

Limits and Opportunities: Women and Their Experiences in the Entertainment Sector during the Late Ottoman Era

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Sınırılar ve Fırsatlar: Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Kadınlar ve Eğlence Sektöründeki Deneyimleri

Öz ■ Bu makale, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun son döneminde (19. ve 20. yüzyıl) eğlence sektöründeki orta ve alt sınıf kadınların deneyimleri ve çeşitli aktörler ile olan karmaşık ilişkilerini incelemektedir. Makale, gayrimüslim Osmanlı ve yabancı orta sınıf kadın girişimci ve işletmecilere kıyasla, orta sınıf Osmanlı Müslüman kadınlarının bu sektörde özel mülk sahibi olarak göründüklerine işaret etmektedir. Ayrıca orta sınıfın alt kesimini temsil eden sektördeki serbest çalışan kadınlara da dikkat çekmektedir. Daha sonra akrobat, şarkıcı, dansçı ve aktrist olarak iş yapan alt sınıf Osmanlı gayrimüslim ve yabancı kadınları ele almaktadır; Müslüman kadınlar kültürel/dini nedenlerle 1920'ye kadar tiyatro sahnesinde yer alamadılar. Bu yaklaşım sektörde dahil olan kadınları alt ve orta sınıf olarak kategorize etmeye, çeşitli rollerini ve dini/etnik kökenlerini belirlemektedir. Önerilen analizde temel olan alt sınıf çalışan kadınların gündelik deneyimleridir; onların cinselliklerini sergilemeleri, fuhuş yapmaları, erkek şiddetine maruz kalmaları ve eğlence sektöründe yer alan devlet, müşteriler ve farklı diğer aktörlerle girdiği ilişkileri. Böylece bu makale, etnik/dinsel, sınıfısal ve toplumsal cinsiyet boyutlarına sahip dinamik eğlence sektörüne dahil olan kadınların seslerini yakalamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Eğlence, tiyatro, kadın sanatçular, altı sınıf kadın, orta sınıf kadın, cinsellik, Osmanlı devleti.

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Introduction

From the nineteenth century and onwards, women found ways to become involved in the Ottoman entertainment sector. Although the sector was male-dominated, with the decline of female seclusion and segregation at the end of the nineteenth century, Ottoman Muslim women quickly became spectators, while mixed-gender gatherings in public gained ground.¹ Unlike the spectators, as private owners of theater buildings or casinos, some Muslim women entered this sector more indirectly. However, for cultural/religious reasons, Muslim women did not perform on the theater stage until an actress, Afife Jale, gave her premier in 1920.² Long before Afife, non-Muslim Ottoman and foreign women had started to work as acrobats, singers, dancers, and actresses, while others had organized charities, became business operators and self-employed entrepreneurs. The present article, focusing on the pre-1920 era, shows the diverse experiences of these women, directly and indirectly, entering the entertainment sector and emphasizes their different class and religious/ethnic backgrounds.³ In this way, it seeks to fill the gap in the existing scholarship,⁴ which has, so far, studied

1 For more information on women in public space, see *Ottoman Women in Public Space*, eds. Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, (Leiden: Brill, 2016); *Women in The Middle East: Past and Present*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 62.

2 Metin And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2014), p. 119.

3 In the Ottoman Empire, Muslims, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews were organized around religious/ethnic lines, which contained their own authority, structures, and organization. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Tanzimat leaders introduced equality before the law for Muslims and non-Muslims subjects to make them all loyal to the sultan and the Ottoman administration. To some extent, this failed since, for instance, non-Muslim communities developed their own religious and national identities, and had their separate education, and enjoyed Western support and advantages in trade. Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 131, 137, 151-152, 286-296.

4 There is a growing literature on Ottoman women. For the history writing on the late Ottoman women, see Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou, "Introduction: Historiography of Late Ottoman Women", *A Social History of Late Ottoman Women: New Perspectives*, eds. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 1-27; More specifically, please consult Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Iris Agmon, "Women, Class, and Gender: Muslim Jaffa and Haifa at the Turn of the 20th Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 30/4 (1998), pp. 477-500; Judith E. Tucker, *In the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law*

Ottoman entertainment⁵ but has not adequately explored the subject from the article's perspective.⁶

Unlike this scholarship, the present article demonstrates middle-class and lower-class women in the entertainment sector and their intricate relationships with various actors, including the authorities and customers. It shows that the entertainment sector offered job and career opportunities to women despite its limits, and displayed ethnic/religious, class and gender dimensions that impacted women. By considering such dimensions, this article argues that entertainment is

in Ottoman Syria and Palestine, (Berkeley: University of California, 2000); Khaled Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century", *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Eugene Rogan, (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), pp. 77-102; *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Madeline C. Zilfi, (New York: Cambridge University, 2010); Gülnar Balsoy, *The Politics of Reproduction in Ottoman Society, 1838-1900*, (London: Routledge, 2013); Başak Tuğ, *Politics of Honor in Ottoman Anatolia: Sexual Violence and Socio-Legal Surveillance in The Eighteenth Century*, (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Badegül Eren Aydinlik and Seyfi Kenan, "Between Men, Time and the State: Education of Girls During the Late Ottoman Empire (1859-1908)", *Paedagogica Historica*, (2019), pp. 1-19.

5 For Ottoman entertainment activities, see an edited volume, *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014).

6 However, some studies have directly dealt with Ottoman female performers. They include Fahriye Dinçer, who writes on questioning female identity through the experience of Afife (later Afife Jale), known as the first Ottoman Muslim woman on the stage without a legal permit. Fahriye Dinçer, "Afife Jale on The Stage: Questioning Female Identity in Theatre: Late Ottoman and Early Republican Modernization Processes", *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), pp. 393-406; a more recent work examines two Turkish actresses, again Afife Jale and Bedia Muvahhit, to depict their experiences representing working women in the entertainment business. Saliha Elif Shannon-Chastain, "Daughters of the Stage: Constructing the Modern Woman in the Theatre in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic (1914-1935)", (MA Thesis, İstanbul Bilgi University, 2019); Hasmik Khalapyan studies an Ottoman-Armenian (later a Russian-Armenian) actress, named Azniv Hratçya (Azniv Hrachia). Hasmik Khalapyan, "Theater as Career for Ottoman Armenian Women, 1850 to 1910", *A Social History of Late Ottoman Women: New Perspectives*, eds. Duygu Köksal and Anastasia Falierou, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 31-46; Hasmik Khalapyan, "Multiple Ramifications: Azniv Hrachia's Autobiography As a Source for the History of the Theatre and the World Beyond," eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), pp. 377-392.

more than just about entertaining people,⁷ it also intertwines, such as administrative, commercial, class, religious and gender issues.

This article is composed of four sections. The first one gives an overview of Ottoman entertainment with an emphasis on spectators. The second section highlights the entertainment sector's class dimensions and demonstrates that middle-class women were property owners, charity organizers, business operators, and entrepreneurs (some held small businesses, others were self-employed). The third one exemplifies lower class women and under what circumstances they worked, struggled to get a job, or maintain it, and how their job might, on occasion, intertwine with prostitution. A focus on working women and their consensual sexual relations as well as becoming, from time to time, targets of various forms of male violence forms the final section.

Ottoman Entertainment and Spectators: An Overview

Before the late Ottoman era, Ottomans amused themselves at the festivals where shadow theatres, puppet plays, storytellers, singers, musicians, impersonators, jugglers, or acrobats performed in public. Other activities included horse races and fireworks that set fire to the images of giants, elephants, rhinoceroses, and dragons on the festival scene.⁸ During an imperial wedding or a circumcision ceremony of princes, such as war games, food distribution, and acrobatic shows could occur, indicating that the sultans were comfortable and familiar with this universe.⁹ With good weather, sultans and their entourage amused themselves with sports activities (*torba darbi, tomak, cirit, menzil ciridi*) and during the wintertime, with performances of players and dancers.¹⁰

7 Entertainment is more than entertaining people. It also has non-entertaining functions, as the present article explores. For more information on the issue, see Stephen Bates and Anthony J. Ferri, "What is Entertainment? Notes Toward a Definition", *Studies in Popular Culture*, 33/1 (2010), pp. 1-20.

8 For more details, see Efdal Sevincli, "Festivals and Their Documentation: Surnames Covering the Festivities of 1675 and 1724", *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), pp. 193-194.

9 Sevincli, "Festivals and Their Documentation," pp. 196-197.

10 For more details, see Mehmet Ali Beyhan, "Amusements in the Ottoman Palace of the Early Nineteenth Century: Revelations from Newly Analysed Ruzname", *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), pp. 225-236.

Both sultans and ordinary people enjoyed storytellers (*meddah*), shadow theatres, and puppet shows.¹¹ Ordinary people entertained themselves with various other activities during the nights of Ramadan, the Ramadan feast following the fasting, Sacrificing Feast, harvest feasts, or weddings. Craft guild members held excursions to mark the promotion of members to a journeyman or a master.¹² Ordinary people gathered in gardens, factories, shops, cafés, taverns, someone's rooms where they drank wine, ate, and played games, produced music, and sang together.¹³ Most people practiced traditional dancing named *halay* and *sirtaki* during public festivities and listened to popular music accompanied by a famous drink named *rakı*.¹⁴ Before the late Ottoman era, women were not much visible in such activities. However, their public presence increased from the nineteenth century and onwards, during which entertainment took new forms with the introduction of the European style of dance, theatres, operas, cinemas, etc.

Modern theatres initially developed in the Ottoman port cities of Istanbul and Izmir¹⁵ where the inhabitants of those cities had more contact with Europe and, therefore, European culture. Non-Muslim Ottomans (like the Greeks and Armenians) played an indispensable part in running the theatre business.¹⁶ Spectators of modern theatres were mostly foreigners but to draw in larger Turkish-speaking audiences, Turkish language plays and musicals were encouraged.¹⁷

11 Beyhan, "Amusements in the Ottoman Palace," p. 232.

12 Fikret Yılmaz, "What About a Bit of Fun?: Wine, Crime, and Entertainment in the Sixteenth-Century Western Anatolia", *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), p. 145.

13 Yılmaz, "What About a Bit of Fun?", pp.159-164.

14 Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 281.

15 Three volumes listed below detail Istanbul theatres during the late Ottoman era. Kerem Karaboga, *Geleceğe Perde Açılan Gelenek: Geçmişten Günümüze İstanbul Tiyatroları, I: Suriçi İstanbul, Bakırköy ve Çevresi*, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011); Yavuz Pekman, *Geleceğe Perde Açılan Gelenek: Geçmişten Günümüze İstanbul Tiyatroları II: Beyoğlu, Şişli, Beşiktaş ve Çevresi*, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011); Fakiye Özsoysal and Metin Balay, *Geleceğe Perde Açılan Gelenek: Geçmişten Günümüze İstanbul Tiyatroları, III: Anadolu Yakası*, (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011).

16 Nalan Turna, "The Ottoman Stage: Politicization and Commercialization of Theaters, 1876-1922", *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), p. 322.

17 Nur Gürani Arslan, "Musicals in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Theatre: The Story of

Spectators went to theatres to watch comedies, romantic plays, melodramas, and performances, in which music played an important part.¹⁸ Besides adapted European theatres, Ottoman intelligentsia contributed to the sector as playwrights, like Namık Kemal's patriotic 'Fatherland or Silistra' (*Vatan Yahut Silistre*). Spectators also went to theaters to see more originals/local plays during the 1910s.¹⁹

Other forms of entertainment included attending cinema, using bicycles, watching boat and horse races. These new forms of entertainment encouraged the presence of female spectators, which hitherto had remained discrete. However, the state began to seek control of visible signs of female spectators' sexuality, such as unveiling,²⁰ and began to curb their growing public presence and mixed-gender gatherings.²¹

In 1889, the state pressured entrepreneurs/theater managers not to allow female Muslim spectators to attend any theatre activities.²² Nevertheless, not all entrepreneurs agreed with the state since, for economic reasons, they sought to attract a broader audience. In 1900, an entrepreneur voiced his objection to the state that had banned mixed-gender gatherings at a theater activity in Yenibahçe Kehhalbağı.²³ Other entrepreneurs developed strategies to overcome the existing restrictions by organizing separate shows or providing lodges in theaters for

Leblebici Horhor Ağa”, *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraia Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), pp. 343-358.

18 Suraia Faroqhi, “Introduction 2: Research on Ottoman Festivities and Performances”, *Celebration, Entertainment and Theater in the Ottoman World*, eds. Suraia Faroqhi and Arzu Öztürkmen, (Chicago: Seagull, 2014), p. 46.

19 Faroqhi, “Introduction 2,” p. 45.

20 The state called their way of dressing “improper,” meaning a disregard of Islamic practices regarding seclusion and veiling. Directorate of State Archives-Ottoman Archives (*Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi* (BOA), *Zabıtiye Nezareti* (after this ZB), 326/79, R-9.7.1324 (September 22, 1908).

21 BOA, *Yıldız Umum Vilayetler Tahrirâtı* (Y.PRK.UM), 16/63, H-13.8.1307 (April 4, 1890).

22 BOA, *Dahiliye Nezâreti Mektûbi Kalemi* (after this DH.MKT), 1635/128, H-10.11.1306 (July 8, 1889).

23 BOA, DH.MKT, 2094/50, H-4.4.1316 (August 22, 1898); during the Young Turk era, a theater owner, Ali Fehmi, raised his objection. He challenged the Istanbul Police Department's decision on closing his theater. He claimed equality and justice promised by the existing Constitution because, unlike him, others in the theater business continued to run the business. Turna, “The Ottoman Stage”, p. 332.

female spectators.²⁴ In 1909, Abdürrezzak (*Efendi*), a theatre director, decided to extend the theatre building in Kadıköy Yoğurtçu Çeşmesi,²⁵ indicating a desire to encourage more women to frequent entertainment places,²⁶ including casinos.²⁷

Besides theaters and casinos, women went on boating excursions or picnics, took promenades, participated in imperial pageantry, and went shopping. They spent time in the new parks that sprung up during the twentieth century, like the Gülhane Park.²⁸ Still, while males enjoyed relative freedom of circulation in places of entertainment, this was far less true for women, especially Muslim women. Nevertheless, by changing their dress to disguise themselves as men or Christian women, Muslim women (probably a few) too found freedom of circulation.²⁹

Middle-Class Women in the Entertainment Sector

This article reveals the importance of a class dimension in the entertainment sector of the late Ottoman era. To this end, it relies on Jürgen Kocka's definition of the middle-class concept in the context of the "long nineteenth century" (from the eighteenth century to WWI). The present article uses Kocka's concept for two reasons. First, his concept is broad, meaning it is comprehensive and helpful to conceptualize the Ottoman entertainment's class dimension. Second, it coincides with the period (from the mid-nineteenth century and onwards) under study.

24 Metin And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e*, p. 72.

25 BOA, ZB, 359/59, R-8.4.1325 (July 21, 1909); one of the most famous Ottoman Armenian (later converted to Islam) actor, director and entrepreneur, Güllü Agop (Agop Vartoyan) in 1879, already had separate caged-like lodges for women. And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e*, p. 72; Güllü Agop, Mınakyan, Fasulyeciyan, and his wife were other entrepreneurs. Like Küçük İsmail and Mmakyan, some Armenian and Muslim entrepreneurs had joint businesses. Muslim entrepreneurs/theatre managers included, for example, Kel Hasan, Komik Arif (*Efendi*), Kambur Mehmed and Mehdi (*Efendi*), Abdürrezzak and Ahmed Fehim (*Efendi*). And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e*, pp. 90-91.

26 BOA, ZB, 328/77, R-15.9.1324 (September 25, 1908).

27 BOA, *Dahiliye Nezâreti Muhaberât-ı Umumiye İdaresi* (DH.MUİ), 109/29, H-24.6.1328 (July 3, 1910); see an example in BOA, ZB, 314/68, R-4.2.1325 (April 17, 1909); in 1921, men and women attended the same event at the İstanbul Taksim Tepebaşı area. BOA, *Dahiliye Emniyet-i Umumiye Asayıf* (after this DH.EUM.AYŞ), 76/46, H-16-8-1339 (April 25, 1921).

28 Boyar and Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, p. 221.

29 And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e*, p. 116.

Interaction and confluences had long come through European entrepreneurs and actors/actresses seeking new Ottoman entertainment opportunities. Thus, in this particular context exploring the functions and meanings of the class dimension of the period requires such an emphasis on the “long nineteenth century,” as offered by Kocka’s analysis. However, by using Kocka’s concept, the article does not argue that European and Ottoman experiences were exactly the same.

According to Kocka, the economic middle class included “merchants, manufacturers, bankers, capitalists, entrepreneurs, and managers, as well as rentiers and their families.”³⁰ The educated middle class comprises “the families of doctors, lawyers, ministers, scientists and other professionals, university and secondary school professors, intellectuals, men and women of letters, and academics, including those who serve as administrators and officials in public and private bureaucracies.”³¹ Kocka also sees artists and military officers as part of the middle class. Master artisans, retail merchants, and innkeepers were part of the middle class in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, they moved to the margins of their class as time went on. During the final part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they often, along with lower-middle ranking salaried employers and white-collar workers, represented the lower middle class. Kocka excludes nobles, peasants, manual workers and the mass of lower-class people from his definition of the middle class.³²

Following Kocka’s definition of class, the present section of this article categorizes some women engaged in the entertainment sector as members of the economic middle-class and one case (Mrs. Ayvolya) as part of the educated middle class. Female entrepreneurs under study who led small entertainment groups and were self-employed more or less represented the lower middle class.

Although Muslim and non-Muslim women were among property owners, available evidence reveals only middle-class Muslim women in the Ottoman entertainment sector as property owners.³³ A middle-class Muslim woman, Emine

30 Jürgen Kocka, “The Middle Classes in Europe”, *The Journal of Modern History*, 67/4 (1995), p. 784.

31 Kocka, “The Middle Classes”, p. 784.

32 Kocka, “The Middle Classes”, p. 784.

33 The Land Code of 1858 that had a more egalitarian framework of inheritance rights than the previous legislation eliminated at least some obstacles to women’s property ownership. Attila E. Aytekin, “Agrarian Relations, Property and Law: An Analysis of the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45/6 (2009), p. 942.

(*Hanim*) appears in the evidence as an owner of a theatre building, a former mansion in Istanbul Gedikpaşa.³⁴ In 1862, she sold it to an Ottoman Greek, İstifnaki Karatodori. For Muslims in the area, this caused two problems. First, Emine sold the property to a non-Muslim. The second concerned the new owner, who wanted to use the building near the mosque and neighborhoods where Muslims lived to hold entertainment activities.³⁵ Collective religious anxieties rather than her gender or even her status as a Muslim played a role in Emine's difficulties in selling her property. Although she had to step back from selling the theater for the said reason, this particular location/Gedikpaşa developed as a center of entertainment with the Soullier Circus, the Gedikpaşa Theater, and the Ottoman Theater, the latter had performed there from the late 1850s and onwards.³⁶

Emine İffet was another Muslim woman who owned a theatre building in İstanbul Direklerası; her considerable property holdings included shops, an out-building at the lower side of the theater building and a mansion-house in İstanbul Paşalimanı.³⁷ In 1899, she had difficulty renting it³⁸ since, like others, her wooden construction posed a danger to the public.³⁹ Indeed, in 1882, a theater building in Şehzadebaşı had already collapsed, killing seven people.⁴⁰ Given such disasters, the authorities insisted that Emine İffet and others, conform to fire/safety and sanitary standards.⁴¹ Despite the building's problems, the state in 1900 allowed Hasan Efendi, the director of the Ottoman Dreamhouse Theatre and the actors, to rent the building and receive a performance license for particular days.⁴² In

34 For women's involvement in various urban economic sectors, see Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, "The Role of Women in the Urban Economy of Istanbul, 1700-1850", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001), pp. 141-152; Donald Quataert, "Ottoman Women, Households, and Textile Manufacturing, 1800-1914," *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 161-176.

35 BOA, *İrâde Meclisi-i Vâlâ* (İ.MVL), 471/21360, H-24.2.1279 (August 21, 1862).

36 For more details on this location, see And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e*, p. 94.

37 BOA, *Şurâ-yı Devlet* (after this §D), 2994/5, H-21.7.1317 (November 25, 1899); BOA, §D, 3138/3, H-26.6.1334 (April 30, 1916).

38 BOA, DH.MKT, 2164/110, H-23.9.1316 (February 4, 1899).

39 Karaboğa, *Geleceğe Perde Açılan Gelenek: Geçmişten Günümüze İstanbul Tiyatroları*, I, p. 42.

40 Metin And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu": *Kuruluşu-Gelişimi-Katkısı*, (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1976), p. 153.

41 BOA, DH.MKT, 2286/98, H-16.8.1317 (December 20, 1899).

42 BOA, DH.MKT, 2329/36, H-5.12.1317 (April 6, 1900).

1902, however, state authorities declined another Muslim entrepreneur's request to perform in the same building.⁴³ As a result, the revenue of this female Muslim property owner decreased. In some respects, being a middle-class female Muslim property owner in the Ottoman Empire might not guarantee a problem-free enterprise.

Although entrepreneurs in the entertainment sector mainly were Ottoman and foreign males in the “long nineteenth century,” female entrepreneurs seemed to be non-Muslim Ottomans and foreigners. In 1860, Doruhi, a Catholic Ottoman woman (a member of the Ottoman Latin community), operated a casino in Salacak/Üsküdar. The police became involved when some people from the area wanted the authorities to close her casino. The police examined the place and found the casino had commercially acceptable functions and created no problems for most people (including non-Muslims) who lived in the surrounding area. Although the authorities did not close the casino, they reviewed the case to satisfy the complainants.⁴⁴ Doruhi strongly defended her right, however, we do not see many women like Doruhi operating a casino since, as mentioned above, Ottoman non-Muslim and foreign males dominated this business.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, evidence from later periods offers clues about such women like Doruhi in the sector. Miss de Moldo, a French citizen and a theater actress, started a business by renting an equestrian vaulting center in the Haleb Hanı, a well-known commercial building located on Ağa Camii Street in the Beyoğlu district of Istanbul in 1908. De Moldo was able to get authorization to organize ballroom dances inside the building, which already included a theatre, café, and a concert hall.⁴⁶

43 BOA, *Bâb-ı Âli Evrak Odası* (after this BEO), 1955/146598, H-24.8.1320 (November 26, 1902).

44 BOA, *Divan (Beylikçi) Kalemî* (A.)DVN), 157/10, H-29.3.1277 (October 5, 1860).

45 Yorgi was an Ottoman Greek man who was a casino holder. In 1912, when he wanted to open a café, the state refused permission because the new place would be a place for music performances, with women working as maids or singers, and customers holding drinking parties. BOA, ZB, 601/127, R-2.12.1327 (February 15, 1912); evidence from 1916 shows that Naciye and Raife (probably Naciye's daughter) became property owners after inheriting a casino in Salonika and other properties from Naciye's father. BOA, *Hariciye Nezâreti Sofya Sefareti* (after this HR.SFR.04), 905/33, June 18, 1916. In general, unlike non-Muslims, both Muslim men and women did not directly or openly run such businesses because Muslim religion outlawed alcohol drinking, which was widespread in casinos.

46 BOA, ZB, 386/114, R-2.5.1322 (September 22, 1908).

Other middle-class women's participation was more indirect when organizing entertainment activities to raise money for charities.⁴⁷ In 1893, a middle-class woman, together with her husband (a French banker), and her sons, applied to the state to organize an entertainment event to finance the winter expenses of the poor in Istanbul Makriköy (current day Bakırköy).⁴⁸ In 1908, the wife of the steward of the Ottoman Greek Patriarch, named Mrs. Ayvolya, asked the state for permission to stage a play at the famous Odeon Theatre in Taksim. She aimed to raise funds and collect goods for poor pregnant women and children up to five, from the Beyoğlu area.⁴⁹ By extending their domestic activities into public life,⁵⁰ these two women likely hoped to receive social recognition⁵¹ for themselves and to improve the public image of their husbands and families. Undoubtedly in the latter case, the Ottoman Greek Patriarchy likely benefitted from Mrs. Ayvolya's activity.⁵² In 1896, however, with the founding of the house for the needy (*Darıülaceze*) serving to bring the poor of every religion under one roof, the state sought to establish its financial monopoly over religious groups'/charity-based entertainment

47 Besides foreigners, Ottoman non-Muslims organized performances, concerts, theaters, and ballroom dances to finance hospitals, churches, and schools, thus helping the needy. Turna, "The Ottoman Stage," pp. 332-333; some wealthy Muslims too could contribute to state projects voluntarily. For instance, Abdurrahman Tevfik Efendi, a merchant from Istanbul, organized concerts to raise funds for *Darıülaceze*, a particular institution founded for the needy people. Turna, "The Ottoman Stage," p. 333; unlike non-Muslims, however, evidence at hand does not often mention their taking part in charitable activities through entertainment events although both Muslim men and women held property and as part of their religious culture, they engaged in philanthropic activities. About Muslims men's and women's philanthropic activities, see Amy Singer, *İyilik Yap Denize At: Müslüman Toplum-larda Hayırseverlik*, trans. Ali Özdamar, (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2012).

48 BOA, *Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzât* (after this Y.MTV), 80/188, H-25.1.1311 (8.8.1893); BOA, Y.MTV, 81/15, H-2.2.1311 (August 15, 1893).

49 BOA, ZB, 634/88, R-14.11.1323 (January 27, 1908); see similar cases in BOA, ZB, 321/94, R-19.10.1322 (January 1, 1907); BOA, ZB, 389/167, R-18.12.1322 (March 3, 1907).

50 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2019), p. xxxviii.

51 For such a debate, please see Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. li.

52 For details, see Turna, "The Ottoman Stage;" an example from 1908 tells us that the Ottoman non-Muslim religious leaders were willing to finance church expenses through theater activities. The Armenian Patriarchate asked the Ottoman government to allow a theater play in Sarıyer to meet the church's (in Büyükdere) debts and the janitor and the poor's needs. BOA, *Dahiliye Nezareti Muamelat* (DH.TMIK.M), 273/57, H-26.6.1326 (July 26, 1908).

organizations. Though it appeared that the state only charged the organization fees to finance its expenses,⁵³ this action also possibly impacted on a reduction of space for both individuals, including these middle-class people (men and women) or religious communities, to raise money from entertainment activities.

Unlike the more upper-level middle-class women, self-employed female entrepreneurs that represented the lower middle class and small entertainment groups were more mobile. Mrs. Virhanyamski and Virginia were two such women. In 1906, Mrs. Virhanyamski, an Italian, travelled to Giresun with her four children and two male colleagues. As with most foreign-based entertainment companies' competition with Ottoman companies resulted in banishment from the town. However, the local government banished them from the town because they had competed with an Ottoman entertainment company. The local government's backing of the local Ottoman company made it difficult for the group to continue performing. Earning little, Mrs. Virhanyamski negotiated with the governor to work in the city until the group could finance their travel expenses back to Italy.⁵⁴

Another Italian woman, Virginia, and her colleagues went to an Anatolian town, Tokat, to perform an acrobatic show. Upon their arrival, they found an inn where they stayed and worked for at least forty days. Virginia used one of the inn's rooms to store her acrobatic possessions. The inn keeper asked her to leave the inn after four performances. When Virginia refused to move, the inn keeper locked up her tools used in her shows and prevented her from working. Furthermore, Virginia and her colleagues faced accusations from the public that they conducted themselves noisily on the streets and bothered people. Whatever the reason, the authorities became involved and required Virginia and her colleagues to pay a license fee, five *mecidiyes* for the acrobatic show, ten for the stage plays, and the Ottoman navy 722 *guruş* from a one-night theatre performance. Desirous of continuing to work, the group had no choice but to accept to pay the required fee.⁵⁵ In this case, we observe the state more concerned by extracting fees and taxes, not simply controlling public reactions to the group.

Indeed, as the latter case has demonstrated, the state had already mobilized its fiscal machinery, and by 1905, for instance, it asked theaters not only to pay a fee

53 Turna, "The Ottoman Stage," pp. 332-336.

54 BOA, DH.MKT, 1098/12, H-14.4.1324 (June 7, 1906).

55 BOA, *Dahiliye Nezâreti Hukuk Kalemi* (after this DH.H), 37/7, H-19.11.1328 (November 22, 1910).

known as *harc-i tasdik* for each scene of each section of a play. Overall, from 1910 onwards, the state continued to extend its control and taxation practices of the entertainment sites.⁵⁶ In those days, following the legal regulations that stipulated fees/taxes and required official licensing, a further financial burden fell upon performers. Municipal authorities used such income for recreational or other activities for the residents of the city. It cannot be ignored that the performers for being allowed to perform likely provided services for urban people too. Undoubtedly, the evidence also reflected the functioning state apparatus.⁵⁷

During the 1910s, performers and, more directly, entrepreneurs in the theater business became affected by new state policies. Promoting Turkish nationalist policies, the state, for example, required theater owners to publish their advertisements in Turkish. Failure to comply would lead to the state imposing a double taxation fee. Further, it encroached on the sector with the abolition of unilaterally capitulations during WWI, resulting in foreign theatre companies losing their tax privileges. By the early 1920s, the cinema, public dances, concerts, sports events, racecourse events, and clubs had to pay mandatory standardized fees and taxes, the *Darülaceze* fee and *temaşa*/performance tax.⁵⁸ First, as mentioned above, the state looked to expand its fiscal revenues by imposing new taxes. Second, beset by economic and political constraints, ensuing wars and territorial losses, the state sought efficient political tools to consolidate its power and unify the nation, and thus⁵⁹ the cinema, like the theater, became such tools.⁶⁰

During the chaotic atmosphere of WWI, foreign women especially found limits to their participation in the entertainment sector. For security reasons, both

56 Turna, "The Ottoman Stage," p. 332-333.

57 The details of the Municipal laws from 1877 give insights into the municipalities' roles, functions, and duties that obviously affected the entertainment sites. Osman Nuri Ergin, *Mecelle-i Umûr-i Belediyye*, IV, (İstanbul: İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 1994), pp. 1624-1672.

58 Turna, "The Ottoman Stage," pp. 333-335.

59 Permanent and seasonal cinema-houses throughout WWI, and its afterward followed the first opening cinema house in 1908 in Istanbul. For details, see Çeliktemel-Thomen, "Regulating Exhibitions at Cinema-Houses in Imperial Istanbul", *Sinecine*, 9/1 (2018), pp. 81-112.

60 Under the Regulation of 1916, the state specifically focused on the contents of the programs during the actual screening, banning films found improper and imposed sanctions under the Criminal Code if entrepreneurs operated without correct licenses or failed to follow the rules. Çeliktemel-Thomen, "Regulating Exhibitions", pp. 81-112.

the entrepreneurs who had outside contacts and the foreign performers in question could not obtain authorization to perform in the Ottoman lands. The state increased its control over the entertainment sites to keep an eye on potential spying activities. In 1916, an Ottoman Jew, Yosef Yerevlico, the director of a theatre called *Parisiana* in Beyoğlu, sought to employ two Austrian actresses, Marie Kohliyah and Barbara Volof, to perform in Istanbul. As one might expect, the state distrusted foreign performers, believing that they could likely obtain information detrimental to the state and exchange it with the enemy during their short stay in Istanbul.⁶¹

Almost two years after the end of WWI, Mrs. Kotopolis, a Greek citizen and owner of a theatre company, found herself in a complicated situation, too. At this time, the Ottoman state discouraged or banned plays that negatively affected public opinion and worsened the relationship between people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds;⁶² therefore, the Istanbul police department canceled Mrs. Kotopolis's theater activities.⁶³ Kotopolis' failure to run the theater business does not seem to be due to her gender but rather the need to control anti-Ottoman public sentiment among the Ottoman Greeks and other populations subjected to Ottoman rule. Overall, intermeshed with the unstable twentieth century, which witnessed the Ottoman Empire was on its way to a nation-state, ethnicity/religion played a more critical role in the daily lives of these women in the entertainment business.

Lower Class Women and Their Labor Practices

As the previous sections have shown, though differently, women from the middle class engaged in the entertainment sector comprised of Muslims and non-Muslims. However, until 1920, the lower class working women in the sector appeared to be all non-Muslims Ottomans and non-Ottomans; cultural/religious reasons prevented Muslim women from working in the sector for a long time. Indeed, until the nineteenth century, actors played female Muslims in the traditional Ottoman/Turkish theaters. In the nineteenth century, Ottoman Christian women, primarily Armenians, started to play these roles.⁶⁴ Two factors intervened. First, most Armenian actresses speaking Turkish with an accent increased the need

61 BOA, *Hariciye Nezâreti İdare Kalemi* (HR.İD), 68/9, February 10, 1916.

62 See a particular case from 1919. BOA, DH.EUM.AYŞ, 17/27, H-3.11.1337 (July 31, 1919).

63 BOA, DH.EUM.AYŞ, 38/31, H-25.7.1338 (April 14, 1920).

64 Çiğdem Kılıç, *Geleneksel Türk Tiyatrosu’nda Zenneler*, (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2007).

for Muslim/Turkish women. Second, intellectuals of the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918) supported the entrance of Muslim women onto the job market.⁶⁵ Muslim men had already been in the business as actors and entrepreneurs; the first Muslim actor in the modern sense, Ahmet Necip (*Efendi*)'s performed in the 1870s. There were other motivations, too. During the Second Constitutional era, the Conservatoire (*Darıü'l Bedayı-i Osmani*) of drama and music departments began to include Muslim women with sufficient independence amongst its students. Behire, Memduha, Beyza, Refika, and Afife represent such women.⁶⁶ In 1918, Muslim women employed by the same Conservatoire took courses in theatre to perform specific roles in the future. In 1920, the Conservatoire produced Hüseyin Suat's play "Patches" (*Yamalar*) in Kadıköy, and Afife, the first Muslim woman on the stage, played the role of Emel. However, the police warned the theater managers not to allow a Muslim actress to perform in public. This had a twofold effect. First, Afife continued to perform despite the state pressuring theater managers and actually searching theaters to locate her. Second, she performed secretly, even using different pseudonyms.⁶⁷ The Conservatoire certainly played a role in promoting Muslim women's entrance onto the public stage. More importantly, Afife's courageous actions helped advance not only her own independence but that of other female performers.

Long before Afife entered the sector as a Muslim woman, Ottoman non-Muslim women had started to work either due to economic constraints or eagerness to pursue a career in this sector.⁶⁸ Fanni (Agavni Hamoyan) became the first Ottoman Armenian theatre actress to perform in the mid-1850s, and at the end of 1861, the head of the Ottoman Armenian community agreed on female members becoming actresses.⁶⁹ Many entered the sector. Among them were

65 And, *Başlangıçından 1983'e*, pp. 118-119; feminists of the time criticized discrimination, polygamous practices, segregation of men and women on public transport, restrictions on women's education and work. For more details, see Serpil Çakır, *Osmancı Kadın Hareketi*, (İstanbul: Metis, 1994).

66 Ahmed Fehim claimed that he was the first Muslim actor in the modern sense, and another Muslim actor, Nuri, followed him; soon after, however, Nuri left his job. And, *Başlangıçından 1983'e*, p. 79.

67 For more details about Afife, see Dinçer, "Afife Jale".

68 Khalapyan, "Theater as Career", pp. 37, 40-42; see also Khalapyan, "Multiple Ramifications", pp. 377-392.

69 Dinçer, "Afife Jale", p. 395; a priest's daughter, Bayzar Papazyan (her married name was Fasulyecian), too, worked as an actress. And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu," p. 139.

Elize Binemciyan, Kınar (*Hanim*), Yeranuhi Karakaşyan, Vergine Karakaşyan, Mari Nıvart, Siranuş, Meryem Asdğig, Koharik Şirinyan, Aznif Hratçya, Bistos Araksiya, Teresa and Arnik Çuhaciyan, Takuhi Hiranuş were other well-known Armenian actresses;⁷⁰ see also Sara Mannik who features in the photograph below.



An Ottoman Armenian actress from *Darıül Bedayı*, Sara Mannik. BOA, Fotoğraflar (after this FTG_f), 589 (no date) (on the left); actors and actresses during the play. BOA, FTF_f, 1028 (no date) (on the right).

Family ties played essential roles in Ottoman Armenian actresses entering the job market where sisters and male relatives had already performed. Yeranuhi and Verkine were sisters.⁷¹ Siranuş's elder sister was Asdğig and her aunt's daughter was Aznif Hratçya. Some married an actor, like Bayzar Papazyan, who became a couple with a well-known actor, Tomas Fasulyeciyen.⁷² Most actresses mentioned above started to work at a young age, ranging from 9 to 16 and likely under their families or relatives' protection and permission; Aznioharik Şirinyan (9), Vergine Karakaşyan (11), Yeranuhi Karakaşyan (13-14), and Mari Nıvart (16).⁷³ Overall, economic reasons or eagerness to pursue a career by using close family/community ties influenced Ottoman non-Muslims to find compromises in this particular labor market.

⁷⁰ And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", pp. 129-140; And, *Başlangıcından 1983'e*, pp. 79-80.

⁷¹ And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", p. 139.

⁷² See also another couple in the Ottoman entertainment sector. An Italian woman, Rozenya Sakarina, worked in Edirne to stage a play while her husband performed a puppet show. BOA, DH.MKT, 1005/12, H-11.07.1323 (September 11, 1905).

⁷³ And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", pp. 129-140.

During the late Ottoman era, the entertainment sector usually practiced a system of payment or shares from performers' earnings, not only hierarchically arranged according to talent but also probably different business networks applied their own rules. As the various categories show, a more experienced and talented actress from the nineteenth century, Yeranuhi Karakaşyan,⁷⁴ earned 30 *lira* per month while another one with less experience, Meryem Asdgig, earned 5 *lira*.⁷⁵ During the 1870s, Aznif Hratçya earned 350 *lira* for a one-night event for which wealthy Armenians made donations. When she started to work as the lead singer for Çuhaciyan's musical group, Aznif made 50 *lira* per month and received 5 *lira* for a rented house in Beyoğlu.⁷⁶ Other factors intervened. Performers' earnings varied from city to city, theater to theater, or season to season as well. Similarly, an actor's earnings followed the same criteria. A Muslim actor, Ahmet Fehim, earned 130 *lira* per month at the Gedikpaşa Theater in Istanbul and 150 *lira* in Edirne.⁷⁷ Obviously, both male and female performers did not seem to have a regular income since most jobs in the sector were itinerant/seasonal.

Another difficulty for performers was the need to get state permission to perform,⁷⁸ to travel to and within the Empire,⁷⁹ they needed external passports after 1867 and internal ones mostly from 1841 and onwards. In 1889, a famous Italian canto singer, Mrs. Ficri,⁸⁰ and, in 1901, two female composers and singers,⁸¹

⁷⁴ And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", p. 129.

⁷⁵ And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", p. 149.

⁷⁶ And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", p. 150.

⁷⁷ And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", pp. 150-151.

⁷⁸ See more examples in And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu," pp. 138, 140; in particular, in 1894, an Armenian entrepreneur named Papasyan received state permission to perform in the Balkans. BOA, *Hariciye Nezâreti Tahrirât-ı Hariciye* (HR.TH), 145/43, August 19, 1894.

⁷⁹ The Ottoman state applied internal passports regularly from 1841 and onwards. For more details on Ottoman internal passport practices, please see Nalan Turna, 19. yy.'dan ve 20. yy.'a Osmanlı Topraklarında Seyahat, Göç ve Asayıf Belgeleri: Mürür Tezkereleri, (İstanbul: Kakanüs Yayınları, 2013).

⁸⁰ BOA, *Yıldız Mâbeyn Erkânı ve Saray Görevlileri* (Y.PRK.SGE), 3/38, H-12.8.1306 (April 13, 1889).

⁸¹ The two famous singers, Miss Saminad, and Mrs. Terofiye, came to Istanbul for three days and gave a concert at a French club. BOA, *Yıldız Teşrifat-ı Umumiye İdaresi Maruzâti* (Y.PRK.TSF), 6/28, H-24.12.1318 (April 14, 1901); in 1910, now Ottoman performers left for Germany. Five Ottoman actresses who, with the encouragement of a French actor, Bretran, went to Germany. Here, the state endeavored to obtain their extradition, but we

and Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), a famous French actress,⁸² requested permission to perform in the Ottoman state; they could obtain state permission only for some previously licensed plays.

Unlike the above famous women, lower-class women had to travel to smaller towns where performing had its challenges. In 1902, Kurti Arniko, an Italian male acrobat and the group members went to Çorum, the local authority allowed only him and his sons to act, not the female acrobat (probably an Italian). The reason given by the local government to ban a woman from performing was that the people of the town were unfamiliar with female performers, an indication of cultural/religious constraints.⁸³ If found improper, the state banned the way of dancing, singing, or the contents of the songs. In 1903, for such reasons, the state must have refused an individual Ottoman non-Muslim singer, Marika's application to work in Kozana (Monastir) and nearby districts.⁸⁴ In 1904, she reapplied to emphasize her need to work but seemed to have no result.⁸⁵ In the same year, the authorities requested that an Ottoman female singer stopped singing Turkish and Arabic songs of "weird" words, which were, in fact, obscene ones.⁸⁶ Indeed, such state restrictions clearly interrupted the work of these women.

On occasions, female performers who publicly overstepped socially conservative rules governing female sexuality found themselves unemployed. In 1908, Minyon Virjini, who was an Ottoman Armenian and worked at the Beyoğlu Variety Theatre, sang a canto using joyful Armenian words, *hay nare nare*, which her audience, including Armenian families, not only condemned, but the authorities deemed her stage presence obscene. Of particular relevance, here is that the authorities, instead of associating her performance with her singing, highlighted only her sexuality. However, Minyon ignored the warnings the authorities gave,

do not know if it made them return to their home country. BOA, HR.SFR.04, 845/34, April 6, 1910.

⁸² BOA, DH.MKT, 912/70, H-26.9.1322 (December 4, 1904); BOA, BEO, 2459/184405, H-29.9.1322 (December 7, 1904).

⁸³ BOA, DH.MKT, 537/7, H-2.4.1320 (July 9, 1902).

⁸⁴ BOA, *Rumeli Müfettişliği Arzuhâller* (after this TFR.I.ŞKT), 19/1835, H-3.7.1321 (September 25, 1903).

⁸⁵ BOA, TFR.I.ŞKT, 35/3492, 18.1.1322 (April 4, 1904).

⁸⁶ BOA, DH.MKT, 868/58, H-22.4.1322 (July 6, 1904); another woman who faced similar problems was Coptic woman Safinaz. In 1919, authorities warned her not to sing obscenely. BOA, DH.EUM.AYŞ, 12/14, H-13.9.1337 (June 12, 1919).

thus, the authorities banished her from working. After four months of unemployment, she found a new job provided by a Muslim theatre holder, Ali Rıza (*Efendi*). Women like Minyon Virjini had to seek not only compromises but to cope with constraints. She got the job only after she admitted her mistakes, promised to follow the rules and abide by state warnings.⁸⁷

Some working women of the sector held two jobs, entertaining and prostitution;⁸⁸ the latter opened up economic exchange circuits.⁸⁹ Although in the Ottoman Empire, brothels functioned, prostitutes could find their clients in marketplaces, streets, around places such as mosques, coffeehouses, bachelors' rooms, laundries, restaurants, barbershops, and candy stores or in entertainment areas, such as casinos, theaters, etc.⁹⁰

Prostitutes also received clients inside their private homes, which Sariyannis, a historian, sees as a “home-based” enterprise.⁹¹ A case from 1912 illustrates this intertwining of entertainment and prostitution. The story took place in Edirne where the police refused to allow six foreign female singers to enter their house because, after work, they received male visitors, meaning they practiced prostitution and consumed alcohol in the house. Furthermore, the house was located between two mosques; according to Islamic law, homes, where people consumed alcohol, had to be located 100 *arşun* measurements away from mosques.⁹² The six foreign

⁸⁷ BOA, DH.MKT, 1231/78, H-5.1.1326 (February 8, 1908).

⁸⁸ Historian Anthony Shay points out that in Safavid Iran, people recruited dancers among prostitutes. He also writes: “This equation, dancer = prostitute, continues from ancient Greece and remains little changed to the present, whether professional belly dancers in Cairo and other Arab cities or the baccha, the dancing boys of Afghanistan and Pakistan.” Anthony Shay, *The Dangerous Lives of Public Performers: Dancing, Sex, and Entertainment in the Islamic World*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2014), p. 158; Sariyannis mentions male prostitutes who were usually poor boys, sailors, and workers. He also mentions that apprentice janissaries and even religious students (*softa*) were in the sector as male prostitutes after being raped or seen in illicit sex. Marinos Sariyannis, “Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul, Late Sixteenth-Early Eighteenth Century”, *Turcica*, 40 (2008), pp. 60-62.

⁸⁹ For sex work debates, see, for example, Prabha Kotiswaran, *Dangerous Sex, Invisible Labor: Sex Work and the Law in India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 24-49.

⁹⁰ Füsun Çoban Döşkaya, Ahmet Aksin, “Prostitutes in Ottoman Archival Sources”, *Proceedings of Papers of International Conference on Knowledge and Politics in Gender and Women's Studies*, (Ankara: ODTÜ, 2015), pp. 458-459.

⁹¹ Sariyannis, “Prostitution in Ottoman Istanbul”, p. 54.

⁹² BOA, DH.H, 3/41, H-17.1.1330 (January 7, 1912).

women, already banished from their house, applied to the central state to protest against the local authority's decision. As a result, the local authority moved them to another house and agreed not to interfere with their visitors.⁹³ However, being removed from their present location, such women, temporally or not, might incur not only a loss of revenue but that of their existing market.

The second case from 1914 shows that the inhabitants of a Jewish district in Ottoman Damascus complained to the local authorities about some Ottoman Jewish singers who also practiced prostitution, which the inhabitants judged as immoral. As punishment, the provincial government removed the singers outside the city.⁹⁴ At this time, officials did not use other methods, such as imprisonment, but repeatedly banished the same Jewish singers from their most recent locations in 1898, again in 1902, and finally, in 1914. On the one hand, the state removed brothels and prostitutes (here singers too) who lived in places deemed morally appropriate to other less appropriate areas more suitable for prostitutes to control and satisfy *ehl-i ırz*, the "people of honor".⁹⁵ On the other hand, people who worked in the places mentioned above found ways to overcome these restrictions, as was in this case of the Jewish singers who practiced prostitution and repeatedly after banishment went back to their previous neighborhoods.

Violence Against Women in Entertainment Sector and Other Stories

The entertainment atmosphere encouraged men to have close physical contact with women, which, from time to time, resulted in kidnapping, acts of sexual

93 The state also expelled those who encouraged prostitution. For more details, please consult Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700-1800*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 98; to control prostitution, the state often expelled prostitutes from the existing location, imprisoned and whipped them. Although rare compared to other punishments, during the time of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807), the state executed five prostitutes. Some Ottoman families killed their daughters if they practiced prostitutes. Çoban Döşkaya, Aksin, "Prostitutes in Ottoman", pp. 460-462; for more on punishment methods applied to prostitutes, see Sariyannis, "Prostitution in Ottoman", p. 42.

94 BOA, DH.MKT, 2100/84, H-17.4.1316 (September 4, 1898); BOA, DH.MKT, 2572/107, H-22.9.1319 (January 2, 1902); BOA, *Dahiliye Nezareti İdari* (DH.İD), 68/17, H-21.2.1332 (January 19, 1914).

95 See archival evidence to show how the state dealt with the brothels. BOA, ZB, 390/36, R-18.6.1323 (August 31, 1323); BOA, ZB, 73/55, R-11.7.1323 (September 24, 1907); ZB, 600/97, R-14.7.1324 (September 27, 1908).

and physical violence, rape, shooting, or harassment. It was conducive to people who met and married, allowing more women to have more agency. To put it more explicitly, women in the sector of entertainment had both limits and opportunities.

Kidnapping, an unlawful seizure and detention of people against their will, targeted female performers in the entertainment sites. For instance, in the late 1890s, a sixteenth-year-old foreign actress, Pucci, was kidnapped by her driver, who was employed to drive her from her house in the Beyoğlu Feridiye neighborhood every Monday night to her workplace in Istanbul Ortaköy area. After she performed, the same driver drove her home. One night in 1897, the driver kidnapped Pucci from her house in collaboration with 2-3 other men;⁹⁶ the evidence does not reveal if the police found the kidnappers and Pucci.

Another kidnapping took place in 1899. An Ottoman Muslim, Zeki (*Efendi*), working at the passport department, abducted Mari (Marie) Hawlicik (probably Hawleck), a twenty-year-old Austrian singer who worked with Joseph Anderla's group at a café in Galata. She converted to Islam, and eventually, they married. The Austrian government objected to this conversion because, according to Austrian law, Mari needed to be 24 to change her religion.⁹⁷ The Ottoman authorities declared both Mari's marriage and conversion to Islam null. It might be argued that conversion to the kidnapper's religion, marriage, or rape, lay behind such acts of kidnapping, while not forgetting both forced labor and prostitution as motivational acts to kidnap women.⁹⁸

Another example refers to Amelie, an Austrian actress who worked in Biga (current day Dardanelles) with a theatre troupe, and Reşit, a Muslim naval officer. The two married, and Amelie adopted Islam. According to her country's laws, she was considered a minor, therefore, she could not change her religion. As was Mari's case, her conversion and marriage received no official approval. As a result, Reşit was asked to hand Amelie over to her legal guardian; their story ended up with the couple parting.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ BOA, BEO, 947/70973, H-4.12.1314 (May 6, 1897).

⁹⁷ BOA, *Hariciye Nezâreti Hukuk Müşavirliği İştisare Odası* (HR.HMŞ.İSO), 186/87, H-25.10.1316 (March 8, 1899).

⁹⁸ BOA, DH.MKT, 190/32, H-23.10.1311 (April, 29, 1894).

⁹⁹ BOA, BEO, 1999/149909, H-6.11.1320 (February 4, 1903); BOA, BEO, 2042/153123, H-14.1.1321 (April 12, 1903).

Other cases concern male violence in the form of rape, of which rationale generally lies with the need for power, control, and domination. For example, in 1903, some Ottoman officers abducted Mrs. de Sine (?), a singer from Belgium, who worked in one of the Istanbul Osmanbey casinos to Okmeydanı and attempted to rape her.¹⁰⁰ As a result, she and her husband complained to the authorities. To convince the couple to remain silent, the state offered 88 *liras* to compensate for damages, thus seeking to preserve the officers and, therefore, the state's reputation.¹⁰¹ Significantly, since taking place outside the entertainment places, most acts of such violence would likely go unnoticed, therefore, evidence concerning women in the sector is scarce.

Males threatening female performers with firearms was another form of male violence affecting women working in the entertainment sector. In Gevgili town, Tuti, an Ottoman Jewish singer, earned her living by singing in a coffeehouse. One night, in 1903, Yusuf, a Muslim man working at the Gevgili bathhouse, attempted to shoot her in her workplace. Following the shooting, the local police arrested Yusuf and instigated a criminal investigation.¹⁰² The following case from Amasya expands on the motives behind such violence and crime against women. Mehmed, a Muslim in Amasya, wounded Viktorya, a non-Muslim Ottoman theatre singer. The sources relate his romantic feelings for Viktorya, which culminated in an outburst of violence, leading to his consequent arrest.¹⁰³

Moreover, troublesome incidents of harassment of female performers by male clients were commonplace, resulting in differing degrees of punishment for the culprits. For example, in 1905, Zor Ali (Efendi), a police officer, became drunk and had close physical contact with actresses on the stage. Therefore, the higher authorities asked him to refrain from this practice.¹⁰⁴ However, earlier, the state

100 BOA, DH.MKT, 663/25, H-5.12.1320 (March 5, 1903).

101 BOA, BEO, 1981/148573, 23.10.1320 (February 21, 1903); BOA, BEO, 2007/150475, H-25.11.1320 (February 23, 1903); BOA, DH.MKT, 663/25, H-5.12.1320 (March 5, 1903).

102 BOA, *Rumeli Mütettişliği Belgeleri Selanik Evrakı* (TFR.I.ISL), 50/4952, H-16.6.1322 (August 18, 1904).

103 BOA, DH.EUM.AYŞ, 36/7, H-1.7.1338 (March 21, 1920); the state could become involved for other reasons such as in 1904, when an Ottoman Jewish singer, Robika's lover, Yahya, stole her 80 *liras*. BOA, *Dahiliye Nezâreti Şifre Kalemi* (DH.ŞFR), 332/82, R-29.6.1320 (September 11, 1904).

104 BOA, ZB, 413/64, R-11.6.1321 (August 24, 1905).

had administered harsher punishment to other police officers for engaging in a sexual relationship with a woman by temporarily expelling them from their current location on an island.¹⁰⁵ In 1908, when an Ottoman Jewish actress, Sare, complained about three military school students who had lurked around her house in the Istanbul Ortaköy area, the police located the culprits and sent them to their school for disciplinary action to be taken.¹⁰⁶

Entertainment places were decried by many as locations where a sexual license for males to interact with non-consensual women often resulted in various forms of violence, both sexual and non-sexual, and targeting female performers. In sharp contrast, the world of entertainment opened up the ground for marriage or a sexual relationship between worshippers of a different religion. In 1897, an Ottoman army man,¹⁰⁷ and in 1906, a Muslim translator working for the Salonica Governorship ran away with non-Muslim singers.¹⁰⁸

Changes in women's access to public places enabled female performers to become, to some extent, financially independent and visible in social life. They interacted with men of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Although this atmosphere opened new possibilities, its troublesome questions of male violence could restrict women's choices.

Conclusion

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ottoman cities witnessed the emergence of entertainment and leisure activities. As a result, modern theatre, concerts, opera performances, and the cinema could be found along with brasseries, cafés where singers and musicians performed, and casinos. This world became attractive not only to actors/actresses, playwrights, singers, and spectators but also to entrepreneurs and the state. The state increasingly encroached on this world.

105 BOA, ZB, 17/62, R-26.02.1306 (May 8, 1890).

106 BOA, ZB, 357/143, R-23.8.1324 (November 5, 1908).

107 BOA, *Yıldız Başkitabet Dairesi Maruzatı* (Y.PRK.BŞK), 15/129, H-26.06.1315 (November 22, 1897).

108 BOA, *Yıldız Hususi Maruzat* (Y.A.HUS), 501/208, H-03.02.1324 (March 29, 1906); some liaisons ended sadly. Mari Nivart, an Ottoman non-Muslim actress, and Şemsettin Sami (Frashëri, 1850-1904), a famous Ottoman Muslim writer, had a sexual relationship, and Mari became pregnant. The evidence relates a rumor that she took pills to have an abortion, which eventually led to her death. And, "Osmanlı Tiyatrosu", p. 133.

Along with making tax claims, applying censorship, the state required women who frequented or worked in entertainment places to be subject to a medical examination to detect syphilis. Indeed, to perform, women needed state permission, but that did not guarantee a lessening of gender inequalities they faced daily.

The entertainment sector clearly exhibited a varied labor market conducive to prostitution, often intertwined with stage work. Some female performers ran their prostitutes' activities as a home-based enterprise which sometimes caused difficulties with the authorities. Further constraints on working women in the entertainment sector included, to some extent, outbursts of male violence by clients. Overall, the evidence displays a clear and distinct articulation between labor, sex and power.

The Ottoman world of entertainment held the diverse voices and stories of the women who, directly and indirectly, participated in this world where they raised funds for charities, owned theatre buildings, became spectators, or found jobs as singers, acrobats, or actresses seeking new audiences. They came from different classes and ethnic/religious backgrounds. They were from both the middle (the economic, the educated, and the lower middle classes) and the lower/working-class, thus revealing class aspects of the sector.

Moreover, it took a long time that both Ottoman and non-Ottoman non-Muslim women struggled to pursue a career and made a living before Muslim actresses appeared on the public stage, evidenced by the first Muslim actress Afife, who gave her premier in 1920. Not all working women in the sector were dominated, neither were they totally victimized. Indeed, they often displayed agency, thus making choices, challenging, and constantly negotiating with the power holders.

To conclude, entertainment is more than entertaining people. It also has non-entertaining functions. Not only was the sector highly gendered, but it was where ethnicity, religion, and class interacted, playing crucial roles during the late Ottoman era. This diverse world provided an atmosphere not only job opportunities but one that blurred religious and sexual boundaries. All of these reflect the Ottoman world and its complex realities buried in the on and offstage stories of women full of difficulties, limitations, expectations, and opportunities.

Limits and Opportunities: Women and Their Experiences in the Entertainment Sector during the Late Ottoman Era

Abstract ■ The present article examines middle and lower-class women, their experiences and complex relationships with various actors in the entertainment sector during the late Ottoman era (19th and 20th century). This article points out that middle-class Ottoman Muslim women appear in this sector only as private property owners in contrast to non-Muslim Ottoman and foreign middle-class female entrepreneurs and business managers. It also draws attention to self-employed women in the sector that represented the lower part of the middle-class. It then considers the lower class Ottoman non-Muslim and foreign women who worked as acrobats, singers, dancers, and actresses; for cultural/religious reasons, Muslim women could not hold positions on the theater stage until 1920. This approach categorizes the women who entered the sector as either lower and middle-class, specifies their various roles and religious/ethnic backgrounds. Fundamental to the proposed analysis are the everyday experiences of the lower class working women, including their public display of their sexuality, practicing prostitution, exposure to male violence, and having an intricate relationship with the state, customers, and other performers. Thus, this article seeks to capture the voices of women who became involved in the entertainment sector, with its ethnic/religious, class and gender dimensions.

Keywords: Entertainment, theater, female performers, lower-class woman, middle-class woman, sexuality, Ottoman state.

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