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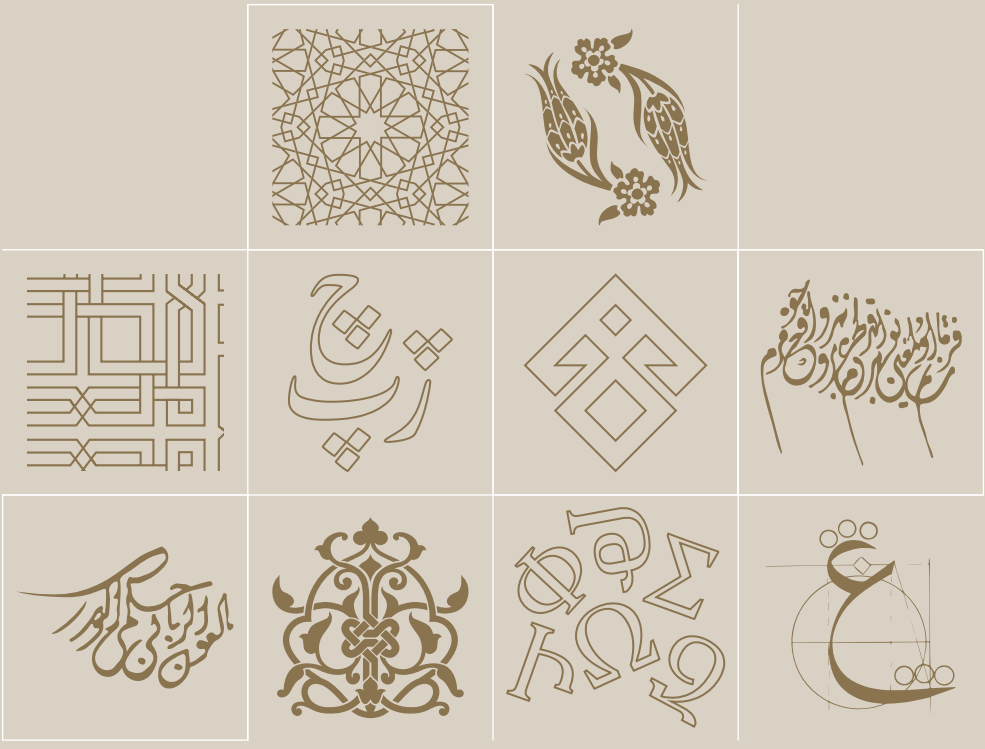

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Dergi Park

Singing on 'The World's Stage': Kanto and Late Ottoman Social Life

'SAHNE-İ ÂLEM'DE ŞAKIMAK: KANTO VE GEÇ OSMANLI SOSYAL HAYATI

ERIK BLACKTHORNE-O'BARR*

ABSTRACT

The staged theater was among the most crucial venues during the late Ottoman Empire for the expression of new modes of social activity and the display of changing fashions and customs, and as such actors, actresses and theater managers represented key figures in the broader process of Ottoman cultural modernization. In 1898, a group of rising artists founded a theater company in Istanbul named the Sahne-i Âlem, "The World's Stage." Despite the brief period in which it operated, the theater represented a major development in the public visibility and self-management of women's labor in the late Ottoman Empire. This paper examines three actresses and singers who managed the Sahne-i Âlem (Peruz Terzakyan, Şamram Kelleciyan and Minyon Virjini) as representative of the modernized city and the discourses that shaped it. The study, which examines non-Muslim female kanto artists belonging to the marginalized populations of Istanbul, explores some of the more understudied aspects of social life during the last years of the Ottoman period.

Keywords: Peruz Terzakyan, Şamram Kelleciyan, Minyon Virjini, Sahne-i Âlem, Ottoman Theater.

ÖZ

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son döneminde sahne tiyatrosu yeni sosyal faaliyetlerin sergilendiği, değişen moda ve alışkanlıkların ifade edildiği önemli mekanlar arasındaydı. Sahne mensupları, aktörler, aktristler ve tiyatro yönetmenleri, Osmanlı kültür hayatının modernizminde adeta kilit rolleri temsil ediyorlardı. 1898'de bir grup sanatçı İstanbul'da Sahne-i Âlem adlı bir tiyatro kumpanyası kurdu. Kısa süren faaliyetlerine rağmen bu kumpanya Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son döneminde kadının sosyal görünürlük kazandığı ve şahsi insiyatifini sergilediği önemli gelişmelerden birine tanıklık etti. Bu makale, Sahne-i Âlem'e mensup üç şarkıcı ve aktristi (Peruz Terzakyan, Şamram Kelleciyan ve Minyon Virjini) modernleşen bir kentin ve onu biçimlendiren öğelerin temsilcisi olarak incelemektedir. İstanbul'un marjinal kesimlerine mensup gayrimüslim kadın kanto sanatçılarını inceleyen çalışma aynı zamanda son dönem Osmanlı sosyal hayatının az bilinen bazı yönlerine ışık tutmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Peruz Terzakyan, Şamram Kelleciyan, Minyon Virjini, Sahne-i Âlem, Osmanlı Tiyatrosu.

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INTRODUCTION: THE SAHNE-İ ÂLEM

Of the various theaters in the Şehzadebaşı district of Istanbul, perhaps none was more infamous at the turn of the twentieth century than the Sahne-i Âlem. Among the district's numerous performance halls, coffeehouses, taverns and reading rooms (*kırâathâne*), a concentration which later commentators would come to call the city's "*alaturka* broadway,"[1] the Sahne-i Âlem stood out as a "den of vice" (*rezalethâne*) where immorality and debauchery prevailed.[2] It was, according to the writer Ahmet Rasim, such a raucous place that upon entering one could not tell whether humans evolved from monkeys, or monkeys from humans.[3] Despite the lofty meaning of its name — "The World's Stage" — literary journals like *Servet-i Fünûn* declared the Sahne-i Âlem "far removed from any sort of taste and decorum, natural beauty or proper enjoyment;" it was a place where "buffoonish actors" performed "nonsense" on stage.[4] A few weeks after one such review in *Servet-i Fünûn*, the authorities seem to have acted on its seedy reputation: finding the theater "in violation of national morals and Islamic conduct" (*edeb-i İslamiye ve ahlâk-ı millîyeyi muhill hâl ve suretinde*), the Theater Inspectorate (*Tiyatro Müfettişliği*) formally shut down the Sahne-i Âlem in early 1899.[5]

Ultimately, however, the notoriety of the Sahne-i Âlem appears to have had less to do with the content of its performances — which were, after all, largely the same light operettas, slapstick comedy acts, and *kanto* musical cabaret commonly found at other theaters in Şehzadebaşı — and more to do with its proprietors. As Melike Nihan Alpargin has noted in her study of late nineteenth-century Istanbulite theatrical culture, the Sahne-i Âlem was unique among the troupes of the city in being owned and operated entirely by its female performers, chief among them the Armenian *kanto* singer Peruz Terzakyan.[6] As ethnic Armenians and Greeks, and coming largely from lower-class backgrounds, performers like Peruz had previously been dependent upon the patronage of more established comedians and impresarios for their livelihood and legal protection.[7] These included prominent figures such as Güllü Agop, Kel Hasan and Abdürrezzak, who typified the emergent "city comedian" (*komik-i şehir*) phenomenon in Ottoman Istanbul. Although they quickly outshone these male comedians in the press and public imagination, they nevertheless reaped only a fraction of the profits generated by their performances and had to pay stage expenses out of their

1 See Haldun Taner, "Direklerarası: Ramazan Takvimi" *Milliyet* (26 July 1980); and "Alaturka Broadway: Direklerarası," 001525733006, Dosya No: 169, Taha Toros Arşivi.

2 Resad Ekrem Koçu, "Amelya, Büyük," *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: İstanbul Ansiklopedisi ve Neşriyat Kollektif Şirketi, 1959), 2/757.

3 Ahmet Rasim, *Şehir Mektupları*, ed. Nuri Akbayar (Istanbul: Metropol Yayınları, 2005 [1910-1911]), 66.

4 Ahmed İhsan, "İstanbul Postası," *Servet-i Fünûn* (19 January 1899), 1.

5 Başkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Dahiliye Mektubi Kalemi (DH.MKT) 2165-73, 26 Ramazan 1316 (7 February 1899).

6 Melike Nihan Alpargin, *Istanbuls Theatralische Wendezeit: Die Rezeption Des Westlichen Theaters Im 19. Und Frühen 20. Jahrhundert Des Osmanischen Reiches* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2013), 169.

7 For the most part these were male Muslims, or in the case of Güllü Agop, converts to Islam. Such protection was not only legal and financial but also physical; later media reports write that Abdürrezzak personally guarded the dressing chambers of his female employees with a wooden club to prevent interlopers. See "Kantocu Peruz Hanım," 001525843006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

personal accounts.[8] By founding the Sahne-i Âlem in 1898, these performers were able to form more stable economic arrangements on the model of an Ottoman guild (*esnaf*);[9] furthermore, they came to publicize their own songs,[10] and to tailor their performances to particular untapped audiences — hosting daytime shows intended for Muslim women, for example.[11] By the turn of the century, *kanto* singers like Peruz were more famous among women than men.[12] Indeed, they had become public celebrities, and even their particular make-up regimens were recorded in the press.[13] The reputation of the Sahne-i Âlem as a "den of vice" was, in part, the creation of competing male theater owners, who complained in the press that women lacked the requisite knowledge and artistic taste to manage such operations. Kel Hasan, for instance, was recorded as "trying [to do] everything he [could] to bring about the breakup of the troupe."[14] Ultimately, the police did what Kel Hasan could not, and the Sahne-i Âlem was shuttered only a year after its opening. Though Alpargin warns against viewing the Sahne-i Âlem performers as "pioneers of a burgeoning emancipation movement,"[15] it is perhaps not too bold to claim that the troupe represented an important instance of professional women in Ottoman Istanbul organizing their labor power and skillfully shaping public discourse, particularly in the popular media — a model of political action that was mirrored by feminist and labor movements in other areas of urban economic and cultural life.[16]

As an art form characterized by "Italian-style singing," and performed by "women from ethnic minorities such as the Armenians or the Greeks,"[17] literature on *kanto* has been highly constrained by its reputation as essentially foreign or non-Turkish; when Yılmaz Öztuna wrote that it was composed by those "who knew little of Turkish music,"[18] he was only extending decades of entrenched orthodoxy regarding the status of *kanto* in the Turkish musical canon.

8 Although it was reported that *kanto* singers could earn a significant income (up to sixty *mecidiye* a day during Ramazan festivities) this amount appears to be extraordinary, and a normal income for a prominent singer was around five lira a night. Out of this money came stage expenses like costumes and makeup, which consumed a significant portion of a singer's gross income. See Hikmet Feridun, "Herdem Taze Bir Sanatkar Kadın: Şamram Hanım, Muharririmize Hayatını Hatıralarını Anlatıyor," 001525846006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

9 Berna Özbilen, *Kanto'nun Değişim Süreçi ve Yakın Dönem İcralarının Değerlendirilmesi* (Istanbul: İstanbul Teknik University, Institute of Social Science, Master's Thesis, 2006), 22.

10 See Hasan Tahsin, *Neşe-i Dil: Yeni Şarkı ve Kanto Memuası* (Istanbul: Matbaa-ı Kütüphane-i Cihan, 1907).

11 For a description, see Halide Edip Adıvar, *The Memoirs of Halidé Edib* (New York, London: The Century Co., 1926), 121-124. For the Sahne-i Âlem daytime performances, see Reşad Ekrem Koçu, "Amelya, Büyük," *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, 2/757.

12 In the novel *Jön Türk*, for instance, Ahmet Mithat Efendi noted that singers like Peruz and Eleni had "won more fame among women than men for the *kanto*s they sing in the theaters." See Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Jön Türk*, trans. Mustafa Karataş (Istanbul: Turna Yayınları, 2009), 17.

13 Sermet Muhtar Alus, "Eski Günlerde Saç ve Yüz Tuvaleti" 001581014010, Dosya No: 312, Taha Toros Arşivi.

14 Alpargin, *Istanbuls Theatralische Wendezeit*, 171.

15 Alpargin, Istanbuls Theatralische Wendezeit, 169.

16 The obvious parallel would be with women's rights advocacy organizations and journals, such as *Şükufezar* and *Kadınlar Dünyası*, which have been extensively studied by Serpil Çakır; one could also consider women's labor movements during the late Ottoman period, which communicated their demands through both printed media and direct action. See Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1994); Tiğinçe Özkiper Oktar, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Kadının Çalışma Yaşamı* (Istanbul: Bilim Teknik Yayınevi, 1998); and Elif Mahir Metinsoy, *Ottoman Women during World War I: Everyday Experiences, Politics, and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 144-146.

17 Ali Ergur and Yiğit Aydın, "Patterns of Modernization in Turkish Music as Indicators of a Changing Society," *Musicae Scientiae* (Special Issue 2005-2006), 97-98.

18 Yılmaz Öztuna, "Kanto," *Büyük Türk Mûsikîsi Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 424.

Although Peruz Terzakyan sang in Turkish "in a rather clear Istanbul accent,"[19] as late as 1940, parliamentarians in the Turkish Grand National Assembly continued to argue that the state should not support the performance of "Peruz Hanım's *kanto*s and God-knows-what-else," but rather real "Turkish music, folk and art music."[20] Recent analyses of *kanto* have come to recognize the pervasive influence of the genre and its singers on Istanbulite social life during the Hamidian period and afterwards, yet the academic study of Ottoman *kanto* has nevertheless remained limited almost entirely to the fields of cultural history and ethnomusicology.[21] These studies offer valuable information on particular *kanto* singers and the performance spaces they were associated with. Their primary focus is, however, on the content and form of the songs, rather than on the socioeconomic conditions of their creation. *Kanto* songs appear in these works as cultural artifacts, but the labor that went into their production and performance is largely obscured; *kanto* singers, when they appear, are described as an effect of a general *alafranga* (European-style) cultural tendency rather than as individual actors adapting to changing social and economic conditions through the translation of local performative forms into new media.[22] Even when *kanto* is discussed in Ottoman social history, such as in Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet's excellent and comprehensive *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, it is as used as primary source evidence of broader societal changes rather than an object of study in and of itself.[23] *Kanto* remains similarly absent in Ottoman labor history. As neither manual laborers nor prostitutes, it can be said that *kanto* singers have, like other eroticized performers, fallen both "on the margins of the theory of labor" and "on the margins of the sex industry," because of the "institutional refusal to consider sex and work side by side [outside of prostitution]."[24] As such, works of labor history focused on Istanbulite prostitution, or other forms of precarious labor coextensive with *kanto* culture, entirely overlook some of the most prominent and upwardly-mobile laborers in this context: the singers themselves.[25]

This essay aims to understand *kanto* singers as paradigmatic figures of Istanbulite socioeconomic life during the later years of the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909), and to analyze them as particularly representative of three discursive processes which underlay

19 See *Cumhuriyet* (29 January 1975), 2.

20 *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (TBMM) Zabıt Ceridesi*, Session 6, Volume 11, Meeting 1 (15 May 1940), 129.

21 See, for example, Şefika Şehvar Beşiroğlu, "İstanbul'un Kadınları ve Müzikal Kimlikleri." *İTU Dergisi*, 3/2 (2006), 3-19; Özbilen, *Kanto'nun Değişim Süreçi ve Yakın Dönem İcralarının Değerlendirilmesi*; Özge Şen, *Taş Plak Kayıtlarındaki Kanto Örneklerinin Müzikal Analizi* (Istanbul: İstanbul Teknik University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's Thesis, 2014); Danielle J. Van Dobben, *Dancing Modernity: Gender, Sexuality and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic* (Tucson: University of Arizona, Near Eastern Studies, Master's Thesis, 2008).

22 For a more complex picture of mutual influence between Ottoman and European performative styles during the late nineteenth century, see Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles," *Assemblage* 13 (Dec. 1990), 54.

23 Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 290, 326.

24 Chris Bruckert and Colette Parent, "La Danse Erotique Comme Métier a l'Ère de la Vente de Soi," *Cahiers de Recherche Sociologique* 43 (Jan. 2007), 99.

25 Although a number of detailed studies on prostitution in nineteenth-century Istanbul exist, these rarely consider the forms of licit labor that were coextensive with prostitution in areas like Galata. Studies on actresses, by contrast, tend to focus solely on the "respectable" theater; see, for example, Hasmik Khalapyan, "Theater as Career for Ottoman Armenian Women, 1850-1910," in *A Social History of Late Ottoman Women: New Perspectives*, ed. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 31–46. For an approach closer to that of this paper, see Malte Fuhrmann, "Down and Out on the Quays of Izmir: 'European' Musicians, Innkeepers, and Prostitutes in the Ottoman Port-Cities," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24/2 (December 2009), 169–185.

this period of Ottoman modernization: precarity, minority, and vulnerability. Each of these processes will be brought forth through case studies of three of the most prominent performers of the Sahne-i Âlem cultural scene: Peruz Terzakyan, Şamram Kelleciyan, and Minyon Virjini, respectively. Although these *kanto* singers shared a number of common characteristics — all were Istanbulite Armenian women of a particular generation, bonded by blood, marriage and master-apprentice relations — each nevertheless highlights a particular aspect of Hamidian-era social life in their work. For Peruz Terzakyan, who is largely credited with establishing the genre, *kanto* represented both a reflection of, and a pathway out of, economic and physical *precarity*; she adapted to conditions of endemic unemployment, impoverishment, and gendered violence in Istanbul's port districts by organizing physical, social and legal layers of defense. Her relative Şamram Kelleciyan, by contrast, had lived in relative comfort as the wife of a state official until communitarian violence forced her to the stage. Her work speaks instead to the singers' positions as non-Muslim *minorities*, which delineated the possibilities of what could be represented on and off stage. Lastly, both economic precarity and political minority constitute elements of the particular *vulnerability* of *kanto* singers as subjects, a vulnerability only amplified by their gender and generally young ages. Minyon Virjini will be taken as a case study of such vulnerability, which she made into an integral element of her stage persona, and which reflected a new concern with the "vulnerable child" in Ottoman social discourse. To be sure, these are hardly the only avenues of research evoked by these figures: one could also think in terms of sexuality, commodity, or celebrity culture in the Ottoman context.[26] Yet the frames of precarity, minority and vulnerability allow this paper to situate itself between the rich and burgeoning literature on the limits of cosmopolitanism in nineteenth-century Istanbul, and the writings of scholars interested in similar analytical frames in other contexts.[27] For example, the discussion of precarity links Judith Butler's theoretical discussions on precarity's contemporary manifestations with research by Donald Quataert, Edhem Eldem and Noémi Lévy-Aksu on labor, class formation and violence in late Ottoman Galata. The discussion of minority juxtaposes Saidiya Hartman's evocation of black nightclub space in early twentieth-century America with the *kanto* theaters of Şehzadebaşı. Finally, this paper connects Nazan Maksudyan's research on the discourse of the vulnerable child in the Ottoman Empire with Carolyn Steedman's writing on the affective power of the "Mignon" motif in nineteenth-century Europe. By placing the study of the Sahne-i Âlem at the intersection of these three frames, it is hoped that both its particularities and convergences with global processes will be brought into high relief.

26 See, for example, Haris Exertzoglou, "The Cultural Uses of Consumption: Negotiating Class, Gender, and Nation in the Ottoman Urban Centers during the 19th Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35/1 (Feb., 2003), 77–101; Fatma Türe, *Facts and Fantasies: Images of Istanbul Women in the 1920s* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015); Anastasia Falierou, "European Fashion, Consumption Patterns, and Intercommunal Relations in the 19th-Century Ottoman Istanbul," in *Women, Consumption, and the Circulation of Ideas in South-Eastern Europe, 17th–19th Centuries*, ed. Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 150–168.

27 For overviews of literature on this topic, see Athanasios Gekas, "Class and Cosmopolitanism: The Historiographical Fortunes of Merchants in Eastern Mediterranean Ports," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24/2 (2009), 95–114; Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), and most recently K. Mehmet Kentel, *Assembling 'Cosmopolitan' Pera: An Infrastructural History of Late Ottoman Istanbul* (Seattle: University of Washington, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2018).

Precarity: Peruz Terzakyan

According to later media reports, when Peruz Terzakyan started to not show up for work, the owners of the theater company for which she performed — the comedian Abdürrezzak and the *tuluat* (improvisational theater) performer Küçük İsmail — rushed to her home as fast as they could. Asking her to come back, "whatever it takes," she laid out two conditions by which she would return to the theater. The first was that, for every two songs she sung, she would be paid the equivalent of two pounds sterling. The second was that she would no longer have to walk or take the tram to the theater; rather, a sedan chair (*tahtırevan*) would be constructed to take her where she wished. In the later Turkish press, this sedan chair became a staple of Peruz's image: as one journalist wrote, she was carried about "like a Hindu maharaja, like an empress."[28] The sedan chair became, in a way, a symbol of the "sultanate of Peruz."[29] It was taken as an example of imperiousness and caprice: the sedan chair being, in Ottoman Istanbul, used previously for the wives of foreign diplomats and the women of the imperial harem.[30] Another explanation was rooted in a criticism of her body: "she was," as one journalist wrote, "built like a seventy-ton English tank,"[31] and, as a result, "she couldn't climb the theater steps, on account of her obesity."[32] Yet other sources speak to a different desire on her part. As Ahmet Rasim recounts in his semi-autobiographical novel *Fuhş-ı Atik,* in the early days of her performances, Peruz was nearly stabbed to death by a notorious serial murderer, whose exploits were tracked in the Ottoman press and street *destan*s;[33] the assailant succeeded in killing her lover on stage.[34] Even regular performances were marked by physical danger. As one journalist described, when Peruz exited the theaters, she was often mobbed by crowds, "which shook the carriages" to get at her and drag her out onto the pavement: "she was obliged to go along with them, out of fear, for once she had objected: she had wanted to save her neck by screaming, but the crowd still took their pound of flesh."[35]

What appeared as caprice to later journalists can be read, in such a context, as basic preservation of the body: not only from assault or assassination, but also from the deterioration of her muscles and joints after hours of performing intensive physical labor upon the stage. Peruz's decision to work with fellow actresses to found the Sahne-i Âlem, too, seems more explicable: why, indeed, would she negotiate with Abdürrezzak or Küçük İsmail for higher pay and secure transport, when she could provide these for herself, based on her own labor? Both the *tahtırevan* and the Sahne-i Âlem are, in this sense, products of a kind of *precarity*: what Judith Butler has called the "politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure."[36] As Butler continues, "by precarity we may be talking about populations that starve or who near starvation, but we might also be talking about sex workers who have to

28 Aysen Devrim T., "Kayıp Geçen Yıldızlar: Türk Tiyatrosunun Unutulmuş Şöhretleri 18: Kantocu Peruz Hanım" 001525842006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

29 "Kantocu Peruz Hanım," 001525843006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

30 See Fanny Davis, *The Ottoman Lady: A Social History from 1718 to 1918* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 138.

31 Aysen Devrim T., "Kayıp Geçen Yıldızlar: Türk Tiyatrosunun Unutulmuş Şöhretleri 18: Kantocu Peruz Hanım."

32 "Kantocu Peruz Hanım."

33 See Nurçin İleri, "İstanbul'un Yeraltı Dünyası: Bıçakçı Petri ve Cinayet Destanları" *Kampfplatz* 7 (October 2014), 57-82.

34 Hüseyin Kınaylı, "Galata Canavarı Bıçakçı Petri", *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, ed. Reşad Ekrem Koçu (Istanbul: Koçu Yayınları, 1971), 11/5891.

35 S. Vural, "Peruz, Devrinin en Güzel ve en Civelek Artistiydi," 001525844006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

36 Judith Butler, "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics," *AIBR: Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 4/3 (2009), ii.

defend themselves against both street violence and police harassment;"[37] precarity, then, encompasses *kanto* singers at the start of their careers, and in their impoverished old age. Peruz herself was an Armenian migrant from Sivas[38] who came to the stage at the age of thirteen or fourteen after growing up around Istanbul's portside brothels;[39] she is said to have died of poverty in an attic in 1919.[40] The experience of precarity characterized her art and her life. Yet what does this term do for us, which poverty or informal labor do not? In the first place, as Veena Das and Shalini Randeria argue, "the socialities that undergird the lives of the poor are constantly being shaped by the experiences of precarity that go beyond material scarcity;"[41] precarity, as such, represents a conceptual frame that links other forms of gendered, racial, or ethnolinguistic insecurity to material impoverishment. Indeed, as Louise Waite writes, "the term is not now limited to 'employment precariousness' but also touches on a much wider suggestion of the 'precariousness of life;'" a notion which, she notes, "is not a uniquely 21st- or 20th-century phenomenon."[42] Precarity, as a term, allows us to understand Peruz as a particular Istanbulite subject, whilst still connecting her to broader socioeconomic processes in the Ottoman Empire and beyond.

The Istanbulite neighborhoods in which *kanto* emerged before its move to Şehzadebaşı — portside districts like Galata and Karaköy — were well-known as realms of urban decay and precarious life during the late Ottoman period. As imagined by writers like Ahmet Mithat Efendi, the port was where *rakı* flowed instead of water, where child prostitution had replaced marriage,[43] and where the local thugs "drink each other's blood, even more predatory than wolves."[44] Yet, as Butler remarked, this precarity was "politically induced;" the populations of Galata and Karaköy were not born into precarity but rather "acclimatized to insecurity and hopelessness."[45] Before 1875, these districts had been known as zones of illicit activity, but were not yet precarious. Social life was structured according to entrenched institutions, like the dockworker's guild, which represented "one of the most cohesive and powerful guilds in the capital."[46] Deep ties of ethnicity and local origin often bound migrant workers together. Galata's porters, for example, were largely Armenian migrants from inner Anatolia, and organized themselves along communitarian lines. The Ottoman sovereign default in 1875 and the emplacement of a third of the Ottoman economy into foreign receivership in 1881 marked a turning point in the stability of these entrenched institutions. Through actors like the Ottoman Bank and the Public Debt Administration, European capital interests launched

37 Butler, "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics," ii.

38 See M. Nihat Özön, "Peruz Hanım", *Türk Tiyatrosu Ansiklopedisi*, eds. M. Nihat Özön and Baha Dürder (Istanbul: Yükselen Matbaası, 1967), 1/345.

39 See Sermet Muhtar Alus, "Karaköy'den Tophane'ye doğru..." *Akşam*, December 4, 1938.

40 S. Vural, "Peruz, Devrinin en Güzel ve en Civelek Artistiydi."

41 Veena Das and Shalini Randeria, "Politics of the Urban Poor: Aesthetics, Ethics, Volatility, Precarity: An Introduction to Supplement 11," *Current Anthropology* 56/S11 (2015), 3.

42 Louise Waite, "A Place and Space for a Critical Geography of Precarity?" *Geography Compass* 3/1 (2009), 415.

43 This is an essential theme of Ahmet Mithat Efendi's novel *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında*, which details the socially corrosive effects of the prostitution of young girls in 1880s Galata. See Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında*, (Ankara: TDK Yayınevi, 2000 [1881]).

44 See Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Dürdane Hanım*, transc. Hüseyin Alacatlı (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1999 [1882]), 3-4.

45 Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 15.

46 Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: NYU Press, 1988), 97.

unprecedented programs of public asset privatization and liberal economic interventionism in the Ottoman Empire, the practices of which were, in certain cases, strikingly similar to those of contemporary neoliberalism.[47] In Galata, as Donald Quataert describes, newly established joint-stock companies aimed to break "the monopoly of the porters' guilds" through intensive legal and economic pressure.[48] The capitalization of guild and *vakıf* assets can be said in part to have produced not only an Ottoman "bourgeoisie" — a multiethnic class of Armenians, Greeks, Turks and Levantines, defined by Edhem Eldem as "the stock and bond depositors of the Ottoman Bank"[49] — but a newly precarious population: violently dispossessed guild and migrant labor.[50]

The first *kanto* singers and their audiences were members of this precarious class. In large part, like Peruz, they were also migrants, arriving in Istanbul from impoverished villages and ravaged border provinces and finding no support system in place for them.[51] Some refugees found temporary employment as street-cleaners and horse-cab drivers, but many were left destitute and homeless, at times without even basic clothing.[52] These migrants were not a uniquely Ottoman phenomenon; in Greece, too, with the sovereign defaults of 1860 and 1893, or in Egypt after 1882, the expansion of free trade and the destruction of local labor structures was accompanied by the vast growth in marginal or precarious populations. The port districts of cities like Istanbul, Izmir, Athens, and Alexandria came to be typified by "poverty, unemployment, rootlessness, homelessness, police oppression, social deprivation, prostitution, criminality and drugs."[53] By understanding Peruz as a migrant, as a subject acclimatized to precarious life, her need to protect herself and preserve her body appears not as caprice but as an outgrowth of the globalized production of precarity as a mode of being; a mode of being which produced, as it continues to produce, contingent solidarities. When Butler writes that "precarity exposes our sociality, the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency,"[54] one might think of the *kanto* audience — "conscripts from the Arsenal, bath attendant girls wearing jodhpurs and hooded sack coats, bath attendant boys, spies from the police, stevedores and barge-men [...] all children of about fourteen or fifteen years old"[55] — or of the Sahne-i Âlem, and the attempt by *kanto* singers to consolidate their own labor power and control the means of their material and physical security.

47 See Murat Birdal, *The Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt: Insolvency and European Financial Control in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York, London: I.B. Taurus, 2010), 16.

48 Quataert, *Social Disintegration,* 102.

49 Edhem Eldem, "(A Quest for) the Bourgeoisie of Istanbul: Identities, Roles and Conflicts," in *Urban Governance under the Ottomans: Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict*, ed. Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 160.

50 See Noemi Levy-Aksu, "A Capital Challenge: Managing Violence and Disorders in Late Ottoman Istanbul", in *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, eds. Ulrike Freitag, et al. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 63-66.

51 For an account of these migrants, see Florian Riedler, "Public People, Temporary Labor: Migrants in Nineteenth Century Istanbul," in *Public Istanbul*, ed. Frank Eckardt and Kathrin Wildner (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), 233-254.

52 Başiretçi Ali Efendi, *İstanbul Mektupları* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2001),674.

53 Elias Petropoulos, *Songs of the Greek Underworld: The Rembetika Tradition*, trans. Ed Emery (London: Saqi Books, 2000), 19.

54 Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 119.

55 Ahmet Rasim, *Dünkü İstanbul'da Hovardalık "Fuhş-ı Atik"* (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1992), 101.

Minority: Şamram Kelleciyan

In her recent *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, American historian Saidiya Hartman describes the predominantly black nightclubs and music halls of early twentieth-century Philadelphia and New York as the site of a "revolution in a minor key."[56] The effect of this revolution was not to overthrow racial segregation or defeat police brutality — indeed, when Saidiya Hartman asks us whether the "joy afforded by the cabaret" could "attenuate the assault of racism," or "quiet any doubts about life in peril," it is clear that these are rhetorical questions without clear answers. Her last question, however, is more ambiguous: what if the "experiment" of the nightclub was instead "to remake the world that defined its mission against you and yours?"[57] The music halls of Galata and Şehzadebaşı were, of course, not necessarily akin to the nightclubs of Harlem; the dynamics of race and class in the American context were fundamentally different from those of Ottoman Istanbul. Yet this sense of the nightclub as the site of intimate and fleeting social experimentation is in many ways apropos to both the American and Ottoman examples, and allows us to think about the social function of these spaces in urban contexts riven by the threat of racial or communitarian violence. Just as the career of Peruz spoke to the effects of precarity upon Hamidian Istanbul, so too does the career of her relative Şamram Kelleciyan speak to the profound influence of communitarian violence in the city during the years of *kanto*'s emergence.[58]

In later interviews Şamram downplayed the significance of this time, referring only to the "Armenian events"[59] or the "Armenian ruckus" (*Ermeni patırtısı*)[60] that led her to the stage. Yet the communitarian violence of 1894-1896, which exploded in Istanbul following a shootout near the Sublime Porte in September 1895 and the Dashnak occupation of the Ottoman Bank building in August 1896, was more than a mere "ruckus;" it left thousands dead and tore apart the social fabric of the city. Before 1896, Şamram's life had seemed preordained: as the educated wife of a rising official at the Imperial Arsenal (*Tersâne-i Âmire*), she, unlike her relative Peruz, seemed destined for a kind of bourgeois respectability. Yet following the Ottoman Bank standoff, her husband, like other Armenian bureaucrats in sensitive positions, was removed from his position on the grounds of suspected disloyalty; in late 1897, he left her with the children and never came back.[61] Şamram was, in a sense, fortunate. Having a familial connection to the theater, she was able to parlay her relationship with Peruz into an independent means of sustenance, and from 1900 until around 1920 she became the most successful *kanto* singer of them all.[62] Even so, years later, she remembered

56 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 304.

57 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, 307.

58 For a detailed analysis of this violence, see Florian Riedler, "The City as a Stage for a Violent Spectacle: The Massacres of Armenians in Istanbul in 1895-96," in *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, ed. Nelida Fuccaro, Claudia Ghrawi, and Nora Lafi (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 164-178.

59 Hikmet Feridun, "Herdem Taze Bir Sanatkar Kadın."

60 Hikmet Feridun, "34 Seneden beri Kanto Söyliyen Şamram Hanım Tiyatroculuğa Nasıl Başladı?" 001525847006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

61 Burhan Arpad, *Bir İstanbul Var idi...* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2007), 44.

62 Boğos Çalgıcıoğlu, *Türkiye Ermenileri Sahnesi ve Çalışanları* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu Yayınları, 2008), 358.

mostly the troubles. As she remarked, "I had to do it all by the skin of my teeth, by tearing out my fingernails."[63] She, like other singers, was under constant threat of arrest. When Istanbul *şehremini* (mayor) Rıdvan Pasha banned theater performances in 1904, a policy which was ended only by his assassination in 1906,[64] she noted that he had threatened to throw all the *kanto* singers in jail after having been spotted at one of their shows.

Yet it was the threat of communitarian violence that truly made her position treacherous. As Merih Erol has described, even in the context of comedic or erotic performance the limits of what could be said on stage were shaped by the capricious effects of Hamidian censorship — a burden placed particularly on Greek and Armenian performers.[65] The great paradox of *kanto* is that, as much as it was a theater of urban life — representing itinerant street-sellers, carriage drivers, shepherds, boatmen, pickpockets and drunkards on stage — the politics of minority meant that it could never depict the "Turkish," "Armenian" or "Greek" types common to the earlier *karagöz* and *orta oyunu* traditions, and which constituted the "real" identities of its performers and primary audiences. Instead, the ethnic types represented in *kanto* were largely those that were remote, unthreatening, or foreign: most notably, Laz, Roma[66] and Iranians.[67] Şamram's Armenian identity was unmistakable, and the female stage performer was, by law and expectation, exclusively a non-Muslim woman;[68] nevertheless, *kanto* could never speak of this openly, lest the illusion of the music hall be broken and the tension between performers and their audience revealed.

This paradox was accompanied by a great irony. As Florian Riedler notes, the violence in Istanbul that drove Şamram to the stage was, in large part, perpetrated by economically marginalized migrant populations, given free reign by local authorities to loot businesses and neighborhoods: as Riedler writes, "the political motives of the instigators and economic motives of the perpetrators matched, and the one instrumentalised the other."[69] These groups were dominated by Laz, Roma, and migrants from the Balkans and inner Anatolia — which is to say, by the very ethnic types that were represented in *kanto* performance. The Laz and Roma types performed by Şamram may have been symbolically unthreatening to much of the audience, but must have carried a vastly different set of associations for Istanbulite Armenians whose livelihoods had been ruined by the events of 1894-1896. There was no free play of cultural signifiers in such performance, and the possibilities of fantasy were fundamentally structured by "outside" political realities. Whatever expression was possible in the guise of the Laz fisherwoman or the Roma fortune-teller could not "quiet any doubts about life in peril," to use Hartman's phrase, because these representations were, in themselves, reminders of the

63 Hikmet Feridun, "Herdem Taze Bir Sanatkar Kadın."

64 See Metin And, *Türk Tiyatro Tarihi: Başlangıcından 1983'e* (Istanbul: İletişm Yayınları, 2017).

65 Merih Erol, "Surveillance, Urban Governance and Legitimacy in Late Ottoman Istanbul: Spying on Music and Entertainment during the Hamidian Regime (1876–1909)" *Urban History* 40/4 (2013), 714.

66 For a detailed overview of Roma representations in *kanto*, see Sonia Tamar Seeman, *Sounding Roman: Representation and Performing Identity in Western Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 145-156.

67 See the author's recent work on the genre of *Acem kantosu*: Erik Blackthorne-O'Barr, "Perversion and Persophilia: Imagining Iran in Hamidian Istanbul" (New York: Columbia University, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Master's Thesis, 2020).

68 As Selma Ekrem, the granddaughter of Namık Kemal, recalled: "the actresses were all Armenian as Turkish women could not act. How could they when they were not even allowed to show their faces to men?" See Selma Ekrem, *Unveiled, the Autobiography of a Turkish Girl* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Pres, 2005), 127.

69 See Florian Riedler, "Armenian Labor Migration to Istanbul and the Migration Crisis of the 1890s", in *The City in the Ottoman Empire: Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity*, eds. Ulrike Freitag, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 169.

precariousness of the *kanto* singers' positions. Yet what about Hartman's final proposition: that the music hall was a space of experimentation in "remaking" the world, if only for a brief moment? In this sense, the Sahne-i Âlem is again striking. Despite the short time-span of its existence and the opprobrium it generated, it represented a similar kind of social experimentation, made possible only by the contingencies of its moment and the uniquely liminal position of these women in late Ottoman society.

Vulnerability: Minyon Virjini

Vulnerability is, of course, a fundamental aspect of both the precarious and the minoritarian positions, but it is not limited to these: it must also include the physical vulnerability of youth, infirmity or old age, or the psychological vulnerability of trauma. Moreover, the display of vulnerability can, paradoxically, help to ensure security, whether by invoking social compassion, charity, or even benign indifference. The *kanto* singer Minyon Virjini seems to have structured her stage persona around this belief: she reacted to her precarious socioeconomic circumstances by playing hard into the new discourse of the wild, vulnerable child, and the power of the "Mignon" motif that had swept Europe in the nineteenth century. In her case, this strategy succeeded, as a brief incident recorded in the Presidency Ottoman Archives will demonstrate. Yet in the case of another "Mignon" — a girl who could never have become a *kanto* singer, but who similarly benefited from the affective power of this motif in dangerous circumstances — the results were more ambiguous.

In fact, her real name was Hayganuş, but the public, the press and the police all called her Minyon Virjini, "Mignon Virgin." There was already a singer named Virjin, and another named Küçük Virjin, and so she had to become *minyon*, a nineteenth-century loanword meaning "slender," "petite," or "child-size." She was, in the words of a later interviewer, "sprightly, flirtatious and wild;" not proper or respectable, but rebellious in a way that endeared her to the public.[70] The audiences and critics loved her: Ahmet Rasim, in an article entitled "A Night at the Sahne-i Âlem," praised her pale beauty "like the white floor of a limekiln,"[71] and *Servet-i Fünûn* likewise extolled the "warmth" of her "songs and dances."[72] Even later journalists, who derided the bodies of Peruz and Şamram, remembered her as "a beautiful woman, not so fat or large," and as a brunette who was "as shapely as [a woman of] that time could be shapely."[73] The audiences protected her, too: when asked whether she had ever feared for her life on stage, Virjini replied:

I was never attacked with guns, bullets, or knives. The attacks I've been subjected to were always the sweetest assaults: instead of pistols, there were many people who threw candy boxes, silk handkerchiefs and speckled gold coins in small silk pouches. Before me, Amelya and Büyük Eleni were attacked a few times, I heard, and people wanted to break their noses! But I never had such things happen to me.[74]

70 M. Süleyman Çapan, "Hay, Ermenice Ermeni Demektir, Nar da Arapça Ateş Demektir" 001525833006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

71 Rasim, *Şehir Mektupları*, 87.

72 Ahmed İhsan, *Servet-i Fünûn* (5 March 1896), 2.

73 Fahri Celâl Göktulga, "Kantolarımız," 001525834006, Dosya No: 175, Taha Toros Arşivi.

74 M. Süleyman Çapan, "Hay, Ermenice Ermeni Demektir, Nar da Arapça Ateş Demektir."

Inderpal Grewal notes that the nineteenth-century Western conception of beauty was tied to vulnerability: "the beautiful was that which was small, 'because we love what submits to us.'" It was that which was in need of safety and protection. "Beauty in distress," wrote Edmund Burke, "is much the most affecting beauty."[75] Minyon Virjini made an implicit contract with her audience: they would protect her, and she would give them someone to protect. Her stage name, in this sense, was perfect. As Carolyn Steedman writes in *Strange Dislocations*, Mignon, "the strange and disturbed child-figure of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister," the slender, deformed dancing girl, became representative of a new sense of what the "child" was in the nineteenth-century European cultural imagination.[76] Mignon was the figure who drew attention to "the visceral sense of the smallness of the self that lies inside," to the little savage whom mothers and fathers needed to protect and to tame, and to the "lost past" of childhood.[77] The uncovering of the wild child opened up new avenues of state concern: as Steedman continues,

Even the act of discovering "savagery" among prosaic little street traders and crossing-sweepers carried its own compensation, for if savages represented the childhood of the human race, or were themselves children, then they were necessarily capable of development and change, for these were the essential potentialities of childhood.[78]

In the Ottoman Empire, as in Britain or France, the discovery of the child savage was accompanied by the proliferation of institutions and regulations intended to protect and reform the urban child. As Nazan Maksudyan has documented, from the 1860s onward "Ottoman administrative discourse and practice started to enact the belief that a modern state should both protect children from danger and protect society from dangerous children."[79] Like the formation of *kanto*, the "vagrant child" was a product of precarity, formed by the destruction of guild culture and the inflow of migrants from the outer provinces: the perception of "child beggars" as a problem mostly derived from the new Tanzimat drive for order and security in urban areas and from its conception of modern governance."[80] Yet whereas vagrant boys were seen as a social menace, and often imprisoned in workhouses or conscripted into the military, the rhetoric around vagrant girls was different: they were depicted "as targets of sexual predators, a danger that became more pronounced when the girls occupied public spaces," and thus they needed to be "saved and disciplined" by the state in loco parentis.[81] Such girls also, of course, represented the threat of venereal disease and social disorder: according to municipal regulations instituted in 1884, for example, prostitutes suspected of disease could be imprisoned in quarantine facilities until cured,[82] at times by authorities who were

75 Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 29.

76 Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 21.

77 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations,* 9.

78 Steedman, *Strange Dislocations,* 83.

79 Nazan Maksudyan, "Orphans, Cities and the State: Vocational Orphanages (Islahhanes) and Reform in the Late Ottoman Urban Space," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2011), 494.

80 Maksudyan, "Orphans, Cities and the State", 496.

81 Maksudyan, "Orphans, Cities and the State", 498.

82 Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umur-ı Belediyye* (Istanbul: İBB Kültür İşleri Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1995), 6/3296-3302.

known to work as procurers and extortionists on the side.[83] Yet the discourse of vulnerability largely engendered a protective response on the part of socially-conscious Ottoman reformers. Ahmet Mithat Efendi's 1881 novel *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında*, for example, depicted a Muslim gentleman rescuing a seventeen-year-old prostitute from sexual degradation by marrying her into a respectable family, something Ahmet Mithat himself put into practice by taking a Greek prostitute as his second wife.[84] Recurrent incidents of communitarian violence within the Ottoman Empire and conflict along imperial frontiers also led to a vast expansion in the number of orphaned children, who became the object of concern for the Ottoman state, religious organizations, and foreign charities; often these institutions competed with each other for the right to "save" these children from both material and spiritual deprivation.[85] It was in this context that Hayganuş became Minyon Virjini — at once brash and vulnerable, particular yet archetypal.

An incident recorded in official documentation, and recounted by Minyon Virjini in later interviews, demonstrates how the strategic deployment of vulnerability as an aspect of her stage persona served to protect her from the more treacherous aspects of her public position. According to a series of archival records in the Presidency Ottoman Archives, she was arrested at the Varyete Theater in Beyoğlu on February 3, 1908, for singing "lyrics contaminated by raving nonsense" (*güfte-i hezeyan-alud*).[86] Although she had only been singing a rather common love ballad — the refrain of which, "hay nare nare nare, başımız yandı nare," clearly referenced the fires of love — the secret police in the audience had instead mistaken the line as referring to *Hay*, the Armenian endonym, and evincing Dashnak revolutionary sympathies.[87] To prevent any Armenian families in the audience from being inflamed by such "nonsensical songs" (*hezeyan-amiz kanto şarkıları*),[88] she was taken to a facility in Tophane and kept in police custody. As she later recounted in a later interview, one of the police officers soon pitied her, fell in love with her, and arranged her release:

God bless Ali Bey, he took over the case, tricked the supervisor, and said I had nothing to do with anything. If Ali Bey wasn't so friendly, if he wasn't protective, I don't know what would've happened to me...[89]

Although she was banned from performing on-stage for several months afterwards,[90] she nevertheless avoided any permanent repercussions; indeed, the Young Turk Revolution later that year significantly liberalized the regime of theatrical censorship and allowed her to perform in relative security. Whether by chance or design, the characteristics of Mignon that Hayganuş exhibited — a vulnerable child in need of the protection of authority — allowed her to survive the capriciousness of Hamidian censorship and thrive, even at its most extreme.

83 Doctor Mişel, who helped to draft the regulation, was apparently also known as "Fat Michel" to those in Galata, and used his power to extort money and property out of licensed prostitutes. See "Galata'daki Mekanlar", 001550016007, Dosya No: 38, Taha Toros Arşivi.

84 Orhan Okay, *Batı Medeniyeti Karşısında Ahmed Midhat Efendi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1991), 176.

85 See Nazan Maksudyan, *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 116-158.

86 BOA, DH.MKT, 1231/78,3, 5 Muharrem 1326 (8 February 1908).

87 Münir Süleyman Çapan, "Hay, Ermenice Ermeni Demektir, Nar da Arapça Ateş Demektir."

88 BOA, DH.MKT, 1231/78,1, 1 Muharrem 1326 (4 February 1908).

89 Münir Süleyman Çapan, "Hay, Ermenice Ermeni Demektir, Nar da Arapça Ateş Demektir."

90 BOA, DH.MKT. 1231/78,4, 18 Mayıs 1324 (31 May 1908).

There was another young woman whose life would be entangled with the Mignon motif, albeit under even more fraught circumstances. In 1916 she was taken into the orphanage for Armenian and Kurdish children at Aintoura, in contemporary Lebanon, dressed in "a dirty chemise which covered only a part of her little body" and speaking only "a mixture of Turkish and Kurdish, putting in Armenian and Arabic words now and then."[91] For the director of the institution, Halide Edip Adıvar,[92] this young child was Mignon not as figure but as flesh: in her memoirs, she notes how she was struck by "her little eyes, blazing with passion and will-power" and her "unearthly shrieks."[93] Whereas the other boys and girls at the orphanage were "beasts" whose "complete degradation" frightened her and the other staff, this young girl — given the name Jale — was "a wonderful, almost uncanny creature, who [had] her own way absolutely." Like Mignon, "Jale" was a dancer, and it is through dance that she revealed to Halide the "vision of horror which she held in her tiny head;" that is, the murder of her original parents. Yet, as Halide Edip describes, she alone of the children at Aintoura accepted her as "Mother Halide." Indeed, in comparison to the other orphans, which she claimed reminded her of "the lowest kinds of animals," Jale exuded a strange, wild vulnerability which fascinated the Aintoura staff.[94] Here, the affective power of the Mignon motif is again evident, but in more ambiguous circumstances. To be sure, the features of this motif were in this case undoubtedly projected onto Jale by the adults surrounding her, rather than part of some conscious strategy of survival. Yet even in this situation, the associations of vulnerability that this motif engendered served to ensure her security in a dangerous and changing environment. Of all the children at Aintoura, it was only Jale that Halide Edip attempted to formally adopt after the war; her fate, however, remains unknown.[95]

CONCLUSION

These three examples represent only sketches; case studies of how the *kanto* singers of the Sahne-i Âlem scene were embedded in, and skilled adaptors to, the emergent socioeconomic processes of Ottoman modernity. The frames of precarity, minority and vulnerability constitute only some of the possible avenues of research that figures like Peruz Terzakyan, Şamran Kelleciyan and Minyon Virjini can illuminate for scholars of Ottoman Istanbul, but here they have been selected as particularly fruitful, in part because they tie the emergence of *kanto* and the Sahne-i Âlem to more general developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Theoretically, too, these frames allow for an interesting juxtaposition of scholarship from within Ottoman studies and from without. Thus, this paper has explored precarity, minority and vulnerability with reference to the work of Judith Butler, Saidiya Hartman and Carolyn Steedman, respectively — scholars who have little tangible relationship to the Ottoman historiographic tradition, but whose insights into these topics can add richness to discussions within the field. Indeed, though the study of *kanto* and the Sahne-i

91 Adıvar, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib,* 454.

92 See Selim Deringil, ""Your Religion is Worn and Outdated:" Orphans, Orphanages and Halide Edib during the Armenian Genocide: The Case of Antoura," *Études Arméniennes Contemporaines* 12 (2019), 33-65.

93 Adıvar, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib*, 464.

94 Adıvar, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib,* 444.

95 Adıvar, *Memoirs of Halidé Edib,* 467.

Âlem troupe can and should be understood through the lenses of cultural history and ethnomusicology, the essential argument of this paper has been that these developments are also richly deserving of study from a number of different methodological perspectives and frames of analysis. As discussed in the introduction to this piece, figures like Peruz Terzakyan and organizations like the Sahne-i Âlem have largely remained marginalized in broader Ottoman historiography, with attention paid only to the lyrical content of their musical production. Their pioneering social roles, as celebrated working women who were among the first to organize their labor power in the public sphere, have been almost entirely obscured. This paper has proposed instead that *kanto* singers like Peruz, Şamram and Virjini were, in many ways, paradigmatic figures, highlighting the operation of several social discourses that shaped urban life and society in the era of Ottoman modernization. They labored under the constraints of intense state censorship, physical and psychological violence, and the constant threat of impoverishment. Yet they were also strategic, adaptable, and able to collectively organize their labor and the affective power of their stage personae to manage these threats and cope with the instability of their position. When we consider this alongside their extensive and continued cultural influence, their particular importance as late Ottoman historical figures becomes even more distinct.

The field of Ottoman social and labor history has made certain strides since Gülhan Balsoy, more than a decade ago, correctly criticized "the absence of female workers and gendered analysis of labor in scholarship;"[96] similarly, a number of valuable studies on marginal or liminal subjects in Hamidian Istanbul have vastly expanded our knowledge of socialities otherwise ignored in urban histories of the Ottoman capital.[97] Nevertheless, there remain significant lacunae in the study of figures who were, in themselves, neither truly hegemonic nor subaltern but rather representative of "a certain pluralism" which, as Butler argues, "allowed for the reproduction of [national] homogeneity on another basis."[98] This paper has attempted, in small part, to fill this gap, and to highlight the historiographic usefulness of *kanto*, *kanto* singers, and the Sahne-i Âlem as microcosms of late Ottoman social life.

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96 Gülhan Balsöy, "Gendering Ottoman Labor History: The Cibali Régie Factory in the Early Twentieth Century." *International Review of Social History* 54/17 (2009), 46.

97 In addition to the aforementioned studies by Malte Fuhrmann, notable examples include Roger A. Deal, *Crimes of Honor, Drunken Brawls and Murder: Violence in Istanbul under Abdülhamid II* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2010); Noémi Levi-Aksu, *Ordre et Désordres dans l'Istanbul Ottomane (1879-1909)* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2013); and Nurçin İleri, "A Nocturnal History of Fin-de-siecle Istanbul" (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, Graduate School of Binghamton University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2015).

98 Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007), 32.

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