate a similar attitude towards the topic. Stephan Bottomore's 'Turkey/Ottoman Empire' entry in the *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* shows a parallel approach with a nuance. Local historians consider the opening of the initial specialist venues to be late for Istanbul (in 1908) due to the fear of electricity; whereas Bottomore cites the same restrictions for the belated arrival of the cinematograph in Istanbul. He claims that the Lumière operator Louis Janin brought a cinematograph to the city in May 1896 yet was unable to put on any exhibitions due to the legendary fear: 'He [Janin] spent several months vainly trying to persuade the authorities to let him project films, and departed before permission was grudgingly granted. The problem was that Sultan Abdulhamid feared electricity and so banned the use of all electrical apparatus.'<sup>26</sup>

Bottomore, in his research, appears to disregard the Ottoman sources, where the letters between Janin, the French Embassy and the Ottoman authorities reveal that it was indeed the bureaucratic process that delayed the arrival of the electrical

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<sup>24</sup> For the first permanent theater in Thailand see Scot Barmé, 'Early Thai Cinema and Filmmaking: 1897-1922', *Film History*, 11.3 (1999), 308-318 (p. 310). For South America see Ann López, 'Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America', *Cinema Journal*, 40. 1 (2000), 48-78 (p. 51). For the situation in France see Richard Abel, 'French Silent Cinema', in *Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 112-123 (p. 112).

<sup>25</sup> For the relationship between French colonialism and the opening of Pathé offices in the developing countries, see Abel 'Booming the Film Business', p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Bottomore, 'Turkey/Ottoman Empire', *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. by Richard Abel (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 646.

lamp for the apparatus.<sup>27</sup> According to the official letters between Janin and the Ottoman bureaucrats, the account of Louis Janin's lamp states that the officers at the customs office were reluctant to allow the apparatus to be brought in the city merely because it was a mechanism that they were totally unfamiliar with. Janin then contacted the Istanbul municipality, who claimed that he was not in charge of the transport of goods. Afterwards Janin wrote another letter to the customs office and received a similar response to the letter from the municipality. Janin finally considered applying to the French Embassy, which then contacted the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote a letter to the Sultan to seek permission for the importation of this apparatus, which is 'beneficial and productive for science and progress'. The permission was then granted, but Janin had already left the city.<sup>28</sup>

Speculating on the story, one of the most reasonable explanations is that Janin was unprepared for Ottoman bureaucratic procedures, while the authorities he applied to were either not in charge or were unwilling to take responsibility. In both cases, according to these official letters, it seems that the 'iron cage of bureaucracy' along with a general ignorance discouraged Louis Janin from arranging an earlier screening than the one in December 1896. Hence, it seems that 'the Sultan's fear of electricity' might only be indirectly related to this incident.

Another obstruction for cinema in Turkish historiography is religious. Alim Şerif Onaran claims that regardless of the intelligentsia's appreciation of cinema, the ordinary people called it a 'devilish invention'.<sup>29</sup> Such a designation is also seen in

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<sup>27</sup> These official letters are held at Prime Ministry Archives (Basbakanlik Arsivleri) in Istanbul. They were both translated from Ottoman Turkish into modern Turkish and cited by Ali Özuyar, *Babiali'de Sinema* (Istanbul: Izdusum Yayınları, 2004), pp. 15-19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Alim Şerif Onaran, *Türk Sineması I* (Ankara: Kitle Yayıncılık, 1994), p. 12. Same naming can also be seen in Rakım Ziyaoglu, *Yüzyıl Yaklaşırken Beyoglu* (Istanbul: Belediye Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1989), p. 21

the memoirs of Sermet Muhtar Alus, where he claimed that cinema was promoted to be ‘the animated pictures’ (animating in Turkish means literally ‘life-giving’) and he recalls some old people claiming that animating is unique to God. Alus also cites a ‘joke’ about the earliest screenings where one of his female friends prayed loudly in the screening hall after seeing the moving pictures.<sup>30</sup> This anecdote can be somewhat unconvincing, for it is assumed that she must have gone to the hall with no knowledge of the show. We can still be skeptical since Alus also underlines her curiosity about the novelties as a reason for her participation in the show. Additionally, Bottomore mentions a ban on religious films by describing a police ban on the screening of *The Life of Christ* in 1911. However, he provides neither references nor other details for these claims which may indicate another ‘chain of Orientalist *isnad*’ or merely academic neglect.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, it was customary to organize circuses, shadow plays, *Orta Oyunu* (‘public storytelling’) and other spectacles. A few months after the cinematograph screenings had begun in Istanbul; during Ramadan in the month of February in 1897, the new medium became a Ramadan attraction in Sehzadebasi, which was supposedly populated by a Muslim majority.<sup>32</sup> This would be the custom in the following decade as well. Fikret Adil recalls a traveling cinematograph that was established in various districts during the yearly Ramadans. He also describes a cinematograph show before the war in 1914 in Eyup Sultan (another district populated mainly by Muslims) that was arranged by a Muslim entrepreneur called Hacı Galip (‘Hacı’ in Turkish is a religious

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<sup>30</sup> Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Eski Gunlerde* (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayınları, 2001), p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> On the issue of religious films it is difficult to encounter any primary sources. Yet, Giovanni Scognomillo, an influential Turkish film historian and an Istanbulite of Italian origins, during an interview for this research mentioned his own experience on this matter. He mentioned his grandmother’s viewings of *Ben Hur* (Fred Niblo, USA, 1927) as a ritual every Easter in the late 1920s in Istanbul.

<sup>32</sup> Cited by Mustafa Ozen, ‘De opkomst van het moderne medium cinema in de Ottomaanse hoofdstad Istanbul, 1896-1914’ (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Utrecht University, 2007), p. 77.

title for those who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca).<sup>33</sup> These do not indicate that there were absolutely no religious reservations to the cinematograph. Yet, there was a strong spectatorship culture in various sects of Islam which reveals that, before coming to such a conclusion there is a need for reliable sources rather than broad assumptions.

These arguments have led the historiography of Turkish cinema to establish another prejudice towards the ‘progress’ of the spectatorship culture in the Ottoman lands. One such view is that the early cinema audience was composed of the ‘Westernized’ elite and that the Muslim subjects were against the cinematograph. This perspective was maintained by the idea that ‘cinema was another Western invention’ and the fact that most of the entrepreneurs were either Western foreigners or Christian minorities of the Empire. Nijat Özön cites the role of Pera, one of the main districts in the city, and describes it as ‘off-country’ with its ‘purely’ foreign and non-Muslim inhabitants.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, according to Nezih Erdoğan, cinema was from the outset a Western form of entertainment for the late Ottoman/Turkish audience. He also states that the first film projectionist and filmmaker, Sigmund Weinberg, was of Romanian-Polish origin. Furthermore it was solely the foreign companies such as Lumière, Pathé, Gaumont and Ciné Théâtrale d’Orient that distributed French, American, German and Danish films.<sup>35</sup> Hence, Erdoğan views the Ottoman spectatorship as elaborated above:

Cinema came as a sign of modernization/Westernization, not only for the images of the West being projected onto the screen, but also for the conditions of its reception. Cinematography was a technological innovation imported from the West and the

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<sup>33</sup> Cited in Gokhan Akcura, *Aile Boyu Sinema* (Istanbul: Ithaki Yayınları, İkinci Baskı, 2004), p. 204.

<sup>34</sup> Nijat Özön, *Karagözden Sinemaya Türk Sinemasi ve Sorunları* (Ankara: Kitle Yayınları, 1995), p. 17

<sup>35</sup> Nezih Erdoğan, ‘Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in the Turkish Melodrama between 1965 and 1975’, *Screen*, 39.3 (1998), p. 260.

ritual of going to the movies became an important part of the modern urban experience.<sup>36</sup>

The emphasis of historiography, however, does not go beyond comparative cultural assumptions that were based on binary oppositions rather than the dynamics of a specific culture. Furthermore, these are debatable assumptions as the criteria to measure to what extent one is 'Westernized' are largely unreliable and misleading. The criterion Erdoğan utilizes is the population structure of Pera, the district where the initial screenings took place, which is usually seen as 'European' in the Westernization narrative. Yet, as elaborated in Chapter Two, Pera's general debauchery and cosmopolitan configuration included not only Muslims, Christians and Jews but also both the rich and the poor.<sup>37</sup>

This tendency to underestimate the Ottoman encounter with the cinematograph also stems from the Westernization narrative approach to the Ottoman society as hostile to the Western 'progress'. This discourse, as argued by Palmira Brummet, is often based on assumptions about Islam, particularly the assumption that Islamic societies naturally reject all forms of innovation: 'Characterizations of Ottoman aloofness to Western technology are a grave form of reductionism. The assessment of Ottoman interest in Western technology must be based more on evaluation of the Empire's economic and political situation and less on cultural assumptions.'<sup>38</sup> The political and economic situation underscores the role

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<sup>36</sup> Nezi̇h Erdoğan, Deniz Göktürk, 'Turkish Cinema', in *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 533-573 (p. 533).

<sup>37</sup> See also an extract from a Turkish story writer and poet, Sait Faik Abasıyanık, written in a later period but depicting the everyday life of Pera in a vivid way 'Turkish, Russian, Armenian, Arab, Roman, French, Catholic, Levantine, Maltese and a lot more different nations are mingled in this weird district. Every evening you see young body doubles walk along with tailors and barber apprentices on the streets. You first hear the sound of a gramophone then maybe somebody screaming' cited in Özdemir Kaptan Arkan, *Beyoğlu Kısa Geçmişi ve Argosu* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), p. 68-75.

<sup>38</sup> Brummet, p. 314-315.

of the foreign and non-Muslim traders of the Empire who had a 'privileged' status and who were encouraged and supported by the Great Powers.<sup>39</sup>

If discussions of political ideas were relatively limited in the press during the late nineteenth century, such restrictions on current political affairs and anything related to liberalism, nationalism and constitutionalism tended to incite enthusiasm for news regarding scientific novelties and rapid transformations in society.<sup>40</sup> As indicated in Chapter Two, this led newspapers and periodicals of the time to concentrate on encyclopedic articles about science, geography, history, technology and literature. Hence, we can easily find evidence of public interest in science, technology, fine arts and the cinematograph at that period.<sup>41</sup> It is, however, not only barely possible but also vain to attempt to identify the religious beliefs of the people in movie halls. However, one can examine the city plans and theater locations in various neighborhoods. Again, as examined in Chapter Two, there were no clear cut boundaries between the religious communities in the city. Pera, where the initial screenings emerged, was controversially seen as a Europeanized district; however as the entertainment and business hub of the city, it was perhaps the most welcoming part of the capital and the inhabitants were largely mixed in terms of religion and ethnicity. The second district for the cinematograph was Sehzelebasi which was generally (and yet again, allegedly) accepted as a Muslim part of the city.<sup>42</sup> Moreover the screenings at the Fevziye Kiraathanesi (a coffee house) in Sehzelebasi were made as part of Ramadan festivities.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 37-38.

<sup>40</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), pp. 196-197.

<sup>41</sup> On the scientific articles printed in Istanbul at that period see *Le Moniteur Oriental*, June-July 1896.

<sup>42</sup> For the screenings in Sehzelebasi, see Ozen, 'De opkomst van het moderne medium cinema in de Ottomaanse hoofdstad Istanbul', p. 77.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

### 4.3. The Cinematograph Day by Day

The commercial introduction of the cinematograph was on 12 December 1896 following a special press show made the previous evening at the same venue, the Sponeck. The films were promoted as 'live photography' and 'moving pictures of natural grandeur'. Entry prices were 5 piastres, which was close to the daily wage of an average handicraft worker of the time (7 to 12 piastres).<sup>44</sup> Compared to the present conditions of a lower middle class family member, the tickets may be affordable but not cheap, yet the newspaper, *Stamboul*, recommends the show since 'it is inexpensive as well as an interesting curiosity'.<sup>45</sup> There were four sessions at night and matinees on Fridays and Sundays, which may be intense for a novelty, but which may also indicate that it drew a large number of people. One can assume if the cinematograph attracted an average of 80 viewers a day, it could then be speculated that around 600 people in the first week must have seen the apparatus.<sup>46</sup>

Five days after the first commercial screening, a new announcement claims that the previous difficulties had been overcome and new scenes allowed the audience to appreciate fully 'the exactness of these interesting photographic reproductions'.<sup>47</sup> The difficulties that had been overcome were probably the smell of gas, and the show as a 'novelty for Istanbul', continued at Salle Sponeck until mid-January 1897. The cinematograph at the Sponeck was also welcomed by another newspaper, *Le Moniteur Oriental*, which claimed that the screenings were always well attended and that the public had a great fondness of this 'curious spectacle'. The selected pictures the newspaper mentions are: 'The arrival of the Czar in Paris';

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<sup>44</sup> See Stamboul, 12 December 1896; Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey, 1800-1914* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 42.

<sup>45</sup> *Stamboul*, 12 December 1896

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Stamboul*, 17 December 1896



‘Bateaux mouches on the Seine’; and ‘Bathing’; which were ‘particularly well received’.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.3.1. The ‘First’ Projector of the Moving Images

The initiator of these early screenings according to Turkish film history has been a mystery as the available sources on the premiere are limited and no official records have been revealed as yet. Many historians claimed it was Sigmund Weinberg, a Polish-Rumanian photographer who lived and worked in Istanbul in the early cinema period. Weinberg is commonly known as ‘the man who brought cinema to Turkey’<sup>49</sup> in 1896 and he still is a prominent figure in Turkish cinema historiography for he also opened the first dedicated movie theater in 1908. On the other hand, due to the lack of primary sources, some reservations still remain on the reliability of his fame as the first exhibitor.<sup>50</sup> Nijat Özön claims that it was Weinberg who ran the first screenings sometime between late 1896 and 1897, while other historians such as Giovanni Scognomillo and Rekin Teksoy agreed both on the date and the name Weinberg.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Behzat Usdiken speculates that: ‘although some research implies the identity of the first exhibitor to be unproven, it was Weinberg who arranged the first screenings, being a Pathé-Frères organization with Weinberg as their Turkish representative’.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 22 January 1897.

<sup>49</sup> As described in the titles of Burçak Evren’s book and Gokhan Akcura’s chapter dedicated to Weinberg as ‘The Man Who Brought Cinema to Turkey’: Burçak Evren, *Sigmund Weinberg: Türkiye’ye Sinemaya Getiren Adam* (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1995); Gokhan Akcura, ‘Türkiye’ye Sinemayı Getiren Adam’, in *Aile Boyu Sinema* (Istanbul: İthaki Yayınları, İkinci Baskı, 2004), p. 175.

<sup>50</sup> For the discussions on the ambiguity of the identity of the first cinematograph exhibitor see the book by Burçak Evren noted in previous footnote.

<sup>51</sup> See Nijat Özön, *Türk Sineması Kronolojisi 1895-1966*, 12; Nijat Özön, *Karagözden Sinemaya* (Istanbul: Kitle Yayınları, 1995), p. 19, Nijat Özön, *Sinema El Kitabı* (Istanbul: Elif Yayınları, 1964), p. 113; Giovanni Scognomillo, *Türk Sinema Tarihi* (Istanbul: Kabalci Yayınevi, 1998), p. 17; Rekin Teksoy, *Rekin Teksoy’un Türk Sineması*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Behzat Usdiken, ‘Beyoglu’nun Eski Sinemaları: 1’, *Toplumsal Tarih*, 22 (October 1995), p. 43.

Another name mentioned for the early screenings was D. Henri by Metin And in his short piece on the first screenings: ‘on the newspapers of the period it appears that D. Henri’s cinema shows started on 18 December 1896’.<sup>53</sup> Most likely based on this data given by And, Deniz Göktürk and Nezih Erdoğan claim: ‘The first public exhibition took place in 1896 or 1897 in the Sponeck pub. The film, probably projected by a D. Henri, was the sensational *L’Arrivée d’un train en gare* (Lumière Brothers, 1895)’.<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, Zahir Guvemli underlines that ‘on the limited amount of data available, an unknown French painter gave the first screening’.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, on reading the newspaper announcements and the reviews in a French language newspaper, *Stamboul*, it appears that Henri Delavalle was the organizer of the first press and public screenings that took place in *Salle Sponeck* on 11 and 12 December 1896. On 26 December, Delavalle’s name was introduced to the readers with a comment on his cinematograph: ‘such an interesting novelty’.<sup>56</sup> This time a clearer and ‘elite’ audience profile is provided; the Greek ambassador and members of his legation were present at the show.<sup>57</sup>

One special name given to the ‘illuminated and animated pictures’ in Istanbul appears to be ‘cinevitagraphe’ on 12 January 1897 with a new repertoire that was not stated in the papers. Following the week of the initial *cinevitagraphe* shows, the Sultan’s birthday was celebrated with spectacular illuminations in the city. The big centers of the city such as Yildiz, Pera, Bosphorus, Nisantasi, Galata and Kadikoy along with an American yacht called ‘Margarita’ were illuminated for the celebrations.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Metin And, ‘Turkiye’de Sponek’, *Milliyet Sanat*, 15 November 1974, p. 106.

<sup>54</sup> Nezih Erdoğan, Deniz Göktürk, ‘Turkish Cinema’, p. 533.

<sup>55</sup> Zahir Guvemli, *Sinema Tarihi* (Istanbul: Varlik Yayınları, 1960), p. 230.

<sup>56</sup> *Stamboul*, 26 December 1896. Some information on Henri Delavalle was also uncovered independently by Mustafa Ozen in his recently submitted thesis, ‘De opkomst van het moderne medium cinema in de Ottomaanse hoofdstad Istanbul’, p. 74.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Stamboul*, 12 January 1897.

#### 4.3.2. Local Views and Pictures from the Lumière Brothers

On 23 January 1897, *Stamboul* provides a more sensational introduction to cinema, this time at a different venue, Odeon Tiyatrosu, a famous theater of the late nineteenth century:

This evening offers the debut of a truly curious spectacle. It is the new Parisian 'cinematograph' with all its latest perfections. That is to say that the projected subjects are not simply animated but made even more striking by being coloured. Landscapes, people, interiors, etc. are reproduced in their natural colours. The repertoire consists of more than twenty very varied subjects -- local views such as the Karakeuy bridge, the Bosphorus quays (wharfs), etc. Uniform price of entry is 5 piastres. Children pay half price. Screenings begin every day at 4 o'clock. There are also matinees on Sundays and holidays at 10 in the morning<sup>59</sup>

It is not clear how these pictures were colored (they might have been tinted or hand-stencilled) and neither do we know how many people attended the screenings. It is, however, obvious that a wide range of audience members were targeted as we can estimate from the reduction of prices for children. This screening is significant concerning its repertoire since it was almost certainly the first time Istanbulites have seen their own city at a public moving pictures show. This might have confirmed a prominent characteristic of early cinema which is the sense of recognition and awareness of viewing that was created by watching these films.<sup>60</sup> These local views also suggest an uncanny effect by showing familiar images through an unfamiliar or rather a new apparatus. It does not indicate an absence of the city's visual representations, but it indicates that this time Istanbulites found an opportunity to see the city through a different medium.

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<sup>59</sup> *Stamboul*, 23. January 1897.

<sup>60</sup> For a further explanation of the local pictures' self-reflexive characteristics see Vanessa Toulmin and Martin Loiperdinger, 'Is It You? Recognition and Representation and Response in Relation to the Local Film', *Film History*, 17 (2005), pp. 7-18.

On 26 January 1897, the *cinématographe parisien* presented a list of films, which are mainly, but perhaps not exclusively, Lumière subjects at the same theater Odeon.<sup>61</sup> Screenings were now at 4, 5 and 6 o'clock in the afternoon and at 8.30, 9.30 and 10.30 p.m. However on the days when theater performances took place, cinematograph shows were made during the intermissions. This seems to be a new practice for Istanbul as we know that the earlier shows at Salle Sponeck were independent attractions. On the other hand, early films are already known to be part of other displays such as vaudeville shows, circus attractions, theater performances and the like.

The Odeon set the same ticket prices as Salle Sponeck: single entry cost 5 piastres and children paid half price.<sup>62</sup> The newspaper states that programs changed every day though no details are provided. Sunday and holiday matinees started at 10 a.m. which may imply 'family' interest in the shows, just as in the setting of different entry fees for children. It is also noteworthy that this particular newspaper report is, perhaps not accidentally, followed by an article about spectatorship manners. Copied from a French newspaper this article focuses on the unpleasant distraction of women's hats during theatrical performances, which later on became a subject for early cinema as well.<sup>63</sup>

The new repertoire at the Odeon consisted of: *The Waterer Watered* [a famous Lumière subject of the gardener and the small boy], *Harvesting the Hay*, *Arrival of a Train in the Station*, *The Tsar's Procession in Paris*, *A Parisian Lady's Bath*, *Procession of the President of the Republic*, *A Children's Ball*, *Problems of a Traveller*, *Argument at the Water's Edge*, *An Outing in Canoe*, *A French Cavalry Charge*, *A Dance in Auvergne*, *A Plunge into the Sea*, *Spanish Dance*, *Belly Dance*

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<sup>61</sup> *Stamboul*, 26 January 1897.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> See *Those Awful Hats* (David W. Griffith, USA, 1909).

[Turkish, perhaps?], *Dance of Unbelievable Little People*. Next time the same local scenes were shown again: the Karakoy bridge, the Bosphorus quays, along with a country dance. On the following day the newspaper printed a review of this show:

During the intervals in last night's [theater] performance, we had the opportunity to witness the animated projections of the new cinematograph. We had great pleasure in viewing the truly curious scenes which passed before our eyes and we could judge close up the ingenious working of this apparatus which allows it to project coloured subjects. [Not clear what this is.] It is an attractive novelty and M. Achard [the theater director] took pleasure in prolonging the intervals by several minutes so that the cinematograph operator had time to give his screenings.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps, confirming the status of the cinema of attractions as a technological curiosity, neither personal reflections on the local views nor the topics of any films are provided in this review. Instead of an aesthetic pleasure or the 'life-like' effects of the cinematograph, the author seems to be preoccupied with the conditions of the screening and the quality of the pictures.

#### **4.3.3. Competitions among the Cinematic Devices**

The apparatus at the Salle Sponeck had been named 'cinevitagraphe' by the newspaper, whereas the one at the new venue Odeon was promoted to be 'nouveau cinématographe parisien'. The different naming may indicate a new apparatus brought by F. De Bouillaune only for the Odeon, prior to the one brought by Henri Delavalle for the Salle Sponeck. In particular, the fact that this time *Stamboul* introduced the device as the 'new Parisian cinematograph' emphasizes a novelty brought to the same apparatus. The second early cinema exhibitor in Istanbul is F. De Bouillaune who installed a cinematograph at the Odeon Theater. Bouillaune

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<sup>64</sup> *Stamboul*, 27 January 1897.

afterwards wrote a letter to the newspaper where he claimed that ‘the cinematograph’ was not the exclusive property of Lumière and had been discovered by many other inventors who continued to develop it. He also declared that he himself contributed to these discoveries especially where color was concerned: ‘As a result of many trials, I personally brought many novelties to the cinematograph after which people, who are able to discuss and judge these types of scientific discoveries, congratulated me.’<sup>65</sup>

Bouillaune also asserted that he was assured that nothing of that nature had been seen previously in Constantinople, where the ‘cinevitagraphe’ [sic] was merely a pale copy of the ‘cinématographe’ [sic]. He then declared that the public would undeniably distinguish between them. Additionally, Bouillaune underlined his intention to continue with the screenings and to explore the history of the cinematograph for there was ‘no monopoly on inventions’.<sup>66</sup> The competition between Sponeck and Odeon seemed to lead to better qualities of the apparatus while also implying an audience interest.

The Odeon Theater, in addition to the cinematograph shows, served as a venue for balls (which indicates an elite type of occasion).<sup>67</sup> On 31 January 1897, it appears that the Parisian cinematograph, shortly before leaving the city, gave only a few more performances at the Odeon: ‘We therefore urge our readers to profit from this curious spectacle while there is still time’.<sup>68</sup> Screenings were at 5 and 6 every day; and in the evening during the intervals of theater performances.

The screenings at the Odeon continued another week with the addition of a new apparatus, the Edison phonograph. In early February 1897 ‘the phonograph allowed the whole hall to hear the sounds, words, music’ instead of a live music

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<sup>65</sup> *Stamboul*, 27 January 1897.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Stamboul*, 29 January 1897.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

performance.<sup>69</sup> After this, the cinematograph shows do not appear in the newspapers for almost a month, then reemerge in Istanbul at Sponeck. During these gaps in the cinema shows, other attractions continued. Russian troupes played at the Odeon; classical music concerts at the Kadikoy Theater, circus shows, Ramadan attractions and pantomime shows also took place in the city.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4.3.4. A Third Venue Opens

At the beginning of March, renewed screenings began at the Sponeck with new subjects and coloured images, accompanied by a phonograph. The animated pictures could be seen everyday at 6, 8.30 and 9.30, and on Sundays at 3, 4 and 5.<sup>71</sup> A third venue opened its halls for the cinematograph on 25 March 1897 at Tepebaşı Theater, which would later be the first specialized cinema hall in 1908. The Tepebaşı Theater promoted its apparatus to be the ‘new Edison cinematograph’ with new pictures and the newspaper declared it was ‘one of the most perfect we have yet witnessed’.<sup>72</sup> A more striking novelty was that the prices were reduced to 3 piastres which may be due to the competition between the different theaters, apparatuses and venues. On 26 March 1897, confirming the idea of possible competition again, the organizer of the screenings at the Sponeck announced an enriched program: ‘In order to thank the public before having to leave, the number of films on the program will be increased. At each session there will now be 15 items instead of the previous 6 or 8. The times of screenings will change to 6, 9 and 10 p.m.’<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Stamboul*, 6 February 1897.

<sup>70</sup> *Stamboul*, 9, 10, 11, 12 February

<sup>71</sup> *Stamboul*, 11 March 1897.

<sup>72</sup> *Stamboul*, 25 March 1897.

<sup>73</sup> *Stamboul*, 26.March. 1897.

What is most surprising about the Tepebaşı Theater is that the person who ran the screenings was the famous Sigmund Weinberg, whose name appeared in the newspapers for the ‘first’ time in relation to the cinematograph shows. This controversial figure of Turkish film history became the director of the Edison Cinematograph at Tepebaşı. In early April, while screenings at the Tepebaşı Theater were continuing daily sessions along with theater entr’actes, the screenings at Sponeck had ceased. In the meantime, tableaux vivants shows, pantomimes, puppet and magic lantern shows continued in the city.<sup>74</sup> According to *Stamboul* the Edison cinematograph at the Tepebaşı Theater was increasingly successful with its ‘interesting showings’.<sup>75</sup> As the spring approached, the screenings were moved to Tepebaşı garden in the open air.<sup>76</sup>

#### **4.3.5. On the Absence of the Cinematograph**

It is not necessarily peculiar to Istanbul, but can also be seen in countries other than the United States or Western Europe, that the cinematograph was not on permanent display for a few years. In the first two years, different showmen brought the apparatus to Istanbul for certain periods after which they may have travelled to the Balkans or to the Middle East. In his work on early cinema in Egypt, Michael Allan mentions the role of traveling showmen in cinematograph shows outside Western Europe. Alexandre Promio as a representative of the Lumière Brothers, travelled through North Africa and the Middle East, which may help to explain the occasional absences of the cinematograph:

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<sup>74</sup> *Stamboul*, 24, 25, 26 March 1897.

<sup>75</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 6 April 1897.

<sup>76</sup> *Stamboul*, 16, 17 April 1897.



Newspapers of the period tended to cover Promio's travels as an imperial conquest and marveled at how 'the entire world' (*'le monde entier'*) might soon be 'the conquest of the Cinématographe Lumière' (*'la conquête du Cinématographe Lumière'*). Importantly, though, Egypt was just one of the numerous stops on Promio's world tour, and it became, in the archives of early cinema, but one site from a range of international locations –among which, Paris, London, Belfast, Berlin, Istanbul, Moscow and Tokyo are just a few. The footage collected at each of these sites was circulated among a network of audiences worldwide, and from Venice to Buenos Aires to Montreal to Beijing audiences could marvel at sites on displays from disparate parts of the globe.<sup>77</sup>

The irregular screenings of the cinematograph might then be explained by the traveling showmen who took the cinematic apparatus from one city to another. Throughout 1897 and 1898 the cinematograph shows were organized infrequently. Other spectacle announcements increased in the periods the cinematograph announcements disappeared; which might be a sign of a public preference for the cinematograph. On the other hand, tableaux vivants, magic lanterns, *Karagöz* shows, puppet theaters, diorama and panorama were still among the popular visual delights of 1897 and 1898. The shows could be performed separately or mixed with two or three different performances. Diorama presentations included some 'sublime' scenes such as big trains or ships; magical transformations; scenic views (Naples and Vesuvius); an aquarium ('with fish, of course'); macabre scenes in a graveyard; and a ship at sea in a storm.<sup>78</sup>

On 24 March 1898, a French language teaching school named the Collège of Saint-Benoit organized a study day for the geography, ethnography and natural history of the Congo with illuminated projections called *tableaux vivants*. The lecture was accompanied with discussions and music; meanwhile the presentation was a kind of visual travelogue followed by 'An Expedition to Algeria'.<sup>79</sup> On 5 April 1898

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Allan, 'Deserted Histories: The Lumière Brothers, the Pyramids and Early Film Form', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 6 (July 2008), 159-170 (p. 160).

<sup>78</sup> *Stamboul*, 12 January 1898. Also for the relationship between the sublime and early cinema see Tom Gunning, 'Phantom Rides and Sublime Motion' (Presentation given at SCMS Conference, March 2006).

<sup>79</sup> *Stamboul*, 24 March, 1898.

an ‘exceptional display by the eccentric clown’ along with the chanteuse Mlle. Andie was performing at the Concordia Theater; where the tableaux were illuminated by electricity.<sup>80</sup> In the following month a stage performance with Turkish music, singing, puppet shows, wrestling and Albanian dances took place at the Union Française.<sup>81</sup> The highlight, however, was a *Karagöz* performance accompanied by a show of ‘elaborate lighting and [performers] wearing extremely sensual costumes that aroused libidinous desires’ from the audience.<sup>82</sup>

Debates over the techniques of the cinematograph continued despite the seeming absence of the shows in the city. However, we can still assume that the early cinema audience of Istanbul were positioning themselves as part of the global audience which was seen in a journalistic account about the various technical possibilities of the cinematograph offered by the French scientists.<sup>83</sup> The enthusiasm and the obsession with scientific novelties may effortlessly be observed in the article entitled *La Cinématografie du ciel* (‘The Cinematography of the Sky’), which describes a performance in France as a sign of interest in the cinematographic novelties elsewhere:

The possibilities of cinema can be multiplied to infinity, more so than any other invention. After entrancing us with scenes representing traffic in the streets, waves breaking on the shore, the countryside seen from a moving train, life shown backwards [reverse motion], the cinema is going to show us something that surpasses all these a hundredfold. This is the rotation of the earth and other celestial phenomena.<sup>84</sup>

The paragraph seems to affirm the general characterizations of the ‘cinema of attractions’ created by a variety of spectacles of immense movements (such as waves, train voyages, traffic scenes and the reverse motions of life). Furthermore, it

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<sup>80</sup> *Stamboul*, 5 April 1898.

<sup>81</sup> *Stamboul*, 12 April 1898.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Stamboul*, 19 January 1898.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

suggests a new project for increasing the effect of attraction by showing the movements of the earth and the stars. The journal introduces M. Camille Flammarion, an early author of science fiction and the secretary-general of the Astronomical Society of France, and his 'strange idea' to film the solar system and the whole horizon with a large field of vision. Providing many technical details and describing an early use of time-lapse photography, the journal exposes a celebration of the moving pictures technology:

As no camera is able to operate for six hours at a stretch (the length of the night at this time of year), and as the apparent movement of the stars is very slow, he takes during the night two or three thousand exposures on the same stretch of film at regular intervals, thus obtaining a continuous series showing the sunset, the stars appearing, the regular movement of the constellations from East to West, the luminous tracks of the stars, the break of day and finally sunrise. This whole series of phenomena can then be projected in two minutes on any projector, thus giving the illusion of the complete and rapid rotation of the earth.<sup>85</sup>

It is also understood that M. Flammarion informed the journalists of his plans to go even further for the cinematic representations of the sky. Accordingly, special effects would be created through the technological advancement of the cinematograph and thereby, the scientific phenomena of the solar system would be shown through an illusion. The attraction would be non-realistic, with only two minutes depicting the whole celestial movement; nevertheless it would undoubtedly be eye catching. Furthermore, such astrological observations would be accessible to the ordinary public, not merely scientists. Therefore, the newspaper claimed that such a development would intrigue a public that knew little of the extent to which the astronomers of the age examined these matters. Perhaps more importantly, the article asserted that at the end of the nineteenth century, the public would no longer be astonished by anything. Considering the current progress of the time to be at the pinnacle, it was assumed that the early cinema audience could easily imagine how

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

their great-great grandchildren, at the end of the twentieth century, could watch a film representing ‘scenes of life on Mars’ that would be more interesting than ‘banal views’ of the Place de l’Opéra or the Champs Élysées!’<sup>86</sup>

#### **4.3.6. The Cinematograph Re-appears**

After vanishing for almost a year, the cinema shows in the city restarted on 11 June 1898 as a ball attraction. In the garden of Taksim, an outdoor charity ball was organized by the ladies of the Jewish-German society. The main attractions were the illuminations and the living photographs (in their natural size) from the ‘new Biograph apparatus’. The ticket prices of the ball were the same as the cinematograph shows of the previous year: 5 piastres.<sup>87</sup> In the meantime, exhibitions of other visual delights continued in the city. At the Theater A. Goffa in Bakirkoy, a magic lantern show along with tableaux vivants was accompanied by live music; the show also included a solo performance by a comedian.<sup>88</sup> At the Tepebaşı Theater, where Weinberg previously arranged screenings, puppet shows with magic lantern shows (‘the Chinese, the animated [living] skeleton, the negro concert, the Magic Lantern, the war of the fishes’) continued.<sup>89</sup> Another Grand Diorama show at the same venue was presented by M. Christoff who: ‘has just arrived from St Petersburg, where his diorama was a great success. Its mechanism is perfect. Without having to move, the spectator sees unfold in front of him pictures representing in their shapes and colors: historical views, towns, mountains, seas, public squares and boulevards, etc.’<sup>90</sup> Again at the Tepebaşı Theater a fairy scene taken from a novel by Jules Verne was shown for the second time. This time the newspaper reported that huge technical

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> *Stamboul*, 8, 9, 10 June 1898.

<sup>88</sup> *Stamboul*, 30 June 1898

<sup>89</sup> *Stamboul*, 10 November 1898.

<sup>90</sup> *Stamboul*, 26 August 1898.

difficulties were overcome especially in the scene with a ship containing thirty actors suspended three meters above the stage which was interpreted as 'true naturalism'.<sup>91</sup>

After a break of about five months, the cinematograph shows began at venues other than theaters. Being famous for hosting celebrities such as Atatürk, Greta Garbo and Agatha Christie, Pera Palace Hotel accommodated the cinematograph along with the phonograph. M.V. Continsouza invited the press on 21 November 1898 to a cinematographic performance during which they witnessed a trial performance of a loud speaker phonograph. The newspaper 'proudly' reported the show's success and the phonograph's 'astonishingly realistic effects' with the natural sounds of both humans and animals. The newspaper review underlined the use of electricity which produced clearer images than the previous shows at the Sponeck, Odeon and Taksim Garden. The most successful scenes for the author were 'burglars who throw a woman over the balcony of a house and then play a nasty trick on the gendarme who comes to arrest them; a scene of a clumsy fisherman; and the pantomime of the devil's mansion, which lasts around ten minutes.'<sup>92</sup> The audience, according to this review, marvelled and were enchanted at the color images and at the famous Edison film of *The Butterfly Dance* shown for the first time. This particular show offered a visual journey for the spectators with 'a most interesting complete spectacle, as, during more than an hour and a half, you can believe yourself transported into a Paris theater.'<sup>93</sup>

However the problem with the screenings at the 'chic' Pera Palace Hotel was the entry fees were almost ten times more than the earlier shows. The reviewer recommended the organizers to reduce the fees to ten piastres so as to 'allow a

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<sup>91</sup> *Stamboul*, 8 August 1898. For similar spectacular stage effects in late nineteenth century American and European theater productions and their influence on early cinema see A. Nicholas Verdac, *From Stage to Screen*, (Benjamin Bloom: New York, 1968).

<sup>92</sup> *Stamboul*, 22 November 1898

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

greater number of people to attend the beautiful screenings'. The second new venue for the cinematograph and the phonograph happened to be a circus, called *Cirque de Pera*, in the following weeks.<sup>94</sup> Lasting for three hours, the program began with the cinematograph followed by a phonograph concert; a show of trained pigeons and parrots; an 'eccentric musician', and a juggler's show for the finale. The ticket prices ranged from 2 1/2 piastres to 30 piastres, which indeed connotes that the show might have a relatively large group of audience members coming from different social classes. It may be claimed that there was a hierarchy amongst the audience as the prices differed according to the seating areas.<sup>95</sup>

The cinematograph and phonograph performances were transferred from the bar of the Pera Palace Hotel to the circus of the City of Alep. The prices were also reduced and became 'affordable for every purse'.<sup>96</sup> The announcement added that this cinematograph offered a superb spectacle', where the images were very well lit and were perfectly clear. The use of electricity accordingly seemed to be a great help as the lucidity of the images was repeatedly appreciated by the journalists. The show was also valued to be a 'complete spectacle' and a 'perfect illusion', which lasted three hours.<sup>97</sup> The films were composed of scenes from the *Avenue of the Champs-Élysées*, *The Arrival of the King of Siam in Paris*, *the Devil's Mansion* and *The Serpentine Dance of Loie Fuller*, which was thought to be 'marvelous'. A greater spectacle, however, was arranged at the Pera Circus as part of a celebration for the anniversary of the Sultan Abdulhamid who, as has been pointed out earlier, was not as hostile to cinema as many critics have claimed. The Pera Circus was illuminated and decked with flags and the great gate leading to Pera Street glittered with

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<sup>94</sup> *Stamboul*, 30 November 1898

<sup>95</sup> *Stamboul*, 1 December 1898.

<sup>96</sup> *Stamboul*, 6 December 1898.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

‘tastefully’ decorated lanterns.<sup>98</sup> On the whole way leading to the circus, a considerable number of ‘Chinese lanterns in gay colors [that] formed a triumphal route’. M. Ramirez at the circus prepared the decorations, after which ‘he was recompensed for his efforts’ as the circus was full every day. Furthermore, the prices were ‘affordable to every purse’. The program for the Sultan’s anniversary was as follows:

1. Piano overture.
- 2 and 3. Phonograph concert by M. Roland.
4. Antipodean games [whatever these may be].
5. Song and dance by Mr. Wilkins.
6. Musical clown by George
7. Hungarian dance.
8. Cinematograph.
9. Piano overture.
- 10 and 11. Phonograph by M. Roland.
12. The iron wire, by Mlle. Ida Debut. [most likely an acrobatic attraction]
13. American comedian, Mr. Wilkins.
14. Comic performance by MM Freyer and Albert.
15. Three clowns (including some of the above).
16. Cinematograph: colored and animated scenes.<sup>99</sup>

#### **4.3.7. The Illusion of the Real**

Focusing mainly on the circumstances of displays, the newspapers provide little data for the specific reactions of the actual audiences to the cinematograph. Only on rare occasions journalists mentions particular spectator responses. In a review of the weekly city attractions for example, one author interprets an audience comment he probably heard at the Odeon theater. Indeed, he uses the dialogue of this spectator to support his argument that the curiosity incited by the cinematograph was not necessarily a sign of the public interest in the aesthetics and the filmic subjects. For him it seemed as if it was the advanced technology that attracted people to the

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<sup>98</sup> *Stamboul*, 31 December 1898.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

shows: 'Look for example, here is what I heard after one of the sessions: "I am not intrigued about the exactitude of the movement or the originality of the topics. What is interesting to me is the rapidity of the switching on and off of the gas lamp".'<sup>100</sup>

Through this particular experience an incredulous or a critical audience reaction is reiterated. The imperfect technology of the apparatus contributed to the awareness of the informed spectator who was already conscious of the illusionary nature of the images due particularly to the visual delights he had previously seen. Another French newspaper of the period, *Le Moniteur Oriental*, mentions the cinematograph for the first time in late March 1897. It would, however, be foolhardy to assume that they did not know of the 'moving images' before. As we notice from the quotation below, the review is not written in a style to introduce an unknown novelty, rather it provides a further reflection on a fresh invention:

There is no pen that can recreate or give more than a feeble idea of the *magical effects* [my emphasis] produced by this Cinematograph. First of all, the photographs here are of a natural size, which ends by giving them the character of living people. In this respect you are so close to reality that you suffer from vertigo.

We recommend the scene of the *Place de l'Opéra* in Paris. The *truthfulness of the enormous movement* here [my emphasis] is truly unbelievable. You see crowds of people passing rapidly, *flâneurs* who meet and greet each other, shake hands, and have a chat; there are cabs, other vehicles, omnibuses passing at all speeds. You wouldn't see things any differently from your window.

We will also mention what is perhaps the most striking of these scenes - that of the arrival of a train. The station platform, recently deserted, is suddenly filled with an enormous crowd; the train arrives; porters open the carriage doors, people get out or say goodbye, they get into cars; it is an effect beyond description. Once again, go and see this marvellous spectacle, it is well worth the effort.

In connection with this last scene, the arrival of a train, an incident took place recently in St Petersburg which is marvellous publicity for the Edison cinematograph.<sup>101</sup> A Russian soldier found himself in the first row of the audience; the train arrives and he sees and recognizes among the passengers his colonel getting out of a carriage and facing him. The illusion is so complete that the worthy Tommy [ordinary soldier] stood up and gave a military salute.

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<sup>100</sup> *Stamboul*, 16 February 1897

<sup>101</sup> Here we should note that this is unlikely the famous *L'Arrivée d'un Train* by Lumière Brothers, since early filmmakers copied subjects freely from one another.



We are not ourselves lavish with praise, but the Edison cinematograph deserves to be made known throughout the world.<sup>102</sup>

One may claim that the author's thoughts focus on the 'realistic', 'magical' and striking effects of the apparatus. His stress on the magical effects of the images, not contradictorily but perhaps unexpectedly, seems to stem from their realism. In other words, he finds the *realistic* image *illusionary* and accordingly fascinating and attractive to the eyes, something that Yuri Tsivian calls 'too perfect to be true'. Furthermore, perhaps controversially again, the author does not recommend readers to see, *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare*, 'the most striking' of all, but the *Place de l'Opéra* which is the 'most realistic' of them, in which he found 'the truthfulness of the enormous movement' unbelievable. Here once again we are in the field of the pre-cinematic viewing, where the oscillation between the illusion and the real had been materialized long before the cinema. One may easily associate this to Rumi's mirror like screen-wall that reflects the beautifully painted second wall. The issue, however, is not the image; or rather the content of the image, but its ability to reflect the images in motion realistically. The journalist seeks and prefers to recommend a 'realistic effect', which is perhaps less curious for a shock-driven audience who supposedly chooses the 'train effect'. Yet, by realism he does not seem to refer to a perfect imitation of the world; he rather implies a 'hyper-realism' or a 'magical realism' that would fascinate the audience with illusion. The multiple perspectives and hyper realist painting, according to Tsivian, created a parallel effect: 'The neutrality of treatment made the world of the image look metaphysical and dreamlike. The effect was similar to that of the *trompe-l'oeil*, to hyper-realist painting, - or to return to the Lumières to the impact of the moving image upon the

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<sup>102</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 29 March 1897.

first film viewers: the image was too perfect to be true'.<sup>103</sup> Hence one can claim the applicability of the terms *hayran* ('wondrous') and *hayret* ('astonishment' and 'wonder') to the spectatorship of *Place de l'Opéra* for example, since the review reveals significant reminiscences to a miniature viewing, which provides multiple perspectives and in which *hayret* and *hayran* were considered to be main feelings.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

Born into an era of worldwide capitalism, early cinema is now considered to be a global phenomenon cinema particularly due to the global marketing success of the Lumière Brothers. The first two years of the cinematograph in Istanbul reaffirms the literature on early cinema without inherent differences. We can of course mention some nuances, yet most of the 'exotic' elements of Ottoman early cinema-going seem to be simplistic attributions in relation to Turkish modernity that has been largely characterized as belated. Therefore these attributions (and/or assumptions) should be reconsidered since there have been no reliable sources or evidence that suggest a cultural or religious prejudice against the cinema-going. Moreover, these arguments over an Islamic prejudice on the topic lead to essentialist assumptions reducing the entire cinematic spectatorship to the Westernized elite. On the other hand, as we can see from newspapers, figuring in the cultural or religious background of the audiences is an impractical and perhaps even a vain attempt to draw conclusions since no data seems to confirm its relevance to the situation. Furthermore such an argument disregards not only the long folklore of pre-cinematic spectatorship, but also the Islamic mysticism that celebrated spectatorship through the senses of awareness, astonishment and wonder. Looking into press records, the

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<sup>103</sup> Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and Its Cultural Reception*, p. 146.

first cinematograph experiences are revealed particularly through the feelings of curiosity about the mechanisms of the cinematograph. As indicated by a general body of work on the cinema of attractions, this type of spectatorship is undoubtedly not peculiar to Turkish audiences. Through the records, we can see an inquisitive, fun-loving audience profile that attended the screenings at circuses, at ordinary beer halls, at fashionable hotels and balls. Class divisions occur especially in the arrangement of entry fees according to the various seats at theaters or on certain occasions such as the individual screenings at balls or Pera Palace Hotel. The identity of the initial exhibitor has been another myth in Turkish film history, for most historians agree on the name Sigmund Weinberg. Yet, on searching newspapers of the period it became clear that Henri Delavalle was responsible for the first public screenings at Sponeck, which were followed by the ones at the Odeon by F. De Bouillaune. Sigmund Weinberg's name appears only after these two projectionists' names. Overall, the screenings were sporadic and when they disappeared, the number of other visual delights increased. The cinematograph shows were mainly done separately in the first few months, yet in 1898 they were merely part of other amusements such as balls and circuses.

A more practical and challenging attempt of defining the audiences according to religious and ethnic backgrounds, is to investigate when exactly the cinema began to be seen as a symbol of 'Westernization'. In the early years it seems that the public merely saw it as a curious invention. The pictures Istanbulites viewed in the early period did not narrate stories, legends or tales of particular national cultures, but rather showed more universal attractions such as the chase scenes, bodily attractions, slapstick, travelogues or nature. The hypothetical question raised by Jonathan Auerbach seems to be important to repeat in this present context: 'If an unknown early film suddenly surfaced without any indication of origin, would we be able to

identify the nationality of the filmmaker based solely on looking at its formal features?’<sup>104</sup> Within the emergence of narrative cinema and a national consciousness in the World War I period, however, we will be dealing with the relationship between cinema and national resistance in Chapter Five.

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<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Auerbach, ‘Nationalizing Attractions’, in *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King (London: John Libbey Publishing, 2008), 17-22 (p. 19).

## **5. CHAPTER FIVE: SPECTATORSHIP DURING THE GREAT WAR, OCCUPATION AND RESISTANCE**

This chapter will selectively cover the period between 1908 and 1923 with a special focus on World War I and its effects on cinema-going; the principal arguments will revolve around the issues of national/international distribution and production practices and the way these dynamics defined and altered spectatorship. Therefore, I will initially discuss the relationship of cinema-going with the politics of the war period; national(ist) resistance towards the films of the Great Powers, and global distribution policies. These sections are divided by the outbreak of the war. Afterwards, I will take a slight detour and examine the gentrification of Ottoman cinema life caused mainly by the effects of the war and the rise of conservatism and nationalism. The spectators of the period are depicted mainly as female in literary texts. Such attributions seemingly stem from two factors: one is the patriarchal and patriotic concerns over the cinematic ‘influence’ of Western European nations who were the occupiers of the country at that time. The second factor is the increasingly dominant role of narrative cinema after the disappearance of the cinema of attractions. These two factors appear to lead the nationalist Turkish intelligentsia to view Turkish women (who allegedly and strongly identified with ‘corrupted’ Italian divas) as being in danger of absorption by the Western values offered by European films.

The period between 1908 and 1923 refers to the tremendous transformation the country underwent as well as the shifts in cinema-going. The year 1908 highlights three major events for this study: the supposed end of the cinema of attractions period, the opening of the first dedicated movie theaters in Turkey, and the Young Turk revolution which all took place in this same year. The transition

period from the cinema of attractions to a narrative based cinema can be considered as taking place between 1908 and 1917 in its widest sense,<sup>1</sup> despite the hesitations expressed by Ben Singer and Tom Gunning on the reliability of the term ‘transitional’ for the description of these cinematic shifts.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it seems appropriate for this work to benefit from such a term and time frame as it refers to significant changes in American and European film history in general. The reason for extending the time frame of this chapter is, however, contextual. 1923 is remarkable for the important changes in the country; as it witnessed by the foundation of the Turkish Republic, after which Ottoman cultural heritage was nearly discarded (exemplified in the abolition of the usage of the Arabic alphabet, the constitution, the calendar system and the Caliphate).

Between 1908 and 1923, subjects of the Empire witnessed the Young Turk Revolution and the restoration of Parliament; three different sultans on the throne; the great loss of the Balkan territories and an influx of émigrés from those lands; World War I and the great defeat; the deportation and massacre of the Armenian population; an enormous immigration wave from Russia to Istanbul due to the Soviet Revolution; occupation of the Mediterranean coast by the Italian and French; occupation of Izmir by the Greek and of Istanbul by the French, Italian and British armies; the abolition of the Sultanate and finally, the collapse of the Empire and the emergence of the Turkish Republic. Tracking the effects of such events on the cinematic spectatorship may be very difficult and ambitious. Yet, we can still read the evolution of viewing practices against such a background and therefore may

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Abel locates this transition in a shorter period between 1904 and 1907. See Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> For the discussions of this ‘controversial’ term ‘transitional’ see Charlie Keil and Shelly Stamp, *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), passim.

investigate a more vivid illustration free from cultural assumptions that may contain the risk of being misleading.

What might the factors be behind the changes in viewing practices? Firstly, the distribution policies were largely under the control of the Great Powers due to both global practices and a national one (the economic state of the Empire in decline). Therefore, the chapter will focus on the changing national backgrounds of the films. Additionally, the economic aspect should be kept in mind: the inflation due to the wars and loss of territories triggered a traditionalist/nationalist resistance to cinema-going since it could be seen as a leisure time activity, and hence one of the primary expenses lower classes could give up. Finally, the outcomes of the Great War and occupation have an inevitable central role on gender politics for this study. Therefore, literary texts on cinema-going will be analyzed in the gender context with the reflection of the socio-political changes of the country.

### **5.1. Decay and Decadence: The Empire in Decline and the Metropolis in Debauchery**

By the end of World War I, Istanbulites were enjoying an extremely cosmopolitan way of life. However, with the emergence of national resistance in the 1920s, ethnic cultures began to differentiate and cosmopolitanism increasingly disappeared. In addition, a national culture started to be constructed. Middle class Muslim women became gradually visible in public life and urban culture evolved into something more ‘Western’.

After Sultan Abdulhamid’s abolition of the Parliament in 1878, the Young Turk movement clandestinely continued in the Balkan territories of the Empire. A great restlessness in the subjects helped the Young Turks to restore the earlier constitution and lead a revolution against Abdulhamid in 1908 and the Empire became a constitutional monarchy. The CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) formed by the majority of the Young Turks had formerly been a secret organization; it then became the official party that led the Parliament after the revolution of 1908. Yet, we should keep in mind that the Young Turks were not a homogenized unit and held different (perhaps even contradictory) ideologies and embodied various class divisions. On one hand, the liberal wing of the Young Turks were supportive of the Sultan and belonged to the upper classes, who were well-educated and ‘Westernized’ cosmopolitans; the nationalist wing, on the other hand, was composed largely of those with middle class backgrounds and was more or less against the Sultan and the imperialism associated with the Great Powers.<sup>3</sup>

The CUP managed to increase the presence of middle class Muslim women in public. Muslim women started not only to make public speeches, but also to

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<sup>3</sup> On the Young Turks Movement see Sukru M. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).



participate in politics and even to appear on the stage.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the Young Turks even after the revolution were not yet always appreciated by the subjects from the provinces due to the strict censorship of Abdulhamid's reign and the continuing economic troubles.<sup>5</sup> The war between the Balkan League (composed of Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia) and the Ottoman Empire started in 1912 and resulted in the loss of all the territories in Macedonia, Albania and a large part of Thrace in the same year. This defeat caused great economic difficulties resulting in large tax increases and immense discontent among the public. The final step in the Empire's decline was however brought about by its defeat in World War I. The leader of CUP, Enver Pasha, was known for his close ties to Germany and accepted the Empire's involvement in the war by joining the Central Powers along with Germany and Austria-Hungary in October 1914 (Bulgaria also joined them in 1915). The defeat in World War I led to the collapse of the Empire in October 1918. The last Sultan, Vahdettin, was said to be only concerned for his throne while the leader of the Cabinet was allegedly deprived of 'courage and dignity'.<sup>6</sup> The army was forced to surrender all arms and ammunition and the leaders 'agreed to every proposal that could protect its members and their sovereign'.<sup>7</sup> The troops of the Entente Powers remained in the country and subsequently the majority of the former Empire's territories were occupied by them. Istanbul was occupied by the British, French and Italian armies; Adana by the French; Urfa, Maras, Antep by the English; Antalya and Konya by the Italians and Izmir by Greek armies.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> See Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A.L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire* (London; New York, Longman, 1998), pp. 183-184.

### 5.1.1. Class Divisions and a Changing Intellectual Viewpoint before the War

Socio-economic class divisions among audiences are difficult to identify with the sources available; novels and memoirs tend to be literary forms that deal mainly with middle or upper class characters and newspapers do not seem to provide much data on this issue either. The location of movie theaters could have provided a clue on the matter, yet unlike the case of the United States of America, the movie theaters of Istanbul were based on three key districts that were the main hubs of entertainment regardless of the hierarchy of class divisions. Through novels and memoirs we can easily claim a middle class interest in cinema-going. However, it is difficult to discern the role of immigrants and lower middle classes in spectatorship since World War I was a period of great struggle particularly for subjects of low income that were unlikely to be able to afford most forms of entertainment.

Just as the cinema of attractions was now being replaced by longer and more narrative based films, the Ottoman Empire was also in a state of transition. Prior to and during World War I, the Young Turks were in power and Sultan Reşad (reigned between 1909 and 1918) was seen as impotent. The Balkan wars and big losses of territories, the Armenian massacre and World War I all took place under Sultan Reşad's reign. Yet his name is rarely mentioned in history books since the Young Turks played a leading role in these events. This may again form a metaphor for the lack of a prominent father figure in the cultural products of the age as Jale Parla indicated for the earlier period between 1860 and 1896 that is mentioned in Chapter Two.<sup>9</sup> We have seen in Chapter Four that the intelligentsia showed a scientific curiosity and a critical view on the cinema of attractions. As we approach more narrative based films in the late 1910s and the decline of the Ottoman Empire, one

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<sup>9</sup> See Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Ogullar, Tanzimat Romaninin Epistemolojik Kokenleri* (Istanbul: Iletisim, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2004)

can also find perhaps a more submissive or escapist attitude towards the cinema by the intelligentsia. Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, in his previously mentioned novel (*Ask-i Memnu*), represented a cynical upper class character that was never surprised by novelties or the cinematograph. Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil now portrays a different relationship with cinema and intellectuals in his memoir of the days when he worked as the head clerk for Sultan Reşad. Indeed reading the novel, *Saray ve Otesi* ('Palace and Beyond') which was based on these memories, it seems that the Sultan's aloofness from politics led to a similar attitude among the elite intelligentsia as well. In this novel Halid Ziya describes melancholic, inert and passive statesmen. However, these men were also perceived as snobbish or light-hearted (due to their 'impotence' against the 'Great Powers') and described as cinema-goers.

Tevfik Bey had his dinners at the palace. However, after dinner he always went to the Tepebaşı Film Theater, as this was his only pleasure. At that time, cinema was so primitive compared to the current progress it has made, and of course, silent. The artists, as Tevfik Bey mentions, were as popular as today's Charlie [Chaplin] or Harold Lloyd, one of them was a Boulevard artist Prince who was renamed Rigadin for his cinema career. Tevfik Bey was particularly attached to him and also to this comic woman Rosalie. He took me to Tepebaşı Theater to see them a couple of times. This evening he talked all about cinema, the future of this art and the films he had previously seen. This friend was usually quiet but somehow tonight, perhaps just to cheer up the current depressing atmosphere, he spoke a lot.<sup>10</sup>

Political inadequacy and weakness had become a connotation of the Ottoman dynasty when these memoirs were written. Accordingly, the statesman mentioned in this text, Tevfik Bey, was a well-educated high level bureaucrat who would be identified as another passive observer/consumer of Western entertainments by the traditionalist authors that will be mentioned later in this chapter on the gentrification of the apparatus.<sup>11</sup> Yet, instead of reflecting such uneasiness upon the characters in a judgmental way, Halid Ziya approaches them in a more empathic manner. However,

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<sup>10</sup> Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, *Saray ve Otesi* (Istanbul: Hilmi Kitabevi, 1940), p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> Such an approach becomes clearer particularly in relation to gender politics which will be mentioned later in this chapter.

his approach still affirms the idea of a stereotypical upper class audience member who was a castrated man (by Western cultural influences) if not already a (castrated in terms of Freud) woman.

In Turkish film studies it has become almost a tradition either to ignore the issue of class and gender divisions among the spectators or to declare that there was no such hierarchy in terms of class divisions. I have already pointed out that the paradigm of Westernization has partially blinded us in the context of viewing practices at its earliest stage by reducing them to an essentialized division of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Yet, it is more challenging and more accurate to attempt to examine spectatorship within the divisions of gender and socio-economic classes rather than within essentialized cultural and religious divisions. It is evident that the earliest screenings were mainly attended by upper or middle classes. Yet after the very initial screenings it could also be speculated that lower classes would have been able to attend the screenings as the ticket prices were relatively cheap (2 to 5 piastres). Moreover, the fact that memoirs or novels mainly depict and were also written by the middle and upper classes does not necessarily indicate an absence of other spectatorships.

It is evident that the seats in movie theaters were arranged according to the prices and the cost of cinema-going was relatively expensive by the end of the War. In the year 1913, according to a survey for the French Consulate in eight different movie theaters (*Américain, Central, Cinéma Parlant, Orientaux, l'Amphithéâtre Municipal, Jardin Municipal des Petits-Champs, Odeon, Théâtre des Variétés*) ticket prices ranged between 3 and 10 piastres.<sup>12</sup> An economic historian of the late Ottoman era, Zafer Toprak, puts the monthly budget of a mid-level government official in July

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<sup>12</sup> The *Annuaire Oriental Ltd. Annuaire Oriental: Commerce, Industrie, Administration, Magistrature de L'Orient* (Istanbul : 1913), p. 202.

1914 at a minimum of 235 piastres.<sup>13</sup> The chart below demonstrates the entrance prices for some theaters in the previous year in relation to certain essential goods.<sup>14</sup>

Commodities	Prices, year 1913 (in piastre, per kilo)	Movie Theaters	Prices, year 1913 (in piastre)
Meat	7	Américain	Reserved: 10 First class: 5 Second class: 3
Bread	1.5	Cinema du Luxembourg	Reserved: 10 Arm chair: 8 Entrance: 5
Sugar	3	Central	Reserved: 7 First class: 5 Second Class: 3
Coffee	12		
Rice	3		
Soap	7		

According to Mustafa Gökmen, there were approximately 25 movie theaters in Istanbul in 1914.<sup>15</sup> On the data available in the French commercial and industrial consular report, the average ticket prices were 3 piastres for 2<sup>nd</sup> class seating and 7 piastres for reserved class seating. Therefore, the 2<sup>nd</sup> class movie tickets were equal to one kilogram of sugar and the first class prices were equal to one kilogram of meat. It is also revealing to compare movie ticket prices to that of chocolate: one kilogram of chocolate was almost twelve times more expensive than a first class movie ticket.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Duben and Cem Behar, *Istanbul Households, Marriage, Family and Fertility, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> For the sources of the table see *Great Britain Foreign Office, Turkey: Report for the Year 1913 in the Trade Record of the Consular District of Constantinople* (London: H.M.S.O, 1914) and *Annuaire Oriental du Commerce de L'industrie* (1914).

<sup>15</sup> Mustafa Gökmen, *Eski İstanbul Sinemaları* (Istanbul: İstanbul Kitaplığı Yayınları, 1991), pp. 21-24

### 5.1.2. Domestic Concerns on Cinema before the War

After the Young Turks Revolution in 1908, young girls were compelled to go to school by the new laws, women were encouraged to find employment and Muslim women gradually started to appear in public spaces without male company. The mixed gender audiences in movie halls were still somewhat less common than in the post Republic period, however.<sup>16</sup> In Izmir in 1908 an enterprising businessman obtained permission to open a combined cinema and roller-skating rink in the city.<sup>17</sup> The permission was given by a Khedive in the city whose daughter in her memoirs mentions great debates over the project. The cine-skating project allegedly created immense controversy as it would be unacceptable for women both to watch films and skate.<sup>18</sup> It is noteworthy that another cine-skating theater was opened in Istanbul nine years after this incident.<sup>19</sup>

There seem to have been no regulations over segregation issues; in some memoirs we read of Muslim women in cinemas with men, while some cinemas arranged special screenings only for women. In July 1914 the 'paradisical' Taxim Municipal Garden announced a new attraction in the newspapers.<sup>20</sup> This was called 'Family Cinema', where a large auditorium was constructed under canvas that was 'well ordered and well ventilated'. The cinema offered three matinees at 5, 6 and 7 p.m. which allegedly filled a gap in the entertainment business as 'previously there was nothing to which a daughter could take her mother without scandalizing her to some extent. Now this is possible'.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, it was an inexpensive attraction:

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<sup>16</sup> In the cinema of attractions period, as mentioned in the previous chapter, it is harder to distinguish gender segregations in the movie shows. This may refer to an absence of a regulation on the matter.

<sup>17</sup> Emine Foat Tugay, *Three Centuries: Family Chronicles of Turkey and Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 276-278.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *Hilal*, 8 September 1917.

<sup>20</sup> *Stamboul*, 17 July 1914.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

moderate prices were one piastre for children and two for adults. Another advertisement on homely matters appears to be 'Cinema at Home', a Pathé product called KOK projector, which worked with electricity and which could be installed in a sitting room, a garden, a school, a café, a club, a hotel, etc.: 'No danger, the films are not inflammable. This machine will give joy to children. An agreeable pass-time for the holidays. Easy to operate. Free demonstration every day (except Sundays) from 5-6 o'clock.'<sup>22</sup>

These innovations are celebrated perhaps due to a moralistic attitude towards cinema. Some families were supposedly worried that their children would be influenced by the 'indecent pictures' at cinema halls:<sup>23</sup>

Though they don't wish to deprive their children of a spectacle to which they have been looking forward, love scenes and the exploits of bandits puzzle children, who want to have them explained, and, if explanations are avoided, they become worried and lose sleep at night, remembering the abductions and assassinations they have seen. Some families, therefore, try to organise alternative entertainments on Sundays. These bring to mind the good times of the magic lanterns and the *ekmek-cadayif* [a traditional Turkish dessert] offered to the winners and other guests. But is it not a shame to deprive children of the instructive and amusing aspects of cinema, and could they not be shielded from [adult] stories and dramas? If cinema owners would reserve the first shows on Sundays, at a reasonable price, for films appropriate for children, they would be very profitable, for there is no one who would not want to spend a few hours, twice a month, in the company of their children. Did not theaters, in the past, organise something similar for families? The idea deserves to be considered. Most cinema owners are sensible and practical people and, would it is hoped, be willing to inaugurate screenings for the young.<sup>24</sup>

The quotation above exposes a type of cinema-going where families have a custom of watching films on Sundays. Therefore, we can assume that cinema in the mid 1910s must have been an entertainment also for children, which supposedly created concerns for middle class families and those who formed public opinion

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<sup>22</sup> *Stamboul*, 3-5 July 1914.

<sup>23</sup> *Stamboul*, 19 January 1914.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

(journalists, novelists etc.).<sup>25</sup> These concerns were on the education and discipline of adolescents who were shown scenes of crime and sex. Furthermore, we can identify a nostalgic view on the older forms of entertainment such as eating traditional sweets and viewing magic lanterns, even though we do not know how ‘instructive’ magic lanterns were for children. On the other hand, we can observe a belief that cinema was still beneficial for it was ‘instructive and amusing’. The concerns over children’s susceptibility towards cinema might stem from the narratives that became increasingly dominant in visual storytelling in those years. Scott Curtis mentions a parallel situation in Germany of the 1910s where children at movie theaters were depicted as being in danger from the unhealthy environment of cinema that ruins both their taste and teeth.<sup>26</sup>

## **5.2. ‘Cinema of Flames’: The Army Film Center and Spectators of World War I**

Before World War I resistance to the Great Powers had already been fuelled in the Ottoman public. In terms of cinema-going this resistance can be observed against the common use of French intertitles. The usual custom in movie theaters was to use second lenses with Turkish handwriting in front of the projector.<sup>27</sup> Mustafa Gökmen, a Turkish film historian, records a movie theater that tried to attract larger audiences with Turkish intertitles.<sup>28</sup> Yet, several theaters continued to ignore an audience unfamiliar with the French language. In 1913 both in Istanbul and in Izmir university students protested against this and demanded Turkish intertitles in

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<sup>25</sup> For similar concerns in the United States of America at the same period see Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>26</sup> Scott Curtis, ‘The Taste of a Nation: Training the Senses and Sensibility of Cinema Audiences in Imperial Germany’, *Film History*, 6 (1994), pp. 444-469.

<sup>27</sup> Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Eski Gunlerde* (Istanbul: Iletisim Yayınları, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Mustafa Gökmen, *Baslangicindan 1950’ye Kadar Turk Sinema Tarihi ve Eski Istanbul Sinemalari* (Istanbul: Denetim Ajans, 1989), p. 22



cinemas. A movie theater in Istanbul named Sark Sinemalari and owned by a company of Belgian origin had sent a letter of complaint regarding the protests to the Belgian Embassy after which the embassy directed these concerns to the Ottoman Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>29</sup> However as stated by Ali Özuyar, who published the original correspondence, in the following year the cinema changed its language policy and began using Turkish intertitles.<sup>30</sup> The Izmir incident seems more controversial as this involved foreign intervention and French military pressure against the students. The French consulate in Izmir allegedly forced the police to expel the students from the theater, threatening to deploy army troops from a French battleship.<sup>31</sup> It may seem ludicrous to fight over the language of intertitles, which, however, for the nationalist Young Turks became an allegory of French imperialism and perhaps a way to exercise power against foreign authorities.

Filmmaking in Istanbul reportedly started with the outbreak of World War I. Acknowledging the benefits of cinema as a propaganda tool in Germany, Enver Pasha from the CUP, decided to found a film center under the management of the Ottoman Army. This center would film military factories, the manoeuvres, the uses of new weapons and the progress of the army at the war fronts.<sup>32</sup> Two of the earliest films the Army Film Center made were known as *Anafartalarda Ihtilaf Ordularinin Puskurtulmesi* ('The Defeat of the Entente Powers on the Anafartalar Front', Fuat Uzkinay, 1915) and *Esir İngiliz Generali* ('The Captive English General', Fuat Uzkinay, 1916). Along with these newsreels, the Army Center also made some narrative films. Some of the most well-known among them are *Himmet Aganin*

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<sup>29</sup> See the original correspondence cited by Ali Özuyar, *Devlet-i Aliyye'de Sinema* (Ankara: De Ki Basım Yayım Ltd, 2007), p. 88.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Özuyar, p. 93.

<sup>32</sup> Battal Odabas, 'Turk Sinemasinin Kurulusunda Ordunun Rolu', 4. *Boyut*, 4 (October 2003). [http://www.istanbul.edu.tr/4.boyut/cumhuriyet/dosyalar/battal\\_odabas.htm](http://www.istanbul.edu.tr/4.boyut/cumhuriyet/dosyalar/battal_odabas.htm) [accessed on 11 September 2008].

*Izdivaci* ('The Marriage of Himmet Aga', Sigmund Weinberg-Fuat Uzkınay, 1916) and *Leblebici Horhor Aga* ('Roasted Chickpeas Seller Horhor Aga', Sigmund Weinberg, 1916).

The Army Film Center was in need of skilled photographers who could be both trained as filmmakers and sent to the war fronts. In 1917, Cemil Filmer, who was an Army Officer at that time, was on army duty in Syria when a letter arrived from Istanbul requesting recruitment of officers knowledgeable about photography.<sup>33</sup> He had developed a quasi-professional interest in photography before the War and applied for the position in Istanbul. Having been accepted as a good photographer by his commander in Syria, Filmer was sent to Istanbul to the Army Film Center where a controversially important personage for Turkish film history, Fuat Uzkınay (who allegedly made 'the first Turkish film' *Ayestefanos Abidesinin Yikilisi* in 1914<sup>34</sup>) was in charge. Uzkınay started teaching Filmer how to use the cinematograph (how to insert the film into the camera, shoot, process and how to show the films, etc.). Filmer's first film appears to be of workers at a lignite factory and the army troop quartered in the same area with them.<sup>35</sup> None of the copies of this film seem to have survived to the present; however, the fact that the story of shooting the film was recorded in Filmer's memoirs may be considered as secondary proof for its existence at that time (around 1915). Using industrial and military subjects as a motivating purpose for the society in dealing with the difficulties of war appears to be a usual practice for silent films of that period.<sup>36</sup> Working class people at factories or on strike or campaigning for child laborers' rights may also be considered for global

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<sup>33</sup> It is not a coincidence that Cemil Filmer's surname is a derivation of the word film ('er' means 'man' in Turkish). As one of the earliest filmmakers in Turkey he started making films before the enactment of the use of surnames instead of titles in 1934.

<sup>34</sup> No copies/stills or official records that could prove the existence of this film have been found yet.

<sup>35</sup> Cemil Filmer, *Hatıralar: Türk Sinemasında 65 Yıl* (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1984), p. 88.

<sup>36</sup> See also, Colin Harding and Simon Popple, *In the Kingdom of Shadows: A Companion to Early Cinema* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1996), pp. 119-136.

spectatorship interest at the turn of the century.<sup>37</sup> In addition, various European countries are known to have documented their army troops at the front.<sup>38</sup> Filmer then filmed horse races and the visit of the Sheikh Sunusi from Libya; the Sheikh also became a member of his earliest audience. Filmer lists the names of Enver Pasha, Sait Halim Pasha, Talat Pasha (who was the leader of the Parliament and responsible for the Armenian massacres), the Sultan and some other members of the palace among his audience members.<sup>39</sup>

Certainly, the Ottoman Parliament's involvement with cinema during the Great War was not just limited to watching films or assigning filmmakers. The government also approached cinema as a tool of manipulation and for this reason permission to foreign filmmakers was somewhat restricted. A showman named Goldsmith from Austria-Hungary, for example, was suspected of being a secret agent. In 1916, Goldsmith was allegedly showing films in Syria and Jerusalem on the successes of the Central Powers (the allies of the Ottomans) on the war fronts. Despite the potential of these films in uplifting the public's belief in victory, the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent a warning letter to the mayors of the cities Goldsmith was visiting.<sup>40</sup> Eventually it turned out that he was harmless to the State. However, the following year another foreign showman, Simiryoni, had to face difficulties caused by the government in Istanbul. Simiryoni, as the manager of an Ottoman distribution company, attempted to import new films to the city. In his

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<sup>37</sup> On the representation of working classes in silent films see Steven J. Ross, *Working-Class Hollywood: Silent Film and the Shaping of Class in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> On British official World War I propaganda films see Nicholas Reeves, 'Film Propaganda and Its Audience: The Example of Britain's Official Films during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18 (1983), pp. 463-494. Also on a film production company purposefully founded for the war period by the Allied Countries, namely *War Office British Topical Committee for World War I Films*, see Rachael Low, *The History of British Film Volume III* (London: Routledge, 1996). A feature length film made by this company was shown as part of the program at the 25<sup>th</sup> *Giornate del Cinema Muto* in 2006: *Battle of the Somme* (Charles A. Urban and Geoffrey H. Malins; 1916).

<sup>39</sup> He projected films at the Palace and for the Cabinet before opening a public cinema. See Filmer, pp. 89-90.

<sup>40</sup> Ali Özuyar, *Devlet-i Aliyye'de Sinema* (Ankara: De Ki Basım Yayım Ltd, 2007), pp. 61-64.

effort to do so he had to go to Germany; however, the bureaucratic process for international travel was made difficult due to war conditions. In addition Simiryoni was a Greek citizen and therefore, from the perspective of the Ottomans, he could be working for the enemy, the Entente Powers. Yet, following intercession by German authorities, Simiryoni was allowed to import new pictures for the Istanbulite public.<sup>41</sup>

The Army Film Center also served as a film school (probably the first one in Turkey) since it educated important filmmakers for Turkish silent cinema such as Fuat Uzkınay, Cemil Filmer, Ahmet Fehim and Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu. Although these filmmakers have scarcely been mentioned in Turkish film history, copies of their two films are allegedly the only Turkish silents that have survived until the present, as stated by the National Film Archive in Istanbul. Ahmet Fehim was the director of two ‘women’s movies’ *Murebbiye* and *Binnaz*, while Sadi Fikret Karagözoglu made a series of slapsticks, resembling those of Charlie Chaplin and the Turkish shadow play, entitled *Bican Efendi* in 1921.<sup>42</sup> The Center also trained two female interns from Istanbul University. One of them, Sabahat Filmer, was among the founders of *Lale Film* along with her husband Cemil Filmer.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Özuyar, pp. 66.

<sup>42</sup> It should also be noted that Karagözoglu in Turkish means ‘the son of Karagöz’ as well as the son of Black-Eyed (the name of the Turkish shadow play). However the fact that Sadi Karagözoglu was one of the earliest comedy directors in Turkish cinema led me to think that his surname could be a reference to a main pre-cinematic comedy show.

<sup>43</sup> Sabahat Filmer’s name is hardly mentioned in Turkish film history. The main printed source I could find about her work as a film producer appears to be her own book: Sabahat Filmer, *Ataturk Yolunda Buyuk Adimlar*, Istanbul: Unknown Publisher, 1983), which was cited in Gokhan Akcura, *Aile Boyu Sinema*, (Istanbul: YKY, 1995). Second source is an online interview with Necip Saricaoglu, an old cinema-operator and the archivist at Lale Film: <http://www.istanbulsanatevi.com/roportaj/roportaj.php?id=6> [accessed on 12 September 2008].

### 5.2.1. Global Distribution Practices in Wartime Istanbul

Tom Gunning dates the emergence of global film distribution practices back to the age of the cinema of attractions since the West European dominance in the international film market demonstrated monopolized distribution practices from the very beginning.<sup>44</sup> In the following decades the dominant role of ‘global’ or rather ‘vernacular’ film circulation can be claimed to have shifted from Western Europe to America through the emergence of Hollywood studio system.<sup>45</sup> In both periods (early and silent cinema) globalism played a role in defining the exhibition practices in economically weak countries like the Ottoman Empire.

Cinema entrepreneurs of Istanbul in the early cinema period largely turn out to be either foreigners or non-Muslims. The reason for this may be explained by the lack of an entrepreneurial class even before World War I. According to Niyazi Berkes, there had been three major classes that defined the economical structure of the Turkish part of the Empire: ‘(a) small land-owning or landless peasants, (b) small artisans and shopkeepers, (c) wage earners and laborers’.<sup>46</sup> In addition to these, there had long been a thwarting of economic growth put on the Empire by the Great Powers.

In 1913 the lists of movie theater owners in Istanbul predominantly show an international presence.<sup>47</sup> The Vitagraph, Pathé Frères and Gaumont appear to be the main distribution companies, although it is known that films from Italy, Germany and Denmark (*Nordisk Films*) were also extensively screened at that time. In 1914,

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<sup>44</sup> Tom Gunning, ‘Early Cinema as Global Cinema: The Encyclopaedic Ambition’, in *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini, Rob King (London: John Libbey Publishing, 2008)

<sup>45</sup> On the early dominance of ‘classical’ Hollywood cinema see Miriam Bratu Hansen, ‘The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism’, in *Modernism/Modernity*, 6.2 (1999), pp. 59-77.

<sup>46</sup> Y. Akcura, *Halka Dogru I* (Istanbul: Basimevi, 1913), 162-72 Cited by Niyazi Berkes in *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), p. 427.

<sup>47</sup> See Mustafa Gökmen, *Eski Istanbul Sinemalari* (Istanbul: Istanbul Kitapligi Yayınları, 1991).

four more foreign distributors were registered with the annual French consular trade reports; *Baltanian, the Franco Eastern Cinemas* (based in London and founded in 1913<sup>48</sup>), *Kyriacopoulos, Osterreicher & Szilagyi* and *Société des Etablissements Gaumont*.<sup>49</sup>

Possibly due to the Great War, it is difficult to track the commercial records between 1914 and 1919. However, in May 1919, *Le Journal d'Orient*, a French newspaper in Istanbul, mentions an Italian film company named *C.I.T.O.* that had recently initiated a branch office in Istanbul. *C.I.T.O.*, supposedly dominated the Eastern film market at that time:

This is a courageous large-scale enterprise which is unprecedented in the history of the cinema. Its powerful organization has enabled it to acquire the whole of Italian film production by the companies Cines, Itala-Film, César and Ambrosio for the countries of the Orient. All the major Italian companies have given this new Society exclusive rights for their productions, but, even more, it has acquired the best productions of the Allies for distribution in countries selected according to its needs. As a result, the *C.I.T.O.* has exclusive rights to all the 'Stars' and their films [gives a list that includes Borelli, Bertini, Menichelli, Hesperia, Gys, Jacobini, Makowska, etc.]. Headquarters are in Rome, but will soon open an office in Constantinople.<sup>50</sup>

The *C.I.T.O.*, despite not being mentioned in any other available sources, must have been a major distribution company that was aiming to distribute more films made by the Entente Forces in the city. We also learn from the announcement that some unnamed businessmen were illegitimately importing Italian films into the country. *C.I.T.O.* in the announcement warned the cinema owners and stated that only the *C.I.T.O.* had the exclusive rights for distribution and that the violators would be prosecuted.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>The Annuaire Oriental Ltd. *Annuaire Oriental: Commerce, Industrie, Administration, Magistrature de L'Orient* (Istanbul: 1914), p. 175.

<sup>49</sup>The Annuaire Oriental Ltd, p. 868.

<sup>50</sup>*Le Journal d'Orient*, 6 May 1919.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

### 5.2.2. Films in the City during the War

At the beginning of World War I cinemas in Istanbul still showed various films in the same showing which usually started with a panorama or a travelogue, continued with a relatively long feature, followed by a newsreel and ended with a comedy or a short drama. On reading a range of newspapers of the period, it appears that the films were imported largely from France, Denmark, Italy or Germany. Italian popular dramas such as *Quo Vadis?*, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, *Mark Anthony and Cleopatra* were seen as among the best films of 1913.<sup>52</sup> These films were shown in the Cinéma du Luxembourg in early 1914 at the time when the Young Turks made demonstrations about the French intertitles. In 1914, the most popular films in the newspapers seem to be all Italian productions *Spartacus* (Giovanni Enrico Vidali, 1913)<sup>53</sup> and *The Clemenceau Affair* (Alfredo de Antoni, 1913) an adaptation from Alexandre Dumas fils starring the Italian diva Francesca Bertini. Also, there was a Nordisk production *Atlantis* (August Blom, 1913), from Denmark.<sup>54</sup> Another box office film appears to be from Germany, *Der Schirm mit dem Schwan* (Carl Froelich, 1916) starring a major German film star Henny Porten.<sup>55</sup> Among these films, *Atlantis* received the greatest attention from the newspaper *Stamboul*:

The Cinéma Américain has been screening since the day before yesterday the sensational film that has been eagerly awaited: *Atlantis*. Queues are lining up to admire this moving drama, which is one of the best and most successful that has appeared on the screen for a long time in Pera. We will avoid telling the story. It is a poignant spectacle and it has to be seen. Also, all Pera has been grabbing seats since Saturday. The screening of *Atlantis* is a real event in town. It is a huge success for the Cinéma Américain and the crowds will not tire of admiring it for many evenings to come. After applauding it once, people return to admire it again. Films like *Atlantis* deserve these crowds and success.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Stamboul*, 9 February 1914.

<sup>53</sup> *The Levant Herald and Eastern Express*, 6 April 1914.

<sup>54</sup> One of the earliest films about the Titanic disaster which was also shown in Le Giornate del Cinema Muto in 2006.

<sup>55</sup> *Lloyd Ottoman*, 24 September 1917.

<sup>56</sup> *Stamboul*, 26 January 1914.

The records of the local trade press in 1914 also show an interest in German films. As the closest ally of the Ottomans, the German army had a dominant presence in the city. Indeed, some German commanders attended local theater plays which narrated stories of historical and military successes (e.g., one on the foundation of the Ottoman Empire), in order to raise public solidarity during wartime. One of the German propaganda films was *The 300 Years of the History of the German Army*, repeatedly screened – ‘upon public request’ – at Ferah Tiyatrosu in 1915.<sup>57</sup> The film showed the ‘heroes of Bismarck’s army during the war in Paris in 1870-1871, together with the armies of Bavaria and Saxony in the French-German war of 1915’. A second film on the same program depicted the yacht travels of Emperor Wilhelm and the manoeuvres of the German Navy in 1914 while the other three films were composed of more scenes from the French-German War of 1915. It is striking that the local journal *Ferah* also printed some patriotic and heroic words by Prince Bismarck, the Great Diplomat, which are rendered in Turkish translation as: ‘We Germans are scared only of Allah in the battlefield’. The German original of the same quote, placed under a picture of Bismarck can be translated as ‘We Germans are scared of God and nothing else [Wir Deutschen fürchten Gott, sonst nichts auf der Welt]’.<sup>58</sup> The word ‘battlefield’ is added perhaps as a sign of the public belief that the Ottoman Army will be successful with the Germans, but more likely the Turkish translation is a concealed expression of the insecurity created by widespread hesitation regarding the necessity of the war. Nevertheless, both the trade press and the films screened in the period seem to demonstrate a general interest in getting to

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<sup>57</sup> *Ferah*, No. 57 (1914).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



know the ‘friends of the Empire’.<sup>59</sup> The British Embassy in Istanbul, reported the immense presence of German films in the city before the outbreak of the World War I and directed attention to the need of British propaganda films:

Cinematographs are perhaps the most popular entertainment form of amusement in the larger towns of Turkey, as theaters are almost completely lacking. British films are quite unknown, but at the present moment would undoubtedly be very well received. All war pictures would draw a large audience.<sup>60</sup>

In 1917, the most sensational films in town still appear to be German productions. Among them are newsreels on the Ottoman-German alliance named *The Arrival of the Emperor William in Constantinople* or *The Representatives of the Turkish Press in Berlin*.<sup>61</sup> Also films with Asta Nielsen such as *Die Tochter der Landstrasse* (Urban Gad, Germany, 1915) and *Die Sünden der Väter* (Urban Gad, Germany-Denmark, 1914); films with Maria Carmi such as *Der Fluch der Sonne* (Robert Reinert, Germany, 1917); *Der Weg des Todes* (Robert Reinert, Germany, 1916) and *Homunculus* (Otto Rippert, Germany, 1916) seem to have drawn crowds to cinemas.<sup>62</sup> In the same year the most popular film star of Istanbul, Pina Menichelli, appears in a ‘weird melodrama’, *La Tigre Reale* (Giovanni Pastrone, Italy, 1916).<sup>63</sup> Another female star from the Netherlands, Annie Bos, attracted attention from the Istanbulite public in the same year with *Les Abîmes de l’âme*.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> This paragraph is taken from: Canan Balan, ‘Wondrous Pictures in Istanbul: From Cosmopolitanism to Nationalism’, in *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini, Rob King (London: John Libbey Publishing, 2008), 172-185 (pp. 178-179).

<sup>60</sup> Great Britain Foreign Office Turkey, *Report for the Year 1913 in the Trade Record of the Consular District of Istanbul* (London: H.M.S.O., 1914).

<sup>61</sup> *Lloyd Ottoman*, 5 November 1917.

<sup>62</sup> *Lloyd Ottoman*, 1-20 December 1917.

<sup>63</sup> *Lloyd Ottoman*, 30 October 1917.

<sup>64</sup> The newspaper provides only the French title of the film which does not seem to appear either on the internet or in the catalogues of the Netherlands Film Museum. However, the French titles of films with Annie Bos until 1917 do not match with any other films and the only film left without a French title seems to be *Liefdesoffer*. Hence, we can consider *Les Abîmes de l’âme* to be *Liefdesoffer* (Maurits Binger, Netherlands, 1916). I would like to thank the archivists of the Netherlands Film Museum,

Additionally, a few films from Denmark demonstrated success at cinemas: different films with Rita Sacchetto, a Danish actress who was active at this period, along with *Daughter of the Night*, a Danish crime serial with the popular Danish actress Emilie Sannon, famous for her ‘daredevil’ stunts, were shown to the Istanbulite public.<sup>65</sup>

In 1919, when the Ottomans and Germany had already lost World War I, Italian and French productions replaced the German films. The Italian products are listed as follows: *I3* (Alberto Capozzi & Gero Zambuto, Italy, 1917);<sup>66</sup> *Il Tank della Morte* (Telemaco Ruggeri, Italy, 1917) starring Terribili Gonzales;<sup>67</sup> *Addio Giovinezza* (Augusto Genina, Italy, 1918) with Maria Jacobini and Mathewska;<sup>68</sup> *Odette* (Giuseppe de Liguoro, Italy, 1916) starring Francesca Bertini;<sup>69</sup> *Carnavalesca* (Amleto Palermi, Italy, 1918) starring Lyda Borelli;<sup>70</sup> and *Alma Mater* (Enrico Guazzoni, Italy, 1915), starring Pina Menichelli who was seen as ‘the most bizarre and perverse of the Italian divas’.<sup>71</sup> There was also a ‘Bertini week’ with various Francesca Bertini films: ‘she is admired by the whole universe, a star of the first magnitude, whose fame and triumphs ceaselessly increase’.<sup>72</sup> And from France, *Suzanne* (René Hervil and Louis Mercanton, France, 1916), starring Suzanne Grandais was promoted as ‘a true cinematic masterpiece. Tender, sentimental, with a troubling charm, it will bring you to tears’.<sup>73</sup> *Alsace* (Henri Pouctal, France, 1916) was however ‘one of the most poignant films of the moment and was shown hundreds of times in Paris during the War. All those who love France will be moved

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Mustafa Ozen and Elif Rongen-Kaynakci, for their help on looking into these catalogues for me. *Lloyd Ottoman*, 2 December 1917.

<sup>65</sup> Again, the original title of this film seems to be a mystery for this study. *Lloyd Ottoman*, 17 December 1917.

<sup>66</sup> *Le Courrier de Turquie*, 1 April 1919.

<sup>67</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 24 May 1919.

<sup>68</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 13 June 1919.

<sup>69</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 19 June 1919.

<sup>70</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 4 July 1919.

<sup>71</sup> *Le Journal d'Orient*, 6 April 1919.

<sup>72</sup> *Le Journal d'Orient*, 11 June 1919.

<sup>73</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 7 June 1919

to tears by this film'.<sup>74</sup> This film was apparently appreciated by the French authorities who were in power after the end of the war. From the film descriptions that are preoccupied with the emotional aspects of the stories, we can effortlessly consider that storytelling (in the sense of classical narrative structures) was becoming increasingly attractive for the audiences.

The (inter)national backgrounds of the films seem to be related to the major population of Jews, Levantines (Ottomans of Italian origins), Armenians and Greeks in the city who were in direct commercial exchange with the Great Powers. In addition to the capitulations that compelled the Ottomans to provide privileges to non-Muslim merchants and foreign entrepreneurs, Mediterranean cultural and economic networks should also be kept in mind. Until the end of the Great War the close relationship with Germany was obvious in the film market; after that the increasing dominance of Italian and French productions can be explained with such economic relationships. On the other hand, it is hard to figure the reasons for the scarcity of American films, yet we do know that there was a lack of commercial relationship with the U.S.A. until World War II. Furthermore, one should consider the fact that American cinema until World War I was not very dominant in the global film market.<sup>75</sup> Yet, in the later decade, particularly by the mid 1920s, American films began to replace the European productions in Turkish cinema life. Nevertheless, we should note that the films which were extensively shown in the Empire were products of the occupying countries. In other words, keeping in mind that the cinema was now dominated by narratives, we can mention a cinema of occupation as well, in which the local public was occupied by the fantasies, ideologies and imagination of their 'enemy'.

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<sup>74</sup> *Le Moniteur Oriental*, 19 June 1919.

<sup>75</sup> See Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

### 5.3. End of the War: Occupied Istanbul and Cinema-going

Following the armistice of Moudros in October 1918 which marked the end of World War I for the Ottomans, Istanbul was officially occupied by British, French and Italian troops in November 1918. Between 1918 and 1920 the city was purportedly the most international in its history. It was divided into zones: the Golden Horn area was under the control of the French, Galata and Pera were dominated by the British, Uskudar (a big district on the Asian side) was under Italian control, and Fener, in which the Orthodox Patriarch is still based, was occupied by the Greeks.<sup>76</sup> The Ottoman dynasty remained almost entirely non-functioning for the nation. The Sultan was described by the Entente Powers, who seemed to support the Dynasty against the nationalist Young Turks, as a pathetic figure who was ‘terribly ill, very old’ or ‘very unimpressive’ or who had a ‘shrunk appearance’.<sup>77</sup> These descriptions somewhat confirm the idea of a castrated leader who had no power either over his subjects or over the occupying forces.<sup>78</sup> The national resistance was reinforced by the ‘unacceptable acts’ of the massive presence of the soldiers of the Entente Powers in the city. 10,000 British, 8,000 Indian, 8,000 French and 2,000 Italian troops contributed to the city’s perpetual carnivalesque atmosphere: ‘If the poverty and demoralization in its side-streets were ignored, the foreign soldiers and sailors had money to spend. For Harold Armstrong, British Acting Military Attaché: “Life was gay and wicked and delightful. The cafés were full of drinking and dancing. There was none of the clogging drag of home ties.”’<sup>79</sup> The non-stop

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<sup>76</sup> Some interprets the motivation for the occupation to be imperialism, vengeance and anti-communism. See Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of World’s Desire 1453-1924* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 382.

<sup>77</sup> Mansel, 387.

<sup>78</sup> This idea of a castrated leader in relation to cinema-going will be examined in the later section where the analysis of literary sources of the period will be made.

<sup>79</sup> Mansel, pp. 397-398.

festivities were then enhanced by the arrival of Russians who had escaped from the Soviet Revolution.

The occupation of the city inevitably provided extraordinary control to the Entente Armies over the inhabitants. Among them was the inspection of the film shows and the theatrical displays. On 24 January 1919, the Ministry of Internal Affairs received a letter on the ban of the films of the Central Powers: Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria.<sup>80</sup> In the same year a Turkish film *Murebbiye* was censored for showing the humiliation of French women by the French Army.

One of the first filmmakers from Turkey, Cemil Filmer, remembers the difficulties he experienced when making films for the National Film Army Institute. He was sent to shoot a public speech given by Halide Edip Adivar (a female novelist and a nationalist) against the Entente Armies. However, the British Army banned any recordings and Filmer had to be cautiously clandestine.<sup>81</sup> The Army Film Center, as part of the Ottoman Army, was also abolished by the Entente Forces. However, the equipment of the Film Center was kept hidden by the managers of the Center and the same crew initiated another production company named *Harp Malulleri Dernegi* ('The Society for the War Veterans').

The cinematic restrictions during the occupation period did not only include the control of the films, but also over theater owners. The movie theater that Uzkinay and other veterans had been running on the Asian side of the city was shut down by the Entente Forces.<sup>82</sup> Turkish silent cinema entrepreneurs had probably experienced the biggest difficulties during this period as they could neither afford nor were allowed to run theaters. The famous filmmaker and distributor of Turkish cinema, Cemil Filmer, mentions later that he could not even find a job as a film operator as

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<sup>80</sup> Ali Özuyar, *Devlet-i Aliyye'de Sinema* (Istanbul: De ki Basım Yayım, 2007), p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> Cemil Filmer, *Hatıralar: Türk Sinemasında 65 Yıl* (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1984), p. 100.

<sup>82</sup> Filmer, p. 107

the owners were short of funds.<sup>83</sup> The list of the distributors in 1920 and 1921 therefore demonstrates mainly the presence of foreign companies: *Comptoir de Cinématographe 'Atlas'*, *Magic Societé Internationale des Films et Cinémas*, *Mamo*, *Silbermann*, *Levant Kinematograph*, *Societé des Établissements Gaumont*, *Statis*, *Vaccaro*, *Weinberg*, *Zarb*, *Zenieri*. The names of movie halls in the city were also foreign: *Amphi*, *Apollon*, *Central*, *Cosmographe*, *Éclair*, *Étoile*, *Luxembourg*, *Magic*, *Majestik Cinéma*, *Orientaux*, *Ottoman*, *Palace*, *Pathé*, *Royal* and *Russo Américain*.<sup>84</sup> It was mainly Swiss (*Magic Societé Internationale de Films et Cinémas*), British (*Levant Kinematograph Company*) and French companies (*Societé des Établissements Gaumont* and *Union Cine-Théâtre D'Orient* – films by Pathé Frères) that were were leading the market in the city.<sup>85</sup>

There were also contributions to the cinema life of the city by the Russians. Escaping from the revolution of 1917, Russian nobles populated the streets of Istanbul occupying themselves mainly with the entertainment business. Among them was a silent film star Ivan Mozhukhin who arrived in Istanbul in 1920. He acted in *L'Angoissante Aventure* (Yakov Protazanov, France, 1920), shot in Istanbul and written by himself.<sup>86</sup> The film tells the story of Russians migrating to Istanbul then to Marseilles and Paris. The post-production supposedly continued at a Méliès studio.<sup>87</sup> Russians in Istanbul in the film business worked mainly as musicians for movie halls. Ivan Ivanovic Poliansky was the orchestra conductor for *Majik Sinema* and supposedly compensated for the weak parts of the films with his music and even managed to attract audiences to some unsuccessful films; his fans would 'go to the

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<sup>83</sup> Filmer, p. 108

<sup>84</sup> The Annuaire Oriental Ltd. *Annuaire Oriental: Commerce, Industrie, Administration, Magistrature de L'Orient* (Istanbul : 1921), p. 706.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> This film was shown under the section of 'Mozhukhin: The Paths of Exile' in the program of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Giornate del Cinema Muto in October 2003 in Pordenone, Italy.

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.filmreference.com/Directors-Pe-Ri/Protazanov-Yakov.html> [accessed on 14 September 2008].

cinema primarily to listen to his music'.<sup>88</sup> Another Russian musician working for *Majik Sinema* was a piano player and former baroness named Valentine Taskin. Her family, just like Ivan Mozhukhin, moved to Paris later on, yet she decided to stay in Istanbul: 'I was now a proper Istanbulite... I loved Beyoglu [Pera], the music and the musicians, those chic ladies and gentlemen who come to listen to me, the cinema and the opera. I was part of that life, it was impossible for me to leave'.<sup>89</sup>

#### **5.4. Gentrification of the Spectatorship**

The Ottoman intellectual corpus of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is preoccupied with the complex relationship with Westernism. The economic difficulties and the loss of political power led the Ottoman Empire to be more economically dependent on the Great Powers. Accordingly, the dominance of Westernization in the export of new technologies and the reformation of both the education and the military systems inspired the way Ottoman intellectuals perceived and reflected on the experiences of urban life, especially in reference to entertainment and fashions. One of the reasons for this new reflection could also be explained by the translation of Western classics and the new education system that created a new type of intelligentsia with great interest in Western literature and fine arts.

Inevitably a resistance towards the Westernist approach also appeared in intellectual life and led to the emergence of an ambivalent relationship between the presumably conflicting new European and the 'traditional Ottoman' cultures. Most of the scholars who deal with the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries see a

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<sup>88</sup> Jak Deleon, *Beyoglu'nda Beyaz Ruslar* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2003), p. 61.

<sup>89</sup> Deleon, p. 102.

clash between these two cultures.<sup>90</sup> Yet, this clash is based mainly on presumptions of essential differences in cultural and moral issues between West and East. Considering the long history of the interactions between cultures in the Ottoman civilization, some other works on the topic rightly observe a more complex relationship than an essential difference between the ‘old’ Ottoman and the ‘new’ Western, whose cultural dialogues and interconnections had emerged long before the emergence of the notions of ‘the East’ and ‘the West’ in the eighteenth century. In order to criticize the binary oppositions established between the two, Palmira Brummet discusses the role of assumptions about Islam, particularly the assumption that Islamic societies naturally reject all forms of innovation.<sup>91</sup> Also the diverse nature of the demographic figures of the period and the State model that was not based on the idea of a unified nation, seem to be another factor that challenges the supposed essential differences. A more original view on the intricate relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe appears to be that of gender which will also be the basis of this section’s major argument.

Orientalist works, as elaborated by Edward Said, ‘otherized’ the Orient by attributing passive, static, exotic and feminine characteristics to it. Ottomans, on the other hand, had long seen Europe as its feminine other according to Nurdan Gürbilek. However, in the age of the New Constitution and World War I, this view was inverted due to the decline of the Empire and with the predominance of Western ‘influence’ (or cultural imperialism) in the culture and the lifestyles. Considering influence as penetration, Gürbilek indicates that it generated a castration anxiety in

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<sup>90</sup> See Şerif Mardin, *Türk Modernleşmesi* (Istanbul: İletisim, 2006); Zeynep Celik, *Degisen Istanbul: 19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Baskenti* (Istanbul: Tarih ve Yurt Vakfı Yayınları, 1998); Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford, New York, Istanbul: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>91</sup> Palmira Brummet, *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-1911* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 314-315.



the Ottoman intelligentsia.<sup>92</sup> As seen in the claim made by Gustave Flaubert, ‘Madame Bovary is me’, the novelists in Gürbilek’s view revealed themselves through their protagonists and projected their own anxieties onto their fictional characters. The novel, as a foreign (Western) form to the Ottomans, fuelled the anxiety in the way novelists either caricaturized the West and Westernized characters or in the way they reflected feelings of guilt, inadequacy, loss and mourning for a mother as an allegory of the motherland that was occupied by European countries.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, two different approaches tended to prevail in the novels of the period. The first one, composed of writers such as Ahmet Midhat, Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar and Peyami Safa, establishes a binary opposition between ‘traditional’ and Westernized characters. The stereotypical Westernized character in these novels seems to be the dandy who had a Western style education, and was familiar with French literature; who was obsessed with appearances, fashions, mirrors; and was self-absorbed and feminine. The traditional character, on the other hand, is attached to his family, virile but respectful to women, kindhearted and assertive. However, the second approach according to Gürbilek, deals with Westernization by internalizing it. The characters created by Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, such as the Ottoman film lover clerk mentioned earlier in this chapter, are also put in the same category by Gürbilek. The gender roles established by the novelists of the first – more traditional - attitude seem to be problematic and significant for this chapter as most of the novelists were male and could themselves be thought to be subject to figural castration as a threat that came from the West.<sup>94</sup> Framed in this way, the female protagonists emerge as fans of European novels, customers of European style amusements (balls, Western theaters

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<sup>92</sup> Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kor Ayna Kayıp Sark: Edebiyat ve Endise* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2004), passim.

<sup>93</sup> However we should also note that Gürbilek seems to overlook the class divisions when she analyzes a homogenized readership and authorship. The authors with different socio-economic backgrounds indeed demonstrate different ideologies towards nationalism, traditionalism or liberalism in their texts.

<sup>94</sup> See Gürbilek.

and the like) and behaved as Bovarists who were under the influence of the strong identification with Westerners.

As also depicted in these texts, the defeat of World War I and the subsequent occupation of Istanbul and Anatolia by the Entente Forces increasingly created resistance from the people. The invasion of the Empire, additionally and inevitably, triggered an anxiety of being even more dependent on the Great Powers. The fear of losing the traditional (or rather, local) values can also be observed in the literary depiction of daily lives, and more importantly for this study, of cinema audiences. Looking into the memoirs and the novels related to ‘cinema-going’ in the period it is striking that they confirm Gürbilek’s conclusion. Movie theaters in Istanbul of the late 1910s and early 1920s were mainly showing the moral tragedies of European divas and therefore, one might assume that the conservative and patriarchal authors saw this as a hazard to the traditional values of a society which had to confront the colonial powers’ economical and political interventions and which was later officially occupied by them. Such a view could easily be reduced to the understanding of a ‘Muslim’ prejudice towards cinema as a ‘Western’ invention, as we saw in Turkish film historiography, elaborated earlier in Chapter Four. However, these hypotheses of historiography also seem to reveal a type of anxiety of influence or a superficial scrutiny that presents a self-exoticism. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that cinema was not seen as a merely European invention by Turkish writers; in 1923, the earliest film magazine from Istanbul even proudly claimed the Turkish shadow play as a precursor of cinema.<sup>95</sup> Yet, what should be kept in mind seems to be the attitude of Ottoman men towards cinema’s power of influence, which I might freely summarize as follows: ‘This is not totally new, incomprehensible and

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<sup>95</sup> Vedat Örf, *Sinema Postasi*, No. 1 (December 1923), p. 3.

as fascinating as it was promoted to be'.<sup>96</sup> The feelings of being exposed to powerful images evoking fascination, astonishment, appreciation or shock roused by cinema were mostly expressed by female spectators in literary texts.<sup>97</sup> It is noteworthy that the novels dealing with cinematic spectatorship were written by men who were supposedly cautious about revealing their own astonishment or wonder at the cinematograph, as we saw in the previous chapter, and attributed such astonishment to their female characters. This section therefore will examine the memoirs and the novels from the period and will analyze them in the context of gender politics.

#### **5.4.1. Fathers and Daughters**

What changed in the Ottoman cultural life and the cinema-going practices after the vanishing of the cinema of attractions?<sup>98</sup> One significant shift concerning this research appears to be the replacement of the dominance of female spectators by males in the primary sources, mainly novels and memoirs. Another point to consider is the anxiety of Western influences in daily lives due to World War I and the occupation of the country by Italy, Great Britain and France from whence many films shown in the Empire were imported.

Novels increasingly became a more popular literary form throughout the early twentieth century. Yet one significant factor to consider for understanding the spectatorship through literature is the social background of the readers. Novel readers

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<sup>96</sup> See Chapter Four, p. 133.

<sup>97</sup> Mary Ann Doane also mentions a different approach to the women at initial screenings in her work entitled 'Technology's Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity', in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, eds. Jennifer M. Bean, Diane Negra (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 530-552.

<sup>98</sup> As formulated by Tom Gunning the cinema of attractions continued until approximately 1908. For further explanation see Tom Gunning, 'Now You See It, Now You Don't' The Temporality of the in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 41-50.

are, as described previously, mainly thought to be middle or upper middle class consumers; additionally, they were assumed to be mostly females.<sup>99</sup>

Peyami Safa is a significant novelist in this context as he seems to be the one who is the most preoccupied with cinema during his lifetime. Known as a conservative and traditionalist, Safa tends to establish a dualism between East and West where the East embodied spiritualism and morality while the West is associated with materialism and corruption. Therefore, he utilized stereotypical Easternized and Westernized characters. Films, on the other hand, were mainly imported from the West, and accordingly for Safa, cinema was another tool of Western cultural influence and to be avoided especially by young women. In one of his early novels, *Sozde Kizlar* ('The Would Be Girls'), first published in 1922, but taking place in 1919, Safa depicts the 'corruption' of city life brought about by the end of World War 1. In order to further the binary oppositions of 'debauchery versus patriarchal values', 'Entente forces versus local resistance', 'modern versus tradition', and 'influence versus resistance', Safa utilizes scenes of romantic affairs and entertainment while following conventional gender roles. More traditionalist characters in his novels appear to be the émigrés from Anatolia, whereas Istanbulite characters appear to be morally inferior and in favour of Western lifestyles. One of the protagonists, Behic, is an upper class womanizing dandy full of cynicism, who has travelled and lived in Western Europe and who tries to tempt a naïve young Anatolian girl, called Mebrure. His ex-lover, Belma, on the other hand, is a frivolous Istanbulite who adores the European melodramas she has seen and aspires to be a film actress. Belma is aware of Behic's designs on Mebrure and tries to keep her away from the undignified lifestyle she and Behic lead. Here, it should be recorded that cinema in this context was seen as mainly European tragedies and melodramas

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<sup>99</sup> See Nurdan Gürbilek, 'Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102.3 (2003), pp. 599-628.

of 1918 and 1919 and embodied the ‘Western’ values such as ‘free love’ and ‘decadence’.<sup>100</sup>

The city atmosphere in the novel begins with a cinema scene containing all the familiar images of a turn of the twentieth century metropolis; such as a vibrant night life, street lights, pleasure-seeking crowds and other types of modern and decadent street life.

Pangalti. There are only a few minutes to midnight. There is an elegant carriage with two black healthy horses in front of the cinema. Having waited so long for the film to end, the driver is now impatient; he sadly gazes at the clock in the entrance of the theater and keeps himself busy by grabbing the flesh of the horses: ‘it is now midnight’.<sup>101</sup>

Two drivers on the street then start a conversation on the duration of the film. One of them claims: ‘It’s a film with either Beynamekel or Peynamekeli (mocking the pronunciation of Pina Menichelli’s name in Turkish), when they show her films, all the inhabitants from Sisli to Altinbakkal, men and women, gather at the cinema. Damn woman’s films are always too long’.<sup>102</sup> The film ends after midnight; the red curtains of the hall open half way; the audience is composed of men, women, and children in an intense crowd of people. All of a sudden they gather on the street. Families look for each other in the bright light with dazzled eyes due to the darkness of the cinema. Women are depicted with their ‘hysterical dialogues’ accompanied by fancy dresses and heavy make-up. Most of them are ‘excited, delighted and somewhat melancholic due to the film they saw. Some of them hold the arms of their husbands or relatives.’ All of them seem to be influenced by the film.<sup>103</sup> It should not

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<sup>100</sup> It should be noted that in the period of World War I, such attributions to Europe as the ‘exotic’ and ‘decadent’ other, who tempted the innocent local women was also prevalent in the films of the U.S.A. See Lucy Fisher, ‘Enemies, A Love Story: Von Stroheim, Women and World War I’, *Film History*, 6.4 (Winter 1994), pp. 522-534.

<sup>101</sup> Peyami Safa, *Sozde Kizlar* (Istanbul: Alkim Yayınevi, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Safa, p. 7.

be a coincidence that the novel begins with the viewpoint of a working class character who can presumably not afford an escapist entertainment when the country was facing the tragic reality of the War and occupation.

The naïve girl Mebrure, coming to Istanbul from her village to look for her lost veteran father, is first mentioned in this scene. She takes the carriage of the driver in question and moves into the house of her 'decadent' cousins. One of them is the womanizer Behic and the other is his fashion-queen sister who, to a moralistic patriarchal author such as Safa, is inexorably preoccupied with the look of European film stars and tries to imitate their make-up styles. She tells Mebrure: '...if I don't put the eyeshadow on top of the eyeliner it would not seem natural. All European actresses use this style of make-up.'<sup>104</sup> Safa again criticizes obsessions with fashion and appearances by presenting these against the background of war, occupation and poverty.

Another victim of glamour is the 'would be' artist and Behic's former lover, Belma, who suffers from feeling of guilt created by her desires to be an artist and her aspirations for a more liberated and richer life in a relatively conservative society undergoing poverty. At various parties, in order to show her artistic talents, Belma performs scenes from films. 'She decided to be an artist even before she started wearing veils [during her adolescence], due to the influence of the movie halls in Sehzedebasi. Since then she has performed monologues or copied famous artists [at parties]. Her weakness for cinema and artists was so great that once she honestly claimed that she would sacrifice anything to be an artist.'<sup>105</sup> At one of the parties she imitates the actress in a film called *Bora* in order to lighten up the heavy atmosphere created by the sad news about the War. Yet it appears that such an act is inappropriate for the responsible and patriotic characters in this situation. Cinema in

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<sup>104</sup> Safa, p. 35.

<sup>105</sup> Safa, p. 50

this context seems to offer escapism from the spirit of a national fight which demanded alerted minds that are not dominated by fascination or influence. Additionally, film-going appears to tempt young women who are supposed to be well-mannered. From a patriarchal perspective, Belma has turned into a 'fallen woman' by a snobbish man while for Mebrure (who is also a moralist, but who shows sympathy towards Belma), she is victimized by the indecent melodramas she had seen and adored. Behic promises Belma that he will introduce her to famous Viennese actresses. He thereby teaches her the 'ill-manners of film actresses and makes her his mistress'. Even Belma's own brother accuses film theaters in Sehzedevasi [a district in Istanbul which was famous for early movie halls] for her troubles. Belma gives birth to an illegitimate child, an unacceptable act for a single Muslim woman who belongs to a modest middle class family. In her attempt to save naïve Mebrure from the 'dirty hands of Behic', Belma describes her passion for cinema as follows:

I looked down on my family's humble way of life. I don't know why, maybe because of the films I saw. I had this dream of a glamorous future which would be fulfilled by me becoming an actress! Becoming an actress! Oh, spectacular! An actress is so free, her life is full of amusement and comfort! If she can act in a film she can go to Europe, see America, make money, become a celebrity, everyone adores her, applauds her... perfect...perfect.. that man Behic told me about the actresses' lives in Vienna, showed me their autographs and postcards with their own handwritings...<sup>106</sup>

Belma's description of an artist's life matches almost exactly that of Miriam Hansen: 'glamour, decadence and tragedy that comes with stardom and success'.<sup>107</sup> One can also mention the role of such situations that became a cliché in the Turkish melodramas of the 1960s where naïve girls are corrupted with promises of becoming film actresses.

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<sup>106</sup> Safa, p. 155.

<sup>107</sup> Hansen, 'Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film As Vernacular Modernism', *Film Quarterly*, 54.1 (Autumn 2000), p. 46.

Nevertheless, Behic kills the illegitimate baby to hide his sins from the elite public of Istanbul. This murder leads Belma to commit suicide after which Behic is accused by her brother. In order to wash his hands of this case, Behic highlights Belma's desire to be an actress: 'This [death] was foreseen. She always told me she wanted to die like Pina Menichelli in the pictures'.<sup>108</sup> Indeed Belma's story resembles at least one of the Menichelli films; *La Storia di una Donna* (Eugenio Perego, 1920) where Menichelli is seduced by a rich man like Behic, and where her death after losing her baby consoles a society governed by middle class moral values.<sup>109</sup> Despite examining a later period (1940s) Mary Ann Doane's work on 'woman's films' and her argument on the conventional attributions to female spectatorship appears effortlessly applicable to the case of Belma: 'Female spectatorship is generally understood in its alignment with other qualities culturally ascribed to the woman – in particular an excess of emotion, sentiment, affect, empathy. That is why women's films are often referred to as "weepies"'.<sup>110</sup>

Belma is punished for avoiding the conventions of a timid daughter. A well-behaved girl like Mebrure, as assumed by Safa, acts on her father's wishes and shies away from modern adventures like cinema and leads a more modest life with a conventional husband. Mebrure could fulfil the needs of her country only by being a passive and domestic daughter, a supportive wife and a devoted traditionalist who stays away from the public eye [of cinema]. Furthermore, even for her there are spectacles to enjoy: her future husband takes Mebrure to watch the sunset by the sea: 'a sharp white light was enlightening the abyss just as the light beams emerging from

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<sup>108</sup> Safa, p. 182.

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.filmlinc.com/archive/nyff/divas.htm> [accessed on 16 August 2008].

<sup>110</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the "Woman's Film" of the 1940s', *Poetics Today*, 6. 1/2 (1985), pp. 205-227.



a projector in the darkness'.<sup>111</sup> That is the kind of cinema Mebrure enjoys, 'a true and a natural one shown by a true Turkish man'.

Ironically *Sozde Kizlar* was adapted for the cinema of the silent period by Muhsin Ertugrul in 1924; however none of the copies of the film appear to have survived. Yet, if we assume that the movie-going issues were problematized by the film as the original source does, perhaps a paradoxical approach to the spectatorship would have been offered since the novel seems to oppose the values offered by the cinema. On the other hand, the only types of films the novel's characters appear to enjoy are Italian and French melodramas or the escapist films made in the occupying countries. Perhaps as a local product, the reception of this film negated the subject matter; young female audiences viewed a national film in which the fictional young women were corrupted by European melodramas.

Safa in his later novels where he depicts life in late 1920s Istanbul, *Fatih-Harbiye* ('Fatih-Harbiye') and *Sinema Delisi Kiz* ('The Girl who is Mad about Cinema') also explores the role cinema-going played in young women's lives and posits movies and film stars in a similar way *Sozde Kizlar*. However, these novels will be analyzed in the next chapter. Another novel dealing with troublesome daughters and the cinema of this period is *Genc Kiz Kalbi* ('Young Girl's Heart'), written in 1912 by Mehmet Rauf. This novel only mentions cinema very briefly. The heroine, Pervin, opposing her father's wishes, goes from Izmir to Istanbul to see the fascinating European lifestyles she had witnessed in films and read about in literature. Pervin is also depicted as the kind of young woman who is susceptible to the penetrating influences of Western literature. She falls in love with a man who has similar intellectual pursuits to her and who seems to be in love with her. However, after she has almost forgotten about her modest family life in Izmir, the man rejects

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<sup>111</sup> Safa, p. 116.

Pervin claiming that she is not wealthy enough for him. Falling into despair, Pervin leaves Istanbul and moves back to Izmir where her family waits for her.

Unlike Peyami Safa, Mehmet Rauf seems to show sympathy towards his free-spirited female character; however, in the end it tragically appears that there is no happiness for a girl who goes against her father.<sup>112</sup> Just as in the case of Belma's story, Pervin is involved in troubles offered by the liberal lifestyles shown in European films. In her journal she records the disillusion created by the dissimilarity of the life she had seen in some European films and the life she expected in Istanbul, for her Istanbul embodies this 'European dream'.<sup>113</sup> This time the punishment for the disobedient woman is not death, but going back to a modest and thereby, a less 'illusionary' life. The research on divas in Italian silent melodramas reveals strikingly similar stories to those of Belma and Pervin.<sup>114</sup> Therefore, we may assume that the novelists, even though severely critical of these films must have seen and examined them and posited the literary characters as being absorbed and strongly influenced by the filmic protagonists:

Although the diva's pain can derive from the loss of a child, her general way of suffering stems from either the painful choice to remain in the past or the lonely decision to break the rules. From this fundamental lack of acceptable options, it is not surprising that, at the end of most melodramas, she returns to the status quo or she is punished or killed.<sup>115</sup>

The capital city of the declining Empire, in most of the novels of this period, embodies the disillusionment of society and the insecurity it created by the lack of a reliable administration and government (Yakup Kadri, Peyami Safa *et al.*); unlike the earlier period where the intelligentsia still kept their beliefs in the Empire,

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<sup>112</sup> The father in this context can also be considered in the Lacanian sense that he is also the symbolic where the self needs to 'behave'.

<sup>113</sup> Mehmet Rauf, *Genc Kiz Kalbi* (Istanbul : Arma Yayınları, 1997), p. 8

<sup>114</sup> See, Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema* (University of Texas Press, 2008), p. 6-8.

<sup>115</sup> Angela Dalle Vacche, p. 7.

epitomized by Ahmet Mithat. Yet, the period of World War I and its aftermath refers to an era in which the modernization project of the Ottoman State almost failed and thereby, a collapse of this formerly cosmopolitan State took place. This was accompanied by the colonization by Western powers, which led modernists and nationalists like Mustafa Kemal, to found a nation state that almost disregarded Ottoman cultural and political heritage.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, there was a conventionalist/moralist resistance towards this modern nationalism which was epitomized by the literary representation of upper middle class women and Westernization. Such women by their tendency to be overly susceptible to influences and penetration demonstrated 'unreliable' characteristics to patriarchy which resulted in the 'occupation/penetration' by the Westernized men. The allegory is made clearer when considering the occupation of the motherland and the capital by the British, French, Italian and Greek armies whose films badly 'influenced' young women.

Another author who mentions Pina Menichelli and other European actresses as role models for Turkish female audiences is Sermet Muhtar Alus. Alus mentions the phenomena of Mary Bel, Gabrielle Robinne, Francesca Bertini, Lyda Borelli and Pina Menichelli with sarcasm. The most influential for him was also Pina Menichelli: 'Her fame was everywhere; all the young girls and ladies were copying her. If they adopted a lustful pose it would be Pinaesque; the décolleté would slip under one shoulder; accompanied by immediate hysterical gestures, mouth half open and eyes half closed...'<sup>117</sup> Such a short quotation indeed reiterates the portrayal of women as fashion victims, hence exemplifying the male attributions which have been the target of feminist criticisms. The patriarchal perspective, also exemplified by Alus, posited women as the passive consumers of cinema and literature which absorbed their

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<sup>116</sup> Mustafa Kemal and his followers were in favor of a Euro-centric modernism and the increasing presence of women in public life; however, they did not represent the whole group of nationalists among whom are traditionalists like Peyami Safa.

<sup>117</sup> Sermet Muhtar Alus, p. 64.

‘naïve’ imagination and intelligence. This critical male point of view thus conceptualized and analyzed the female audiences’ gestures and behaviors that were influenced by the narratives.<sup>118</sup>

The film production part for the women of the Empire usually implied being seen on the screen. Yet, there appear to be some exceptions; for example one of the earliest filmmakers of the country, Cemil Filmer, recalls the interest in film production of two young Muslim women who started doing their internships at *Harp Cemiyeti*, the country’s earliest film production company.<sup>119</sup> In *Binnaz* and *Murebbiye*, both made by Ahmet Fehim in the year 1919, the main attraction appears to be seductive vamp women. *Binnaz* is simply about two men’s quarrel over a proto-*femme fatale*. Voyeurism inexorably takes place in the film; particularly in the initial scene where the audience sees a party and a belly dance performance followed by a close-up of a man looking through a key hole. It is then understood that the initial scene is actually a point of view shot. One of the reviews of this film was written two years after the release. Vedat Örf in a reproachful tone mentions the scarcity of Turkish [narrative] film productions and indicates that until then only two local productions had been made.<sup>120</sup> One of them is *Binnaz* which he thinks attracted much more of an audience than it actually deserved. For him, *Binnaz* was much appreciated as the first national picture, even though it suffered greatly from technical insufficiencies due to the low budget stemming from post-war conditions.<sup>121</sup> Indeed reading the memoirs of Cemil Filmer, who was the arts manager of the film, it appears that this film was made under grotesquely poor conditions:

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<sup>118</sup> We should also, however, keep in mind what Virginia Woolf suggested in *A Room of One’s Own*, published only a decade after these films; writers needed economic independence and a roof over their heads. Yet, female audiences (and these novels’ presumably female readers) by depending on their husbands or fathers, remained passive consumers of the ideas of the novelists written by the male authors.

<sup>119</sup> Cemil Filmer, *Hatıralar* (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık 1984), p. 96.

<sup>120</sup> Vedat Örf, ‘Milli Filmler’, *Sinema Postası*, 1 (December 1923), p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

There was a clerk in charge of our budget who would always warn us about the expenses. I can never forget this: in one scene the man would get angry with his wife and throw a glass jug into the mirror. The clerk objected to this, as both the mirror and the jug would be too expensive to break. Therefore Ahmet Fehim Efendi [the director] came up with a solution, we would use a non-glass jug and the man would throw it into the window instead of the mirror. Yet the clerk again objected: 'someone should stand behind the window and catch the jug before it falls on the ground.'<sup>122</sup>

Fehim's other film *Murebbiye* also dealt with a *femme fatale*, however this time with a political connotation. *Murebbiye* tells the story of a French governess' attempts to seduce the family members of an upper class Turkish household and the troubles caused by her. The film contains allegedly erotic scenes and attracted Turkish audiences as it supposedly portrayed a 'silent resistance' towards the occupying countries.<sup>123</sup> Yet, surprisingly, a French newspaper from Istanbul seems to support the producers of the film, the *Harp Malulleri Dernegi* ('The Society of War Veterans' mentioned earlier) before its release.<sup>124</sup> Afterwards no advertisement of the film seems to be mentioned in the French newspapers. Apparently, the Entente Forces perceived this film in the same manner as the Turkish audiences and therefore the French army forces in the Empire banned its release.<sup>125</sup> It is yet worth considering that the governess character at that time may be an allegory of the two main threats to an upper class patriarchal family: frivolous women and Europe. Furthermore, as part of the international/global make up of cinematic tradition, this 'national' film was made in the 'golden era of the vamp' dating between 1915 and

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<sup>122</sup> Cemil Filmer, p. 95.

<sup>123</sup> On the discussion of *Murebbiye* as a silent resistance to Allied forces see Nezih Erdoğan, 'Narratives of Resistance: National Identity and Ambivalence in the Turkish Melodrama Between 1965 and 1975', *Screen*, 39.3 (1998), pp. 259-271. An advertisement of this film appears in *Le Courrier De Turquie*, 1 April 1919.

<sup>124</sup> *Le Courrier du Tourquie*, 2 April 1919.

<sup>125</sup> Erdoğan, p. 259.

1919.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, it was not only Ottoman male anxiety, but also the general trend of silent cinema of that period that led such characters to appear on screen. Diane Negra elaborates on the perception of Pola Negri in the United States of America and the foreign female characters of the cinema in that period: ‘the cinematic vamp of the 1910s and 1920s was, in essence, a thinly disguised incarnation of the threat of female immigrant sexuality. This figure was multiply deployed to quell [by having the vamp defeated or rejected by the society] both fear of uncontrollable female desire and the spread of immigrant values into the dominant culture.’<sup>127</sup> Such a statement, albeit in a different context, is clearly applicable to *Murebbiye*. What seems less surprising about this film is that the Turkish audience was already very much familiar with cinematic vamps as seen in the case of Peyami Safa’s novels.

It cannot be a coincidence that the author of *Murebbiye* wrote a short story on the viewing of female bodies on screen, presumably in the 1910s. The story was published in a short stories collection in 1929. *Cocuklara Yasak* (‘Banned for Children’) is about domestic trouble caused by the erotic moving images the father figure watched.<sup>128</sup> In this short comic story, the husband and the son along with their servant go to a movie show, after which the son and the servant come back alone and claim that children were not allowed to see the film due to some immoral scenes. Later on, the mother during a conversation with her neighbor, whose spouse went to an erotic film screening, surmises that her husband may have seen the same show. Trouble occurs when she discovers that the show was composed of some suggestive pictures where two naked women wrestle. After her husband returns from the show

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<sup>126</sup> For the periodization of the ‘vamp era’ see Diane Negra, ‘Immigrant Stardom in Imperial America: Pola Negri and the Problem of Typology’, in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, eds. Jennifer M. Bean, Diane Negra (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), 374-404 (p. 374). Also see Tom Gunning on the extent to which early cinema was global or international ‘Early Cinema as Global Cinema: The Encyclopedic Ambition’, *Early Cinema and the “National”*, eds. Richard Abel, Giorgio Bertellini and Rob King (London: John Libbey Publishing, 2008), pp. 11-16.

<sup>127</sup> Negra, p. 379.

<sup>128</sup> See Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, *Mezarından Kalkan Şehit, Eti Senin Kemigi Benim, Tunelden İlk Cikis* (Istanbul: Ozgur Yayınları, 1995).

in the evening, she starts questioning and threatening him. The husband admits that he has seen an erotic show with a naked woman in the shower and a voyeur watching her over the top of a folding screen, a paravane. This is how the scopophilic gaze of the audience found a place in Turkish literature of the early twentieth century. The plot of the film in this story indeed resembles the early film shows, hence Gürpınar's story must have been published at a later period than it was originally written. It might have been printed in a newspaper before it was published in this collection.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced a main concern of cinema-going that demonstrated a national resistance to the cinematic power of Western Europe in the Empire at its decline. The resistance had already started in an earlier period when the country had become economically dependent on the Great Powers. During World War I, the cinematic scene was preoccupied with the films of France, Italy and Denmark. In the beginning of the war, the Ottoman public witnessed the propaganda films of Germany because they were the closest ally of the Empire. Yet, the defeat of the War led to a greater number of films imported from the Entente countries such as France and Italy. The country was then occupied by the British, French, Italian and Greek armies, who also controlled the distribution, exhibition and production of the films in the capital city. The Army Film Center was closed down, the theater owners, if they indeed still had permission for screenings, were left with hardly any budget. Furthermore, the films from the Empire's former allies were banned. These factors may posit Ottoman spectatorship in a peculiar context with regard to Europe and the United States of America. On the other hand, domestic concerns such as disciplining

children and controlling young women in the cinema could also be observed in the cases of Germany and the United States of America.

The patriarchal way of disciplining young women and children seemingly became more difficult with the emergence of classical narrative cinema that was obsessed with tragedies of crime and sex. Such concerns may not only be observed in the newspaper reports and announcements on 'home cinema' and family matinees specially arranged for children, but also in the literary texts written by the traditionalist authors of the period who approached European cinema of the late 1910s and the early 1920s as a tool for Westernization. The burning issue here seems to be the extent to which cinema-going was seen as a symbol of Westernization. We can hardly mention such a perspective in the early cinema period; however, with the disappearance of the cinema of attractions and the Great War, the films became more of a tool for propaganda and a market for new lifestyles. Thus, European cinema entered the field of cultural imperialism in the Empire in decline. In particular, the economic disasters the country faced and the lack of national products increased the male anxiety for this 'influence'. However, we still cannot identify a unique sense of male anxiety as the general attributions of the terms 'hysteria' or the 'excess' which female spectatorship exemplifies.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, Sabine Hake's elaboration on the Weimar Cinema critics' approach to female spectatorship, in particular Kracauer's approach, also demonstrates similarities to those of the Turkish novelists: 'However repressed, fractured, deformed or disguised, the audience of the 1920s is imagined by

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<sup>129</sup> For more on female spectatorship and excess see Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies, Gender, Genre and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44. 4 (Summer, 1991), pp. 2-13. Also for the association of femininity with the pathological see Mary Ann Doane, 'The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the 'Woman's Film' of the 1940s', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 6, No:1/2 (1985), pp. 205-227.



most critics as a female (of women and/or of an audience made female) by its forms of reception'.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Sabine Hake, 'Girls and Crisis - the Other Side of Diversion', *New German Critique*, 40 (Winter 1987), p. 158.

## 6. CHAPTER SIX: CINEMA-GOING AS AN INSTITUTION

In 1919, as a response to the foreign occupation after the defeat in World War I and the decline of the Empire mentioned in the previous chapter Turkish nationalists planned to form a resistance movement in Anatolia by organizing secret meetings and societies. The Nationalist resistance under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal aimed to challenge the authority of the Sultan and his government, confront the occupying forces in Istanbul and other parts of the country and expel the Greek army from Izmir. However, in August 1920, the Ottoman government had already signed a peace treaty with the Entente Powers. The conditions of the Treaty were so severe that the Nationalists found it unacceptable and therefore chose to adhere to the principle of the absolute integrity of all remaining Ottoman territory inhabited by a Turkish Muslim majority, the retention of Istanbul and the Straits, and the rejection of any restriction on the political, judicial, and financial rights of the nation.<sup>1</sup> In order to do so, they declared the 'War of Independence' against the occupying countries. On the Eastern front, the Turkish army fought with the Republic of Armenia, on the South with the French and in Western Anatolia with the Greeks. The Sultanate and Caliphate were against this national struggle; therefore, after winning all these battles the Nationalists abolished them both in 1922. The treaty of Lausanne was signed in 1923, after which Anatolia and Eastern Thrace were left to the Turks. Finally, the Turkish Republic was founded as a nation state in October 1923.

The foundation of the Turkish Republic was followed by many revolutionary movements following the model of European nation states. Mustafa Kemal and his principles for the Republic shaped the country's international and national politics as well as cultural and economic assets. The ideology behind these principles can be

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<sup>1</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 150-151.

considered somewhere in between the nationalist Young Turks at one extreme and the liberal Young Turks at the other. In other words, the country would be purely secular and modern (modern as in Euro-centric modernity), yet absolutely independent and intolerant of imperialism.

The emergence of the Turkish Republic can also be associated with the emergence of a new Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie. The middle classes in Istanbul, before the foundation of the Nation State were formed largely by non-Muslim entrepreneurs, bankers and merchants along with some Muslim bureaucrats. However by 1925, this segment of the society drastically decreased due to both the Turkification of society and the new structure of the State which led to the elimination of the former civil servants. Therefore, one can claim that the place left by the Greek and Armenian commercial classes began to be filled by the Muslims with the encouragement of the new Nation State.<sup>2</sup>

The Ottoman relationship with cinema-going has always been considered to be ambivalent. The Empire was based on 'Islamic laws' which allowed the (self) Orientalist argument 'Islam naturally rejects all forms of innovations' to prevail in film historiography (either explicitly or implicitly), where assumptions on the Muslim public's disapproval of cinema were made. However, as the Empire was economically dependent on the Great Powers, there was allegedly great decadence due to this 'deprived' situation where any types of amusements, particularly 'Western ones', were seen part of this 'decadence'. In the previous chapters I have already elaborated on these cultural assumptions. Therefore this chapter will focus mainly on the way the brand new Republic dealt with cinema and how spectatorship was aimed to be tamed within the institutionalization of cinema.

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<sup>2</sup> Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London, New York: Verso, 1987), pp. 79-95.

This chapter will mainly examine the ways in which cinema was institutionalized in the Turkey of the early Republican period. By institution I refer to the ways film criticism and cinema journalism became a profession and cinema-going offered *new* lifestyles through consumerism and fandom. The increasing influence of the star system for the audiences and the State's growing awareness of cinema as a means of manipulation led to the institutionalization of cinema-going. The earliest cinema journal in the Republic, namely *Sinema Postasi*, began to be published in the same year as the foundation of the new state in 1923. Even though there had been earlier attempts in 1914, such as *Ferah* and *Sinema* which were based on the general spectacle life of the country, *Sinema Postasi* remains the first to focus solely on cinema. Film criticism and cinema writing started immediately after this. Audience letters concerning film stars sowed early seeds of fandom; the controversial relationship of cinema-going with Islam in this period is no more a matter of discussion in the historiography and cinema was now undoubtedly accepted as an educational tool as well as an art form.

## 6.1. The Turkification of the Film Industry the Americanization of the Film Market

The ideological principles of Kemalism, the new regime, were introduced as follows: Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Statism, Secularism and Revolutionism. Yet, the economic and industrial state of the country were still under immensely poor conditions; the population in 1923 was an estimated 15 million while only 14,000 workers were employed at 182 industrial enterprises.<sup>3</sup> The intelligentsia were the political rulers of the country and supporters of Mustafa Kemal. They were inspired by French Revolutionary traditions as well as the Russian revolution and believed in leading Turkey 'into the modern world of civilized nations'. By embracing the ideas of nationalism and positivism they would have to construct a Turkish identity very different from the Ottoman one, similar to French man created by the French revolution or the new 'Soviet' or 'socialist man' created after the Russian revolution.<sup>4</sup> However, there was no notion of a 'Turkish identity' before then, as people used to identify themselves by their religious affiliation. Change began with the nationalism that replaced the multi-religious, multi-national Ottoman identity and initiated a national awakening. Turks, according to Feroz Ahmad, were the last to adopt nationalism since they were ruled by a cosmopolitan system.<sup>5</sup> The word Turk in the Empire before the Young Turks Revolution in 1908 was used only to refer to people from the provinces whereas:

People, if they had a choice, preferred to be identified as 'Ottomans', members of a stratum with its own culture and language (called *Osmanlica* ['Ottoman'] and not Turkish) which transcended the bounds of race and religion. Thus anyone, whether Greek, Armenian, Jewish, Arab, Kurdish, Albanian or Turkish, could become an Ottoman so long as he possessed the proper cultural and linguistic attributes. It was

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<sup>3</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> Ahmad, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

the Europeans, more at home with the discourse of nationalism, who spoke of Turkey and Turks when they referred to events in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>6</sup>

The lack of nationalism, of course, did not mean all strata of the society were content with the old regime, yet it is known that a variety of ethnic groups and their shared cultures survived in the same lands together until the rise of Nationalism in the late nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

The revolution led by the Kemalist regime is also considered to be a bourgeois revolution in a country where there were allegedly no class divisions since for the Ottomans there were only ‘the Sultan and the subjects’. Additionally, there are assumptions that the War of Independence was also an attempt to bring capitalism to the country. The Kemalist regime anticipated the development of all groups in the society where the idea of *innovation* became the main purpose. The innovations would be initiated by the intelligentsia whose ‘principal task’ was to destroy all that was left by the old regime and form a totally new nation. The revolution carried about by this task was done rapidly and educating the public became the greatest mission for the achievement of the revolution. The revolution, such as adopting the Gregorian calendar as a replacement of the lunar Islamic one, the closing down of dervish lodges, using hats instead of the fez, the change of the alphabet from Arabic script to the Roman one, brought the country closer to the West and weakened ties with Islamic countries. Equal rights for women had already started to become an issue by the revolution of 1908. Moreover, the replacement of the Islamic regime’s *sharia* laws and Caliphate by civil law, along with a secularization of the State, education and law as well as social life boosted the liberation of women especially those from the middle classes. According to Feroz Ahmad, ‘the extension

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<sup>6</sup> Ahmad, p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a combination of the inequality between the urban Ottoman elite and the provincial people, the lack of industrial achievements and religious intolerance particularly towards heterodox Islam and Christianity had long led unsuccessful revolutionary attempts in the Empire.

of women's rights was part of the process of creating a Turkish bourgeoisie' and educated women were expected to play a modernizing role both in the family and in society at large.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1920s, the worldwide film industry had already been Americanized while French, Italian and German products retained their presence in the global market. Turkey was still attempting to launch her national industry. Turkish entrepreneurs started to invest in cinema, former multi-ethnic owners of film theaters began to be replaced by Turks, while private production and distribution companies began to be established. American films held the largest share in the projection of films in Istanbul while Italian, French and German actresses' influences on audiences seemed to have disappeared. Turkish spectators were now much more interested in American stars such as Lillian Gish, Rudolph Valentino, Gloria Swanson, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin and others. Mary Pickford was giving advice on how to be a film star to her Turkish fans,<sup>9</sup> while the 'sensational marriage' of her brother Jack Pickford where Charlie Chaplin was a witness, also attracted much attention.<sup>10</sup>

Reports on the American film industry varied from news of particular companies to the general attitude of studios toward film stars. In 1924, American entrepreneurs' and producers' decision not to follow stars' demands found support in the Turkish press. 'Since not all the movies they produce make money, American capitalists and entrepreneurs from now on will spend less on already rich stars. Stars such as Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd had already earned too much'.<sup>11</sup> In 1925 Metro Goldwyn Mayer opened a branch office in Istanbul which generated great enthusiasm in the Turkish press. The decision is celebrated as it was believed that the

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<sup>8</sup> Feroz Ahmad, p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 1 (12 June 1924), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 2 (27 June 1924), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 1 (12 June 1924), p. 4.

new office would help the country's commercial activity and their films would help develop the 'public taste':

The good commercial sense of the Turkish entrepreneurs and their interest in selling movies benefited from the popularity of certain production companies. Many companies from Europe and America have established their branches in the Near East. We can say that the industry and the commercialization of films play a very crucial role in the commercial activity of Turkey that is growing everyday.

[In this article,] We want to look closer at Metro Goldwyn Mayer who just established an office in Istanbul under the direction of Mr. Albert Cornfeld. This [MGM] is one of the biggest companies in the world and the branch in Istanbul works directly with the main office in the United States. Therefore, new films will arrive in Turkey immediately [after they are produced] and will be projected simultaneously in New York and other great capitals of Europe. The names of the stars are known worldwide: Alice Terry, Lillian Gish, Mae Murray, as the most important leading ladies, or Ramon Novarro and Lewis Stone as the most famous screen idols, Wallace Berry and Adolphe Menjou who gained fame playing villains, and the immensely popular child actor Jackie Coogan.<sup>12</sup>

The article seems to epitomize the spirit of the age, in which the film stars offered a life of glamour and escapism to the audiences under the influence of consumerism along with the rise of American cinema. Indeed in a decade, the Istanbulite public was going to be encouraged to appreciate Turkish film distributors as they were supposedly bringing and displaying the latest pictures even before being shown in the cities where they were produced. By the end of silent era, Turkish film critics were proud of catching the latest trends in cinema-going: for example, a film by Charles Lamac was shown in Istanbul three weeks before Paris, even though the film was shot in Paris and Parisians had to wait eight months more just to be able to see the Russian film *Mustafa*.<sup>13</sup> Although American cinema was gradually dominating the Turkish film market, Cemil Filmer mentions the convenience of importing European films to Turkey due to the lack of regulations from the customs office and censorship. Filmer recalls bringing films to the country in a suitcase from

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<sup>12</sup> *Opera-Ciné*, 4 (21 October 1925), p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Sinema ve Tiyatro Heveskari* 4 (27 October 1932), p. 2



Vienna or Paris and obtaining permission from only one of the officers at the censorship committee. According to Filmer, this officer did not even watch the films; he only looked at still images taken from the film, and approved the release.<sup>14</sup>

The American presence in the market increasingly became so great that a journalist in 1927 complains about American dominance in a sarcastic way: ‘The bad films we saw this year were all American, since almost 90 percent of the films we saw were American. This year we only saw 20 European films whereas 150 American pictures were shown in our city.’<sup>15</sup> The same trend could be observed in France, where Georges Sadoul examines a decline in French filmmaking in the post-war era since it was systematically curtailed by the large American firms.<sup>16</sup> Americanization of spectatorship attracted greater attention in France, whose films once dominated the American market at the beginning of the century.<sup>17</sup> However the former Ottoman and the new Turkish film markets had always been dominated by the industries of other countries and therefore the dominance of American films did not arouse much criticism.

German cinema, on the other hand, won back its share of the Turkish market, particularly during the rise of Expressionism and the Turkish National Independence movement. Germany was known to have expertise in the movie business and since cinema was becoming an institution and an educational tool in Turkey, it is no coincidence that a German entrepreneur named Henry Hertenbach considered opening a studio school in Istanbul. He was described as the ‘father of cinema in

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<sup>14</sup> Cemil Filmer, *Hatıralar* (Istanbul: Emek Matbaacılık, 1984), p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> *Artistik-Sine*, 4 (2 February 1927), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Georges Sadoul, ‘The Postwar French Cinema’, *Hollywood Quarterly*, 4.3 (Spring, 1950), pp. 233-244.

<sup>17</sup> See Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Berlin, Prague and Munich’ and potential students were advised to participate and were promised to be hired in German studios ‘if not elsewhere in Europe’.<sup>18</sup>

Public interest in the world film industry was not yet sufficient to increase local industry. According to statistics that were allegedly made in the United States and printed in Istanbul in 1924, the most successful box-office films were made by Fox, Universal and Paramount. From the data available in the same statistics, the number of Turkish movie theaters was among the lowest in Western Europe and North America. There were supposedly 117 theaters in Yugoslavia, 23 in Czechoslovakia, 23 in the Balkans (Bulgaria, Greece and Romania probably) and 32 in Turkey.<sup>19</sup>

The first national private production company, named *Kemal Film*, was founded in 1922 and immediately started making feature length films. Their first production was *Bogazici Esrari* (‘Mysterious Orient’, 1922) which was supposedly distributed in Europe as well. The film was appreciated by the national press as a product of the new regime. Newspapers report that it was successfully shown in Paris.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile early film criticism, which had rarely mentioned a local production before then, praised the film’s success though without much elaboration on the mise-en-scène or cinematography.<sup>21</sup> In the same year, 1922, a very controversial figure for Turkish film history, Muhsin Ertugrul, started making his first features in Turkey. Ertugrul, who was primarily a theater actor and director, was criticized by Turkish film historians for reducing cinema to theater.<sup>22</sup> Indeed he was a prominent figure in the filmmaking industry, and is still remembered as a major film maker, having produced around 40 films by the late 1940s. Muhsin Ertugrul

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<sup>18</sup> *Artistik-Sine*, 3 (19 January 1927), p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 1 (12 June 1924), p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Opera-Cine*, 2 (September 1925), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Sinema Postasi*, 1 (December 1923), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> See Nijat Özön, *Türk Sineması Kronolojisi 1895-1966* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1968); Alim Şerif Onaran, *Muhsin Ertugrul’un Sineması* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981).

initially worked for and made six films with Kemal Film by 1924.<sup>23</sup> Historians agree that his first three films, *Istanbul'da Bir Faciayi Ask*, *Bogazici Esrari* and *Atesten Gomlek*, were successful and his third film in particular gained a positive reception both from the press and through historiography.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, none of his silent films appear to have survived to the present, according to the only film archive in Turkey (Mimar Sinan Sinema-TV Merkezi).<sup>25</sup> From the plot descriptions and the small amount of information gathered through the reviews, it is understood that Ertugrul's films seem rich in décor, props, art direction and acting. The rhythm of his films was criticized for being based on the 'simplistic' use of editing with long takes. However, we can assume if one were to be able to watch these films with a fresh mind-set that they would deserve praise. His first six films made with Kemal Film were *Istanbul'da Bir Faciayi Ask*, *Bogazici Esrari*, *Atesten Gomlek*, *Leblebici Horhor*, *Kizkulesinde Bir Facia* and *Sozde Kizlar* and all have sensational themes with proto *femmes fatales*, murders and melodramatic disasters. It might be especially interesting to re-assess *Sozde Kizlar* at present, as anticipated in the previous chapter. Since the novel, this film was adopted from, depicts female cinephilia and its fatal consequences for women, the film might be self-referential and may have a different aspect than the novel itself.

Finally, the filmmaking industry has boomed in our country. Now, our people can appreciate cinema as a vital cultural touchstone and even as an educational tool. Kemal Film Studios, who had realized such needs, saved us from the dependence on unfamiliar foreign films, and started adopting the spectacular Turkish novels of our national life.

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<sup>23</sup> Gokhan Akcura, *Dogumunun Yuzuncu Yil Armagani: Muhsin Ertugrul* (Istanbul: Istanbul Buyukşehir Belediyesi Kultur Isleri Dairesi Baskanligi, 1992), p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> See Alim Şerif Onaran; Gokhan Akcura; Efdal Sevincli Efdal Sevincli, *Mesrutiyetten Cumhuriyet'e Tiyatrodan Sinemaya Muhsin Ertugrul* (Istanbul: Broy Yayınları, 1987); Vedat Örf, 'Milli Filmler', *Sinema Postasi*, 1 (December 1923), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> However it should be noted that the information given by this archive may not be accurate since it does not provide an open film catalogue for researchers.

Of course, *Istanbulda Bir Faciayi Ask* and *Bogazici Esrari* were the first experiences; but *Atesten Gomlek* can be considered as a masterpiece both from the aspect of the content and the cinematography. The film tells the tormented stories of our War of Independence. This film showed how our nation awakened from the tortures and gained back her honour in the end. We would like to ask dear *Kemal Film* to distribute this beautiful film in Europe and even in America. Thereby, we would be able to demonstrate the Turk and the Turk's new life to those who do not want to acknowledge us, and let them be embarrassed to see how Turks are prepared to develop in science and in modern life as much as in they are on the battlefield...<sup>26</sup>

This article appears to reveal the patriotic pride and insecurity of a new nation through a film about the national war. This nationalist view of cinema may seem parallel to the understanding of silent cinema as an instrument for a progressive, positivistic and nationalistic discourse as also revealed in the case of Italy.<sup>27</sup> Despite their 'technological inadequacies' Ertugrul's early films appear to have gained not only critical acclaim, but also public interest:

Audience demand led Kemal Film to make a second piece: *Bogazici Esrari*, which was adopted from a renowned novel and which indeed was the proof of Kemal Film's progress in mise-en-scène. One would sense more filmic illusions [special effects] and a stronger spirit. It is known that a great deal of effort and capital were invested in some scenes. Their third film (*Atesten Gomlek*) exemplifies their great progress in cinema. Muhsin Ertugrul undoubtedly demonstrated his immense skills. This film embodied the grand Turkish spirit in cinema. There was a need for war scenes to depict this spirit therefore Muhsin Ertugrul added extra numbers of war scenes which were unnecessary in the storyline. However these scenes have a glorious position in our hearts and minds. Kemal Film already proved its capabilities and will maintain this. *Sozde Kizlar* and *Leblebici Horhor* are other examples for the company's development. *Leblebici Horhor* was clearly made with great sacrifices. It was obvious that in this film we are about to have great film artists such as Behzat Bey [the leading actor] who was so natural that he could almost be compared to a European artist. Cinema which is posited on top of all sciences, has emerged in our country and one cannot even imagine any other news happier than this. I [Vedat Örf] reckon it would be ungrateful not to applaud the entrepreneurs.<sup>28</sup>

This article, just as the previous one, appears to be written with nationalistic and therefore, subjective values and criteria which may not provide us with an unbiased view on the films. Yet, they are both helpful to understand the

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<sup>26</sup> *Yeni Inci*, 1 (May 1923), p. 13. Cited in Efdal Sevincli, p. 171.

<sup>27</sup> See *Maciste* series (Luigi Romano Borgnetto and Vincenzo Denizot, Italy, 1915) and *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, Italy, 1914).

<sup>28</sup> Vedat Örf, 'Milli Filmler', *Sinema Postasi*, 1 (December 1923), p. 3.

intelligentsia's perspective and the audience interest in national films. Additionally, technological, industrial and economic insufficiencies seem to lead to feelings of inferiority, nonetheless these were accompanied by a nationalist pride gained from the War of Independence. Cinema was one of the tools to reach the level of the developed countries. Although, the making of *Bogazici Esrari*, which was also shown in Europe, caused a great sensation among the public, it was overlooked in the magazines. The sensation created by the production of this film and its censorship were due to its controversial theme. The film was an adaptation of a novel that reiterated the Orthodox accusations of 'corruption' in an unorthodox religious sect, the *Bektasis*, whose mysticism was the main source of inspiration of *Karagöz*. Bektasis have long been a target for Orthodox Islamic attacks mainly for presenting a more progressive understanding of the faith, however, the foundation of this positivist regime led to growing dislike of religious or mystical communities in the country. According to Alim Şerif Onaran, the plot of Ertugrul's film is based on a doomed love affair between a Bektasi sheik and a female student whom he dragged into the use of illegal drugs and other troubles after she joined the Bektasi community.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, the film drew strong disapproval from the members of the Bektasi order and the set was raided by them. Onaran records that this negative reception led to the resignation of some of the leading actors and *Bogazici Esrari* had to wait for the censorship committee's approval of its release. The film projection was delayed for a year after its production in 1922.

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<sup>29</sup> Alim Şerif Onaran, pp. 161-165.

## 6.2. Verisimilitude and Illusions

During the period between 1913 and 1930 we can still assume that individual films did not gain as much attention as the film stars and cinema was primarily a social event. Reading the cinema magazines of the period, it seems that both the readers, as potential audiences, and the authors, as professional audiences, were pre-occupied with both film stars and the production of films. In other words, the films themselves were insignificant, but they were part of a larger life of spectacle, even if the cinema of attractions period had ended. Furthermore, global and national film industries earned more attention than individual films. The presentation of films, openings of new cinema halls, coquettish interior decorations or audience manners received far more detailed analysis from the press. Meanwhile, film criticism as a new profession seemed no more complicated than straightforward judgements. Such judgements by critics, however, could reveal how sophisticated one's taste was. A good critic would help to improve the audiences' taste and this was an important task since it was related to the notion of educating the public as part of the *zeitgeist* in the early Turkish Republic.

Cinema was undoubtedly seen as a popular entertainment; however the burning question in this context is: 'Whose public sphere was it?'<sup>30</sup> To what extent could the people of the Republic afford it? To what extent could they give importance to the type of entertainment which refers to 'glory', 'extravagance' and 'luxury', at a time when unemployment was an important issue? These questions naturally remain unanswered as the cinema journals, memoirs and novels, only mention those who were able to afford and enjoy cinema, but not those who were unable. Ticket prices may provide an idea of the affordability of cinema, of course.

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<sup>30</sup> See Miriam Hansen, 'Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?', *New German Critique*, 29 (Spring-Summer 1983), pp. 147-184.

Yet at a time when cinema-going also appears to be an act of being seen and refers to high-society values, as observed in the magazines, it is worth considering that cinema was probably the public sphere of the *flâneurs*, of the dandies, of the elite, but less likely to belong to the peddlers, small merchants, less liberated women, prostitutes, or the emerging proletariat who indeed formed a large part of society. Another difference between cinema and *Karagöz* can be observed in the period of silent cinema when journals, stars and films represented certain lifestyles and glamour. *Karagöz* always remained anarchistic (both with its story lines and its display practices) did not tend to be institutionalized, as seen in Chapter Four; moreover, it maintained its appeal to almost all layers of society. However, cinema spectatorship became a matter of class divisions.<sup>31</sup>

The journals' approach to cinema, as stated above, seem to be more audience/reader centered than film centered. Therefore, one may claim that the viewing practices of the cinema of attractions still continued. On one hand, it indeed did, since these journals did not treat films as texts and gave more importance to the notion of 'cinema as part of a larger life of spectacle'. On the other hand, films were now more narrative oriented and, accordingly, spectators' memoirs or novels written about cinema demonstrate an audience absorbed in these texts and who identified with film characters. Thus the early cinema audience, presumably aware of the illusionary nature of cinema, seemed to have disappeared. 'Wondrous audiences' were now replaced by audiences who were absorbed by cinema's convincing use of time with regard to feature length classical narrative films, that presumably anticipate an audience forgetful of the illusionary nature of cinema. However, the audience was still *wondering* how these effects were created as seen in a number of newspaper reports. Harold Lloyd's 1923 film *Safety Last* was supposed to create a sense of

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<sup>31</sup>On the relationship between 'taste' and bourgeoisie or ruling classes see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).

shock in the audience by his refusing to use a double or special effects in the scene where he climbs up a skyscraper in Los Angeles. However, as the audiences of the period were used to seeing this kind of tension in cinema, Lloyd's attempts to shock them were allegedly unsuccessful.<sup>32</sup>

The dangerous position of Harold Lloyd scares one. However it is not at all as dangerous as it seems. It is not so likely that, for example, if Lloyd falls from the top of the building, he will die. This is just an illusion, a filmic one. There is a main street in Los Angeles which goes through tunnels and steep hills. If one climbs up one of those hills she/he can see the streets from a bird's eye view. One would almost feel one was watching the street from the top of an apartment block?. Harold Lloyd, for his *High and Dizzy*, installed an apartment ledge on this hill and climbed up as if he had been on a skyscraper. Thus, the filmic 'dangerous situation' is made safer. It is just a well-thought film illusion. This illusion is *sui generis*, it can only happen in Los Angeles.<sup>33</sup>

Lloyd's and other actors' acrobatic scenes might not have induced shock, but they must have created a wonder in the audience as two different Turkish film magazines felt the need to provide technical explanations of these films, even though they were probably inaccurate. In 1925, a journalist claims that spectators had frequently seen actors jump from an apartment window in dramas, comedies or 'chaotic films'.<sup>34</sup> Then he says however: 'Of course they do not jump from a window in real life... Cinema is merely an illusion'.<sup>35</sup> Such a statement may seem similar to Richard Allen's argument about spectators who could be aware of the act of watching, yet still experience the illusion;<sup>36</sup> but more likely it refers to an audience who is aware of the concealed techniques, yet lacks the knowledge of concealment mechanisms which were explained in the film magazines. Also in the same issue of

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<sup>32</sup> This film was shown in Le Giornate del Cinema Muto in October 2006 and at the presentation of the film these claims were announced to the Giornate audience.

<sup>33</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 1 (June 1924), p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> This description also mentions the film genre conventions albeit with a confusion in naming due to the scarcity of terminology at that time. On the diversity of genre classifications in silent cinema See Stephen Hughes, 'House Full: Silent Film Genre, Exhibition and Audiences in South India', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 43.1 (2006), pp. 31-62.

<sup>35</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 1 (June 1924), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Allen, 'Representation, Illusion and the Cinema', *Cinema Journal*, 32.2 (Winter 1993), 21-48 (p. 22).



the journal, American actors' strategies for crying at appropriate scenes were revealed: film stars listened to music in order to control their emotions while acting, supposedly as a common practice. Once, for example, in order to cry in a scene that takes place at a funeral, an actor brought a violinist to the set and had him play a melancholy sonata by Beethoven.<sup>37</sup> The same issue found a place in another film magazine of 1924 as well. According to *Opera-Ciné* when the actor/actress was supposed to cry, the make-up artist would drop glycerine in the actor's eyes.<sup>38</sup> It seems, however, puzzling that the ability of crying deliberately was of great interest to an audience presumably accustomed to seeing theater performances. This might be due to an interest in the broad range of possibilities of cinema as the readers would perhaps like to know about the illusionary features of this relatively new medium.

The readers also wrote letters to the journals with their various questions about cinema. One reader enquired about scenes showing train crashes or steamboat accidents. The answer was that the pictures in such scenes were not real: 'such accidents are usually done through trick filming', though occasionally some cameramen were able to document such incidents by chance beforehand.<sup>39</sup> Another issue associated with the concerns on reality and illusion in 1925 is the look of film stars. This included the crucial role of make-up for the film stars in order to give the impression of the age of the characters they played. However, their make-up, according to *Artistic-Cine*, ought not to be as tragic as in theater plays. Furthermore, if the actor was to play a villain or a naïve character, the make-up had to be done appropriately. Obviously, a pale pink base and brown pencils were crucial: 'Lon Chaney, for example, would never forget to use them'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 1 (June 1924), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Opera-Ciné*, 1 (November 1924), p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 1 (June 1924), p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Opera-Ciné*, 3 (September 1925), p. 3.

Film studios were inevitably another interest for readers, as they provide a wide range of opportunities for creating spectacular scenes. An author of *Opera-Ciné* seemed to be amazed that any place on earth could be reconstructed in a film studio. The article reveals the techniques of showing a jungle, the palace of Versailles or New York harbor by the same film company. According to him ‘reality’ is produced by the use of the ‘unreal tools’ of cinema.<sup>41</sup>

### 6.3. Cinema as a Bourgeois Public Space and Taste

Cinema is today a true art, respected and loved by everybody. Almost all young people are in love with this magnificent horizon of *glory and fortune*.<sup>42</sup>

Cemal Kafadar’s description of the coffee houses’ role in forming public opinion and transforming the public space reveals similarities to that of early cinema. The lifestyles offered by both cinema and coffee houses changed the measure of leisure and pleasure of their times. Coffee houses functioned as arenas for various dissidents of the Empire until the Young Turk Revolution. Its decreasing significance after 1908 might be due to the Sultanate or State authority that became much less powerful. Moreover, the threat against the people of the country was replaced by the occupation in 1920. Hence, a new form of public space took shape in movie halls. Perhaps because the occupying forces in Istanbul frequented movie theaters more than coffee houses or perhaps because cinema was a manipulative tool and coffee houses were not, it could be assumed that Turkish cinema theaters, filmmakers and audiences between 1908 and the 1920s attempted to form an alternative public opinion against Western Imperialism. The founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 brought about an official celebration of bourgeois lifestyles. The multi-lingual subjects of the Sultan were now Turkish speaking free citizens. Since the current

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<sup>41</sup> *Opera-Ciné*, 1 (November 1924), p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Artistik-Sine*, 4 (February 1927), p. 6.

intelligentsia was largely formed by the supporters of Mustafa Kemal and the new secular Nation State, public opinion was unlikely to have oppositional intentions against the State, unlike the one that had formerly been formed in the coffee houses.

Coffee houses that established a heterogeneous public space had hosted rebellions and revolts against the political authority of the Sultan. In the years of the early Republic, however, we were dealing with a relatively more homogenous society that was united by the idea of a Nation State and that was attempting to create its own bourgeoisie. The transformation of society from a multi-national and a multi-ethnic one to a Nation State coincided with the idea of cinema as a bourgeois public space that was encouraged by current trends in the cinema of the mid 1910s that served the new principles of the State. Aiming at more sophisticated and affluent audiences through film narratives that were adapted from literature and that celebrated white middle class values, as offered by Hansen,<sup>43</sup> and through the opening of ‘coquettish’ movie theaters, cinema life in 1920s Istanbul became a matter of high brow taste. Furthermore, the emergence of a new bourgeois class was parallel to the emergence of new ‘chic’ theaters. Hence cinema-going at this period might seem to have changed the understanding of the public space, which, through coffee houses, had previously functioned to promote an alternative public opinion to the authorities in power.

Early and silent cinema as public space had long been considered, especially in the United States, to be part of the democratic ‘melting pot’ where women, non-white immigrants, working classes, and children were supposedly all welcomed. However, revisionist film historians imply that this might not have been the case, especially after the development of narrative style cinema or the notion of cinema as

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<sup>43</sup> See Hansen, ‘Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?’, pp. 147-155.

the seventh art in the mid 1910s.<sup>44</sup> Miriam Hansen argues for the precariousness of the ‘democratic mission’ of the film industry and states that even as early as 1914 in the USA the prevalence of feature films was ‘accompanied by the downtown picture place and admission charges so prohibitive that they effectively displaced the working class as the cinema’s allegedly primary spectator/subject’.<sup>45</sup>

In the Turkish case, historians see the largest segment of the early and silent film audiences as Westernized, although they also tend to appreciate the boom of movie theaters in ‘traditional’ districts. As reiterated throughout the previous chapters, this study avoids making cultural distinctions and prefers to see such divisions in an economic context. The cinema, as an institution, offered high brow taste in order to attract affluent audiences, and thereby it promoted consumer values which were closely associated with the Western way of life. However, what traditional Turkish film historiography dismisses seems to be the economic reasons behind this. Hence, these essentializing assumptions need to be re-evaluated in light of class divisions rather than the cultural polarity of Western versus Eastern. Indeed, journals and memoirs from the period confirm the idea of a close relationship between the new bourgeois lifestyles and cinema-going, in which the words ‘sensational’, ‘glamorous’, ‘sublime’, ‘supreme’ frequently appeared in the descriptions of new films as well as the reports about film stars. Cinema-going life in 1920s Istanbul was thus, closely associated with taste and the bourgeoisie, similar to the silent cinema spectatorship in Germany,<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See Ben Singer, ‘Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibitors’, *Cinema Journal*, 34.3 (Spring 1995), pp. 5-35, Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Russell Merritt, ‘Nickelodeon Theaters 1905-1914: Building an Audience for the Movies’, in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, rev. ed. 1985), pp. 25-42.

<sup>45</sup> Hansen, ‘Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?’, p. 150.

<sup>46</sup> See Scott Curtis, ‘The Taste of A Nation: Training the Senses and Sensibility of Cinema Audiences in Imperial Germany’, *Film History*, 6.4 (Winter 1994), pp. 445-469.

In the social life of our city, cinema plays a more crucial role than it does in Europe and America. The good commercial sense of the Turkish entrepreneur and their interest in selling movies benefited from the popularity of certain production companies such as Metro Goldwin Mayer.<sup>47</sup>

As was stated above, taste was something to be developed by the bourgeois entrepreneurs and to be trained by the production of ‘good quality’ films which were presumably imported from the large American studios. The judgement and the decision mechanisms were formed by economically or politically powerful authorities, hence aesthetic judgement was related to the dominating classes who were able to show social discrimination through the expression of their taste.

Anthony P. Stoll, a French speaking contributor to *Artistik-Sine*, showed an explicitly subordinating positioning on the matter of taste: ‘Until a few months ago I was accusing the public of Istanbul for not knowing how to criticize films. However now in the last season, I am satisfied to say that our public proved certain qualities of their cinematographic judgements.’<sup>48</sup> Stoll then continues with the number of good, bad and mediocre movies shown in that season and appreciates how the public received coldly ‘the bad’ and ‘the mediocre movies’. Although he does not mention why he dislikes certain films, he defines his judgemental standards with the ‘story’ and the ‘techniques of realization’. Stoll’s obvious patronizing position implies a social distinction in which his criteria for good or bad movies demonstrate a personal view on the subject. His role in shaping public opinion provides him with the authority to shape and train the aesthetic reception of the public. This perspective may be emphasized when considering the celebration of the new offices of Metro Goldwyn Mayer in 1925 as ‘a center that distributes good taste’.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, we may get a clearer view if we look into the intelligentsia’s attitude towards provincial

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<sup>47</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 3 (July 1924), p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Anthony P. Stoll, *Artistik-Sine*, 4 (February 1927), p. 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Opera-Ciné*, 3 (September 1925), p. 5

audiences with 'bad tastes', who suffer from 'the scarcity of [Western style] theatres' that offer a superior aesthetic judgement to the urban dwellers rather than the 'provincials'.<sup>50</sup> One of the articles, written in 1926, mentions the visit of a distributor from an unknown rural area to the journal's office in Istanbul. A journalist interviewed this distributor. From the data given by the distributor, it appears that every 20 days 15 new films were shown in this unknown small town, demonstrating an important function of cinema as an educator to the journalist:

The public adores cinema, because they never see theater plays. Even if they do, they are unable to comprehend the deep meaning of the theater. Since its viewing is easy, cinema satisfies and instructs them more. There were some primitive and uneducated peasants who, before cinema, had no knowledge of urban life. Now after starting to watch films they became coquettish, and more pre-occupied with 'cars' or 'ties' [as signs of urban lifestyles].<sup>51</sup>

The way cinema became a tool for lifestyle values is emphasized by the opening of a new theater hall, Sinema Kismet, in Istanbul in December 1927:

I was impressed by this coquettish little hall which can be considered to be one of the best cinemas in Pera. Everything is modified, it is very luxurious. There is luxury even in the smallest details and nothing left from the old Orientaux [name of the old movie theater that was refurbished]. Cine-Kismet has 600 places all lavishly decorated. This theater will attract high society; at the opening night some of the most select people of Pera were present.<sup>52</sup>

The advertisement of the opening of the Sinema-Kismet also indicates the targeted audiences of this theater: 'The beautifully and extravagantly decorated room of Sinema-Kismet is the rendezvous place for high society,'<sup>53</sup> or, as another announcement suggests 'Luxury and obscurity: Cine-Kismet, the trendy cinema near

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<sup>50</sup> *Artistik-Sine*, 2 (November 1926), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Artistik-Sine*, 7 (December 1927), p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7

Tokatliyan Hotel, will be the meeting place for the elegant public of Pera.<sup>54</sup> This view of an elite public was highlighted by another advertisement, this time for a restaurant that was also close to the ‘fashionable’ movie halls: ‘After the cinema, the elegant public will dine at *Maxim*’.<sup>55</sup>

One of the most famous distributors and movie theater owners of the country, Cemil Filmer, demonstrates a class consciousness in his descriptions of the different movie halls in the city. He reports that in the late 1920s, ticket prices for the two large movie theaters were almost four times higher than the smaller ones.<sup>56</sup> Thereby, we can assume that perhaps not all the cinemas were attracting an elegant public. The journals and, therefore, public opinion had already started to advertise the glamorous lifestyles of the film stars and celebrated an elegant public that watches them in the ‘coquettish’ movie halls.

#### **6.4.Tamed Daughters and the Disciplined Audiences of the Patriarchal Imagery**

According to the survey prepared for an American high school in the city, namely Robert College, during the occupation of Istanbul, only political censorship was regulated in cinemas: ‘Some of the films are very suggestive and would not be allowed in America or in England’. The survey also records ‘a board of censors to eliminate immoral scenes from films’ as being among the deepest needs of the city’s cinema life.<sup>57</sup> Yet, less than a year before the foundation of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal initiated a policy over the censorship of erotic films as well as formulating an educational mission for cinema: ‘Under the condition of banning immoral scenes and in order to provide peasants with beneficial knowledge, we

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<sup>54</sup> *Artistik-Sine*, 7 (December 1927), p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> *Opera-Ciné*, 6 (October 1925), p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Cemil Filmer, p. 149.

<sup>57</sup> Clarence Richard Johnson, *Constantinople To-day or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. 265.

should encourage showing films about agriculture, industry, geography, economy and health.’<sup>58</sup> Hence the positivistic attitude of the new regime brought about the idea of training the public through cinema. Such education aimed not only at those in the provinces, but also at children and the women who were supposedly the least educated in the society of that period. This objective can be easily observed in the journals and the newspapers of the early Republican era. Thus, those forming public opinion started developing aesthetic criteria and sharpening the public taste. The *fin-de-siècle* movements which were preoccupied with a ‘faith in the ability of education to overcome social ills’ and ‘to promote social progress’ were also a fundamental premise for the Turkish government.<sup>59</sup> The cinematic public taste in Istanbul was influenced by journalists who were also supporters of the government’s policy.

This ‘good taste’ was inexorably determined by the film critics who took the initiative to be mediators between cinema and the audiences and formed a second public sphere within the public sphere of cinema. Thereby an interactive relationship between cinema and audiences is assumed within the description of the newly founded film magazine *Opera-Cinema* in 1925:

We try to connect what is happening between the public and the cinema. Considering cinema as a commercial activity, we observed with satisfaction that it became an important factor of the commercial life of our city. There are new theaters and cinematograph companies which we predict will bring success for the development of our country. The cultural value of the cinema can quite often be challenging because of the influence of good films. It plays a crucial role in training the public’s taste.<sup>60</sup>

We can interpret the role of progress in cinema as a crucial one for the 1920s. In the same article the journal offers alternatives to develop and homogenize, or make uniform, the public taste. If ‘the good quality films’ chosen by the critics or the

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<sup>58</sup> Afet Inan, *Izmir Iktisat Kongresi 17 Subat-4 Mart 1923* (Ankara, Turk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1989), p. 39.

<sup>59</sup> For the similar tendencies in Germany between the 1890s and the 1920s, see Scott Curtis, p. 446.

<sup>60</sup> *Opera-Cine*, 5 (September 1925), p. 3.



distributors were repeatedly screened, *Cine-Opera* believed that the audiences would have to see the same ‘good quality’ film at least once. Thereby, they would have an idea of what a ‘good film’ was like. It would be too simplistic to assume that cinema’s mission as an educational tool emerged with the notion of cinema as a high art; however, it is true that the prevalence of this notion in the printed media coincided with the ‘educational’ concerns. One of the early declarations of cinema as the Seventh Art in the Turkish media was made in 1924 at a time when the ‘progressive’ principles of the New State were celebrated.<sup>61</sup> Positing cinema as ‘the greatest success of modern civilization’, the author suggests that the artistic qualities and rapid developments of cinema raised it to the level of a science. The author then declares that a decade earlier, in the 1910s, cinema was only a ‘primitive form of entertainment’ which was ‘far away from demonstrating an artistic spirit’. Whereas, at that particular period in the mid 1920s, cinema became ‘the most sophisticated fine art and had the qualities of literature’.<sup>62</sup>

The Kemalist intelligentsia has long been criticized for its patronizing attitude towards the ‘ordinary public’, particularly by the liberal Turkish cultural critics.<sup>63</sup> On one hand, the Kemalist purpose of training the less educated attempts to eliminate distinctions between the ‘elite’ and the ‘illiterate’; on the other, this aim intrinsically assumes a discriminatory and superior role for the leaders of public opinion. These intentions were also exemplified by a famous silent filmmaker and theater director of the period, Muhsin Ertugrul, who prepared a leaflet aiming to teach potential audience the appropriate behavior in theaters. Ertugrul’s rules included:

1. Theater is not an entertainment; it is a school for adults.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> *Sinema Yildizi*, 2 (June 1924), p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> See for example Sinan Ciddi, *Kemalism in Turkish Politics: The Republican People’s Party Secularism and Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 37.

2. One should be decently dressed and behave in the theater hall.
3. One should be silent throughout the play. A nation's intellectual capacity depends on its interest and respect for art and artists.
4. One should not smoke cigarettes in a theater hall.<sup>64</sup>

The general aim of the tastemakers was disciplining the spectators in public spaces; the audience who enjoyed not only viewing spectacles, but also socializing in the venues of shows.<sup>65</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, the female presence in Ottoman public spaces had already increased, but through the enactment of the Republican civil law, women were increasingly more liberated. Yet, the patriarchal aspect still maintained its dominating role, in which young middle class women were subject to control and protection by the national modernization project. In this discourse, Peyami Safa, the author of *Sozde Kizlar* that was analyzed in the previous chapter, becomes a key name in the literature of cinematic spectatorship. He published two more novels that could be seen as a continuation of his earlier work on the subject. The first one, *Fatih-Harbiye* (the names of two districts in Istanbul, one known for its traditional-conservative values and the other for its modern lifestyle), depicts the transformation in the lifestyles of Istanbul in the late 1920s. The heroine, Neriman, a young admirer of a more liberated life, is engaged to a lower middle class traditional Turkish man; but she maintains an affair with someone else whom she sees only at upper class entertainments such as cinemas and balls. Her fiancé does not enjoy these elitist types of entertainments and therefore never accompanies her. When she decides to break with him, her father, who gets along well with her fiancé, becomes seriously ill and needs her fiancé's help. After hearing that her new boyfriend is cheating on her in these hard times, she realizes that her true love was actually her former partner.

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<sup>64</sup> Akcura, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> See John F. Kasson, 'Disciplining the Audience': <http://www.city-journal.org/article02.php?aid=1641> [accessed on 23 September 2008]

Throughout the novel Neriman is depicted as spoiled and frivolous, but deep down kind-hearted and naïve. However, she is always discontented; in one of her complaints against the restrictions in her life, she explodes: 'I cannot even go to the cinema,' as cinema-going is an opportunity for her to see the world outside.<sup>66</sup> Neriman's critical mind seems to be developed by her interest in cinema: 'the European bars I have seen in cinema' or 'such an interesting story, just like cinema'.<sup>67</sup> As a spoiled and outgoing daughter she is presented as a non-altruistic female member of the audience and may bring to mind Miriam Hansen's category of female movie-goers as 'those who neglect their duties at home'.<sup>68</sup> Yet, in the Turkish case, there also seems to be a slightly different moralistic attitude towards women; cinema represented the lives of fallen or corrupted women with whom these young girls could identify only at their own peril.

Safa's other novel *Sinema Delisi Kiz* ('Cinemacholic Girl' or 'The Girl Who is Mad about Cinema') speaks extensively about the negative effects of cinephilia on young women; while his earlier novels dealt with the subject in a more implicit way. In *Fatih-Harbiye* and *Sozde Kizlar*, cinema plays a small part in the perceived widespread decadence, whereas in *Sinema Delisi Kiz* spectatorship appears to form the main source of the 'corruption' of youth through fandom.

*Sinema Delisi Kiz* depicts the troubles of a girl caused by her passion for cinema-going. Her love and understanding of the world are directed by films and film stars. Sabiha stages films at her home; she makes her mother, cousins and grandmother act for her imaginary films. She also plays the leading role in her films and tries to imitate Clara Bow or Marlene Dietrich. One day when leaves a movie

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<sup>66</sup> See Peyami Safa, *Fatih-Harbiye* (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 1995), p. 24.

<sup>67</sup> Safa, p. 32.

<sup>68</sup> Miriam Hansen, 'Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?', p. 176. Hansen also directs our attention to the film industry's new model for female audiences, namely that of stars. On the matter of conservative concerns about female and young spectators, despite depicting a decade earlier, 1910s see Richard Abel, 'Red Rooster Scare', pp. 118-119.

theater she meets a French film star, André Roanne, who in reality turns out to be a Turkish man who tries to take advantage of her by promising both romantic love and leading roles in French movies. Throughout the novel the man takes her to his studio flat and stages imaginary films with the idea of testing and practising her acting abilities. In the meantime, her best friend's brother Pertev, for whom she had formerly developed feelings that had never been fulfilled as he was away in Paris for his studies, returns to Istanbul and contacts her. Sabiha considers that she would give him another chance, if only he could share in her love for cinema. She tries to start conversations for the latest news about film stars; however Pertev is a 'serious' man of science who considers cinema mere entertainment and has little curiosity for film stars. Sabiha tells the reader that Pertev does not understand or appreciate cinema; instead he always talks about more serious matters like 'science', 'physics' and 'literature'. Indeed, Pertev sees interest for the cinema as a naïve and unsophisticated pastime that can only keep one away from the intellectual life and the reality of politics and social life. He also tells Sabiha that cinema is deceptive for young girls. In the mean time, Sabiha keeps on seeing the man she still thinks is André Roanne, who attempts to make Sabiha elope so that they can go to Paris, get married and make films together. Totally unaware of his daughter's plans, Sabiha's father complains that 'after the cinema emerged, it became increasingly difficult to raise a daughter'.<sup>69</sup> She thinks her brother is the only person who understands her feelings, but even he disapproves of her wish to become an artist; not as a sign of 'conservatism', but because according to him 'Turkish people are incapable of making good films'. Being almost totally deceived, Sabiha discovers that André Roanne is actually an old school friend of Pertev and not the French actor she adores. At the end of the novel, Peyami Safa, who is also influenced by an Orthodox

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<sup>69</sup> Peyami Safa (Server Bedii, pseudo.), *Sinema Delisi Kız* (Istanbul: Semih Lütfi Basımevi, 1931), p. 45.

understanding of Islam, makes his leading character regret her passion for cinema and she claims: 'Cinema blinded my eyes, I ceased seeing [the world as it is].'<sup>70</sup> Ultimately Sabiha declares: 'all the evil that exists in this country comes from the cinema!'<sup>71</sup>

We can consider one of Peyami Safa's main concerns to be his belief that his characters, and therefore young female readers, were mesmerized by the blurring boundaries of cinema. For him, cinema as a modern apparatus weakened the borders between the public and the private spheres; between the safe home in the conventional sense and the dangerous life outside in the modern cities; and ultimately, between the traditional gender roles of men and women. Yet, according to Safa the real danger is not cinema itself but the lifestyles offered by it; the popular culture that is becoming increasingly dominant in everyday life and alienating young people or naïve women that need education and discipline.

Sabiha, similar to the hypothetical classical narrative cinema audience formulated by Christian Metz or Jean-Louis Baudry<sup>72</sup>, is deceived by the illusions of appearances and consequently she is tricked by a man who presents himself as a film star. The one who sees the truth beyond the appearances is Pertev, who has adopted the scientific knowledge of Europe, but who rejected its moral values.<sup>73</sup> Pertev is 'modern', 'respectable', 'honest' and respectful of tradition.

At the end of the novel, Sabiha and Pertev arrange a scene for the deceitful man; they invite Pertev's friends to 'Roanne's' flat and the friends come in the guise of journalists. These visitors act as though they want to write articles that Andre

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<sup>70</sup> Safa, p. 120

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Jean Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 286-298; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyly Williams, Ben Brester and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975).

<sup>73</sup> This is a renowned cliché from the story of Westernization in Turkey which implies that Europe should be a technological and economic model, but not a moral one.

Roanne is in Istanbul and, even more sensationally, that he is going to make a film with a Turkish girl. One of the journalists called Server Bedi, Peyami Safa's penname, promises to write a novel about the story of this adventure from the viewpoint of Sabiha. Therefore, the reader is made to think that the author was a medium or a narrator of these events and not the creator of them. Nevertheless, the story results in the happy marriage of Sabiha and Pertev who keep going to movies, particularly those of André Roanne.

By the end of the silent cinema period, the intelligentsia of the new regime became increasingly concerned about the negative effects of spectatorship on children. One of the earliest pieces of field work on this topic was prepared by a Kemalist author, Hilmi Malik, who dedicated his study both to attempt to control cinema-going habits of school children and to explore means to make movies more beneficial for children as well as for the poorly educated public in the provinces. Malik makes his ideological concerns as well as the fundamentals of this new politics very clear from the beginning of the book. In particular, 'Statism', which anticipates a strong state intervention and control over the economic, technological and cultural developments of the country, plays a significant part in the foreword. For Malik, the eminent Turkish revolution that covers and gives shape to everything in the country *cannot* neglect the control of cinema in the crucial role that it plays in educating the public:

The State should not only control the films shown in the country, but also encourage the production of Turkish films that fits the new regime's social and political agenda. The Turkish revolution and its people sincerely aimed at providing a powerful and national education for children, and founded new schools accordingly. Just like the new schools, the production of national and effective films requires great efforts and determination. European countries have acknowledged these cinematic needs and fulfilled them. Turkish people and the Turkish revolution cannot stay behind, and such is our aim.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hilmi A. Malik, *Türkiye'de Sinema ve Tesirleri* (Ankara: Hakimiyeti Milliye Matbaası, 1922), p. 1.

According to a law passed in 1930, children under the age of 12 were not allowed to go to the cinema unless they were accompanied by their parents and the film was intended for children. In 1932, an ambitious questionnaire was conducted about the influence of cinema on young people. The questions were answered by a group of pupils aged between 8 and 15 who were asked to write down the genres they prefer to watch:

1. Comedies: these films are fun and make them laugh.
2. Newsreels: these films are educating and thought provoking.
3. Serious films: because they are serious students.

It is noteworthy that they strongly preferred Turkish films to foreign productions.

Here is the list of the films the students (supposedly) said they disliked:

- 1) Mystery films: 'because they are scary'.
- 2) Sentimental films: male students found them unnecessary.
- 3) Hollywood: because these are meaningless.
- 4) 'Films about marriage': male students found them boring.
- 5) Demoralising films [without any reasons]
- 6) Adaptations [without any reasons]
- 7) Foreign films:[without any reasons]
- 8) Melodramas: 'they are about love and love is not good for students.'<sup>75</sup>

They listed their reasons for going to the movies as follows:

- To see the big film stars
- For fun
- Out of enthusiasm

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<sup>75</sup> Malik, p. 34.

- Cinema is good for them
- To see the love scenes
- To develop their social life
- To listen to good music
- Because cinema is a science
- To contemplate and to see, 'which are essential things for students to do',<sup>76</sup>

Malik also categorized the film audiences according to their spectatorship habits. According to him there were five types of audiences: firstly, 'those who see every film shown at theaters. For those, cinema becomes more than entertainment, it becomes a disease and 98 percent of them are young people'. Secondly, 'those who go to the cinema every weekend; they want to learn new things and be amused'. Thirdly, 'those who only see good or recommended movies'. Fourthly, 'the spectators who go to movies to watch other spectators'. Lastly:

those who go to see movies to make love. They prefer the back and darkest seats. The most dangerous of them all are the first and the last two groups. The first group considers life and everything else in it as in cinema, and acts accordingly. There is danger waiting for them and their lives are usually catastrophic. The last two groups are morally corrupted. They use theaters as dating arenas to fulfil their sexual desires and they merely go to cinema to meet the opposite sex.<sup>77</sup>

Malik's concerns about the discipline of the young were not limited to the audience behaviors; he also wanted to alarm the public about the plots of the films. He proposed that film censorship had to become much stricter as 95% of the movies were about love, theft, alcohol, religion and a decadent lifestyle. Instead of watching

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<sup>76</sup> Malik, p. 35.

<sup>77</sup> Malik, p. 37.



such films, which could have a bad influence, the students had to be encouraged to see films that dealt with science and progress.<sup>78</sup>

Another moralist view on youth and cinema-going focuses on couples at movie theaters. In 1927, we see a whole journal column dedicated to ‘misbehaving couples’ in the cinemas in Istanbul. According to *Le Film*, the only ‘irritating’ parts of watching films is the young couples who go to the movies not for the sake of watching them, but for petting.<sup>79</sup>

## 6.5. Conclusion

The new Turkish Republic was inspired by the ideals of nationalism and progress. In order to reach the educational and technical level of the developed countries, the main principles of the State were considered to be the education of all strata of the public as well as fostering the emergence of a new bourgeois class. European films still continued to be shown, but in decreasing numbers. However, the films shown in the country came to be largely American productions. MGM opened a new distribution branch in the city while films by Fox, Universal and Paramount attracted considerable audiences. The first national private production company *Kemal Film* was founded in 1922 and led to a production of films dealing with national pride and independence.

Cinema was seen both as a tool for manipulation and education for the new regime and spectatorship was considered a social event to be enjoyed by an ‘elegant’ public at recently opened ‘chic’ cinemas. The lower middle classes, on the other hand, continued watching these films in smaller theaters. ‘Wonder’ was still a significant state in the spectators’ relationship with cinema. Therefore, questions and

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<sup>78</sup> Malik, p. 38.

<sup>79</sup> Le Grincheux, ‘Propos du Grincheux’, *Le Film* No. 6 (16 November 1927), p. 3.

answers about film stars, acting techniques and special effects all found a place in the cinema journals that formed and shaped public opinion. These journals were preoccupied with the 'glamorous' lifestyles offered by the film stars and the 'elite' audience profile that was found at the cinemas. An additional mission of the taste makers that influenced public opinion was to improve the 'bad' taste of the ordinary public and to educate youth through 'high art' films. Movie halls were advised to screen 'good films' several times at lower prices while films dealing with history and science were also encouraged. Furthermore, strict censorship was seen to be necessary particularly for children who were under the 'influence' of cinema.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the spectatorship culture in Istanbul during a period of transformation from the 1890s to the end of silent cinema in the 1930s. Istanbulites in this period witnessed a great deal of transformation in the political, demographic and cultural realms due mainly to a shift from a multi-confessional empire to a nation state. A parallel rupture to that of the country was experienced in the visual media: the global distribution of photographic images altered the dominant images determined by shadow plays, miniatures and the art of calligraphy. The cinematograph arrived in this environment and became part of this great transformation.

Early cinema in Turkey, just as in other non-indigenous cultural forms such as novels and Western style theaters, has always been viewed in relation to the Westernization paradigm that assumes essential cultural distinctions between the 'East' and the 'West'. As a problematic approach, which is somewhat difficult to apply to the study of a transnational/global medium, the Westernization narrative needed to be questioned throughout the thesis. Approaching the cinematic apparatus as an invention originating in France, Turkish film historiography tends to assume a negative perception of early cinema in Turkey by making essential cultural distinctions in the audience profiles. Such assumptions seem to stem initially from the idea of the Turkish modernization project as a late comer and a backward one in relation to the Euro-centric understanding of modernity. Therefore, a discourse of lack and absence of a 'traditional public' in the early screenings was produced and the early cinema audiences were perceived as a Westernized elite. Yet, the primary sources have shown that the reason for the relatively belated arrival of the cinematograph stemmed from economic and bureaucratic obstacles rather than a

cultural reluctance. In this context, the second chapter of this thesis that focuses on the transformation of the Ottoman economy along with industrial and everyday life has made clearer the reasons for the lack of local Muslim entrepreneurs in cinema as a new business. On the other hand, the significance of the commercial practice of *berat* that discouraged Muslim bourgeois to invest in the cinema business did not cause a lack of traditional/local public interest in cinema-going. Moreover, as we have seen in the third chapter, there had been a rich spectatorship culture that was prevalent in everyday life and enjoyed authentic visual delights nourished by popular forms of Islamic mysticism, namely Sufism. From my point of view, one needs to dwell on the philosophical underpinnings of spectatorship that a theory of the cinema of attractions has not sufficiently explored. Surely, a philosophical exploration runs the risk of ahistorical speculations. However, since attitudes inspired by Sufism were prominent in the visual culture before the arrival of the cinematograph and the feeling of *hayret* still prevailed in the spectator reactions in a perhaps more secular way, underlining the transformation of the spectatorship culture has become crucial. The participatory spectatorship offered by these visual delights was later shared by the cinematograph after the initial screening on 11 December 1896. The practices of the cinema of attractions were similar to those of the shadow play, *meddah* and public storytelling, not only through the exhibition venues but also through the self-referential characteristics of these shows. It would be reductionism to assume a local prejudice towards the cinema merely because it was a foreign invention. Thus, I have pursued a rhetorical question on the extent to which the early audiences were Westernized. A close look into the memoirs and newspaper records available for this study has revealed that the screenings made between 1896 and 1898 were appreciated by a large public whose cultural backgrounds are not easy to identify. The intelligentsia's reactions to the cinematograph in memoirs, novels and

newspapers have shown a critical, or rather a sophisticated perspective on the spectacles. These criticisms focused on the screening practices and conditions rather than the filmic subjects, parallel to the notion of the early cinema audience as 'medium-sensitive'.

Different segments of the Ottoman society responded to the screenings in different ways: the haphazard displays seemed to attract a large segment of the society to circuses, to ordinary beer-halls, to fashionable hotels and balls. The press focused on the conditions of the early screenings (the smell of gas, the technology of the apparatus, the rapidity of the movements on the screen, etc); the traditionalist novelists during and after World War I tended to see the European melodramas as a threat to patriarchal values; early filmmakers wanted to use cinema to awaken national feelings while positivist journalists of the early Republic hoped to utilize cinema as an educational and a disciplinary tool for the youth. Yet there is little or no evidence of the role of religious reservation on the apparatus.

The ethnic identities of the initial cinema entrepreneurs have demonstrated diversity; as claimed by the historiography, most of them were initially foreigners until the period of World War I. The cinematograph as an invention of various entrepreneurs, but the property of Lumière Brothers, was sent all around the world and brought to Istanbul in December 1896. The apparatus was transnational and the pictures it showed were sometimes local and sometimes from Russia, Spain, France or from the United States of America. Initially in the Ottoman capital a multi-ethnic public viewed these transnational pictures. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire coincided with that of the Habsburg, the Russian and the Chinese Empires since much of the world in this period underwent a transformation from empires to nation states. However, even in the Soviet Union internationalism was accompanied by new policies to recognize and develop national cultures. Istanbul, on the other hand,

presents us with the most complex instance of such transformations in the nature and structure of the cinema audiences which have not yet been directly taken into account.

Throughout World War I, like the earlier period, most films shown in Istanbul were imported from Western Europe. At the beginning of the war, it was mainly films from Germany, France, Italy and Denmark that dominated the film market in Istanbul. Turkish filmmaking allegedly started at the beginning of the war; however, none of these films made before the 1920s has survived, and there are very few newspaper records on their screenings. By the end of the war and during the occupation period between 1918 and 1923, the industry was to a certain extent under the control of France and Britain. While the city started to experience a Turkification, or nationalization, through the policies of the young Turkish Republic (founded in 1923), it is ironic that the film market was being Americanized. The process of nationalization and the ambivalent relationship of the Ottomans with Europe did not necessarily lead to a purely negative perception of cinema. The encounter with the cinematograph as a Western European and Northern American technology, however, implied negotiations in the realm of cultural reception that can be accounted for only through its fragile connection with the local metaphysics of seeing along with the gentrification of spectatorship. The negotiation needs to be understood by taking into account a spectatorship endowed with an incredulous eye trained by the self-referential characteristics of Islamic mysticism, namely Sufism, as the philosophical basis of Turkish shadow play, miniatures and public storytelling. Another vernacular manifestation in the interaction with the cinematic apparatus can be located in the patriarchal intelligentsia's imagination of the spectatorship as female which seems to stem from the Ottomans' peculiar relationship with Europe. The arrival of the cinematograph and the institutionalization of spectatorship coincided with the decline

of the Ottoman Empire, and the imperial capital was soon to be occupied by the Great Powers. Cinema was, not surprisingly, seen as a ‘Western’ form of pleasure, given that due to economic and political decline most of the films shown in the country were products of France, Britain and Italy. Thereby, Ottoman writers tended to depict cinema-goers to be women who were presumably susceptible to the ‘Western cultural imperialism’.

In short, this project has paid particular attention to two themes that have not been explored in early cinema studies and thus makes a unique contribution to the field: the role of popular mysticism that informed and shaped the spectatorship culture, and the ‘feminization’ of cinema through traditional gender attributions in relation to Euro-centric modernity. Early cinema studies at the peripheries of Western Europe can be viewed also in relation to the construction of national identities and cinema as a foreign invention. The role of gender in the patriarchal criticism of early cinema with respect to its social as well as cultural dimension, however, and the indigenous cultural traditions that paved the way, or set the parameters, for the reception of moving images at Europe’s periphery – in our case, popular mysticism and its attendant culture of visual delights in late Ottoman Istanbul — have never been examined in detail. Furthermore, there has been little work on early cinema in countries under the influence of Islamic cultural traditions, not to mention the scarcity of works on Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. Given the recent proliferation and increasing depth of studies on cultural life in the Ottoman Empire, specifically in Istanbul, and also given the abundance of source materials for research, it is surprising that the spectatorship during the early years of cinema has not been subject to serious engagement by several scholars. There are very few detailed studies on early film spectatorship and hardly anything on gender in relation to film viewing. Mustafa Ozen’s doctoral thesis, which is available only in Dutch so

far, covers certain aspects of early cinema-going in Istanbul in depth. Focusing on a shorter time frame between 1896 and 1914, Ozen's thesis mainly provides historical data on the exhibition and screening practices, while my project covers a longer period with significant ruptures and attempts to analyze the emotional and philosophical underpinnings of the cultural perception of the moving images. Thus, this study contributes to the field by improving our understanding of the relationship between non-European modernities and cinema while taking into account the patriarchal perspective of the intelligentsia as well as the philosophical aspect of a spectatorship culture steeped in a long tradition of Sufism. It would be fair to say that both of these themes have been neglected, but the latter in particular has not even been raised until this study. Moreover, even in the scholarly literature produced in Turkish, one can hardly find any academic works, no matter what their perspective, on the life of spectacles in late Ottoman Istanbul or on the depictions of the spectatorship culture in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Turkish novels.

Since early and silent cinema spectatorship in Istanbul has barely gained an academic interest, I have preferred to concentrate on a relatively long period of time. Yet such periodization bears the risks of disregarding detailed analyses of different moments, hence I have picked the most significant dates for special focus. Another limitation of this project has been a spatial one, due to the multi-ethnic characteristics of the Ottoman Empire and its drastic differences from the Turkish Republic, I have merely focused on Istanbul. Accordingly this study is not particularly a study of Turkish early cinema but an important element of it. The sources I have consulted have formed another boundary for the project. I have mainly taken advantage of novels, memoirs, newspapers and magazines of the period. Memoirs and novels are helpful for understanding the intelligentsia's point of view on the cinematograph;



however, their perspective is representative of only a limited social segment. The writers belong to the upper middle classes, and have their own agendas in relation to Westernization, modernity and cinema. While some authors appreciate all the scientific novelties, some of them, particularly a traditionalist and conservative like Peyami Safa, tend to perceive cinema as a manipulative tool of cultural imperialism. The newspapers and magazines consulted for this project were printed in French and Ottoman Turkish, consequently I had to disregard those in other languages used in the period due to language barriers. During an interview I made with an influential Turkish historian, Giovanni Scognomillo, on the limitations of an early cinema research focusing on Turkey or Istanbul, we came to the conclusion that these problems could easily be overcome by a group of researchers combining research skills in Ottoman Turkish, Greek, Arabic, Armenian, French and English languages. Regardless of the language barriers, the lacuna in the Ottoman/Turkish film historiography can be surmounted through empirical and philosophical investigations of the attributes of the early and silent cinema audiences.

I would like to conclude with a poem by a profound mystic troubadour from the early twentieth-century Turkey, Asik Veysel. His poetry influenced many Turkish pop and folk singers for decades, yet my encounter with this one was serendipitous as it has never been covered by a contemporary singer:

Cinema:  
I encountered a girl,  
She is illusionary like the cinema  
looked into her eyes and passed by  
I, too, became a cinema

Migrations and caravans move around  
Some buys some sells  
Arrows are shot  
All penetrating arrows are cinema

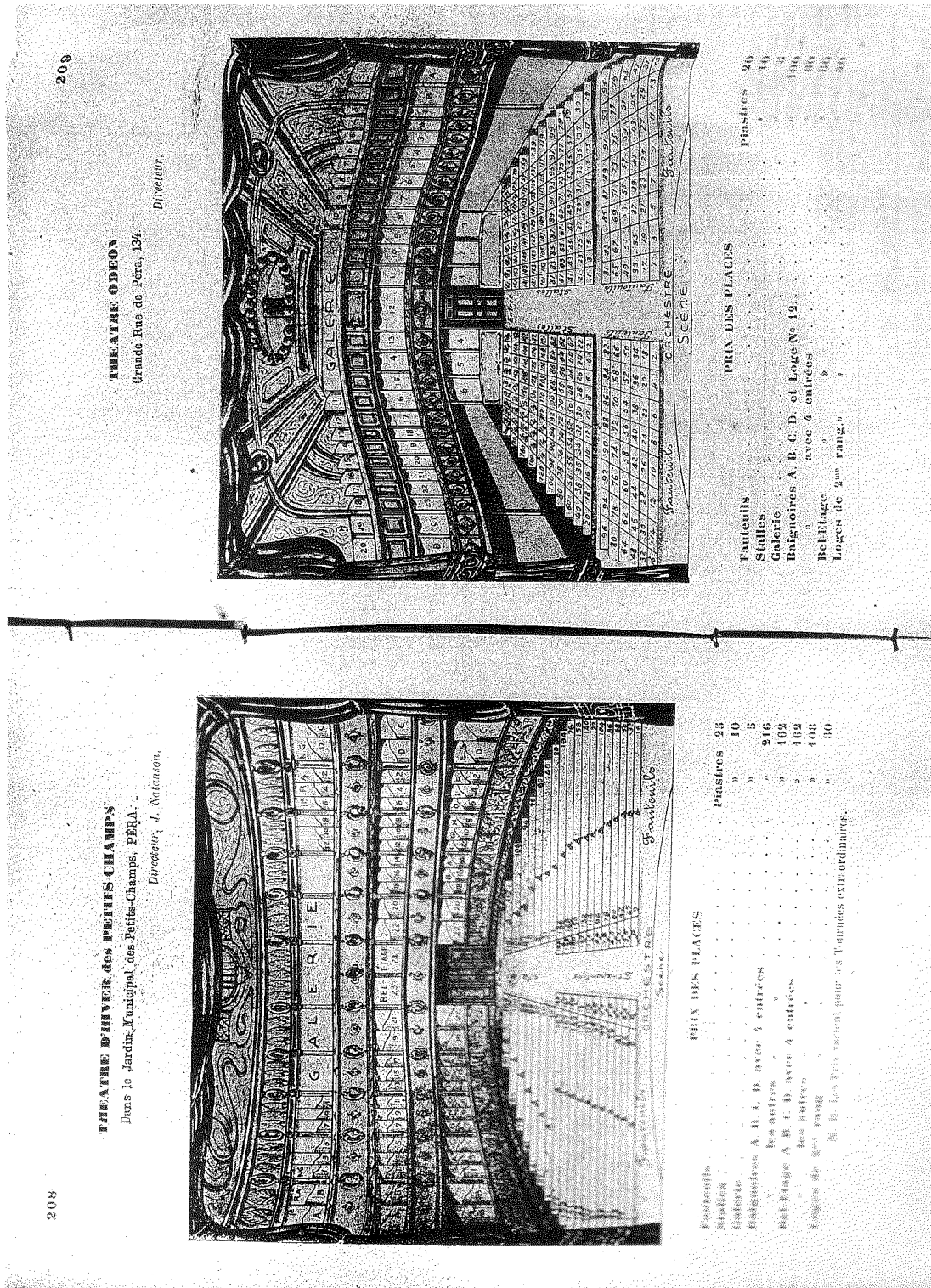
My state of mind disappears suddenly

Your eyes missed my doe.  
Faith, too, shoots a film  
Here it is a grand cinema  
All our acts are cinema.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hubabi.blogspot.com/2007/05/sinema.html> [accessed on 9 February 2009].

**1. Theater Plan: Tepebaşı Municipality (the Pathé Frères branch) and Odeon Theater, 1911.**



Source: *Annuaire Oriental du Commerce de l'Industrie, de l'Administration et de la Magistrature*. Istanbul: 1911.

2. 'Hale Sinemasi'. Still from the journal Sinema Postasi, December 1923.

قاضی کوی :

هاله سینہ ماسی

محیطك الك كبار صالونی - الك محشم فیلما - زنکین اور کسترا

بو هفته حکمدارلق مازطوسی مملہ سی : سوہ آغالونہ



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یاوز کتبخانہ سی ، ازمیرک جدید واستقامتیله

مشهر بکانه مؤسسہ سیدر .

مجموعه هنرک بکانه بایمی اوراسی در .

کبار علی کاغدی

سفاره کاغذ رنگ

الک کباری وان اعظمی



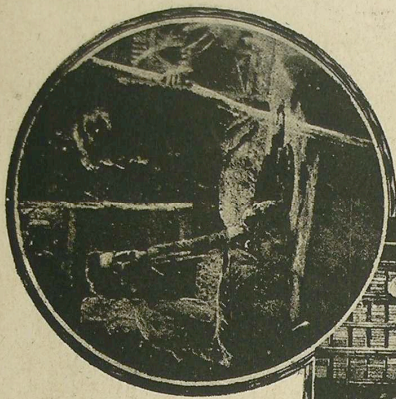
سینہ مادہ «خیال»

سیتا چارلینز بن بکن دایلدرو تصادف ایملین (خیال) لری امل ایلک طوعری بر شی ایلماز. عشق داما چیمهای تحریک  
مهراتی تربید ایملین دیله کویله یللیک خان اکر یلسمده (خیال) موجوددر. بلا راقی. اولسمده حرن حرن دوشونورکن  
برودیه قشورسده سوکیلیک سیتا کیه چیمسی، فوشن اولان سوکلن پرواندیک مارو دویور اولمکده قشورسده کوزورکی شم  
سکزه یله یوله خیالی مشهور اولمده سوزساکه قایلنلاره هر یکر ویرس اولمده سیتا کیه قوشولمده، احسانه انتقاد ایملینکی  
معلوم اولمده خیالی مشهور اولمده (خیال) لری امل دیله آندیک کیدیکدن آکلایلیور. . . سیت و جلدور. امل مختلف یملینده بر ی  
اروزور، بن شیده ملح ایملین اولسینل مارلور. و، حین رولانی ل مشهور یولور. عشق داما کوره ک امل ستمکار اولمده بر ی  
ایملیندر. لری زیادده سوک یللیکده (خیال) و، فرانسس سیتا سوزساکه سرف وطرلنلرین تیلن ایملین  
سیتا چارلینز کیکر یله مشهور اکرانه ساق اولمده، سوک زیادده بر فرانسس سیتا سوزساکه سرف وطرلنلرین تیلن ایملین  
عزیم بر یله دیله کپورسور. آلا یلیمده حارملرین آوزور اولان یکی یوللری اولور. و یللیک اسما سکن کیمک ادر.

دها هنوز میدانۀ کلاسیکی ایچون آن تهائی ی حقه بر فکر ویر میهمی

قارلارمنه بو صحیفه ندره تقدیم ایلدیکمز رسولر ندره د ومنتخب  
( خیال ) لی فیلملره عائددر .

۱- عا.الدك خيلى  
(آيمس آيرس)  
۲- وادارد قىل  
(ويئام ستايند)  
۳- روجل لوقاى  
(مارى ميل ميني)  
۴- مايونك اسرك  
۵- خيلى كرابه  
۶- خيلندى وشتور  
۷- نهدىر بر خيال  
۸- نوسرلر، سولان  
۹- نعا.آر سىل مامادور



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