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**Interview with the cinema and theatre actress, Suna Yıldızoğlu¹
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Amanda Yeşilbursa²



Amanda Yeşilbursa: As far as I know, you come from a very large family. What would you like to tell us about them?

Suna Yıldızoğlu: In fact, they're a bit crazy, they're completely crazy. Genetically, I can't think of one of them, that is, you know, "in the box", okay, that's neither the men or the women. Though the women are more intelligent, you know, and they have been, obviously, I've been going to the National Archives in London. Looking at my family, and now women have, you know, because the woman comes first. And sometimes the father is not even around his children. I don't know where he goes. And then I looked at my father's side as well. And it's the same, women in charge.

So women, to women have a particular thing about independence, they always have been very independent. That's me. I had to think about this example. I was brought up without realizing, as a feminist, standing up for myself, and trying to protect my rights and others. But now it's got to the stage where I mean, I'm not sure I can be standing open. It's become something different. I also believe we need each other. I think life's too short.

Amanda Yeşilbursa: What about your childhood? School?

Suna Yıldızoğlu: I was born in a village of one house. In the middle of the fields, it was my grandmother's house. And her cottage was supposed to be knocked down, but we had nowhere to go. So much time. So I spent most of my time outside until I was called in. It was really fun. So I spent most of my time up trees in fields in rivers, which was incredible. I am

¹ Suna Yıldızoğlu (born in Bournemouth, UK, as Sonja Eady) is a British-Turkish actress based in Istanbul. She came to Turkey in 1974, and married Kayhan Yıldızoğlu, upon which she took on Turkish citizenship and the name, Suna. She played alongside Cüneyt Arkın in the film "Yıkılmayan Adam", with Zeki Alasya and Metin Akpınar in "Petrol Kralları", Kemal Sunal in "Gol Kralı", and Metin Belgin in "Sokaktaki Adam", among many others. In 1981, she won competed in the 17th Golden Orpheus Acting Contest and won the Özel Burgaz Award and the Journalists Award. In 1996, she won the award for Best Female Actor at the 18th SİYAD Turkish Cinema Awards for her role in "Sokaktaki Adam". Between 1978 and 2000, she took on roles in films, TV series, advertisements, as well as doing photo modelling and singing. In 2000, she left the stage and cinema to move to Australia for her children's education. Here, she set up a small business, "Alaturka", which was a success in promoting Turkey on a small-scale. Seven years later, she returned to Turkey, which she has called her "second homeland". She still resides in Istanbul.

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Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 2 Number 2 June 2021

so glad that I had that upbringing. Nobody, particularly until I started school. Nobody really had much influence over me. There were no men around. Mum was very busy. She was incredibly disciplined. And everything that, things like that, huge punishments and then one day in May, I remember that day really well, she took me to write me, sign up for school. So yeah, I must have been about just four, so she was writing strongly up to the next week we went into the headmistress's office. I'd never seen anything like it. There were pictures and a piano. I was running, touching everything. I know, I was touching. I know that feeling even now, that was amazing. I was so shocked. And then apparently what happened was the teacher said I should start right now. She's just so curious. There's no need to waste time. Get her started right now. I started right then.

I loved until I was 11 years old. And then something went wrong. I've no idea to this day. I passed my 11-plus, and I went to grammar school in Brighton. And I was always top of the class. I was always top of the screen once you screen when I was in primary school and I went down to seventh. Yeah. So I had to climb up.

So that's, that's how, how I was brought up. So I was affected. And I wasn't, I wasn't afraid of people, it's just I didn't know how to be afraid. And then I started going to school. Living out in the country, you learn that there are dangerous people out there. So you have to be careful. And then when I knew I wasn't going to stay, because I used to sit in the trees and watch the planes from Hurn Airport.

Hurn Airport had planes going to Guernsey and Jersey. But it was actually training pilots and testing shows with planes, new planes. So I saw, the things I witnessed were incredible. My mum, she used to work at the airport, and she, she had a lot of friends from different countries. So, I got more and more interested. And then my uncle married a Chinese woman. He was working for Readers Digest in Hong Kong. And he moved to China. So we have a Chinese woman in the family. And they brought us a present, a lamp, and it had Chinese writing on, and they told me what that meant. And I learned by heart, and I knew I knew ...this is what I'm trying to say. I'm writing on windows, writing these signs on windows. And they said what are you doing? I said writing Chinese, and they said do you know Chinese? I said of course I know Chinese? And it was from then on that I was really interested in, getting more and more interested in different languages nothing I did was, I was all into it. *I'm* going to do this, *I love* dancing music. Yeah, so they kicked me out of ballet when I was 12 because I was too well-formed. I think what happens is sometimes you shouldn't try to do something. If the door closes, the door's closed. Let's find another door. You know, I'm not like that kind





Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 2 Number 2 June 2021

of person who bangs on. Why should I waste time banging on the door? There's another...So Turkey was kind of like that?

Because I was, I'm outspoken, I'm, I don't know I, I was always told that you don't speak until spoken to, right? Yes. Children should be seen... And even if you try to explain a problem in a polite way with the school, for example, in the polite way... school, dinners, I couldn't eat pineapple, for example., So I went up to the chef and I said very kindly, I think, you know, my mum pays for these meals, so I think we can decide...I had to go and serve the younger children. For the rest of the time I was at that school, I had to sit there. For quite a while. When I came to, Turkey, it was a completely different thing. We went to weddings, danced as much as we like. Nobody said sit down. So I found a place to express myself. I did in, in Spain too, I spent a lot of time with gypsies, working the hotel, they used to go down to the beach in the evening, and they can tell us and we used to dance. It was incredible.

Actually, no, it was, there were two playgrounds one was for the boys so they could play football and cricket, and us girls with the young children so you couldn't run around. And I used to sneak into the boys' playground to play football and cricket and whatever. And they'd come out and send you back each time, and then we've got the other girls starting to come. So that was good. I think I have to change the world. So, I can change things at primary school, I can change the world!



Amanda Yeşilbursa: Would you say that it's easy to leave somewhere and it make a go in a new place, in a way, when you're outgoing? Why Turkey?

Suna Yıldızoğlu: Yeah, ...because I fell in love with the Istanbul that I saw back then. It was incredible to me. I mean, I love history, and culture and this culture. We turned the radio on, there were French, English, Turkish, Italian, Spanish songs. We had to listen to pirate radios in my age if we wanted to listen to French songs. Radio Caroline, on the ships, Radio Luxembourg. Here? People spoke different languages. Everybody. I'm not talking about high society. Ordinary families. Then there was the

Kapalı Çarşı, it was incredible. I loved going there.

And then when you go to the villages, when I started working, and we started hanging out in the villages. That was so different. But that culture was something you learn from, they use completely different things. And I didn't like the gap between the city, or what we say, the city-culture person — villager, I didn't like that gap because I thought that was rather ridiculous. Because the knowledge that a farmer or a villager has is so completely different



Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 2 Number 2 June 2021

from ours. And it should be *added* to our knowledge. You can't just say oh, we know this. So you'd get lost. If you only had the city culture, you'd get lost. I was lucky I had both.

Amanda Yeşilbursa: Would you see yourself as a cultural ambassador in a way?

Suna Yıldızoğlu: Because I do have ridiculous amounts of information outside of Turkey. And sometimes, I think it's really a relief for Turkish people to know that they're not the only ones. Right? It's not just them...Yes, yeah. doing different, you know, showing people different views of the world different alternative viewpoints. I mean, what's the word? *Kışkırtıcı*? Protagonist? Oh, yeah, I am attacking this. But I like to think that I'm a protagonist in a positive way. Yes. I don't go out on the street, screaming, whatever, whatever. But I like to make brains, people's brains work in different ways. *Seviyorum işte!* You asked about my children? I have very difficult children! So, my fault I know isn't my fault. Because I'm, I made them think more. And we went live in Australia, right? Yeah. In 2000, I was so sick and tired. I just wanted to be *me* now.

When you're well known, I guess. You never know. When anybody wants to be friends with you. I mean, I went to Australia and I met this neighbour, a woman, we met in Sydney. Okay? She was trying to sell me....She was just being friendly, because that's what your friendship is. Yeah. So when you're well known, you don't know what people want. And I noticed that a lot of people wanted so much in every way, and I was so tired of giving.... And life doesn't work that way, it doesn't exist on a plan — Put your mask on and then first, before you put on... what I call it the cost to myself.

In terms of cultural relationships, because I thought when I was younger, I just could not understand from one minute why I'm, you know, doing things in the 80s. Okay, I was way out. Because I was singing as well. I couldn't understand for one minute why the government didn't want to use me for tourism. I mean, I spoke to now cities back then, because I had an opportunity. I've got a private company in England, we're doing a thing on my life, documentary. And I said, why don't I arranged for you guys to come to Turkey, we'll do a tour of Turkey. I'll sing. And I spoke to the Minister of Tourism and Culture, he was going to London for the Ottoman exhibition. So we met up with the guy there. And they agreed. So they said that they arranged the hotels, and for some reason, when asked, it was it just, you know, I don't know what happened. I have no idea.

Amanda Yeşilbursa: In one interview you said you were curious, like a permanent student. What would you like to say about that?

Suna Yıldızoğlu: I just love curiosity, oh, going there, go in there, do that, sure, that that's what it is. It's always curiosity. How does it work? How is it done? It's like, I painted, and I realized that I really didn't get much enjoyment out of painting pictures because they



Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 2 Number 2 June 2021

weren't functional. So I started painting the house! You see knitting is functional, it's ...a blanket.

Amanda Yeşilbursa: You've got cats as well.

Suna Yıldızoğlu: I love cats walking dogs I find very boring, because it's something I have to do. Cats are free ... I've got three now. Fluff, my love. I love him. You know I've loved every single animal. Of course. I do. I do. This, this cat. Here he was. He's just; he comes to me in the morning. In the very beginning, it was a nice time to wake up at five in the morning. So not really. You know, I put the wall up again, I go back to sleep. But that's not the stage where I couldn't sleep. And I was going to bed about three o'clock in the morning. So an hour later I wasn't waking up. Then it was like a slap. And then a bite. So what I did was I said — Look, if you were a man, you'd be gone by now!

Amanda Yeşilbursa: You once said that it would be *ihanet*, betrayal, to leave Turkey.

Suna Yıldızoğlu: Yeah, in spite of everything, isn't it? And people. I mean, a lot of people didn't understand that. Because the difference between Turkish people, I find, is that when they go abroad, they dream of Turkey. I know. Not not because they don't like England. And I'm very lucky that I had my education there. I'm I feel very lucky for everything I have done. But I don't dream of England!. I mean, at the moment, I'm dreaming of South America! But I can't. I left in 2000. That's fine. That was my own decision. I wanted to take, bring my children up in a different way, et cetera, et cetera. But now, it's like, come on, you know, you're there for so many years. You've had good times, really good time. You've got loads of good friends. Really nice friends I would never want to leave, you know. And how can I get on a plane and go sit somewhere nice and say..? No, you can't do that. No, you can't. It's well... Yeah, it's just I mean, obviously, Turkish people dream, going to America, someone to leave that view is quite difficult to understand, in a way. But... I wouldn't dream. I think I see what you mean.

I never thought, I was I was never taught to think I was anything special. When I started, as soon as you're in the cinema, and people were saying, oh, you're so beautiful. I never thought about beauty being something special. And this age. I treat this age unlike myself. When you know, it's a good thing. But I wasn't aware that I still believe that we were absolutely irrelevant. Each individual is actually irrelevant, but at the same time, so, so relevant. And life is just one paradox. I don't know where we are, you still have a human being under those electron microscopes, and it's a village. This is a city. This is a city, then you look up. What do you think ... maybe I'm just a cell of something? Not me personally, but the world. There might be a gallstone in some other huge entity, right? And again, it's very disturbing. The gallstone is causing problems, you know? Got to have this out! So it's, I think it's absolutely ridiculous to think that you're anything special. You're special to people



Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 2 Number 2 June 2021

close to you, especially to the people you connect with. When I go, my kids are going to be sad for a while. But that's going to pass. Is it so important? I mean, if you're going to be like Hitler! I'd rather not being in history books. A lot of the people in history books... and again, it doesn't matter what you write about. Here, to be a hero, you have to be a mean boss, if you can't, you can't be nice. So I think that's what Atatürk did, he created the balance.

Amanda Yeşilbursa: You have said before that Atatürk was a true leader. What would you like to say about that?

Suna Yıldızoğlu: He had to do things that I'm sure that he didn't want to do. And I'm sure that making those decisions must have been hard, yet necessary. I watched the film *Mustafa*? Did you like *Mustafa*? I loved it. I cried. And then I come here. What do you when you make a film like that kind I said, What's the matter? It was a brilliant film. I said I cannot crime is showing Atatürk in that way. What way? I said he was a human being that makes him greater. Well, he did because he wasn't a god. He wasn't a prophet. He was a human being with human feelings, that what, that is why it makes it incredible. Incredible. People don't understand that the more you make somebody's superhero, a superhero; you take away their powers, if you understand that it's just a human being who has to make awful decisions for which people are going to die for. That's terrible. But if you know, he just had such an incredible idea of the future, and foresight, science, he had incredible foresight. He knew the people so well; he knew what was going to happen. It happened. It happened. You look at history. I mean, way back like 2000 years ago, they would have made him a prophet! Because the things he said came true. But it's not prophecy. He was. Have you if you haven't infamous, your fate information all the time. You're not aware of this is what I find really exciting is the fact that there's a library in my head. And sometimes it comes up with some incredible things. But I believe that he was one of those men, when he, he had all this information, and he was aware of it and knew how to use it. This is really important. This is not prophecies. It's just logic. But this is what happens in this situation. This is what happened. It's intelligence and logic, both so important in life. Feelings are also important. So, they definitely like a leader. Even though, he didn't want to be one. He didn't want statues; he just wanted to do his job. I understand. I just want to do my job. I don't want to be famous. I don't want this. I don't want that. I don't want special attention. I want to be me. He was, he wasn't a kind of God, as far as I've read. And I've read so much. I really don't get, he just wanted to be himself. And he wanted to do, I mean, if you look at his life, he's legendary. Incredible and he wouldn't have had time for women. He had to get married because he's supposed to get married. You know, they want him to marry. But there's no time for marriage. There's not that's like me now. There's a tiny relationship. Too much to do. I want to read. I want to think I don't. I mean, I get annoyed when I'm in the kitchen now. And I said to my son the other day, he doesn't ask me to do anything. But this is thing I'm like, I'm not



Journal of Anglo-Turkish Relations Volume 2 Number 2 June 2021

Italian Mother, you gotta cook for your baby. And what am I doing? I don't want to do. I don't want to cook. I just want to think I want to share. That's why, I thought, think he had success. He wanted to love. I believe he wanted to know, I mean, there was that romantic side of his letters. But he put his country, his aim before everything. Thank God! Well, I think, I mean... Turkey. So who would it be? The British, the Italians, the Greeks. They'd have a bit of *İç Anadolu*I mean I love the Aegean! If I was Turkish, I'd be Aegean! I love the East. They're so nice, so polite. I mean I don't know what they're like in their houses. That's not my business. And so helpful. And so kind. I felt I've never felt anything *yargılayıcı*... judge - judgmental in the East.

Amanda Yeşilbursa: Thank you very much for your time.

Suna Yıldızoğlu: Thank you.

