

The Curtain of Dreams: Early Cinema in İstanbul

1896-1923

by

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ABSTRACT

The Curtain of Dreams: Early Cinema in İstanbul, 1896-1923 traces the introduction of cinema, cinema-going and filmmaking in İstanbul during the late Ottoman era. This period was witness to the end of the Empire and the emergence of new nation-states. It was the time of wars, occupations and population exchanges. New classes were appearing as catastrophic political and social struggles were taking place. This thesis proposes that despite the ongoing turmoil, the cinema-going experience in İstanbul had a significant role for the *élite*, especially in the context of modernization and nationalism. The preliminary assumptions made through the examination of sources reveal that for the İstanbulian audience cinema was very much in accord with the ideology of Westernism. In this vein, the very first films of the era also represent patriotic and nationalist sentiments that reflect the mood of the time, directly before the proclamation of Republic of Turkey.

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 (*Sinema Yıldızı*, 1924 [1340])

ABBREVIATIONS

The Committee of Union and Progress (<i>İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti</i>)	CUP
Central Military Office of Cinema (<i>Merkez Ordu Film Dairesi</i>)	MOFD
The Society of National Defense (<i>Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti</i>)	MMC
The Society of Disabled Veterans (<i>Malul Gaziler Cemiyeti</i>)	MGC

INTRODUCTION

The Curtain of Dreams: Early Cinema in İstanbul, 1896-1923 traces the introduction of cinema, cinema-going and filmmaking in İstanbul during the transition period. This includes the interplay between local performance arts and the early filmmaking in the region, from state propaganda to domestic films. I introduce the ideologies of modernization and nationalism in this thesis, so the reader may understand the framework in which cinema evolved and has been understood, both by contemporary social scientists and intellectuals of the time period. Cinema is a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon and surely cannot be deduced to interpretation by only one set of theory. In other words, as a medium, cinema may fall within the bounds of nationalism and modernization, yet it can not be reduced to these theoretical frameworks entirely.

During the late Ottoman era in which the modernization movement accelerated, everything from manners and fashion to the public sphere activities of people were gradually subject to changes, most likely towards a European-styled one. These transformations formed a new fabric of social norms and practices within this era. The Armistice Period also offers a focus on proto-nationalist and patriotic concerns that can be found in the cinema. Additionally, this thesis seeks to explore how this transformation was reflected in cinema during the years of turmoil and change; what films represented for certain audiences and how the novelty of cinema was understood vis-à-vis the ideology of modernization.

Many of the leading film scholars and social scientists in this growing field of film history unfortunately focus on the Republican era extensively, which ranges from the 1930 to the 1970s. This period focus allows them to showcase the issues on cinema such as the distribution of Hollywood films, interrelation of modernity and cinema and a descriptive set of knowledge. Yet, none have focused exclusively on the late Ottoman film history. My focus on the late Ottoman era for this thesis is an attempt to do that.

Even though the existing secondary literature provides a wide range of sources on the evolution of cinema and usage of state propaganda in filmmaking, there is limited data on the audiences' experience of film, how film affected them and what role cinema played at that time in İstanbul. Here, I attempted to seek answers for these questions through examining the film journals, memoirs and novels of the time written in the French, Turkish and Ottoman Turkish languages.

Memoirs of the time were helpful to understand the first impressions of the films by audiences and to capture the descriptions of the imperial capital and its customs and traditions at the period. In order to do this, I referred to various memoirs of individuals such as those of Ayşe Osmanoğlu, Muhsin Ertuğrul and Sermet Muhtar Alus. Additionally, the novels were useful for transferring factual knowledge, comprehending values and evaluating the author's perspectives about the novelty of cinema. The novels of Refik Halid and Peyami Safa are particularly outstanding for following the journey of cinema. Another important feature of this thesis is that it extensively relies on the periodicals of film, literature, arts and spectacles, such as *Le Courier du Cinema* (*Sinema Postası*), *Temaşa*, *Yarın*, *Dergah*, *Sinema Yıldızı*, *Ferah*, *Sinema* and *Stamboul* that

covered the events of the day as they were happening. Among these periodicals, the relevant years and subject matters of each issue were examined thoroughly.

This thesis consists of three chapters: Chapter One sets the historical background by focusing on the political and socio-cultural changes in the late Ottoman Empire and specifically the Armistice Period. In this way, Chapter One is designed to provide the historical perspective and the larger component of transformations which were greatly linked to the evolution of cinema and cinema-going in İstanbul. Chapter Two offers an overview on the interplay between local performance arts and the newly arrived Western arts, such as drama and cinema. Furthermore, it gives information about the first film screenings, the opening of the cinema-houses and the profile of the audience. Chapter Three covers the years of Armistice Period and the development of state-owned film institutions along with the first films that were produced. Also some relevant feature-length films are examined in the text in relation to the historical developments. Lastly, the changing face of the audience and the representation of cinema are discussed briefly in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 1.

TRACING THE HISTORY

Introduction

From its introduction in the early twentieth-century to the end of the Ottoman Empire, cinema was an influential medium, especially for the Ottoman *élite* in the capital, with its ethnic and religious diversity. By the foundation of Republic of Turkey in 1923, including both foreign imports and domestic film productions were primary instruments of both entertainment and state propaganda. Obviously, the tumultuous events of the time - the Balkan Wars, World War I and the National Struggle that ushered in the Republic of Turkey were a backdrop not only for the cinema-going public but also as a subject for the films themselves. The Armistice Period (1918-1923), when İstanbul was occupied by Allied Powers, was a particularly intense period and the long-lived debates about "modernization" and "Westernization" were motivated by the situation on the ground. The main aims in this work are to scrutinize the introduction of cinema in the imperial capital, show the nature and evolution of the cinema audience and illustrate the domestic film making and state-owned film production institutions in the late Ottoman Empire.

The socio-cultural aspect and impact of cinema in İstanbul from a historical perspective is the central emphasis of this thesis. Of course, political, socio-cultural and economic forces conditioned the way in which cinema was introduced and received in the distinct milieu of İstanbul. Thus, a compelling analysis of the development of the film

industry in this context - including the infrastructure of import, production and distribution, as well as the films themselves - requires an understanding of the historical context of İstanbul in this period. At the turn of the century “like the Austrians, the Ottomans ultimately failed to address the contradictions of a poly-ethnic empire in the age of nationalism.”¹ The struggle to this end affected the life of İstanbulians and in a narrower context the journey of cinema in the imperial capital.

1.1 An Overview of the late Ottoman Empire

In no place were the heterogeneous characteristics of this vast Empire felt and evident than the imperial capital, İstanbul. The city occupied a strategically important position on the Bosphorus Strait, where those who ruled it were easily able to control maritime trade in the area. Since ancient times its position on the bottleneck of the Anatolian land bridge between Europe and Asia had been recognized as strategically important. Prior to the Ottomans this city, then called Constantinople, had served as the seat of the Roman and Eastern Roman Empires for centuries. After the conquest of the city in 1453 by Ottoman forces, İstanbul was above all a center of government of the Islamic imperial power structure of the Empire.² The Ottoman Empire grew and ruled a

¹ Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 209.

² Throughout its history the vast Ottoman Empire had a very heterogeneous population and was ruled according to the principles of the *millet* system. The *millet* system was one in which communities of both Muslims and non-Muslims were granted their own autonomous legal and religious rights as long as allegiance and tribute was given to the Empire. Ottoman Muslim communities consisted of Sunnis primarily as well as Shi'ites and Alevi, and other sects such as Druzes and Nusayris. Ottoman Christians included members of Eastern Christian and Roman Catholic churches, Assyrians and numerous different Christian groups. The heterogeneous religious population was also a multilingualistic one as well. For the purpose of administrative communications and other official correspondence there were nine common languages employed by the Empire at the turn of the twentieth-century. Those were Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Ladino, Serbian and Syriac. Apart from these Albanian, Kurdish, Rumanian, and numerous Caucasian tongues were widely spoken in the boundaries of the Empire. For detailed information see Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton and Oxford:

vast territory, stretching from Central Europe to North Africa and the Middle East for centuries.

The demography of the imperial capital changed significantly from the mid-1850s until the end of the century. The population of the city increased more than two fold, from 430,000 to over 1 million. In 1885, about 60 percent of the inhabitants of İstanbul had a place of birth outside of İstanbul.³ The overall population of the city in 1885 was 873,565 (508,815 males and 364,750 females).⁴ It is known that a major increase in the population came about in the second half of the nineteenth-century, especially after the Crimean War (1853-1856). The growth and number of non-Ottoman settlements increased in the city. The population of the newly opened quarters of the Pera district, a renowned hub of non-Muslim settlement, doubled towards the end of the century. Estimates found in Western European and Ottoman sources give a population of 857,069 in 1912, 855,515 in 1913 and 977,662 in 1914. Another source published by Bab-i Ali, shows that the religious division of the overall population of 1914 in İstanbul was 560,434 Muslims and 289,856 non-Muslims.⁵ Nevertheless, this data gives a questionable total of 850,290 for the population of İstanbul in 1914, when compared to the above-mentioned data.

As it was the imperial capital, İstanbul also played a privileged role as an interface between Europe and the Ottoman world that vividly represented the interaction with the

Princeton University Press, 2008.; Zeynep Celik, *The Remaking of İstanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986.

³ Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı Nüfusu (1830-1914): Demografik ve Sosyal Özellikleri*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2003, p. 141-143.

⁴ No Name, in: *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, v. 6, İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1994, p. 110.

⁵ Ibid, p. 110.

West.⁶ At the turn of the century İstanbul was a significant port city that “transcended the material world of trade and exchange, embracing the much wider concept of contact, of interface in the realms of politics, culture and power in all its forms.”⁷ Trade was mostly in the hands of non-Muslim members of society who were able to exercise leadership or obtain power through their connections in Europe. Hence it is not surprising that the first film screenings were firstly organized by French origin İstanbulians and the first permanent cinema-house in the city was founded with the collaboration of French Pathé Frères. Nevertheless, İstanbul might have been a natural location for entrepreneurs inside and outside the Empire to also import film and make films, as it was the case for Lumière Frères. It is known that Eugène Promio, a technician of Lumière Frères, came to İstanbul in 1896 for the purpose of filming sceneries of İstanbul for the European audience. He recorded the views of Bosphorus and Golden Horn and today these footages are known as *Panorama of the Golden Horn (Panorama de la Corne d’Or)* and *Panorama of Shores of Bosphorus (Panorama des Rives du Bosphore)*.⁸ This matter of commercial and cultural interaction between Europe and İstanbul in the context of cinema will be examined in Chapter Two thoroughly.

⁶ Edhem Eldem, “İstanbul: From Imperial to Peripheralized Capital”, in: *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, İzmir and İstanbul*, E. Eldem, D. Goffman and B. Masters (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 138.

⁷ Eldem, “İstanbul: From Imperial”, p. 137.

⁸ Rekin Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, M. Thomen & O. Celiktemel (tran.), İstanbul: Oglak, 2008, p. 1.



Figure 1.1- Galata Bridge and Golden Horn, 1908. (Collection of Maggie Land Blanck)

Beginning in the nineteenth-century political movements throughout the Empire, including those in the upper echelons of the imperial power structure, was calling for a number of changes and modernization in various areas. Indeed, before with the *Tanzimat* reforms of 1839, modernization not only brought a change in the administrative rule but also paved a way for new educational institutions, emergence of new ideologies and European-style “Westernization”. The growing fascination of the bureaucratic *élite*, intellectuals and professional classes with the Western culture gradually marked a shift in the Ottoman society at this time.

1.2 Reforming the Empire

Much of these transformations came to a head during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r.1876-1909) with the Revolution of Young Turks in July 1908. The Young Turk movement was made up of military officers who advocated for sweeping modernization and changes in many areas of the Empire. The major Young Turk organization was the Union of Ottomans, founded by a group of medical students at the Royal Medical Academy, and other members of secret committees, based in Europe and Egypt.⁹ The members of Young Turks from İstanbul and Paris branches started their movement under an institution called the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP, *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*).¹⁰ The revolutionaries' goal was to implement a constitutional monarchy under a parliamentary regime and push through modernization reforms in administrative, judicial and constitutional areas. After the counter revolution of Sultan Abdülhamid II in April 1909, he was overthrown by the CUP and his successor, Sultan Mehmed V (r. 1909-1918) came to the scene and was followed later by Sultan Mehmed VI (r. 1918-1922). Decisions were taken collectively by the CUP's officers of the Third (Macedonian) and Second (Thracian) Army, but two officers in particular, Enver Paşa and Cemal Paşa stood out and became the military leaders of CUP.¹¹ Enver Paşa had gained extensive power during World War I, while serving as War Minister and Commander-in-Chief. Gradually, the CUP established the constitutional regime in the Empire in a bid to earn credibility and support from the liberal states of Western Europe.¹²

⁹ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 145.

¹⁰ The Young Turk movement renamed the organization as Committee of Progress and Union (CPU) from late 1905 until summer of 1908. Then CPU was reverted the traditional name Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). See Erich J. Zürcher, *Turkey a Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2001, pp. 89-90.

¹¹ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 159.

¹² Zürcher, *Turkey a Modern History*, p. 103.

As noted by Şükrü M. Hanioglu, the legitimizing devices of the CUP was first the military ethic and second national sovereignty. The third tool was the press which assisted in the consolidation of power.¹³ Interestingly, the opening of Central Military Office of Cinema (MOFD, *Merkez Ordu Film Dairesi*) in 1915 by Enver Paşa was aimed at assisting the military through production of propaganda films. This initiative can be interpreted as a sea-change for the history of early film in this region and this proposal will be explained in greater detail in Chapter Three. Propaganda films likely helped to justify the consolidation of power and solidify the national sovereignty movement in a certain way.¹⁴

The Balkan Wars (1912-1913), with the Ottoman successor states of Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, dramatically altered the Empire's situation. As historian Donald Quataert points out, "[t]he Ottomans lost the last of their European possessions except for the coastal plain between Edirne and the capital."¹⁵ Interestingly enough, "for the first time in Ottoman history, ethnic Turks became a majority of population" after 1913.¹⁶ Admittedly, the drastic change in the Ottoman population also affected the way in which contemporary film historians approach the first films of the era. As it will be discussed more in Chapter Three, the first films of the region were shot by the Manakis Brothers of Macedonian origin. Surprisingly, many sources on the issue avoid including this detail due to the nationalist sentiments.

¹³ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 165.

¹⁴ One of the first film institutions, Central Military Office of Cinema (MOFD, *Merkez Ordu Film Dairesi*) was founded by Enver Paşa (1881-1922) as noted he was an influential member of the Committee of Union and Progress. Enver Paşa is also known his personal interest in photography. In his letters to his brother Kamil and wife Naciye Sultan he mentions about different films that he needed for his camera and photos that he has taken in different occasions. See Inan Ari (ed.), *Enver Paşa'nın Özel Mektupları*, İstanbul: Imge, 1997, pp. 95, 100, 315, 338, 389.

¹⁵ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.59.

¹⁶ Zürcher, *Turkey a Modern History*, p. 109.

As the work of many historians has shown the Balkan Wars were an essential link to World War I that solidified the secret Ottoman-German alliance of August 1914.¹⁷ It is important to note that the Ottomans' condition for a serious military fight was a limited one in terms of military capabilities, economic resources and internal communications.¹⁸ As historian Zafer Toprak explains, the devastating effects of this war starting in 1914 somehow permeated until 1945.¹⁹ During the war years, disease, poverty, economic and political instability and exchange of population was the reality for many.

1.3 The Armistice Period (1918-1923)

The end of World War I determined İstanbul's future extensively, particularly during the occupation of the city by the Allied Powers. After the ceasefire in Bulgaria on September 29, 1918, the Ottomans' forces were in bad shape. In the aftermath of World War I, the Peace Conference in Paris marked the end of the Empire. Following this, the Mudros Armistice between the British and Ottoman governments on October 30, 1918 required "the demobilization of the Ottoman army and surrender of all arms to the Allies; occupation of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles forts; and most importantly, the ambiguous clause VII, which allowed the Allies to occupy any area if they thought there was a security threat."²⁰ On November 4, 1918 Sultan Mehmed VI dissolved the Parliament in which the deputies of the CUP had been the majority. The movement against the CUP

¹⁷ See for detailed information: Zafer Toprak, *İttihad Terakki ve Cihan Harbi Savas Ekonomisi ve Türkiye'de Devletçilik 1914-1918*, İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2003, pp. 1-42.; Mehmet Temel, *İsgal Yıllarında İstanbul'un Sosyal Durumu*, Ankara: Kultur Bakanlığı, 1998, pp. 60-72.; Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler, İttihat ve Terakki, Bir Cagin, Bir Kusagin, Bir Partinin Tarihi*, İstanbul: Hurriyet Vakfi Yayinlari, 1989, pp. 480-483.

¹⁸ Zürcher, *Turkey a Modern History*, p. 112.

¹⁹ Toprak, *İttihad Terakki*, p. 4.

²⁰ Nur Bilge Criss, *İstanbul under Allied Occupation 1918-1923*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, p. 1.

continued with the arrest of sixty-nine party members, while the leaders of the party - Talat Paşa, Cemal Paşa and Enver Paşa- left the country.²¹

The occupation of İstanbul took place in two stages: the *de facto* occupation of the city, which started on 13 November 1918 when the navy of the Allied Powers, comprised of fifty-five battleships, and the second, the *de jure* occupation of İstanbul, on 20 March 1920. Following the occupation of İstanbul, the Greek army also occupied İzmir in May 1919. The occupation by these forces solidified the Turkish nationalist resistance movement in 1919. What has come to be known in Turkish history as the Turkish War of Independence or the National Struggle was a resistance movement (1919-1922) lead by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk against the occupying powers.²² The occupation of İstanbul lasted until October 1923 when the army of the National Struggle movement succeeded in retaking İstanbul.²³



Figure 1.2- British soldiers in İstanbul, 1919. (*Tempo*, 2007)

²¹ Zafer Toprak, "Mütareke Döneminde İstanbul", in: *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 6, İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 1994, pp. 19-20.

²² A. L. Macfie, *The End of the Ottoman Empire 1908-1923*, London: Longman, 1998, p. 173.

²³ Criss, *İstanbul under Allied*, p. 2.

Many aspects of life during the occupation were focused on the political and critical current issues of Armistice Period. In fact, even journals concerned with the performance arts published articles concerning the political and war events of period. On November 30, 1918 the theater journal of *Temaşa* published an article describing how the “foreigners” murdered Armenians, robbed Greeks and executed Turks and Arabs throughout the country. The anonymous author of the article uses a frustrated tone to describe the occupation of İstanbul and the negative effects of foreign troops in İstanbul. The author complains that first the Germans invaded bearing colorful flags and then the smartly uniformed British soldiers occupied the imperial capital. The way in which the “foreigners” celebrated their victory on the streets of Pera reminded him or her of the indecent carousing which usually accompanied Easter celebrations in the city.²⁴



Figure 1.3- Military Units in Taksim, 1909. (Atatürk Library Archives)

²⁴ No Name, “Temaşa Siyasetde”, in: *Temaşa*, no: 12, (30 November, 1918 [1334]), p. 1.

During the Armistice Period there were many refugees from different ethnic origins in İstanbul. A survey conducted by the American Red Cross reports that the number of refugees in İstanbul was 65,000 while the entire population of the city was approximately 1,200,000 in 1920.²⁵ Additionally, in 1919 the Greek army occupied Western Anatolia and the Turkish army moved toward the Aegean coast in 1922. Then, the Greek population fled to the coast and onto the islands of to Greece and as a result approximately one million Greeks emigrated from Turkey to Greece between 1912 and 1923. Following this, after the agreement of both countries on exchange of populations, 1,200,000 Greeks and 400,000 Moslems were exchanged between the countries from 1923 to 1926.²⁶ Moreover, especially after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 in Russia, approximately 200,000 White Russians moved to İstanbul in great numbers.²⁷ All these population movements changed the social face of İstanbul. Indeed the killings of people, poverty and the constantly changing face of the city caused by the presence of foreign troops were cause for concern for many İstanbulians.

The war brought disintegration into the society; many from the Muslim and non-Muslim population were called to fight in great numbers. At the end of the war, the remaining population consisted mainly of women and elderly people.²⁸ For some historians, the social, economic and political instability in İstanbul created corruption and moral degeneration as well. While the extreme poverty and excessive wealth coexisted, a new class of people, “war profiteers”, who took the advantage of economic instability,

²⁵ Clarence Richard Johnson (ed.), *Constantinople Today: or the Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople: A Study in Oriental Social Life*, New York: Macmillan, 1922, pp. 16, 205-206.

²⁶ Çağlar Keyder, *The Definition of a Peripheral Economy: Turkey, 1923-1929*, Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 22.

²⁷ Temel, *İsgal Yıllarında İstanbul*, pp. 114-116.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

emerged gradually. Many of these “war profiteers” such as the former party members, bureaucrats and small merchants were from the Committee of Union and Progress who lived in the prominent districts of İstanbul. Especially during World War I the livelihood of these people was made in the black market and included the hoarding of basic commodities, the embezzlement of public funds and speculation.²⁹ Many of the wealthy families of both Armenians and Greeks were obliged to leave the country in the 1920s, and as a result this led to the enrichment of a native wealthy class.³⁰

This era also led many women to search for employment due to the economical instability and decrease in the male working population. Most of the women served in state offices or in service sector. According to the Ottoman traditions women have never been employed outside of their homes even though the policy of the CUP supported female employment. While the occupation was taking place, women, who had been segregated for many years, became more visible in the streets of İstanbul. Interestingly at this time, according to the religious authorities there were limits for women working in acting on the stage or in the films. Most of the vaudeville shows in the city were performed by either Armenian or White Russian ladies, but none of Turkish origin. This situation would only change later when cinema became more widely introduced into society. Women’s engagement in the area of film making might have been supported by many, while women’s suffrage was taking place in the social realm of the time.

During the Armistice Period, the resistance movement in Anatolia was organized by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and other former members of the Ottoman Army in Samsun on May 19, 1919. The Treaty of Sèvres, prepared by the British, was signed by the Ottoman

²⁹ François Georgeon, “Gülüşün ve Gözyaşlarının Kıyısında”, in: *İstanbul 1914-1923*, Stefanos Yerasimos (ed.), Cüneyt Akalin (tran.) İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1997, pp. 81-82.

³⁰ Keyder, *The Definition of a Peripheral*, p. 20.

grand vizier Damad Ferid, on August 10, 1920. For the British, it was important to stop the national movement in Anatolia and to this end they supported the Sultan's government legitimacy and included him in their future plans.³¹ The victory for the Turkish nationalist movement in the War of Independence and the recognition of the Great National Assembly in Ankara by the Russians on March 16, 1921 and French on October 20, 1921 altered the British policies in Anatolia previously shaped in The Treaty of Sèvres. Accordingly, the Allied states mediated between the Greek and the Turkish forces and the Mudanya Armistice was signed on October 11, 1922. The Ankara government abolished the Ottoman Empire on November 1, 1922 and in this way it strengthened its political power by ending the duality of the political centers.

Finally, the terms of peace between the Allies and the Great National Assembly of Ankara were signed at the Lausanne Conference, at which most of the goals of the National Pact were attained and Republic of Turkey emerged as a sovereign state with the ratification of the Lausanne Peace Treaty on July 24, 1923. According to the terms of the Treaty, the occupation of İstanbul ended after the evacuation of the Allies on October 2, 1923, and the entry of the Nationalist troops to the city on October 6, 1923.³² While these events were playing out on the ground, some of them were also being filmed by the state-owned film production institutions and shown to a limited audience in the realms of early cinema.

1.4 A Test for Modernization: Westernization

Throughout the late Ottoman era a number of ideologies competed to be the best way to revive the collapsing Empire. The post-revolutionary period of the CUP witnessed

³¹ Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 8.

³² Criss, *Istanbul under Allied*, pp. 18-19.

several intellectual debates ranging from Ottomanism to Turkism, from Islamism to Westernism as the best form in which to move into the future.³³

This part of the chapter is more concerned with the Westernism due to its close relation to modernism. Yet, the aim is not to answer to all questions that are raised within the framework of modernization and Westernization. However, it is important to point out that during the time that many drastic changes were taking place in İstanbul, the intellectuals and decision-makers were also discussing the innovations and decisions made towards modernization. Most of the sources of the period show that there were controversial debates going on at that time; the concepts of progress and backwardness, integration and influence were being debated by the intellectuals and administrators of the time.

In fact, the ideology of Westernism has two interchangeable concepts as has been used by social scientists when discussing the late Ottoman era. These concepts were advocated by those who wished to move the Ottoman Empire in the direction of Western Europe via modernization reforms.

For contemporary scholars, the concepts of Westernization and modernization present a dynamic, if problematic theoretical framework for understanding the

³³ One of the dominant ideologies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was Turkish nationalism while other ethnic groups were also seeking their own national aspirations. The emergence of Turkist organizations, the National Struggle and resistance movements flourished under this ideology. Ottomanism was another influential ideology during this period and was the official ideology of Sultan Abdülhamid II's reign. It called for the solidarity of the Empire's Muslim subjects, no matter their ethnic or religious background. Islamist intellectual activity also flourished after CUP came to power. This was based on the solidarity among all Muslims, based on religious ground and was a rejection of ethnicity within the Muslim community. The Islamists were strongly subjugated during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Later on, this ideology was used as a unifying shield against the Muslim communities' nationalist movements. Islamist ideology was diametrically opposed to the Westernist school of thought and its secular approach. For detailed information see Mehmet Alkan (ed.), *Cumhuriyet'e Devreden Düşünce Mirası: Tanzimat ve Mesrutiyet'in Birikimi*, vol. 1, İstanbul: İletisim, 1996.; Uygur Kocabasoglu (ed.), *Modernleşme ve Batıcılık*, vol. 3, İstanbul: İletisim, 2007.

developments in the late Ottoman Empire. One critique of this situation comes from the historian Edhem Eldem, who remarks that these two concepts are used “imprecisely”.³⁴ Eldem acknowledges the transformation that was taking place in the society, yet he suggests a wider perspective within “the process of integration with the west” that is situated within an economical approach.³⁵ Additionally, historian Cemal Kafadar argues against the ideological model of the nineteenth-century of Europe as being either the “unique civilization” or “the best of all the civilizations”. He criticizes the generalizations of the theories on “civilization” since these ideas and mind set allow any nation’s apologists to create boundaries between cultures or produce the concepts of belonging, “developed or backward cultures”. Kafadar shows that these “primitive questions” are being answered in a way that applies the theories of the “uniqueness” and “otherness” of civilizations.³⁶

The Ottoman Empire witnessed Westernization, for the first time, as a formal policy linked to extensive bureaucratic reform during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (r.1808-1839).³⁷ The period of the *Tanzimat-ı Hayriyye* (Beneficial Reforms), lasted between 1839 and 1871 and implemented some administrative, military, economical and constitutional reforms. These were put in place by the proclamation of The Rescript of Gülhane (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu*, 1839). The Rescript not only offered a relatively fair system of taxation and equal rights for all of the subjects of the Empire before the law, but also gradually introduced a new socio-cultural environment within the society. The

³⁴ Edhem Eldem, “Batılılaşma, Modernleşme ve Kozmopolitizm: 19. Yüzyıl Sonu ve 20. Yüzyıl Başında İstanbul”, in: *Osman Hamdi Bey ve Donemi*, Sempozyum 17-18 Aralık 1992, Zeynep Rona (ed.), İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1993, pp. 12-26.

³⁵ Eldem, “İstanbul: From Imperial”, pp. 138-139.

³⁶ Cemal Kafadar, “Osmanlı Siyasal Düşüncesinin Kaynakları Üzerine Gözlemler”, in: *Cumhuriyet’e Devreden Düşünce Mirası: Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet’in Birikimi*, Mehmet Alkan (ed.), İstanbul: İletişim, 2006, p. 24.

³⁷ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 63.

Tanzimat introduced Westernization in a formal, administrative level and along with this a Western European cultural perspective was brought to the Ottoman society. The concepts of Westernization and modernization are important when studying film in this context. For many, the new technology of film was a prime example of modernity that was imported from Europe.

Reforms in the late Ottoman period were the attempts to respond to the challenges brought by modernity as it was the case in other countries of the time. The Ottoman Empire began its journey to modernization later than most of its European counterparts, and thus took Western Europe as a model. The administrators and intellectuals of the time had to deal with different aspects of modernity such as “reconciling religion with scientific progress, confronting traditional bases of society, coping with urbanization, responding to public opinion, digesting massive cultural transformation and incorporating technology into administration”.³⁸

According to some scholars, the notion of Westernization during the late Ottoman era has negative connotations for being progressive and elitist or is interpreted as merely a copying the West and introduction of some reforms without substance. Historian Feroz Ahmad’s interpretation of Westernization is in accord with the above-mentioned view. He claims that it “was merely the import of luxury goods for the upper classes and was abandoned and replaced with the conviction that true westernization meant restructuring society so as to build a new state on these foundations.”³⁹ Ziya Gökalp, a sociologist of the time, points out some of the issues surrounding modernization within Ottoman society in the following lines:

³⁸ Ibid, p. 203.

³⁹ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, p. 24.

“[W]e Muslims could not imitate the ready-made norms of Europe and its standardized ways of living... The New Life will be created, not copied. Our new values will be economic, domestic, aesthetic, philosophic, moral, legal and political values born out of the soul of the Ottomans. To create their own civilization, the Ottomans themselves have to work out a new form of family life, new aesthetic standards, a new philosophy, a new morality, a new understanding of law and a new political organization. Only through the knowledge of these national values will the national civilization of the Ottomans inspire the praise of Europeans...They [Europeans] are in more favorable position only with regard to economics and social living. Because we are going to benefit from the achievements of modern science and philosophy in our search for a new life, the methods we shall follow in every aspect of life will be more up-to-date.”⁴⁰

Here Gökalp, like other members of *élite* in the society, shows the desire to be “modern”. While doing this he acknowledges the superiority of the Europeans, yet this is a way to perceive Europeans as “others”. One of his concerns was on how to start modernization. At this point, Gökalp touches upon the most debated theme of the “model” and “copy” discussions, which has been examined by the intellectuals and theorists for a long time. The study of cinema in the late Ottoman era, especially during this transition period is a unique way to view the modernization question.

1.5 Cinema and Modernity

Modernity can be seen as a way of expressing a subjective experience or can be framed within a broader social, economic and cultural transformation, where it reflects itself through a tangible innovation such as the telegraph, telephone, railroad, car, photograph or cinema.⁴¹ The introduction of cinema is an example of one of these innovations that reflects different perspectives of modernity. In cinema events, objects and characters presented not as fact but as the material for make-believe, in other words

⁴⁰ Niyazi Berkes (ed.), *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization Selected Essays of Ziya Gökalp*, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1959, pp. 31-32.

⁴¹ Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 1.

representations of another kind. Admittedly, early films made in Western Europe and the Northern America at the turn of the century spread into the other parts of the world. Through this, cinema was indirectly established as a representation of Western culture, probably a reality for a model; the symbol of technology and progress for the audience. This was relatively in line with what had been experienced in İstanbul before through other Western art forms, such as photography, and also preceding forms of cinema such as diorama, cosmorama and magic lantern shows starting from the mid-1850s.⁴² One gets the sense that the cinema-going experience in İstanbul was identified with technology and progress of the West and was a model of Western modernity for the audience in the early years of cinema. Here, modernization is in reference to the transformations that result from the idea of technology and progress, and particularly to its certain effects on socio-cultural life such as urban living and the introduction of new set of values and attitudes.

The relation between science and Ottoman society is a complex one as Şükrü M. Hanioglu explains that during the nineteenth-century the tastes and mentality of the educated *élite* had changed drastically. This cultured group of people gradually began to borrow European attitudes and embraced urban living, European fashion and tastes that were largely borrowed from Paris. Most of these people followed the literary journal of *Wealth of Sciences* (*Servet-i Funun*) while the elders of society, being opposed to the European style mentality, read “old books printed on yellow papers” that only some people could read.⁴³ As was noted by Palmira Brummett most of the generalizations made about the Ottoman society stems from its Islamist ideology and reflect the

⁴² For detailed information about the screenings of earlier spectacles see Metin And, "Türkiye'de Sponek Birahanesindeki İlk Sinema Gösterisinin Öncesi ve Sonrası", in: *Milliyet Sanat*, no. 10, (1974), pp. 8-12.

⁴³ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 96.

reductionist point of view.⁴⁴ The progressive tenets of Enlightenment were at stake in the late Ottoman period. The promise of progress, as seen by the intellectuals of the period, was also highlighted in the poetry of the time, such as in the lines of Sadullah Paşa:

“Alas! The West has become the locus of rising knowledge,
Neither the fame of Anatolia and Arabia nor the glory of Cairo and Heart remains
This is the time for progress; the world is the world of sciences;
Is it possible to uphold society with ignorance?”⁴⁵

Cinema might have been seen as the notion of progress which was delineated within the concept of “à la Franca” for the many. Anything which symbolized Europe and European supremacy -an object, a piece of furniture and fashion- would also denote a Westernized ideology or person. In this sense, for most cinema-goers, cinema might have been a sign of a European attitude and the symbol of progress. While the followers of cinema accepted, enjoyed with the films there were also others who rejected and avoided having contact with it. An anecdote of an İstanbulian audience shows how he was fascinated by seeing actresses on the screen, such Lida Borelli, Gabriel Robin and Pina Menikelli. He notes that among young female audience there were many imitators of Pina Menikelli who borrowed her flirtatious look and low-cut fashion. He recalls that elderly people of the time avoided seeing films due to the name of “living picture” that was given to cinema at that time. In their eyes, the ability of creation of living objects only belonged to God. In this sense, Islamist ideology of elders might have seen going to cinema as equal to that of committing a sin.⁴⁶ Even though the perception of cinema varied, it was an art form that was appealing for many educated and cultured İstanbulians.

⁴⁴ Palmira Brummett, *Image and Imperialism in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press 1908-1911*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000, p. 314.

⁴⁵ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 139.

⁴⁶ Faruk Ilkan (ed.), *Sermet Muhtar Alus Eski Gunlerde*, İstanbul: İletisim, 2001, pp. 61-64.

In the film journals of early twentieth-century, there are many articles dedicated to pointing out the superiority of Europeans in filmmaking and the idea of progress via cinema. One example of this dates to 1921 where the author Cevdet Reşid explains that; “as it is the case for many areas, even for the arts we are bound to the West. Thus, I am saddened that we can not offer any support to our artists for their first films.”⁴⁷ Another example comes from a literary spectacles journal *Dergah* that says; “without a doubt the world’s highest spectacle culture has been reached by the Germans, while at the same time Paris can be considered the capital of spectacles.”⁴⁸ Interestingly, one of the prominent names of early cinema, Muhsin Ertuğrul went to Germany during World War I and was trained in filmmaking there. In this way “progressive tenets of cinema” might have consolidated in İstanbul via Muhsin Ertuğrul’s films. Overall, novelty of cinema was a modern experience for many and was in accord with the Westernized ideology of technology and progress.

⁴⁷ Cevdet Reşid, “Sinema Hakkında Notlar IV”, in: *Yarın*, no. 11, (29 December 1921 [1337]), p. 8. Muslim Ottomans did not have surnames: either they had two names, personal and birth name, or had titles stemming from their position or profession. Last names were provided in accord with the “Surname Law” of 1934 during the early Republican era. In the text and for the purpose of bibliography individuals without surnames will be identified according to their given names or titles as they were known at the time. As an example Cevdet Reşid is an individual with two given names, neither of which is a surname. Thus, he is found in bibliography alphabetized according to his first given name. Other examples include Enver Paşa and Refik Halid. For individuals who were assigned surname after 1934, their surnames will be given in parenthesis after their given name as they were known before the law was passed. One example is Halide Edip (Adivar).

⁴⁸ Ragıp Hulusi, “Temaşa, Temaşa ve Dar’ül Bedayi”, in: *Dergah*, no. 15, (20 November 1921 [1337]), p. 27.

CHAPTER 2.

CINEMA IN İSTANBUL ON THE EVE OF ARMISTICE PERIOD

Introduction

This chapter will shed light on the cinema-going experience in İstanbul from the year of the first film screenings in 1896 until the Armistice Period and locate it within the broader performance culture of İstanbul at that time. This period was a time of war, occupation, population exchanges and political and social struggles. Economic relations were changing and new social classes were appearing. Despite the ongoing turmoil of this transition period, cinema-going experience in İstanbul was thriving and becoming an important activity for certain audiences. It also was a significant opportunity for the spectators to observe and understand the so-called Western world via the films. Additionally, most of the films portrayed what the modern world and a modernized society might look like and how a modern person might behave. Even though there was chaos and on-going poverty for many, it can be argued that the socio-cultural life during the course of war years was lively and vibrant in certain districts of the city. This lively milieu also served as a major vehicle for the embracement of Western culture.

The first section of this chapter will contain a brief description of cinema-going before the Armistice Period. This includes details about the film screenings, the opening of cinema-houses and the profile of spectators. Secondly, other forms of performance arts that existed in the imperial capital will be examined in order to contextualize the

cinema-going experience in this very period. This form of performance culture consists of local forms of performances and other earlier adopted Western performance arts.

2.1 Pera: So Much Like Paris

In the early twentieth-century cinema-going in İstanbul was a form of cultural activity mainly for the upper classes. This included both non-Muslim and Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire; the *élite*, senior administrators, and wealthy merchants of the imperial capital in the neighborhoods of Pera and Galata as well as the inhabitants of Yıldız Palace, the imperial family themselves.⁴⁹ These people, who often possessed a Western educational background, close commercial relationships or any type of contact with Westerners, had the ways and means to patronize this newly-introduced Western art form. It was only later and gradually that cinema-going would spread to other parts of the city. Yet, during the early years of cinema obstacles, ranging from limited electricity service throughout the city to economic conditions, limited cinema-going and the distribution of films to other socio-economic groups.⁵⁰ It was only after the 1930s that cinema-going became a form of entertainment for the masses in İstanbul.

The Pera district of İstanbul was the main hub for the circulation of European films and was the most modernized section of the city. In the early twentieth-century, the population of this district was diverse; consisting of wealthy Muslims, Europeans of all

⁴⁹ Galata is located on the northern bank of the Golden Horn in İstanbul and was a former Genoese town. Pera, today known as Beyoğlu, stood on the hill to the north of the walled district of Galata. Pera's population was concentrated in the street of *Grande Rue de Pera*, also called as either *Cadde-i Kebir* or *İstiklal Caddesi*. These districts of the capital were inhabited mainly by the non-Muslim and diverse population.

⁵⁰ During the early years of cinema (1896-1927), black and white, silent and one or two minute films were also called moving-pictures, projections of photograph, *cinématographe* or *kinematoscope*. In the Turkish and Ottoman Turkish languages there are many terms for describing these forms such as "hayal perdesi" (curtain of dreams), "canlı fotoğraf" (moving images) and "sinema seridi/kurdelasi" (cinema ribbon). Here I will refer all these as "films" while covering this period.

nationalities and Ottoman Christians –mostly Greeks, Armenians, Jews, French and Austrians.⁵¹ After the Bolshevik Revolution, White Russian émigrés began to live in Pera, too. In the words of historian Edhem Eldem, Pera “was a world of contrasts, ranging from the rather violent and disorganized world of the representatives of Western powers as well as some of the wealthiest members of the non-Muslim merchant community.”⁵² Pera’s symbols of modernity and Western European lifestyle consisted of modern stores, fancy restaurants, modern schools, embassy buildings, cultural centers and theatres. A wide variety of cultural activities, from the local shadow plays, *meddah* and *ortaoyunu*, to the Western European forms of opera, dramas and vaudeville were available in Pera.



Figure 2.1- Shops and people on narrow up-hill street of steps in Pera, 1900s.
(Collection of Maggie Land Blanck)

⁵¹ Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914 Demographic and Social Characteristics*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 97.

⁵² Edhem Eldem, “İstanbul: From Imperial to Peripheralized Capital”, p. 148.

The venues for the newly-arrived films were small store-front cinema-houses, coffeehouses, theatre salons and museums until the first permanent cinema-houses were established in the 1910s. Silent, black and white, short films first brought the West to İstanbul and provided a visual representation of Western concepts of urban life, technology, consumerism and fashion to the cultured *élites* of the imperial capital. The interaction between spectators and Western cinema provides an important glimpse into the changing nature of the society of İstanbul during this very period.

2.2 The Curtain of Dreams: Arrival of the Seventh Art

While further research is needed even to establish the basic historical facts related to the introduction of cinema into İstanbulian society, it has been widely accepted that the first public *cinématographe* screenings occurred in Pera in late 1896. Various sources include information about three individuals, Sigmund Weinberg, M. Tambouridis and Henri Delavallée, who may have organized the first *cinématographe* screenings at the *Salle Sponek* Pub, located in Pera. In this section, intention is to explore the available evidence about the early film screenings by focusing on both the theory and dialectics of evidence.

Sigmund Weinberg, an İstanbulian of Polish-Jewish descendant, might have organized the first screenings in late 1896 at the *Salle Sponek* Pub in Pera.⁵³ Yet,

⁵³ Rekin Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, M. Thomen & O. Celiktemel (tran.), İstanbul: Oglak, 2008, p.14. Limited information exists about Sigmund Weinberg, whose surname is also sometimes spelled “Weimberg”. Being of Polish-Jewish descendant, he might have been either an Ottoman citizen or an émigré from Europe. Sigmund Weinberg is known for his Bon Marché store, located in Pera, in which he was selling technical materials and tools for photography. For detailed information See Behzat Usdiken, “Asri Sinemasi”, in: *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, N. Akbayan, E. Isin (eds.), vol.1, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1993, p. 358.; Behzat Usdiken, “Beyoğlu’nun Eski Sinemalari I”, in: *Toplumsal Tarih*, , no. 22, (October 1995), p. 43.; Behzat Usdiken, “Bonmarseler”, in: *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, N. Akbayan, E. Isin (eds.), vol. 2, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1994, p. 298.; Rekin Teksoy (ed.), “Türkiye’de Sinema”, in: *Arkin*

according to Hilmi A. Malik, Weinberg screened silent films at Pera's Concordia Theatre in 1901 while vaudeville shows were also taking place. Because of the popularity of films, Weinberg later organized other screenings at the Fevziye Kiraathanesi located in the Şehzadebaşı district.⁵⁴ Fevziye was a coffeehouse that regularly hosted the local shadow plays, concerts and *meddah* shows, especially during the month of Ramadan for the upper class residents of Şehzadebaşı.⁵⁵ While many secondary sources have accepted this as fact, there is other data about the first film screenings that refutes this.⁵⁶

Most probably from the very early days of its invention, the *cinématographe* traveled to İstanbul through the representatives of Lumière Frères from France. A local French language newspaper of the period, *Stamboul*, lists M. Tambouridis as the organizer of film screenings. M. Tambouridis was likely a representative of Lumière Frères and organized *cinématographe* projections in December 1896 while on tour in the region. Announcements of the screenings in the "Théâtres" column of the *Stamboul* newspaper reveal that they started on December 9, 1896 and were repeated several times throughout the month at the *Salle Sponek* Pub.⁵⁷ Moreover, announcements in the same newspaper show that another İstanbullian, Henri Delavallée, organized *cinématographe* screenings for spectators at the same location on December 25-26,

Sinema Ansiklopedisi, İstanbul, 1975, p. 453.; Nijat Özön, "Türk Sinemasına Toplu Bir Bakış", in: *Türk Dili*, vol. 17, no. 196, (1 January 1968), pp. 265-71.

⁵⁴ Hilmi A. Malik, *Türkiye'de Sinema ve Tesirleri*, Ankara: Hakimiyet-i Milliye Matbaası, 1933, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Resad Mimaroglu, "Fevziye Kiraathanesi", in: *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Resat Ekrem Kocu (ed.), vol. 10, İstanbul: Kocu Yayınları, p. 5727.

⁵⁶ Some sources indicate that Weinberg's screenings were organized in late 1897. For detailed historiography of first film screenings See Behzat Usdiken, "Beyoğlu'nun Eski Sinemaları IV", in: *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 26, (February 1996), pp. 46-51.

⁵⁷ No Name, "Théâtres", in: *Stamboul*, Journal Quotidien, Politique et Littéraire, Eduard Chester (ed.), Pera, (9 December 1896), p. [N.P.]. This local newspaper was published in French between 1875 and 1964. After 1934 it took the name "İstanbul" instead of the French name. The main readers of *Stamboul* were merchants and professionals of Pera and Galata districts. See Orhan Kologlu, "Stamboul", in: *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, N. Akbayar, E. Isin (eds.), vol.7, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1994, p. 43.

1896.⁵⁸ The announcements claim that the shows of Delavallée attracted large crowds every evening. There were four shows every evening between 5.30 pm and 9.30 pm.⁵⁹ Moreover, theatre historian Metin And states that a newspaper dated December 18, 1896 announces the opening of D. Henri's cinema-house and a public *cinématographe* projection of the "Arrival of Russian Tsars to Paris".⁶⁰ Currently no clear information exists to determine whether or not D. Henri and Henri Delavallée refer to the same person. Whoever may have organized the first screenings, it has been firmly established that the novelty of *cinématographe* traveled to İstanbul quite early in its infancy; most likely at the end of 1896. If the announcements of *Stamboul* are to be believed there were many İstanbulian spectators who attended the first screenings.⁶¹ While this ambiguity exists concerning the concrete historical facts about cinema's arrival, it is a fact that the cinema was embraced in several quarters of İstanbulian society after its invention.

⁵⁸ Ibid, (25-26 December 1896), p. [N.P.].

The only available information on Henri Delavallée is that he began to live in İstanbul in 1894, and he was a painter by profession. See, Jean Francois Staszak, *Géographies de Gauguin*, Editions Bréal, 2003, p. 95.

⁵⁹ Ibid, (25-26 December 1896), p. [N.P.]. "Les curieuses séances que nous donne. M. Henri Delavallée avec ses projections photographiques attirent chaque soir beaucoup de monde. Remarqué, jeudi dernier, la présence de S. E. le ministre de Grèce accompagné d'un cavass et du personnel de la légation. Nous avons dit quelle intéressante nouveauté M. Delavallée nous présente et nous recommandons encore a nos lecteurs d'aller assister a ce spectacle aussi amusant que peu couteaux. Représentation tous les soirs 5 ½, 6 ½, 8 ½, et 9 ½ heures. Prix d'entrée 5 piastres."

⁶⁰ Metin And, "Turkiye'de Sponek Birahanesindeki İlk Sinema Gosterisinin Oncesi ve Sonrasi", in: *Milliyet Sanat*, no. 10, (1974), p. 8.

⁶¹ No Name, "Théâtres", in: *Stamboul*, Journal Quotidien, Politique et Littéraire, Eduard Chester (ed.), Pera, (25-26, 27-28 December 1896), p. [N.P.]. "Les curieuses séances que nous donne. M. Henri Delavallée avec ses projections photographiques attirent chaque soir beaucoup de monde."

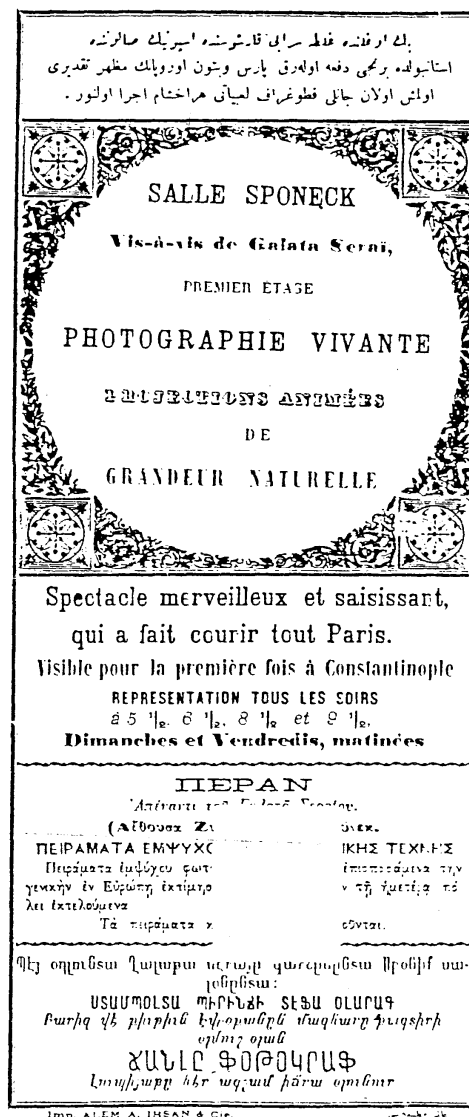


Figure 2.2-Handbill promoting the film screening in Salle Sponeck Pub in Pera, written in Ottoman Turkish, French Greek and Armenian. (Gökmen, Mustafa. 1997)⁶²

Following these screenings, Fuad Bey (Uzkinay), who later became widely accepted as the first Turkish filmmaker, also displayed films to the students at the Galatasaray High School with the help of history professor Şakir Seden in 1910.⁶³

⁶² This handbill, promoting a film screening in Salle Sponeck Pub in Pera, written in Ottoman Turkish, French Greek and Armenian states that a “surprising and fascinating show that amused the Parisians is in İstanbul for the first time. Shows are everyday at 5. 30 pm, 6.30 pm 8.30 pm and 9.30 pm. Sunday and Fridays are matinees.” See Mustafa Gökmen, *Yıldız Tiyatrosunda Sinema*, İstanbul, 1997, p. 20.

⁶³ Teksoy, “Türkiye’de Sinema”, p. 452.

Sigmund Weinberg eventually became the distributor for French film and photography company Pathé Frères and opened up Pathé Cinema in 1908.⁶⁴ The Pathé Cinema was the first permanent cinema-house in Pera. The opening of this cinema-house was only possible after electricity became available in all parts of Pera. In 1915 Weinberg was appointed as the director for the Central Military Office of Cinema (MOFD, *Merkez Ordu Film Dairesi*). Fuad Bey also got his filmmaking start in this organization which was charged with creating newsreels for the purposes of the state propaganda.

Besides state propaganda, early films of the period were usually shorts dedicated to single events or themes. Examples include: *Ascending to the Tower of Eiffel*, *Mr. Emile Loubet at the Reception of Longchamp on July 14*, *Cendrillon*, *Boat Race in Prinkipo*, *A Friday in Kâğıthane*. The screenings became social occasions where members of the *élite*, administrative and merchant classes of the city would share refreshments and exchange ideas during the intermission. Spanish Ambassador Camposagrado organized diplomatic parties every Wednesday where film screenings would be shown at Ramirez Theatre.⁶⁵ Most films screened in the city before World War I were from France, Italy and Scandinavian countries. Later, between 1915 and 1918, German films became very popular. According to the survey of Hilmi A. Malik, German films were more lifelike to the audience than the others. The popularity of these films was also likely affected by the fact the political alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire during the World War I.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Nijat Özön, *Türk Sineması Tarihi (Dünden Bugüne) 1896-1960*, Ankara: Antalya Kültür Sanat Vakfı, 2003, p. 34.

⁶⁵ Sadi N. Duhani, *Beyoğlu'nun Adı Pera Iken*, İstanbul: Celik Gulersoy Vakfı İstanbul, 1990, p. 76. Ramirez Theatre was owned by Spanish entrepreneur Ramirez. This venue was also used as a music hall and cirque and it was named as Yeni Ses Theatre in the 1940s.

⁶⁶ Malik, *Türkiye'de Sinema*, p. 8.

During World War I, despite the ongoing turmoil, the demand for cinema did not diminish in İstanbul and films continued to be screened as they were before the war. In fact the theatre and film journal *Ferah* reported that screenings of German propaganda film entitled “The 300 Years of History of German Army” ran longer than expected due to public demand in 1914. The *Ferah* Theater hosted these German propaganda films as the Ottoman Empire was a German ally in World War I. In this show seven different films were screened, emphasizing the glory and victories of Emperor Frederick, Emperor Wilhelm and Prince Bismarck. The announcement of *Ferah* featured heroes of the German-French War (1870-1871) and maneuvers of Germany during the War in 1914. The announcement also depicted a motto attributed to “the Great Diplomat” Prince Bismarck: “We, the Germans, are only afraid of God in the battlefield.” The screenings concluded with a drama entitled *Blanshet* and a comic show of monkeys.⁶⁷ Another screening of the period, announced in the journal *Sinema* took place at Şehzadebaşı’s Müdafaa’i Milliye Cinema on January 23, 1914; in the midst of the war years. The screening included scenery of cocoons, a drama entitled *Princess Elena* and a comic film with shows for women at 1:30 pm and for men at 8:30 pm.⁶⁸ While World War I was being fought, demand of the newest form of art moderately existed in İstanbul.

Theatres recorded in Cesar Raymond’s geographical survey of Pera published, most likely about 1915 include: Amphithéâtre de Petits-Champs, Cirque de Péra, Cinéma Central (1911), Cinéma Cosmographe, Cinéma Etoile, Cinéma Luxembourg, Cinéma Magic (1914), Cinéma Orientaux (1912), Cinéma Weimberg (Pathé Cinéma, 1908),

⁶⁷ No Name, in: *Ferah*, no: 57, Ibrahim Halid (ed.), İstanbul: Sancakciyan Matbaasi, (29 January 1914 [1330]), p. 3. *Ferah* is a newspaper of theater, *cinématographe* and arts, owned by Kavakibizade Selahaddin.

⁶⁸ No Name, in: *Sinema*, no: 62, (23 January 1914), p. 1. This information is cited from the work of Ali Özuyar, *Sinemanın Osmanlıca Serüveni*, Ankara: Oteki Yayınevi, 1999, p. 107.

Théâtre Odeon and Théâtre d'Hiver de Petits-Champs.⁶⁹ Milli Cinema was established in 1914 in Şehzadebaşı and following this Ali Efendi Cinema and Kemal Bey Cinema were opened in Sirkeci.⁷⁰ At this time many of these venues hosted other performance arts in addition to film screenings and were often operated on temporary, seasonal and variable schedules.

⁶⁹ Cesar Raymond, *Nouveau Plan de Péra*, Imprint Constantinople: Librairie Raymond, [1915], p. 15.

⁷⁰ Nijat Özön, *Sinema El Kitabı*, İstanbul: Elif Yayinlari, 1964, pp. 113-114.

ارزوی عمومی اوزرینه سوک دفعه ارلهرق

سینما طوغراف

آلمانیه دولت فخمه سنک ۳۰۰ سنه لك تاریخ عسکریه سنی مصور



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- ۱ - آلمانیاه دولت فخمه سنک ۳۰۰ سنه لك تاریخ عسکریه سنی مصور و زار شتارک ۱۸۷۰ - ۱۸۷۱ ده اوس محاصره سنی اجرا ایند قهرمان عسکریه زار ۱۹۱۵ فرانسه آلمانیاه محاصره سنیه ساقسوتیا و پولوارا ولی عهده لرنک اداره لرنده نولان اردو لری ازایله ایند قورقارز قورده لا.
- ۲ - ۱۹۱۴ - ۱۹۱۵ لرنده آلمان عسکرلرک ساقسوتیا و ایمپراطور و یلهلم حضرتلری یطاریه تشریف لری.
- ۳ - ۱۹۱۵ - ۱۹۱۶ آلمانیاه فرانسه محاصره سنی بر دارجه.
- ۴ - (بالکتر) مدهق برام ۳۰۰ قور ۱۵۰۰ مورو
- ۵ - (قومیق) ۳۰۰ مورو
- ۶ - (قومیق) ۳۰۰ مورو
- ۷ - (قومیق) ۳۰۰ مورو

Figure 2.3- Announcement of *cinématographe* screenings. (Ferah, 1914)

2.3 “Lifeless Smiles, Soundless Laughter”

“There is a station in Europe and a locomotive spews black smoke from its chimney. There are people on the harbor walking in rush. Oh what a big rush! Movements are so fast and uncontrolled. You may think that they are all in shock. The train leaves silently. Oh my God! It is coming right for us.”⁷¹

This was the initial impression of Ercument Ekrem Talu at the Lumière Frères’ *cinématographe* screening of “The Arrival of the Mail Train” in 1896 at the *Salle Sponek* Pub in Pera.⁷² The rush of emotion used by this Istanbulian spectator to describe his experience illustrates the way in which modernity has been identified by its vigorous, ephemeral, and immutable notions and characterized by a sense of shock and surprise. In fact, Talu’s impressions were not unlike many spectators upon their first experience of the new art and the technology of cinema.

The Russian author Maxim Gorky elaborately explained his thoughts after watching a *cinématographe* screening at the Nizhni-Novgorod fair in a newspaper review entitled “Last Night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows”. Gorky’s experience was similar to that of Talu’s, in his perception of cinema as “magical”. He described the large grey streets of Paris that were reflected on the screen in this way:

“...Suddenly a strange flicker passes through the screen and the picture stirs to life... [T]he darkness in which you sit, somewhere from afar people appear and loom larger as they come closer to you...Their smiles are lifeless, even though their movements are full of living energy...Their laughter is soundless although you see the muscles contradicting in their grey faces.”⁷³

For most of the spectators the medium of cinema was a poignant and impressive experience.

⁷¹ Ercument Ekrem Talu, “İstanbul’da İlk Sinema ve İlk Gramafon”, in: *Perde Sahne*, no. 7, (1943), p. 5.

⁷² Ercument Ekrem Talu (1886-1956), Turkish poet and author.

⁷³ Maxim Gorky, “Last Night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows”, in: *In the Kingdom of Shadows: A Companion to Early Cinema*, Colin Harding & Simon Popple (eds.), Slovenia: Gorenjski Tisk, [from *Nizhegorodski listok*, 4 July 1896], 1996, p. 5.

It can be argued that the *cinématographe* was embraced early in its history by *élite* and Western oriented İstanbulians. *Cinématographe* also gained a reception in the home of the Ottoman Sultan. Ayşe Osmanoğlu, daughter of Sultan Abdülhamid II recounts in her memoirs that there were *cinématographe* screenings in Yıldız Palace in late 1896. The Sultanic family was introduced to films by the Italian and French actors and magicians who performed Western styles of entertainment in the Palace. The films, which were presented to the Sultan by a French court jester named Bertrand were not much longer than a minute and were enjoyed by the palace residents. The films were projected upon a dampened curtain hung on a wall in the Palace.⁷⁴

A close reading of these initial impressions to films demonstrates that the novelty of *cinématographe* was effective and successful at depicting lifelike moments to the spectator. The movements of a train, horse-carriages, bike-riders and scenes of people in the midst of a modern city elicited curiosity and attraction from the spectators. The hustle and bustle that was shown in the urban scenes of France was on the screen thanks to the projectors of Lumière Frères. The technology of early cinema and its fleeting images appealed to İstanbulian spectators and gave them a glimpse of the world beyond the imperial capital.⁷⁵

2.4 A Plethora of Pleasures: Other Forms of Performance Arts

Prior to the arrival of cinema in İstanbul, a number of performance arts existed. In fact in the decades leading up to the turn of the century, imperial capital offered a

⁷⁴ Ayşe Osmanoğlu, *Babam Abdülhamit*, İstanbul: Guven, 1960, p. 68.

⁷⁵ Tom Gunning, "From Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin and Traffic is Souls (1913)" in: *Wide Angle*, vol. 19, no. 4, (1997), pp. 25-63.

plethora of visual pleasures, from Western arts to local spectacles. An examination of the theatre-going activities of the İstanbulians offers an intriguing glimpse into the performance culture of the day within this distinct historical milieu. While some performance arts were imported from Western Europe and others, such as the local genres, have roots in the Eastern world. In fact much of the performance culture of İstanbul during this period was affected by various cultures. Thus, the study of performance arts without the use of the “Eastern” and “Western” genres as binary oppositions, helps one appreciate the rich visual and entertainment culture that was formed by a variety of influences at this time, be it West or East.

However, much of the scholarship about performance culture and cinema published in Turkey to this day has used the duality of West versus East as its theoretical framework. This is a case in the work entitled “From Karagöz to Cinema”; one of the most comprehensive works on Turkish film history.⁷⁶ It is obvious, even from the title that its author, Nijat Özön, possesses the view, held by many; those Western arts came to Ottoman and Turkish culture as a replacement to the local art forms. It can be argued that the performance culture of İstanbul in the years before the introduction of cinema was an amalgamation of local and Western arts.

Theatrical performances can reflect the general dimensions of a culture, religion, politics, values and lifestyles of a society; via the script, performer, subject matter, as well as audience’s participation. Hence, an understanding of local performance arts in İstanbul during the early twentieth-century is important to evaluate the later phenomena of cinema-going within the society. Theatre historian Metin And has defined two different

⁷⁶ Nijat Özön, *Karagöz'den Sinemaya Türk Sineması ve Sorunları*, Ankara: Kitle Yayınları, 1995.

types of improvisatory Turkish theatre: one is the folk theatre found in villages and rural areas and the second is popular theatre found in the big towns and cities. And's classification is not solely based on geographical distribution, but involves other features of art as well. He claims that both forms are natural and vivid due to their spontaneity, use of simple language and their tendency to rely on a close connection between the audience and performers. Both the folk and popular theatre traditions in Anatolia employ these techniques through the usage of puppetry, story telling and dramatic dances.⁷⁷ The three most widespread local Turkish theatre genres are considered to be *meddah*, *ortaoyunu* and shadow plays. All three can be regarded as improvisatory due to the lack of formal scripts, reliance upon familiar subject matter and collective participation by the audience with the performance.

2.5 Local Forms of Performance Culture

Meddah is the narration of a dramatically rich story with voice modulation and dramatic gestures performed by a story teller. It is a common performance art throughout the Islamic world.⁷⁸ *Meddah* was originally influenced by themes from Persian and Arabic cultures and often based on the holy history of the Muslims. It was later affected by Byzantium cultural themes as well. In the second half of the nineteenth-century, *meddah* was influenced by European arts, particularly by French plays. Hence an average *meddah* story teller would know at least a hundred stories from different regions of the world. Generally *meddah* shows took place in the coffeehouses with accompaniment of a small orchestra. Among the audience there would be people from different strata of the

⁷⁷ Metin And, "The Turkish Folk Theatre", in: *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 38, no.2, (1979), p. 155.

⁷⁸ Metin And, *A History of Theatre of Theatre and Popular Entertainment in Turkey*, Ankara: Forum Yayinlari, 1963-64, p. 28.

society, including children. Yet, most of the time women and men were segregated during the performances. A *meddah* show would routinely last two or three hours. Apparently, in İstanbul *meddah* was enjoyed by the diverse audiences. Announcements of the shows were generally made in Ottoman Turkish Greek, Armenian and French. A typical announcement of a *meddah* show in 1910 in İstanbul read:

“The actor Asqui Efendi announces to the public that he likes to continue his amusing performances in different dialects at three o’clock for Turkish time [means three hours after sunset] each night during the month of Ramadan.”⁷⁹

Ortaoyunu is another improvised folk theatre tradition and is often compared to the Italian *Commedia dell’arte*. Metin And points out that *ortaoyunu* was heavily influenced by Jewish culture. He explains “the Jewish emigrants, who came to Turkey by the thousands from Portugal and Spain at the end of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, when *commedia dell’arte* had already been introduced to Spain” may have been a largely responsible for the adoption of this performance form.⁸⁰ He also highlights the existence of Jewish public entertainers from that time until the end of nineteenth-century. *Ortaoyunu* relies upon a set narration and well defined characters, a ready-made plot. It also includes some other forms such as puppetry, shadow-theatre, dancing of jesters and clowns and other comical and satirical elements of popular and folk theatre. It is noteworthy that in 1870s Turkish actors developed a new form of stage-theatre called *tuluat*, which was based on the improvisational nature of *ortaoyunu*.⁸¹ *Ortaoyunu* shows took place in public squares, open air venues or in the coffee houses of the city. It was

⁷⁹ Nicholas N. Martinovitch, *The Turkish Theatre*, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968, p. 25. “Le commédien Asqui Efendi annonce au public qu’il veut continuer chaque soir ses représentations ridicules en diverse langues à trois heures en turc, pendant tout le temps de Ramazan.”

⁸⁰ And, “The Turkish Folk Theatre”, pp. 165-169.

⁸¹ Nermin Menemencioglu, “The Ottoman Theatre 1839-1923”, in: *Bulletin* (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies), vol. 10, no: 1, (1983), p. 54.

frequently performed on a stage or plaza during the imperial and religious holidays while a small orchestra was accompanying with the show. Similar to the *meddah* performances, women audience members would often have been separated with a veil from the men.⁸²

The shadow play, also frequently referred to as *Karagöz*, the name of the “black-eyed” main character of the play, has a long tradition within İstanbullian society. *Karagöz* was primarily performed in the mansions and coffeehouses of İstanbul and were an important and influential part of the socio-cultural life of the city. Many legends exist about the emergence of *Karagöz*. One of the most popular portrays the two principle characters, *Karagöz* and *Hacivat*, as real people living in the city of Bursa in the fourteenth-century. Another attributes the emergence of *Karagöz* to Sheikh *Küşterî* who first played the puppets at a plaza known as *Küşterî Meydanı* in the same period.⁸³ *Karagöz*, shadow plays include a great variety of characters, yet the show is grounded on the dialogues of particularly the two main characters: the idle *Karagöz* and the relatively educated *Hacivat*. Other characters of the show usually portray ethnic stereotypes of the inhabitants of a typical Ottoman community.⁸⁴ It can be argued that these local forms of performances did not introduce the audience to the same views of the world that cinema later would.

Some who did enjoy the local entertainment also went on to embrace cinema in the same way. In fact one of the Turkish actors and filmmakers, Muhsin Ertuğrul, explained in his memoirs how his love of theatre started at an early age while watching

⁸² Martinovitch, *The Turkish Theatre*, pp. 15-17.

⁸³ Metin And, *100 Soruda Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1970, pp. 48-49.

⁸⁴ And, *A History of Theatre*, pp. 47-48.

the local shows. He watched *Karagöz* at Büyük Kahve - a coffeehouse that regularly hosted shadow plays-, attended *ortaoyunu* performances of Hamdi Efendi and Küçük İsmail in Üsküdar, and saw Western plays in Kadıköy staged by the Osmanlı Dram Troupe. He adds that “In order to find a seat in the first row, I would torture myself by going to the coffeehouse very early; waiting impatiently for the start of the play.”⁸⁵ His love of performance arts was nurtured by all of these local genres.

Indeed, the introduction of Western art forms into the socio-cultural life of İstanbulians represented a change from the local forms to a new form. This new medium can be very well observed in one of the dialogues of *Karagöz* shows. In the following lines, the arrival of cinema within the discussions of illusion and reality also affects the content of *Karagöz* shows for a certain extent. The main character, Karagöz, amazed by the popularity of *cinématographe* utters:

“...I'll be damned, all these *madamlar*,[madams] *müsyüler* [monsieurs], *matmazeller* [mademoiselle], *efendiler* [sirs], *beyler* [gentlemen], *agalar* [landlords], dandies, bums and hooligans. The whole nation is there ... all buying tickets. I am not sure, is it called a 'sinematograf' or a 'minagotoraf'?”⁸⁶

2.6 From à la Turca to à la Franca

Western forms of performance culture were gradually integrated into the socio-cultural life of İstanbul. This process began when Western novels, paintings and opera came to İstanbul in the 1830s and continued with the introduction of modern theatre in

⁸⁵ Muhsin Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*, İstanbul: Dr. Nejat Eczacıbasi Vakfı Yayınları, 1989, p. 65.

⁸⁶ Dror, Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p.134. Ze'evi cites from Cevdet Kudret, *Karagöz*, vol. 1, İstanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayınları, 2002, pp. 178-179.

the 1840s, photography in the 1850s, and cinema in 1896. Along with the local performance arts, İstanbul also provided various alternative activities imported from the West such as panoramas, dioramas, magic lantern shows and eventually *cinématographe* screenings.

According to theater historian Refik Ahmet Sevengil, “starting from the Tanzimat era of 1839 not only were the administrative changes occurring, but also entertainment life was affected by these innovations. Only after the Tanzimat, people were introduced to theatre.”⁸⁷ Sultan Abdülmecid had the Dolmabahçe Palace theatre built in 1859 and the Yıldız Palace theatre was built during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II, in 1889. The latest plays of the day such as those of Molière and Corneille were performed in these theatres. From then on operas, operettas and modern dramas of the Western troupes were performed in specially designed theatre buildings. On January 19, 1845, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* was staged at the Naum Theater.⁸⁸ The first Western style Turkish play was written by İbrahim Şinasi Efendi in 1860 and entitled *The Poet's Marriage* which was about Anatolian wedding customs. It was staged by an amateur troupe in Selanik just after 1908.⁸⁹

In her memoirs, Ayşe Osmanoğlu recalls the operas and operettas staged by the Italian troupes at Yıldız Palace. These included operas such as *Traviata*, *Troubadour*, *Bal Masqué*, *Barbier de Séville*, *La Fille de Régiment*, *Frđiavolo*, *Mascotte* and *La Belle Héllene*. She also notes that the French ambassador of İstanbul invited Sarah Bernard

⁸⁷ Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *İstanbul Nasıl Egleniyordu?*, İstanbul: İletisim, 1985, pp. 163-164.

⁸⁸ Refik Ahmet, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, İstanbul: Kanaat Kutuphanesi, 1934, p.13.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 29. İbrahim Şinasi Efendi (1824-1871); Young Ottoman intellectual and author of the time. The Turkish title of the play is *Şair Evlenmesi*.

and Coquelain Cadet to the palace to stage their plays.⁹⁰ The local French newspaper *Stamboul* contained announcements of the upcoming opera and operettas in İstanbul. One such announcement, dated December 9, 1896 indicates that *La Belle Héliene* was soon to be staged at the Odeon Theatre.⁹¹ A news item from the same newspaper claimed that there was a large crowd of people during the second show of opera *L'Enlèvement de la Toledad* on December 16, 1896 at the Odeon Theater.⁹² The *élite* of İstanbul embraced these art forms soon after their arrival to the city.

Compared to *Karagöz* and the other local performance arts, Western drama - as a cultural and artistic performance- is temporally and spatially more bounded. For the audience too, Western drama and opera introduced not only a new cultural experience but also a new set of manners to be observed as they watched the performances. Metin And points out that a distinctive set of manners for the audience of the Western theatre existed and was different than those of audience of *meddah*, *ortaoyunu* and *Karagöz*. He claims that the new manners, seating habits, and restrictions on eating or speaking up during the performances created a different atmosphere for the audience than what they were used to in local performances. The İstanbullian audience used to smoke, eat and drink coffee at Gedik Paşa Theatre before they got used to the Westernized mode of participation in which audience was often silent.⁹³

⁹⁰ Osmanoğlu, *Babam*, p. 68.

⁹¹ No Name, "Théatres", in: *Stamboul*, Journal Quotidien, Politique et Littéraire, Eduard Chester (ed.), Pera, (9 December 1896), p. [N.P.].

⁹² Ibid, (17 December, 1896), p. [N. P.].

⁹³ And, *100 Soruda Türk*, pp. 99-102.



Figure 2.4- A sample of *Karagöz* characters, Zenne and Celebi. (And, Metin. 2005)⁹⁴

Traditionally for theatre-going there would have been different showings for men and women. Showings for the women were scheduled during the day and at nights men went to the theatre salons. In February 1909 the Sporting Club in İzmir organized a mixed-gender show for the public, yet some conservatives protested this action. In fact, the reactions against a mixed-gendered audience were harsh during the initial days of staged performances. Some members of the public and some of the newspapers claimed that Muslim women watching theatre and films in the same venue with men was against Islam and traditional customs of social life. Some enthusiastic women audience who desired to go frequently to the theatre would have to be either disguised as a man or would have to

⁹⁴ Metin And, *Karagöz Turkish Shadow Play*, İstanbul: Dost Yayınları, 2005.

dress like a non-Muslim lady in order to enter.⁹⁵ Some conservatives were not content with the changes that were introduced by the new arts, but others, such as intellectuals tended to see Western drama, opera and cinema in a positive light. An avid supporter of drama, Namık Kemal, described theatre as a school that would improve manners and ethics in the society and eventually produce a high culture such as what can be found in Western Europe.⁹⁶

While it is difficult to speculate on the motivations and ideas of the spectators who went to different performances in the early twentieth-century, there were number of many enthusiastic patrons of all forms. “Said Bey” of Paul Dumont’s work is a good, yet a random, example of how an İstanbullian followed both local and Western forms of art in his leisure activities. Said Bey’s diary offers an interesting opportunity to trace the everyday steps of a middle class İstanbullian in the early twentieth-century. His notes show that he attended *ortaoyunu*, *Karagöz*, Western drama and from time to time opera and balls as well. The following is one of the examples of his weekly schedule activities in February 11-17, 1902.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ And, *100 Soruda Türk*, p. 209.

⁹⁶ Refik Ahmet. *Türk Tiyatrosu*, pp. 34-35.; Namık Kemal (1840-1888); Young Ottoman intellectual and author of the time.

⁹⁷ Paul Dumont, “Said Bey: The Everyday Life of an İstanbul Townsman at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century”, in: *The Modern Middle East*, Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khoury (eds.), London: I.B. Tauris, 1993, pp. 275-276.

Monday, February 11	Midday meal at the bazaar Muhallebi [a desert] <i>Nargile</i> at Direkler Arasi [hookah] Visit to neighbors in the evening Show of <i>Meddah</i>
Tuesday, February 12	Midday meal at Yani's <i>Raki</i> at Sirkeci [alcoholic beverage]
Wednesday, February 13	Midday meal at Tokatliyan Visit to neighbors in the evening
Thursday, February 14	Midday meal at Yani's In the evening, <i>Karagöz</i> show
Friday, February 15	Calgili Gazino (café-concert)
Saturday, February 16	Confectioner's at Pera <i>Raki</i> at Tokatliyan <i>Raki</i> again Visit to Seyfeddin Bey Greek carnival at Beyoglu
Sunday, February 17	Arifiye coffeehouse Arab music <i>Karagöz</i> show in the evening

Table 2.1- A sample of leisure activities of Said Bey. (Dumont, P., 1993)

While it is the question of interpretation, it is noteworthy that Paul Dumont depicts Said Bey as “an urban bridge between East and West.”⁹⁸

In the early twentieth-century, the historical dimension of accepting Western European arts should be understood as a result of administrative and cultural policy. Most of the people of the upper classes supported this process as did the intellectuals of the time who received a European style education. Moreover, political and economic circumstances of the time, including domestic and external forces, encouraged the changes happening throughout the Empire and accepted the Western art forms.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 278.

Contemporary scholars have debated the role and effect of the acceptance of Western art forms during that period. Russian theater historian, Nicholas Martinovitch claims that the traditional forms of *meddah*, *orta oyunu*, and *Karagöz* were threatened by the introduction of Western arts. Martinovitch's belief that the modernization reforms that carried out at the turn led the disappearance of popular Turkish theatre and this view is shared by many scholars.⁹⁹ Metin And also sees the demise of local performance arts as a part of adopting Western arts. He says that:

"Some intellectuals in the 19th century, champions of Western culture, refused to support Ortaoyunu because they found primitive and vulgar, and admittedly dialogues were replete with sexual and obscene jokes. So gradually Ortaoyunu lost its traditional color and vigor. And with Westernization and the opening to outside influences Turkey moved away from its indigenous dramatic spirits."¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Despite the great transformation that was taking place from the introduction of cinema in 1896 until the Armistice Period, cinema-going in İstanbul can be interpreted as a complex cultural phenomenon. The district of Pera was the most modern section of the city, embracing the popular performance and visual arts of the time. The audience of early cinema was firstly the upper classes of Pera that often had a Western-oriented mindset and contact with other parts of the world. Gradually, cinema was embraced by other groups of people and spread beyond the streets of Pera. Even though the first venues for film screenings were often ad hoc, permanent cinema-houses were later established in several districts during World War I. In fact, despite the ongoing political turmoil, cinema-going was growing in popularity in İstanbul.

⁹⁹ Martinovitch, *The Turkish Theatre*, p. preface.

¹⁰⁰ And, "The Turkish Folk Theatre", p. 170.

The interplay between local performance arts and the newly arrived arts, such as cinema, is an ongoing topic of research and discussion. Members of society of the day as well as contemporary sources differ in their interpretation of the affects of cinema on local performance arts as a whole. However it is clear that during this period Western performance arts and cinema as well as the local performance arts of *meddah*, *orta oyunu* and shadow plays were patronized by diverse audiences. Indeed, on the eve of Armistice Period, the imperial capital presented a lively social milieu.

CHAPTER 3.

FILMMAKING AND CINEMA-GOING DURING THE ARMISTICE PERIOD

Introduction

The period of transition and change that occurred in İstanbul from the first film screenings in late 1896 until 1918 was followed by an even more challenging time for the imperial capital. During World War I the alliance that the Ottoman Empire forged with Germany sealed the end of the Empire and set the territory of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace on the road to become the Republic of Turkey. The Mudros Armistice, signed with the Allied Powers on October 30, 1918 initiated the last historical chapter of the Ottoman Empire known as the Armistice Period (1918-1923). İstanbul came under occupation by the British Army starting on November 13, 1918.¹⁰¹ Following this, the French and the Greek Armies occupied various parts of Western Anatolia. These powers remained in occupation of the city and other parts of the former Empire until their departure in September 1923 ended the Armistice Period. This occupation of the key Ottoman cities of İstanbul and İzmir helped to initiate the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Nur Bilge Criss, *İstanbul under Allied Occupation 1918-1923*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰² Mehmet Temel, *İsgal Yıllarında İstanbul'un Sosyal Durumu*, Ankara: Kultur Bakanlığı, 1998, pp. 1-10.

Interestingly enough, the Armistice Period was also important for the development of cinema and cinema going in this area of the world. It was during this period when subjects of the Ottoman Empire began to make their own films, almost twenty years after the introduction of film into the Ottoman society. Unsurprisingly, the initial films developed during this time were newsreels depicting scenes both from the battlefield and from behind the lines, chronicling the years of war and the national struggle. The majority of the early films fit into one of these raw footage formats until the 1917 release of *The Claw* (*Pençe*) directed by Sedat Simavi, the first feature-length narrative film produced in İstanbul. The story of early filmmaking is closely tied to that of the country's state of war and the formation of the early Republic. This early filmmaking and its environs is the subject of this chapter.

3.1 Competing Ideologies

The late Ottoman period was witness to different and competing schools of thought as to what political and national forces would dominate the future of the region. As was noted earlier in Chapter One, these ideologies, such as Ottomanism, Islamism, Westernism and Turkism, along with the national aspirations of different ethnic groups, were all grasping for power and claiming legitimacy at this time. Indeed, "as the CUP [Committee of Union and Progress] became increasingly penetrated by Turkist ideas, the difference between "Ottoman" and "Turkish" became increasingly blurred."¹⁰³ During this time nationalist movements and proto-nationalist sentiments became gradually more significant. Thus, many of the political and intellectual developments of the era projected these aspirations onto the screen via some of the works of the early Ottoman cinema.

¹⁰³ Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 166.

Some of these early films highlight proto-nationalist and patriotic concerns. The theme or subject matter of the films refers to the ideas and values which were or have come to be associated with certain groups of communities with goals of establishing a nation state or independence according to their point of view. The complex question of the various nationalist movements during this period will not be explored in detail in this text. Thus, the usage of the terms “nationalist”, “patriotic” and “proto-nationalist” in the context of early cinema in this region signifies themes found within the films that reflected the cultural aspirations and ideologies of the communities at this period. For the purpose of this text, the specific proto-nationalist aspirations considered most intently are those that focus on the Turkism which will eventually led to the emergence of Republic of Turkey.

This chapter seeks not to portray every detail of the early filmmaking in the context of the nationalist sentiments and movements of the period in the region, but to take a glimpse at how the filmmaking was affected by these historical events in the case of the late Ottomans. In fact, during the Armistice Period the first film production institutions were state-owned and their works were dedicated to the advancement of the war effort. These state agencies formed organizations for filmmaking and also viewed it as a possible source of income generation for military expenses. Linking these early films to these efforts and understanding them within this larger historical milieu will help to understand the formation of early Ottoman cinema.

3.2 The First Domestic Films

Not only did the war and Armistice Period signal the end of the Empire but also the emergence of domestic film production in the region. A newsreel filmed during this period

entitled *The Destruction of the Russian Monument in Ayastefanos* (*Ayastefanos'taki Rus Abidesi'nin Yıkılışı*) has been called the first "Turkish" film by many contemporary film historians. *The Destruction of the Russian Monument in Ayastefanos* was reportedly filmed on November 14, 1914 by Reserve Officer Fuad Bey (Uzkınay).¹⁰⁴ This early footage has not survived to the present day and contemporary resources are far too thin to allow a detailed construction of its existence as the first "Turkish" film.¹⁰⁵ A cautiously interpretation of the limited literature may lead one to make the following conclusions: The Russian Monument in the Ayastefanos district of İstanbul - which was built by the Russian army to show the high water mark of their forces during their sieges of İstanbul of the Russian-Ottoman War (1877-1878) - was destroyed in 1914 by the public.¹⁰⁶ Chronicling the public destruction of this monument, a symbol of the Russian victory and threat against Ottoman sovereignty was deemed important by members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Reserve Officer Fuad Bey, who previously screened films and initiated the opening of cinema-houses in İstanbul, was reportedly appointed to record this important moment by the leaders of CUP. Evidently, from this early stage in the struggle for power and important symbols of victory and sovereignty, the power of the cinema and its new technology were well understood. From then on cinema was gradually used more and more frequently for the purpose of recording important political and military moments in the region by the state.

¹⁰⁴ Fuad Bey (Uzkınay) (1888-1956) worked as a director, cameraman and producer during the early years of filmmaking in the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey.

¹⁰⁵ There are so many different accounts about the loss of the first "Turkish" newsreel. For detailed information see Dilek Kaya- Mutlu, "Ayastefanos'taki Rus Abidesi: Kim Yikti Kim Cektı Kim Yazdı", in: *Seyir*, no. 3, İstanbul, (Bahar 2006), pp. 12-21.; Rekin Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, M. Thomen & O. Celiktemel (tran.), İstanbul: Oglak, 2008, p. 17.; Burcak Evren, *Değişimin Donemecinde Türk Sineması*, İstanbul: Leya Yayıncılık, 1997.; Giovanni Scognomilo, *Türk Sinema Tarihi 1896-1959*, vol. 1, İstanbul: Kabalci Yayınevi, 1998.

¹⁰⁶ Ayastefanos refers to today's Yesilkoy district in İstanbul. Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, p. 16.

Interestingly enough, another newsreel filmed in the Empire predates Fuad Bey's *The Destruction of the Russian Monument in Ayastefanos*. This is Yannakis and Miltos Manakis' footage of *Sultan Mehmed Reşad V's Visit to Selanik and Monastir* on May 1911.¹⁰⁷ The Manakis Brothers, considered ethnically as Macedonians, were the subjects of the Ottoman Empire until the end of Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and they made newsreels covering a number of significant events throughout the Balkans and İstanbul during this time period. For one to get a sense of just how problematic the study of this transition period may be the case of which was the first film of the country is an interesting case. Were the Manakis Brothers from a different ethnic group or had they recorded an event more in line with national struggle themes, such as Fuad Bey's *The Destruction of the Russian Monument*, the portrayal of their place in the film history of the region might be quite different. The strategic importance of claiming that *The Destruction of the Russian Monument* was the first "Turkish" film outweighed and even continues to outweigh for some scholars.

¹⁰⁷ Christos K. Christodoulou, *The Manakis Brothers: the Greek Pioneers of the Balkanic Cinema*, Thessaloniki: Organization for the Cultural Capital of Europe, 1997, pp. 119- 120. Detailed content of the footage: "Most of the film footage shot by the Manakis Brothers filmed the Sultan's journey...Every event has been filmed in such detail that the scenes flow [in the following order]: Number 4: "The sultan at the window of the prefecture with schoolchildren, soldiers and others marching past". Number 6: "Hurriyet [Freedom]. Towns-people, troops and others marching past, before the Sultan in Thessaloniki". Number 7: "Train, Thessaloniki – Naousa – Amyntaio bridges. The Sultan en route to Monastir". Number 8: "The Sultan at the mosque, coming out of the mosque, the Toumbe Café". Number 10: "March before the Sultan in Thessaloniki, the Sultan at the Bechtsina Café and arriving in a carriage". Number 18: "The Sultan at the railway station in Monastir, before his departure from Monastir". Number 27: "The Sultan's reception by the people of Monastir, with the parade of the Viziers". Number 47: "The Sultan's ship at Thessaloniki". Number 61: "Festivities with Sultan Reshid". Number 64: "The Sultan in Thessaloniki on his way to the Bechtsina Café". Number 66: "The Sultan at Monastir, Toumbe Café, the Thessaloniki-Monastir train". Number 67: "Young girls and troops in Thessaloniki marching past". Sultan's visits filmed in 12 different footages by the Manakis Brothers in May 1911.

3.3 Film Production Institutions and Newsreels

The first national institution for filmmaking was initiated by Enver Paşa, when in his capacity as War Minister, he established the state-owned Central Military Office of Cinema (MOFD, *Merkez Ordu Film Dairesi*) in 1915 in İstanbul. The MOFD aimed to assist the military through the production of film screenings for fundraising. It was probably during his earlier stay in Germany for political reasons that Enver Paşa realized the benefits that an office of cinema could bring to the war effort. During his stay there he saw many short films of war and various newsreels filmed by the German Army at the battlefields. Upon his return, Enver Paşa founded this organization to do the same for his country's forces.¹⁰⁸ Sigmund Weinberg was appointed as the general manager and the Reserve Officer Fuad Bey served as his assistant.¹⁰⁹ The MOFD had limited technical tools imported from Western Europe and its budget was limited.

The cameramen of the MOFD worked at the battlefields and in 1916 filmed several newsreels such as: *The Battle of Canakkale*, *The Funeral of Von der Goltz Paşa*, *The 19 Squads of Galicia Operation*.¹¹⁰ The products of the MOFD, newsreels from the battles, were screened for the public at the Military Museum (Askeri Muze) in the Sultanahmet district of İstanbul and money raised during the screenings was sent to support the military.¹¹¹ Later, the MOFD attempted to produce other types of films like the comedy

¹⁰⁸ Rekin Teksoy (ed.). "Türkiye'de Sinema", in: *Arkin Sinema Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1975, p. 453.; Nijat Özön, *Sinema El Kitabı*, İstanbul: Elif Yayınları, 1964, p. 114.; Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, pp. 16, 134.

¹⁰⁹ Özön, *Sinema*, p. 114.

¹¹⁰ Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, p. 135.

¹¹¹ Teksoy, "Türkiye'de Sinema", p. 453.

Horror the Nutroaster (Leblebici Horhor Ağa, 1916); but the film could not be completed when many of the actors were called to serve in the military.¹¹²

Another state-owned charitable institution - the Society of National Defense (MMC, *Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*) - started to make films in 1917 while supporting the national struggle. This institution, similar to the MOFD, produced newsreels throughout the country. After the war, the Allied Powers appropriated the resources of the Ottoman Empire, including the MOFD and MMC. For this reason all of the MOFD's equipment, staff and resources were transferred to a newly established organization, The Society of Disabled Veterans (MGC, *Malul Gaziler Cemiyeti*) which was providing help to the veterans.¹¹³

The first productions of state-owned institutions were not appreciated in the artistic and aesthetics terms. Cinema-goers could choose between watching domestic films as well as international ones. Most intellectuals criticized the domestic films of the MMC harshly. One example, published in literary journal of spectacles, *Temaşa*, comes from author Halide Edip (Adivar) dated September 26, 1918:

“[Earlier] we noted that the Society of National Defense, [MMC, *Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti*] makes newsreels, yet very bad ones, until finding a specialist on this issue, the organization should stop filming and wasting money and this difficult task should be delayed until a more serious and attentive approach is introduced.”¹¹⁴

Halide Edip goes on to say that the productions of MMC would have gradually caused the loss of “Turkish national dignity” if more films were produced in the future in the same

¹¹² Ibid, p.18. “Approximately 15 percent of the entire population, or almost one out of two adult males outside the civil service, was called to arms. By 1918, Ottoman casualties had reached the appalling figure of 725,000 (325,000 dead and 400,000 wounded).” See for detailed information Şükrü M. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 181.

¹¹³ Nijat Özön, “Türk Sinemasına Toplu Bir Bakış”, in: *Türk Dili*, vol. 17, no. 196, (1 January 1968), p. 269.

¹¹⁴ Halide Edip, “Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti Riyaset-i Muhteremesine”, in: *Temaşa*, no: 9, (26 September 1918 [1334]), p.11.

way. Interestingly, she highlights MMC's previous collaboration with Greek and Bulgarian filmmakers and compares their successful films to the more recent situation of money loss and poor products.¹¹⁵ The MMC replied that this "arrogant" attitude saddened the organization and as a state organization MMC would protect "Turkishness" and "national dignity" with their films.¹¹⁶ In spite of the harsh criticisms, the state-owned film organizations continued film making and eventually began producing feature-length films with more developed narratives, while maintaining their goals of promoting the nationalist concerns.

3.4 The feature-length narrative films

The first feature-length narrative film of the Society of National Defense was entitled *The Claw* (*Pençe*, Sedat Simavi, 1917). *The Claw*, based on author Mehmet Rauf's play of the same name, was a satire criticizing the institution of marriage. Consequently, one gets a sense of that the film targeted a high-society audience who would have the knowledge of the play. It was produced by the MMC and distributed to raise fund for the military. While *The Claw* does earn a place in film history as being the first locally made and produced feature-film, it was not well received by the audiences or critics of the day. In fact, an article published in 1918 in *Temaşa*, reveals that all the early filmmaking organizations in the country that started as state-sponsored organizations met with unsuccessful endings after their move to feature-length narratives.¹¹⁷

Compared to the traveling newsreels and feature-length films from Western Europe and Northern America, these examples of early domestic films were fraught with

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

¹¹⁶ No Name, "Müdafaa-i Milliye'nin Mektub-u Cevabi", in: *Temaşa*, no: 10, (17 October, 1918 [1334]), p. [N.P.].

¹¹⁷ No Name, "Memlekette Sinema Hayatı", in: *Temaşa*, no. 6, (15 August 1918 [1334]), p.7.

technical problems and other hallmarks of inexperience. The *Temaşa* article went on to harshly dissect *The Claw* with words, representative of a number of critiques it received. “The technical mistakes lower the first national film to a coarse quality” and caused many in the audience to leave the cinema-house in shame. The author does go on to mention that the “[MMC, the Society of National Defense,] is filming the most auspicious events of our history, a historical epic, the Alemdar Vakasi.”¹¹⁸ The anonymous author follows the disappointed review with some tips about how to make a good film. The article states that, “a good director with a qualified cameraman, and a proficient décor and period costumes should be provided” to ensure film quality.¹¹⁹ It is obvious from these comments and the audience reaction that *The Claw* did not acclaim much appreciation at the time when it was first released.

The Society of National Defense followed with an adventure film called *The Spy* (*Casus*, Sedat Simavi), released in 1917, which portrays spying events during World War I. The film starred actors from Armenian and Turkish origins such as Bedia Muvahhit, Eliza Binemeciyan, Nureddin Sefkati and Rasit Riza. Having Turkish Muslim women starred in the films was an important step for Turkish origin actresses to break the gender barrier and act in the domestic films. Bedia Muvahhit was an example of this situation. While authorities opposed this development, artists, intellectuals and press of the time celebrated women’s participation in national film making. For instance, author Vedat Örf illustrates his excitement in his article entitled “Bedia Muvahhit Hanım”. For him, Turkish

¹¹⁸Ibid, p.7. *Alemdar Vakasi* was a resistance movement organized by the Janissaries against the Grandvezier Alemdar Mustafa Paşa in 1808 in İstanbul. The film was planned to be shot by Sedat Simavi in 1917, yet due to the war conditions it was not completed.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

women could contribute greatly to the development of national theatre and domestic filmmaking.¹²⁰

Following above-mentioned films, in 1921 the MMC produced three comedies chronicling the comic character of the clumsy Bican Efendi, *Bican Efendi the Butler* (*Bican Efendi Vekilharc*), *Bican Efendi the School Master* (*Bican Efendi Mektep Hocası*) and *Bican Efendi's Dream* (*Bican Efendi'nin Ruyası*) were directed by Şadi Fikret Karagözoğlu.

Up until this point, most early films exemplified a variety of genres such as comedy, adventure and drama. Interestingly, most of the works were couched in events of the times, driven by proto-nationalistic themes, which were reinforced by the production of newsreels and other information from the battlefields. In this vein, the Society of Disabled Veterans filmed the public protests against the occupation forces. The protest organized in İstanbul against the Greek occupation of İzmir was filmed by the MMC on May 15, 1919 and is entitled *Protest in Fatih against İzmir's Occupation*. This protest also marked the start of the National Movement by Mustafa Kemal and his supporters to resist the occupation of Anatolian lands by foreign troops. Another public protest against the occupation forces was filmed at the Sultanahmet district of İstanbul on May 23, 1919.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Vedat Örf, "Sanatkarlarımızı Tanıyalım Bedia Muvahhit Hanım", in: *Sinema Postası*, no: 8, Hikmet Nazım (ed.), (21 February 1922 [1338]), p. 1.

¹²¹ Teksoy, "Türkiye'de Sinema", p. 455.



Figure 3.1- Public protest at Sultanahmet, 1919. (*Cumhuriyet*, 1997)

Many intellectuals and writers of the day supported the use of cinema as a propaganda tool. For example in the journal of arts and ideas, *Yarın*, the columnist Cevdet Reşid suggests that “benefiting from cinema is an important task for us. It is time for introducing the history of Turks, the essence of the Oriental spirit, and for wiping out the stain upon us [via cinema].”¹²²

In addition to celebrating these rationalist themes, some attempts to offer more objective film criticism also appeared. In an article written in 1919 by Kemal Emine, he attempts to analyze the footages and narratives filmed by the Society of Disabled Veterans. Emine recounts the important tools and steps of filmmaking; first the investment, a good subject, and qualified decorations for the eastern styled settings. He claims that a good cameraman can not guarantee a good result without having these tools. Additionally, Emine emphasizes the recent success of Fuad Bey working on 2500-

¹²² Cevdet Reşid, “Sinema Hakkında Notlar I”, in: *Yarın*, no. 8, (1 December 1921 [1337]), p. 12.

metre length film and adds that, “although there are some things left out in his works... our only hope is that Fuad Bey would continue making film and show the success of cinema for our country.”¹²³ Obviously he believes that his full support and appreciation for Reserve Officer Fuad Bey is very important for the sake of country’s future national films.

3.5 The Governess: An Example of “Nationalist Sentiments”

Comparisons to other countries’ filmmaking experiences helps to better understand the history of early Ottoman cinema. Indeed, the situation of filmmaking at this time is, in one way, similar to the early formation of Latin American filmmaking. Ana M. Lopez argues that “the cinema fed the national self-confidence that its own modernity was in “progress” by enabling its viewers to share and participate in the experience of modernity as it developed somewhere else.”¹²⁴ In other words, early films contributed to this worldwide cinema realm and a feeling of participation in that realm. In the late Ottoman context, there was an urgent need for the filmmakers to contribute to this “progress” and use the novelty of cinema to identify and affirm themselves while the country was under occupation and turmoil was taking place.

The study of early film narratives in the Ottoman context may expose the themes of proto-national or ethnic representations. For example, the choice of themes in the early films such as historical epics, newsreels of protests against the occupation and cultural representations may have helped the creators and spectators of the films understand their role in the changes taking place. Much of these productions created in the early

¹²³ Kemal Emine, “Bizde Sinemacılık”, in: *Temaşa*, no. 15, (1 April 1919 [1335]), pp. 1-2.

¹²⁴ Ana M. Lopez, “Early Cinema and Modernity in Latin America”, in: *Cinema Journal*, 40, no. 1, (Fall 2000), p. 53.

years of cinema acted as an intermediary for the nationalist discourse and heralded the resistance movement during the Armistice Period.

When viewed from the national and cultural representation one particular film stands as a prime example, a feature-length production of The Society of Disabled Veterans, *The Governess* (*Mürebbiye*, Ahmet Fehim, 1919). *The Governess* was based on the novel of Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's and filmed by the famous actor Ahmet Fehim Efendi. "Aside from Ahmet Fehim, actors from Armenian and Turkish origins such as Behzat Haki Butak, Raşit Rıza Samako, Mrs. Kalitea, Bayzar Fasulyeciyan starred in the film, while Fuad Bey handled the camera."¹²⁵ The main protagonist of the film, Angel, is a young and "morally corrupt" French governess. In this black and white, silent film Angel lives in the mansion of a wealthy Turkish family and eventually begins to tempt the males. Angel is, then, opposed and confronted by the "upstanding morals" of the Turkish family. While the whole country was under the occupation of Allied Powers, the film was censored by the occupied forces in Anatolia after the initial screenings of İstanbul.¹²⁶ In fact, *The Governess* was an example of passive national resistance taken against the Allied Powers. However, the power exercised by the Allied Powers during the Armistice Period became more visible with this censorship related to the distribution of local films in the country.

An article describing the premier of *The Governess* claims that it was the first work of "The Society of Disabled Veterans Film Factory" (*Malulin Guzât Sinema Film Fabrikasinin İlk Eseri*) and depicted a period of "our national life and national morality and

¹²⁵ Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's (1864-1944) works include novels, short stories, plays and also translations. *Mürebbiye* was first published in 1895. Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, p. 18.

¹²⁶ Teksoy, "Türkiye'de Sinema", p. 455.

customs “with the help of technology and equipment.”¹²⁷ One way to interpret these lines is that the emphasis on morality and customs was a way to show “the inferior morals” of another: the occupying French forces. Undoubtedly, national consciousness was more visible after the defeat and occupation began in the country. According to *Temaşa*, *The Governess* won a great popular appreciation. The first screening in İstanbul consisted of fifty to sixty people, including the War Minister Enver Paşa, the author Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar, journalists of the daily newspapers, a number of women, other prominent figures of the time and the film crew. The article about the screening written in *Temaşa* claims the audience was happy to see their true “national identity” projected onto the screen.¹²⁸

3.6 Muhsin Ertuğrul: The Making of Domestic Cinema

The rise of film director and actor Muhsin Ertuğrul was a turning point during the early cinema years before the proclamation of Republic. Although he had left no lasting artistic impressions in film history, he shot twenty nine films in total in Turkey, Germany and the USSR respectively.¹²⁹

He had always been interested in film making while staging plays for the İstanbul's City Theatre for many years. For this reason, during the war years he went to Berlin in order to learn the details and techniques of filmmaking and bring his experiences and skills back to his home country upon his return.¹³⁰ The Stamboul Film Production Company which Ertuğrul founded with Nabi Zeki in Berlin produced his first film *The*

¹²⁷ E. G. [?], “Murebbiye Filmi”, in: *Temaşa*, no.17, (1 June 1919 [1335]), p. 1.

¹²⁸ Ibid, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁹ Teksoy, “Türkiye'de Sinema”, p. 458.

¹³⁰ Muhsin Ertuğrul, *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın*, İstanbul: Dr. Nejat Eczacıbaşı Vakfı Yayınları, 1989, p. 247.

Samson (*Izdirap*, Muhsin Ertuğrul, 1919). “For my first film, I was the director, producer and the main character all at the same time” writes Ertuğrul in his memoirs.¹³¹ Yet, this adaptation of Maurice Level's novel *L'Angoisse* could not capture much acclaim from the Istanbulian audience. The literary journal *Dergah* illustrates how this first feature-length film was approached and the columnist harshly criticizes *The Samson's* failure.

“Muhsin Ertuğrul's “Izdirap,” to what useless junk have we subjected our eyes and ears? If Mr. Muhsin Ertuğrul were to abandon the stage for “Izdirap,” there would be no one who wouldn't be saddened. So much labor wasted in vain, and the investments are wiped out. Even if we scream “this is not appreciated and there is no support,” it is of no use. Where is the art?”¹³²



Figure 3.2- Muhsin Ertuğrul Bey from “Samson”. (*Temaşa*, 1920)¹³³

As a devoted follower of cinema, Muhsin Ertuğrul contributed to the emergence of national cinema in a great length for his seventeen years of prolific work. Although his films did not receive popular appeal from the audience, he encouraged entrepreneurs Kemal and Şakir (Seden) Brothers to start the first private film production company. With his support Kemal Film Studio was founded in 1922. One of his most successful films, *The Shirt of Fire* (*Ateşten Gömlek*, 1923, Muhsin Ertuğrul) is an adaptation of Halide

¹³¹ Ibid, pp. 273-275.

¹³² N.D., “Sinematograf”, in: *Dergah*, vol. 13, no: 29, (20 June 1922 [1338]), pp. 63-64.

¹³³ *Temaşa*, no: 22, (1920 [1336]), p.14.

Edip's novel of the same title. Ertuğrul's interest in portraying the Turkish War of Independence in *The Shirt of Fire* is not a surprising decision since it was released only six months before the proclamation of Republic of Turkey.¹³⁴ While the film chronicles the war years and struggle for a Republic it clearly celebrates the victory of making a modern nation-state. Additionally, the film was significant in terms of starring two Turkish Muslim women, Bedia Muvahhit and Neyyire Neyir, in leading roles. As was noted earlier, Muslim women were prohibited from acting on stage and in films due to the religious and legal regulations; hence this event was innovative and important part of the early film history in the region. No doubt, *The Shirt of Fire* reflected the patriotic emotions and sense of collectivism as a nation that was evident at that time.

3.7 Cinema-houses and cinema-going in İstanbul

As was noted earlier in Chapter Two, the venues for the newly-arrived films were small store-front cinema-houses, coffeehouses, theatre salons and museums until the first permanent cinema-houses were established in the 1910s. Even though the first screenings were exhibited along with variety theater shows and traveling cinemas, the opening of permanent cinema-houses in İstanbul initiated a wider distribution of films and helped to target a larger audience and increase attendance numbers.

During World War I there were approximately twenty-five cinema-houses in İstanbul. The ticket prices ranged from 3 to 7 piastres according to seating classes available in the cinema-houses.¹³⁵ While most of the film historians' data show similar figures for the number of cinema-houses in these years, a survey conducted by the

¹³⁴ Teksoy, *Turkish Cinema*, p. 25.

¹³⁵ Mustafa Gökmen, *Eski İstanbul Sinemaları*, İstanbul: İstanbul Kitaplığı Yayınları, 1991, pp. 21-24. In European languages "piastres" refer to the "kuruş" which was also a unit of currency in the Ottoman Empire until 1844 and later on Turkish gold lira was introduced.

British occupation forces indicates a rise in cinema-houses right before the Armistice Period.¹³⁶ In May 1921 there were approximately thirty-two permanent and twelve temporary cinema-houses in İstanbul, as merely twenty six of them is shown in Table 3.1. According to the survey of British forces, the cinema-houses were poorly built structures “according to Western standards,” but were improving due to larger audiences and more lucrative business. The survey also stated that “the films shown are French, Italian, German, and American,” and, “on the whole they are cheap and sensational.”¹³⁷

Name	Location	Seating Capacity	Classification
Magic	Pera	1005	1 st Class
Etoile	Pera	541	1 st Class
Cosmograph	Pera	900	2 nd Class
Russo-American	Pera	342	2 nd Class
Luxemburg	Pera	460	1 st Class
Ciné Palace	Pera	482	1 st Class
Eclair	Pera	452	1 st Class
Central	Pera	350	2 nd Class
Cinema Orientaux	Pera	466	2 nd Class
Ciné Amphi	Pera	1030	1 st Class
Pangalti	Pera	450	2 nd Class
Cinema Variété	Pera	752	2 nd Class
Majestic	Pera	200	3 rd Class
Cinema Ali Efendi	Old İstanbul	280	2 nd Class
Cinema Kemal Bey	Old İstanbul	338	2 nd Class
Alemdar	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Cinema Milli	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Military Museum	Old İstanbul	300	1 st Class
Cinema Ertugrul	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Shark Sinemasi	Old İstanbul	500	1 st Class
Cinema Kumkapi	Old İstanbul	300	2 nd Class
Cinema Taksim	Old İstanbul	300	2 nd Class
Cinema Appollon	Uskudar	400	1 st Class
Taksim Garden	Pera	400	2 nd Class
Cinema Tepé	Uskudar	1000	2 nd Class
Layla Bahcesi	Old İstanbul	----	2 nd Class

Table 3.1- A List of 26 cinema-houses in May 1921. (Johnson, Clarence R. 1922)

¹³⁶ Clarence Richard Johnson, *Constantinople To-Day or The Pathfinder Survey of Constantinople A Study in Oriental Social Life*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922, pp. 264-265.

¹³⁷ Ibid, pp. 264-265.

A local film journal, *Sinema Yıldızı*, also published a survey about cinema-houses all over the world. The survey was conducted by Americans in 1924 and gives the number of cinema-houses located in the entirety of the countries surveyed.¹³⁸ Interestingly, both of the surveys tallied thirty-two permanent cinema-houses; yet one is for İstanbul, the latter for the entire country. Below, Table 3.2 shows the number of cinema-houses in different countries around world as it was published by *Sinema Yıldızı*. Additionally the journal calls on the help of its readers living in Anatolia to find out how many cinema-houses are in the entire country. The journal asks the readers to report back the name, owner, location and profile of the cinema-houses as well as list of the films, general public opinion about the cinema-going activities and any suggestions of the readers concerning these venues.¹³⁹

Obviously this minor attempt to find out the general conditions of cinema-going, the profile and taste of spectators can be perceived as an attempt to better understand cinema-going as it was still being formed by discrete entities in different parts of the country in the mid-1920s. Additionally, it was difficult to maintain basic information of all conditions due to the lack of unified regulation and state or entrepreneurship formation. In brief, it can be concluded that from During World War I there was a gradual rise in the number of cinema-houses until the year of 1924, yet the available evidence still shows that there are some discrepancies.

¹³⁸ No Name, "Sinema İstatistikleri", in: *Sinema Yıldızı*, vol. 1, no: 1, Mehmet Rauf (ed.), (1924 [1340]), p. 7.

¹³⁹ No Name, "Kari ve Karielerimize, Bir Rica", in: *Sinema Yıldızı*, vol. 1, no: 1, Mehmet Rauf (ed.), (1924 [1340]), p. 14.

Country	Number of Cinema-houses
Austria	800
Belgium	778
Canada	750
Czechoslovakia	23
England	3000
France	2400
Germany	3721
Holland	227
Hungary	180
Italy	2200
Central America	500
Poland	300
Russia	3500
Scandinavia	703
South America	1200
Spain	156
Switzerland	123
The Balkans	23
Turkey	32
Yugoslavia	117

Table 3.2 – A List of number of cinema-houses in 1924 in the selected countries. (*Sinema Yıldızı*, 1924 [1340])

The increasing number of cinema-houses, in the above-mentioned statistics, no doubt supports claims that the demand for cinema was also growing by the audiences in İstanbul. The available memoirs, film and art magazines and novels suggest that especially during the Armistice Period, with the rising number of permanent cinema-houses, women in particular became significantly avid followers of cinema. These women were probably from the upper class residents of İstanbul, who had the ways and means to access the cinema-houses; be it for encountering more modern and liberating ideas or purely a diversion afforded to them by their high economic status.

Cinema-houses began to cater to the women audience, appealing to women on the basis of consumer products, beauty tips and star gaze. Most of the women's magazines, fashion journals and daily newspapers of the time describe the egalitarian

society, liberated women in chic dresses and athletic bodies while advertising the film lists of the various cinema-houses and pointing out the beauty of stars such as Mary Pickford and Agnes Ayres.¹⁴⁰ A fashion journal, *Süs*, exemplifies this matter in the announcement aimed at “fashionable ladies” for the opening of a new cinema-house. The announcement claims that “it is highly recommended that the fashionable ladies visit the Elhamra Cinema and see the films before making their winter outfit and accessory choices.”¹⁴¹ A close reading of this article suggests that “if you go to the Elhamra Cinema, you will be in Paris.”



Figure 3.3- Saray Cinema-house [Ciné Palace]. (Atatürk Library Archives)

3.8 Depiction of Cinema in Novels of the Period

The novel is a powerful tool for highlighting the social milieu of the time, because literature in the context of the late Ottoman era is deeply rooted in realism. Thus, this part

¹⁴⁰ For detailed information see No Name, “Banyo Mevsimi ve Çıplak Ayaklar, in: *Sinema Yıldızı*, vol. 1, no: 3, (24 June, 1924 [1340]), pp. 6-7.; No Name, “Mary Pickford”, in: *Sinema Yıldızı*, vol. 1, no: 1, (1924 [1340]), p. 11.; No Name, “Agnes Ayres”, in: *Sinema Yıldızı*, vol. 1, no: 1, (1924 [1340]), p. 13.

¹⁴¹ No Name, “Elhamra Sinemasında Paris’in Son Modası”, in: *Süs*, no: 14, Selami İzzet (ed.), Tanin Matbaası, (15 September 1923 [1339], p. [N.P.].

of the chapter will examine the depictions of cinema in novels of the period. Peyami Safa's novel *The Would Be Girls* (*Sözde Kızlar*, 1923) depicts the life of a traditional and conservative young girl, Mebrure, in the midst of the Greek and Turkish War of 1919. Eventually the heroine encounters other young girls in İstanbul who tend to be more liberated and modernized. One of them, Berna, is portrayed as a fervent follower of cinema-houses in the Şehzadebaşı district of İstanbul. Berna wishes to be an actress and imitates the life-style and beauty tips of stars. The author illustrates the night life of İstanbul centered on the cinema-houses. He describes the large crowds of "enchanted and dreamy spectators" coming out of the cinema-houses and gives details of that lifestyle. Cinema-going became such a staple of entertainment life that even cinema was set the stage of this novel.¹⁴² Another novel, *Cinema Crazy Girl* (*Sinema Delisi Kız*, 1935), portrays another account of a woman who enjoys going to cinema for the male-gaze and eventually looks for men in life that resemble the stars in the films.¹⁴³ Cinema-going and its environs became common themes of the fiction in the early twentieth-century literature and helped to shape debates on traditional and modernist views in the society.

As a woman author, Halide Edip criticizes the common belief of the time that there were two groups of women in the society: the "realist" hard-worker and who join the science clubs and guilds as opposed to the "ignorant, child-neglector", living one day at the cinema-house and the other day at the theaters in Pera.¹⁴⁴ There were also many advocates of the first group of women as the model woman of the society. These people

¹⁴² Peyami Safa, *Sözde Kızlar*, İstanbul: Ötüken, 1995, pp. 7, 50.

¹⁴³ Server Bedi, *Sinema Delisi Kız*, İstanbul: Semih Lütfi Kitabevi, 1935. [Server Bedi is a pseudonym for Peyami Safa.]

¹⁴⁴ Halide Edip, "Bir Mukayese", in: *Yarın*, no. 28, (27 April 1922 [1338]), p. [N.P.].

generally felt that cinema would eventually become dangerous due to the Western mores that women saw projected onto the screen. This was reminiscent of Miriam Hansen's descriptions of the early American films which also dramatized "the fate of the fallen women, the cult of true womanhood."¹⁴⁵ In the context of the İstanbullian women audience, *The Governess* (*Mürebbiye*, Ahmet Fehim, 1919) was a good example of these types of characters.



Figure 3.4- Hale Cinema-house in Kadıköy. (*Le Courrier du Cinéma*, 1922)

Another example, a collection of anecdotes written by Refik Halid, shows how the society had changed its taste in visual pleasures from *Karagöz*, to Western drama, then to cinema from the time of Sultan Abdülaziz (r.1861-1876), Sultan Abdülhamid II (r.1876-

¹⁴⁵ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, London: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 120.

1909) and the mid-1920s respectively.¹⁴⁶ In *The Memoirs of Ago Paşa* (*Ago Paşa'nın Hatıratı*, 1918), Refik Halid depicts the newly emerged nation-state's capital, Ankara, as the high-tech center for cinema with monitors broadcasting the events of five different continents. Either this was an ironic way for Refik Halid to criticize the technologically limited milieu of Ankara at the time or his future dream for the new capital.¹⁴⁷ Yet, it is the way in which cinema captured the imagination of many and was upheld as an example of the spectacles of modern technology. Most of the authors of the time portrayed cinema within the realm of the country's progress and used positivist outlooks as found in the examples mentioned.

Conclusion

During the Armistice Period (1918-1923), the state-owned institutions and a number of individuals began to cast their own realities and viewpoints onto the big screen through newsreels and fictions. These productions covered the war years as well as the national struggle. Additionally, some of these early films highlight proto-nationalist and patriotic concerns. It was also at this time that women became more visible in the social realm and more engaged in the pleasures of cinema. In sum, despite the ongoing turmoil, cinema appealed to certain audiences.

¹⁴⁶ Refik Halid, *Üç Nesil Üç Hayat*, İstanbul: Semih Lütfi Kitabevi, [1943], pp. 34-39, 91-95.

¹⁴⁷ Refik Halid, *Ago Paşa'nın Hatıratı*, İstanbul: Semih Lütfi Kitabevi, 1939, p. 29.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the introduction of cinema, cinema-going and filmmaking in İstanbul during the late Ottoman era in relation to the competing ideologies of the time, principally modernization and nationalism. Broadly, it has portrayed the first film screenings, profiled the audience and the cinema-going experience. The interrelation between the Western forms of art and local forms of art has been discussed. The importance of the foundation of state-owned film production institutions, from newsreels to feature-length narratives has also been explained. The main aim was to explore how the transformations in the society of the time were reflected in cinema during the years of turmoil and change; what films represented for certain audiences and how the novelty of cinema was understood vis-à-vis the ideology of modernization, technology and progress.

In Chapter One, the interrelation of modernity and cinema was examined within a broader historical perspective. It was argued that the introduction and evolution of cinema in the İstanbulian society was connected to the broader transformations that were taking place at that time. An understanding of various issues during the last decade of the late Ottoman era, with a focus on the modernist framework, helps to understand the linkages between society, technology and cinema.

The interplay between local performance arts and the newly arrived Western arts were examined in Chapter Two vis-à-vis the ideas of the members of the day and the contemporary approaches. Additionally, Chapter Two gave an overview of the first film

screenings that took place in the Pera district of İstanbul and introduced the existing issues on these screenings in today's film history.

Chapter Three showed that the history of early filmmaking is closely tied to that of the country's state of war and the formation of the early Republic. This chapter suggested that the initial films developed during the Armistice Period served for the state-propaganda and highlighted proto-nationalist and patriotic concerns of the time. Moreover, the changing profile of cinema audience at this time showed the representation of cinema within the context of changing tastes and attitudes.

By and large, the preliminary assumptions made in this thesis show that the historical study of early cinema in the late Ottoman era provides an important glimpse into the social changes and ideologies of the period within the distinct framework of modernity and nationalism. At the same time, cinema - the curtain of dreams - appealed to the audiences, as they sought an amusing experience while the imperial capital was under turmoil.

TIMELINE OF RELATED EVENTS

- 1299 Osman I founds Ottoman Empire (1299-1324)
- 1413 Mehmed I becomes Sultan (1413-1421)
- 1451 Mehmed II becomes Sultan (1451-1481)
- 1453 Mehmed II takes Constantinople; end of the Byzantine Empire
- 1520 Suleyman I becomes Sultan (1520-1566)
- 1566 Selim II becomes Sultan (1566-1574)
- 1683 Ottoman force besiege Vienna
- 1789 Selim III becomes Sultan (1789-1807)
- 1808 Mahmud II becomes Sultan (1808-1839)
- 1830 Greece gains independence
- 1839 Tanzimat reforms begins (1839-1871)
- 1853 The Crimean War begins
- 1859 Dolmabahçe Palace theatre is built
- 1876 Abdulhamid II becomes Sultan (1876-1909)
- 1876 First Ottoman Constitution
- 1877 Russo-Turkish War begins (1877–1878)
- 1889 Yıldız Palace theatre is built
- 1895 First *cinématographe* screenings in Paris
- 1896 First *cinématographe* screenings in Istanbul
- 1908 Young Turks Revolution
- 1908 Bulgaria declares independence
- 1908 Opening up Pathé Cinema in Istanbul

- 1909 Sultan Abdulhamid II is overthrown by CUP
- 1909 Mehmed V becomes Sultan (1909-1918)
- 1912 Balkan Wars (1912-1913)
- 1913 Enver Pasha leads the coup
- 1914 World War I begins (1914-1918)
- 1915 Central Military Office of Cinema is founded
- 1918 Mehmed VI becomes Sultan (1918-1922)
- 1918 Armistice of Mudros
- 1918 Istanbul occupied by Allied forces begins
- 1919 Turkish War of Independence starts
- 1920 Turkey gives up the Ottoman Empire and all non-Turkish areas
- 1920 Treaty of Sèvres is signed
- 1921 Recognition of Nationalist Parliament in Ankara
- 1922 Ottoman Empire is abolished
- 1922 Mudanya Armistice is signed
- 1922 Kemal Film Studio is founded
- 1923 Allied occupation of Istanbul ends
- 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty is signed
- 1923 Republic of Turkey is established

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The Spy (Casus), Sedat Simavi

1918

The Marriage of Himmet Ağa, (Himmet Ağa'nin Izdivacı) Fuad Bey, Sigmund Weinberg

1919

The Governess (Mürebbiye), Ahmet Fehim

Samson (Izdırap), Muhsin Ertuğrul

Binnaz, Ahmet Fehim

1920

Festival of Black Tulip (Kara Lale Bayramı), Muhsin Ertuğrul

The Satanists (Şeytana Tapanlar), Muhsin Ertuğrul

1921

Bican Efendi the Butler (Bican Efendi Vekilharç), Şadi Fikret Karagözoğlu

Bican Efendi the School Master (Bican Efendi Mektep Hocası), Ş.F. Karagözoğlu

Bican Efendi's Dream (Bican Efendi'nin Ruyası), Ş.F. Karagözoğlu

1922

A Love Tragedy in Istanbul (İstanbul'da Bir Facia-i Aşk), Muhsin Ertuğrul

The Mystery of Bosphorus (Boğaziçi Esrarı), Muhsin Ertuğrul

1923

The Shirt of Fire (Ateşten Gömlek), Muhsin Ertuğrul

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