

SHAKESPEARE AND AUTHORITY:  
THE INTERSECTION OF THEATRE, LOCALITY AND POLITICS IN TURKEY

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Melis Günekan, certify that

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## ABSTRACT

Shakespeare and Authority:

The Intersection of Theatre, Locality and Politics in Turkey

In this dissertation, I investigate the complex phenomenon of political Shakespeare adaptations in modern Turkish theatre and examine five distinct cases from independent theatre artists, Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası* (1980), Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu's *Kim Var Orada?* (2015), Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* (2013), Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus: A Five Act Maganda Tragedy* (2010), and Serdar Biliş and Sami Özbudak's *Romeo and Juliet* (2016). Since the late twentieth century, William Shakespeare's plays have become a common ground for addressing certain fundamental cultural and political transformations in Turkey, and adapting Shakespeare to the local context is often accompanied by a politically resistant desire to revisit the issues of ethnic difference and political otherness. My cases reveal that the practice of adaptation is carried out as a collaborative process, which embraces oftentimes neglected performance dynamics such as the historical/cultural background of the theatre site and concerns over Shakespeare's politically loaded legacy. Theatre artists' focus on the collaborative features of adaptation goes parallel to their major adaptation tendency: to unearth ethnic difference and/or political otherness in debating political fault lines in Turkey's recent history. It also gives them room for untangling the issues of legitimacy, fidelity and cultural hegemony that have been central for Adaptation Studies. I argue that these theatre artists step outside the binary logic that surrounds the "original/adaptation" opposition since negotiating Shakespeare's preserved, authorial status necessarily involves the questions of difference and identity that have marked modern Turkish history.

## ÖZET

Shakespeare and Otorite:

Türkiye’de Yerellik, Tiyatro ve Politikanın Kesişimi

Doktora tezimde güncel Türk tiyatrosunda politik Shakespeare uyarlamalarını inceliyorum; bu çetrefilli meseleyi bağımsız tiyatro sanatçılarına ait beş farklı oyun üzerinden ele alıyorum: Can Yücel’den *Bahar Noktası* (1980), Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu’ndan *Kim Var Orada?* (2015), Moda Sahnesi’den *Hamlet* (2013), Semaver Kumpanya’dan *Titus Andronicus: 5 Perdelik Manzum Maganda Faciası* (2010) ve Serdar Biliş ve Sami Özbudak’tan *Romeo ve Juliet* (2016). Yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısından bu yana, William Shakespeare’in oyunları, modern Türkiye’deki belirli kültürel ve politik dönüşümleri ele almada ortak bir zemin oluşturmaktadır. Shakespeare’i yerele uyarlamak çoğu kez etnik farklılık ve politik ötekilik meselelerini muhalif bir zeminden yeniden ziyaret etme arzusunu içerir. Bu açıdan “uyarlama” pratiği, tiyatro alanının tarihsel/kültürel zemini ve Shakespeare’in politik olarak yüklü mirasıyla müzakere gibi genellikle göz ardı edilen performans dinamiklerini kucaklayan, ortak çalışmaya dayalı bir süreç olarak yürütülür. Bu bağlamda, Shakespeare’i yerele uyarlamak, Türkiye’nin yakın tarihindeki fay hatlarını tartmaktan, etnik farklılık ve politik ötekilik meselelerini su yüzüne çıkartmaktan geçer. Bu süreç, tiyatro sanatçılarının Uyarlama Çalışmaları’nda önde gelen meşruiyet, sadakat ve kültürel üstünlük meselelerinin düğümünü çözmek için de bir alan açar. Bahsi geçen tiyatro sanatçıları “orijinal/uyarlama” ikiliğinin ötesine geçebilmektir çünkü Shakespeare’in iyi muhafaza edilmiş, seçkin statüsü ile müzakere etmek, modern Türkiye tarihine damgasını vuran farklılık ve kimlik meselelerine dair sorgulamaları kaçınılmaz olarak beraberinde getirmektedir.

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*In loving memory of my grandmother  
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## INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I investigate the complex phenomenon of political Shakespeare adaptations in contemporary Turkish theatre. Since the late twentieth century, William Shakespeare's plays have become a common ground for addressing certain fundamental cultural and political transformations in modern Turkey, and adapting Shakespeare to the local context is often accompanied by a politically resistant desire to revisit the issues of ethnic difference and political otherness. At the intersection of locality, adaptation and politics, the concerns, aspirations and authorial intentions of independent theatre practitioners come to the surface and mark the ambivalent place that Shakespeare occupies in Turkish theatre. When theatre people address "locality" through Shakespeare's work, they do not engage in a unilateral encounter with "Shakespeare", "adaptation" and "locality". Far from being homogeneous categories, these are multifaceted entities that bring along a complex set of hierarchies embedded in the terrain that is "Shakespeare in Turkey". In Turkish theatre history, references to Shakespeare embody a long-surviving anxiety over and aspiration for Western/European dramatic traditions, which have extensively shaped theatrical conventions in late Ottoman Era and Republican Turkey. Following the late nineteenth century in particular, the means of access to and engagement with Shakespeare's work were closely linked to theatre's role as a political agent in the projects of modernism and nation-state building. Thus, adapting Shakespeare inherently involves a complex set of hierarchies of cultural difference, both of which emerge in relation to issues of adaptation and locality today.

My cases reveal that the dynamics of political contextualization of Shakespeare in Turkey come back to certain dualisms that pertain both to international discussions on the practice of adaptation and to issues of locality, theatre practice and identity politics in Turkey. In Turkish theatre history, dualities such as East/West, locality/foreignness, and traditional/modern are constantly replicated in theatre artists' engagement with Shakespeare in different eras and contexts. As recent scholarly discussions problematize binary approaches towards adaptation and translation, they provide me with the necessary set of questions to dig into the complex domain of locally filtered Shakespeare adaptations. An Adaptation Studies lens demonstrates that the aforementioned dualities are complicated as well as replicated on the surface of Shakespeare in Turkish theatre. Similarly, recent discussions on approaching adaptation as "process" help identify and evaluate the political and cultural stakes behind filtering Shakespeare's work through socio-political agendas in Turkey. Today, the politically-loaded legacy of the playwright continues to shape the manner in which theatre artists experience anxieties and aspirations in relation to "Shakespeare".

On the one hand, the cases of Shakespeare adaptations that I analyse reveal that theatre practitioners engage in "adaptation" as a collaborative, experimental practice that provides one with the necessary tools and space to grapple with the authority of Shakespeare, to focus on oftentimes ignored constituents of adaptation such as the improvisational contribution of the cast, and to deal with identity politics as their defining feature of locality. Adaptation opens up a space of solidarity in which theatre artists relate their ideals, concerns and positions of political otherness to issues of ethnic diversity, the erasure of non-Muslim cultural heritage, youth culture or freedom of speech. This is why their foundational principles and authorial

aims often claim to problematize a dualistic approach to adaptation and identity politics. Their political struggles are informed by their desire to resist cultural hegemonies that have been transferred over generations and continue to haunt theatre practitioners in Turkey.

On the other hand, these vital interrogations often leave theatre practitioners in a state of contradiction as their authorial aims turn out to be at cross purposes with the locality that shape their adaptations as a distinguishing feature. This is very much related to the inherently complex and politically loaded position the name Shakespeare occupies in theatre practices in Turkey. The dualism between the original and adaptation in this regard has multilayered connotations in Turkish theatre, and it inherently signals the erasure of a hybrid culture which works against perceiving theatre practice as a domain in which such strict, essentialised dualisms cannot survive. Within Shakespeare's legacy in Turkey lies embedded the constant re-establishment of the aforementioned dualities. In other words, dealing with the authority of the name Shakespeare is itself a politically loaded issue, which becomes far more complex when adaptations of Shakespeare turn to local politics. When Shakespeare is filtered through the local in Turkey, the issues of ethnic diversity, the erasure of non-Muslim cultural heritage, and/or political otherness vibrate in and through the history of theatre in Turkey.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon calls attention to the vital role of changing contexts for transcultural adaptations in conditioning meaning (2006, p. 145), and points out that when "local particularities become transplanted to new ground [...] something new and hybrid results" (p. 150). Drawing on Susan Stanford Friedman's usage of "indigenization", Hutcheon reminds us that "indigenization can lead to strangely hybrid works" (p. 151) and argues that when we consider the term

in its anthropological usage, that the intercultural encounter between the adapted work and adaptation indicates agency: “people pick and choose what they want to transplant to their own soil. Adapters of traveling stories exert power over what they adapt” (p. 150). In this regard, indigenization “allows the transformation of power to a useable form for a particular place or context” (p. 150). Hutcheon’s emphasis on indigenization outside an immediate post-colonial context is very much in line with the distinct dynamics of adaptation theatre artists engage in when they address “locality” in modern Turkish theatre, as well as its hybrid nature and historiography. As I explicate in each distinct case study, the term “local” indicates different socio-political contexts across varying spatiotemporal realities, and in this regard the various levels of cultural and political transformations adapted to Shakespeare’s work suggest a hybrid practice of adaptation. Yet, I prefer to use the term “locality” over “indigenization” since theatre artists in Turkey also deal with a hybrid and complex cultural and political heritage when they deal with the name “Shakespeare”. Their journeys with the playwright are very much informed by the politically-loaded legacy of Shakespeare, a dynamic which pushes them to problematize the issue of exerting power over what they adapt as well as untangling the very material that they adapt.

In my first chapter, I explicate the theoretical backbone of my dissertation through the case study of Can Yücel’s adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Bahar Noktası*. The debates surrounding *Bahar Noktası*’s original 1980 production prefigure both the nascent interest we see in recent scholarly discussions on notions of adaptation, translation and theatrical practice and the recent aspiration to modernize Shakespeare’s plays through the local, socio-political agendas in Turkish theatre. Even though “adaptation” is a developing notion that embodies the stage

performance of a dramatic text or its re-contextualization, the tendency to make a hierarchical distinction between an adapted work –the “original”- and its adaptation/translation as a subsidiary is a prevailing anxiety for theatre practitioners in Turkey. As late twentieth-century scholarship on adaptation interrogates the still valid dualism of “original” vs. “adaptation”, the lens of adaptation provides me with the essential ground to evaluate the intertwined issues of grappling with Shakespeare’s authority while re-contextualizing his “original” plays through the lens of socio-political determinants in the Turkish context. In this regard, the case of *Bahar Noktası* provides me with the necessary set of questions I address in relation to the issues of theatrical authority, cultural hegemony and the notions of legitimacy and fidelity, because both the translation process and the 1980 production of *Bahar Noktası* are premised on the presupposition that adaptation better underlines the dynamics of the Shakespearean original. Yücel and the company negotiate the depoliticizing strategies of the 1980 military intervention and the surrounding prohibitions, violence and state oppression by re-contextualizing Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with reference to Republican Turkey’s non-Muslim cultural heritage and adapting Shakespeare’s global imagery to Ottoman minorities. For Yücel, adaptation and translation become collaborative practices when other constituents like the director’s involvement and that of the actors become primary dynamics in evaluating the work. Focusing on how Yücel incorporates locality and the immediate socio-political agenda to the original work, I evaluate Shakespeare in translation and adaptation outside the binary logic of author/translator and text/performance dualisms.

In Turkish theatre history, *Bahar Noktası* marks a turning point for the following generations in the way that it adapts Shakespeare’s “original” to the local,

working on adaptation as an improvisational, collaborative and experimental process under the socio-political circumstances of the time. It exemplifies Adaptation Studies scholar Susan Bassnett's idea of "co-operative" translation and thus distances itself from the confines of the binary logic overruling logocentric theatre. Yücel and the company members handle Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a dynamic work that provides the grounds for revisiting both contemporary and deep-rooted issues related to Turkey's political and cultural history, such as ethnic difference, and the erasure of non-Muslim cultural heritage. They reflect a conscious desire to negotiate their immediate cultural and political concerns with their anxieties over the authority of the playwright's legacy. As such, the *Bahar Noktası* case study presents an intertwined matter that will re-emerge over the course of my dissertation.

A closer look at Turkish theatre history allows us to understand the role of Shakespeare in building a hierarchical relationship with European literatures, setting major Western literary figures as markers of knowledge, forming an understanding of translation and adaptation as "secondary" to the adapted work, and shaping "the anxiety of influence" over Shakespeare that still haunts theatre practitioners today. Thus, in my second chapter, I look into the dispersed means of accessing and adapting Shakespeare in Turkish theatre history, while also examining the dynamics that have structured Turkish theatre historiography. In late Ottoman Era and Republican Turkey, the practice of theatre was used as an operative agent for the realization of the socio-political, economic and administrative reorganizations of different political regimes. As such, Shakespeare occupies an ambivalent place in Turkish theatre history, one that cannot be considered independently from concerns about cultural hegemony, the status of non-Muslim minorities, and theatre's role as a political agent in the twin projects of modernism and nation-state building.

In this framework, the 2015 production of *Kim Var Orada?* by the independent theatre company Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu emerges as an important case study because the play examines the intertwined impact of Shakespeare and legendary theatre director Muhsin Ertuğrul on Turkish theatre history. Against the broader background of Turkish theatre history, the figure of Shakespeare signals the indeterminate relationship between “an elite Western culture” and a “local” Ottoman one, a relationship that further involves the complexity of the long-ignored cultural heritage of non-Muslim communities as “local foreigners” defined in opposition to “authentic” Turks. Whereas the name Shakespeare wavered around different connotations such as a canonical playwright that influenced Armenian dramatic literature, a marker of knowledge and intellect, or an influential dramatist whose works were paraphrased or adapted in the late Ottoman Era, the playwright acquired a preserved, authorial status in modern Turkish theatre. Meanwhile, Ertuğrul’s career significantly shaped the legacy of Shakespeare as a marker of knowledge and intellect as well as an authorial figure celebrated with national pride in Republican Turkey. In the cultural context of early twentieth century Turkey, Ertuğrul represents the paradox of a theatre practice that is conducted under conditions of national surveillance, even as this surveillance is justified in the name of the liberating ideals of secularism and republicanism. In this chapter, I argue that looking at the dispersed nature of the early access to Shakespeare’s work alongside the political dynamics underwriting Ertuğrul’s career sets the stage for interpreting post-1980s political adaptations of the playwright.

My third chapter revisits the aforementioned issues of cultural hegemony, adaptation as process, and identity politics through an analysis of Moda Sahnesi’s 2013 production of *Hamlet*. Moda Sahnesi contextualizes the play in relation to the

period's Gezi Park Protests and seeks to challenge political as well as literary power by imagining Hamlet as a dissenting character that resists the propagated "truths" of a power centre based on the exclusion and silencing of dissent. Shakespeare occupies an ambivalent place for Moda Sahnesi: a greatly influential canonical figure, a brand name that helps theatre practitioners prove their mastery in stage arts, and an authority that should be questioned in relation to the still-valid "anxiety of influence" it signifies for theatre artists. My evaluation focuses on how the company negotiates these issues by representing Hamlet as a character of frenzied motion. With this depiction, the company avoids presenting a conventional Hamlet whose contemplation and inaction mark his deferral of revenge. Moda Sahnesi prefers to wrestle with this complicated hybridity by putting the body and motion to the forefront, thus calling attention to the immediate body of the theatre practitioners, the presence of the audience, and the formal choices of adaptation as vital, often ignored features. Even though the company claims to contest the "anxiety of influence" over Shakespeare, the performance adheres to the "authority" of the playwright by nonetheless defining the practice of theatre within Western frames of criticism. Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* is a significant example of Shakespeare adaptation in contemporary Turkish theatre because in addition to the language, the body becomes the arena where wrestling with local politics and the "anxiety of influence" over Shakespeare take place. The company's theatrical and visual claim of collectivity, claiming public space, and shattering literary and ideological narratives of authority and power through adapting Shakespeare to the local, however, does not prevent the company from depending on the legitimating authority of Shakespeare. For Moda Sahnesi, to perform *Hamlet* is to set forth a critical position against authority, but the company ironically disregards their consideration of the dramatic text as one of the

elements that constitutes a theatrical production together with other variables such as the construction of the theatre site. Nonetheless, the production is a significant case that underlines locality through a specific emphasis on the acting body and movement.

Looking at Yücel's *Bahar Noktası*, BGST's *Kim Var Orada?* and the discourse surrounding Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet*, we see that theatre practitioners usually recall Turkey's non-Muslim cultural and political history as a context for problematizing contemporary political fractures and the struggles of artists for a liberating cultural and political domain. In contrast to this, the negotiations around identity politics in my next case study, independent theatre company Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus: A Five Act Maganda Tragedy*, occur as implied references to ethnic otherness, which exclude the very otherized position the company sets forth to embrace in their foundational principles and theatrical decision-making processes.

In my fourth chapter, I evaluate Semaver Kumpanya's 2010 production, *Titus Andronicus: A Five Act Maganda Tragedy*, which is a stage adaptation of the translator Sinan Fişek's rewriting of Shakespeare's bloodiest revenge tragedy. Fişek contextualizes *Titus Andronicus* as a farce with an "Eastern" twist, one that attaches the play's cycle of revenge to honour killings and gender violence. In doing so, Fişek draws an image of racial and ethnic otherness from the socio-political and cultural panorama of 1990s Turkey by situating the *maganda* figure at the core of his reworking. Both the *maganda* figure and honour killings have particular ideological associations in Turkey that coalesce around a vague image of "otherness," which is disclosed in the play text through the East Anatolian dialect the translator inserted into his rewriting to suggest an idea of patriarchy and feudal dynamics in Eastern

Turkish culture. Although the company focus on violence against women in their adaptation, they engage in this issue by connecting it to a unique, ethnic identity and its “traditional” customs, distinguishing the modern “us” from the traditional Kurds and/or Eastern population. In this process, Semaver Kumpanya reflects much less concern over contesting Shakespeare’s authority, because the company does not consider Shakespeare’s dramatic text as a fixed point of origin in working on Fişek’s rewriting. Instead of Shakespeare’s “original” work, the stated ideals of the company and their interest in the rewriting with an Eastern twist mark the dynamics of adaptation for the company. When we analyse the differential impact of political violence on different communities in *Titus Andronicus* as a question of adaptation, the company’s theatrical choices display conflicts over both the politics of representing violence in contemporary Turkey and the process of theatre making.

My last chapter offers an analysis of Serdar Biliş and Sami Özbudak’s 2016 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, which situates Shakespeare’s famous tragedy of star-crossed lover into the contemporary world of high school students and reimagines it as a classroom tragedy that discloses the destructive impacts of militarized education in Turkey. Referencing the cultural climate of 1980s Turkey, the collaborators centre upon the classroom as the binding element of their adaptation and address the issues of civil strife, family feud, youth culture, sexuality, forbidden love and paternal authority in relation to the larger issue of militarized education’s impact on society. In this adaptation, Biliş and Özbudak’s authorial intentions are at cross purposes with the actual stage performance because they also take the flattening “peer” quality of the classroom as an emancipatory gesture when they evaluate the totality of the adaptation. The director Biliş evokes *Romeo and Juliet*’s famous balcony scene in particular as an extended metaphor for an

emancipatory domain that can contest the authoritarian underpinnings of co-educational publicness. At the same time, the manner in which the artists recall Turkey's cultural climate in the 1980s demonstrates that neither freedom of expression nor sexual emancipation are straight-forward experiences. In this case, the negotiation between the Shakespearean original and the local filters the collaborators apply poses a challenge as to the adaptation's parameters. Struggling with the anxiety over the centuries-long cultural hegemony of the name Shakespeare, the collaborators reflect a discrepancy between their envisioning of the project and its realization on stage. Parallel to my earlier cases, the collaborative endeavors of working in and through adaptation and locality point at the vital issue that there is not one single "Shakespeare" that the theatre practitioners engage in. Their journeys with the playwright are multilayered and heterogeneous "processes", which lay bare the fact that today access to and engagement in Shakespeare is in itself a hybrid process.

In this dissertation, I explore these issues by drawing on original playscripts, brochures, and video recordings, many of which I obtained from the performers and artists themselves. Additionally, I draw on artists' published memoirs, as well as the contents of interviews that I was able to conduct with the theatre practitioners. As each of my case studies elucidates adaptation as a collaborative process that oftentimes embodies off-stage constituents such as the rehearsal notes and experiences, my methodology includes a critical evaluation of relevant off-stage elements as well as the scripts and videos of the adaptations I analyze in each chapter.

CHAPTER 1

TO TELL IT IN TURKISH:

AT THE INTERSECTION OF TRANSLATION,

ADAPTATION AND REWRITING

<p><i>Testere</i> [<i>Petraki the carpenter</i>]: I'll call your names from the right!</p>	<p><i>Quin</i>. Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver?</p>
<p><i>Öreke</i> [<i>Niko the weaver</i>]: From the left! Not the right. ...</p>	<p><i>Bot</i>. Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed. ...</p>
<p><i>Öreke</i>: Come on, lad! I'll kiss your feet. Give me the role of the lion. I'll roar and roar in such a way that the Duke will wear his fur inside out. I'll swear to God, he'll implore, "Make this lion roar again for the sake of God!"</p>	<p><i>Bot</i>. Let me play the lion too. I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar, that I will make the Duke say: 'Let him roar again; let him roar again!'</p>
<p><i>Testere</i>: Then the maids of the Duchess will shit themselves in outcries, right? No way, mate. I don't intend to end up in the gallows so that you can demonstrate your skills!</p>	<p><i>Quin</i>. And you should do it too terribly, you would fright the Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek: and that were enough to hang us all.</p>
<p><i>All</i>: By God! They will hang us all!</p>	<p><i>All</i>. That would hang us, every mother's son.</p>
<p><i>Öreke</i>: All right, got it! I know how cruel those polite sluts are. They would first make us wash their underpants as we'll ruin their pomposity. Then they'd hang us on a clothesline by our feet. But, I'll use a tenor voice and roar so gently that it will screw a male dove's warble to its mate.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p><i>Bot</i>. I grant you, friends, if you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us. But I will aggravate my voice so, that I will roar as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar and 'twere any nightingale.</p>
<p>(<i>Bahar Noktası</i>, pp. 48-50)</p>	<p>(<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>, 1.2.16-78)</p>

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, Turkish theatre witnessed a rising interest in integrating local, socio-political concerns into Shakespeare adaptations. Especially since the 1980s, independent theatre productions have focused on the representation of state violence, ethnic difference, authoritarian discipline, authority and gender, and, broadly speaking, minority status in relation to local politics. For theatre practitioners today, engaging in political Shakespeare adaptations involves dealing with not only the playwright's work in its actual content, but multi-layered issues of locality, adaptation and authority/cultural

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<sup>1</sup> All of the translations from Turkish to English, including the excerpts from *Bahar Noktası* and the rest of the adaptation cases I analyse, are my own unless otherwise stated.

hegemony as well. Even though the dynamics of filtering Shakespeare's "original" through the local differs from one case to another, the overall tendency to address socio-political agendas in Turkish theatre comes along with concerns over the authority of the figure of Shakespeare, around which gather the anxieties, aspirations, and self recognitions of theatre practitioners. In Turkish theatre history, the figure of Shakespeare lies at the heart of certain dualisms that pertain both to larger global discussions around the notion of adaptation and to ongoing concerns over unveiling ethnic difference, political otherness and the voicing of dissent in addressing the local. Over the years, Shakespeare has become a site for the negotiation of dualities such as "original/ adapted", "East/West", "foreign/local" and "surface-level locality/ substantial locality" in Turkish theatre, a dynamic that will come up throughout the rest of my dissertation as a key dimension of the adaptation cases I evaluate.

Among modern-day Shakespeare productions in Turkey, *Bahar Noktası* (1980), the famous poet and translator Can Yücel's (1926-1999) reworking of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was a remarkable case that marked a rupture from traditional, Westernized stage adaptations of the playwright's work. *Bahar Noktası* prefigures the resurgence we witness in late twentieth century debates around adaptation, translation and theatrical studies, which re-evaluate the still-prevailing tendency to make a hierarchical distinction between an adapted work –the "original"- and its adaptation/translation as a subsidiary. This conflict is itself a firmly established, multifaceted issue of cultural hegemony that dates back to the Ottoman theatrical scene in the history of Shakespeare adaptations in Turkey. The Shakespeare productions I analyse reveal that even when theatre practitioners bring collaborative, experimental dynamics to the forefront of their theatre-making activities, such as the integration of neighbourhood culture or the improvisational

contributions of cast members, they oftentimes struggle to step outside this dualism in negotiating the overall dynamics of adaptation. We see that this hierarchical binarism is replicated even as theatre practitioners aspire to represent voices of cultural dissent by looking at certain fundamental transformations in Turkey's recent cultural and political arena. *Bahar Noktası* is a precursor of this intertwined issue that will be visible throughout this dissertation, that the deep-rooted desire to grapple with the authority of the playwright's legacy in Turkish theatre is often articulated through an interest in focusing on modern Turkey's history of ethnic diversity and local politics. *Bahar Noktası* exemplifies these dynamics in its immediate response to the 1980 coup d'état. In this regard, *Bahar Noktası* allows us to formulate the fundamental theoretical and contextual questions necessary for evaluating Shakespeare adaptations in Turkey, its historiography, and the contemporary cases I analyse in detail in my dissertation.

In this chapter, I will first investigate the paradigm shift we see in adaptation and Shakespeare studies in the second half of the twentieth century. The recent critical discussions on multicultural and non-Anglophone Shakespeare adaptations provide one with the necessary set of questions to look into the case of *Bahar Noktası*, which in return allows us to outline the issues at stake in each contemporary case study. Looking at *Bahar Noktası* through the lens of adaptation discloses that the emergence of local, socio-political concerns through Shakespeare in Turkish theatre is shaped by the practice of adaptation, itself a process that involves recurring complexities and contradictions. On the one hand, the Shakespeare productions discussed within the scope of my dissertation reflect the attempt to include oftentimes disregarded performance dynamics such as the construction of the theatre venue, the ideals of a theatre company as a collective, the cultural heritage of ethnic

diversity in Turkey, and the problematization of the cultural hegemony signified by the figure of Shakespeare in Turkish theatre history. In this regard, I will evaluate *Bahar Noktası* by focusing not only on Yücel's understanding of translation and excerpts from the dramatic text, but also the contextual and historical significance it has as a political project.

On the other hand, the ramifications of adapting Shakespeare to the local involves not only the replication of certain dualities mentioned above, but also the complex endeavour to complicate a dualistic approach to adaptation. It is my contention that the recent aspiration to modernize Shakespeare's work through the local is realized by a politically resistant inclination to revisit the issue of identity politics while at the same time marking the ambivalent place Shakespeare occupies in Turkish theatre. At the crossroads of locality, adaptation and politics, independent contemporary Shakespeare productions in Turkey convey a turn to identity politics to unearth ethnic difference and/or political otherness by working on distinct cultural, socio-political transformations from Turkey's recent past.

### 1.1 Shakespeare at the crossroads of locality, adaptation and politics

The Shakespeare adaptations that I analyse in this dissertation reveal that Shakespeare occupies an ambivalent place for theatre practitioners in Turkey: at once a greatly influential canonical figure, a brand name that helps theatre practitioners prove their mastery in stage arts, and an authority that should be questioned in relation to the still-valid "anxiety of influence" it signifies for theatre artists. As a result, in both *Bahar Noktası* and the following cases in my dissertation, adaptation is realized as a process rather than a unilateral practice, a process that provides room for a turn to local concerns and identity politics, which emerge in conjunction with

theatrical negotiations that complicate a dualistic approach to adaptation. Since late twentieth-century scholarship on adaptation itself seeks to problematize the dualism of “original” vs. “adaptation”, studying the complex phenomenon of Shakespeare adaptation in the Turkish context through this lens provides unique insight into how local dynamics can alter received dualisms and hierarchies.

Over the last three decades, Shakespeare Studies and scholarly debates around text, performance and adaptation have called into question what Susan Bassnett (1991) rejected in the 1990s with reference to theatre translation: assuming that the written text cannot be fully grasped by the translator because its essence is best realized in performance. In “Translating for the Theatre: The Case Against Performability”, Bassnett calls attention to the issue that theatre translation is still an under-theorized field, which is largely due to the common assumption that although the dramatic text is “read as something ‘incomplete’ or ‘partially realized’”, it is nonetheless supposed to embody a spatial and gestural dimension immanent in the language of the text (p. 99). In this context, the verbal text and the gestic dimension within can be actualized in performance, and the interlingual translator is unable to attain that complete entity. Thus, the interlingual translator “is expected to translate a text [that] a priori in the source language is incomplete, containing a concealed gestic text, into the target language which should also contain a concealed gestic text” (p. 100) albeit of a different gestic repertoire. Viewing the theatre text as incomplete and waiting to be realized on stage puts the translator in a hierarchically lower position as s/he is unable to attain that complete entity of performance, and is thus “left with the task of transforming unrealized text A into unrealized text B”. The hierarchical logic prevailing here presupposes a subsidiary position for the translator, whose work is not a primary constituent in the performance realization of a dramatic text, but rather

remains as a secondary occupation in comparison to any other component in the evaluation of a performance.

Rejecting the idea of the translation of a theatre text as unrealized, Bassnett (1985) highlight “co-operative translation” as an ideal practice of theatre translation. This strategy foregrounds the collaboration of the translator either with a native speaker or a director and actors:

This method parallels the way in which theatre spectacle is created collaboratively, and the translator becomes someone who produces a basic scenario that is then worked by the company. This type of translation avoids the notion of ‘performability’ as a quality that can be added to the written text and involves the translator simultaneously in the written and oral versions of the text. (p. 91)

Defining the relationship between a theatre text and its performance as dialectical, inseparable and coexistent, Bassnett suggests that in this middle ground, the interlingual translator’s practice becomes contradictory and complicated. For this reason, co-operative translation is a practice that steps outside the binary logic of both author/translator and text/performance dichotomies because it gives way to a collective practice for theatre translation in which the translator is a substantial constituent rather than a subsidiary one.

At this juncture, Jacques Derrida’s critique of logocentric theatre is helpful in considering the phenomena of translation as an indispensable constituent of a theatre production rather than a subsidiary element. In his influential work *Writing and Difference*, Derrida (1978) presents his critique of Western theatre and marks it as “theological” and dependent on the authority of a unified thing out there and complete in itself:

The stage is theological for as long as it is dominated by speech, by a will to speech, by the layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance. The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed

with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter represent him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts, his intentions, his ideas. He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors, enslaved interpreters who represent characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of “the creator”. (p. 296)

For Derrida, logocentric theatre is problematic because it privileges the existence of an author-creator that dominates the theatrical site from outside, and thus takes it for granted that representation is overruled by a primary *logos*. The relationship between what is happening on stage and the structure that defines and regulates it is unilateral, and it renders all that takes place before, during and after a theatre production as subordinate to the thoughts, intentions and ideas of the author-creator. Here Derrida is building upon the French playwright and director Antonin Artaud, who was himself responding to the early and mid-twentieth century French theatre context, which was dominated by the movement of realism. Critical of realism as mundane and moralistic, Artaud (1958) was skeptical towards the relationship between language and representation. Joining the range of modernist theatrical experimentation that emerged during the inter-war period, he turned towards a non-verbal theatre practice that would communicate in an extra-discursive fashion, targeting the audience’s sensory faculties, rather than their critical-cognitive ones. Thus, Artaud departed from the language-meaning tradition and called for a ritualistic theatre, which centered upon improvisation and performance rather than a written text (*The Theatre and Its Double*). In the same way as Artaud, the kind of theatre that troubles Derrida is one that is governed by a textual centre, rather than an improvisational theatre, because such an approach fundamentally disregards other crucial constituents. The contemporaneity and spatiotemporal existence of the theatrical site is overwhelmed by the author-creator’s seal.

Derrida's critique reverses Bassnett's take on the text/performance hierarchy, yet both thinkers are joined in their resistance to the essentialization of authorship. These positions are of crucial importance to the development of the idea that taking the text as a fixed point can end up disregarding other variables such as contemporary culture and locality. Today, instead of taking the dramatic text as a point of origin, the dramatic text and the performance text are commonly considered as elements that constitute a theatrical production together with other components such as acting and the bodily performance of the players. Although now it is assumed that the authority of the author and the work has given way to the idea of text as process, W. B. Worthen (1996), looking at the history of Shakespeare studies and J. L. Styan's famous phrase "the Shakespeare revolution" (1977) for the development of stage-centred criticism, nods to Derrida and reminds us that the (A)uthor survives in some respects. Worthen remarks that the name "Shakespeare"

often summons a kind of critical ghost, a fiction, an openly rhetorical convenience labeling a network of discursive practices, legitimating strategies, and institutional pressures . . . [it] demarcates a zone of cultural transmission that includes various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, their textual and performative history, and our own labor and conversation with them. (p. 13)

Bestowing "Shakespeare" with a legitimating authority imposes a definitive form to Shakespearean drama, its past and its representative traditions in a strict sense, such that we struggle to extract meaning from and interpret a foundational essence (p. 13). This runs the risk of tracing an already existing meaning in the text towards which the acts of interpretation, representation, staging and acting move. In this case, the practices of translation, adaptation and rewriting are considered secondary when compared to the canonical adapted work, which is the starting point and ground that a possible reworking deals with. For Bassnett (1991), this essentialism can be contrasted with the different semiotic strategies surrounding a dramatic text:

The pre-performance literary reading which involves an imaginative spatial dimension by the individual as the reading of a novel, the post-performance literary reading which contains remembered signs from the experience of having seen the play, the director's reading which involves shaping the text within a larger system of theatrical signs, a performer's reading, which focuses on one role and other similarly focused readings by lighting technicians etc. (pp. 106-107)

Bassnett underlines the need to take other variables into account, such as the director's engagement with a text, and further states that the interlingual translator's involvement and reading have long been ignored. As a result, theatre translation has continued to be an under-theorized field lacking a terminology that includes the translator's reading.

In a similar fashion to Bassnett's take on theatre semiotics, Margaret Kidnie (2009) questions the conventional terminology around the notion of adaptation and re-evaluates the definition of the theatrical work in question. In her recent book *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, Kidnie underlines that

The notion of the 'work' . . . continues to serve a practical function in both academic and generalist analyses of Shakespeare's drama. It is what enables one to speak of King Lear or Pericles, grouping under a generic title non-identical examples of text and performance that are somehow recognized as 'same'. (p. 7)

In Kidnie's discussion, historicity plays a significant role in addressing what an adaptation is. The critic prefers to call the work "the play as process" and points out that the work is continually reshaped and redefined over time as a result of critical debates and divergent performances:

The work, far from functioning as an objective yardstick against which to measure the supposed accuracy of editions and stagings, whether current or historical, continually takes shape as a *consequence* of production. The criteria that are sufficient to mark out 'the work' –and so to separate it from adaptation, or what is 'not the work' –constantly shift over time . . . in response to textual and theatrical production. (p. 7)

Kidnie refuses to define adaptation within clear-cut and definitive lines because its relation to what we understand as "the work" or "the play in process" experiences

paradigm shifts over time. The critic hints at the possibility that there may not be a tension between the text and the performance because the work is an ongoing process rather than a fixed subject, and she furthers this argument by noting that the consequence and impact of performance should also be taken into account in dealing with the developing category of adaptation:

A play, for all that it carries the rhetorical and ideological force of an enduring stability, is not an object at all, but rather a dynamic process that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users. (p. 2)

Touching on the issue of historicity from another angle, Bassnett corresponds closely with Kidnie's take on historicity and draws attention to the practice of writing and adaptation in Shakespeare's own time:

So despite the fact that Shakespeare's texts exist in Quarto and Folio forms, and versions of the same play can vary considerably, there has been a tendency to consider those same texts as sacred cows and to assume that they were written as unified wholes and then reproduced by actors. (p. 103)

In short, both Bassnett and Kidnie agree upon viewing the dramatic text and the performance text as elements of a theatre production, and cast doubt upon evaluating Shakespeare adaptations under firm categories of legitimacy and fidelity.

These critical discussions help identify the stakes of the *Bahar Noktası* case study, which illustrates that the practice of adaptation is realized as a process that evolved in response to the immediate socio-political circumstances of the time, including the 1980 coup d'état, which in return necessitated the collaborative and experimental work of the theatre practitioners to negotiate their interest in the local. This is quite similar to Kidnie's focus on "the play as process" because the multi-layered adaptation dynamics of *Bahar Noktası* demand that one views the practices of adaptation and translation, as well as Shakespeare's legacy, outside the hierarchical dualism of "original" versus "adaptation". This is related to Yücel's particular approach to translation, which is akin to what Bassnett (1985) calls "co-

operative” translation. Therefore, I will first look into the story of *Bahar Noktası*’s staging and then investigate Yücel’s understanding of “telling Shakespeare in Turkish”<sup>2</sup> so as to shed light on the key issues to be discussed in the following chapters.

## 1.2 Staging *Bahar Noktası* (1980)

The 1980 production of Can Yücel’s *Bahar Noktası* was an attempt to actualize a political project, and this process embodied not only negotiations over the dramatic text and the performance, but also the constitution of the physical conditions of the site, the preparation of the decor and the stage, the bodily presence of the actors, the rehearsals, and the critical and intellectual consideration of Western theatre and Turkish locality.

Before taking a close look at the production of *Bahar Noktası*, we shall briefly focus on Yücel’s background, which sheds light on his theatrical choices as well as his approach to translation. Can Yücel is the son of Hasan Ali Yücel (1897-1961), the former Minister of National Education who was a notable figure for the reforms he brought to the education system in the mid-twentieth century, especially recognized for the foundation of Village Institutes, which were among the efforts to spread secular Kemalist educational reforms in villages across rural Turkey (Zürcher, 2004, p. 194). As a representative of the Kemalist agenda associated with the highly centralized, Western-looking, secular Republicanism of M. K. Atatürk, Yücel led the movement in the 1940s to translate world classics into the Turkish language. The Translation Committee, which was founded in the 1940s, aimed at translating world classics, particularly the Western canon, from their original languages. The

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<sup>2</sup> *Türkçe söyleyen.*

Committee produced 973 translations within twenty-six years (Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2009, p. 181). It was during this time that the 16 year-old Can Yücel became preoccupied with translation. In an interview, the poet points out that for his first translation he collaborated with the poet, translator and critic Nurullah Ataç to work on Ovidius' poem "Narkhissos" (Buharalı, 1981 p. 11). Ataç was one of the leading figures of the Translation Committee, and he edited Can Yücel's translation of Ovid, which was published in 1944. Can Yücel's familial background paved the way for his education in Latin and Ancient Greek both at Ankara University and at Cambridge University.<sup>3</sup>

Well-known for his use of colloquial, vulgar and slang language in his poetry and translations, Yücel authored numerous translations including F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and plays by Federico Garcia Lorca, Tennessee Williams, William Shakespeare and Berthold Brecht. At the time of the March 12, 1971 Turkish coup d'état, Yücel was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment for having translated pieces from the Bolivian revolutionary Che Guevara and the Chinese revolutionary Mao Zedong, and he was released from prison in 1974 with a general amnesty. By this time in Turkey, the political environment had changed in such a way that the son of a very established educator and administrator found himself on the margins of Turkish political culture, facing forms of censorship that would eventually impact the production of *Bahar Noktası*.

When comparing *Bahar Noktası* with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the first conspicuous characteristic is the title that Yücel prefers to use as he coined the phrase *bahar noktası* as the Turkish equivalent of the original title. It can be roughly translated back into English as "the spot of seasoning" or "the point of seasoning". In

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<sup>3</sup> While living abroad, Yücel worked as a translator at several embassies and in the Turkish language section of the BBC in London before moving back in the 1960s.

Turkish, *bahar* means season and it can refer to both spring or autumn depending on the prefix or suffix added to change and specify its meaning, in the sense of a change of season. *Nokta* not only means “a full stop”, “an end” and “a spot”, but it also denotes “a place” and “a moment”. Unlike the earlier translations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the writer and translator Nurettin Sevin, Yücel avoids using a word-for-word translation. His ambivalent phrase can be associated with his desire to situate the play's context within the political backdrop prior to the 1980 coup d'état. On this subject, the acclaimed director, actor and writer Başar Sabuncu states: “The September 12, 1980 coup d'état caught us at “the spot of seasoning”” (2003, p. 9). Faced with the censorship and oppression that followed during the immediate aftermath of the military coup, Sabuncu, Yücel, and their colleagues found that they were experiencing a change of season in which one could be spotted and arrested in an instant. As such, Shakespeare's famous dream motif became a way for the translator to express the absurd and delusive state that they experienced at the time.

Today, it is almost impossible to analyse *Bahar Noktası* without reference to the September 12, 1980 coup d'état in Turkey.<sup>4</sup> On this date, the military declared control over the government via broadcast over radio and television, abolishing the parliament and dismissing members of the parliament, aldermen and mayors. Their justification was that they aimed to end the anarchy and fighting caused by Rightist, Leftist, Islamist and Kurdish nationalists labelled as “terrorists”, to re-establish

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<sup>4</sup> Turkish politics of the previous decade had been marked by coalition and minority governments and by the late 1970s, the country was in an extremely vulnerable condition, experiencing the belated repercussions of the first oil crisis of 1973. The Turkish economy was dependent on foreign inputs and import substitution, and by 1979 inflation rose above 90 per cent (Zürcher, 2004, p. 263). Meanwhile, the struggle between political factions identifying as Right and Left reached significant levels, and directly impacted daily life, a fact that was especially visible in struggles over university campuses and streets. The number of victims of political violence rose from 230 in 1977 to more than 1200 in 1979 (p. 263). The galloping inflation, the shortage of basic goods, the violence on the streets and in public spaces, and the parliament's perceived inability to deal with such chaos all contributed to a feeling of political exhaustion.

governmental authority, order and the supremacy of law, and to protect the country's unity, security of life, property and integrity (Ahmad, 1993, p. 181).

The military intervention aimed at depoliticizing urban youth, which “required crushing every manifestation of dissent from the Left, including revolutionaries, social democrats, trade unionists, and even members of the nuclear disarmament movement organized as the Peace Association and which included the very cream of Turkey's elite” (p. 184). Under the regime, educational and cultural policies were determined in line with the Turkish-Islamic synthesis, an ideology that underscored Turkish culture as grounded in Islam and a pan-Turkic identity.<sup>5</sup> During this time, there was systematic and widespread use of psychological and physical torture, and the killing or disabling of hundreds of people in prison. According to official numbers, 650.000 people were arrested, more than 1,600,000 were blacklisted, 517 individuals were sentenced to death, and 50 were executed. 30.000 people were dismissed on account of being a suspect (TBMM 2012).<sup>6</sup>

Under the pressure of state politics, a group of leftist theatre artists worked with Yücel to find an alternative way of performing their theatrical activity as resistance to the depoliticizing actions of the military intervention. One week after the military coup, many intellectuals were unable to carry on their artistic activities in the City Theatres because, being civil servants, they were all threatened by new legal regulations. In accordance with a supplementary item added to the law amendment 1402 on September 19, civil servants who were found suspicious of disturbing social order and security in areas under martial rule were to be removed or

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<sup>5</sup> The extreme Right was also targeted and crushed during this period, but its ideology, which was represented by the Nationalist Action party, “was adopted in the form of the so-called ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’” (Ahmad, 1993, p. 184).

<sup>6</sup> Available at <[https://meclishaber.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/haber\\_portal.aciklama?p1=122186](https://meclishaber.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/haber_portal.aciklama?p1=122186)>.

suspended from duty.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Sabuncu had directed numerous political plays ranging from productions of Berthold Brecht to those of Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet in state and city theatres, his political stance and staging manner, preferring to focus on playwrights associated with communism and socialism, was now considered inappropriate by the administration of the Istanbul City Theatre.

Sabuncu and his colleagues had originally founded the Tepebaşı Drama Theatre, which had been burnt to the ground in 1970, and the group partnered with Yücel to reopen their demolished, independent theatre with the production of *Bahar Noktası* in August 1980, this time calling it the Tepebaşı Experimental Stage [*Tepebaşı Deneme Sahnesi*] (2003, pp. 9-10). While the company strived against financial pressures and the necessary space to build the stage, Sabuncu participated in the process of writing the dramatic text and proofreading it with Yücel. Each time Yücel handed in a fragment of translation from *Bahar Noktası*, Sabuncu presented it to the company, who studied the piece, planned the staging and rehearsal process, and gave feedback (pp. 11-12). Gradually, each component became interwoven into each other and moved toward the stage production simultaneously.

For Yücel and the company, when the act of translation took place together with that of the play's preparation and staging, it became a more emancipating practice in the sense that other constituents like the director's involvement and that of the actors became primary dynamics in evaluating the work. This instance of collaboration echoes with Bassnett's (1985) discussion of "co-operative translation", which underlines theatre translation as a substantial constituent of a production, not a subsidiary. In this way, the translation practice becomes an integral component of the adaptation along with the rest of the determining factors. The overall process of

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<sup>7</sup> The law amendment 1402 was originally taken at the time of the 1971 Martial Law.

staging *Bahar Noktası* was determined without previous preparation. As the physical and social circumstances demanded immediate action, the adaptation was independent of a controlling mechanism that set regulations for the production to follow. Instead, the improvisational and interwoven relationship between these constituents gave birth to its own dynamics from within. Ultimately, however, the company's improvisational culture did not mean that they were not subject to other forms of discipline. After the military coup, the director Sabuncu and almost all of the actors were fired from The City Theatres and banned from further theatrical activity. When *Bahar Noktası* was first performed on January 7, 1981, therefore, it was with a new crew and cast, under the title "A Collective Work by Tepebaşı Experimental Theatre". This was Sabuncu's suggestion, but his "name was blinded from the previous posters with a dirty paper tape" (2003, p. 19).

### 1.3 Yücel's approach and "to tell Shakespeare in Turkish"

*Bahar Noktası* was Can Yücel's first Shakespeare translation, followed by later translations of Sonnet 66, the plays *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*. In all of these works, Yücel's style stands out with its distinctive use of colloquial language, vulgarisms, popular culture and local contextualization. *Bahar Noktası* has propelled a debate in Turkish academia and theatre since its first encounter with the audience. This is partly due to the fact that Yücel refers to his practice as "telling Shakespeare in Turkish," and argues that the practice of translation can be achieved in the best manner possible by reworking the material through the lenses of the present day context and locality, and translating the "essence" of the matter: "I think of what this man [an author] happened to say and which situation and case he wanted to develop. Then I retell what he tells" (Oral, 1999, p. 8). The assumption here is that adaptation

better underlines the dynamics of the original text. Yet at the same time, Yücel seems inclined to seek and reveal an “essence” that lies beyond the text. The translator notes that what he means by the essence of a work has to do with its place in the source language, context and literature, and the cross-references and allusions in the work (Karantay, 1989, p. 15). To tell in Turkish, for Yücel, is to grasp the text as a whole instead of working through the lines in detail. As for theatre translation, Yücel notes that he translates plays on account of their staging and reception:

One doesn't address the reader who reads and tries to understand the text. One is at a point where one needs to directly give voice, take voice and eventually has to be applauded . . . Besides there is something more important: the actor has to understand it when he's on stage. If he doesn't, he cannot act. (p. 15)

We can discern from Yücel's interest in presenting the audience and reader with familiar material that the translator puts the reception of the work on the forefront in transferring it to Turkish. Taking into consideration the style of language, formal composition, theme, figures of speech and intertextuality, the translator tries to situate the source text into a new context in the target language so that it can be more accessible. His understanding of telling Shakespeare in Turkish thus seeks to adhere both to the original material in the source language and to retain its “essence” in the target text. This inclination to regard translation and adaptation as interwoven practices has caused controversy over the issues of legitimacy and fidelity.

Although today many Turkish scholars, theatre artists, reviewers and translators recognize Yücel as the one who “tells Shakespeare in Turkish” rather than referring to him as a translator, an adaptor or a rewriter, his approach towards translation is still a subject under debate. Whereas theatre practitioners, scholars and critics such as Başar Sabuncu, Cevat Çapan, Işın Bengi Öner and Zeynep Oral<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Cevat Çapan's review of *Bahar Noktası* entitled “Özgürlüğüne kavuşan Shakespeare”, *Bahar Noktası* (2003), Zeynep Oral's “Tiyatro: Bahar Noktası ya da Yaşasın Tiyatro”. *Milliyet Sanat Dergisi*

acknowledge Yücel's practice as a unique way of translating while dealing with the original English material in Turkish, critics and translators such as Zehra İpşiroğlu, Bülent Bozkurt and Süha Sertabipoğlu<sup>9</sup> find it problematic to define Yücel's practice as translation. The former consider him a translator especially because of his re-contextualization of Shakespeare in the Turkish language and culture, stepping outside the common discussion of fidelity. Yet, the latter believe that Yücel's translations of Shakespeare are autonomous and unrestricted works that do not adhere to the authority of the original work, which is used by Yücel to expose his own voice as a poet and writer. Süha Sertabipoğlu (2006), for instance, refuses to characterize Yücel's translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 66 as proper and accurate since he argues that one does not sense the presence of the translator in a good translation (*Cumhuriyet Kitap*, 841.23).

Against the criticism raised on the issues of legitimacy and fidelity, Yücel avoids imposing and ascertaining any one of the practices as the ultimate definition for what he is doing. On the subject of the translation-adaptation conflict in an interview, he remarks that he is adapting the plays, not declaring them translations (Karantay, 1989, p. 16). To make matters more complicated, the translator also explains that he uses the phrase "to tell in Turkish" as an inscription for his translations since he views them as a rewriting and recreation. In dealing with the critical lens imposed upon his work, the translator deliberately refers to all three practices interchangeably so as to avoid any firm classification. The fact that Yücel avoids being identified as a translator, an adaptor or a rewriter per se complicates the

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17 (1981) and Işın Bengi Öner's "Eskiler.. Yeniler.. Şiirler.. Çeviriler.. Eleştiriler.. Kuramlar *Dükkân I.*" *Ludingirra* 2 (1997).

<sup>9</sup> See Zehra İpşiroğlu's *Tiyatroda Devrim*. İstanbul: Mitos-Boyut Yayınları (2000), Bülent Bozkurt's "Shakespeare'in Bütün Sözcükleri". *Akşam-lık* (18 April 2003) and Süha Sertabipoğlu's "Çeviri ve Çevirmenlik Üzerine Tezler". *Cumhuriyet Kitap* 841 (2006).

evaluation of his practice. *Bahar Noktası* calls for a critical consideration outside the hierarchical logic underlying the author/translator or original/translation oppositions, which resonates with the aforementioned critical discussions on the risk of tracing an already existing meaning in the “original” work. From this standpoint, looking at the contemporary resurgence in Shakespeare adaptation and performance in Turkey requires addressing criticism that is skeptical of dualistic approaches defining the notions of translation and adaptation as secondary compared to the so-called original text. In the following chapters, we see that the collaborative dynamics of staging Shakespeare complicates a dualistic approach to adaptation even though theatre practitioners still wrestle with the authority of the name Shakespeare and oftentimes tend to replicate the hierarchical distinction between “original” and “adaptation”.

#### 1.4 Critical consideration of Western and Turkish theatre conventions

The production process of *Bahar Noktası*, which predated the play’s published version (1981), also embodied a critical discussion on Western and Turkish theatre conventions. It is evident from Sabuncu’s account that the company was not concerned with introducing an untranslated Shakespeare play to the Turkish audience and reader. The project of *Bahar Noktası* pursued the goal of presenting a locally-informed version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and it also aimed at shattering the common reception of Shakespearean comedy on the Turkish stage, which generally involved considering comedy as a medium of entertainment with hardly any focus on integrating local agendas into the thematic concerns of the play. Although the history of Shakespeare translations and perception in Turkey will be dealt with in the next chapter, Turkish theatre history betrays a tendency to associate Shakespeare’s

tragedies with issues of state violence, government corruption and power struggle, and the comedies with depoliticized entertainment.

The director Sabuncu admits that neither he nor Yücel could accept the fact that the “great” Shakespeare’s comedies were commonly perceived by the audience as a form of depoliticized entertainment revolving around issues like love and jealousy whereas his tragedies were understood to be dealing with more serious subjects like revenge, governmental corruption and the ambition for power. They did not want to acknowledge that

The great Shakespeare who approaches the individual, society and historical facts with a bitter objectivity, and pulls human relations and sensibility to shreds in his masterpieces on power struggle could write a shallow “entertainment” adorned with spirits, fairies and magic. (2003, pp. 11-12)

Sabuncu’s commentary is suggestive of a general conception of the Shakespearean canon by theatre artists and audiences in Turkey: the reference to Shakespeare functions as a distinction between high and low cultures, and Shakespeare himself is a figure of authority and admiration as a master of Western theatre, but also categorized according to a centuries-old standardization which outclasses tragedy over comedy.

Sabuncu informs us that “Can Yücel’s gratifying “telling of Shakespeare in Turkish” came into existence in parts during our meetings at Dragos for a “specific” staging in accordance with a predetermined “concept” –a fashionable term nowadays” (p. 11). By a specific staging, the director refers to underlining the political aspect of Shakespeare’s dramatic text, and reinforcing the issues of power struggle, patriarchy, class-power, and rivalry between the rulers as the core thematic concerns of the play.

It is a court entertainment and a reckoning as well in which the Amazon queen “feminist” Hippolyta (as we may say in modern-day expression) and macho Theseus the king of Athens, who boasts about conquering her country

and love, undertake a power struggle against each other in the guise of the fairy queen and king of the forest -this time as Müzeyyen and Babaron through Can's renaming, two juveniles and young ladies from the ruling class cram down their lifetime experience of love into a night, court attendants transform into "actors" as Philostrate the Master of Revels assumes the role of a "spirit" and servants are forced to assume the role of "fairies" with wings fastened to their shoulders just like in an elementary school play. (p. 15)

Here, Sabuncu's description of the production shows that the group pursued the Shakespearean interest in the political issues of gender and class distinction.

Influenced by Jan Kott's famous *Shakespeare: Our Contemporary*, Sabuncu and the company decided to emphasize the political aspect of the comedy, that it actually reveals an ambition for power rather than a mere entertainment or romance (p. 11).

Adding to this deliberation, Sabuncu mentions that the company organized the staging of the play together with the poet, translator and scholar Cevat Çapan, and their discussions on naturalism and Western theatre provide insight as to how the play was staged at the time. Referring to the famous Reinhardt production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the 1930s as "the one with rabbits", the company was proud to have rejected such naturalism for the *mise en scène* of *Bahar Noktası*. Instead, the production's conceptualization stemmed from two major factors: the immediacy of the 1980 military coup, and Yücel's unique re-contextualization of the original work.

Another factor the company took into consideration was that the Istanbul State Theatre included a Turkish production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in its repertoire that same year, which was to be directed by the famous English actor David Conville (Sabuncu, 2003, p. 13). At the time, another translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the writer and translator Nurettin Sevin already existed, and theatre artists commonly used it when staging the work. Compared to *Bahar Noktası*, this work adheres more to the original English one, and aims to

produce a word-for-word translation. The Conville production using the Nurettin Sevin translation premiered while Yücel and the company were preparing *Bahar Noktası* for the stage (p. 13). The company's instant reaction towards this production ironically underlines the anxiety regarding the Western canon as marker of intellect and knowledge. When they heard of this production, they could not help but boast about their version:

At first, some of us felt uneasy about this, that "He is English and he knows about Shakespeare better than we do," But then we couldn't abstain from becoming boastful, "They are staging *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we on the other hand *Bahar Noktası*." (p. 13)

This instance of anxiety and the immediate defiance following it confronts the company with the hegemony of the English language and culture, and hints at the continuity with dealing with the West on the intellectual, cultural and political domains.<sup>10</sup> The company's experience resonates with W. B. Worthen's commentary on how the issues of legitimization and fidelity interact with the subject of the author-function:

Legitimizing the Author *is* a way of authorizing ourselves, which perhaps explains the anxious acts of filiation that, surprisingly, continue to animate accounts of stage performance. But by allowing "Shakespeare" such authority, we reify Shakespearean drama –and the past, the tradition it presents –as sacred text, as silent hieroglyphics we can only scan, interpret, struggle to decode; we impoverish, in other words, the work of our own performances, and the work of the plays in our making of the world. (1996, p. 26)

When the dramatic text and/or the figure of the author are acknowledged as the source where meaning stems from, adherence to the original simultaneously reaffirms the legitimacy of the Author and validates our own position as an authority in Shakespearean drama. This act of self-authorization is especially acute in post-

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed history of Turkish theatre and its relationship with the Western tradition, see Metin And's *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu* and *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Tiyatrosu*, İnci Enginun's *Tanzimat Devrinde Shakespeare*, and the collection of critical essays entitled *Eleştirmen Gözüyle Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Tiyatrosu Eleştiri Seçkisi I-II-III*.

colonial, non-Western contexts and is valid for the translator and the adaptor as well as the director, actor, spectator, critic, writer, etc. Ironically, each of these positions occupies a secondary place upon having recourse to Shakespeare to legitimate meanings and interpretations. In Worthen's words,

Recourse to "Shakespeare" is also a way of turning away from the question of how our acts of representation are implicated in the dynamics of contemporary culture, a way of passing the responsibility for our theatrical and critical activities on to a higher authority. (p. 25)

Instead, the critic calls for a consideration of the dramatic text as an element that constitutes a theatrical production together with other variables such as the dynamics of a contemporary culture. Here, it is important to note that Shakespeare's work has been greatly influential in the development of theatre practice and criticism in the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey for well over a century. The fact that the company was turning its gaze to Western theatre was thus an outcome of an ongoing tradition of self-authorization.

On Yücel's choice of the title *Bahar Noktası*, Sabuncu reveals that within their circle of intellectuals Yücel had by then become a figure of authority on the matter of translation: "I haven't heard of such phrasing before, but when Can Yücel said: "This is the way to tell *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Turkish," it becomes indisputable, right?" (2003, p. 9). The indisputable trust in the translator's practice makes one question whether it is possible for a theatre-maker to distance themselves from the burden of legitimacy and fidelity because the translator/adaptor may replace the original author as the point of centre in interpreting a text. Although the inclusion of other constituents like the collaboration with the actors in *Bahar Noktası* helps depart from the idea of taking Yücel as a point of origin, their case still reflects the tendency to validate one's position in a theatrical community through the authority of the translator/adaptor.

On the other hand, preparing a work that overflows with Turkish culture and local, historical references lends itself to a bilateral relationship between the source text and its translation. In the Yücel case, the association of the source text and the target language and culture makes one question translation outside the confines of a legitimating authority. Carrying the dramatic text to the local sphere through elaborately conceived prose which is musical, rhythmic and full of internal rhymes and idioms peculiar to the Turkish language and culture, Can Yücel untangles and reinvents it in the contemporary world of his audience.

### 1.5 Adapting the “essence” of the matter

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* occupies a unique place in the Shakespearean canon, especially due to the mythological, stylistic and dramatic diversity it embodies. It revolves around issues of love, marriage, gender distinction, order and disorder, reality and illusion, and dreams and the supernatural, which are represented through several intertwined plotlines. On the eve of the marriage preparations of Theseus, Duke of Athens, and the Amazon Queen Hippolyta, the nobleman Egeus brings his daughter Hermia to their presence. Complaining about Hermia's rebellious actions, Egeus appeals for the Duke's help as she refuses to marry Demetrius and states that she is in love with Lysander. The Duke commands Hermia to obey her father, or the Athenian law demands that she must either be sentenced to death or enter a convent. That night, Hermia and Lysander leave Athens and run away into the woods, which is governed by the Fairy King and Queen, Oberon and Titania. In the chaotic dream-like world of the forest, the play unfolds with the parallel conflicts between the four young lovers, the rehearsal experience of the amateur mechanicals, and the rivalry

between Oberon and Titania, all of which are impacted by the mischievous enchantment cast by Oberon and Puck.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare brings together a complex diversity of mythological and literary allusions as well as rich figurative and rhetorical elements. He draws upon classical mythology, English folk tradition, elements of farce and burlesque, powerful lyricism, festive traditions and the courtly love conventions of his time.<sup>11</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is in constant conversation with its contemporaries and the classical, English and European literary tradition it draws on. Yücel follows the storyline and thematic concerns of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but divides the play in two acts and prefers to use prose instead of verse all throughout the text except for the songs. In *Bahar Noktası*, the complicated intertextual world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is translated into allusions to Ottoman and Turkish history, folklore and culture, Islamic mythology, the celebration of *newroz* (the arrival of spring) in Kurdish culture, and non-Muslim theatrical heritage and craftsmanship, while also conserving numerous mythological references that Shakespeare draws upon. Yücel also retains Shakespearean rhetorical devices, stylistic richness, irony, sexual innuendo and lyricism, but he applies a colloquial and vulgar tone to the totality of his dramatic text, which becomes the predominating style of language. Yücel thus engages with Shakespeare's dramatic text as a dynamic, stimulating work, not as a stable ground of origin that one feels obliged to represent legitimately. Instead, Shakespeare's "original" aids the adaptor in negotiating his response to the demands, sensibilities and objectives of the practitioners he collaborates with. Here, the practice of adaptation resembles

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<sup>11</sup> Ovid, Seneca, Apuleius, Chaucer, Lyly, Spenser are among the influential figures Shakespeare draws upon throughout the play. For more on this, see Harold F. Brooks' detailed discussion of Shakespeare's sources and dramatic complexity in his "Introduction" to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Arden Shakespeare).

Kidnie's suggestion of the "play as process", a reciprocal practice that initiates one to consider the "original" outside its conventional, preserved status.

This is also evident in Yücel's treatment of translation and adaptation as interwoven practices that filter *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through the socio-political sensibilities of his time, tracing the intertextual complexity of the original in the local context. On this issue, Cevat Çapan (2003) remarks that numerous personas and concepts that Yücel incorporates in his translation serve the purpose of highlighting the intertextuality that we find in Shakespeare's play:

*Bahar Noktası* is the name given by Can Yücel to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at his discretion while translating the work anew to arrange and adapt it to our awareness. The success of the play commences with this liberating understanding of translation and is finalized with a stage interpretation that conceives the essence of the original play. Can Yücel perceived the meaning of this Shakespeare play and introduced a dramatic text which articulates Shakespeare's characteristic expression by means of Turkish. The characters Shakespeare created having been influenced by Greek mythology, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and British folklore preserve their likelihood in the Turkish text, but contextualized within the scope of a familiar legend, fable and folklore realm without becoming meaningless and unidentified. (p. 31)

Here, Çapan notes that Shakespeare's text can only be understood through making a contextual rearrangement because it is filled with folkloric specificity and laden with particular local details. Yücel's rearrangement seeks to create a familiar realm of textuality and performance for the Turkish audience so that they can better access Shakespearean intertextuality and linguistic complexity. In this regard, the practice of integrating of local literature and culture into the original material leads Yücel to turn to Ottoman minorities, their cultural heritage and ethnic otherness, which come to the surface as fundamental issues that mark the local context in Shakespeare adaptations.

In creating a familiar realm for the audience, for instance, Yücel takes Puck, the fairy King Oberon and Queen Titania outside the pastoral, medieval and classical

context Shakespeare makes use of. Instead, he invites the audience into the palace of Sultan Tezeus in Athens, and the magical, disorderly world of the fairy Sultan Babaron, his Sultana Müzeyyen, and Puck/the Jinn. In the following excerpt, we meet Puck for the first time as he comments on the conflict between Oberon and Titania.

*Jinn:*

God damn it! Our Sultan has his revels here tonight.  
Amen, she should get out of his sight. Boo-hooooo,  
he's mad as hell, Babaron is hopping mad! Ah, ah,  
Müzem Sultan! She won't behave! It's an Indian maharaja  
that she has recently made away with from a palace;  
for my sweetheart she says, keeping him out of sight in darkness.  
Green with envy, Babaron took a firm stand saying he will  
Take the frolic son to his heart and Enderun school. I guess  
he will make the boy course in battue in maiden forests.  
You know my queen, what a dark night and lustful queen  
she isss! Up and doing at the acemi boy's side, she lines up  
vervains with his semen to her arrow-like brow. Therefore,  
when the two child molesters meet either by the spring of the  
fountain or by the meads of the meadow, they hide in acorn shells  
fearing that these two will get up against each other. (Yücel, 2003, p. 52)

Yücel presents Puck to the Turkish audience as “Jinn”, a supernatural figure from Islamic mythology that is usually invisible and inhabits the unseen world, and the translator renames the King and Queen of the Fairies respectively as Sultan Babaron and Sultana Müzeyyen. Whereas the translator prefers to use the Turkish versions of certain character names in *Bahar Noktası* such as “Ege” for “Egeus” and “Dimitri” for “Demetrius”, he renames some of the characters quite distinctively as seen in the case of the Fairy Queen. This is due to the need to present a familiar context to the audience for whom it is easier to recognize “Jinn” as a spirit with magical powers rather than “Puck”. In the original play, Puck is also referred to as “Robin Goodfellow” and in a similar fashion Jinn is also called “Babacan Bican” in *Bahar Noktası*.

Here, Yücel tries to capture Shakespeare's interest in puns, repetition and internal rhyming in the sense that "Babacan Bican" is used in the meaning of a good natured, fatherly spirit: *baba* means "father" in Turkish and *can* means "life" and "spirit". Just as being a good fellow is ironic for the mischievous Puck; it is likewise a pun to call Jinn a good natured, fatherly spirit. In addition to this, the phrase "Babacan Bican" resembles a nursery rhyme that is easily remembered, like the word "Babaron". Yücel renames the character "Oberon" as "Babaron", and with the repetition of the word *baba*, he not only plays on the relationship between the king and his servant since "Babaron" and "Babacan" are so readily replaceable, but turns a critical eye on the authority of the kingly figure since the sounding of "Babaron" in Turkish creates a comic effect as well. Moreover, the choice to replace "Titania" with "Müzeyyen" recalls a stereotypical coquettish woman in the eyes of the Turkish audience. The etymology of the name "Müzeyyen" dates back to the fourteenth century, and it means "adorned" or "ornamented" in the Arabic language. Presented in the Ottoman context, the sexual innuendo present in Shakespeare's dramatic text changes in accordance with the cultural references Yücel draws upon.

What is important to note about the political dimensions of this process is that translating Shakespeare's imagined Athens into the context of Ottoman multiculturalism allows Yücel to reference the historical erasure of Turkey's non-Muslim minorities to address contemporary issues like political otherness, censorship and systematized state violence. Instead of providing the audience with an overt criticism of the political climate of 1980, Yücel negotiates the era's prohibitions by using a seemingly not-so-political, folklorish language in the context of Ottoman minorities. Through Shakespeare's political hegemony, however, Yücel accomplishes a highly political project. Working on a canonical Shakespeare comedy

offers Yücel and the company the necessary space to look at the political fault lines of his time as well as that of a censored history. As Yücel makes a deeply political history folklorish to avoid censorship, the question of the canon automatically re-politicizes this choice.

In the above-quoted excerpt, these dynamics are visible in the adaptation of the sexual subtext surrounding the Indian boy. Here, the translator addresses Ottoman history, as Sultan Babaron “will take the frolic son to his heart and Enderun School” (p. 52). Founded in the fifteenth century and abolished in 1908, The Enderun School educated elected children from Christian families in arts and sciences, and converted them to Islam so as to have them serve the empire in the palace, military, governmental duties or bureaucracy (Ahmad, 1993, pp. 19-20). The “lovely boy” Titania had her attendant steal from an Indian king in the original text appears as an *acemi* boy in *Bahar Noktası*, a non-Muslim child who was converted to Islam and educated to be become a member of the military in the Ottoman Empire. Within this context, Yücel provides a critical commentary on Ottoman history under the guise of his witty and vulgar mannerism, and comments on the Enderun School as a corrupt organization which not only seizes non-Muslim children by force to raise them in accordance with the orders of the empire, but abuses them sexually as well. Rather than being crowned with flowers, the boy is being molested by Queen Müzeyyen, whose sexual desire for the boy is overtly worded with the imagery of the vervains made up of semen.

Furthermore, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania describes Oberon's absence from the Fairyland as his sojourn “in the shape of Corin, sat all day/ playing on pipes of corn, and versing love/ To amorous Phillida” (1979, 1.2.66-68). Yücel re-

establishes the affair in Constantinople where Sultan Babaron fell in love with the “Mermaid Eftelya” rather than the shepherdess Phillida:

*Müzeyyen:*

Well! It was you to freak out from Fairyland to Konstantanniye in all kinds of trickery and knavery, disguised as a priest, right? Like a moor who found riches there, weren't you secluded with the Mermaid Eftelya for months with your hand on your section, beating time, shrilling your pipe? Deny it, come on! (2003, p. 52)

The “Mermaid Eftelya” was an epithet used for the famous late nineteenth century cabaret singer Eftelya Işılai, who was the first non-Muslim singer to record in the name of Dar-ül Elhan (1917-27), the first music academy of the Ottoman Empire. Işılai used Turkish pseudonyms for almost 30 of her records, and during the 1930s, her professional identity was secured as “Mermaid Eftelya”. Also recognized as having sung to M. K. Atatürk in person, Eftelya Işılai (1891-1939) had such a distinct voice that it influenced the famous Kamancheh artist and composer Aleko Bacanos, who composed a piece for her (O'Connell, 2003, pp. 204-207). Again, Yücel takes us back in history and alludes to a figure who witnessed the transition of the country from an empire to a republic, a phase which witnessed the total erasure of the history of non-Muslims. Unlike Oberon, who “hast stol'n away from fairy land” (Shakespeare, 1979, 1.2.65) in the like of a shepherd to seduce a shepherdess, the Sultan Babaron is disguised as a priest to seduce a famous Greek singer from Constantinople, a unique figure whose story likens her to the image of a Muse inspiring artistic creation. However, Yücel's use of the stereotype of the sexually available non-Muslim woman is used here to satirize this typically degrading approach. Historically, non-Muslim women are both attractive objects of sexual desire and easily seduced because of their social and religiously inferior status in

Muslim-dominated society.<sup>12</sup> This theme will re-emerge in Chapter 2 with respect to the non-Muslim actresses who were the first women to appear on stage both in the Ottoman Era and in Republican Turkey.

The political stakes of Yücel's re-contextualization are particularly visible in the community of Greek artisans, who are meant to embody Shakespeare's mechanicals. In Shakespeare's dramatic text, the mechanicals are first and foremost identified by their artisanship as they address each other by referring to one another's profession: Peter Quince the carpenter, Nick Bottom the weaver, Francis Flute the bellows-bender, Robin Starveling the tailor, Tom Snout the tinker and Snug the joiner. These artisans are commonly considered to represent English craftsmen (Bloom, 2005, p. 139), unlike the Duke and Duchess, the young lovers and the fairy King and Queen, for whom Shakespeare drew upon classical sources. The group belongs to the lowest social strata in Athens, and they form an amateur theatre company, preparing a play for the marriage celebrations of the Duke and the Duchess. As the mischievous spirit Puck puts it, the artisans are "a crew of patches, rude mechanicals, that work for bread upon Athenian stalls" (Shakespeare, 1979, 3.2.9-10). Puck characterizes the group as an amateur company of absurd, uneducated and shallow commoners that struggle for a living. Their rehearsal process is marked by their literal-minded conception of dramatic illusion as well as their bombastic language and acting style.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> On this issue, see Daryo Mizrahi's (2014) "Language and Sexuality in Ottoman Shadow-Puppet Performances" in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*, pp. 275-292.

<sup>13</sup> The mechanicals and their play-within-the-play are oftentimes regarded as a parody of early Elizabethan amateur dramatic tradition and royal pageantries. On this issue, see Clifford Davidson, "What hempen home-spuns have we swagg'ring here?" *Amateur Actors in A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Coventry Civic Play and Pageants." *Shakespeare Studies* 19 (1987) and Louis Montrose, "Bottom's Dream." *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (1996).

In *Bahar Noktası*, Yücel presents the mechanicals as Greek artisans, and throws a critical eye on the issues of censorship, non-Muslim cultural heritage and violent military intervention as well as the conflict between Right and Left under the guise of their farcical rehearsal story. Petraki the carpenter, Niko the weaver, Lambo the bellows-mender, Yani the tailor, Mavradis the tinker and the unnamed joiner prepare to stage “Pyramus and Thisbe” for the marriage celebrations of Tezeus and İpolita. As we see in the opening excerpt, both the Greek artisans and Shakespeare’s mechanicals fear the death penalty at the gallows when Niko/Bottom insists on performing the part of the lion to demonstrate his skills. The rest of the company warn Niko/Bottom against using hyperbolic gestures and verbalization during the performance since they might be hanged for scaring the royal maids of the Duchess: “You would fright the Duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek: and that were enough to hang us all” (Shakespeare, 1979, p. 23). The inability of the mechanicals to conceive dramatic illusion not only produces an ironic treatment of the earlier burlesque tradition in drama, but it also indicates the intricate relationship between art, class distinction and authority. The mechanicals are haunted by the possibility of being executed if they somehow overstep the authority of the governors. On this issue, James H. Kavanagh (1985) suggests that for the mechanicals, decisions over dramatic representation are closely bound to the demands of the current ideology: “to disrupt their lived relation to the real, would be an unacceptable usurpation of ideological power, possibly punishable by death; we must temper our dramatic practice, restrain its effect, and inscribe in it the marks of our own submission” (p. 156). Kavanagh’s reading of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* sheds light on Yücel’s adaptation of this scene to the prohibitions and censorships they face in the 1980s.

Yücel draws upon the recurrent image of the gallows in this dialogue as a marker of the repetitive exertion of violence and death sentences during the 1980 coup d'état by making an addition to the opening of this scene. To announce the distribution of roles, Petraki the carpenter states: "I'll call your names from the right!" and Niko immediately reacts to this: "From the left! Not the right" (Yücel, 2003, p. 48). Niko's corrective assertion here signals the concern over affirming their affinity with the Left, which in return reinforces the image of the gallows in relation to the political sensibilities of the 1980s. Whereas these references are embedded within the comic banter of the Greek artisans, its resonances for Turkish audiences are clear: the "usurpation of ideological power" by means of creative expression remains fraught. Over time, the politically loaded term *darağacı* [the gallows] has been revisited by later politicians to suppress dissent in modern Turkish politics. In later chapters, the cases of Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* (2013), and Biliş and Özbudak's *Romeo and Juliet* (2016) call out to the cultural and historical memories of the audience members in a similar way and explicate that the image of the gallows has become an imprint of political violence on collective memories in Turkey, and its recurrent repetition by later politicians.

In *Bahar Noktası*, the rehearsal experience of the Greek artisans also alludes to the tradition of folk drama dating back to the nineteenth century Ottoman Era, where shadow play, *Meddah* and *Orta Oyunu* were popular genres that dwelled upon a comic representation of stereotypical figures in society like the Greek tavern keeper.<sup>14</sup> Being both craftsmen and theatre practitioners, the Greek artisans typify the non-Muslim population in the Ottoman period, a time when the place of Greek and Armenian populations in society were initially signified by their vital roles in trade,

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<sup>14</sup> See Yavuz Pekman's *Çağdaş Tiyatromuzda Geleneksellik* (2002) for a detailed discussion of these genres, caricatured representation of ethnicity as well as commoners and Muslim Ottoman citizens.

handcrafts and the development of theatrical practices. As I point out in my following chapter, Greek and Armenian theatre artists were among the first adaptors of Shakespeare's work, and their close involvement with Western theatrical forms and culture were part of the reason why they were regarded as the "local foreigners". From this perspective, Yücel's re-contextualization of the play-within-the play "Piramus and Tisbe" as an *orta oyunu*, an improvisational Ottoman theatre convention, aims at calling attention to the gradual erasure of non-Muslim culture from the theatrical scene.

By doing so, Yücel also implicitly equates his own, oppositional intellectual practice to the gradual erasure of Turkey's non-Muslim cultural heritage following the late Ottoman period. I will evaluate the stakes of these connections in more detail in Chapter 2, which will focus on issues of non-Muslim identity and cultural hegemony in Turkish theatre historiography. For now, however, what Yücel's adaptation demonstrates is a tendency that haunts the ways that theatre practitioners filter Shakespeare's work through the socio-political agenda in contemporary Turkey; they often do so by positing a solidarity between political opposition in their contemporary moments and the country's history of ethnic diversity. Over the course of my dissertation, these socio-political issues come to the surface in each Shakespeare adaptation case, especially in relation to the association theatre practitioners make between representing their state of political otherness with reference to ethnic diversity and the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. In their *Hamlet* (2013) adaptation, for instance, Moda Sahnesi builds a parallelism between *Hamlet* and the political background of the Gezi Park Protests, and situates the play around the idea of defying political as well as literary power by framing Hamlet as a dissenting character that resists the propagated "truths" of a power centre based on

the exclusion and silencing of dissent. In a similar fashion to *Bahar Noktası*, Moda Sahnesi immediately responds to the political turmoil at the time, practices adaptation as a collaborative process and reflect a desire to engage with the non-Muslim intellectual heritage and history of the neighbourhood that surrounds their theatre site. Therefore, *Bahar Noktası* effectively elucidates my argument over the course of the dissertation that localizing Shakespeare in relation to being on the margins of Turkish political culture is actualized by a turn to the representation of ethnic others.

#### 1.6 Adaptation as process

Taking *Bahar Noktası* as a case that conjoins notions of translation, adaptation and rewriting adds another dimension to the way critical discussion and language function in international scholarship. When the original text and the local culture/context converge and compose a new material as in the Yücel case, how does one evaluate such a complicated process with a translation back into English, so that one can talk about its place in Shakespeare scholarship? As it is impossible to recreate the site of performance that gave birth to *Bahar Noktası* as a political project, one only has the dramatic text, historical account and visual material at hand. In this matter, one might turn to Ton Hoenselaars (2006), who addresses the twentieth-century move in regarding translation and adaptation as connected practices. Hoenselaars recognizes the favourable aspect of this interrelatedness as it lends itself to viewing translation and adaptation beyond a hierarchical, binary logic. When defined as neither dependent on nor subsidiary to a source text, translation and adaptation constitute a shifting and slippery ground that makes it quite difficult to differentiate between the two. Translation as a mode can be thought of as adapting a

text into other lingual and cultural contexts, carrying it to new readers and audience spaces. The stage production of a text can also be viewed as a mode of translation and this time it involves generic transformation, as well. As for adaptation, it can be thought of as translating a text rather figuratively, fitting, modifying and/or adjusting it anew. To this extent, *Bahar Noktası* can be situated in this slippery ground oscillating between translation and adaption, and thus disallowing the construction of a hierarchy between the original work and its translation/adaptation.

Yet, the critic argues that even if we consider translation as a mode of adaptation and adaptation as a metaphorical form of translation, rather than autonomous practices in their own rights, “there is a point at which either term reclaims its original meaning” and their interchangeable use becomes unlikely (2006, p. 50). Although Hoenselaars does not touch upon the original meanings he refers to, he is mainly concerned with the relationship between non-English Shakespeares and the two practices. For non-English Shakespeare adaptations,

back translation into English will still be required if communication between the academic communities of different nations continues to be a desirable objective. The final change in the field of translation is that, partly due to the cultural turn in literary studies, the English-speaking Shakespearians, who formerly left the traffic of Shakespeare between languages to their foreign colleagues, have now been inspired by the notion of ‘translation’ in the broadest sense of the term. (p. 50)

In other words, global Shakespeare Studies necessitates translation as a practice of interaction, and this is also the case for the present study, which not only aims at analysing adaptation and rewritings of Shakespeare in Turkey over the last century, but also inquires how we can evaluate the significance and impact of locality with reference to the sphere of international Shakespeare criticism. What Hoenselaars considers risky here is that even when translators reclaim a position other than that of a substituent, the hegemony of the English language and culture predominates the

discussion on Shakespeare. One needs to take notice of the fact that reclaiming a place outside the original/translation dichotomy by way of the English language in the international domain may end up either reinforcing the legitimacy of the author or replacing it with that of the translator, adaptor and rewriter. The risk/consequence of using the notion “translation” as a broad term, which embodies textual translation, cultural translation and adaptation, is that it may reaffirm and sustain the legitimacy of the author.

The nascent interest in non-Anglophone Shakespeares goes hand in hand with research inquiring into the possibilities of redefining and theorizing translation and adaptation from different angles. For the critic Dennis Kennedy (1996), the worldwide growing engagement in foreign Shakespeare interrogates “the idea that Shakespeare can be contained by a single tradition or by a single culture or by a single language” (p. 149). Against regarding translation and adaptation as secondary and subsidiary to the source text, Kennedy relates to Bassnett’s criticism: when we assume that there is a spatial and gestural dimension inherent to the theatre text, the realization of the source text in translation is hardly possible. This time it is the totality of the linguistic and cultural dimension that can neither be realized by non-English speakers nor the native speakers in the contemporary world of the twenty-first century. In his famous article “Shakespeare without His Language”, Kennedy notes that English-speaking audiences are inclined to take for granted the fact that non-English productions inevitably “lose an essential element of Shakespeare in the process of linguistic and cultural transfer” (p. 140), and adds:

But it is also true that some foreign performances may have a more direct access to the power of the plays. In this respect the modernity of translation is crucial. Shakespeare’s poetry may be one of the glories of human life, but the archaism and remoteness of his language create enormous difficulties for audiences in the late twentieth century . . . we do not speak the same language of Shakespeare: at best we speak a remote dialect of it. A foreign language,

while missing the full value of the verse, can be said to have an advantage of great significance in the theatre. (p. 140)

Kennedy announces that the authority of the theatre text is subverted by the very act of translation and to translate Shakespeare brings him closer to our contemporary world, pulls the rug out from under the feet of his remote and out-of-reach stature and makes it possible to have access to the supposed power of his plays. What the critic means by “the power of the plays” is a moot point in that it appears to presuppose a certain interpretation and reading of the plays to which we somehow try to have access. Although Kennedy disagrees with the idea of recognizing translation and adaptation as secondary, he still acknowledges the existence of an essence, a glorious and seemingly universal one, which is lost both in translation and in the contemporary theatre productions in English.

On the one hand, Kennedy asserts that a foreign language misses “the full value of the verse” and by this way the act of translation enables one to explore the texts in a freer manner because “unable to place the same emphasis on Shakespeare’s verbal resourcefulness, foreign performances have explored scenographic and physical modes more openly than their Anglophone counterparts” (p. 141). Being unable to grasp the “essence” of the plays in their totality turns into an advantage for the translator as s/he lead us to a Shakespeare production that is less remote and more contemporary. From this perspective, translation poses a challenge to the supposed authority of the original text and its completeness.

On the other hand, Kennedy tends to overgeneralize the idea of foreign Shakespeares and ignore the fact that different societies have experienced different theatre conventions. He presents us only with Euro- and Anglo-centric examples in this context. Throughout the centuries, Shakespeare has entered the non-Anglophone sphere in numerous distinct ways such as through strictly source-oriented

translations, translations of adapted texts, adaptations and rewritings, commentaries, and translation of other languages. The suggestion that “in general, foreign productions of Shakespeare, freed from the burden imposed by centuries of admiring his language, have been more ready to admit that the door to the past is locked” (p. 150) seems to put aside the dynamics of cultural hegemony and postcolonialism that continue to accompany the burden of the English language and culture, and the issues of fidelity and legitimization. Not to mention the fact that colonialism made English a global language, we can deduce that even the language of the critique is sometimes problematic in dissociating itself from these assumptions, and at the same time institutes the dichotomies author/translator, original text/adaptation, body/text, etc.

The style and mannerism seen in *Bahar Noktası* lends itself to categorization as a rewriting or adaptation as process rather than a translation, and Yücel’s intertextuality can be considered a palimpsestic practice that revisits the original text from different angles, such as his preference for translating the title as “the spot of seasoning”. Linda Hutcheon (2005) addresses this issue in her work on adaptation, which foregrounds intertextuality as a theoretical model for adaptation. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon suggests that adaptations somehow declare their status as adaptations because they are always haunted by the adapted texts. For this reason, all adaptations are palimpsestic, and even if they are autonomous works in their own rights, they need to be treated as texts in process in Barthesian terms (pp. 4-5). In contrast to approaching adaptation with a concern for fidelity and adherence to the original, Hutcheon intends to discover and work through a web of relations because the “palimpsestuousness” of adaptation defies the idea of fidelity. Even though “the morally loaded discourse of fidelity is based on the implied assumption that adapters

aim simply to reproduce the adapted text” (p. 7), it is very difficult to define what adaptation is because we use the same word to refer both to the process in Barthesian terms and the product. As Barthes declared the death of the author, stripping him of the self-present authority he claims over the work, he replaces the notion of the work with that of the text as process, which implies that the referential aspect of language gives way to numerous interpretations independent of any authorial intention. For Hutcheon, adaptation may be viewed both as process in this regard and as product.

In addition to this, the critic recognizes the ongoing inclination of defining translation with respect to the idea of fidelity: “in most concepts of translation, the source text is granted an axiomatic primacy and authority, and the rhetoric of comparison has most often been that of faithfulness and equivalence” (p. 16).

Referring to the recent debates on translation, Hutcheon notices that there is a newer sense of translation that is quite similar to adaptation –being involved in “a transaction between texts and between languages” (p. 16). As she presents us with Bassnett’s idea of translation, that is “an act of both inter-cultural and inter-temporal communication,” Hutcheon states that the two notions have come to be interrelated. This interrelatedness, as Hoenselaars also remarks, challenges the centuries-old assumption with regards to fidelity and adherence to the original. On this subject, Barbara Hodgdon (2005) points out the controversy over the issues of legitimacy and fidelity in relation to the so-called categorization of “genuinely Shakespearean” adaptations: “Shakespeare himself might be labelled ‘The Great Adapter’ *and* ‘The Great Appropriator’” (p. 158). According to Hodgdon, adaptation and appropriation revolve around the vocabulary of propriety –to take, to suit, to apply, and in trying to define and study examples of adaptation and appropriation, intertextuality should

also be taken into consideration because such phrasing lends itself to the idea of a textual original.

When addressing the impact of post-structuralism on critical debates on translation and adaptation, we might revisit a major text by Jacques Derrida (1991), “Letter to A Japanese Friend”, where he raises the question of translating different aspects of deconstruction into Japanese. Derrida points out that the problem of translation cannot be rendered as one that occurs between two languages because one should problematize translation within language itself:

To be very schematic I would say that the difficulty of defining and therefore also of translating the word ‘deconstruction’ stems from the fact that all the predicates, all defining concepts, all the lexical significations, and even the syntactic articulations, which seem at one moment to lend themselves to this definition or that translation, are also deconstructed or deconstructible, directly or otherwise, etc. (p. 274).

Here and elsewhere, Derrida argues that we always believe we should be able to designate words as equal to thought. Dissatisfied with the idea that one can find a word structure stable and secure in itself, Derrida calls attention to the referential aspect of language. Through his theory of a play of signifiers, he points out that no element can function as a sign without referring to another both in writing and in speech. In this regard, when the practice of translation assumes that there is something present in itself, a concept, a signified, and it attempts to give it a new name and a new place in another language.

However, Derrida challenges the assumption that each word stands for something which is concrete in itself. The philosopher notes that if we regard language as a tool that clearly transfers our thought to speech and writing, we end up tracing after a definitive meaning, an essence that makes interpretation almost impossible on different levels. This is why translation is one of the issues in which deconstruction is interested. According to Derrida, things mean what they mean by

virtue of their context and we never have the whole context. Even the syntactic articulations, the way words are divided in a linear fashion in a sentence, lend themselves to other referential and definitional articulations, and escape our attempts to grasp a unified meaning. This is why Derrida highlights that deconstruction is just one of many designations that he uses when making a point. Careful not to point at deconstruction as a signified, Derrida writes:

The word “deconstruction,” like other words, acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is too blithely called a “context”. For me, what I have tried and still try to write, the word has interest only within a certain context, where it replaces and lets itself be determined by such words as “écriture,” “trace,” “différance,” “supplement,” “hymen,” “pharmakon,” “marge,” “entame,” “parergon,” etc. (p. 275)

Derrida’s critique challenges the idea that one can translate, that one can transfer and carry something unified and complete to another place or language:

I do not believe that translation is a secondary and derived event in relation to an original language or text. And as “deconstruction” is a word, as I have just said, that is essentially replaceable in a chain of substitution, then that can also be done from one language to another. (p. 275)

When we consider translation from this angle, Derrida does not necessarily mean that translation cannot take place. Instead, translation, like deconstruction, can be thought of as caught up in a chain of signifiers and substitutions which make it impossible to render the position of any text as unified and primary. Derrida’s criticism is of crucial importance here since the idea that language is replaceable implies that “true” and “correct” translation is impossible even in one language. Within the chain of signifiers, meaning is constantly deferred. As meaning in one definitive sense always escapes our reach, it defies the hierarchical logic in binary couplings such as author/translator, body/text, text/performance. In this vein, thinking translation and also adaptation along with deconstruction opens up the opportunity to approach these

practices as processes. This is what Hutcheon aims to theorize: adaptation and now translation as intertextual and palimpsestic practices.

Along with Bassnett and Kidnie, Hutcheon also paves the way for a rethinking of translation, adaptation and rewriting in terms of the poststructuralist approach of text-as-process. Nevertheless, we may suggest that Hutcheon diverges from the two critics. Whereas Bassnett and Kidnie take the performance site as an indispensable constituent of process for the practices of translation, adaptation and rewriting, Hutcheon seems inclined to ignore this aspect, and puts more emphasis on the textual aspect. The “palimpsestousness” of an adaptation sidesteps the performance aspect. Although taking *Bahar Noktası* as a palimpsestic text escapes the authorial intervention and affirms the autonomy of adaptation and translation in their own rights, it is almost impossible to consider Yücel’s work as process when we put aside the constituents involved in the realization of this project. Stepping outside the socio-political circumstances surrounding the work runs the risk of re-establishing a binary logic, which can be avoided by emphasizing the interrelatedness of each component to one another.

*Bahar Noktası* designates a phase in the history of Turkish theatre where the adaptation of Shakespeare’s “original” is realized as an improvisational, collaborative and experimental process under the socio-political circumstances of the time. I have earlier pointed out that the practice of “co-operative translation” in this case moves away from the confines of the binary logic overruling logocentric theatre, and Yücel and the company members approach Shakespeare’s dramatic text as a dynamic work that provides the grounds for revisiting both contemporary and deep-rooted issues related to Turkey’s political and cultural history such as ethnic difference, and the erasure of non-Muslim cultural heritage. In this regard,

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is re-contextualized with a conscious attempt to negotiate the immediate cultural and political concerns of the theatre practitioners with their anxieties over the authority of the playwright's legacy. *Bahar Noktası* demonstrates that the inclination to touch upon issues like political otherness, oppression, and freedom of expression comes along with the representation of ethnic difference and dissent in the Turkish context. Yücel in particular helps us get to the heart of this intertwined matter because the translation process as well as the production of *Bahar Noktası* in 1980 show that factors such as the construction of the theatre site and the ideological goals of a theatre company become significant determinants of evaluating locality in contemporary Shakespeare adaptations in Turkey. *Bahar Noktası*, both as a dramatic text and as performance, reworks the definition and practice of the aforementioned notions by becoming a process in and through which the theatre site evolves into an emancipating space even though it takes place within limits. Likewise, the Shakespeare productions that I analyse in the coming chapters focus on fundamental transformations in Turkey's recent cultural and political arena to unveil ethnic difference and/or political otherness, such as the militarized educational policies of the 1980s and the Gezi Park Protests (2013,) as well as marking the ambivalent place Shakespeare occupies in Turkish theatre history.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCALITY, WESTERNIZATION AND SHAKESPEARE IN TURKISH THEATRE HISTORIOGRAPHY

*Muhsin:* Who is there? (*He notices that there is no one there. He looks at the letter he holds.*) *Hamlet* begins with this line. Why do I always recall *Hamlet* when I write my memoirs? “Who is there?” Who isn’t there? I bring the dead to life. Now they have become all equal, talking to me, the young, the old, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, the rich and the poor. (*He sits by the table and starts writing...*) My father Mr Hüsni was a cashier at the surgical ward. He married two times. I was born from his second wife. My mother Fatma Verdrich was a German. (*He hesitates and starts thinking.*) My mother Mrs Fatma was a German... My mother was a Muslim of German origin... She was a Muslim German... My mother was Muslim... For goodness sake, who cares! Who cares what she was, what she did? I hereby do not write about personal history, but I try to write the history of our theatre . . . Leaving home for the sake of theatre... Vahram Papazyan, the only actor that one cannot meddle with... the contribution of Mardiros Minakyan to our theatre... Kinar Sivaciyani and Ferah Theatre... Acquiring the leading role at Binemeciyani Company... (*Hesitates.*) Yan, yan, yan... Nameeely.

(*Vahram’s ghost enters the stage. Muhsin doesn’t notice...*)

*Muhsin:* No need to mention Binemeciyani Company...

*Vahram:* No need...

*Muhsin:* It was a brief period.

*Vahram:* Quite brief...

...  
*Muhsin:* Besides it would be such a versatile narrative.

*Vahram:* It should be otherwise...

*Muhsin:* Yes... The first *Hamlet* with Vahram.

(*Kim Var Orada?*, 2015, pp. 1-2)

Premiered in 2015 on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Boğaziçi Gösteri Sanatları Topluluğu’s *Kim Var Orada?* [*Who Is There?* by the Boğaziçi University Performance Arts Ensemble] is a historical/biographical play based on the memoirs of Vahram Papazyan (1888-1968) and Muhsin Ertuğrul (1892-1979), the latter commonly referred to as the founder and father of “modern” Turkish theatre.

The play focuses on the transitional period from the end of the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire to the early years of the Turkish Republic, a time when Ertuğrul played a key role in the realization of cultural transformations within the scope of the nation's broader secularist, republican ideals. The ghosts of two theater practitioners, the famous Armenian actor Vahram Papazyan and a fictional Muslim actress, Latife, approach Ertuğrul while he is writing his memoirs. They ask to be remembered, recognized and marked in Ertuğrul's biographical account of theatre history in Turkey. Taken from the opening scene of the play, the above excerpt reveals that Ertuğrul censors his accounts, beginning with his own identity as the son of a German mother, and further excludes Armenian theatre practitioners from his narrative as it ends up being full of non-Muslim names. Alluding to the first line of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, "Who's there?" (2006, 1.1.1), the play addresses the long-ignored issue of what theatre historiography in Republican Turkey has often left behind: the contributions of non-Muslim theatre practitioners. In the cultural scene of the early twentieth century, Muhsin Ertuğrul represents the paradox of having theater practice function as a symbol of the "liberating" environment of secularism and Westernization in Republican Turkey, while nonetheless placing those very practices and practitioners under surveillance. During the early years of the Turkish Republic, realizing the ideal of a secular, "modern" and civilized nation-state often meant practicing authoritarianism in the name of "liberty" and Shakespeare productions were part and parcel of how this process was reflected in the world of the theatre.

In this chapter, I will explore these historiographical dynamics with reference to two competing issues that structure the history of Shakespeare adaptations in Turkey –locality and Westernization. A focus on Shakespeare in Turkish theatre history, I argue, allows us to notice that within the Ottoman Empire, the historical

duality of East vs. West was often reproduced between Muslims and non-Muslims where non-Muslims embodied the West within and Muslim Ottoman citizens were presented as the “real” locals. In this regard, there were two layers of foreignness in relation to what the “local” was, which often emerged as two competing dualities, one exterior and one interior. On the one hand, the projects of modernization from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic emphasized the hierarchical relationship between East and West by approaching Western literary figures as markers of knowledge. On the other hand, this hierarchy of cultural difference was reproduced within Turkish theatre historiography, where the local itself was split between two positions: the dominant/local dichotomy of cultural difference involved the further binary opposition of “local foreigners” (Greeks and Armenians in this case) and “real” locals, Ottoman Muslims. This complexity of locality was intertwined with the ambivalent relationship between the idea of Westernization and the understanding of liberty. In a context where Westernization as liberty revealed itself as authoritarianism in relation to issues like the presence of non-Muslims and women’s rights, Turkish theatre historiography likewise grappled with the issues of modernity, liberty and authoritarianism.

In Turkish theatre history from the late nineteenth century to the present, the aforementioned issues are intertwined with the adaptation of Shakespeare’s work. Shakespeare occupies an ambivalent place in Turkish theatre history, one that cannot be considered independently from concerns about cultural hegemony, the status of non-Muslim communities, and theatre’s role as a political agent in the twin projects of modernism and nation-state building. Throughout this chapter, I will be using the figure of Muhsin Ertuğrul as the embodiment of these dynamics. Ertuğrul witnessed the transition from autocracy to the Second Constitutional Era (1908) and from the

Ottoman Empire to Republican Turkey (1923). I will be focusing on the recent play *Kim Var Orada?* by BGST in which it is precisely the themes of locality and Westernization with regards to Muhsin Ertuğrul's historical character that illustrate questions of otherness and ethnic identity, and the questions of liberty and authoritarianism. Ertuğrul embodies that complexity within his theatrical career. BGST itself is a post-1980 ensemble that is indicative of the turn to identity politics in the Turkish Left. *Kim Var Orada?* is a product of years of collaborative work on the part of the BGST ensemble, whose central mission has been to underline Turkey's Armenian, Greek and Kurdish heritage. In this regard, focusing on Shakespeare reveals all these dynamics, and in return a focus on non-Muslim minorities reveals the socio-political dynamics behind adapting Shakespeare. These connections will ultimately pave the way for understanding the cases of Shakespeare adaptations I analyze in the following chapters.

In this chapter, I also argue that there is an urgent need for a new vocabulary and methodology with which to evaluate the ambivalent place that Shakespeare has occupied within this complex historical panorama. Margaret Litvin's (2011) model of literary appropriation, "the global kaleidoscope," provides a helpful and illustrative approach in the way I conceptualize Shakespeare's entry into the Ottoman world. Considering the recognition and perception of *Hamlet* in the Arab world, Litvin remarks that the playwright entered the Arab scene through a variety of dispersed sources, which makes it impossible to consider a one-to-one relationship between the playwright's "original" texts and their "appropriations". A similar experience took place in the late Ottoman period as Shakespeare entered the Ottoman stage through a scattered medium of different sources such as French adaptations and melodramas, excerpts from productions by English and European theatre troupes,

and local Armenian and Greek productions. For Litvin, “the would-be appropriator typically receives a text through a historically determined kaleidoscope of [such] indirect experiences”, and responds to this global kaleidoscope of diverse sources and precedents through an interaction that is much more complex than “the dichotomy between a colonizer’s “source” culture and the “target” culture of the colonized” (p. 36). Rather, the appropriator is surrounded by a complex web of relations in which historically specific political and cultural dynamics shape the idea of “Shakespeare”. In this regard, Litvin argues, it is vital to recognize the continually changing pattern of the relationship between a Shakespearean “original” and Arab “appropriations”.

In the broader issue of local Shakespeares in Turkey, this approach helps emphasize the fact that for theatre artists, Shakespeare indicates the indeterminate relationship between the “dominant culture” and the “local” one, a relationship that further involves the complexity of the long-ignored cultural heritage of “local foreigners”, the non-Muslim communities. In this regard, looking at the dispersed means of accessing Shakespeare’s work is of crucial importance to interpreting the contemporary resurgence in political Shakespeare adaptations.

## 2.1 The Tanzimat era (1839-1876)

From the nineteenth century onwards, the development of theater practice and criticism in Turkey was closely associated with political and cultural reforms, especially visible at the time through purpose-built theatres modeled on Western examples. As Suraiya Faruqi (2014) notes, “for more or less purpose-built theatres –as opposed to performances in coffeehouses or the open air- arrived as a ‘package deal’ with the military, administrative and cultural remodeling that we call the

Tanzimat” (p. 48). For this reason, the major tendency in Turkish theater historiography has been to evaluate theater practice under three historical periods with regards to the influence of Western Europe on the reforms and reorganizations of areas like the military, science, economy, education, law and technology. These periods are respectively the Tanzimat Era (1839-1876), the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1920) and Republican Turkey (1923- ). Major historical accounts of theater trace this chronology and try to provide the reader with a panorama of the relationship between stage arts and Western examples, the flourishing of theater buildings, acting and staging conventions, translations and adaptations of Western authors, and their influence on contemporary plays and prose.

Turkish theater historiography is largely based upon foreign newspaper columns, articles, official letters and commentaries to display and evaluate the cultural and theatrical dynamics of the time. Although the idea of the “West” is first and foremost associated with “international influence” in Turkish theatre historiography, it is at the same time deeply interwoven with “local diversity” in the sense that Ottoman Armenian and Greek intellectuals were already reflecting on Western dramatic conventions long before Muslim Ottomans dominated the stage. In the opening excerpt from *Kim Var Orada*, for instance, Muhsin Ertuğrul’s attitude toward the Armenian theatrical heritage reveals the common approach in historiography. When listing the names of Ottoman Armenian theatre artists, Ertuğrul refers to the non-Muslim theatrical heritage as a “contribution ... to our theatre”. By making a distinction between non-Muslim dramatic practices and “our theatre”, Ertuğrul approaches Armenians as “local foreigners”, thus ignoring their presence. Disregarding the non-Muslim theatrical heritage in turn overlooks the complexity of local theatrical diversity, and its interaction with Western dramatic

conventions. Muhsin Ertuğrul himself is an example of this in that even though he achieves artistic maturity by collaborating with Armenian theatre practitioners, his career is largely remembered in relation to his passion for European and Western trends in drama and his trips abroad.<sup>15</sup>

Writing about Turkish theatre history, then, effectively requires that one write simultaneously about Turkish theatre historiography. As Nalan Turna (2014) notes, “although there are a few exceptions, most historians of Ottoman theatres still write within the intellectual framework of the Turkish nation-state” (p. 327). The foundation of what we today call “Ottoman theatre” and “Turkish theatre”, both of which reference theater practices in a Western framing, dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, the Era of the Tanzimat (reform and reorganization) of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey, rulers, officials and the majority of the intelligentsia treated theater practitioners as vital contributors in the social and political changes of their time. As the scholar and theatre practitioner Yavuz Pekman (2002) underlines, the art of theater was viewed as an operative agent in the realization of Westernization:

Beginning from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Westernization movement also formed ‘an opinion platform’ in which a variety of viewpoints collided. They were brought up for public discussion through the agency of newspapers, literary works and theatre. Since Ottoman dramatic literature had hardly been crawling at the time ... writers continued their attempts of not only writing plays, but also publishing reviews and

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<sup>15</sup> For more on this, see *Başlangıcından 1983’e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi* (2004) by Metin And and *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın!* (1989) by Muhsin Ertuğrul.

<sup>16</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, the territories of the Ottoman Empire approximately included “the Balkans (with modern-day Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Bulgaria and large parts of Romania), Anatolia (modern-day Turkey) and most of the Arab world (with the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Iraq, Kuwait, parts of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria)” (Zürcher, 2004, p. 9). At the time, the majority of the population, about 85 per cent, lived in rural contexts, and the rest in urban centers. By 1800, the patrimonial ruling system was, in theory, organized around two social distinctions: the ruling elite and the rest of the population (pp. 11-12). The non-Muslim communities in the Islamic Empire, especially notable Christian and Jewish minorities in the Asiatic provinces, were given a so-called ‘protected’ status, which in theory aimed at their integration into society, allowed them a second-class status with no attempts at conversion, and limited autonomy in conducting their own affairs (p. 10).

criticism on the condition of theater practice at the time. The basic discussion on this matter revolved around the issue of either reproducing the traditional material by means of Western theater techniques, or completely abandoning the traditional material to channel into Western theater. (pp. 86-87)

Here, the issue of reproducing or abandoning traditional, local material mainly revolved around the conflict between “international influence” and Ottoman dramatic literature. The tendency in theatre criticism to regard the traditional material as a homogenous entity rendered the theatrical practice of non-Muslim communities under the category of “foreignness”. In this period, non-Muslim Ottoman citizens, especially Armenians, were the first theatre artists to stage European plays in a Western framing and to produce dramatic literature in the vernacular under the influence of canonical Western artists (Enginun, 1979, p. 14). Looking at the artistic contributions of non-Muslim communities in the Tanzimat Era outside the binary logic of West/East and foreigner/local dichotomies, lays bare the fact that Ottoman dramatic literature was already in interaction with European literature.

Known as the era of reorganization, the Tanzimat was a period of military, administrative, fiscal and judicial reforms that took place during the mid-nineteenth century and that were inspired by and modeled on European examples. The interest in the West had already been an agenda in the eighteenth century Ottoman Empire, which had begun to occupy a politically weaker position within international politics by the beginning of the following century. Struggling against growing Western economies, rising nationalisms within its borders, a weakening army and a growing gap between its ruling elite and almost totally illiterate rural population, the Ottoman Empire began to institute reforms to cope with international and domestic troubles (Zürcher, 2004, p. 12). Above all, the need for reforms was related to the condition

of the janissary troops<sup>17</sup>, which were by then “powerful enough to terrorize the government and the population, but weak to defend the empire” (p. 15). The Ottoman Empire was in an economically vulnerable position as well in the face of the emerging industries and population growth in the West.<sup>18</sup> Even as the gap between the ruling elite and the rest of the population was reduced in the nineteenth century (mainly by way of Islamic mystical orders<sup>19</sup>), the ruling elite was still the main center of social and cultural change and Westernization.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the reforms instituted by Sultan Mahmud II to restore his authority in the face of the rising power of the notables in the provinces and the janissary troops in the capital served as a preparation for the Tanzimat reforms (Ahmad, 1993, p. 25). Thus, the Tanzimat reforms were initially related to consolidating the Sultan’s power and aimed to legitimize his authoritarianism. The sultan replaced the janissaries with a new and European-style army and initiated the establishment of a ministerial government and bureaucracy by assigning his supporters to key positions in the areas of the military, administration, education and religion. Over time, institutions similar to a treasury department and a justice ministry developed, and thus a division of labor took place in the Sublime Port (Zürcher, p. 42).

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<sup>17</sup> A powerful salaried infantry, the Janissary troops had been active in politics since the fourteenth century. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, Sultan Murat I had young male Christians from the newly conquered territories brought to the capital to be recruited and trained in the Palace school, and converted to Islam (Ahmad, p. 18-19). Some became soldiers and joined the Janissary troops, an elite infantry.

<sup>18</sup> The Ottoman economy was largely dependent on agricultural production and landownership as its main tax base, and the notables, formed by Ottoman governors, merchants and bankers, landowners and religious dignities, had great regional power as they succeeded in becoming intermediaries between the government and rural populations for tax collection and handling of the troops (Zürcher, p. 16).

<sup>19</sup> They served as a link between the ruling elite and the rest of the population as people from different layers of society could come together and interact when they become a member of a fraternity (Zürcher, p. 27).

The Tanzimat Era witnessed the continuation of these European-style reforms, but “the center of power shifted from the palace to the newly emancipated bureaucrats of the Porte” (p. 58). Gradually, a number of ministries and boards such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were founded on the European examples. Judicial reforms included new secular laws such as the new penal code that instituted equality between Muslims and non-Muslims (p. 61). In the nineteenth century, local Christians, mostly Greeks and Armenians, “were granted the status of subject of a foreign power through the acquisition of a *berat* (decree of appointment) from the Ottoman government... and with the growing strength of the European powers gained an ever-growing advantage over the sultan’s Muslim subjects” (Zürcher, p. 11). This was one reason for non-Muslims’ active presence among the cultural elite at the time.

Secularization was also seen in the areas of the education and military because it became a priority to have professional training colleges for the members of the army and bureaucracy.<sup>20</sup> As part of the reforms, Western involvement and intervention in the areas of politics, economy, military and education had a direct bearing on the social and cultural life of urban centers; this was visible in European style clothing, architecture and literature, especially theater (Ahmad, p. 25).

Before the emergence of an interest in Western performing arts in nineteenth century Ottoman culture, various dramatic forms and entertainment arts were being practiced in the empire. These included “peasant plays, processions, war games, parades, shadow plays (*Karagöz*), puppetry, street performances, mimes, mockery and the Turkish *commedia dell’arte* known as *ortaoyunu*...[and] professional

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<sup>20</sup> Following the advice of the French Ministry of Education, a three-layered system of institutionalization was brought for public education. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman economy was incorporated into the European economy such that European banks were lending loans to the Empire. In 1856, the Ottoman Bank was founded as a British enterprise and it was reconstituted as an Anglo-French firm called Banque Imperial Ottomane in 1863 (Ahmad, p. 25).

storytellers known as *meddahs* [that] found listeners when they extolled the deeds of heroic figures” (Turna, 2014, p. 319). At the same time, there were performances in courtly circles such as individual entertainments that took place for imperial weddings or circumcision ceremonies (p. 320). Traditionally, there was a wide range of performance forms in the Ottoman world, and most of the time these were public enactments (Öztürkmen, 2014, pp. 5-6).

The first traces of Ottoman familiarity with Western theater can be found in sixteenth century *Sefaretnames*, the travel accounts of Ottoman ambassadors narrating the journeys and experiences of officials on duty in a foreign land. The accounts included detailed descriptions of staged plays, café-theaters, operas as well as leisure activities, the architecture of promenades, royal seating arrangements in a court performance and decoration (Süloş, 2014, p. 433). Over time, the ruling elite gained further acquaintance with Western literature through the accounts of civilian officers, ambassadors, traveling circuses and troupes, and the press. “Western” art was acknowledged and translated through scattered intermediaries, encounters and sources, and this familiarity gradually turned into a fascination with Western culture.<sup>21</sup>

The Tanzimat Era was not only an experimental period in which intellectuals had access to the Western canon from different sources, but they had predetermined conceptions of this intellectual domain even before getting acquainted with it. By this time, the palace had become the main site of theatrical activity and interaction, and great publicity was given to Western entertainment and stage arts. The growing interest of the sultans in receiving foreign circus companies, actors, jesters and illusionists, theater and opera troupes in the palace and its whereabouts paved the

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed consideration of this issue, see Melis Süloş’s “Performance as Politics of Westernization in the Late Ottoman World” in *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World* (2014:433).

way for the foundation of theater buildings toward the end of the nineteenth century. As there had been no institutionalized theater buildings or stages at the time, performers of entertainment and stage arts had been hosted in the palace, the mansions of the members of the ruling elite and temporary stages and tents.<sup>22</sup> During Sultan Mahmud II's reign, it had become widespread to have temporary theater stages or buildings on the palace grounds or main towns, and foreign troupes sought the sultan's permission to build a stage and perform (And, 1972, pp. 22-23). By the 1850s, it was quite common to have temporary stages, and thus İstanbul and major Western towns gradually became centers of theatrical activity. These channels of encounter with the West took place within a limited circle because the temporary stages were built to entertain the ruling elite. As Nalan Turna notes, "Following the imperial example, highly placed public officials and notables welcomed such activities into their households. This is how the elite set itself apart from the commoners" (2014, p. 321). Consuming theater as status, the Ottoman ruling elite and intelligentsia promoted Western theater as a superior and sophisticated art form.

## 2.2 International influence and locality

An overview of the history of Turkish theatre shows that the interest in translating, adapting and staging Shakespeare took place as part of broader movements of modernization and Westernization in both the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey. Even though the work of William Shakespeare entered the Turkish scene for the first time during the second half of the nineteenth century, non-Muslim communities and European residents in the empire had already been interested in Western theater and staging plays in their native languages during the early

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<sup>22</sup> For more on this subject, see Metin And's (1972) *Tanzimat ve İstibdat Döneminde Türk Tiyatrosu*.

nineteenth century. By the eighteenth century, for instance, visiting troupes from Europe were staging plays in their native language for their respective embassies or consulates in İstanbul (Turna, p. 320). Thus, the European influence was already present before the Tanzimat Era and the newly Westernized bureaucrats could enjoy it as they increased in number. The Ottoman attempts to put Western theater into practice were first of all carried out by non-Muslims, notably Armenians. As Hasmik Khalapyan (2014) notes, being the founders of “the modern-style Ottoman theatre”, Armenians approached theater both as a marker of national pride “in being the ‘importers’ of European-style performances into the empire” and “an effective way of raising funds for the poor and for educational institutions” (p. 380). By staging plays Armenians could not only promote Armenian in the vernacular, but finance community schools as well. For this reason, Shakespeare productions initially circled around Armenian players and writers, alongside the productions by Italian, French and English traveling troupes.

Indeed, the close connection between Shakespeare’s entry into Ottoman theatre and the Armenian presence in this domain is undeniable. İnci Enginun (1979) directs our attention to the fact that in the 1840s, the playwrights Siraboyun Hekimyan, Petros Minasyan and Tomas Terziyan revealed the influence of Shakespeare on their plays (p. 14). According to the theater researchers S. N. Bilga, Aşot Madat and Arslan Kaynaradağ, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* were staged in Armenian in 1842, and between the years 1850-62, Atamyan and Fasulyeciyani, who were well-known Armenian actors of the time, appeared in Shakespeare plays -the former as Othello and King Lear, and the latter as Othello (p. 16). What is more, Armenian women played male roles in this period, and one of the most notably recorded cases was that of the famous actress Siranuş (1857-1932),

who became the first Armenian woman to play the role of Hamlet in 1901 (And, 1972, p. 148).

Women had a second-class social status in the Ottoman world, and non-Muslim women seemed to enjoy the privilege of acting compared to Muslim women, who, let alone being able to act, were usually segregated as audience members in to reserved areas of theatre auditoriums (Dinçer, 2014, p. 396). This privilege of acting did not translate itself to an empowering, liberating experience, however, since non-Muslim women had been subjected by not only the ethnicity politics in the Ottoman world, but also by the gender politics in the Christian community itself<sup>23</sup>. Their identity was not construed as Armenian, or women; they were Armenian women. Khalapyan (2014) points out that by the twentieth century,

Until 1914, the jobs open to Ottoman-Armenian women were limited to teaching, domestic service, nursing and needlework . . . acting was an option which, in spite of the social opprobrium involved, a few young women took up as an exceptional and unique career opportunity. (p. 379)

In *Kim Var Orada?*, BGST touches upon this issue by presenting the audience with a fictional Muslim actress, Latife, who disguises her identity and pretends to be an Armenian actress so as to gain the opportunity to perform. Once the Ottoman officers learn about this, Latife has to go into hiding, being unable to perform anymore. Even though BGST does not focus on the difficulty of being a female performer in the Armenian community, it highlights the danger of arrest Armenians faced at the time of the Genocide, along with the oppression Muslim women experienced within the Ottoman patriarchy.

Late nineteenth century theatrical activity was marked by the Armenian actor and director Güllü Agop (1840-1898), who was given a royal prerogative in 1870 to

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the gender politics in theatre in late Ottoman Era and within the Armenian society, see Dinçer, Fahriye. "Questioning Female Identity in Theatre: Late Ottoman and Early Republican Modernization Processes". *Celebration, Entertainment and Theatre in the Ottoman World*. Seagull Books: London, 2014. 393-406.

stage Turkish plays for 10 years. This act of securing the staging of Turkish plays provided Güllü Agop with the opportunity to stage Armenian, Turkish and European plays at the same time. Güllü Agop is the most referenced Armenian theatre practitioner in Turkish theatre historiography, and this case signals the two-tiered issue of “foreignness”. On the one hand, acknowledging the presence and contributions of Güllü Agop is particularly related to his interest in staging Turkish plays, which makes it possible for him to be recognized as a “local”. In his book *Başlangıcından 1983’e Türk Tiyatro Tarihi* [*Turkish Theatre History: from its Foundation to 1983*], the historiographer and scholar Metin And (1992) remarks that “Güllü Agop’s Ottoman Theatre, which is considered as our first national theatre, attached particular importance to including Turkish players and playwrights” (p. 74). On the other hand, this case also signals the gradual erasure of Agop’s other non-Muslim contemporaries, many of whom carried out their theatrical practice in both Turkish and Armenian. The fact that Shakespeare plays in Armenian and Greek languages and plays by non-Muslim playwrights are much less recognized and studied in detail reveals that non-Muslim communities were regarded as “local foreigners” and only tangentially related to discussions on Ottoman dramatic literature.<sup>24</sup>

Pekman (2002) notes that the foundation of “modern” theater in the Tanzimat Era presupposed that there had been no theatrical heritage to build on, and thus theater was practiced with reference to Western forms, terminologies, concepts and elements (p. 161). Today many theater scholars, practitioners and critics agree that traditional dramatic forms were ignored in establishing and developing a purposeful

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<sup>24</sup> Metin And directs our attention to the importance G. Agop gave to correct pronunciation of Turkish by the Armenians, who were already performing plays in Turkish before the establishment of “Ottoman Theatre”. And notes that at the time there was rising criticism against considering Turkish performances by Armenians under the roof of Ottoman theatre, while at the same time the incorrect use of the language by Turkish artists was also criticized (1992, p. 75).

theater practice in a Western framework. According to Pekman, following the phases of Westernization in the Ottoman Empire, the disregard of the traditional forms of drama resulted in leaving behind a vital part of the empire's cultural and theatrical heritage, in that the often-ignored shadow plays and *ortaoyunu* were grounded in the local culture of the time, revolving around the social relations and dynamics in society and neighboring communities (p. 69). On the subject of the relationship between Western theater and local tradition, Metin And (1972) points out that during the Tanzimat Era, there was an awareness of the major difference between the traditional theater practices of Ottoman culture and Western theater: traditional theater consisted of shadow play, *ortaoyunu* and *meddah*, lacked written materials and texts, and had no established theater discipline or building, but was rather based on oral tradition (pp. 18-19). The newly introduced Western theater, however, was a text-oriented practice that took place on a stage following certain acting and staging conventions. Despite the fact that there was also an increasing interest in the shadow play, *ortaoyunu* and *meddah* beginning with the eighteenth century, these traditional forms of folk drama could not be transformed into written genres (Pekman, 2002, p. 11). Class distinction was a determinant factor in this because the documentation of folk forms was inadequate and scattered compared to performances in courtly circles (Öztürkmen, 2014, p. 7).

There were complex hierarchies in the Ottoman performative traditions. Even though the palace had hosted traditional Ottoman festivals and "local" performances, this was again centered upon the ruling upper class. This privileged stratum, the sociologist and political scientist Şerif Mardin (1991) indicates, constituted one major part of the social structure in İstanbul, one which the scholar juxtaposes with the rest of the society. City life gathered around two major forms of socialization:

One was the world of the sultan and the important people surrounding him, and the other was the world of the rest of the society. Here, ‘the rest’ denotes the remaining phratries, villagers and those who belong to the lower stratum in İstanbul. An economic division marked this binary system: the former consisted of tax collectors and the latter was made up of taxpayers. As a result of this economic difference, these two groups were crystallized into distinct cultures. On the one hand, there was the culture of the ruling elite, and on the other hand there was that of the rest –the culture of the masses. The culture of the palace was limited to a circle of military, bureaucratic officials, and also religious functionaries. (pp. 57-58)

The distinction of high and low cultures in this case corresponded to different kinds of theater attendance, one that could be roughly categorized as “Western” and traditional forms of drama. Whereas Western art forms were limited within the circles of the ruling elite, the rest of the society would have been more readily exposed to traditional forms such as the shadow play. The elitism here juxtaposed the two kinds of theatrical activity and placed Western drama in a hierarchically higher position. Traditional forms of drama such as the shadow play, *ortaoyunu* and *meddah* gradually fell from popular esteem, and this served as a major obstacle for the integration of or collaboration between the two.

In this framework, approaching this issue on the basis of a duality between Western and traditional dramatic forms is problematic, since it presupposes that both “Western” and “Ottoman” drama are rigid, homogeneous domains. Additionally, it reproduces a related binary in which non-Muslim Ottoman theatre practitioners emerge as the “Western” foreigners placed in opposition to the abiding “localness” of Muslim Ottoman traditions. Even as the place of non-Muslim theater practitioners and playwrights is highlighted, discussed and criticized in major theater historiographies, what needs to be considered as well is the relationship between the Western-style theatrical conventions of the non-Muslim communities and traditional Ottoman theater conventions.

These interrogations are of crucial importance in studying the history of theater in the Ottoman and Republican Eras, especially bearing in mind the fact that non-Muslims are hardly mentioned in accounts on the Republican Era. Criticism against projects of Westernization, Pekman notes, proposed returning to the traditional forms of drama which in most cases ended up applying Western staging frameworks to the traditional material. He points out that most playwrights neglected a critical comparison of the two in the face of changing social circumstances, and rather attempted to rely on a tradition that had been left aside by history. Even today, contemporizing the traditional material in theater generally references situating up-to-date jokes into old models and staging plays with a limited knowledge of their original contexts (2002, pp. 163-64). However, what has been understood as “tradition” oftentimes excludes non-Muslim theatrical heritage or evaluates it by pursuing identity politics through a secular-nationalist vein.

This tendency was already visible in the nineteenth century, when theater criticism was a developing discipline that mainly consisted of essays and commentaries introducing the subject matters of the plays being staged, and the acting and staging techniques that were practiced. Along with these, discussing the pros and cons of adapting Western plays was and has always been on the forefront (Sevinçli, 1994, xxiii-xxiv). The incipient theater criticism and commentaries of the nineteenth century often raised the issue of whether a synthesis between Western and local theater traditions was possible. The prominent Ottoman Turkish playwright, reformer, journalist and writer Namık Kemal, for example, was a fervent opponent of retaining elements of traditional folk drama in developing Western practices of theater:

Theater is not *Ortaoyunu* because *Ortaoyunu* is mere entertainment. Theater, however, at times makes you laugh and at times cry, and it even entertains without laughter, but tears. *Ortaoyunu* displays the most foolish situations, the most immoral utterance and the most complicated, vulgar wordings. (as cited in And, 1972, p. 270)

Kemal took Western theatre practices as a point of departure to define what could be properly called theater from an Orientalist standpoint. Whereas Western theater practices were serious, decent and sophisticated in Kemal's understanding, traditional forms of Ottoman drama were frivolous, indecent and ludicrous. Such a differentiation reveals an aesthetic concern that approaches literature as a refined taste in pursuit of intellectualism and relies upon a juxtaposition of the Orient and the Occident. Kemal also approaches the matter on the basis of a class distinction due to the fact that Western-style theatre was mostly performed within the circles of the ruling elite whereas elite audiences as well as the vast majority of the public enjoyed *ortaoyunu*.

It is also problematic to regard shadow play, *ortaoyunu* and *meddah* as the only traditional forms, firmly defined as Ottoman folk drama, since the local diversity of the time displayed a hybridity of genres. The Greek journalist and writer Theodor Kasap reflects an opposing view to Namık Kemal in his discussion of Western influence and tradition, which exemplifies non-Muslim Ottoman intellectuals' concern for preserving the Ottoman dramatic heritage. Kasap was among the intellectuals who were critical of the interest in melodrama and vaudevilles, and he tried to draw attention to the neglect of traditional Ottoman dramatic plays and practices of *meddah*, shadow play, marionette and *ortaoyunu*:

There is no need for us to drive from and apply theater from Greece, Rome, France or even England. We have an understanding of theater –a theater that we call *zuhuri*- that came into existence either by means of application and imitation, or that has already been there. If this theater remained underdeveloped and insufficient in comparison with the developments of the time, we should bring it up to a level that fulfills our demands. In other

words, we should take *zuhuri* outside the yards and stables where it was staged, and carry it to an enormous site like Gedikpaşa. (as cited in And, 1972, p. 177)

Kasap's criticism reflects an awareness of the neglect of traditional forms of Ottoman drama in imitating the West. The leading stages of the era like Gedikpaşa had Western-oriented repertoires which included translations and adaptations instead of *ortaoyunu* or *meddah*. Rather than approaching the issue from a dichotomy between the West and the East, Kasap acknowledged that the point was not whether *zuhuri*, the tradition of *ortaoyunu*, was based on imitation or on former practices. The development of *ortaoyunu* dates back to the late eighteenth century as it developed during Mahmud II's reign as "a mixture of both traditional and modern theatres" (Turna, 2014, p. 321). For Kasap, who preferred a synthesis between Western and local forms of drama, what was at stake here was the survival of this tradition that remained outside the popular performance sites of the time.

Kasap's understanding of synthesis involved wrestling with a hybridity of genres since he points out that Ottoman dramatic forms were heterogeneous, and thus involved imitation. As opposed to Kemal, Kasap's approach implies a rethinking of imitation in the sense that the critic evaluates local theatre outside the East/West dichotomy by considering it as a hybrid genre. When we take into consideration the complex hierarchies within the local itself, especially the one between "local foreigners" and "real locals", side by side with the issue of synthesizing local theatre with Western examples, theatre practice in the late Ottoman Era emerges as a complex hybridity of genres. This complex hybridity found almost no expression in Turkish historiography, and in the following excerpt from *Kim Var Orada?* the erasure of this multifaceted theatricality is addressed when Muhsin Ertuğrul denies the diverse theatrical heritage present in the late Ottoman Era.

*Muhsin:*

When I attempted to perform, there was no proper theatre practice, and also no playwright. Neither a decorator, nor a dresser! No audience!

You are well aware of this: We used to rehearse a play endlessly, and good riddance if you can perform a play two times! A third time would be... a miracle! As you showed up on stage in Soviet Russia, Europe, Armenia, I was struggling to establish theatre! Even from scratch! From scratch!  
(*Vahram makes a gesture of being betrayed from behind...*)

*Vahram:*

From scratch?.. Right, it was less than nothing... Nothing...

Then they shouldn't have reduced it to zero...

(*A long silence. Muhsin becomes wordless. He offers liqueur.*)

...

*Muhsin:*

Certainly, it wasn't zero...

Who can deny the contribution of Güllü Agop, and Master Minakyan to our modern theatre?

*Vahram:*

*Shadow play... Orta oyunu...*

These were powerful genres at the time as well. (BGST, 2015, p. 4)

In the dialogue above, Ertuğrul's judgment of early Republican theatre as unfavorable, insufficient and underdeveloped exemplifies Namık Kemal's Orientalist and elitist viewpoint. Whereas Ertuğrul embraces European theatre as sophisticated and exemplary, and favors it over Ottoman theatre, Vahram's response illustrates Kasap's emphasis on the local and its multifaceted complexity. And the fact that BGST chooses to weave these discussions around the central motif of *Hamlet* demonstrates just how key the Shakespearean canon has been to the development of these debates in Turkish theatre history.

### 2.3 "Kaleidoscope of indirect experiences"

The Tanzimat Era witnessed an outburst of written literature and theatrical activity, and experimentation with the Western genres and literary movements of the time.

Shakespearean drama was central to this development, yet the playwright's influence on Ottoman writers was often indirect and limited to thematic borrowing (And, 1972,

p. 292). As Metin And (1999) points out, the rising interest in Shakespeare in the second half of nineteenth century had to do with the close attention devoted to the English playwright by French romantics and melodrama writers (p. 175), as the popular productions of the day mainly consisted of melodrama and vaudevilles. Ottoman texts recycled these conventions: And takes Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan's play *Finten* as an example and underlines the scene in which a contemplative young girl holds her own head between her hands in a thoughtful manner, reminding the audience of Hamlet's soliloquys through the bodily movement of the young girl.

The perception of Shakespeare in the late Ottoman Era was thus being formed through Litvin's "kaleidoscope of indirect experiences," a continually changing and scattered pattern of stage productions, translations, adaptations, excerpts and summaries that made a one-to-one relationship with the playwright irrelevant. This was true for a range of Western authors; Ottoman intellectuals and artists would read works by authors and playwrights such as Victor Hugo, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (known by his stage name Molière), Eugene Scribe and William Shakespeare in French (Enginun, 1979, pp. 2-3). For instance, Namık Kemal was among the intellectuals of the time who learned about Shakespeare through French romanticism, especially by means of Victor Hugo's work. Enginun notes that Kemal displays his preference for romanticism over classicism, and in his introduction to his work *Celal* (1881) includes a section informing the reader about Shakespeare's life, works and success as a great playwright (1979, p. 124). For him, Shakespeare should be commemorated side by side with Walter Scott, Friedrich Schiller, George Gordon Byron, Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset as superior literary figures that emphasize the representation of human nature in dramatic literature and the novel (p. 128).

The primary agency of French language and culture in learning about Western literature was in part associated with the reforms related to Ottoman education and the empire's central bureaucracy. By the 1860s, France had such an influence on the reforms that a regulation advised by the French Ministry of Education was issued for Public Education in 1869. Following the European pattern, former scribes became bureaucrats for whom knowledge of European languages and presence in social circles with foreign officials and intellectuals were important determinants of their newly adapted administrative positions (Zürcher, 2004, p. 66). A more significant reason for French domination of the access to Western theater was that French embassies had staged French and Italian operas and plays such as Molière's *Cocu Imaginaire* and Corneille's *Cid* as early as the seventeenth century, and had a theater building constructed within the grounds of their embassy in İstanbul (And, 1972, p. 38). This reinforces the fact that Western theater had already been practiced in the Ottoman Empire within the social and political circles of foreigners and non-Muslims.

Access to Shakespearean drama was equally mediated by the fact that the circulation of textual material was quite dispersed. The documents to which playwrights and theatre artists could have access ranged from commentaries, letters, diary entries, book introductions, and newspaper articles not only in Ottoman Turkish, but also in Greek, Armenian and foreign languages, mainly French. The Tanzimat Era witnessed the spread of the Ottoman press, the first glimpses of which can be found during Sultan Mahmud II's reign, when *Takvim-i Vekai*, the first bulletin-like newspaper, was published in 1840 (Zürcher, p. 67). By the 1880s, around ten periodicals were being published a year in İstanbul, but even as newspapers, periodicals and literature publications were becoming more

professional, numerous publications lacked proper issuing dates. Besides, this was a time when the Islamic calendar was being used, and thus one may find discrepancies between the first publication dates and later editions of a work. In their pioneering works on the Tanzimat Era, the historiographers and scholars İnci Enginun and Metin And both underline the difficulty of determining the exact dates of some sources. On the practice of translation, for instance, Enginun remarks that it was a disorderly practice at the time as the translations were published in newspapers and periodicals, adding that it is still possible to encounter new Shakespeare translations (1979, p. 3).

Following the 1860s, the number of Shakespeare productions, adaptations and translations increased in number, and oftentimes *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice* were being staged. The first known Turkish production of Shakespeare is that of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1871 and 1874, but the dramatic text has not survived. Unfortunately, this is the case for most of the Western productions of the time. Included in the same repertoire with *Leyla ile Mecnun*, *Tahir ile Zühre* and *Arzu ile Kamber*, *Romeo and Juliet* was the most influential Shakespeare play during the Tanzimat Era. The balcony scene became the most frequently mentioned part in the drama and prose of the time (Enginun, pp. 227-28). The writers of the time experimented with the play's subject matter, and adapted the issues of thwarted romance and the lovers' suicide more than any other motif or theme from Shakespeare (p. 252). İbrahim Şinasi, Namık Kemal and Abdülhak Hamit Tarhan were among the prominent literary figures of the Tanzimat upon whose work *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* had great impact<sup>25</sup>. Enginun interprets the tendency to be influenced by tragedies,

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<sup>25</sup> See İnci Enginun for more information on the influence of Shakespeare on Tanzimat writers: *Tanzimat Devrinde Shakespeare*, II. Bölüm: Tesirler, pp. 115-238.

especially *Macbeth*, as an outcome of the reaction against autocracy at the time (p. 253).

The dynamics that constituted the understanding of Shakespeare were quite changeable as well and thus the “originality” or “coherence” of a unitary author figure was often not at stake. The second production of Shakespeare known to be staged in Turkish was *Othello*, and this production allows us to ask what constituted the understanding of Shakespeare and his work at the time, since it was translated from a French adaptation of the original play. The co-translators Hasan Bedreddin and Mehmet Rıfat translated *Othello* in 1876 from Jean-François Ducis’ French adaptation, and included no mention of Shakespeare’s name in the publication, supposing that the story had first been represented in Italy as an opera and then translated into French by Ducis (Enginun, p. 22). It was staged at the famous Gedikpaşa Theater sometime between the years 1876-77, and it is the only Turkish-language Shakespeare production of the time whose dramatic text has survived (p. 19). Considering the fact that Ducis did not know English, used the 1745 La Place translation of *Othello* for his adaptation and earned a reputation for altering Shakespeare’s play greatly, the Turkish audience in fact became acquainted with a rewriting of *Othello*. Ducis’ version, which dominated the French stage in the second half of the eighteenth century, has a different story line, altered character names and scenes. For instance, Loredance (Cassio) was Othello’s rival and tried to convince Hedelmone (Desdemona) to leave Othello and marry him instead. The evil doings of Pezzare (Iago) were only revealed in the last act, and Hedelmone kept secrets from Othello, who had reason enough to doubt her infidelity.

For an attuned audience who had seen or known about Shakespeare’s *Othello* in advance, and had access to it through other languages, Ducis’ *Othello* may have

been experienced as an adaptation of Shakespeare. On the other hand, for those who saw *Othello* on stage for the first time or learned about the play through the Ducis adaptation, the name Shakespeare might have sounded irrelevant to *Othello*. By this time, theaters had begun to reach wider audiences due to increases in the number of theater companies and stages, and the widespread usage of the press. The Ducis case indicates that within the larger framework of the heterogeneous “Ottoman theatre”, Shakespeare -as a playwright, as a marker of knowledge and intellect, as a great romanticist or as Ducis- entered the cultural domain through different mediums and languages. This indicates the paradox of defining translation and adaptation as secondary practices because the issue of adherence to the original itself became invalid in this context where Shakespeare functioned as an umbrella term gathering together a variety of practices.

Towards the end of the Tanzimat Era, there were almost 100 translations from European works and 8 were from English Literature. Among these, 7 were from Shakespeare and this reveals that the playwright was almost the only figure acknowledged from English Literature (Enginun, pp. 19-20). A couple of years after the Ducis translation, Hasan Sırrı translated *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Comedy of Errors* into Turkish in 1884 and 1887, respectively. Though we do not have information on which editions Sırrı used, these were the first complete translations of the Shakespeare plays from English, with hardly any alteration and reduction. In his introduction to *The Merchant of Venice*, Sırrı points out that he also referred to a French translation of the play when he had difficulty with the complicated language of the text. The translator also included notes on ancient Greek and historical references in the play as he sought to clarify them for the reader (p. 33). What made Sırrı’s version remarkable was that it represented a shift from a

performance-oriented practice of translation and adaptation to a text-oriented one, reflected in an increasing interest in providing the reader with background information on the playwrights, the context of the plays and the translator's commentaries.

In the 1880s, there were other important examples of Shakespeare translations from English, and this preoccupation was limited to the accessibility of the published English translations of the time. Working on *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb, Mihran Boyaciyan translated *Romeo and Juliet*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Othello* in 1884, and had them published only in 1912 when she could at last have official permission to do so (Enginun, p. 57). Until this time, there had been no published translations of *Hamlet* in Turkish, although Mehmet Nadir had translated several excerpts from the play in 1881. Nadir provides commentaries and information about the play along with the excerpts he translated. His other translations of and on Shakespeare include Robert Greene's *Pandosto* in 1882, various excerpts from the plays *Troilus and Cressida*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, more than 40 sonnets, and excerpts from the narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* in the late 1880s. Nadir's translation of Robert Greene resembles the case of Ducis in the sense that he adapted *The Winter's Tale* into a Turkish novel, but this was actually the translation of *Pandosto*, the source text provided by Robert Greene. This was how Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* was introduced to the reader for the first time, which again shows that the Ottoman intelligentsia's recognition of and engagement with the playwright occurred through diverse and dispersed means of translation and adaptation.

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, there was a lull in theater practice because of the bans and censorship practiced under the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909).<sup>26</sup> The playwrights of the Second Constitutional Era thus built their artistic creations on the works of Tanzimat theater practitioners and playwrights but by this time, theater productions and works of drama were influenced by not only Western examples, but Turkish works written during the era as well. İnci Enginun remarks that the plays *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Othello* were censored in the 1880s under the reign of Abdulhamid II. At the time, the Italian actor and playwright Ernesto Rossi was invited to the palace to perform in the presence of Abdülhamid II, but due to censorship he could only stage *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* under the title “Shylock” (1979, p. 17). This is related to the sultan’s disposition to ban plays that revolved around or alluded to “disloyalty to the regime, spreading a negative image of the Ottomans or troubling political relations both on the local and the international levels” (Turna, p. 331). For instance, the Committee of Union and Progress, which was a secret organization established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his supporters in 1908 for the realization of the Republican regime, organized an entertainment in 1909 and invited both men and women to attend. However, women could not attend the show as a group of fanatics surround the theater carrying knives (Nutku, 1969, p. 15). The constitution was restored in 1908, and with the beginning of the Second Constitutional Era, censorship was removed and political exiles began to return to the empire. As the

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<sup>26</sup> Under Sultan Abdulhamid II’s reign, there was significant economic decline and the emergence of strong political opposition by the Young Turks, who were a group of Muslim bureaucrats and officials that criticized the regime, especially the strict autocratic rule of the sultan. They managed to force the sultan to adopt a constitution in 1876 that aimed at relieving the repercussions of free trade on depressed classes (Ahmad, p. 28). Yet, the sultan shelved the constitutional regime in 1878 and froze developments in the areas of economy and ownership for thirty years (p. 29).

period of autocracy inhibited the development of theater for a time, there was still a need for gathering the theatrical practice and education around an institution.

#### 2.4 The Second constitutional era (1908-1920)

As I have underlined before, Shakespeare's works were part and parcel of theatre's role as a political agent in the twin projects of modernism and nation-state building. During the Second Constitutional Era, theatrical activity was especially concerned with attempts to revive theater as a disciplined practice and institution, and this era witnessed institutionalization from outside. For the foundation of a drama and music conservatory, Ottoman officials and intellectuals again turned their gaze to Western experts who were officially employed and funded. The Second Constitutional Era reflects the paradox of "foreign" institutionalization, which added another dimension to the aforementioned criticism brought against the negligence of the Ottoman theatrical tradition. In this regard, Muhsin Ertuğrul's theatrical career epitomizes the forced Western institutionalization of theatre, the increasing disengagement with the Ottoman theatrical heritage and the erasure of Armenians from theatre historiography.<sup>27</sup> Ertuğrul made great effort to publicize contemporary Western and European theater conventions, especially Shakespeare's work. In return, Shakespeare gradually gained a preserved, authorial status in modern Turkish theatre, and issues of legitimacy, fidelity, and self-authorization, which became vital concerns for theatre artists, once again relied on the hierarchy of cultural difference between East/West with hardly any consideration of the multifaceted aspect of this duality until the late twentieth century.

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<sup>27</sup> The constitutional revision in the Second Constitutional Era affected theatrical practice in no time as numerous amateur companies and troupes were formed after 1908. Among the newly-formed companies, the Burhanettin Company was the longest-lasting one, and it was where Muhsin Ertuğrul, today recognized as the founder of modern Turkish theatre, appeared on stage for the first time in 1909.

In the wake of this transitional period, Muhsin Ertuğrul's tight engagement in European dramatic traditions and Shakespeare in particular incongruously led him assume the role of the "Western expert" he is so eager to learn from. The fact that today Ertuğrul is acknowledged as representative of his generation for introducing contemporary Western and European theater conventions is especially observed in his trips abroad and theatre career under Darülbedayi-i Osmani, the first Ottoman theater and drama school established in 1914.<sup>28</sup> Darülbedayi-i Osmani was founded under the supervision of the French director André Antoine, who had established the first independent theater in Paris. Antoine, as the "Westerner" who was commissioned to initiate this institutionalization, dealt with a series of different negotiations, as he was requested to establish a conservatory and a national theatre based on the conventions of the Comédie Française.

Oddly enough, Antoine was the founder of the Paris-based Théâtre Libre, one of the earliest independent theatre institutions. That a theater-maker who challenged the centralized theatrical institutions of his time and favored less popular and more improvisational productions was commissioned to establish a theater resembling the Comédie Française was one of the many ambivalences that marked this period in Turkish theatre history. The admiration of Ottoman intellectuals and officials for the West, and French culture and literature in particular, left theater in an indecisive situation according to the playwright and scholar Haldun Taner. In criticizing the

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<sup>28</sup> In 1914, the İstanbul Town Council allocated funding from its budget for the establishment of a Music and Drama Conservatory. When it was opened in 1914, Darülbedayi-i Osmani offered courses on pronunciation, prosody, history and literature, verse, drama, swordplay, tragedy and comedy, and dance. Whereas the music conservatory was divided into a Western Music Department and a Turkish Music Department, the drama conservatory was rather Western in its organization. 197 students applied to the institution and there were only 8 women among the applicants, all of whom were non-Muslims. 63 candidates could pass the first elimination, and most of these applicants were theatre practitioners who were already performing and working in various companies at the time (Nutku, 1969, pp. 16-32).

first repertoire of the Darülbedayi-i Osmani, Haldun Taner (1966) notes the ambivalent state of non-Muslims as “local foreigners”.<sup>29</sup>

You will come across many western wannabe practices. The audience and future playwrights were to be trained this way. It would be hardly possible, or impossible as it is a frequent case now, to pull the generations through the influence of such a subconscious imprint that associates theater with a world in which people belong neither to us, a Turkish surrounding, nor to them, a European one, but one that has situations and behaviors resembling Levantine families. (p. 31)

Taner characterizes the dilemma of belonging neither to Western nor to Ottoman traditions as an ambivalent experience in referring to the idea of being a European under Ottoman rule. Drawing on the status of the Christians living in the empire, he builds a parallelism between being a non-Muslim under Islamic rule and practicing theater under Western conventions. This parallelism hints at the multilayered hierarchies I have highlighted surrounding the issues of cultural hegemony and identity politics witnessed in the previous eras. The interior layer of foreignness associated to the non-Muslim citizens as “local foreigners” is likened to the ambivalent state of institutionalizing theatre under Western expertise. This ideal of institutionalization from outside firmly relies on a rigid distinction between “an elite Western/European culture” and a “local” Ottoman, identifying the former with the source of modernity, high culture and intellect, and the latter with the secondary position of the uncultivated recipient. However, just as the ambivalent state of the new generation of theatre people who are about to receive Western expertise to establish and work towards a national theatre, the immediate Ottoman theatrical conventions they have engaged in mark the hybrid and heterogeneous nature of

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<sup>29</sup> Darülbedayi began its first season on January 20, 1916 with the production of *Çürük Temel*, an adaptation of *La Maison d'Argile* by the French playwright Emile Fabre who was the general administrator of the Comédie Française at the time. The play was performed many times; the matinee productions were for women and the soirees were for men. In its first years, Darülbedayi was an unstable establishment, and the Music Conservatory was closed in 1916 due to the fact that the annual funding given by the municipality did not cover the costs for both departments (Nutku, p. 37).

theatre practice that have embodied performance traditions of non-Muslims as well as Muslim Ottoman citizens.

As highlighted in *Kim Var Orada?*, during the transitional period from the Second Constitutional Era to Republican Turkey, Armenian theater practitioners like Vahram Papazyan were hardly recognized and given credit for their theatrical activities. In the following excerpt from the play, Vahram Papazyan's inability to remain in İstanbul during the pogroms that characterized the Armenian Genocide (1915) are glossed as a European research trip:

*Muhsin:*

“This artisan came back to İstanbul after a research expedition of five years. He started acting his repertoire in Armenian.”

*Vahram:*

Research expedition... (*A fit of laughter.*) Sure, sure. Back then we Armenians developed a passion for research. We spread throughout the world for research. Besides, am I a researcher? I am an actor. I perform. To make matters worse, he said five years! Five Years! One would ask what I have contributed to literature! (*He suddenly stops laughing. Serious.*) Is this the way you write the history of theatre?

*Muhsin:*

So what? Would I state that he barely made it from the genocide? That our movie set was attacked by bigots, and that Vahram had a narrow escape. Would I write all this and end up being forced to flee like you? What would it change? Would stating all this have prevented all of you from going away? (BGST, 2015, p. 19)

Here, there is an inability to recognize what is actually taking place, the Armenian Genocide, which is paralleled in the erasure of the non-Muslim theatrical heritage in Turkish theatre historiography. The above excerpt bares witness to the fact that the gradual erasure of Armenian theatre artists from the official accounts served the ideal of nation-state building. These parallel forms of censorship aimed at effacing the existence of a community, which was a vital part of the history of theatre for more than a century. Ertuğrul himself was greatly influenced by Armenian theatre practitioners as a young actor and he calls Vahram Papazyan “my first mentor” in

*Kim Var Orada?*, which alludes to the brief section Ertuğrul talks about Papazyan in his famous memoir *Benden Sonra Tufan Olmasın!* (1989) [*After Me, Shall No Deluge Be!*] (pp. 136-137). In 1911, he went to Paris to study the theatrical conventions upon Papazyan's advice, and there he watched Mounet-Sully's performance of Hamlet at the Comédie Française. When Ertuğrul came back in 1912, he staged *Hamlet* and performed the young prince for the first time.<sup>30</sup> Commenting on his first Hamlet role, Ertuğrul refers to his interest in Shakespeare's work as an "infatuation", a life-long passion he feels to the bone.

I played Hamlet for the first time in 1912, exactly fifty years ago! Hamlet is such an infatuation. As this love for Shakespeare that spread over me at such a young age got rooted over years, I endeavored to acknowledge his other works one by one. (as cited in Nutku, 1969, p. 10)

Ertuğrul's retrospective account here reflects the issue of self-recognition through the authorial position he occupies as an expert of Shakespearean drama, which is also revelatory of the erasures and the binaries of Turkish theatre historiography.

Although Ertuğrul directed and performed Hamlet for the first time in 1912 when he was only twenty years old, this instance was not the first time he took part in a *Hamlet* production. In 1911, shortly before his visit to Paris, Ertuğrul collaborated with Vahram Papazyan to stage *Hamlet* in İstanbul, which was a bilingual production as Papazyan performed Hamlet in Armenian and Ertuğrul performed Laertes in Turkish (Ergün, 2020, p. 19).<sup>31</sup> This case effectively exemplifies the paradox of "foreign" institutionalization through Shakespeare adaptation, as Ertuğrul not only disregarded the theatrical conventions of the "local foreigners", the non-Muslims, but

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<sup>30</sup> This production used Abdullah Cevdet's translation of *Hamlet*, which is the first known published version of the play in Turkish. After the success of this production, Ertuğrul went to Paris again for a couple of months in 1913 and attended the Lugué-Poe Theatre that was under the provision of André Antoine at the time (Ertuğrul, 1989, p. 157).

<sup>31</sup> For an analysis of the re-enactment of the historical account *Kim Var Orada?* engages in, see İlker Ergün's MA thesis entitled "Who's There? Staging the Silenced Past in Contemporary Theatre in Turkey", Sabancı University 2020.

he spent a life-time staging, directing and performing in Shakespeare's works through the influence and knowledge he gained through European examples. Ertuğrul's nationalist and elitist approach to the modernization of theatre not only ignored the non-Muslim and Ottoman heritage, but replicated, in a renewed fashion, earlier generations' dispersed means of accessing Shakespeare.

In 1914, Ertuğrul received acceptance from Darülbedayi-i Osmani, passing the preliminary examination with a performance he prepared from *Hamlet* (Nutku, 1969, p. 24). He thus followed in the footsteps of Antoine and led the theatrical activities and training in the drama conservatory, seeking to establish a disciplined theater for the public.<sup>32</sup> Rather than recognizing Antoine's aforementioned background in establishing independent theatre institutions in France, Ertuğrul preferred to occupy a leading role in the establishment of a centralized "national" theatre on the basis of Western dramatic conventions. In this context, Ertuğrul's passion for becoming competent in Shakespearean drama disclosed itself in his professional field trips, which he wrote about extensively in his memoir. Influenced by pioneering figures like Jean Mounet-Sully, Max Reinhardt and Konstantin Sergeievich Stanislavsky, Ertuğrul spent years studying the conventions, productions and theatrical activity of the period to come back and apply what he had learned as an administrator, director and a lead actor in Darülbedayi-i Osmani.

Recalling the time he watched *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1925, Ertuğrul remarks his deep admiration for the production by comparing it to earlier stage adaptations of *Hamlet* that he considers as praiseworthy:

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<sup>32</sup> In the wake of the First World War, Antoine had to leave İstanbul in August 1914 without completing his schedule and plans, and thus he was not present when Darülbedayi-i Osmani was opened in November 1914.

The embedded traces of Shakespeare plays I saw in central and remote cities of Europe rose up from the depths of my memory when I watched *Hamlet* in Moscow. In my mind, the things I previously observed and considered about *Hamlet* became layered and I sensed that my skull almost cracked as it broadened. From Comédie Française's traditional and majestic *Hamlet* to performances at small, shabby sites, I reviewed all the productions of the play I had seen and admired so far. Starting with Mounet-Sully, I recalled the final images of great figures like Sarah Bernhardt, Suzanne Deprés, Edouard de Max, Alexander Moissi, Raoul Aslan, Oscar Marek, all of whom were the pride and joys of their societies ... Eventually I also pieced together everything I could observe and remember in relation to this tragedy [of *Hamlet*] ... the way it was envisioned by world-renowned directors like Max Reinhardt from Germany, Gordon Craig from England and Lugné-Poe from France. The sum of all these stood aghast the *Hamlet* production at the Moscow Art Theatre (1989, p. 381).

Ertuğrul's narration of the time he was overwhelmed by the success of the Moscow Art Theatre offers a condensed panorama of the leading European theatre artists that he set as exemplary figures of authority in his field, in this case Shakespearean drama. On this subject, however, Ertuğrul does not provide the reader with a detailed assessment of the theatrical conventions and distinct dramaturgical choices that he claims have shaped his comprehensive understanding of staging *Hamlet*. The list of the pioneering figures are mentioned almost like side notes at this point in his memoir even though they constituted an extensive part of his theatrical negotiations, being major markers of expertise and intellect he drew upon.

In his account, Ertuğrul romanticizes the enriching experience of studying numerous stage performances of *Hamlet* on site, and in this way he simultaneously concretizes his own position as an authority in stage arts and Shakespeare in Turkish theatre, which plays a crucial role in shaping "the anxiety of influence" over Shakespeare that still haunts theatre artists today. Ertuğrul successively foregrounds the European role models as points of reference that served to cultivate and anchor his reputation in Turkey. His own bewildered state of mind in the face of all of the *Hamlet* productions he tries to grasp in their totality also discloses "the anxiety of

influence” he experiences over Western literary figures as markers of knowledge. Ironically, Ertuğrul’s engagement with Shakespeare’s work presupposes a unilateral encounter with the playwright as he juxtaposes distinct dramatic conventions from the “West” as his layers of access to Shakespearean drama and disregards the complex set of hierarchies that flourish from within the heterogeneous theatrical dynamics of the previous era. It is evident in the above excerpt that Ertuğrul’s narrative of his theatrical apprenticeship with Shakespeare turns a blind eye to the contribution of non-Muslims citizens to the practice of theatre in the late Ottoman Era, especially the Armenians in this case. Whereas Ertuğrul’s initial familiarization with Shakespeare occurs via the agency of Vahram Papazyan, he provides hardly any space on the theatrical achievements of the Armenian actor in his memoirs and disregards the bilingual *Hamlet* production, which is a defining moment in Ertuğrul’s life as the first time he performs in Shakespeare’s famous tragedy.

During the Second Constitutional Era, Ertuğrul’s theatrical career effectively reveals that the means of access to and engagement with Shakespeare’s work continues to take place through a “kaleidoscope of indirect experiences”, making it impossible to have a direct, unilateral relationship with the playwright. This time, however, the heterogeneous and hybrid nature of dealing with Shakespeare’s work in the earlier generation leaves its place to a complex identification of theatre practice with Western dramaturgical and theatrical conventions.

## 2.5 The Republican era (1923-)<sup>33</sup>

Muhsin Ertuğrul's theatrical choices in the Darülbedayi-i Osmani, which transformed into the İstanbul City Theater in 1931, exhibit the first traces of the common understanding of Shakespeare in twentieth century Turkish theatre. As the new regime paid great attention to the development of theater within its scope of secularism, Kemalist ideology and Republicanism, Shakespeare became associated with this new ideal of nation-state building. While the bilingual *Hamlet* by Papazyan and the young Ertuğrul was quickly forgotten, by 1966, Shakespeare had become the most staged playwright of the İstanbul City Theater under Ertuğrul's administration (Nutku, p. 10). At this point, Ertuğrul's career had become synonymous with his continual trips to Europe, and his desire to build a national, public theatre in Turkey often meant staging plays from canonical European figures in line with Western theatrical conventions. In time, Shakespeare was not only viewed as the greatly influential canonical figure, marker of modernism and elite culture, and the authorial brand name in proving mastery in stage arts, but his name and legacy was embraced with nationalistic pride.

Twentieth century Turkish theatre historiography oftentimes critiques the Tanzimat Era Westernization through a particular nationalist gaze, one that effaces the Armenian Genocide, excludes most of the non-Muslim intellectual heritage and confirms the new secular-nationalist standards of behavior assigned for women in society. In the early years of the Republican Era, one witnessed the endeavors to establish a national theater for the public interest from a new perspective. Metin And

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<sup>33</sup>The Young Turks played a revolutionary role in the establishment of the constitution in 1908, which was a precursor to the abolishment of the Sultanate and the establishment of the republic. It served a vital role in the decline of the Ottoman Empire by gradually setting the stage for republican reforms. Following the War of Independence (1918-22), the Young Turks re-established the rule they had initiated as the Committee of Union and Progress between 1913-18. During the post-war period of 1922-1926, "the structure of the state was changed and the one-party state established once again" with the establishment of the Republic (Zürcher, 2004, p. 4).

(1973) describes the goal as founding a relatively controlled and beneficial public theater that elevated the standard of culture, and that was intended for the benefit of the public (p. 7). As the Republican Era witnessed the transition from absolute monarchy to the establishment of a republic, theatre was an important contributor to the cultural revolution that accompanied Westernization. The dominant republican ideology of the time required a sense of Westernization that was quite distinct from that of the Ottoman Era because turning the gaze to the West did not only mean the appropriation of Western culture or sociopolitical modernization, but an absolute state of rupture from the Ottoman past (Zürcher, 2004, pp. 191-93). Pekman designates one of the most crucial features of the Republican cultural agenda as fighting against and generating a way out of the dualism between traditional and Western values that Ottoman Westernization reforms were entangled with, and he notes that this new program aimed at an infrastructural and superstructural integrative change.<sup>34</sup> Its main objectives for cultural change were to reach the level of “modern civilizations”, to abolish almost all of the established values of the old regime and to maintain a new order that had independence as its main principle (2002, p. 188). Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself was present at the major theater sites to watch, criticize, comment on and correct the content and staging of many plays during the first years of the Republic (And, 1983, pp. 6-11), and censorship was directed towards any material that showed relevance to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>35</sup> As the

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<sup>34</sup> Even though the transition to a republican state did not happen over night, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic, and all of the prominent figures who played a role in establishing a new regime actualized the renovation and reorganization of society with such decisiveness that the result was a total discontinuity with Ottoman Westernization practices (Pekman, 2002, p. 193).

<sup>35</sup> Besides his close involvement with theatre in the figure of an official dramaturge, Atatürk also ordered several plays that revolved around his accomplishments and the values of the republican regime. Before they were staged, he edited the dramatic texts and discussed the plot with the players. Such investment in and inspection of the theatre on behalf of the republican regime inevitably resulted in censorship with regards to the Ottoman past. For instance, many plays by Namık Kemal were either banned or censored on account of bearing the traces of the former regime. His famous play entitled

officials predominantly approached theater as a didactic phenomenon that served to perpetuate Kemalist ideology and republican reforms, it gave way to theatrical shifts that were at once liberating and constraining, progressive and conservative.

Especially visible through his endeavors and works in the Republican Era, Ertuğrul came to be known as the sole expert of Western-style training, directing and acting. When he was the director of Darülbedayi, the plays by Western canonical figures such as Shakespeare, Pirandello, Schiller, Ibsen and Strindberg were always on the forefront, although plays by Turkish playwrights were staged as well. In an article Ertuğrul wrote in 1925, he advocated his insistence on staging Western drama against the criticism brought on by his choice of repertoires:

My opponents believe that one cannot gain anything by presenting the public with masterpieces such as Ibsen and Strindberg who could not be understood in many European capitals yet. At this point, to see that the great artist Meyerhold and the Russian government, for whom improving the public is the sole aim, walk in the same path once more confirms the fact that my approach is not wrong. (as cited in Gürün, p. 120)

One of Ertuğrul's main goals was to become more disciplined and professional such that the new regulations he set up for Darülbedayi included imposing fines for those who were absent at rehearsals and productions with no valid excuse (Nuktu, 1969, p. 65). In 1927, he went on a field trip to Russia, where he observed and learned about the theatre of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold. In the next season the most striking success of the establishment was Ertuğrul's production of *Hamlet*, in which Ertuğrul also performed Hamlet. Following this period, it became a tradition to open each season of the İstanbul City Theatre with a new Shakespeare production (Halman, p. 18), which also turned into a strict shaping of the repertoires to include plays by Shakespeare as a rule. Among the countless Shakespeare plays he staged and

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*Vatan Yahut Silistre* could only be staged on the condition that the statements "Long live the Sultan!" and "Long live the Ottomans" were removed from the dramatic text (And, 1973, p. 11).

performed, Ertuğrul is first and foremost associated with *Hamlet*, having worked on more than a dozen productions and numerous different translations of the play.

In this regard, Muhsin Ertuğrul's theatrical choices were rather marked by the nation-state building ideal of the newly established Republic, and the growing authoritarianism that came along with it. BGST touches upon this oppressive environment in *Kim Var Orada?* in the scene where Ertuğrul is approached by two secret agents who offer him the opportunity to modernize and institutionalize Turkish theatre on the condition that he does not collaborate with Armenians. In response to Ertuğrul's emphasis on providing room for "local" playwrights in addition to Western figures like Ibsen, Shaw and Maeterlinck, one of the anonymous officials alters Ertuğrul's choice of the word "local" with a corrective attitude: "Let's work together with national playwrights" (BGST, 2015, p. 30). The official further warns Ertuğrul against collaborating with Armenians, fickle traitors to the nation (p. 31), if he agrees to pioneer the new theatre in the Republic and become a leading figure in the secularist social and cultural transformations.

This scene demonstrates that the multifaceted and hybrid nature of "locality" that I elaborated upon in the previous sections is now replaced by an authoritarian focus on national identity, placing theatre practice under surveillance while having theater function as a symbol of the "liberating" environment of secularism and Westernization in Republican Turkey. In this context, Ertuğrul, who spent a lifetime staging Shakespeare's work, embodies the dualities of East/West and dictatorship/liberty displaced by the republican ideology in setting and practicing its reforms. As İlker Ergün notes, Ertuğrul "claimed that he staged *Hamlet* in the line of secularist and Kemalist dramaturgies and links [sic] Shakespeare to universalist humanism, as a milestone which will introduce the deepest parts of the human soul to

the Turkish audience” (2020, p. 48). This new ideal of Westernization was experienced as an imitation that disregarded Ottoman cultural and traditional heritage, and it rather strictly relied on the notion of national identity in establishing Turkish theatre.<sup>36</sup>

That “Muhsin Ertuğrul” has become the authoritative reference point for thinking about “Shakespeare in Turkey” is also due to his dominating, one-man attitude in taking vital steps and decisions on the institutionalization of theatre from outside. In evaluating the contribution of Ertuğrul to Turkish theater, Metin And emphasizes the director’s singular stature, even as he underlines his enthusiasm for cultivating new theatre artists. On twentieth century Turkish theater, And (1973) states that we come across Ertuğrul’s name in every innovation or alteration:

According to some, the presence of theater in the Republican Era was solely an outcome of Ertuğrul’s single-handed endeavors... Ertuğrul’s greatest fallacy was that he wanted to be the mastermind on theater, and supposed that only he knew the matter in the right way since he had a low opinion of what others thought. In fact, as a director and performer he was eclectic and a collector. He constantly emulated Western theater, and wanted to adapt Western innovations to Turkish theater almost immediately... He managed to have publicity in the press, aroused the interest of the public opinion, but always preferred to remain ‘the one-man’. (p. 12)

And’s criticism here is directed to the way Ertuğrul approached the modernization of theater throughout his career. For him, Western drama was on a pedestal, and applying the latest theatrical conventions from the West could elevate the aesthetic taste and level of education of the public. No matter how much attention Ertuğrul paid to Turkish playwrights when he was a director in numerous different institutions

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<sup>36</sup> On this subject, Nutku (1969) notes that the Westernization movement, which dates back to the Tanzimat Era of the Ottoman Empire, imitated and emulated the Western canon at face value. Once it turned out to be a unilateral cultural exchange, it moved away from national identity and culture, and failed to become a synthesis between “self” and “other” (pp. 3-4). Here, Nutku refers to the traditional theatre practices of shadow play, *meddah* and *ortaoyunu* on which various intellectuals of the Tanzimat wrote criticism, emphasizing the way that they are neglected in attempts at Westernization. Nutku’s criticism was to the point to a certain extent, in that Westernization was experienced as an imitation that disregarded Ottoman cultural and traditional heritage, but also his firm reliance on the notion of national identity presupposes a homogeneous Ottoman tradition and thus he turns blind to the simultaneous erasure of the non-Muslim heritage

and companies, Western playwrights such as Shakespeare, Ibsen, Pirandello or Strindberg were always in a hierarchically higher position for him.

From this perspective, as Ertuğrul's elitist "infatuation" with Shakespeare in the realization of cultural transformations permeated through the nation's broader secularist, republican ideals, it found expression in the still-valid national pride reflected onto the playwright. A striking example of this discourse is seen in the way the scholar, writer and diplomat Talat Sait Halman (1931-2014) celebrates Shakespeare's 450<sup>th</sup> birthday and praises the playwright's place in Turkish culture and theatre in "Shakespearean Art in the Turkish Heart: The Bard in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic" (2014):

We Turks adore Shakespeare. We have translated him over and over again since the second half of the 19th century. By January 2003, the complete tragedies, comedies, histories, and sonnets had been translated into Turkish – some of the major plays nine, ten, eleven times. No mean achievement. Not all languages are that fortunate. So, Shakespeare is not a passing fad in Turkish life – not a fashion, but a Turkish passion and compassion. (p. 11)

Halman's rhapsodic expression around the practice of translating Shakespeare's work into Turkish echoes the way Ertuğrul characterizes his passion for Shakespeare –an "infatuation". Through the glorification of the name Shakespeare, we see here the discourse around Shakespeare's authority and the accompanying issue of self-authorization. In Halman's words, Shakespeare is not any playwright that occupies a fleeting place in the cultural practices of modern Turkey, but a "Turkish" passion, symbolized by the artistic and cultural achievement of having translated the totality of his works into the vernacular. The national pride here is further connected to the aforementioned republican ideals of nation-state building, as Halman includes a poem in his rhapsodic account of Shakespearean art in Turkish culture:

"Shakespeare, like Atatürk, condemned those who make spears:/ They both sang loving praises of those who break spears./ Our nation is Atatürk's but also

Shakespeare's" (2014, p. 16). Here, Halman approaches both figures as mythical embodiments of the secular, liberating ideals of the republic and underlines Shakespeare's "local" reputation as a symbol of Western-influenced Turkish modernity and an authorial figure praised with national pride in Republican Turkey.

## 2.6 "Do not forget us!"

The diverse means of access to and treatment of Shakespeare's work in the Tanzimat Era complicates the issue of grappling with Shakespeare's authority, which comes to the surface as an inextricable concern in each of the case studies I evaluate in my dissertation. The changing pattern of dramatic texts and performances in various languages were the determinants of Shakespeare's incipient legacy in the late Ottoman period, and thus the dynamics that shaped the understanding of Shakespeare were variable and oblique, making it impossible to bestow "Shakespeare" with a legitimating authority and to impose a foundational essence to the adaptations of his work. Shakespeare's name oscillated between distinct dispositions: a canonical playwright that influenced Armenian dramatic literature, a marker of knowledge and intellect, an influential dramatist whose works were translated, paraphrased, adapted, and even Ducis himself.

In the twentieth century, we see that Shakespeare gradually gained a preserved, authorial status in modern Turkish theatre, and his name gathered concerns over legitimacy, fidelity, self-authorization, but was also adopted and glorified with national pride. Against the "national fascination" with Shakespeare, BGST's *Kim Var Orada?* deglorifies both the figure of Ertuğrul as the "father" of "Turkish" theatre and the "local" legacy of Shakespeare as a symbol of Western-influenced Turkish modernity and an authorial figure praised with national pride in

Republican Turkey. BGST'S *Kim Var Orada?* captures a striking moment towards the end of the production as Vahram reminds Latife that it is about time he performs the one remaining role that he has not played in *Hamlet*: the Ghost. With this, the ghosts of Vahram and Latife turn to Muhsin Ertuğrul and call out in Armenian and Turkish respectively: "Do not forget us!" (BGST, 2015, p. 33). In the meantime, Ertuğrul fails to recognize their appeal since he is busy thinking aloud, planning the next *Hamlet* he will direct—a grand production at the amphitheatre of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Rumelihisarı fortress in İstanbul. As the ghosts of Vahram and Latife fade out, Ertuğrul continues pouring out his mind breathlessly:

Hamlet will encounter his father's ghost at the outer walls of the castle. There is this crane system I saw in Germany; we will import that to Turkey. The Ghost will circle around in the sky with this system. Everyone will be astounded. We will build a parallelism between Hamlet and the Turkish intellectual. The curtain will open with the phrase "There is something rotten in this country." There is something rotten in this country! ... We will be accompanied by the most favourite theatre artists from Turkey. (2015, p. 33).

The above excerpt from the closing scene as well as the overlooked state of Vahram and Latife pinpoint the twin hegemonies of both Muhsin Ertuğrul and Shakespeare in Turkish theatre history. Ertuğrul's firm reliance on and fascination with Western drama is caricaturized in this scene; his dramaturgical choices remain at face value and his interest in "locality" finds expression in the exclusion of ethnic diversity. That he envisions a direct parallelism between the figure of Hamlet and the image of the "Turkish intellectual" alludes to his act of self-authorization as the first and foremost acknowledged expert of Shakespearean drama in Turkey. Yet, with the politically loaded witticism of "Do not forget us!", phrased both in Armenian and Turkish, the ghosts of Vahram and Latife remind the audiences of the long-ignored cultural heritage of non-Muslim communities and further overturn the authorial position Ertuğrul has occupied in the broader cultural and historical landscape of

Turkish theatre. In this framework, BGST's *Kim Var Orada?* nails down the issue that negotiating Shakespeare's preserved, authorial status in contemporary theatre in Turkey necessarily involves the questions of difference and identity that have marked modern Turkish history because the issues of cultural hegemony, ethnic difference, political otherness and "locality" echo in and through Shakespeare's politically loaded legacy.

## CHAPTER 3

### AMBIVALENT CLAIMS: *HAMLET*, MOTION AND AUTHORITY

#### IN MODA SAHNESİ

As one walks along Bahariye Street in Kadıköy on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, a narrow slope on the left leads to Moda Sahnesi, a theatre company established in 2013. Almost invisible to the eye, Moda Sahnesi is situated at the grade across a wall repeatedly painted by the municipality to cover the slogans of protest written on it, slogans such as “Resist”. During a personal interview on June 12, 2015 with director Kemal Aydoğan and actor Onur Ünsal, sitting in front of this recurrently polished wall, voices of demonstration rose up in the air. A group of protestors were passing by the neighborhood, echoing slogans of freedom and equality in the background. Such a scene has become quite common in daily life especially after the Gezi Park Protests of 2013, when a peaceful sit-in at the park turned into a countrywide protest after the police forced groups of environmentalist out. Whereas districts like Bahariye and Moda were middle class neighbourhoods rarely associated with police invasion, the disproportionate use of force by the police was now visible in every corner during and after Gezi.

Within the cultural milieu of Turkish theatre in the twenty-first century, the production of *Hamlet* by Moda Sahnesi in 2013 demands a closer inspection since the company relates their performance to the strong sense of solidarity expressed throughout the Gezi Park protests, which profoundly impacted the preparation of the play as well. Like Can Yücel and his colleagues, Moda Sahnesi company members immediately reflected upon the political turmoil and cultural transformations at the time, modernized Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* through the local and turned to commonly

disregarded performance dynamics by practicing adaptation as a collaborative process. Collectivity, the act of claiming public space, and shattering literary and ideological narratives of authority and power are encapsulated in the company's outlook on treating *Hamlet*. This is particularly evident in the repetitive use of a slogan jotted down throughout the rehearsal notes provided by the company on their website: *Hamlet Örgütlenmektir*. The phrase translates as “Hamlet is to stand together” or “Hamlet is to be (politically) organized”. It is an appropriation of a famous slogan used by the demonstrators during the Gezi Park Protests: *Aşk Örgütlenmektir* (“Love is to stand together” or “Love is to be organized and stand out”). Quoted from the poem “Violet Rascal” by the Turkish poet Ece Ayhan (2008), *Aşk Örgütlenmektir* (p. 59) was initially used by LGBTQ+ supporters and became an enactment of solidarity during the Gezi Park protests. It was written down on walls, banners, flyers and bags, not only visible in public space and social media, but voiced by the masses at the time. In this context, the phrase embodied the ideal of collectivity and organization around a common cause, associated with solidarity regardless of one's gender, race, ethnicity, religion, language or political beliefs.

Even though the semantic resonance of *örgütlenmek* has long been associated with a Leftist legacy in Turkish history, and further identified with the Kurdish political movement, it gained the all-embracing breath of dissent during the Gezi Park Protests. The fact that the expression *örgütlenmek*, which bears the imprint of the Turkish leftist tradition, has spread out to encompass such a large field shows that it has become a binding signifier that implies the co-existence of difference, as Zeynep Gambetti (2014) suggests, in the carnivalesque atmosphere of the Gezi Park:

Most of the activities taking place in the park were characterized by an ecological and anti-capitalist sensitivity, the will to combat the exclusion of the Other through ethnic, religious, gendered and sexual binaries, and the desire to experiment with direct participatory democracy... Artistic and

intellectual activities such as concerts and open lectures were offered by anyone interested and without expecting anything in return. Countless tangible services by countless volunteers - such as helping out at the infirmary, feeding stray animals, forming an organic vegetable patch, painting signs and posters, setting up acoustics and lighting systems or making and distributing tea to the nearby tents - were all executed without any institutional supervising, rules, administrators or leaders. (p. 93)

While this carnivalesque atmosphere suggested by Gambetti envisions the co-existence of conflicting stances brought together by the idea of *örgütlenmek*, the question remains as to whether Gezi should be regarded as the microcosm of an egalitarian society, where the demands and rights of long silenced and ignored communities such as the LGBTQ+, Armenians and Kurds are conceived and accepted. Consider, for instance, the grey Styrofoam gravestones displayed at Gezi Park in the early days of the occupation by the Armenian youth organization Nor Zartonk, which demanded that protestors question official historical narratives of citizenship in Turkey.<sup>37</sup> Although this performance rendered the histories of violence and dispossession experienced by non-Muslim communities in Turkey visible, long-surviving antagonisms were not thoroughly resolved during and after Gezi. Even as such forms of solidarity on display opened up an environment of desired plurality, Öykü Potuoğlu-Cook (2015) contends that, these solidarities suspended social difference and former enmities only temporarily (p. 107).<sup>38</sup>

By re-contextualizing the politically imbued slogan *Aşk Örgütlenmektir* as *Hamlet Örgütlenmektir*, Moda Sahnesi was not simply making a direct claim of resistance. That they chose to put this slogan on the forefront displays the extent to which Moda Sahnesi's principles as an independent theatre company and their

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<sup>37</sup> Gezi Park itself became a public space in the first half of the twentieth century, being founded on the ruins of the Armenian Surp Agop Cemetery as it was expropriated by the state (Potuoğlu-Cook, p. 97).

<sup>38</sup> Potuoğlu-Cook (2015) further notes that it is important to look at how old and new hierarchies are conceived during Gezi to avoid the overstatement of resistance (p. 97). For more on this, see Bozcali, F. and Yoltar, C., "A look at Gezi Park from Turkey's Kurdistan," *Cultural Anthropology Online*, no. 31 (October 2013) and von Bieberstein, A. and Tataryan, N., "The What of Occupation: 'You Took Our Cemetery, You Won't Have Our Park!'," *Cultural Anthropology Online*, no. 31 (October 2013).

approach to a canonical text were informed by a broader, collective stance against state oppression. On the one hand, their performance space outside the stage was shaped by dynamics of collaboration and co-operative translation, and filtered through with discussions on political, theatrical and textual authority. The company's experience of collaboration involved manual work during the construction of the theatre venue, their concurrent efforts at translation and rehearsal, the production of online rehearsal notes, critical discussions of Western theatre and their local context, and joining the city protests. Moda Sahnesi's foundational principles also reveal an aspiration to engage with the non-Muslim intellectual heritage and history of the neighbourhood that surrounds their theatre site. These off-stage activities were integral parts of the process through which the company defined itself in relation to Gezi, as well as in relation to their critical perception of the legitimizing authority of Western scholarship on Shakespeare.

On the other hand, the actual stage performance of *Hamlet*, much like the fragility of the temporary forms of solidarity described above, became a confined space in which theatrical and textual authority were often re-established, even as the company experimented with bodily expressions of locality. Moda Sahnesi situates *Hamlet* around the idea of defying political as well as literary power by conceiving Hamlet as a dissenting character who resists the propagated "truths" of a power center based on the exclusion and silencing of dissent. The company similarly claims to contest the "anxiety of influence" over Shakespeare's legacy. As a result, Hamlet appears as a character of frenzied motion, rather than a more traditionally conceived figure of "excessive meditation" whose contemplation and inaction mark his catastrophic delay. Even though the collaborative effort of the company avoided a potential gap between the dramatic text and its performance as far as translation and

preparation went, the production became an act of self-authorization since the idea of a “recourse to Shakespeare” nonetheless predominated the totality of the production. A closer look reveals, however, that these politically sensitive choices nonetheless betray an ambivalent attitude towards Shakespeare scholarship and the authority of Shakespeare by continuing to rely on Western frames of criticism.

Moda Sahnesi adopts the discourse of solidarity surrounding Gezi Park Protests, but hierarchies remain in terms of their negotiation of Shakespeare’s legacy. The production’s local contextualization occurs at the level of the body and of language, which at times creates a tension between language and the body and eventually offers a surface-level locality. In this chapter, I further argue that Moda Sahnesi’s engagement with the political turmoil in Turkey and “Shakespeare” as a brand name occurs especially through adapting locality to the actor’s body -their movements, intonations, and costumes- to critique ideological and literary narratives of authority. In Moda Sahnesi’s *Hamlet*, the company prefers to use a slightly contextualized translation, which is a modernized, prose version of *Hamlet* that preserved the dramatic context, Shakespearean treatment of language and figures of speech, and pays particular attention to the language of translation to match the physical and vocal signifiers of locality with the language of the text. Ultimately, the company’s decision to foreground a politically loaded slogan resulted in mere allusions to Turkish politics and patriarchy, achieved through bodily language, intonation, costumes and several verbal references.

In what follows, I will begin by looking at the context of the Gezi Park Protests, particularly the politics of space, authority and bodily performance, and link them to the dynamics of Moda Sahnesi as an independent company, and the manner in which they filtered Shakespeare through the local political agenda of this time.

During the demonstrations, Moda Sahnesi was under construction as a group of theatre practitioners decided to bring a long-forgotten cultural centre back to life, while at the same time establishing an independent theatre space. In this regard, I will formulate the dynamics of collaboration experienced by the company members. By looking at the representation of Hamlet as a character of frenzied motion, I will also analyse how the company elevates the discourse of the acting body over the conventional meditative figure of Hamlet. As the company focuses on the body as a site of locality, their dynamics of adapting Shakespeare differ from the rest of the cases in my dissertation. I will thus focus on the bodily expression of locality as well as a textual analysis of Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet*. I will then explicate the company's integration of Turkish politics to the dramatic text, which aims to offer a shared space for dissent. In this regard, I will also explore the relation between locality and the translation of the dramatic text, and engage with relevant scholarship on Shakespeare and adaptation. Inasmuch as Moda Sahnesi comes up with an innovative strategy of adapting the local through the body and its capacity for motion, the realization of their project comes up against the limits of what they imagine as collectivity and solidarity in *Hamlet*.

### 3.1 Politics of space and authority: Gezi and Moda Sahnesi

During the time of the Gezi Park Protests, which were initially about claiming a public space, Moda Sahnesi was being reconstructed and transformed as a group of theatre practitioners decided to bring a long-forgotten cultural center back to life, while at the same time establishing an independent theatre space. In fact, the politics of space and authority underline and unite the dynamics of Moda Sahnesi, Shakespeare adaptation and the Gezi protests, creating a rich background for the

staging of *Hamlet*. The Gezi Park Protests was a massive anti-government movement that started in Istanbul as the immediate goal of the protests was to prevent Gezi Park from being demolished to build a replica of Topçu Kışlası, a nineteenth century Ottoman artillery barracks, to be used as a shopping mall and hotel complex.<sup>39</sup> Gezi Park is situated in Taksim, in the heart of Istanbul. As a popular touristic destination, Taksim is at the heart of civic life; it plays a key role in the history of the Republic, embodying an ideal of urban secularism modelled on European capitals. At the same time, it represents conflicting histories on the verge of oblivion. Gezi Park became a public space in the early twentieth century, when the Turkish state expropriated the ruins of the Armenian Surp Agop Cemetery and a monument dedicated to the victims of the Armenian genocide. Decades later, on May 28, 2013, a group of environmentalists gathered at Gezi Park to prevent bulldozers from cutting down trees. The excessive violence used by the riot police against the peaceful encampment at the park caused immediate outrage and reaction by the public. The spontaneous form of civil disobedience and resistance that characterized the Gezi Park Protests brought together people from diverse segments of society, and many formerly adversarial groups cohabited the park: left-wing parties, unions and platforms, ultra-Republican parties, feminists, environmentalists, football fan clubs, the LGBTT block and organizations affiliated with the pro-Kurdish BDP, as well as ordinary visitors of the park and generally apolitical youngsters (Gambetti, 2014, p. 91). For more than three months the whole country was in a state of unceasing

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<sup>39</sup> Throughout the century, the area witnessed numerous demonstrations and has been a politically and historically vital space. Attempts to appropriate it as a symbol of state politics and ideology have caused processes of urban commercialization in the form of hotel constructions and architectural renovations. For more on this issue, see Ayfer Bartu Candan and Cenk Özbay, eds., *Yeni İstanbul Çalışmaları: Sınırlar, Mücadeleler, Açılımlar* (Istanbul: Metis, 2014) and Çağlar Keyder, *Istanbul: Between the Local and the Global*, (USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

occupations, demonstrations, civil resistance and disobedience in the face of state violence.

Moda Sahnesi's rehearsal notes for *Hamlet* instantly reveal the desire to counter the intensity of this state violence, both physically and verbally. The slogan *Hamlet Örgütlenmektir* was inserted into the rehearsal accounts on a daily basis, disclosing the immediacy of the need for solidarity, and declaring this solidarity to be interwoven with the practice of theatre. Such urgency was accompanied by – or was rather the direct cause for – the widespread usage of social media, which was at the backbone of the resistance in standing against and documenting violence and polarization, calling out for help, and organizing the mobilization.<sup>40</sup> The then Prime Minister, now president, assumed a polarizing attitude toward the demonstrators and labeled them “marauders” (*çapulcu*) who were determined to defile the country's international reputation and overthrow the government.<sup>41</sup> The President's polarizing rhetoric included references to the drunkenness and promiscuous sexual behaviour of secular citizens, invoked images of protestors attacking headscarved women, and repeatedly referenced treachery and a conspiracy to overthrow the government. Justice and Development Party (JDP) politicians repeatedly stigmatized the protestors as marginal, terrorists, degenerate elites who resort to violence and provocation against national will and unity. The biased official narratives were challenged by the protestors, who made use of social and alternative media to provide a continuous broadcast of what was actually happening on the streets all around the country. Moda Sahnesi's rehearsal notes function in a similar fashion as

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<sup>40</sup> As the major vehicle of communication between the protestors, Twitter was regarded as “the worst menace” to society by the President, under whose command censorship reached such an extreme point that the news channel CNN Türk broadcast a documentary of penguins rather than reporting what was happening at the park and on the streets: unrestrained police violence (Ferguson, 2014, p. 80).

<sup>41</sup> See “Abusive Use Of Force By Law Enforcement Officials”, 16. Available at <https://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/eur440222013en.pdf>

the company's self-documentation underlines the transparency of the practice of theatre, and offers a shared space with the public in revealing their approach to state politics.

Moda Sahnesi's collaborative theatrical principles as an independent neighbourhood company reflect their desire to turn to identity politics in relation to their own position of practicing theatre on the margins of Turkish political culture. In defining the practice of theatre, director Kemal Aydođan (personal communication, June 12, 2015) emphasizes identification with the historical and political textures of the neighbourhood that surrounds their theatre site.

We already define ourselves as such, performing in a district, a neighborhood. When we state this, we are recognized along with the neighborhood itself... Where are we? Where do we live? I assume it is no longer possible to perform without knowing these, and it is not possible politically as well. We have the retailers (*esnaf*) right here across the street and we reside here... We continue the practice of acting as people living in Kadıköy in this age.

What Aydođan means by performing "here" and now in this era relates to the fact that the space of performance and its existence in the public domain is under the threat of authoritarianism, along with every other domain of life in Turkey. This issue of gentrification, connected to the commercialization of urban neighbourhoods, green areas and historical sites, is very much at the heart of the issue of performing in a neighborhood, as underlined by the company.<sup>42</sup> As the most prominent and central site of culture, commerce and social life on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, the Kadıköy district (where Moda is one of the popular neighbourhoods) received its share of commercialization. Compared to the rapid waves of urban (re)construction that have taken place in other parts of Istanbul, however, Moda remains less chaotic,

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<sup>42</sup> The protestors' instant reaction against the plans to destroy the urban greenery in Taksim is connected to the projects of gentrification conducted by the JDP municipalities over the past ten years. Since JDP came into power in 2002, it has carried out rapid urban transformation projects in Istanbul as part of its neoliberal state politics of global competition and economic growth (Aksoy, 2014, p. 27-30).

with less intervention into its historical and cultural texture. In 2013, therefore, the Moda neighborhood still offered a less gentrified space for independent artists, and it was here that the company members decided to revive a long-forgotten cultural center, Moda Cinema.

Moda is a relatively wealthy neighborhood, and the majority of the residents consist of educated, anti-government, middle and upper-class members of Istanbul. Yet, the director makes a rhetorical move here by foregrounding the idea of being among the retailers of the society. Using the language of the “local” to describe a very well-to-do neighborhood, he considers Moda as a salvaged zone compared to the European side of Istanbul, which has become a hot spot for global capital since the 1980s.<sup>43</sup> Today, Istanbul’s European coast features skyscrapers, commercial centers and malls that have mushroomed as a part of the projects of gentrification and privatization. As a result of this clean-and-polish state policy, the local texture of innumerable neighbourhoods have been washed away. In this context, Aydoğan reflects how paradoxical it is that neighbourhoods such as Moda remain distinctly upper-class yet seemingly humble and “local” against the escalating globalization of Istanbul.

The influence of the Gezi Park Protests on the company’s pre-production process is narrated in a short documentary entitled “Etre Comédien ou Ne Pas Etre: Un Documentaire sur Moda Sahnesi” (2013).<sup>44</sup> The documentary includes excerpts from the protests, scenes from the construction of Moda Sahnesi and *Hamlet*’s rehearsals and interviews with the company members. On the history of Moda, actor Onur Ünsal remarks in the documentary that:

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<sup>43</sup> On the rapid projects to integrate İstanbul to global capital in the 1980s, see Çağlar Keyder’s *İstanbul: Between the local and the global*. USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Directed by Özgür Yıldız and Selin Altıparmak, the documentary was screened free of charge at Moda Sahnesi on March 20, 2014. With the permission of the co-directors, I had access to it on 19 June 2016 through the following link: <<https://vimeo.com/81796605>>.

Kadıköy was a district where there used to be numerous theatres, operas and cinemas. With its Armenian and Greek architecture, Bahariye was quite different from how it is now... When I spend too much time on the other side, coming to Kadıköy is like wearing one's pyjamas for me.

Moda was traditionally a non-Muslim area, with a concentration of intellectual and artistic activities. In this regard, Ünsal's desire to hold onto the past here gives a vague image of cultural cosmopolitanism since the company does not actually engage with the non-Muslim history of the neighbourhood in *Hamlet*, which as a locally-filtered, political adaptation also functions as the opening production of the company in the face of the protests. Just as the Gezi dissenters promoted collectivity yet produced flaws in solidarity, the company's engagement with the history of minorities reveals the fragility of neighborhood remembrance and resistance as well. Moda Sahnesi adopts a particular attitude towards re-claiming this neighborhood, one that carries references to non-Muslim histories.<sup>45</sup> Yet, meeting a confined audience profile paradoxically builds a barrier between the objectives of the company and their realization.

### 3.2 Motion and the body as sites of locality

The parallelism that Moda Sahnesi builds between the stage performance of *Hamlet* and the political background of Gezi reveals itself especially in the discourse of the body developed for the characters. Bodily performance was an important element of Gezi's repertoire of appropriation and artistic creation, which aimed at questioning authority on many levels of signification, ranging from official narratives to sexist discourses to deep-rooted political and cultural antagonisms. For example, the now famous *Duran Adam* [Standing Man] offered an unusually still body to highlight the

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<sup>45</sup> Among the demolished and reconstructed sites and neighborhoods there are historical venues, properties that accommodate impoverished segments of the society and buildings abandoned by non-Muslim citizens (Erder, 2012, p. 382).

relationship between individual protest and collective formations. On July 17<sup>th</sup> 2013, the young modern dancer Erdem Gündüz stood for eight hours in the middle of Taksim Square, silently, without changing his posture. Wearing a plain shirt and pants, Gündüz carried no signs or indicators of a political stance, and refused to talk to the police, journalists or anyone who approached him. Thousands of people undertook this new means of protest initiated by one man: standing silently in public squares (Sofos, 2014, p. 136). The individualistic stillness of *Duran Adam* was an unconventional form of protest, marked by total silence, and it gave voice to an irreducible message: the silent and immobile man figures as a frozen statue against the background of constant and hectic movement emerging not only in Gezi Park, but also in urban life. Since this detached and speechless performance strategy emphasized singularity, however, it was also prone to underestimating the coexistence of differences in collectivity. Potuoğlu-Cook suggests that this performance strategy is inevitably open to a reading that reinforces exclusion: “[Standing Man] inadvertently reinforced the neo-liberal cult of the individual... his plan departed from the anti-market sociality of Gezi... [but] also breached the power of the collective, departing from Gezi’s vision of non-authoritarian governance” (2015, p. 114). Individualistic performance strategies, in other words, could risk casting collectivity and interdependence out of a critique of authority.

From this perspective, Onur Ünsal’s performance of Hamlet in particular is reminiscent of the circulation of enthusiastic mobility that gradually became a solidarity and survival strategy during the protests. In Moda Sahnesi’s production, Hamlet’s body engages in a rejection of compliance with the requirements of his society as well, but his version of dissent involves a feverish, restless mobility. The manifestation of power in the physical body reveals itself in the first act of the

production where Hamlet's deliberate avoidance of decorum finds expression both in his bodily language and his speech style. During Claudius' first speech (announcing his marriage to his brother's widow Gertrude), the characters on stage, except for Hamlet, display an image of the body that contracts and adheres to the authority of the king – a body that occupies a fixed spot on the stage, careful not to distract or interrupt his speech, but to confirm it. Their carefully arranged presence is complementary in ensuring the continuity of royal authority. This assembly is disturbed by Hamlet's entrance since the prince poses a direct opposition to the proper code of conduct exercised by the rest of the characters. Wearing sweatpants, a t-shirt and sneakers, Hamlet approaches the group strolling almost like an innocent bystander who is not willing to become a participant of the royal ceremony. The firm and formal disposition of the rest, who stand in a hierarchically ordered, horizontal line, constitutes the ceremonial structure of the gathering. Claudius and Gertrude stand in front with Polonius and Laertes positioned slightly behind the royal couple, and Ophelia remaining far behind. This structure is shattered by Hamlet, who stands aside with his hands crossed and his body loose throughout Claudius' speech, interrupting it in the middle with ironic applause. In this framework, Hamlet's disposition exhibits bodily disobedience towards and dismissal of prescribed social requirements, disturbing the royal power of the king.

Onur Ünsal's Hamlet looks like a universal misfit, a young rebellious university student with his informal outfit, unkempt hair and loose body posture (see Figure 1). Hyperactive and loud, he manipulates the space on stage by constantly being on the move and appropriating the gestures, intonation and vocabulary of the other characters. Such an image of youthful dissent and mocking mimicry fits the atmosphere of Gezi, however, at first glance Ünsal's portrayal of a youthful

dissenter, who struggles against the oppressive workings of authority and claims space and freedom of thought, does not appear to go beyond exhibiting a stereotypical misfit. This is because the company's bodily choices are matched by a loyal treatment of the dramatic text -a modernized, prose Turkish version that hardly includes any alterations of the plot and the context. Their translation does not include many overt references to the protests or explicit lingual references to the demonstrators.

During our conversation, director Aydoğan (personal communication, June 12, 2015) hinted at the fact that whereas the company avoided using any explicit markers of the protests in the production, Gezi influenced their practice of acting. Indeed, the director favoured the idea of exhibiting resistance largely through bodily presence. This is very much related to the issue of mobility and claiming space seen in Hamlet's body language, gestures and the comic effect he adds to his interactions with the other characters. During the protests, resistance to prescribed norms and violence in both public and private spheres of human life demanded quick decision-making and action, which can be discerned in the enthusiastic, rapid and demanding way that Onur Ünsal acted in presenting the figure of Hamlet as a young misfit. The casual appearance of Hamlet not only signifies a universal misfit, but it also demonstrates a common image of the protesters. This is due to the fact that during the occupation the casual and ardent actions and repartees of the demonstrators questioned and subverted prescribed norms such as moral codes, gender roles or legal rules (Gambetti, 2014, p. 98). The experience of informality in different domains of social life was among the markers of resistance.



Figure 1. Onur Ünsal's Hamlet

Ünsal's undertaking of Hamlet stands in opposition to the conventional representation of the young prince as a grave, mediating figure, which has predominated on the modern Western stage and in Turkish theatre accordingly for more than two centuries. A vast majority of *Hamlet* productions in modern Turkish theatre were filtered through a republican discourse –taking sides with secularism and modernization-, and used Western dramaturgical conventions (Arslan, 2008, p. 158).<sup>46</sup> The visual and auditory impression Ünsal leaves on the audience is first and foremost marked with mobility and strongly expressive noisiness, representing a new strategy that stands in opposition to the customary representations of the Danish prince on the Turkish stage.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of the discourses surrounding *Hamlet* translations and adaptations in Turkey, see Hilal Erkazancı Durmuş's "Discourses on Hamlet's journey in Turkey". *Transcultural: A Journal of Translation and Cultural Studies*, 12.1 (2020), pp. 120-139.

<sup>47</sup> On alternative, "indigenized" *Hamlet* adaptations in contemporary Turkey, see Inci Bilgin's "Hamlet in Contemporary Turkey: Towards Postcolonial Feminist Rewrites?". *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, 12.27 (2015), pp. 65-74.

The production presents us with Hamlet as the young prince of Denmark, who is approached by the ghost of the dead king to avenge his unjust murder by his brother Claudius. The prince decides to put on “an antic disposition” (Shakespeare, 2006, 1.5.170), that is, to act wildly, awkwardly and unexpectedly, until he ensures his uncle’s betrayal and avenges the deceased king. Whereas Hamlet does not exhibit any explicit acts of solidarity and collective resistance in this process, departing from the representation of Hamlet as the solemn, contemplating individual that dominated the stage and artistic imagination in the West from the nineteenth century onwards is itself a resistant gesture. As Margreta De Grazia (2001) notes, nineteenth century representations of Hamlet dissociated character from plot, resulting in the (still-predominant) view that Hamlet was a figure of “excessive meditation”, “exquisite sensibility” or “extreme delicacy”:

Character now is not only superior to plot but independent of it. Its newfound autonomy emerge[d] in response to a new critical problem: delay. In answering the question “Why does Hamlet delay?” critics came up with an interior—or, rather, innumerable interiors—that preempt or subsume the plot. Hamlet’s delay is seen as symptomatic of some acute emotional or mental state —“exquisite sensibility,” “extreme delicacy,” or “excessive meditation”— that later develops into disorders, pathologies, and neuroses. (p. 364)

Here, De Grazia refers to the extent to which German Romanticist approaches to *Hamlet* influenced the increasing interest in character criticism along with the newly established institution of psychology in the twentieth century. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and August Schlegel’s *A Course of Lectures in Dramatic Art and Literature* are among the pioneering works of the German Romanticists famous for their preoccupation with thinking and mediation in their reading of the character of Hamlet. The everlasting image of Hamlet holding the skull of Yorick in his hand, the serious posture of Hamlet weighing his lines during

his famous soliloquys, and many other iconic representations have nurtured the still-debated issues of adherence to the author's original intentions and a "valid" reading of the play, even though the emphasis on interiority is itself only ambivalently related to the "original". Aydođan (personal communication, June 12, 2015) juxtaposes the company's portrayal of Hamlet to the debates on interiority in academia: "If we want to take this work beyond academia, the answer is that he [Hamlet] is wearing a T-shirt". The casual and shaggy figure of Hamlet in the performance constitutes an opposition to the representations of Hamlet as a contemplative intellectual with highly metaphysical concerns, representations that have circulated for more than two centuries.

De Grazia's comparison of "modern" and Jacobean performances of Hamlet is illuminating as well, once it is evaluated within the scope of criticism on the fidelity and legitimacy of a Shakespeare performance:

In the early decades of the play's performance ... Hamlet's signature action appears to have been not paralyzing thought but frenzied motion, which would have linked him more with the knock-about clown of folk tradition than with the introspective consciousness acclaimed in the modern period. (2001, p. 358)

In opposition to the iconic modern representations of *Hamlet*, De Grazia points out that prior to its radical dissociation from plot, frenzied motion marked the performance of the character of Hamlet. Since Ünsal's bodily and vocal performance can be defined by excessive action or extremely frenzied motion, it not only steps outside the so-called valid representations of Hamlet on the global scale, but ironically signals the historicity of the play's performance.

Moda Sahnesi's engagement with the body and space in *Hamlet* unfolds throughout the *mise en scène* of the play. The company uses a modest, pitch-black stage design made up of six black coffins erected side by side upstage, and each

coffin has thematic keywords written on it for an assigned character (see Figure 2). Stable throughout the play, the coffins compose the entirety of the stage décor and serve a variety of functions such as shifts in time and place, and an on-stage exit for the players who recede into the coffins when they make an “exit”. In Act 4, Scene 7, for instance, while Claudius is reading a letter from Hamlet, the prince is sitting in his coffin, supposedly in England, and reading the letter aloud while the king is scanning through the document. Aydoğan (personal communication, June 12, 2015) explains that by constituting the sole décor, the coffins serve as an embodiment of the Gravedigger scene and let the company keep the *memento mori* theme constant throughout the play. Although the company removes the gravedigger scene, they attribute the theme of the mortality of humans to the coffins and achieve what the Gravedigger scene is expected to do through the constant visibility of these enclosures.



Figure 2. The coffins on the main stage  
(from left Hamlet, Horatio, Rosencrantz (*standing*), Laertes, Guildenstern  
(*standing*), Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius (*Osríc in this frame*) and Ophelia)

More importantly, this constant visibility of the actors makes it possible for the audience to stay focused on and compare the bodily existence of the characters. For instance, even as a character is supposedly off-stage, s/he rests in the assigned coffin, which keeps them visible within this limited space. When the king and queen are off-stage in Act I Scene II as Hamlet is delivering his first soliloquy, they are seen in their coffins, which in this instance become a symbol of their bedchamber. The queen is freshening up and the king is eating with a lustful appetite in the background while Hamlet is alone, talking about the death of his father. These (im)mobile presences serve the purpose of highlighting Hamlet's mobility. At times he points at other characters while delivering a monologue or moves constantly around the other coffins, invading the space of the supposedly absent characters. By repeating the gestures, intonation and words of Claudius, Polonius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet becomes an active mirror image of the characters, providing a crooked reflection of these figures.

Moda Sahnesi's preoccupation with motion and the body as local signifiers evokes Dennis Kennedy's (1996) observation on foreign Shakespeare productions: The differences that derive from performing in languages other than English have led to major differences in performance strategies. These are especially noticeable in the visual aspects of productions: "unable to place the same emphasis on Shakespeare's verbal resourcefulness, foreign performances have explored scenographic and physical modes more openly than their Anglophone counterparts, often redefining the meaning of the plays in the process" (p. 141). Thus, Kennedy emphasizes the importance of reading non-English productions with particular focus on adapted, altered elements that emerge as "scenographic and physical modes". Yet, the critic links the physicality attributed to a non-Anglophone production primarily to the

linguistic insufficiency of non-Anglophone theatre practitioners, who are regarded as unable to grasp Shakespeare's dramatic complexity. Kennedy's legitimacy-oriented approach positions Shakespeare's dramatic work as a fixed point of origin with which theatre artists engage to trace an already existing meaning. Moda Sahnesi's interest in locality through the body, however, complicates the assumption that plays as printed texts are established and stable grounds against which the theatrical production is viewed, observed and categorized. The "scenographic and physical modes" in Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* are localized elements of adaptation that are strategies meant to defy political and literary power, not to trace an "essence" in Shakespeare's original work.

### 3.3 Local politics and language in *Hamlet*

Throughout *Hamlet*'s rehearsal process, the company members were helping the construction of the theatre site and the stage décor, rehearsing *Hamlet*, studying the dramatic text and scholarship on Shakespeare while at the same time actively partaking in the Gezi Park Protests, facing violence and threats of arrest on a daily basis. Once Moda Sahnesi associated their production with the idea of "standing together" in this cultural climate, the canonical work was drawn into its local, socio-political atmosphere. This can be seen in the following remarks from the rehearsal notes: "During our conversations, current political movements took part in our discussions on the play so that we could acquire a point of departure in relation to our day and this geography."<sup>48</sup> Here, we see a highly mediated decision to channel the historical, political and social conditions pertaining to Turkey into the adaptation of *Hamlet*. This did not mean, however, that the treatment of the dramatic text

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<sup>48</sup> The conversation is available at <<https://www.modasahnesi.com/hamlet?p=prova#tab-11>>.

involved the thorough inclusion of a socio-political agenda in adapting it to the stage. Rather than projecting a grand narrative of resistance on to the play, the resistance constituted a starting point for their reading of *Hamlet*. Producing *Hamlet* in “this geography,” in other words, automatically asked the audience to associate the issues of power, corruption and violence in the play with the JDP’s authoritarian state politics. At the same time, the company’s dramaturgical choices, such as their decision to exclude the Fortinbras story from their playscript, ran the risk of undermining these associations.

Importantly, the company’s political choices in *Hamlet* departed from their previous experiences, which included more direct references to current events. For example, Aydoğın’s 2010-2011 production of *Macbeth* at the Play Workshop [*Oyun Atölyesi*] presented the audience with three bodies lying on the floor in the opening scene (one of whom was the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, assassinated in 2007), and touched upon the issues of undisclosed state violence and unsolved murders in Turkey. Nonetheless, Aydoğın (personal communication, June 12, 2015) put forward that the experience of Gezi pushed audiences to adopt a new way of approaching and evaluating history and politics in Turkey:

We thought that after Gezi people would understand *Hamlet* very well. Well, they didn’t understand *Macbeth* at the time because there was no experience of the Gezi incident, and there wasn’t such a thing as understanding or evaluating through Gezi in our minds. Whereas there were the masks of Hrant Dink, Uğur Kaymaz and Ceylan Önkol there [as dead bodies on stage in the beginning of *Macbeth*], people said nothing. People didn’t even relate them to the witches, that they were the witches... Yet, in *Hamlet* we avoided any direct indication on purpose. Still, everybody related the play to Gezi.

The director believes that in Moda Sahnesi’s *Hamlet*, the association between the original dramatic text and adapted local elements did not have to be presented in an explicit way to remind the audience of Gezi. Whereas the *Macbeth* Aydoğın directed included direct references to unresolved murder cases in Turkey, it did not fulfill the

expectation of the practitioners at the time with respect to the use of local political elements. Yet, for Moda Sahnesi, the experience of Gezi was transformative for the imagination and perception of the public, creating a strong semiotic landscape that allowed audiences to understand the position of dissent and reconsidering histories of violence in Turkey.

In this respect, the company's decision to include the famous phrase about Denmark being a prison that appears only in the first Folio (presented not in the progression of the dramatic text, but in an appendix in the Arden edition), is significant. In the below dialogue between Hamlet, Rozencrantz and Guildenstern, the word "Denmark" from the Folio version is replaced with the phrase "this country" [*bu ülke*] to create a parallelism between Hamlet's consideration of Denmark as an imprisoning state and the political agenda(s) in Turkey.

*Hamlet:*

Neden? Kıyameti mi haber almışlar? Neyse, zaten *istihbaratınız* [*emphasis added*] doğru değil. Sorumu biraz daha açayım. Siz bu talih kuşuna ne yaptınız da sizi bu *hapishaneye* layık gördü?

*Guildenstern:*

Hapishane mi lordum?

*Hamlet:*

*Bu ülke bir hapishane.*

*Rozencrantz:*

O zaman bütün dünya öyle.

*Hamlet:*

Hem de alası. *Bir sürü zindan, hücre, işkencehane...*

*Bu ülke de en kötülerinden biri.* (Ünsal & Adıyaman, 2013, p. 25)<sup>49</sup>

As Guildenstern is surprised to hear Hamlet characterize the state as a prison, Hamlet further defines it as a dungeon [*zindan*], a confine [*hücre*] and a ward/a torture

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<sup>49</sup> The dialogue in the first Folio: "Hamlet: Let me question more in particular. What have you, my Good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune that she sends you to prison hither?/ Guildenstern: Prison, my lord?/ Hamlet: Denmark's a prison./ Rosincrance: Then is the world one./ Hamlet: A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons –Denmark being one o'th' worst" (2006, 1-9, p. 466).

chamber [*işkencehane*]. Even though the Turkish dialogue does not refer to an explicit historical moment or case of excessive force controlled by the state, the aforementioned structures of confinement and the resort to violence connote the numerous instances of undisclosed and/or belatedly revealed cases of oppression in the history of the Turkish Republic, including the Gezi Park Protests. This reading is also triggered by the first three lines of this conversation, which are taken from Q2 where Hamlet questions the motive behind Rozenkrantz and Guildenstern's visit: "but your *news* [emphasis added] is not true... what make you at Elsinore" (2.2.234-36)? The company uses "*istihbarat*" [security intelligence] for the Turkish equivalent of "news" to awaken the collective memory of the audience in relation to the issues of state surveillance and oppression witnessed in numerous cultural and political transformations in modern Turkey.

The historical sweep of Moda Sahnesi's interest in local politics is equally visible in one of the rehearsal notes, where the company appropriates a famous line of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk from the public speech he gave during the 10<sup>th</sup> year celebration of the Republic in 1933. Atatürk addressed the public with the following lines: "My fellow countrymen! We have accomplished great things in a short period of time".<sup>50</sup> Commenting on the struggle to sustain the newborn republic, Atatürk underlined Turkish heroism, nationalism, unity and Turkish culture as the nation's vital weapons that would pave the way for becoming a powerful, civilized and unified nation equal to the West. Moda Sahnesi appropriated the famous statement as "We have mastered great brutality in a short period of time."<sup>51</sup> Substituting "great accomplishments" with "brutality" produces a critical commentary on the grand narrative of nationalism and heroism embedded within the context of becoming a

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<sup>50</sup> Available at < <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/onuncu-yil-nutku/?pdf=3422>>.

<sup>51</sup> This and all the other rehearsal notes of the company are available at their website: <<https://www.modasahnesi.com/hamlet?p=prova>>.

democratic, modern and civilized nation. When the rehearsal notes are considered hand in hand with the adapted elements of local politics in the play, avoiding an overt historical reference provides the company with the opportunity to comment on state violence in broader terms.

Despite the company's broad interest in Turkish politics and authoritarianism, however, many production elements are relentlessly topical in their significations. In the first scene of the production, for example, adapted elements in the bodily posture, costume, and the language of the kingly figure of Claudius create a parallelism between him and the Turkish President. As the play opens with Act 1, Scene 2 where Claudius is about to start his speech on "mirth in funeral" and "dirge in marriage", there occurs a frozen moment in which all the characters stand side by side downstage waiting for Hamlet to participate in the ceremony. In this moment, the audience is presented with a still image of the characters, who only move slightly to adjust their clothes or clear their throats. Looking directly back at the audience, the characters appear to compose a photographic image while they await Hamlet's arrival. For a couple of minutes, the audience is caught up in a period of silence where they not only have the opportunity to observe the scene, but to become the addressed public by indirectly participating in the ceremony as well. Here, witnessing Claudius in his checkered suit monitoring the masses he is about to address invites the audience to approach the play by pondering its multifaceted local signification.

What is more, the assertive, violent bodily and verbal language that Claudius exhibits during his speech (see Figure 3) is a representation of the way the Turkish President moves his arms in public speeches, pointing repeatedly at the crowd to emphasize his points. For the anti-government, "elite" audience of Moda, these

gestures enable them to recognize traces of the President's public appearance in the figure of Claudius, whose seizure of power through fratricide, and tyrannical, unjust and corrupt rule are meant to create a parallelism between the "de facto" king and the current Turkish government.



Figure 3. Claudius (*in the middle*) addresses his subjects

Costumes play a key role in inviting audiences to associate the characters with the company's immediate political agenda. This is especially visible in the costumes of Claudius, Hamlet, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, particularly the politically loaded outfit of the figure of Claudius. The checkered dark blue and black jacket Claudius wears creates an inevitable link between the king and the President, since the suit has become almost an integral part of the politician's public performances. As the President has given numerous public meetings around the country wearing checkered suits, this attire has become a distinguishable feature of the party. Various leading party members have imitated the President by using an almost identical version of the suit during significant public events such as business receptions, interviews and voting. The image of JDP officials and supporters in checkered suits has hit the headlines in several media channels from both supportive

and opposing veins, which report that fashion designers consider the preference to use checkered suits to be reflective of the idea of being a “man of the people.”<sup>52</sup> Besides, the circulation of party members’ photos in checkered suits on social media has served to popularize the attire as a typified representation of the JDP’s discourse of “stability” and “uniformity”. During the Gezi Park Protests, whimsical slogans against the discriminatory policies of the party as well as encouraging remarks on its reign were voiced under the headline *#direnköse* [*#resistcheckered*] on Twitter. Deriving on the metaphor of the political father, Claudius is portrayed as a self-appointed king/authority particularly in relation to the then prime minister’s political strategy to fashion himself as the “father” of the state.

When Aydođan compares *Hamlet* with the Gezi Park Protests in the documentary “Etre Comédien”, he points to Sigmund Freud’s renowned reading of the play in proposing the theory of the Oedipus complex and the unconscious in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

[*Hamlet* is] the symbol of European society with respect to the issue of killing the father. It as a play based on the power of the individual, one that kills the father and starts becoming an individual. We have intended to kill the father within the process of Gezi.

Here, the psychoanalytic analogy between the Gezi Park Protests and authoritarianism is enunciated around the metaphor of killing the political father.

This issue echoes Çađlar Keyder, who considers the demands of the younger generations participating in the Gezi Park Protests along a similar vein in his essay “Law of the Father”:

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<sup>52</sup> Hürriyet, Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Sözcü and Takvim are among the major media companies that reported Erdoğan’s attire in their newspapers. See the following as examples of this issue on the newspapers.

<<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-kendi-modasini-yaratiyor-27942514>>,

<[http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/577276/Turk\\_siyaset\\_tarihinde\\_modanin\\_iktidari.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/577276/Turk_siyaset_tarihinde_modanin_iktidari.html)>

They wanted to be able to defend public space against neoliberal incursion, and they refused to live under the authoritarian guidance of a self-appointed father of the country. They felt at home in a collective way of life with gender equality and respect for diversity - a recipe for a new covenant that makes irrelevant the pretensions of Erdoğan's supposedly benevolent (and now wrathful) paternalism. (19 June 2013)

The supposedly benevolent manner of the President is based on the dichotomy of center and margin through which the policies of the party have been structured. In this regard, the company drew upon the polarizing attitude of the President, and adapted it to the speeches of Claudius in the play. A common rhetorical strategy the President employs in his public speeches is to set up a contradiction between “us” and “them”. In his speeches, the President positions his supporters as “we” when he addresses them, especially when he is responding to criticism directed to his policies. He further designates any member of the society, who disagrees with the dominant ideology, as part of what he calls “those”. As Arzu Öztürkmen (2014) aptly points out, “over the years Erdoğan developed a populist notion of *millet*, literally meaning “nation” but rhetorically referring to the conservative front whose constituents voted for him” (p. 40).

Situated against the JDP's understanding of the *millet* are all life styles that are in conflict with the values of conservative (Islamic) morality. Moda Sahnesi integrates these dynamics into Claudius' speech at the royal court and re-formulates it in assertive, conversational and daily prose, directly addressing the public/audience. In the excerpt below, the royal “we”, the councilors and king's subjects, is re-contextualized as Erdoğan's *millet*:<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Claudius' speech from the Arden edition is as follows: “Nor have we here barred/ Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone/ With this affair along. For all. Our thanks./ Now follows that you know: young Fortinbras,/ Holding a weak supposal of our worth/ Or thinking by our late dear brother's death/ Our state to be disjoint and out of frame -/ Co-leagued with this dream of his advantage -/ He hath not failed to pester us with message/ Importing the surrender of those lands/ Lost by his father. . ./. . . So much for him./ . . . we have here writ/ Of this his nephew's purpose. . ./ The lists and full proportions are all made/ Out of his subjects” (Shakespeare, 2006, 1.2.14-33).

*Claudius:*

*Siz, bizden daha iyi bilenler; sizden aldık onayımızı. Sağ olun, var olun [emphasis added]. Şimdi gündemimiz malum: Kıymetli kardeşimizin ölümüyle güç kaybettiğimizi zanneden, devletimizin bölündüğünü, hatta parçalandığını düşünen toy Fortinbras, durumu lehine çevirme rüyaları görüyor. Talepleriyle başımıza musallat olmayı başaramadı değil. Aferin ona. Diyor ki: “Babamın elinden aldığınız toprakları teker teker geri vereceksiniz!” Boyunu aşan laflar bunlar. . . Dedik ki; gerekli maddi yardımı ve asker diye peşinde sürüklediği başıbozukları senin halkından, senden izinsiz alıyor bu adam. (Ünsal & Adıyaman, 2013, p. 1)*

In the original English version, a close reading of the king’s speech immediately makes one suspect his public face as he always uses antithetical statements such as “defeated joy”, “mirth in funeral” and “dirge in marriage” (Shakespeare, 2006, 1.2.10-12). The company builds on the idea of hypocrisy already present in the characterization of Claudius and calls attention to the king’s treatment of his subjects by adding local elements to the translation. In the above excerpt, Claudius reminds his councilors that he came to the throne and married his brother’s widow with their permission: “Nor have we here barred/ Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone/ With this affair along” (1.2.14-16). We see in the Turkish version that the language the king employs underscores phrases repetitively used by the President in appealing to his *millet* and condemning dissent. Rather than the councilors, the speech addresses the conservative majority of Turkish society, calling them “those who know better than we do” [*Siz, bizden daha iyi bilenler*]. With this phrase, the company invites the audience to evaluate Claudius’ accession to power in relation to Erdoğan’s rhetorical move. In his speeches, the President gains the sympathy of his supporters by assigning them the role of active political agents of the dominant ideology. His rhetorical strategy is to characterize his supporters as possessors of better understanding so as to define his relation to power as a natural, grassroots process.

The counter position, on the other hand, is framed as occupied by the enemy, Fortinbras, who threatens to invade the state he thinks of as “disjoint”. Even though using the words *bölünmek* [disintegrate, divide] and *parçalanmak* [break up, split] as the Turkish equivalents of “disjoint” reveal literal and figurative agreement with the martial conflict set in the English dramatic text between Denmark and Norway, the two words connote the issue of separatism the President often underlines when faced with domestic or international threats to his governance. Claudius accuses Fortinbras of making empty threats: “*Boyunu aşan laflar bunlar*” [These are remarks that exceed your authority]. This is another common phrase used by the President in defying criticisms against his actions and policies. Rather than responding to the demands and questions of the dissent, the President has been marginalizing opposing views through disapproval, denunciation and underestimation. By adapting this language of exclusion to Claudius, Moda Sahnesi draws an analogy between the king and the President, calling attention to the affinity between authoritarianism and the JDP’s “public”-centered ideology.

Nevertheless, political signifiers like the checkered suit, or signifiers of linguistic locality through Claudius’ word play raise tension between the local and the global since these signifiers create a geographically specific Claudius. Local signifiers combined with universal dramaturgical choices result in a vague political critique. The figure of Claudius in Moda Sahnesi’s *Hamlet* signals populist conservatives in contemporary Turkey, and yet the exclusion of Fortinbras from the production creates a dramaturgical tension in portraying the political weight of the story. In the original English *Hamlet*, the opening scene sets an atmosphere of uneasiness and political turmoil. The tension experienced by the two sentinels Barnardo and Francisco is reflected in the memorable first line of the play: “Who’s

there?" (2006, 1.1.1). The appearance of the late king's ghost alludes to the war-like state of Norway, which can be seen when Horatio questions the intention of the Ghost: "What art thou that usurp'st this time of night/ Together with that fair and warlike form/ In which the majesty of buried Denmark/ Did sometimes march?" (1.1.45-48). The first scene further sets the martial conflict between Norway and Denmark when Horatio recounts the recent history of Denmark. He informs the sentinels that Hamlet Senior killed Fortinbras Senior in battle and conquered certain lands of Norway, which are now reclaimed by young Fortinbras (1.1.79-106).

Moda Sahnesi adapts this political conflict to contemporary Turkey; however, the company cuts this scene as well as Fortinbras out of the production. The frequent omission of Fortinbras from stage adaptations is an issue often addressed in Shakespeare scholarship. Many scholars suggest that this decision revolves mainly around thematic concerns such as diluting the play's political background and emphasizing domestic and psychological concerns, or plot concerns such as ending the play with Hamlet's death. Margaret Kidnie (2009) points out that the exclusion of Fortinbras and the threat of martial intervention by Norway was a nineteenth-century Anglo-American convention (p. 41). Bringing the curtain down with Hamlet's death rather than the arrival of Fortinbras to take over the Danish throne prevailed in British theatres especially until the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Before the renewal of interest in the national and international politics of *Hamlet* in the 1980s, Anglo-American productions, especially in the United Kingdom and North America, were primarily preoccupied with a psychoanalytical reading of the play, whereas in

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<sup>54</sup> Both critics and editors of Shakespeare's work have addressed the point in question. For more, see "Prince's progress - There's more to Hamlet than Hamlet" by Michael Billington, *The Guardian* (November 21, 1989). "Shakespeare Without His Language" by Dennis Kennedy, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* by M. De Grazia, Robert Hapgood's "Introduction" in *Hamlet* by Cambridge University Press (1999), the "Introduction" in *Hamlet* by the New Cambridge Shakespeare (2003), the "Introduction" in *Hamlet* by the Arden Shakespeare (2006).

Eastern and East-Central European productions, it is notable that Hamlet was oftentimes staged as a political play in relation to the Soviet Union and the Cold War (Thompson & Taylor, 2006, pp. 67-68).

From this perspective, Moda Sahnesi initially foregrounds the rhetoric of the President in relation to the conflict between Claudius and Fortinbras. However, one cannot identify the place of Fortinbras, an external threat to the state, within the context of the Gezi Park Protests or Turkish politics, due to the fact that the company chose to omit the scenes related to the Norwegian prince and his invasion from the production. We neither see Fortinbras on stage, nor hear him mentioned at any other instance throughout the production, aside from Claudius' speech to the "public". Fortinbras becomes a mere functional tool to pull the President's polarizing rhetoric and understanding of the "nation" into the scene and then becomes thoroughly absent from the play. Although the play opens with the image of the President and raises questions regarding authority, hypocrisy, the "nation" and marginalization, it does not pursue the issues of solidarity and resistance at this point and falls outside the all-embracing disposition implied by *Hamlet Örgütlenmektir*. Put otherwise, Moda Sahnesi does not provide its critique of authoritarianism with a complete political frame due to the discordance one finds between adapting Claudius' usurpation of power and corruption to the local without tracing the enmity between the two kingdoms.

#### 3.4 Shakespeare and authority

Whereas Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* is in direct conversation with the question of legitimate political authority, these concerns are equally visible in the company's relationship to the legitimacy of *theatrical* authority, including their ambivalent

relationship to the figure of Shakespeare himself. Looking at the brief history of Moda Sahnesi, its repertoire and the company's critical discussions on Western scholarship and Shakespeare provides insight into evaluating the performance within the context of this particular socio-political agenda. Moda Sahnesi is a relatively new company that was founded by twelve theatre artists in 2013, when they reconstructed a movie theatre formerly known as Moda Cinema (*Moda Sineması*).<sup>55</sup> After a conflict over financial matters, the director Kemal Aydoğan and several young and promising actors left the established Play Workshop in Kadıköy, and decided to form Moda Sahnesi, a company that would run on the principle of collaborative management rather than working under a single patron (Çuhadar, 2013). The company renovated the neglected culture and art center under the name of Moda Sahnesi, where, together with the company's productions, performances by different musicians, dancers and companies, and literature and art workshops would take place. Aydoğan's emphasis on collaboration also includes the support of artists from theatre, cinema and art circles, students and the residents of the neighborhood, who visited the site, offering to help the company members (Çuhadar, 2013).

In Moda Sahnesi's discourse, theatre practice is constituted by a horizontal structure that is a natural outcome of being open and transparent to the public. Yet, "the public" in this case amounts to acquaintances from art circles and inhabitants of the neighborhood. Even though Moda Sahnesi's three-year repertoire rests almost completely upon Western writers and the space was inaugurated with the production of *Hamlet* in October 2013, Shakespeare is the only canonical figure staged at the

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<sup>55</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, Moda Cinema used to be an important site of artistic activity on the Anatolian coast of Istanbul that hosted theatre plays, festival movies, art discussions and concerts. By the end of the twentieth century, however, it lost its popularity and became neglected until the company members decided to revive this once-popular cultural site.

theatre.<sup>56</sup> At first glance, meeting the audience with *Hamlet* can be considered a practical choice since Shakespeare has always carried a dual function for theatre practitioners in Turkey, first in proving the mastery of the practitioners over a canonical text, and second in appealing to the aesthetic taste of audiences. For this attuned and “elite” audience, Shakespeare serves the purpose of fulfilling the intellectual and artistic expectations they have of the theatre.

The company’s rehearsal notes convey a Janus-faced view of theatricality and textual authority: on the one hand, for the company, theatre practice is defined through self-documentation and transparency –the idea of being open and welcoming which resonates with the atmosphere of Gezi. The company does not seek productions that are finalized following a self-enclosed process. By being receptive to the public and rendering the whole process of pre-production accessible on-line, in however mediated a fashion, the company displays a bilateral relationship between the world outside and what they create. In this way, rather than associating themselves firmly with the canonical text and the long-established conventions of Shakespeare productions in Turkey, they attempt to mark themselves by opening up a space that is informed by the co-existence of what is on and off the stage. On the other hand, they cannot disassociate themselves from the authority of the source-text and the Western scholarship surrounding it. For example, the company’s rehearsal notes shed light on the process of working through the dramatic text that brings along canonical scholarship on Shakespeare and Western thought. Several entries feature a number of prominent Western theoreticians and philosophers who materialize in the

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<sup>56</sup> *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare, *All Nuts Love Me or the Temptation* by the Bulgarian writer Stefan Tsanev, *Roberto Zucco* by the French playwright and director Bernard-Marie Koltès, *An Incident at the Border* by the Scottish playwright and director Kieran Lynn, *Brasserie* by the African writer Koffi Kwahulé, *Dog, Woman, Man* by the German writer Sibylle Berg and *We Love and Know Nothing* by the German writer and director Moritz Rinke

notes under “Guest Appearances”, including Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche, Baruch Spinoza and Terry Eagleton:

#### Guest Appearances

Thomas More (he participates with Utopia)

Rabelais (we love his grotesque world)

Nietzsche (we delight in whatever originates from him)

Spinoza

Ursula Le Guin (we talk about a person who said: “You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution”. She is more than welcome)

In the above excerpt, we see that the company benefits from seminal theoretical texts by well-known writers, who figure in the notes alongside anecdotes and commentaries. The fact that they refer to Medieval and Renaissance literature shows their interest in grasping the dramatic text within its historical and literary context. In this way, the company signals their own erudition while at the same time connoting that their version of history and academic study is colloquial.

The rehearsal notes also make clear that company members immersed themselves in the established critical frameworks surrounding the dramatic text and used the Arden edition so as to follow an annotated version of the play. Discussing the issue of whether Gertrude has any awareness of Claudius’ plots and King Hamlet’s murder, they note that they worked on the first folio of the play to resolve this confusion. In our conversation on the subject, Onur Ünsal (personal communication, June 12, 2015) states:

We worked on the Arden edition, which provides one with the difference between the quartos and the folios. It presents the reader with the discrepancies between the versions based on the research and studies done on this matter... For instance, it points out that the “To be or not to be” speech is indeed misplaced, which we also thought. That the speech remained as a rough copy and was added to the dramatic text afterwards, and that there is a dramaturgical error... So, one does the translation along with lots of information on the play... The thing is, when you perform the play, you prune a considerable amount of the text.

In the above lines, the members of the company position their practice of theatre on an equal scale with Western criticism not only by acknowledging seminal texts, but by affirming their competence in approaching the dramatic text as well. On the one hand, the Arden edition provides them with the canon of criticism on Shakespeare, and on the other hand the edition turns into a point of reference for the company to verify their mastery over the English text. Though Moda Sahnesi's production was locally and politically conscious, it could not disregard the tradition of criticism and interpretation formed by the West throughout the centuries around the authorial name of Shakespeare. This desire to exercise complete mastery over Shakespeare scholarship was reflected in the dialogues between the actors as well. For instance, while talking about how to open the first act, they discussed whether Horatio was already present in the scene they were rehearsing. To this the director responded: "Well Shakespeare says he is present". Aydoğan's reference to Shakespeare here indicates that the authority of an imagined intention, attributed to the playwright, did override the company's own sense of the text. A more significant example can be found in the following dialogue again chronicled in the online rehearsal notes:

*(Telephone sound)*

*Ka:* Guys, this scene is not supposed to be like this. Shakespeare has just texted me.

*Onur:* You mean William?

*Esra:* Bah, he meddles in everything.

In the lines above, the desire to come up with a correct interpretation of the text is presented with a tongue-in-cheek reference to an intervention from the playwright. The authority of Shakespeare dominates the preparation process to a great extent while at the same time adherence to the original is overturned by the ironic treatment of Shakespeare's presence, which further mirrors the ambivalent attitude inherent in

their understanding of theatre. The company's awareness of this dilemma can be observed in the comments that Aydođan (personal communication, June 12, 2015) made on Shakespeare in the academy:

As far as I am concerned, I do not trust academia as an illuminating, guiding institution... The power of academia in relation to Shakespeare is too much concerned with the stability of the word/text. However, this man wrote all this to be staged as well... If we want to take this work outside academia, the answer is that he [Hamlet] is wearing a T-shirt. We want the play to be understood and to find its equivalent in today's world... We are also concerned with the question of how to create a new perception of Shakespeare. Otherwise, there will always be poor examples.

In these comments, even though Aydođan is critical of a text-oriented approach that he associates with academic scholarship on Shakespeare, his anxiety with regards to good examples suggests that wrestling with the Shakespearean canon is still an inevitable concern. Ironically, he situates theatrical practice in opposition to academia while at the same time displaying the academic credentials of the company in the rehearsal notes.

This instance again exemplifies Moda Sahnesi's indecisive approach towards textual and academic authority; their adversarial position does not prevent them from trying to prove their theatrical mastery by engaging in long-established scholarship on Shakespeare.

One of the ways that the company negotiates these conundrums is by developing a meta-commentary on the canonicity of Shakespearean language in the performance. For example, when the company members refer to the issue of conventional Hamlet productions that typify the famous "To be or not to be" speech in the rehearsal notes, they discuss the matter of the skull. Rather than privilege the scene with the skull, the company prefer to present the audience with a dashing Hamlet figure from daily life who leaves the stage, walks along the hallway that separates the audience's seating and starts the "to be or not to be" soliloquy in a

mocking fashion that repeats the phrase in both English and Turkish: “To be or not to be. *-mek, -mak, ya da -memek, -mamak*” (Ünsal & Adıyaman, 2013, p. 29). Here, the prose language carries the unofficial undertone Ünsal’s Hamlet applies to his words throughout the play; by playing on the Turkish infinitive form, the company both emphasize the canonicity of the famous phrase and poke fun at this stature. Even though the figures of speech and witticisms all belong to the original dramatic text, and retain the manner in which Shakespeare arranges puns and irony for example, the informal Turkish translation and its performance lets Hamlet break away from the decorum of the court. Using a modernized, prose version is also related to the issue of intelligibility. Actor Ünsal (personal communication, June 12, 2015) points out that intelligibility was a huge concern for him and the co-translator Emre Adıyaman, who decided to provide the audience with a relatively less ornamented, prose Turkish version that preserved the Shakespearean treatment of language and figures of speech. However, the informality also breaks away from the authority of the text as well. In many instances throughout the play, the Turkish dramatic text goes beyond preserving Shakespeare’s treatment of language, and attempts to defy his authorial power by referring back to the figurative strategies the playwright employs.

The production also includes several instances where this experience of informality is reflected onto the text by troubling the “authority” or weight of the Shakespearean language through repetition, intonation or the use of a colloquially comic effect. In the following dialogue, Hamlet comes to realize that he has just killed Polonius, who was eavesdropping on the conversation between the prince and Queen Gertrude, mistaking him for Claudius.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The scene is as follows in the original English text: “Hamlet: How now! A rat! Dead for a ducat, dead! [Kills Polonius.]/ Polonius: O, I am slain!/ Queen: O me, what hast thou done?/ Hamlet: Nay, I

*Hamlet (Kılıcını çeker):*

Ne oluyor, fare galiba. İmdaat! Aha, öldürdüm. Vallaha billaha öldürdüm.

*Polonius:*

Aaaa, öldüm.

*Gertrude:*

Aman Allah'ım, ne yaptın?

*Hamlet:*

Ne bileyim? Kral mıydı o?

*Gertrude:*

Ne kadar canice!

*Hamlet:*

Ne kadar? Bir kralı öldürüp kardeşiyle evlenmek kadar...

*Gertrude:*

Bir kralı öldürmek?

*Hamlet:*

Evet, ben de öyle dedim. (*Paravanı kaldırır ve Polonius'u fark eder*) Zavallı meraklı gerzek! Bye bye. Ama ben seni daha önemli biri sandım. Kaderinse çekeceksin! İşgüzar! Oynama ellerinle, sakın ol! (Ünsal & Adıyaman, 2013, pp. 43-44)

In the Turkish version, the dialogue maintains a melodramatic undertone that turns the scene into a comic take on Hamlet's accidental murder of Polonius. The ironic tone Hamlet uses in reacting to Polonius' death, saying that he will bet a ducat to the rat if he is actually dead, is characterized by overt crudeness and ridicule in the Turkish translation: "*Aha, öldürdüm. Vallaha billaha öldürdüm*" [Aha, I killed him. Gee, I killed him, O gosh.]. Polonius' murder is ridiculed by his own words as well when he exclaims, "Aaaa, I am dead". This almost farcical effect is further reinforced by Hamlet when he waves goodbye to the dead body: "*Bye bye. Ama ben seni daha önemli biri sandım. Kaderinse çekeceksin!*" [Bye bye. But I thought you

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know not. Is it the King?/ Queen: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!/ Hamlet: A bloody deed – almost as bad, good mother,/As kill a king and marry with his brother./ Queen: As kill a king?/ Ay, lady, it was my word. [Uncovers the body of Polonius.]/-Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell:/ I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune;/ Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger./ - Leave wringing of your hands. Peace," (3.4.22-32).

were rather an important personage. You can't escape fate.]. The lack of seriousness in this scene is accompanied by the exaggerated acting style of the characters, making use of the conventions of melodrama. These choices on the part of the company are meant to overshadow theatrical authority, but they inevitably underline the company's still-valid anxiety over the figure of Shakespeare.

In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet famously manipulates his social, military, political and rhetorical skills to subvert authority, designating informality, restlessness and witticism as the manifestation of his disavowal. Whereas the rest of the characters remain constricted before Claudius, Hamlet expands both his witty rhetoric and the variety of his bodily expression throughout the play. In Moda Sahnesi's production, Hamlet achieves this effect by constantly moving within the spaces he occupies and repeatedly distracting the other characters by a variety of means, such as turning his back to the king, directly staring at the king and impatiently chasing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In almost every movement of the prince, one can trace attempts to dislocate the center of power or any interruption to his actions and thinking. These dynamics are reflected at the level of language as well. For instance, when Polonius approaches him in his usual curious and hypocritical manner, asking what the prince is reading at the moment, Hamlet's famous reply is: "Words, words, words" (Shakespeare, 2006, 2.2.189). This famous line is turned onto itself to serve as a pun on the importance and weight of the word itself in the Turkish text: *Kelimelerlikelimekilerlererlerlerkelermileler* (Ünsal & Adıyaman, 2013, p. 22) [Wordwithwordsthatsssworrrdssss]. In this case, the explicit and concise repetition of the word "word" is abstracted from the intelligibility of the textual realm and transformed into a playful medium to call attention to the anxiety non-Anglophone theatre practitioners have to face in staging a Shakespeare play. The

daunting task of mastering Shakespeare's "words" reflects the anxiety over the need to master the English language and scholarship on the play. But it also reveals how the company handles this concern, preferring to call attention to the loaded nature of the work by approaching it through mockery.

### 3.5 Moda Sahnesi's ambivalent claims

In adapting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to their local context, Moda Sahnesi frames their production with reference to the issues of collectivity, claiming public space and shattering literary and ideological narratives of authority and power. In Aydoğan's words (personal communication, June 12, 2015), "when we study the dramatic text, we are not interested in focusing on an already acknowledged reading of the play. This would mean conforming to a kind of authority". The idea of contesting literary power is paralleled in the way in which the figure of Hamlet is imagined as a politically dissenting character who stands up against the propagated "truths" of a power center that rests upon the exclusion and silencing of dissent. In this regard, Moda Sahnesi's interest in the body and motion in performance exhibits a dual function: first, to capture the frenzied, enthusiastic mobility of the surrounding Gezi Park Protests, thus wedding "locality" to the performers' bodily expressions, and second, to subvert the authority of "Shakespeare". As such, the company's approach resonates with De Grazia's (2001) remarks by portraying a Hamlet character that is far removed from "excessive meditation" as a mental state. The company thus departs from conventional Hamlet representations that associate his delay with contemplation and inaction. As a result, the company's experimentation with the body and motion not only becomes the main adapted element of local politics in the

play, but also serves as a means to interrogate the issue of adherence to textual and theatrical authority.

This theatrical and visual claim, however, does not prevent the company from turning back to Shakespeare. The company's contextual and dramaturgical choices reveal their anxiety over how to engage with "Shakespeare", a name that has come to signify cultural hegemony, political critique, and theatrical convention in the context of Turkish modernization. Moda Sahnesi prefers to wrestle with this complicated hybridity by calling attention to the immediate bodies of theatre practitioners, but also by approaching Shakespeare's canonical language in a self-deprecating manner. Ultimately, for Moda Sahnesi, to perform *Hamlet* is to organize and stand together, and just as the desired collectivity of Gezi's dissent produces tensions, so too does the political frame within which Moda Sahnesi situates *Hamlet* impose limits on their critique of authoritarianism. While recourse to Shakespeare and relevant scholarship also becomes a strategy for Moda Sahnesi to set forth a critical position against authority, it ironically suppresses their consideration of the dramatic text as an element that constitutes a theatrical production together with other variables such as the dynamics of a contemporary culture. Even as the realization of what the company imagines in this regard comes with limitations and paradoxes, the production is a significant case to draw our attention to locality through a specific emphasis on the acting body and movement.

## CHAPTER 4

### *TITUS ANDRONICUS* AS A MAGANDA TRAGEDY:

#### VIOLENCE BEGETS INDIFFERENCE

##### VIOLENCE RENDERS EVERYTHING INDIFFERENT!

So does a heart attack. The pain when you have a heart attack,  
it is nothing... (Unless you are Dead...)  
What matters is the thereafter. Your whole life...  
Wondering when it will happen again...  
While carrying my child in my arms?  
While driving with my family?  
While making love?  
Or in the bathroom...  
In the sea...?  
The pain caused by these thoughts is more violent...

How do we experience political violence as opposed to  
physical violence...  
What we try to demonstrate with Titus is the perpetual violence  
bred by political violence.  
Yes, 22 people are killed throughout the play.  
Blood, pain, outcry,  
Son, mother, father, friend...  
Soooo...

Later ?...  
Much later ?...

Heart attack?  
Violence?  
Politics !!!!! ( what is it then?)

Işıl Kasapoğlu<sup>58</sup>

In “Violence Renders Everything Indifferent”, the flier prepared for Semaver Kumpanya’s *Titus Andronicus* (2010) adaptation, the director Işıl Kasapoğlu suggests that the company aimed to highlight political violence as a continuous, anticipated experience. Kasapoğlu thinks about violence through the metaphor of a heart attack, and builds an analogy between anxiously experiencing the awareness of the possibility that one may undergo a heart attack, and the persistence of the probability of violence initiated by political power. For Kasapoğlu, it is not the

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<sup>58</sup> Kasapoğlu’s commentary is available at:  
[http://www.isilkasapoglu.com/yazi\\_yorum\\_goster.php?id=70](http://www.isilkasapoglu.com/yazi_yorum_goster.php?id=70).

painful instance of the attack itself that is violent, but the possibility of experiencing it again, as this anticipation haunts the totality of a person's existence. Similarly, political violence can strike one's life suddenly and unexpectedly, but also operate systematically, with "indifference" to the moment or the place or the person that it destroys.

Semaver Kumpanya's decision to use a heart attack as an analogy for political violence is helpful for tracing a number of ambiguities that are central to their production of *Titus Andronicus*. Importantly, the analogy equates the physical, biological experience of a single human body with the heteronomy of a body politic, and draws an analogy between the individual and society, an analogy that relies upon the figure of a "middle-class" family as representative of society as a whole. If the condition of being exposed to political violence is framed around a supposedly middle-class parent figure while driving with his family, it is rather problematic to consider political violence as operating with "indifference" to all members of society. This comparison ironically leaves aside the socioeconomic, ethnic and gender dynamics that constitute the different fractions of a society. The analogy also presupposes a hierarchical distinction between a spontaneous exposure to violence and the anxiety that develops in its aftermath. Whereas a heart attack is a medical condition, physical violence involves an act of force exerted upon a victim by a perpetrator. In *Titus Andronicus*, physical violence involves murder, mutilation, rape and beheading, not just any biological pain. Associating these acts of brutality with chest "pain" renders the perpetuation of violence commonplace and ordinary, ignores the hostility and unlawfulness of the means to exert violence, and the disparity of power between a victim and a perpetrator. The political background against which the visible acts of violence are carried out is what simultaneously causes and sustains

various forms of brutality. Of course, political violence can be a singular act, such as the spontaneous, singular events that we associate with a war or an act of terrorism, a particular instance motivated by political causes or ideologies at a given period of time and place. But political violence can also be indirect and systemic, constantly present everyday through economic structures, exploitations, patriarchy or misogyny. While the former involves the intentional use of force to inflict damage and injury, the latter is the systematic perpetuation of a certain ideology in everyday existence.

Ultimately, thinking about political violence in terms of a hierarchy between unique instances and a long-term condition, or institutional anticipation, produces an ambivalent idea of both the source of violence and the identity of sovereignty. This ambiguity emerges in Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus* in a specific way. In their adaptation, the idiom the company uses for talking about political violence is "honour killing", which works to associate this local issue and ethnically-marked gender violence with the political sovereign. My argument in this chapter is that Semaver Kumpanya's adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* alludes to traditional kinship ties in East Anatolian Turkish culture as markers of anticipated political violence, thus marginalizing the Kurdish identity as uncivilized, prone to violence and representative of oppression and patriarchy, as opposed to the modern "us". Semaver Kumpanya builds a parallelism between the revenge cycle in Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy and the issues of honour killing and gender violence in modern Turkey to present political violence as an anticipated, ever-present phenomenon. In other words, their adaptation attaches the oppressive and unjust exercise of political power and emperorship seen in Shakespeare's dramatic text to kinship ties in East Anatolian culture in Turkey. In doing this, the company's adaptation reveals tensions of representing violence in contemporary Turkish theatre making. The company's

decision to focus on an Eastern feudal ruler/patriarch figure as representative of authoritarianism disregards the fact that such a figure is part of the broader political landscape of ethnically-marked modern politics, rather than a primary marker of it. Indeed, the systematic perpetuation of political violence in modern Turkey cannot be considered as detached from governing institutions such as the law or the economy.

Although kinship ties, honor killing and gender violence are signifiers of the ever-present political violence in Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus*, they are also represented as initiators of sovereignty. In the adaptation, Titus becomes the mouthpiece of a feudal landlord figure, and also a conqueror/hero figure that the public chooses as the next ruler. Thus, he is associated with the political sovereign in the world of *Titus Andronicus*. In the Turkish context, however, "honour killing" is a very particular idiom to talk about political violence, and it works to disguise the violence of the actual sovereign power. In this adaptation, when the murders of honour committed by Titus are linked to the authority of a South Eastern landlord figure, the ethnically-marked gender violence is used as the substance of a binary opposing modernity to tradition, and thus producing a language of otherness in the play. As such, gender violence is inadvertently attached to a unique, ethnic identity and its "traditional" customs. In line with what Dicle Koğacıoğlu discusses as the "tradition effect", however, gender violence does not disappear with modernity; once it is recognized as something that is attached largely to "custom", it can only be considered within the modern/traditional duality: as opposed to the modern "us", the traditional Kurds and/or Eastern population.

Importantly, these dynamics are particularly present in the written text of *Titus Andronicus*, but they are less visible in the performance, where local references to kinship culture in south-eastern Turkey are eliminated. In this chapter, I argue that

this contradiction is a reflection of the politics of practicing adaptation in Semaver Kumpanya's local context. The company is located in Kocamustafapaşa, a historic and impoverished neighbourhood in Istanbul that is surrounded by the Byzantine walls. Since its establishment, the company has staged its productions at Çevre Tiyatrosu, a theatre venue built in Kocamustafapaşa in 1972. The venue has hosted diverse theatre companies and events since then, and became a permanent playhouse for Semaver Kumpanya in 2002. Established by the acclaimed theatre director Işıl Kasapoğlu in 2002, the company was built with the explicit purpose of having a "theatre practice on the other side of the Golden Horn". Kasapoğlu studied theatre at the Sorbonne University, and became an acclaimed theatre director over the course of his career, working intermittently in both France and Turkey,<sup>59</sup> winning many awards, and establishing several theatre companies including Semaver Kumpanya.<sup>60</sup> For the last twenty-five years of his career, Kasapoğlu has worked on Shakespeare more than any other playwright, and staged ten different plays by Shakespeare across Turkey.<sup>61</sup> By designating a relatively small and lower class neighbourhood in Kocamustafapaşa as their permanent venue, Kasapoğlu and original company members aspired to carry this theatrical legacy to Istanbul's margins, defying the hierarchical relationship between the low and high culture ideals of Republican

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<sup>59</sup> In his early career, Kasapoğlu trained in the Paris State Conservatory at the Pierre Vial Atelier, and worked as assistant to the director Mehmet Ulusoy, who established the Théâtre de Liberté in Paris in 1971 and staged plays from Bertolt Brecht, Dario Fo, Nikolai Gogol and Nazım Hikmet. Like Ulusoy, Kasapoğlu was immersed in French culture and language from an early age and built his theatrical career in France, staging both Turkish and French writers. Ulusoy's influence can be seen in Kasapoğlu's career especially in relation to his commitment to working with novel theatre practitioners in Turkey. For more biographical information and commentaries on Kasapoğlu's theatrical career, see <http://www.isilkasapoglu.com/biyografi.php>.

<sup>60</sup> Having directed over sixty plays so far, Kasapoğlu earned his reputation by staging a fairly large repertoire of Turkish and foreign playwrights, such as Sophocles, William Shakespeare, Molière, Bernard-Marie Koltès, August Strindberg, Orhan Kemal and Haldun Taner.

<sup>61</sup> Among his productions, the six-hour *Hamlet* production at the İzmit Municipal Theatre in 1997 of the whole dramatic text with no edits stands as a memorable project. This was a festival-like occasion that included live Renaissance music and feasting during the intermissions so as to entertain and keep the audiences present for this extended performance. For the newspaper commentaries on this production, see: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/yedi-saat-kesintisiz-hamlet-39272777>, [http://www.isilkasapoglu.com/basindan\\_goster.php?id=44](http://www.isilkasapoglu.com/basindan_goster.php?id=44).

modernism.

Evaluated against this background, Semaver Kumpanya's decision to utilize a problematic language of national, urban marginalization reveals the difficulties of merging social goals and aesthetic decision when adapting Shakespeare. Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus* (2010) is the first production of the play in Turkish theatre history. A stage adaptation of the translator Sinan Fişek's rewriting, it is entitled *Titus Andronicus: A Five Act Maganda Tragedy*. Fişek rewrote Shakespeare's play as a grotesque farce heavily dependant on a brutal and vulgar use of language in 1991, when he was in Paris with the director Işıl Kasapoğlu, and two decades after its completion the company worked on the translator's version, edited and staged it. This text draws an image of racial and ethnic otherness from the socio-political and cultural panorama of the 1990s, attaching the play's cycle of revenge to honour killings and gender violence, but also drawing on the figure of the *maganda*, which represents a specific idea of masculine "otherness" in the cultural imagination of the Western Turkish metropolis. When Semaver Kumpanya worked on Fişek's version, they removed the East Anatolian dialect and the titles associated with an imagined Eastern local lord, because they felt that portraying the Eastern villager as a stereotypical "other" figure involved in issues of blood feud and custom was troubling. They chose, however, to keep the allusions to honour killing and gender violence, as well as the *maganda*. In this chapter, I argue that a closer look at Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus* reveals the problematic gender politics that can plague Shakespeare adaptations in contemporary Turkey.

#### 4.1 Thinking about adaptation through *Titus Andronicus*

In Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus*, the Shakespearean canon is a flexible target that reveals the paradoxes associated with relying on Shakespeare's authority to address local, political concerns. In contrast to the earlier cases of adaptation and rewriting discussed in this dissertation, the issue of grappling with the authority of Shakespeare's legacy reveals itself quite indirectly in this adaptation. This is in part because Kasapoğlu's is the first *Titus Andronicus* production in Turkey's theatre history, and thus the company had no earlier examples of this particular play to draw on. Besides, the company worked on a rewriting of the "original", and had to negotiate Fişek's version with their own reading of the play, conducting their decisions at a remove from Shakespeare's dramatic text. As a result, the issues of fidelity and legitimacy addressed throughout the preparation process of Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası* and Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* did not come to the forefront in the decisions that Semaver Kumpanya made in preparing *Titus Andronicus*. At the same time, however, the translator Fişek acknowledges Shakespeare's legacy as he describes the process of rewriting (personal communication, February 24, 2018): "I took the characters and the plotline, and tried to stay loyal to what the play was about. But as you see, I rewrote it in a new way, and this can't be considered Shakespeare. Or maybe it can be". Here, Fişek considers rewriting as both a formulaic practice, and a thematically in-between phenomenon in the sense that it offers a new output diverging from the original while at the same time remaining suggestive of the underlying dynamics of this original. The translator's approach is reminiscent of Can Yücel's understanding of adaptation, a practice that better underlines the play's concerns and patterns.

In the case of Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus*, adaptation cannot be thought of independently from the cultural context of the company, their stated ideological goals and the relationship between the rewriting and its adaptation. Similar to the previously analysed cases of Shakespeare adaptations in Turkey, the immediate cultural and political concerns are first and foremost determinants of "adaptation" in filtering Shakespeare's original through the relevant socio-political agenda. Adaptation thus emerges as a process rather than a unilateral practice, a process akin to Kidnie's (2009) discussion of "play as process" (p. 7). Even though this process first involves the rewriting of the "original" and then the adaptation of the rewriting, the company members do not experience an anxiety over being twice removed from the Shakespearean "original", because neither Fişek nor the company members engage in Shakespeare's dramatic work as a fixed point of origin to trace an already existing meaning. Semaver Kumpanya avoids thinking of the canonical work as what Worthen calls a legitimating authority that imposes a definite and strict ground on the dynamics of adaptation. The company's decision-making process involves engagement with Shakespeare's dramatic text hand in hand with Fişek's rewriting.

Instead of turning back to "Shakespeare", Semaver Kumpanya works through its own dynamics as a company to engage in the practice of adaptation in the most productive way possible. The principles that characterize Semaver Kumpanya as an independent theatre company influence the dynamics that shape the local analogies in their *Titus Andronicus* adaptation. This approach resonates with Worthen's call to take into consideration the immediate variables shaping a performance, such as the presence of the cast members and the contemporary culture. Kasapoğlu reflects a cast-oriented approach for the adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* as he preferred the

practitioners to come up with their own reading of a scene or a character. Fişek was present at some of the rehearsals, but only as an outside observer because Kasapoğlu was against having any intervention or comment from the rewriter. Even though this cast-oriented approach reflects privileging the company members as the primary decision makers of a product, it left aside any discussion with Fişek on re-imagining a Renaissance revenge tragedy in twentieth century Turkey. The rewriter-actor relationship was excluded from the preparation process since Kasapoğlu avoided a possible hierarchy between the adaptor and the performer figures, and refused to designate the rewriter as a reference point that the company members adhered to. In turn, this kind of “authorial” intervention was carried out by the director himself, who ruled out the collaboration between the company members and the rewriter. Parallel to the complexity that Bassnett underlines for the inter-lingual translator, the rewriter’s involvement thus became subsidiary rather than a constituent in the realization of the performance.

Ultimately, Kasapoğlu and the company members pulled three factors to the forefront as defining principles of their theatre practice: collaboration, bringing theatre to the margins and eliminating/avoiding the hierarchical distinction between high and low culture theatricality in modern Turkey. When we look at the way they negotiated these ideals with the issues of political violence, honour killing and gender violence in *Titus Andronicus*, there are several complexities reflected in their adaptation, which are observed through the process of decision-making and the representation of cultural communities and women in the play. In this chapter, my analysis of Semaver Kumpanya’s *Titus Andronicus* draws on the discourse surrounding the preparation and actualization of the production by the company members, the limited documentation of the actual stage production and Fişek’s

rewriting of Shakespeare's revenge tragedy as a farce. Given the limited recording of the production, my analysis of the actual stage performance focuses on visual and verbal representations of sexuality, gender and "otherness" with a specific focus on the language of vulgarity. In the absence of certain kinds of archives, to evaluate the way that Semaver Kumpanya approaches *Titus Andronicus* as an adaptation involved in the aforementioned issues, we need to consider this case as a process and look at the ideas that the company members and the translator associated with the dramatic text. A closer look at the scholarship on violence and politics in *Titus Andronicus* clarifies the contextual and verbal alterations and additions made to Shakespeare's dramatic text, as well as their relation to the way the director integrated locality in to the production.

#### 4.2 *Titus Andronicus* scholarship

The decisions and negotiations that permeate Semaver Kumpanya's process of producing *Titus Andronicus* parallel the key questions that have arisen in scholarship on the production history of the play. The stylistic and thematic negotiations that the company make in working on Shakespeare's earliest and bloodiest tragedy are primarily about revenge tragedy as a political form, the representation of violence on the modern stage and the comic effect resulting from the abundance of grotesque moments and language in the play. For Semaver Kumpanya, revenge tragedy is a political form that they work on to explore the consequences of anticipated violence. They approach the thematic concerns of the revenge tragedy through the idiom of "honour killing," a concept that automatically signals "traditional" communal ties. Thus, their adaptation is a communal reading of the revenge tragedy in the Turkish context. Whereas the company aims to criticize sovereign power, they isolate an

ethnic community as the ultimate signifier of revenge and political violence. Semaver Kumpanya compares the iteration of bloodshed and grotesque moments in the revenge tragedy with the abundance of violent crime news, such as rape and murder, in contemporary Turkey. The farcical effect prevalent in Fişek's rewriting serves to underline the pervasiveness of political violence in the lives of the characters, especially women; in the adaptation the brutal, vulgar and misogynistic discourse appears as an extension of physical violence. Thus, the company takes the comic effect created by the grotesque in the revenge tragedy as a signifier of absurdity.

*Titus Andronicus*<sup>62</sup> is one of Shakespeare's least staged plays even though it was quite successful during the playwright's lifetime, cementing an already established reputation. *Titus Andronicus* is a revenge tragedy that revolves around issues of violence, cannibalism, gender, race and political power. The renowned Roman general Titus, who has lost twenty-one of his twenty-five sons in battle, returns victorious from war against the Goths with Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, her sons, and Aaron the Moor as his prisoners. Titus has Tamora's eldest son killed brutally as a sacrifice to the spirits of his dead sons, and Tamora vows revenge. In the meantime, the brothers Saturninus and Bassianus engage in a dispute over the Roman imperial crown, but Titus is nominated emperor by his brother Marcus, who informs them that the Romans prefer Titus as the next Emperor. Declining this offer, Titus grants the title to Saturninus, who in gratitude asks to have Titus's daughter Lavinia as his empress. As Lavinia is already pledged to Bassianus, conflict arises and Saturninus makes Tamora as his empress. Tamora's sons avenge their mother by raping and mutilating Lavinia, and killing Bassianus. In return, Titus sends his

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<sup>62</sup> The earliest recorded reference to the play dates back to late sixteenth century. For more on this and the print history of the play, see Jonathan Bate's "Introduction" in *Titus Andronicus*, The Arden Shakespeare (1995).

surviving son Lucius to the Goths to raise an army to avenge Tamora. He kills and cooks Tamora's sons, serves them up to her at a banquet, and then kills her. As Titus is then killed by Saturninus, Lucius avenges his father's murder and becomes the next emperor.

Semaver Kumpanya approaches the action-driven revenge cycle of the sub-genre as a political context to talk about anticipated violence. The repetitive, grotesque violence is among the formulaic elements of the Renaissance revenge tragedy, and the company regards the cycle of revenge in *Titus Andronicus* itself as a manifestation and an extension of political violence rather than a mere stage convention. This approach is very much in line with the twentieth-century scholarly resurgence in viewing *Titus Andronicus* as a critique of political power and social institutions as opposed to the centuries-long disavowal of the play as evidence of dramatic failure. In this regard, anachronism haunts the criticism of *Titus Andronicus*. Since its initial publication in 1594, the play has been a problematic text for both scholarly and theatrical circles, particularly in relation to its place within the larger framework of the revenge tragedy genre. Even though *Titus Andronicus* exhibits common elements of the sub-genre, the spontaneity of the grotesque killings in the play, and the frequency with which rape, mutilation, chopped-off and cooked limbs occur therein, have led to a centuries-long disavowal of the play as a problematic and amateurish text presumably written by Shakespeare in his early years as a dramatist. In eighteenth century literary criticism, for example, the play was commonly regarded as one of bad taste, and for centuries it was either unwelcomed as part of the Shakespearean canon, "being unworthy of its author's genius, or vilified as a terrible aberration committed perhaps as a concession to the tastes of barbarous audiences" (Wells, 1997, p. 206). S. T. Coleridge, for instance,

famously condemned the play as “obviously intended to excite vulgar audiences by its scenes of blood and horror” (1971, p. 132). In a similar vein, T. S. Eliot famously referred to *Titus Andronicus* as “one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written” (1999, p. 82).

These discussions around authorship and literary taste typically feature a comparison between *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*, another revenge tragedy, which has been applauded as the epitome of Shakespeare’s dramatic genius. The reason *Hamlet* is celebrated as both dramatic literature and philosophical text is because it binds the violent actions of the revenge sub-genre to human interiority. *Titus Andronicus* in contrast seems like a formulaic, action-driven drama since it keeps the violent events themselves on the forefront. Such criticism is anachronistic and reductionist because within the boundaries of a more classical revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* is relatively standard whereas *Hamlet* plays with the common elements of the sub-genre and stands out as unconventional for Renaissance audiences and dramatists.

The classification of certain late Elizabethan and early Jacobean plays as revenge tragedies is itself a twentieth century phenomenon that groups together the recurring thematic issues and stylistic elements observed in popular plays of blood and gore such as Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*<sup>63</sup>. According to records, *The Spanish Tragedy* was performed 29 times in the 1590s and set the stage for Shakespeare’s most famous revenge tragedy, *Hamlet*, which is equally strewn with

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<sup>63</sup> In 1902, A. H. Thorndike used the term “revenge tragedy” as an umbrella term for plays that revolve around a cycle of killings motivated by an initial act of revenge. Modelled on Senecan revenge plays, the English revenge tragedy displays common elements such as murder and crimes committed against the protagonist who seeks justice through revenge. Oftentimes, a vengeful ghost reveals the events to the protagonist and urges him to take immediate violent action against an actual or supposed injustice. The revenge plot also includes the growing insanity of the protagonist, who usually ends up dead, along with the main characters in a cycle of revenge killings that composes the main action of the play.

dead bodies<sup>64</sup>. The scholarly discussion surrounding revenge tragedy as a term and what it encapsulates in terms of thematic issues is linked to the political and social concerns of the Shakespearean era, as the subgenre developed during a period when drama was a public event where audiences were not only entertained, but also provided with a set of questions regarding political power, corruption, usurpation and authority. In this vein, *Titus Andronicus*, though packed with bloody acts of revenge when compared to *Hamlet*, a play whose main driving force is the reasoning and argumentation surrounding the impending act of revenge, still offers us a set of issues relating to the political and social environs set in the play. As Derek Dunne (2016) suggests in his *Shakespeare, Revenge Tragedy and Early Modern Law*, the chain of events involved in a revenge tragedy, no matter how singular or individually driven they may seem at first glance, are always already part of a wider political and social context:

Real life revenge may spring from an intensely personal motivation, but in the early modern theatre, revenge tends to be more public than private, in the dual sense of a public act as well as being performed for a paying public. It is readily apparent that the plots of revenge plays depend on kinship ties of obligation and reciprocity, as in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, or *The Tragedy of Hoffman*. But these plots also encompass wider political action, when characters unite to depose a corrupt or tyrannical ruler, as is the case with *Titus Andronicus*, *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*. This shift in perspective, from individual to community, can be used to transform how we read these plays, by seeing revenge not as a personal duty, but as a political, participatory act carried out by a group of citizens in opposition to the powers that be. The obvious point that regicide is political has long been recognized, yet surprisingly this has not given rise to the idea that revenge tragedy is critiquing social institutions in any serious way. (p. 5)

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<sup>64</sup> For more, see: Fredson Bowers's *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587-1642*. New Jersey: Princeton, 1940. Alan C. Dessen's *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984. Paul Innes looks at extreme violence on the Elizabethan stage as a generic requirement in "Titus Andronicus and the Violence of Tragedy", *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*. 1:1, Spring 2012, pp. 27-48. Liberty Stanavage and Paxton Hehmeyer, eds. *Titus Out of Joint: Reading the Fragmented Titus Andronicus*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. Lawrence N. Danson's "The Device of Wonder: *Titus Andronicus* and Revenge Tragedies", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. 16.1, Spring 1974, pp. 27-43.

For Dunne, revenge tragedy as a sub-genre, whether it revolves around kinship ties or broader political actions, is by definition interested in commenting on authority and social institutions. Instead of isolating the issues embedded in one example or another, the critic evaluates Elizabethan revenge tragedies along with their common involvement with political power. Rather than taking *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy that retrospectively provides a critical outlook on *Titus Andronicus*, Dunne considers both plays in relation to other revenge tragedies within the larger framework of the sub-genre and its inseparable relation to politics. The kind of political statement possible in *Titus Andronicus* is that the iteration of violence, marked by the persistence of the dismemberment of body parts, calls attention to the act of revenge as well as the way it is enacted, individually and/or communally. For Dunne, focusing solely on the individual experience of the revenger prevents one from seeing the collective, political consequences of violence. That Semaver Kumpanya deals with political violence as an issue that implicates not just individuals, but entire communities resonates with Dunne's call to consider the violence of revenge tragedy as a communal issue. But, their adaptation of the communal reading of the play leaves us with a set of paradoxes and stereotypes because the company's idiom for political violence, honour killing, makes it seem as though the ethnic community in which it takes place is guilty of the violence implicated in individual acts of brutality. In the Turkish context, when the idea of communal violence is adapted to the idiom of honour killing and gender violence, it turns into the tradition effect, marginalizing the community itself as a stereotype, a rendition of violent masculinity and crime rather than an opposition to sovereign power.

The spontaneous and grotesque violence featured in *Titus Andronicus* was among the reasons the company chose to stage the play almost twenty years after

Fişek rewrote it (personal communication, February 24, 2018). When Kasapoğlu introduced the play to several theatre companies in Turkey in the 1990s, it was not welcomed due to its extensive use of stage effects and vulgar language, as well as the budget it required for the production. Kasapoğlu's decision to include *Titus Andronicus* in his repertoire of Shakespeare adaptations resonates with global trends because the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a rising interest in re-evaluating the play not just in Anglo-American theatres, but in many different parts of the world.<sup>65</sup> Since this adaptation is the first production of *Titus Andronicus* in Turkey, it relates to the international resurgence in reconsidering Shakespeare's earliest revenge tragedy in relation to the issues of violence and realism on the modern stage.

The scholarly discussion surrounding *Titus Andronicus*'s violence is often anachronistic as well. The question of violence in the play revolves around thematic and generic issues regarding grotesque and verbal violence, as well as illusionism and comedy. Unlike twentieth-century concerns with extreme violence on stage, bloodshed, murder, battle scenes and duels were vital parts of public entertainment on the Renaissance stage. As F. Bowers (1940) suggests in his study of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, the Elizabethan audience that "attended public executions as an amusement was used to the sight of blood and would scarcely flinch from it on stage. Rather, he would demand it, for he was keenly interested in murders for any other motive than simple robbery" (p. 16). In a similar vein, the critic Paul Innes (2012) evaluates the use of extreme violence on the Elizabethan stage with a focus on the dramatic conventions at the time. "Such extreme violence is a generic requirement

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<sup>65</sup> On this subject, see P. C. Kolin's "Titus Andronicus and the Critical Legacy", the Guardian review "Titus Andronicus in South Africa, 1970: Bard Shock Capetown", Qiping Xu's *Titus Andronicus in China, 1986*, Yoshiko Kawachi's "Titus Andronicus in Japan" in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays*, P. C. Kolin (Ed.). New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1995.

for tragedy on the Elizabethan stage,” Innes notes, as “it has nothing to do with the tragic awareness of the protagonist. The very concept is alien to Shakespeare’s stage precisely because it is not an element of tragedy in his period” (p. 31). Alan C. Dessen (1989) looks at different strategies that have been used to cope with the discomfort caused by the extent of violence in the text, such as stylizing the grotesque moments, cutting them, or representing them realistically. *Titus Andronicus* hardly appeared on stage until the second half of the twentieth century, when Peter Brook’s 1955 production starring Laurence Olivier earned great success and praise (Dessen, pp. 1-7). At the time, Dessen notes, most critics approved of Brook’s decision to eliminate or stylize the visual representation of violence and blood. For instance, Brook used red ribbons instead of realistic representations of blood to portray Lavinia after her rape and mutilation (pp. 20-23).

Semaver Kumpanya’s *Titus Andronicus* revisits the Renaissance stage conventions of having extreme and grotesque brutality on stage, since the company did not stylize the scenes of bloodshed in the play. In an interview, the lead actor Serkan Keskin points out that the company members worked in detail to create realistic replicas of Titus’s chopped-off hand and the heads he ordered to be slaughtered (Traşın, 2010). It is important to note at this point that there is a tendency among Anglo-American theatre practitioners in the twentieth century to compare the spectacle of violence in the play to contemporary culture and media. In Dessen’s work, a common, global theme in the approaches of directors and practitioners to *Titus Andronicus* is to mention the extent of violence seen on TV as a rationale for either turning back to *Titus Andronicus* today or expecting a lessened audience reaction to the brutality on stage. The actors Serkan Keskin and Sarp Aydınoglu use a similar logic when pointing out that some audience members criticized the

production because of the violence and swearing seen on stage. The actors remark that verbal and physical violence are part of the everyday reality on TV, and that the everyday news cycle is often more violent than what is represented on stage.

Semaver Kumpanya evaluates, in other words, the violence visible in contemporary media as a contemporary equivalent of the spectacle of violence witnessed during the Renaissance.

Finally, Semaver Kumpanya's interest in highlighting the absurdity of ever-present violence in *Titus Andronicus* resonates with critical discussions on the undesirable potential of the grotesque moments in the play to create comic effects. Even though the company did not promote their production as a farce, they made use of the overall farcical effect created by the translator Fişek to serve as an extension of the anticipated violence they aimed to portray. On this issue, Dessen points out that the overall anxiety of theatre practitioners has been over avoiding unwanted laughter in staging *Titus Andronicus*, unless they consciously decide to evoke dark comedy (1989, p. 112). The critic Richard T. Brucher (1979) evaluates the comic effect of some violent scenes in the play as a conscious choice to hinder conventional moral expectations and suggests that the form of violence in the play that achieves this is "shocking in its expression of power and evil, and yet so outrageous in its conception and presentation that it causes laughter as it disrupts our sense of order in the world" (p. 73). The critic Douglas H. Parker (1987) responds to this issue by shifting the focus to Shakespeare's use of certain elements of comedy rather than tracing the comic effects in the play. For Douglas, the playwright makes use of conventions of comedy such as the banquet scene and the romantic rural environment to intensify the tragic effect of the play (p. 487).

Ultimately, the concerns over the potentially funny effect of violence would not have been considered a hindrance for dramatic effect on the Renaissance stage, a far cry from the techniques associated with modern realism, since stage conventions at the time entailed the audience's acknowledgement of the performance as spectacle rather than an expectation of realism in the modern sense. As Andrew Gurr (1970) notes, Renaissance stage realism was a complex issue, as it involved the different dynamics that resulted from the different stagecrafts of the sixteenth century:

Without the proscenium-arch to separate players from audience, as it has generally been done since the Restoration, the presentation of illusion as reality was inevitably more complicated. The players were closer for one thing, in the midst of the audience, and lacked the facilities for presenting the pictorial aspects of illusion because they were appearing in three dimensions, not the two which the proscenium-arch picture-frame establishes. Awareness of the illusion as illusion was therefore much closer to the surface all the time. (p. 118)

According to Gurr's assessment of Renaissance stage realism, given the audience's understanding of "illusion as illusion," avoiding unwanted laughter, which has the potential to reverse a desired tragic effect, would not have been a point of concern. Moreover, as Gurr further suggests, Renaissance stage realism was closely linked with spectacle, and with stage business and effects. For instance, it is known that Renaissance stagecraft involved bladders or sponges of vinegar concealed in actors' armpits and squeezed to produce the semblance of blood (p. 120). Such simple realistic devices were intended to enhance the spectacle of violence, in Gurr's words, they were "designed to intensify the inherent comedy or tragedy of its occasion": "When the bad bleeds' as Vindice says in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, then is the Tragedie good" (p. 121). Anxiety surrounding the potentially funny effect of violence emerged as a twentieth century phenomenon formed anachronistically around modern realism's concern with verisimilitude; extreme violence for the sixteenth century audience was an expected element of tragedy whether it produced

laughter or not.

The farcical effect the translator Fişek aimed at creating is also linked to a larger question posed by the scholarship as to the relationship between violent action and verbal violence in *Titus Andronicus*. Fişek (personal communication, February 24, 2018) remarks that he was overwhelmed by the extent of violence in relation to the play's central themes, and that he preferred to rewrite the play as a grotesque farce by highlighting an elaborate use of swearing throughout the text. On the subject of verbal choices in the play, the critic Jean-Pierre Maquerlot (1998) reminds us that the figurative language on and of violence is a crucial part of why the play has caused great controversy over the years, since the verbal cruelty provides the literalization of the terrifying grotesque in the play (pp. 47-48). On this issue, Albert H. Tricomi (2004) points out that the figurative language in the dramatic text imitates the dreadful events so as to depict the horrors of the revenge tragedy:

By shackling the metaphoric imagination to the literal reality of the play's events, the tragedy strives for an unrelieved concentration of horrific effect. Through its prophetic allusions to physical dismemberment, its incurably literalized figures of speech, and its ambitious use of the stage as a dramatic metaphor, *Titus Andronicus* strives to exhaust the language as well as the events of tragedy. (p. 237)

For Tricomi, exhausting language as well as the body maintains constant attentiveness to the gruesome revenge cycle in the play, and the verbal markers of violence incessantly point to the unbearable images of brutality, such as mutilation, in our imagination. In what follows, I will show that this understanding of figurative language as performative in *Titus Andronicus* is very much relevant to Semaver Kumpanya's adaptation since the extensively brutal and vulgar use of language emerges as an extension of the broader concern with violence in the production.

#### 4.3 Semaver Kumpanya's paradox

As the close reading of the text will soon reveal, Semaver Kumpanya's production poses a number of problems that are central to the process of adapting Shakespearean drama. On the one hand, the stated ideals of Semaver Kumpanya are having a culture of collectivity and collaboration as a company, and providing equal access to theatre. Rather than assuming the role of mediators of culture and literacy, it is important for the company members to not be perceived as undertakers of a cultural mission to transfer high culture. Kasapoğlu's understanding of accessibility is not only about neighbourliness, but also about embracing young and promising theatre practitioners and students from all backgrounds (Akyol, 2003). On the other hand, Semaver Kumpanya's call to bringing theatre to the margins would presuppose a hierarchical relationship between the practitioners and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, one that would deem the latter as "uncultivated". This conflict arises in relation to the marginalizing idioms that their adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* revolves around: the *maganda* stereotype and honour killing, both of which become exclusionary gestures especially to the immediate audience of the company. Adapting Shakespearean drama to a familiar local idiom, in other words, automatically triggers questions as to which "local" is being hailed.

In his rewriting, Fişek uses the *maganda* figure as a derogatory reference point suggesting an uncivilized and sexually overt masculinity, which he links to South Eastern traditions and kinship ties in Turkey. Fişek's choice recalls what Ayşe Öncü (2002) examines in relation to the urban narrative of the invasion of Istanbul by "outsiders". The anthropologist looks at several connotations of the word *maganda* in the cultural discourse of Istanbul following the 1970s and connects these meanings to the rapidly increasing immigration to Western metropolises at the time.

For Öncü, the *maganda* is “a derogatory label and a stereotype which condenses and connotes an array of socially and morally offensive attributes into a single typification” (p. 172). This typification is first and foremost associated with a sexually abusive, foul-mouthed and rude male figure lacking decorum in private and public spaces. This figure is closely in line with the urban narrative of the “outsider” coming and contaminating the middle-class culture of Istanbul:

To the extent that the label *maganda* is valorised in public discourse by invoking such familiar metaphors as invasion, siege and assault, it becomes part of a continuing narrative whose basic storyline is fairly simple –yet another wave of ‘outsiders’ who threaten to undermine the civility of Istanbul’s cultural life . . . Their [outsiders] propensity to cross the boundaries of their territorial enclaves (low-income neighbourhoods) to encroach upon public spaces of city life (marked by mainstream middle-class culture) is what makes the *maganda* dangerous. As such, the cultural sonorities of the epithet *maganda* are simultaneously racial, gendered and spatial (p. 186).

Here, Öncü remarks that “outsiders” were considered a threat to the civility of Istanbul’s cultural life, which is largely associated with central venues such as Taksim, Beşiktaş and Kadıköy. Marginal districts like Semaver Kumpanya’s Kocamustafapaşa, on the other hand, have been “the territorial enclaves” of the outsiders migrating to Istanbul. Semaver Kumpanya’s decision to plant themselves in Kocamustafapaşa is a gesture of neighbourliness that is meant to bridge such divides, but their decision to stage a *maganda* tragedy in this cultural environment can nonetheless be interpreted as an exclusionary choice. Aside from the title of the adaptation, *Titus Andronicus: A Five Act Maganda Tragedy*, the remaining excerpts of the performance reveal that the otherizing *maganda* representation is evoked in the production. The grotesque and violent atmosphere is reflected on stage primarily through images of an underground culture that are suggestive of the outskirts of the city. In the production, dark, metallic, rotten imagery of pipes and chains deem the “territorial enclaves” as dangerous and criminal.

Furthermore, in *Titus Andronicus*, honor killing comes forth into view in relation to kinship ties, marriage and rape as Lavinia is regarded as a stain on Titus's honor not only when she desires to marry someone of her choice, but also when she is raped and mutilated. If honour killing is the company's example of continuous violence, it is important to look briefly at how honour killing as a political discourse operates in Turkey and what the company's choices reveal about how they perceive this multi-layered phenomenon. Honor killing is oftentimes defined as the murder of a female family member by male family member(s) or acquaintances in patriarchal societies. The murders are allegedly committed in the name of honor and morality codes, condemning the victims for supposedly bringing dishonour to the family due to their sexual behaviour.<sup>66</sup> For perpetrators of honour crimes, female sexual behaviour damages the honour of the family or public morality if one has an extramarital relationship, demands or gets a divorce, has sex before marriage or at times, is even raped. As Ayşe Parla (2001) points out, "the woman's status as virgin, non-virgin, or married plays a significant role in how a crime against her is interpreted. So powerful is the identification of girls and virgins that girl is linguistically iconic with virgin" (p. 79). Parla's analysis of virginity examinations in Turkey sheds light upon the gender normative and discriminative language surrounding honour killing; the critic reminds us that women are victimized in the discourse of honour killing as well as by being categorized according to their sexuality at the outset. Damaging "honour" implies the framing of women as dishonourable, wrongful, transgressive, improper and/or impure. The list of derogatory remarks goes on as such in cases of rape as well.

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<sup>66</sup> For more on this subject, see: Dicle Koğacıoğlu's "Knowledge, Practice, and Political Community: The Making of the 'Custom' in Turkey", *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 22:1 and Ayşe Parla's "The "Honor" of the State: Virginity Examinations in Turkey". *Feminist Studies*, 27: 1. Spring, 2001.

In discussing the relevance of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* to our day, the actors Sarp Aydınoglu and Serkan Keskin recount their experience of hearing about a violent honour-killing incident, the Bilge Köyü Murders (Traşın, 2010).<sup>67</sup> As in the case of Kasapoğlu's commentary on the play, the men, women and children slaughtered in Bilge Köyü were part of a cycle of revenge murders committed as honour crimes. Even though this brutal incident is not reflected on stage, it constitutes an important part of how the company imagined honor killing as a form of pervasive violence that is rooted particularly in kinship ties and is visible mostly in rural cultures. On this issue, Parla suggests that approaching codes of behaviour related to honor and guilt as essential parts of rural, traditional communities in the Turkish context overlooks the nation-state's preoccupation with virginity and proper female behaviour that were also part of Republican modernization projects.

Occasionally, the press will cover news of what are called "revenge killings," instances when a stain on the family honor leads to the murder of the offender as well as the woman he has raped or had an affair with by an appointed male member of the "wronged" family. Like the minister for Women's Affairs, who refuses to compare what she calls traditional forms of revenge with the punishments enacted by the rule of law, many of her allegedly progressive opponents wish to relegate such incidents to the more backward, traditional parts of Anatolia, or to the urban fringes populated by migrants. It seems to me that such attempts at geographical and conceptual containment—they only occur there, perpetrated by those people—partake in the conflation of identity and space, and reflect the wishful expulsion of the unsavory to the brims of what is vindicated as the civilized, the modern. Such distancing makes it possible to overlook the disquieting correspondences between acts condemned as barbaric and the logic of the legal structures. (p. 78)

Ultimately, Parla underlines that gender violence is not limited to custom, but is very much about modernity as well, institutionalized through the legal system in Turkey.

Here, the critic also emphasizes how people from different layers and/or ethnic

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<sup>67</sup> In 2009, 44 people were killed during an engagement ceremony in the Bilge village of the city of Mardin, a historic city in South Eastern Turkey populated predominantly by Kurdish people. At least two masked attackers assailed the ceremony with grenades and guns, and opened fire on the crowd without considering whom they were aiming at. See <https://bianet.org/english/crisis/114290-attack-at-village-engagement-in-southeast-turkey-kills-44>.

backgrounds of society are condemned as “uncivilized” and more inclined to resort to violence. The Bilge Köyü Murders is a case that can easily be labelled “uncivilized” and “barbarous” when evaluated through the lens of the modern/traditional dichotomy. Semaver Kumpanya’s ideal of bringing theatre to the margins and yet their representation of *maganda* culture and honour killing with reference to South Eastern kinship, which inevitably highlight the rural culture as a startling case of ever-present, repetitive violence, point to the paradoxes of inclusivity in Turkey.

The Semaver Kumpanya case study is also unique in the context of this dissertation, because it points to a radically different approach to questions of diversity and multiculturalism in the Turkish context than those examined in previous chapters. In Can Yücel’s *Bahar Noktası*, BGST’s *Kim Var Orada?* and the discourse surrounding Moda Sahnesi’s *Hamlet*, Turkey’s non-Muslim history is often evoked as a language for debating contemporary political fault lines and artists’ emancipatory struggles. Conversely, in *Titus Andronicus*, veiled references to ethnic otherness function to perpetuate a series of dominant cultural exclusions, and leave artists with a messy socio-political message.

#### 4.4 Fişek’s rewriting and Semaver Kumpanya’s adaptation

As previously argued, Semaver Kumpanya looks at the conflict over the throne, familial disagreement and gender violence in *Titus Andronicus* through the lenses of honour killing and *maganda* culture. Along with these major local filters, a mixture of lingual and gestic references to modern Turkish politics, contemporary culture and South Eastern tradition is present on the stage. These include references to the historical language of the Turkish Left, grotesque costumes combining references to

the military and village life, and grotesque stage props mixing an imaginary underground culture with futuristic images.

The issues of political conflict and the violence preceding and following it are presented at the outset when Titus Andronicus returns glorious from war against the Goths. The victory of war is overshadowed by the possibility of a civil war between the sons of the late emperor as the Romans choose to have Titus as their next emperor instead of one of the legitimate heirs to the throne: “Know that the people of Rome, for whom we stand/ A special party, have by common voice/ In election for the Roman empery/ Chosen Andronicus, surnamed Pius/ For many good and great deserts to Rome” (Shakespeare, 2009, 1.1.20-24). Fişek’s rewriting revolves around the same strife as the text opens with Marcus announcing the emperorship of Titus while Saturninus and Bassianus, the two heirs to the deceased emperor, argue over their rights to the throne. The way Fişek rewrites this scene exemplifies his interest in replacing the elevated language of the play with a vulgar discourse, one that aims to create a farcical, absurd effect. In Shakespeare’s dramatic text, the heirs’ meticulous articulation of their claim to the throne and their political cause are represented through a language embellished with pompousness and a detailed argumentation fit for the Roman code of *pietas*, as alluded to by Titus’s surname Pius. This decorum and respect for imperial power and its representatives is stripped of its seriousness in Fişek’s rewriting, as the play opens with Marcus addressing the Romans to announce the election day in an unserious and discourteous manner:

*Marcus:*  
Gather around you dickheads  
It is the election day for emperorship  
Sons of the deceased chief  
Saturninus (*with his followers on the right*) and Bassianus (*from the left*)  
The greatest candidates for the supreme duty

*Saturninus:*

It is what the custom demands, the blood tie,  
Emperorship is my right!

*Bassianus:*

There is no such thing anymore, you out-dated cow!  
Now we have democracy in this country!

*Marcus:*

Keep on gibbering, you fools!  
It's done, the self-sacrificing, relentless hero Titus  
Has already conquered the hearts of the public!  
The rest is nothing but talk! (Fişek, p. 2)

In the above conversation, we see that the elevated language of the Shakespearean text is replaced with vulgar colloquialisms, a fact further underlined by Marcus's comment that "the rest is nothing but talk!" as the public prefers Titus to ascend the throne. Given that the power of political rhetoric is thus invalidated, Saturninus and Bassianus, the heirs to the throne, do not engage in a lengthy argumentative speech. Whereas Marcus addresses the heirs as "Princes, that strive by factions and by friends/ Ambitiously for rule and empery" (2009, 1.1.18-19) in Shakespeare's dramatic text, the translator empties out the authority signified by the titles by referring to them as nothing but "dickheads" before their followers.

This scene also hints at the idea of *töre* ("custom") that Fişek traces in the text. He replaces the issue of primogeniture and royal rights in Shakespeare's dramatic text with dynamics of *töre* ("custom") in Turkish culture, signaling the oft-referenced undercurrents of patriarchal village life prevalent in Eastern Turkey. In the above excerpt, Saturninus remarks that this is what the "custom" demands, making use of the Turkish word *töre* both in the written text and the performance to clarify that he is the legitimate heir. In its broadest sense, *töre* represents a code of morals and conduct that regulates public and private behaviour, and gender dynamics in a strictly patriarchal tradition. Here, "custom" brings along loaded associations

relating to the socio-political dynamics of Turkish patriarchal culture. Just like honour killing, the term “custom” is oftentimes used to pinpoint the southern regions of Turkey and Kurdish identity as the primary authors of honor-driven and customary crimes. In her work on representation of honour killings in Turkey, Dicle Koğacıoğlu (2011) looks at the array of social and political discourses on honour crimes such as news items, political party programs and films, and evaluates the indeterminacy of the term “custom”:

Honor crimes are presented as if they stand in and of themselves. Indeed, the recent excessive circulation of the term *custom* underlines this imagined discontinuity between patriarchal practices that lead to honor crimes and other practices. The prevalence of this term over the last five years, increasingly signifying the normative social order mainly of Kurds, presents a change from its earlier usage, synonymous with the term *tradition*. “Murderous custom at work,” “victim of gossip and custom,” or “one look is enough for the custom” are some of the examples of how honor killings are reported. (p. 177)

Crimes related to *töre* (“custom”) have a close connection to honour killing, and they are alternately labeled “murders of tradition”, “crimes of custom” or “customary killings”. These terms are sometimes used alternately in the place of honour killing because they are commonly regarded as crimes caused by codes of honor. Yet, Koğacıoğlu calls attention to the increase in the circulation of the word “custom” to designate Kurdish culture as the embodiment of honour crimes. In a similar vein, Nükhet Sirman (2014) looks at the socio-political connotations of “custom” in Turkish culture when compared to “honour”.

In Turkey, honour is seen as part and parcel of the integrity of a human being and therefore perfectly compatible with individuality and modernity. Custom (*töre*) by contrast, is what is seen as traditional. In other words, Turkish society, with its legal apparatus, social services, media and police force applies the discourse the west uses to otherize the east, to its own east, the Kurds. (p. 5)

The critic stresses the fact that when “custom” is compared to “honour”, the former functions strictly as an alienating tool in legal as well as social discourses that represent Kurdish identity as “secondary”, “illiterate”, “uncivilized” and “dangerous” compared to the so-called “modern”, “western”, “urban” individuality characterizing the citizens of the Turkish nation-state. This opposition reveals itself in the previous excerpt when Bassianus opposes Saturninus’s reliance on “custom”, and reminds him of democracy. Insulting his brother as an “out-dated cow”, Bassianus recognizes political turmoil as attached to “custom” and opposes it to its “modern” counterpart, democracy: “Now we have democracy in this country!” (Fişek, p. 2). Here, the issue of democracy is disclosed as a temporal reference to contemporary Turkey, signalling the issue that a leftist understanding of modern politics appears as a sterilized institution that stands at a distance from that which is traditional and deemed underdeveloped.

As mentioned earlier, this strategy to identify political violence by juxtaposing the modern and the traditional is revealed in Fişek’s decision to use the *maganda* figure. Parallel to this, Semaver Kumpanya relies on this dynamic to evoke uncivilized and unrefined masculinity, in this instance characterizing Saturninus. The conversation between Marcus, Saturninus and Bassianus is performed in a deliberately informal and discourteous manner as the actors articulate the lines as consecutive, absurd statements (see Figure 4). Performed without any addition or change, this opening scene presents a discourteous and nonchalant treatment of political conflict, exposing both political parties (Saturninus and Bassianus) as comic, clueless versions of rulers.



Figure 4. (from the left) Marcus, Saturninus, Titus, Bassianus, Lavinia

In Fişek’s rewriting, a modern, daily language prevails over the totality of the text, and the Southeastern dialect mostly emerges in instances where kinship titles are used. For instance, Titus is oftentimes addressed as *buba*, the Turkish version of the word father, *baba*, with a specific Eastern dialect, which is meant to generate a stereotypical *agha* (local landowner) image in the imagination of the reader/audience. We especially see this when Titus agrees to give Lavinia’s hand in marriage to the now emperor Saturninus, who addresses Titus as *buba* as well. Fişek prefers to cut this scene and remove any references to Titus’s image as a commander and master of his household, only to keep his presence as a father. In Shakespeare’s dramatic text, on the other hand, the status of being a “father” is one of the many significant titles Titus carries. Whereas Saturninus’s decision to marry Lavinia is a noble and royal gesture performed to reward Titus as an honourable and courageous commander in Shakespeare’s text, the way Saturninus articulates this gesture in the rewriting shows that this scene is reduced to a mere matrimonial decision, a formality:

*Saturninus:*

Good job! He turned out to be man enough! Yes!

I will do a quick favour Titus.

By the long-drawn-out command of God and the word of the prophet

I seek your daughter's hand in marriage

She would at least lead a life in a palace.

*Titus:*

It's done!

*Saturninus:*

Father! Now I am delighted! (Fişek, p. 6)

Here, we see that Saturninus's long-winded speech that accompanies his kingly gesture, marking the beginning of an important alliance in Shakespeare's dramatic text, is drastically condensed into a modern daily language that turns the scene into an absurd and farcical moment. In this way, the initiation of a royal marriage, making Lavinia the royal mistress of Rome, becomes almost a vile deal between two males- Saturninus and Titus. Saturninus's act of repayment to Titus to "advance thy [his] name and honourable family" (Shakespeare, 2009, 1.1.238-39) turns into a "quick favour" done to award Titus, who turns out to be "man enough." In a similar manner, Titus's reply, "it's done," is the swift affirmation given by Titus to this offer whereas in Shakespeare's text we see Titus conscientiously articulating his response to this act of regal kindness:

*Titus:* [...]

my worthy lord, in this match

I hold me highly honoured of your grace,

And here in sight of Rome to Saturnine,

King and commander of our commonweal,

The wide world's emperor, do I consecrate

My sword, my chariot, and my prisoners,

Presents well worthy Rome's imperious lord:

Receive them then, the tribute that I owe,

Mine honour's ensigns humbled at thy feet. (1.1.244-52)

In the above excerpt, the prenuptial agreement appears as an exchange between Saturninus and Titus, whose presence as a father is overshadowed by his status as a

commander and a master. In exchange for the honour granted to him by Saturninus's demand of betrothal, Titus offers his commitment to the new emperor's reign, dedicating his sword, chariot and prisoners to the imperial lord. Titus's bondage to and respect for imperial power reduces Lavinia into an object of exchange, and as Coppélia Kahn (1997) notes, this "underlines Titus's reverence for tradition and authority and his eagerness to garner imperial favor, while effacing or even exploiting her" (p. 51).

In Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus*, this scene of exchange is condensed and presented as a formality in both the rewriting and the performance. Fişek is less concerned with the process through which these dramatic moments occur or the treatment of such moments by the characters, and more so with representing these moments in a fast-paced, informal manner with uncouth language. Similarly in the performance, the above Shakespearean scene transforms into a compact and terse exchange between Titus and Saturninus, which foregrounds the transactional nature of a royal marriage that has been decided upon by two figures of male authority. This is notable in the performance of this scene as well, as it is characterized by representations that treat moments of great importance relating to political power and authority in a rapid manner, exaggerated with discourteous language. Ultimately, scenes such as these remove patriarchal violence from within the broader tapestry of political and military power present in Shakespeare's text. Here, gender violence and misogyny emerge as gratuitous, automatic dimensions of kinship.

As the rewriting and the performance are predominated by a discourse of swearing that is misogynist, assertive and masculine, the issue of political violence is also constantly foregrounded linguistically. All of the vulgar jokes, references to

local culture, and swearing are extensions of the larger issue of violence and revenge in the play. This is particularly important in relation to critical discussions surrounding the unintended comic effects of the grotesque moments in the play. To exemplify, the scene where Marcus finds out that Lavinia is raped and mutilated is rewritten within a masculine discourse that reproduces this physical violence at the level of language:

*Marcus:*  
Where have you been girl, you are a sight for sore eyes!  
Where is your husband, that scoundrel? We were supposed to have drinks.  
Hey now, what is it with you, you look like a fucked-up animal!  
Have you been beaten up by your husband – aren't you adorable!  
Come on, speak, have you lost your tongue?  
*(realising her present state:)*  
Your hands ... what's happened to your hands!  
Man, this is the work of someone cold-hearted, but who!  
This is neither manly nor humane!  
Oh my, oh my, what is this!  
This is a torture far worse than murder!  
Alas, such a shame!  
Come on my poor bird; let me take you to Titus!  
No father can bear such cruelty. (Fişek, pp. 30-31)

Marcus's belittling words upon seeing Lavinia re-enacts the violence that has been inflicted upon her. The way Marcus reacts to Lavinia shows us that sexual violence is a manifestation of the general, all surrounding systematic violence that effects the way women are treated in the play. Looking like "a fucked up animal," Marcus's attempts to show compassion for Lavinia and her situation are an extension of the same misogynist culture manifesting in physical and sexual violence. Marcus's words are quite removed from the way Marcus approaches Lavinia in the original dramatic text: "Speak, gentle niece, what stern ungentle hands\ Hath lopped and hewed and made thy body bare / Of her two branches?" (Shakespeare, 2009, 2.4.16-18). This scene has become an emblematic moment in adaptations of the play. Peter Brook for instance stylizes the violence with red ribbons in his famous 1955

production (Dessen, 1989, p. 27); Julie Taymor prefers to materialize the metaphor of the tree by having branches come out of Lavinia's wrists.<sup>68</sup> Whereas the victimization, suffering and innocence of the female body is foregrounded in famous twentieth century adaptations of *Titus Andronicus*, Fişek prefers to employ a different metaphor for the usurped female body, that of a "fucked-up animal" (p. 30). The farcical representation of this scene on stage simultaneously intensifies the violence exercised over women. Moreover, in Fişek's rewriting, domestic violence stands as an ordinary, expected occurrence as Marcus's first reaction upon seeing Lavinia is to suggest that she could have been beaten up by her husband: "Have you been beaten up by your husband – aren't you adorable!" (p. 30). Marcus's manner of reacting to Lavinia's state becomes a mouthpiece for a male-dominated outlook that justifies domestic violence. In other words, if her present condition were a result of domestic violence, her mutilation would not be a serious problem that would demand the attention of her relatives.

Semaver Kumpanya uses Fişek's farcical treatment of the play to build a distance between the characters and the audience. Serkan Keskin highlights that the company chose not to affirm any of the characters in the play, so as to avoid having the audience feel mercy for Titus, who should not be regarded as a righteous murderer (Traşın, 2010). The actor Tansu Biçer (personal communication, February 28, 2018) underlines this issue as well: "Kasapoğlu desired to have this adaptation be as grotesque as possible, including the sounds used in the production, to sharpen the cruelty as much as possible. He didn't want to allow for any sympathy for the characters." Hence, to build a distance between the audience members and the murderous characters in the play, Semaver Kumpanya made use of highly disrupting

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<sup>68</sup> In addition to Alan Dessen's 1989 study, see Michael D. Friedman's *Titus Andronicus* (2019) on a detailed evaluation of Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) movie.

and disturbing audio-visual stagecraft and representation techniques such as the use of high-pitched electro guitar sounds and metallic stage props such as chains and pipes to suggest a setting associated with an underground, criminal atmosphere. This atmosphere prevails in the scene in which Lavinia is mutilated as well. However, the company's decision to avoid cultivating sympathy ironically renders gender violence secondary to the damage done to male honour, since masculine authority and revenge emerge as extensions of political violence.

In turn, Lavinia's mutilation indicates the failure of language to voice her state as a victim of misogyny that institutes a rule of violence and death. Through the male language, her victimization is doubled, and in this regard language does not provide justice to the victim, but rather intensifies the violence she experiences. Both figuratively and literally, Lavinia has no say on the crimes committed against her, except for pointing at the perpetrators of the crime. The sense of justice in both Fişek's rewriting and Semaver Kumpanya's performance emerges through the protection of "honour" (*namus*), which is voiced several times by the characters throughout the play, specifically in relation to Lavinia's rape and her relationship with Bassianus, and Titus's murder of his own son Mutius, who refuses to separate Lavinia from Bassianus (See Figure 5). "Honour (*namus*) is lost, they are kidnapping the girl!" Titus cries out, when Bassianus escapes with Lavinia (Fişek, p. 7). When Marcus later on deplores Titus for killing his son, Titus defends his act of murder as a necessity to protect family "honour" in the face of the challenge posed to the authority of the father: "I neither consider him as a son, nor approve of you/ you all brought shame to the family honour!" (Fişek, p. 9).



Figure 5. Titus kills his son Mutius

In her work on gender and kinship in Turkey, Sirman (2004) underlines that the norms of proper behaviour that gather around *namus* are distinguished through a strict division of gender roles.

In present-day Turkey, the term ‘honour’ (*namus*)... connotes the ability of the person to live up to the standards of masculinity and femininity as set by the society. The difference in what honour entails for men and for women is the difference in gender. Thus in Turkey, a dishonourable man is one who is not trustworthy, and therefore unable to undertake his social responsibilities nor to control his own sexuality and that of the women he is responsible for. A woman’s honour, by contrast, is linked only to her sexuality. Honour, in kin-based societies, is deemed to be a moral issue regardless of gender. Thus, dishonourable men or women are seen as posing a threat primarily to the moral rather than the social fabric of society. (pp. 44-45)

Here, Sirman points out that whereas honourable behaviour is associated only with sexuality for women, it embodies proper, moral behaviour in society as well as the sexual behaviour of both genders for men. The notion of *namus* does not only connote behaviours regulating and limiting female sexual behaviour in both domestic and public circles, but it also urges and at times obligates men to protect female chastity.

It is precisely with reference to this broader cultural context that Semaver Kumpanya members negotiate Fişek's use of the notion of honour killing, the *maganda* stereotype and kinship dynamics in Eastern Turkey. In the following excerpt, Titus kills Lavinia as he regards her rape as a stain, a damage to his honour:

*Titus:*

Saturninus, talking about steak tartar a la turca, it occurred to me:  
It is custom [*töre*], you know, in the songs:  
If one's daughter gets into trouble, god forbid,  
- you know, if she is raped or something -  
They kill her instantly! Do you find this appropriate? If so, why?

*Saturninus:*

This is something good Titus, and righteous, because  
Even as the girl thinks that she can survive, she cannot live with the shame!  
Even if she does, her father can never get any better!  
Besides it's not fitting for a woman to put men in such a situation!

*Titus:*

Well Saturninus your speech is always full of strong language!  
What the emperor states should be exemplary to us all!  
After what you've stated – give the devil his due -  
a poor subject like me cannot object to this!  
Fate, my dear daughter Lavinia, there's nothing else to be done!  
You should get over this, so should I - farewell!  
(*He kills Lavinia.*)

*Saturninus:*

What have you done, you fool!

*Titus:*

I obeyed your order, Saturninus!  
The stained honour is cleansed! (Fişek, pp. 75-76)

The above conversation between Saturninus and Titus exemplifies the issue of “cleansing the stain” that defiles male honour and respect in the public's eye as well as the family circle. The idea of defining female sexuality mainly through chastity is very much in line with what Ayşe Parla (2001) identifies as the linguistic repertoire surrounding *namus*:

The importance of a woman's purity as an icon of family honor is reflected in the linguistic repertoire most notably in the injunctions against “staining the family honor” (*aile namusunu lekelemek*)... Its varying intensities

notwithstanding, the notion of staining the family honor remains a powerful trope, capitalized on by popular Turkish movies and the press, and usually succeeds in eliciting empathy and emotion. (p. 77)

The discourse surrounding honor killing reflects the heteronormative, patriarchal and oppressive dynamics of gender violence as the female victims are targeted as guilty, immoral and impure in the allegations and daily conversations surrounding honor killing as well. As such, language serves as a violent tool for the female victim, deepening the effect of gender violence on the victim by the attributions used to define her state. By being subjected to unwritten laws, Lavinia is again victimized, this time on the level of language by being described as “shameful” and “stained” by her father (See Figure 6). This scene is also about male bonding and approval, which are threatened by female sexual behaviour, and need to be redeemed and reconstructed to protect male integrity.



Figure 6. Lavinia and Titus

Since Titus demands the emperor’s approval for the killing of the rape victim, he discloses the fact that the custom of maintaining one’s honour through violence

permeates the totality of the society and the political system. Referring to oral tradition, Titus remarks that this is a strict custom passed between generations through songs, and that it casts shame on the father who can never undo the horrible crime and damage without killing the victim. Titus is both subjected to the unwritten laws of honour killing and also a propagator of the tradition that demands murder: “I obeyed your order, Saturninus! The stained honour is cleansed”!

This scene becomes emblematic once it is considered side by side with the South-eastern dialect the translator makes use of, deeming the issue of honour killing and male violence as strictly connected to a patriarchal culture stereotyped by a certain ethnic group. Fişek’s preference to render the original text in the South Eastern dialect, which typically brings to mind regions commonly populated by Kurds, inevitably leads to the identification of honour killing with South-eastern Turkey and the Kurdish population. When the actors Serkan Keskin and Sarp Aydınoğlu underline their concern over murder cases in Turkey, they further state that

What we try to convey is that if blood is shed somewhere and someone is murdered, it is never about one incident and never will be. It will turn into a cycle... and we think that this play is so much relevant to our day... Titus arrives by winning a war and shedding blood. Therefore, the victims will never remain as merely victims; there is always a reason to shed more blood. (Traşın, 2010)

Here, the company members frame political violence as a never-ending cycle, a chain reaction that seems to multiply the number of victims. Yet, when they evaluate honor crimes within the boundaries of the modern/traditional, and eastern/western dichotomies, they resort to a distancing, otherizing effect on the rural, its inhabitants and customs. This is similar to what Dicle Koğacıoğlu (2004) suggests when she notes that considering honour killing as a predominantly “Kurdish phenomenon” propagates an already established stigma associated with Kurds:

To single out the Southeast implies that honor crimes are primarily a Kurdish phenomenon, as the area is populated primarily by Kurds. Such a portrayal amounts to the stigmatization of Kurds, a process that is already very much under way due to past armed conflicts between the Kurdish guerilla forces and the Turkish military, with the ensuing forced migration and poverty of Kurds. Here we see the ethnicization of the tradition effect: honor crimes attributed to the traditions of an already disadvantaged ethnic group and its region. This enables other parts of the country to be imagined as somehow immune to the problem. (p. 130)

To avoid such a generalization of this disadvantaged ethnic group, the company removes the usage of attributes such as *buba* and *ağam*, but prefers to include the local terminology surrounding blood ties, patriarchy and honour killing in Turkey. The company negotiates the issue of honour killing in Fişek's rewriting with Shakespeare's revenge tragedy by pointing to the local without overtly pointing to a specific ethnic group. In the Turkish context, however, the idiom of honour killing and gender violence marginalizes the Kurdish identity, and reinforces the stereotype of the community as an uncivilized representative of oppression, violence and patriarchy.

#### 4.5 *Titus Andronicus* as a flexible target

In the mind-set of Semaver Kumpanya and Sinan Fişek, *Titus Andronicus* appears as a flexible target around which all of these related, but also different connotations of violence and politics are gathered. The processes of rewriting Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* as well as the realization of staging it after almost twenty years reveal a variety of issues as to the concern with locality and politics in the overall experience of rewriting, preparing and staging the play. At the centre of his *maganda* framework, Fişek situates the image of a South Eastern landlord from rural Turkey, a stereotype of racial and ethnic otherness, so as to rework the revenge tragedy as a farcical portrayal of vulgar, violent and sexually overt masculinity. In their

adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*, Semaver Kumpanya relies on Fişek's local analogies, and points at traditional kinship ties in East Anatolian Turkish culture as markers of anticipated political violence, thus otherizing the Kurdish identity as uncivilized, inclined to violence and representative of oppression. Although the company removes some of the culturally and politically marginalizing images, their portrayal of honour killing and gender violence rely on the modern/traditional dichotomy. As an independent company, Semaver Kumpanya considers collaboration, bringing theatre to the margins and eliminating/avoiding the hierarchical distinction between high and low culture theatricality in modern Turkey as their defining principles. The way they negotiate their ideological commitments with their adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*, however, reveals tensions about their representation of cultural communities and women on stage. As the company preferred to retain the problematic language of urban, national marginalization in Fişek's rewriting, their goal of communicating and integrating with the inhabitants of Kocamustafapaşa is compromised.

When we look at the differential impact of political violence on different communities in *Titus Andronicus* as a question of adaptation, the company's decisions display conflicts over both the politics of representing violence in contemporary Turkey and the process of theatre making. In his heart attack analogy, Kasapoğlu thinks about spontaneous, singular violence and impending violence within a causal relationship, and considers honor killing and gender violence as extensions of political violence in their adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*. In this way, Semaver Kumpanya builds a link between the oppressive, unjust workings of imperial power in Shakespeare's dramatic text and the more family-oriented framework of honour crimes in modern Turkey. The company relies on the idiom of

“honour killing” to talk about the political sovereign, and replaces the Shakespearean revenge cycle with honour crimes. Once the company dwells upon Titus as an Eastern feudal/patriarch figure that represents authoritarianism, it disregards the fact that political violence in Turkey is not a phenomenon that can be related particularly to the “East”, that which is deemed traditional and uncivilized. In the broader political landscape of ethnically-marked politics in Turkey, “honour killing” is a very particular idiom that appears to disguise the violence of the actual sovereign power. In Semaver Kumpanya’s adaptation, when Titus commits honour crimes relying on his authority as a South Eastern landlord figure, the ethnically-marked gender violence serves as a discourse of otherness. Even though the company looks at violence against women in their adaptation, they represent this issue by attaching it to a unique, ethnic identity and its “traditional” customs, mimicking Koğacıoğlu’s “tradition effect” and distinguishing the modern “us” from the traditional Kurds and/or Eastern population. Gender violence does not disappear in the domains and discourses of modern institutions such as the law, but when it is acknowledged as something that is attached largely to custom, it can only be recognized within the binary logic of modern/traditional.

In relation to the larger paradox of depending on Shakespeare’s authority to address local, political concerns, Semaver Kumpanya reflects little concern over contending with the authority revealed by the legacy of Shakespeare as a playwright and marker of knowledge in the theatre history of Turkey. This is not only because Semaver Kumpanya’s adaptation is the first production of *Titus Andronicus* in Turkey’s theatre history, but also because the company do not take Shakespeare’s dramatic text as a fixed point of origin in working on Fişek’s rewriting. The dynamics of adaptation are marked by the stated ideals of the company as well as

their interest in the rewriting as a primary focus, instead of the Shakespearean original. Both the rewriting and the adaptation are shaped by the immediate socio-political concerns of the practitioners when they filter Shakespeare's dramatic text through local analogies.

## CHAPTER 5

### A CLASSROOM TRAGEDY:

SUBJECT: *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Love is blind. It does not care about sociology.  
It makes those burning with flames of love climb  
on the balcony of their enemies. The balcony is  
the place where we come out of our shells and  
taboos, and breathe. There is freshness and peace  
there. Come on the young ones, to the balcony!  
Serdar Biliş<sup>69</sup>

*Romeo and Juliet* (2016), the recent stage adaptation of Shakespeare's famous love tragedy, is the product of the collaboration between the director Serdar Biliş and the playwright and translator Ahmet Sami Özbudak. In the adaptation's booklet, Biliş encourages young people to climb on to a metaphorical balcony, a space where one transcends things condemned as improper and unacceptable by society.

Shakespeare's balcony scene is memorable for the romantic exchange of devotion between the passionate lovers, and it marks the instance where they question the ancient feud as the primary marker of their identities. In this moment, Romeo and Juliet disregard familial and social restrictions set against them by the feud, such as obedience to paternal authority and masculine honor. Biliş uses the shell image in this context as an analogy for living under such restrictions, which indicates that one's identity and body are entrapped in the shell moulded by their society. For Biliş, the balcony is a liberating space, where the power of love compels one to turn a blind eye to social taboos, come out of one's shell, breathe and feel peaceful.

The dynamics of space in the Shakespearean original, however, suggest that *Romeo and Juliet* undergo a threshold experience rather than a breaking of taboos. In

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<sup>69</sup> The excerpt is taken from the booklet of the production; the translations from Turkish to English, including other excerpts from the booklet, are my own.

this scene, the balcony symbolizes the intersection of public and private spaces, and the lovers are still surrounded both by the literal and symbolic walls of the feud. It provides Romeo and Juliet with the necessary detachment from Juliet's parents and the opportunity to experience their own privacy, which transgresses the boundaries of privacy controlled by paternal authority. Yet, the fact that the lovers can only occupy a secret domain indicates that they cannot be fully detached from the social and familial restrictions built around them. Juliet is even interrupted in the threshold experience of the balcony as the Nurse, who oftentimes accompanies her, calls her in. Juliet warns Romeo that he will be killed if found sneaking into Capulet territory: "The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,/ and the place death, considering who thou art,/ If any of my kinsmen find thee here" (Shakespeare, 2012, 2.2.63-65).

Romeo would also be condemned a traitor by his kinsmen and friends, since his family loyalties and public identity would demand that he maintain masculine honor; this is why Mercutio is later furious to see Romeo approaching Juliet's cousin Tybalt with a truce. Thus, the peace Biliş imagines that the lovers find in the balcony is only a temporary state of relief and a questioning of taboos instead of a breaking of them.

In Biliş and Özbudak's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, the idea of coming out of one's shell finds expression in the production's ambivalent representation of visibility, sexuality and the publicness endowed to the characters, particularly to Juliet. Shakespeare's thirteen-year-old Juliet does not exist in the public domain except for the Capulet party, which is a controlled form of publicness inside the Capulet household. In the adaptation, when Juliet is endowed with publicness and has the opportunity to voice her thoughts and desires, we see a sixteen-year-old, caricature-like high school teenager. She expresses her love and passion towards Romeo while eagerly screaming from the balcony, as she delivers the famous "deny

thy father, refuse thy name” speech (2012, 2.2.34). Although this Juliet is more assertive and demanding, and attempts to defy her father by boldly ridiculing him in a vulgar tone, she is eventually unable to transgress the Capulets’ authority, as the adaptation follows the thematic concerns and plotline of the Shakespearean original. The balcony analogy thus invites the audience to ask: Is making women and sexuality visible in the public arena an emancipatory experience or does it become an illusion of transgression? Does the fact that the characters express their thoughts and concerns in the public freely mean that they are now able to break taboos?

In this chapter, I argue that Biliş’s “coming out of one’s shell metaphor” needs to be evaluated in the context of the production’s defining dramaturgical choices. Biliş and Özbudak reworked *Romeo and Juliet* by using a high school classroom as the *mise en scène* of the adaptation, turning Shakespeare’s original into a play about discipline and surveillance in the contemporary world of students in Turkey. Özbudak divides the text into nine scenes: the feud, negotiation, the party, the balcony, marriage, murder, exile, death and suicide, all of which take place in the classroom. The collaborators allude to a post-1980s cultural climate and the authoritative understanding of education in Turkey as the central local filters of the adaptation by using politically loaded phrases and era-specific references. The two households become two feuding student groups in the classroom, a space that functions as a manifestation of coeducational publicness, a bordered domain occupied by men and women from different age groups and social backgrounds. Except for the Prince, the characters appear first and foremost as students. The classroom provides an impression of a social world organized by a severe discipline, yet within which sexuality, forbidden love, vulgarity, smoking, drug use, and partying flourish anyway. In approaching the plays’ core theme of forbidden love,

the collaborators bring the visibility of women, youth culture, and the issue of controlled democracy to the forefront. The themes of enmity, male honor, family loyalties, sexuality and paternal authority in the Shakespearean original are reconsidered in relation to the impact of militarized education on Turkish society.

As was the case with Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* and Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus*, Biliş and Özbudak's decision to locate the feud and the tragedy of the lovers within the oppressive dynamics of militarized education results in an ambivalent adaptation. Their choice of the post-1980 coup classroom aims at disclosing an image of coeducational publicness where the conflicting and restrictive dynamics of Juliet's private space and Romeo's public space become intertwined with one another. Resisting a more classical interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*, the collaborators trace the direct and indirect impacts of militarized education on shaping the social and familial being of the characters, and reconsider the constituents of privateness and publicness in the original text and their relation to identity. In the adaptation, women are endowed with visibility and become active members of the workings of this society. The youth culture is predominantly expressed through sexual overtness, vulgarity and colloquialism in the public arena, where freedom of speech is actualized when the characters openly confess and reflect on their private thoughts and concerns. These production choices can be considered a progressive intervention at first, but the authoritarian ideology is re-established under the illusion of the depoliticized freedom of speech, and transgressive female and sexual autonomy. The disputes between the characters include gender discriminative language and sexual harassment, especially notable in Paris's forceful advances on Juliet. In exploring the classroom as a "state apparatus", in other words, Biliş and Özbudak's reliance on the local, political agenda goes contrary to framing the

balcony as an emancipatory experience because the characters at times become almost typified versions of Shakespeare's dramatis personae, which marks a discrepancy between authorial intentions and the actual stage performance, even though the collaborators present the audience with a substantially dramatized locality. Like the ambivalence we see in the way Moda Sahnesi negotiates their contextual and dramaturgical choices, Biliş and Özbudak's *Romeo and Juliet* reveals the conflict of modernizing the brand name "Shakespeare" by revisiting the issue of political otherness in the Turkish context. The politically resistant imagination of the balcony as a liberating domain, which is an image that comes with the aforementioned pitfalls, does not find substantial expression in the realization of the adaptation, because the aspiration of the collaborators to have a comprehensive grasp of Shakespeare's original works against the political and cultural transformations they aim to critique.

In this chapter, I will first look into the way the collaborators discuss their common interest in adapting *Romeo and Juliet* in relation to the larger issue of grappling with Shakespeare's authority, which in this case reveals itself in a relatively similar fashion with Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* adaptation. Özbudak's anxiety over recognizing Shakespeare's iconic status is related to the gap one finds between the way the collaborators imagine their work in the booklet and its realization on stage. Recourse to Shakespeare marks the contradictions that occur in adapting the playwright's work to post-1980s culture although the production has a deep connection to the local context. I will then analyse the classroom dynamics in the adaptation and address the aforementioned questions on the breaking of taboos. In light of the relevant scholarship on *Romeo and Juliet*, I will evaluate the feud as an extension of ideology while at the same time briefly looking at the socio-political

panorama of the 1980s in Turkey. Addressing the militarized decision-making policies that surrounded the Turkish educational system in this era, I will provide insight into the dynamics of youth culture, discipline and publicness portrayed in the adaptation. Finally, I will thus explore the contextual and thematic alterations and additions made to Shakespeare's original so as to evaluate their relation to the way Biliş and Özbudak use local elements in the production.

### 5.1 Adapting Shakespeare, politics and love

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the process of adaptation involves the collaboration between the director Serdar Biliş and the young playwright and translator Ahmet Sami Özbudak, the issue of dealing with Shakespeare's legacy, and lastly the improvisational involvement of the theatre practitioners. Biliş studied Theatre Arts at Middlesex University, where he specialized in Theatre Directing, and he sustains a transnational career: he is an associate director at the Liverpool Playhouse, artistic director of the Istanbul-based Pürtelaş Theatre, and a part-time instructor at the Theatre Department at Kadir Has University.<sup>70</sup> Both Biliş and Özbudak have received acclaim for their theatre practices. Biliş was awarded the Channel 4/Lime Pictures David Frazer Bursary in 2008 and the Channel 4 Theatre Director's Award in 2005. Özbudak won the Best Young Playwright award at the Heidelberg Stückemarkt in 2011 and the best vernacular play of the year as part of the prestigious Afife Theatre Awards in 2014 for his play *Stain*. *Romeo and Juliet* is his first known adaptation of Shakespeare, which was among the major productions of the 2016-2017 repertoires of the Istanbul City Theatres.

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<sup>70</sup> Even as the theatrical experience of Biliş varies between his projects abroad and in Turkey, his journey of becoming an acclaimed director has been greatly shaped by his training and success in England, having collaborated with several contemporary theatre artists such as David Harrower, Frank Cotrell Boyce and Stephen Sharkey. For more information, see <https://serdar-bilis.squarespace.com/about>.

*Romeo and Juliet* diverges from this dissertation's previous cases of adaptation and rewriting in terms of the way the collaboration was carried out. As discussed in the earlier chapters, collaboration was a determining feature of the adaptation process in both the preparation and the actualization of Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası*, Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* and Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus*. In all three cases, collaboration was not a mere constituent of the adaptation process, but rather it was a crucial principle followed by the members of each company. They connected their ideals of theatre practice to specific political causes and thus a key concern was the idea of maintaining a theatrical space that aimed at avoiding a possible hierarchy among the practitioners and in their relationship to their imagined audiences.

Rather than the product of an independent company, the collaboration between Biliş and Özbudak was carried out to put forth an individual project of adaptation with little focus on the dynamics of collaboration between all the theatre artists involved in the realization process. In this case, even though the experience of collaboration included the contributions of the cast, it was not regarded as an indispensable characteristic that influenced the artistic decision making process of adapting Shakespeare's original to the contemporary world of students. As part of his introductory comments in the production's booklet, we see that Özbudak focuses on the crucial role of the adaptor in completing the adaptation as an efficient work in its entirety:

An important reason why I find this work efficient in the end is the director's approach. He not only maintained limitations to lessen the difficulty of my work, but also provided me with a pleasant degree of freedom. Besides, he initiated a theatrical space for the practitioners that paved the way for improvisational acting at certain instances, which helped finalize the adapted text. (Nilüfer Belediyesi, 2016, p. 10)

Here, Özbudak pays tribute to the director's approach to his reworking and to the improvisational instances of acting by the cast, which at the same time points at the director as the determining mechanism of the adaptation. In the *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation, the understanding of collaboration differs from that of the previous cases, which evaluated collaboration on a larger scale encompassing different dynamics such as neighbourhood culture and the construction of the theatre venue as exemplified in the cases of Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası* and Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet*. For the playwright Özbudak, the director-adaptor-practitioner relationship primarily serves to explore the full potential of his version of *Romeo and Juliet*. He does not rank this relationship in a hierarchy, but his remarks imply an order of importance, one that ultimately works to come up with the best version of the adaptation he devised. As such, the adaptation is at the centre of this process, for the realization of which the director and the practitioners work to follow the adaptor's scheme.

On the other hand, Özbudak also highlights the role of the director as the major decision maker, one that not only sets boundaries, but provides a degree of freedom to the adaptor and the practitioners as well. In this case, we see the director and the adaptor as the primary decision makers, aided by the improvisation of the cast members. Both the director and the adaptor seem to occupy a position that is reminiscent of the author function, since the dynamics of adaptation are predominantly specified by the authorial intentions of the duo. In introducing and publicizing the adaptation, Özbudak first emphasizes his recognition of the authorial presence of the adapted work, reaffirming the legitimacy of Shakespearean authority, which in return validates the adaptor's authorial position vis-a-vis the subject and provides him with a degree of self-recognition.

Even though adapting Shakespeare's original plot to the classroom is a remarkable case of contextualization, neither the director nor the adaptor point at this choice and its cultural and/or socio-political context in promoting the production. In the booklet, the collaborators call attention to Shakespeare's Verona, the image of the balcony, and dynamics of politics, love and hatred in the Shakespearean original: Özbudak remarks that "love, violence and the political atmosphere make up a never-changing entanglement in the world" (Nilüfer Belediyesi, 2016, p. 10). These comments elevate the Shakespearean original and provide a sense of expectation that this adaptation is more of a classical reading of the play instead of a modern reworking that evokes the issues of publicness and education in Turkey. Thus, as Worthen remarks, "recourse to Shakespeare" (1996, p. 25) simultaneously sets a secondary position to the other important constituents of an adaptation, such as the local context and the bodily presence of the practitioners. This is related to the disunity between the local and contextual dynamics of the adaptation and what Biliş associates with the image of the balcony. In the booklet, when Biliş directly encourages the youth to climb up to the balcony, his language shifts the register to a more informal one, which reflects his attentiveness to young audience members. For him, they are able to challenge obstacles and hardships that result from social and familial taboos. Nevertheless, the collaborators' desire to be acknowledged as having a comprehensive command over the original overshadows this enthusiasm to witness emancipation and also the outcome of their project. In other words, grappling with the authority of Shakespeare leads to a discrepancy between what they propose in the booklet and what they then realize on the stage.

*Romeo and Juliet* is quite removed from the original dramatic text, even as the collaborators follow Shakespeare's plot-line, and the themes and issues he offers

in the play. Compared to the earlier two cases of adaptation analysed in this dissertation, departing from the “original” does result in a predominantly local reading of the adapted work as the era-specific features of the adaptation and the local negotiations at the level of language situate the play into a socio-politically specific context in Turkey in a more consistent fashion. However, *Romeo and Juliet* displays an indecisive dynamic between the local and the global due to Biliş’s envisioning of the balcony metaphor. The production is inspired by the original’s ending to imagine an emancipatory experience for the youth, but its elements of “local” adaptation actually point to liberation as an illusion. This tension between adherence to the “original” and adaptation is revealed in relation to the larger issue of wrestling with the authority of the Shakespearian legacy.

In the booklet for the production, Özbudak’s commentary on the process of adaptation demonstrates that “Shakespeare” haunts the imagination and creative practice of the adaptor, who in return endeavours not to get lost in this profundity:

When Serdar Biliş suggested that I adapt *Romeo and Juliet* for the stage, I become quite excited, but I also realized that I was about to embark on a toilsome journey. To study Shakespeare and follow his footsteps is tougher than one assumes because the unique stage calculation of a genius, that exceeds centuries, stands erect in front of you like a spectre. It is possible to get lost in this abyss. To avoid this, I looked at many versions of *Romeo and Juliet* and I also went through English sources and movies. (Nilüfer Belediyesi, 2016, p. 10)

The fact that Özbudak refers to Shakespeare as a ghost, and likens the adaptor’s work to hardship resonates with the anxiety that Worthen labels the “recourse to Shakespeare”. Similar to the earlier cases of adaptation, Özbudak cannot dissociate the process of reimagining Shakespeare from the historical and literary context of the dramatic text, but also from its performance history, as the playwright notes that he studied many stage and movie adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, and examined sources in English. The desire to recognize Shakespeare’s authority and the

accompanying attempt at self-authorization are made manifest in the way Özbudak promotes his adaptation. In the end, the playwright states, he aimed at coming up with a contemporary version of the love story and its layers of signification by trying not to ruin the elegance of the Shakespearean language. Recognizing Shakespeare's canonical presence also serves as a strategy for promoting the adaptation, and thus reflects Özbudak's awareness that the theatrical conventions in modern Turkey still approach the name Shakespeare as a marker of refined taste and culture.

## 5.2 The classroom dynamics

In Biliş and Özbudak's *Romeo and Juliet*, the dynamics of publicness stand in contrast to the social dynamics of the original play. This is especially explicit in the space Juliet occupies in the adaptation compared to the Shakespearean original, in which the characters have diverse and dissimilar access to public and private spaces depending on their gender and socioeconomic background in society (Roberts, 1998, p. 35). Even though Juliet at times transgresses the domesticity of the household and parental jurisdiction to secretly meet and get married to Romeo, she is substantially indoors in the original, not being part of the public domain that men occupy in Verona. Diverging from this separation of the public and private, the adaptation places co-educational publicness at its centre, and erases the intergenerational gap between the original characters, whose identity as students supersedes their role as family members, friends, servants and/or acquaintances. In this way, the characters bear double identities, and the audience is invited to trace the connection between being a student as well as a father, mother, daughter and lover, which implies that their social and familial identities are now extensions of the classroom. The classroom encapsulates the restrictions that gather around the domesticity of the

Capulet house, the threshold experience of the lovers, and the public domain that Romeo occupies in the original play.

The adaptation opens with a key moment in which we see Romeo and Juliet lying dead on the desks in the classroom, the former on the left hand side and the latter on the right (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Romeo and Juliet dead

The collaborators replace the prologue in the original delivered by the Chorus with this frozen moment, which informs the audience of the tragic end that awaits the young lovers. This time, the lovers appear as victims of what the adaptation later identifies as an authoritarian educational system. When the rest of the students discover them, they react dramatically, screaming and crying over the dead bodies, except for the Prince. At this point, it is important to note that though Mercutio and Tybalt are dead by the end of the adaptation as victims of the feud, they are alive in this instance, when the whole group becomes paralyzed by discovering the tragedy of the lovers. This introductory scene brings all the characters on the same level as students, uniting them in a moment of horizontal awe, confusion and heartache.

Following this foreshadowing, the students first appear as carefree classmates in black and white uniforms, horsing around regardless of their age group and gender. An unknown, seemingly trivial disagreement suddenly triggers a quarrel, and the classroom transforms into a street fight in which the students split into two groups engaging in a classroom brawl, kicking and beating each other (see Figure 8). Whereas Romeo, his back turned to the scene, doodles things on the blackboard during the fight and keeps himself isolated from it, Juliet is drawn into the conflict, becoming an active participant. The image of Juliet's presence in this domain is marked by the red beanie hat and red stockings she wears, which call attention to her identity primarily as a dynamic and opposing student. Juliet is taken outside the domestic enclosure of the original, because her identity is not limited to that of being a daughter. As a young woman, her movements are much less restricted as she occupies the same space with her peers in the classroom and raises her voice during the brawl.



Figure 8. The Fight (*Juliet in the middle, recognized by her red tights*)

Throughout the transition from the playful engagement of the students to the violent turmoil, the classroom appears as a public space, since it functions as the scene of a street fight during which the students throw each other aside with vigour and use the desks as barricades. They are then disciplined under a furious and authoritarian gaze as the Prince intervenes in the fight as a teacher/principal figure. The Prince breaks the fight up by resorting to brutal force, kicking, dragging and beating the students. Once the students line up in their seats and stand still with their backs facing the audience, the Prince reprimands the adolescents before facing the audience as he approaches downstage centre:

*Prince:*

Enough! Get away! Get back! Again? Now what? Disperse, get back to your seats... I said get back, back to your seats.

I lost count. What is it this time? What is it that you can't share? What is wrong with all of you? What do you have against each other?

Listen, I won't let you disrupt the peace and harmony of this place. You cannot disrupt, no way! I put so much effort into bringing peace and stability to this city... Who do you think you are? You! (*He points at Suat and Suat stands up.*) Who do you think you are? You? (*He points at Deniz and she stands up*)

Who do you think you are? All of you? Two enemy families! You fell down on us like a nightmare, like knife cuts in our hearts. You have flooded the streets with neighbour blood. Are you looking for trouble and rebellion? I'll take it easy. (*He hits Armağan.*) easy... easy...

Stand up!... Sit down! Stand up!... Sit down... Stand up... Sit down! Stand up! Stand at attention and listen!

Look here rascals. Look here bastards. Look here you mad dogs. I swear if you ever go against us, I'll hang you all from the gallows. (*He walks to the blackboard*) I'll show no mercy! (Özbudak, 2016, p. 1)

In the above excerpt, the Prince uses the discourse of the classroom, exerts discipline on the students and maintains order not only by his authoritarian language, but also by controlling the bodily presence of the students. As he scolds and orders them to get back to their seats, hitting and pushing in the meantime, the Montagues sit down

on the left and the Capulets on the right. In reflecting on the feud between the two enemy families, the Prince does not address the situation merely as a classroom fight, but points at the threat posed to “the peace and harmony of this place” by the two groups. This affects the characterization of the feud to a great extent, because the adaptation does not take place in “fair Verona”, but in an unnamed city. In the original, the fight in the opening scene first breaks out between the servants of the Capulets and the Montagues, which lays bare the negative influence of the ancient feud on different levels of society. Prince Escalus addresses the fighting servants and noblemen as “rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,/ profaners of this neighbour-stained steel” (Shakespeare, 2012, 1.1.78-80). The nature of rebellion here is closely linked to household loyalties, which are initially erased in the adaptation. Even though there is an unidentified grudge between the two families, the feud is first and foremost characterized as a student fight in Biliş and Özbudak’s version. The Montagues and the Capulets appear on stage both as students and family members in this scene, but the Prince does not address them with their names or family titles. As such, the institutions of education and the family are presented as intertwined with one another, disrupting order in the classroom as well as in society.

For an audience in Turkey, this scene represents the interwoven relationship between education and military discipline, because the Prince implements the repetitive actions of sitting and standing, trying to suppress the disturbance by making the crowd operate as one submissive, silent body. Standing at attention, the students/family members learn that the ultimate punishment of causing menace in society as well as in the classroom is being hanged. Ideally, the teacher/headmaster figure is supposed to bring truce and set an exemplary model for the students, yet the Prince brings more violence into the picture. Even as he intervenes to put an end to

the fight, his systematization of the bodily movements of the students is reminiscent of a military context, as if all the students are potential soldiers educated to be docile, submissive followers of the authoritarian rule.

The Prince in Shakespeare's dramatic text threatens the fighting family members with the death penalty, without specifying the means of this punishment: "If ever you disturb our street again,/ Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace" (2012, 1.1.94-5). In the adaptation, however, the Prince references the gallows, *darağacı* in the Turkish version. In the Turkish context, *darağacı* is a politically loaded term, which calls out to the cultural and historical memories of the audience members. As discussed earlier in relation to Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası*, the struggle between right and left political factions was widely visible on the streets in late 1970s Turkey, a major part of which was the fighting and violence witnessed between students groups at the time. Among the executions taking place following the 1980 coup d'états, the death penalty at the gallows became an imprint on collective memories, as fifty people were hanged at the time. The idea of execution at the gallows has been recurrently revisited by politicians in suppressing dissent in modern Turkish politics, the most recent cases of which could be found in the polarizing authoritarian public speeches of recent government officials, even as the death penalty is no longer a legalized act of punishment.<sup>71</sup> The way in which the Prince, as a figure of authority, handles the situation insinuates that what transpires as a student fight in the first scene is reminiscent of the bloody disorders taking place on the streets in the Turkish socio-political context.

Moreover, the intervention of the Prince, castigating the students in the classroom, is reflected onto the blackboard through projections (see Figure 9). The

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<sup>71</sup> See for instance, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/36828182>

director plays with this idea of being under surveillance and being aware of the gaze of authority, by adding the image of a camera shooting into the production. The Prince raises his head to the camera, points his finger to his throat and demonstrates the act of killing by directly looking at the audience. By reiterating the death penalty in his duplicated image, the Prince becomes all-knowing, observing the movement of the characters as an omnipresent force. As in the original, the Prince appears two more times in the sequence of events, to exile Romeo after he kills Tybalt and to comment on the tragedy at the very end. When the Prince is not on stage, the youth do not reflect a sense of submissiveness. Whereas the all-entrapping gaze of the Prince is absent on a large scale in the adaptation, this hardly means that the liberating imagination of the balcony finds expression in the coexistence of the students in the coeducational public arena.



Figure 9. Capulets (*on the right*) and Montagues (*on the left*)

On the one hand, situating this local, political dynamic at the heart of *Romeo and Juliet* and erasing the intergenerational gap between the original characters flattens

them into uniform recipients of authoritarian discipline, revealing despotic education's impact on society. If we examine this scene hand in hand with the earlier moment of finding Romeo and Juliet lying dead on the desks, the classroom dynamics also reinforce the idea that the feud and the dynamics of family and youth are extensions of authoritarian education. From this standpoint, we can consider the typified manners of the youth's expression of a rather visible sexuality and female voice as illusionary states of transgression in the immediate absence of authority. Even though Juliet's autonomy and voice make her more visible and active, she does not go through a liberating experience of being a young female student who questions the workings of the oppressive society around her. Establishing truce in the context of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* requires resolving the rivalry between two enemy families and the conflict between parents and the younger generation. In sharp contrast to viewing the balcony as an emancipatory domain where peace is established, the youth seem to enjoy gender discriminative jokes, using drugs, and fighting outside the immediate presence of the authority figure. They neither address the oppressive workings of the classroom nor the polarizing effect of the feud. As mentioned in the beginning, even Juliet's interrogation of the differentiating impact of the feud is accompanied by her caricatured portrayal as an infatuated adolescent. From this perspective, the adaptation provides the audience with recognition of authoritarian education's flattening impact on gender, family loyalties, sexuality and the youth in general.

Aside from the first scene, the way the youth express themselves and the confessions of the characters in the adaptation are a crucial part of the local filter applied by the director and the playwright. For the young Romeo, quotations from the poets Nazım Hikmet and Cemal Süreya become a mouthpiece for expressing his

love towards Juliet. Benvolio likens Romeo's infatuated, love-bound state to a shop-window dummy cast to the dump. In like manner, Mercutio teases Romeo's hyperbolic verbalization of love as unrefined: "Ahh, it stinks like arabesque" (Özbudak, 2016, p. 18). These local references signify an a-political youth culture that is often understood to have emerged in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d'état. As critics have noted, post-1980s youth culture was marked by "depoliticization" in Turkey, following the strict regulations and law amendments set against any kind of discussion, inquiry and/or interest around politics that could take place within the borders of the classroom (Altınay, 2004, pp. 155-56). This being the case, the political and cultural climate following this era involves a very complicated experience of publicness and youth culture, one that contains many contradictions.

On the other hand, pulling the socio-political panorama of post-1980s Turkey and the relevant culture of educational militariness into the adaptation is problematic, because this local context signals a discrepancy between imagining the youth as breaker of taboos and portraying them as extensions of ideology. We see in Biliş and Özbudak's *Romeo & Juliet*, as we did in the previous two cases of adaptation that the concern to modernize and localize Shakespeare goes hand in hand with the desire to stay loyal to the thematic and dramatic concerns of the "original".

### 5.3 From 1980s Turkey to the confessional classroom

The cultural panorama of post-1980s Turkey involved distinct contradictions in relation to various issues including public/ private spaces, visibility, and freedom of speech, contradictions which continue to impact contemporary Turkish culture and society at large. Following the 1980 military coup, Turkey witnessed not only the realization of repressive laws to silence dissent, especially on the Left, but also a

simultaneous engagement with freedom in social and cultural spheres (Gürbilek, 2011, pp. 4-5). The critic Nurdan Gürbilek characterizes this period as a time of “explosion of speech”, “a freer era of cultural pluralism” (p. 6), which was ridden with contradictions:

The notion that the private is political was first voiced then; but it was often overshadowed by the publicity of private life as politics fell from esteem. There was more interest in the past than ever before; but the past became a pop history cleansed of its historical-political burden. Language was freed from its political responsibilities and allowed to define itself as a game, but at the same time it became completely random, arbitrary. (p. 12)

As Gürbilek notes, this was a time marked by censorship, prohibitions and imprisonment, while at the same time people were urged to speak up in the public sphere about their private lives, concerns and desires. Instead of being interested in politics, they were drawn into a consumerist culture surrounded by media and advertising, especially the youth. As Ahıska and Yenal (2006) note, along with economic liberalization and privatization, the post-coup society witnessed the “*force* to close various channels for expressing solidarity, criticism and opposition, this way creating a very repressive environment. The primary justification of the *coup* was bringing an end to the ‘anarchy and violence’ prevailing in society” (p. 357). For this reason, issues like women’s rights, gender equality, and class distinction were surpassed by a consumerist desire for cultural pluralism, depoliticization and a “liberal” categorization of identity on a vast scale. Rıfat Bali (2002) points out that, along with the transition to a free market economy, media coverage of the success stories of business and entrepreneurship was extensive, calling attention to the desired model of the youth as “modern”, “liberal”, well-educated individuals with high incomes (pp. 20-21).

Referring to the resulting discourse of popular culture and media in this era, Gürbilek highlights that language was used in a random fashion as an imitative

component by disengaging a word, concept, and/or notion from its political, historical context (2011, p. 51). In the adaptation, Biliş and Özbudak employ this arbitrary fashion of using politically loaded quotes and references in the speeches of Mercutio, Benvolio and Romeo. For instance, seconds before he dies, Mercutio mocks his own murder, and alludes to the poet Can Yücel's fondness of wine when he asks Romeo and Benvolio to pour wine onto his grave now and again:

*Mercutio:*

Tybalt! . . . Not so deep a scratch... such a blow I stroke on the asshole! Not so deep, but it will finish me off. It's done, it's done. Son of a bitch! Buddy, pour some wine on my grave once in a while. God damn you both houses. Damn your cause, damn your honor. Man, you feed me to the worms.  
(Özbudak, 2016, p. 29)

The tongue-in-cheek humour and mannerism seen in the above excerpt is a defining quality of Mercutio in Shakespeare's dramatic text. He elaborates on the destructive weight of the enmity between the two families, cursing further misery on them, and in the same breath, he treats his own death sardonically: "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man/. . . A plague a' both your houses! / They have made worms' meat of me./ I have it, and soundly too. Your houses!" (Shakespeare, 2012, 3.1.99-102). Özbudak applies a more vulgar tone to Mercutio's witticism and makes him recall the public persona of Yücel, who was closely associated with the oppositional Left in Turkey. In 2011, twelve years after Yücel's death, a group of people poured wine on his tombstone to commemorate his legacy, allegedly following the poet's will. In the aftermath of this ceremony, a local member of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) made a formal declaration criticizing the ceremony, denying the alleged will of the poet and calling the incident an insult to the moral and sentimental values of the nation. Soon afterwards, the tombstone was

vandalized, which led to further polemics on the issue.<sup>72</sup> At this juncture, Mercutio's implicit reference to this incident recalls not only Yücel's oppositional stance being on the margins of political culture in Turkey, but also discussions raised around the Leftist legacy, the stereotype of the modern Turkish secularist identity as fond of drinking, the vandalism of artefacts and the complex issue of the ongoing polarization between secularism and conservatism in Turkey's socio-political arena. However, Mercutio pulls this multifaceted reference outside its historical and political context and turns it into an instantaneous joke he makes abruptly as he is about to die. The unacknowledged reference to Yücel becomes an object of consumption for Mercutio. The intricate levels of signification are thus erased in his arbitrary treatment of the issue, which marks the way the depoliticized youth dissociates himself from politics. This in return functions to undervalue the tradition it points at and to reinstate its erasure, which brings up the concomitant issue of the invisible workings of power underlying the liberating strategies of this period.

According to Gürbilek, inscribed into the cultural dynamics of this period was a working of power that carried out the promise to be inclusive and liberating rather than repressing and obliterating one's social life (p. 6). This strategy of power operated through the idea that being visible in the social and cultural arenas, coming into the open, benefiting from the opportunities offered by urban centers and expressing thoughts without being judged as unrefined were liberating experiences. Gürbilek argues that this led to a blurring of lines between public and private spaces, because what had been unspeakable and perceived as private and/or uncultivated was now open in the public sphere, exposed and expressed boldly:

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<sup>72</sup> For the news related to these in English and Turkish, see <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/late-poet-can-yucels-tomb-to-be-finally-renovated-67864>, <http://bianet.org/bianet/sanat/132220-can-baba-nin-sarabina-tepki>, <http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/132238-can-yucel-in-mezari-parcalandi>.

But what left its stamp on Turkey in this period was not this kind of inward turn, not a withdrawal into privacy. On the contrary, what had long been private was brought out into the open; it was transformed into news, information, images. After the ‘Speaking Turkey’ period . . . people who had once frozen before cameras and microphones, unable to put two words together as if cornered in a government office or police station, learned not only to talk on television but to speak directly about themselves; not in the name of some institution or mode of thought, but about love, sexuality, the pain of lost love, even the death of loved ones, uninhibitedly. (2011, p. 55)

Of course, such sensational journalism was not new to this period, but it became more common and striking at the time, particularly evident in the outburst of real life stories and tragic accounts of family dramas circulating in the media at the time.

What lay behind such widespread realization of the right to speech, which took place at the intersection of the public and the private, was a controlled form of democracy. In other words, once the right to speech was depoliticized, it maintained the common deception that one was now free and less restrained to speak, no longer falling under the oppressive workings of authority. Ironically, this inclusive policy of power provided one with what was understood as freedom, an illusionary emancipation cleansed from politics. As Gürbilek puts it, people talked about their own experiences “not in the name of some institution or mode of thought” (p. 55) but on behalf of their own, private, selves.

Biliş and Özbudak capture this inherently contradictory aspect of “speaking Turkey”, the make-believe liberty and democracy initiated through the idea of having a voice in the public arena, by having the major characters express their inner thoughts and emotions in front of the camera. In Shakespeare’s dramatic text, Prince Escalus, Capulet, Montague and Friar Lawrence are the major characters that touch upon the devastating ends of Romeo and Juliet. Prince Escalus reprimands the Capulets and Montagues, and remarks that the tragedy of the lovers was the outcome of the feud between the two households: “See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,/

That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love” (2012, 5.3.292-293). Likewise in the original, there is certainly recognition of other social and familial dynamics that play a crucial part in the tragic end of Romeo and Juliet. When Friar Lawrence reveals the course of events that led to the suicide of the couple, he hints at the detrimental effect of forcing Juliet into engagement with Paris. In the last scene, there is a collective acknowledgment of the repercussions of the feud as it also takes place in the presence of Lady Capulet, the watchmen and the attendants.

In the adaptation, Biliş and Özbudak give voice to a range of characters by isolating each in front of the camera. The Capulet parents, Lady Montague, the Nurse, Benvolio, the Friar and the Apothecary reflect separately on the death of the lovers, and their accounts are filmed by the Prince and broadcasted live onto the blackboard. The collaborators single out each confessional account and integrate them into the scenes following Romeo’s exile. We see in the following excerpt that Capulet pours his heart out to the camera while the Prince stands with his back facing the audience and silently captures this live delivery (See Figure 10):

*Capulet:*

If you asked me yesterday, I would say what mattered above all was our title. But it doesn’t matter anymore, now I can see this. What mattered was Juliet, and that she had love in this world. Now I am nothing. I am a destitute man. My only richness now is the legacy Juliet left behind. That is love, their love... (Özbudak, 2016, p. 39)

In his self-reflection, Capulet touches upon the issues of family honor and loyalties, which now lose their significance as they are replaced by the feelings of remorse and grief. This publicly shared, seemingly sincere confession operates as a powerful and effectual turning point because the father, as the marker of authority in the Capulet household, regrets having prioritized masculine honor over his daughter’s wishes and well-being, and thus reaches out to an audience through the media in a didactic fashion. At this stage, the oppression of paternal authority is no longer a private

matter, but it rather indicates that the private is political, even though not openly recognized as such by Capulet.



Figure 10. Capulet (*facing the audience*) and Prince (*facing back*)

In a similar vein, Lady Capulet and the Nurse also take the blame in this family drama and carry the issue outside the borders of the family by using their newly-found spotlights. In contrast to her earlier unresponsiveness, Lady Capulet now declares that she will reach larger audiences, almost calling out for a collective recognition of the tragedy: “I guess my biggest mistake was to keep silent to this day... I watched everything silently. But I will no longer be silent. I will always tell the story of Romeo and Juliet, always” (Özbudak, 2016, p. 37). For both families, the forbidden love between the young couple leaves a legacy behind, that their love should be brought into the open and transferred. This proclamation takes place at the intersection of public and private with visual media as its medium, which seems to provide a democratic and equal means for the characters.

At the same time, these publicly shared confessional accounts are detached from one another because each figure stands solitary in front of the camera when they endeavour to give voice to and/or comment on the tragedy. The death of the lovers brings the characters together with a shared experience of bereavement and self-reflection, but this mutuality includes certain irreconcilable complexities. First, the characters remain isolated even though both families cast the enmity aside and demand public recognition of their case as exemplary. The determination of the parents goes against their own existence in this intertwined domain of the public and the private because they eventually do not stand in solidarity and broker peace. This is closely linked to the function of the Prince as the cameraman, who is hardly discernable on the stage as he remains in the dark standing below each speaker, with his back facing the audience. Ironically, self-questionings come to life through the channel of the Prince as the figure hidden behind the camera. This casts doubt upon the nature of the recognition that the characters demand, as well as on whether their voices can be transformative or not, because the Prince indirectly holds the power that allows the characters access to an inclusive domain of speech.

This resonates with the issue of controlled democracy that Gürbilek highlights, in that none of the characters acknowledge the oppressive classroom dynamics they were surrounded by. Similar to the depoliticized and deceptive dynamics of culture in “speaking Turkey”, the experience of coming out is realized at the expense of ignoring the crucial effect of the classroom, and the mechanism of discipline and surveillance it generates. When the Prince assumes the role of the broadcaster, he is positioned outside the ongoing circumstances and generates comprehensiveness and emancipation. The characters are provided freedom of speech at the expense of shutting their eyes and ears to the repercussions of the

violent, all-knowing authority of the Prince. While he is clearly visible as the direct embodiment of authority in the classroom, he now becomes the invisible initiator of controlled democracy behind the camera. For this reason, the confessional accounts become a parody of democracy and emancipation, which is also deduced from the account of the Apothecary:

*Apothecary:*

Look, I didn't sell him poison on purpose. But he insisted so much. So much that he was almost down on his knees, begging. Ok, I needed money as well. I don't deny it. I don't get it. He somehow convinced me to sell it. What's the big deal? It was just commerce, a trivial thing. So what? Does one have to be regretful as one appears here [*in front of the camera*]? I don't get it. (Özbudak, 2016, pp. 42-43)

In articulating his viewpoint, the Apothecary unveils the public anticipation for scandal and exposure triggered by the sensational journalism of the 1980s, which diverts attention from state violence, repression and political affairs by providing a depoliticized arena of freedom of speech. Not being regretful, the Apothecary feels out of place, jokes around and questions whether appearing before the camera necessitates that one assume a preconditioned public identity. His statement is exemplary of the blurring of lines between public and private spaces reminiscent of post-1980s culture.

#### 5.4 A brief history of education in Turkey

If publicness, surveillance, and youth culture are central to Biliş and Özbudak's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, equally important is the space in which they locate public life: the classroom. The production's opening scene discloses the classroom as a public space in which military discourse operates to "educate" the students; this is particularly evident in the way Biliş and Özbudak imagine the Prince, an oppressor trying to resolve a student/family conflict by intimidating the group with the gallows

as the ultimate punishment. Biliş and Özbudak's idea of the classroom as a place of authoritative surveillance is not a coincidence, since the classroom has played a key role in planning and regulating social life and behaviour, sexuality and the institution of the family in Turkey.

The understanding of discipline and authority seen in the classroom scene is very much related to the reforms realized in the early years of the Republic as well as the history of coup d'états in the second half of the twentieth century. The defining features of the current educational system in Turkey can be traced back to the establishment of the Republic, and the subsequent nation-building processes of secularism and the Kemalist agenda. The transformation of the educational system was among the central republican reforms in perpetuating Kemalist ideology. As Fatma Gök (2004) points out, the main function of education in this period was to equip the public and coming generations with necessary tools to reinforce the new regime and to serve the liberal economy model adopted by the government in 1923 (p. 5). With the Law of Unification of Instruction passed in 1924, the Ministry of Education became the centralized authority in charge of educational policies, institutions and curricula in the Republic, a centralization that continues to this day. This law formed the basis of secular education in Turkey as it eliminated the dual system of education, Islamic and secular, of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1950, four years after the introduction of multiparty elections, the Democrat Party (DP) was elected with a landslide victory, and the party implemented religion-oriented policies in the educational system, as part of their integration of Islam into the political culture of the republic. On this subject, Bayhan and Gök (2016) suggest that the right-wing Democrat Party "successfully appealed to the Islamic sensibilities of the society and hence blamed the ruling Republican People's

Party for abolishing religious education”, ultimately increasing the number of Imam Hatip schools, where future religious personnel would be trained for government service (p. 3). As Sam Kaplan (2006) remarks, “the Kemalist dream of a Turkish nation where all thought and actions would conform to secular positivism never came about” (p. 43). Soon afterwards in 1960, the military took control of the government and “the junta accused the DP politicians of undermining the secular legacy of Atatürk and thus of turning the republic into theocracy” (p. 43). The Turkish Constitution of 1961 displayed a more libertarian, secular approach with regards to education and science, according to which primary education was obligatory in public schools, and it became compulsory for all citizens, male and female.

However, Turkey witnessed escalating upheaval in the following decades, with the army intervening two more times in 1971 and 1980. It was the 1980 coup d'état that brought strict regulations that intensified the ties between the military and the national educational system. After the intervention, the military embarked on a religious adjustment of education and “instituted a series of educational reforms that sought to prevent at all costs the consolidation of distinct identities that threatened to fragment the nation into a polity riddled with divisions” (Kaplan, 2006, p. 44). In the post-1980 legal amendments to education, the “student” was, and still is, seen as a constant source of fear and anxiety, a threat to the established order. The militarized educational policies sought to shape the coming generations as docile members of the society, and thus implemented a classroom environment of surveillance that fortified patriotism. To achieve this, Kaplan puts forward, a crucial strategy was to frame instructors as parents who would monitor students for the benefit of the nation:

Instructors, in turn, take on the role of surrogate parents, who provide the necessary nurture for the children's eventual integration into adult society. In fact, the entire pedagogical apparatus constantly deploys a language normally associated with family and patriotism –both domains of disinterested love and solidarity. The state-run school becomes simultaneously a national extension of home and a domestic version of the nation. In effecting this move from home to school to nation and back, the curriculum is replete with a vocabulary usually reserved for family members. Pupils are “siblings” to one another, and the teachers and principals are “parents” who manage well, supervise and support this familial order. (p. 61)

In the above excerpt, Kaplan foregrounds the double identities that instructors and students bore within this militarized pedagogical program. This pedagogy also deemed the student's identity as an empty, flexible vessel that was to be filled with the desired objectives of the nation. As substitute parents, the instructors were responsible for nurturing the children and supervising their upbringing in the classroom, which was now an extension of ideology. In this context, the classroom, as “the national extension of home,” reorganized familial ties around a nationalistic, militarized discourse and embodied the planning and regulating of one's social being. These details shed light on Biliş and Özbudak's choice of the classroom as the central, binding element of the adaptation to reconsider the feud as an extension of ideology, the oppressive operation of education in post-1980 Turkey. As we see in the opening scene, the Prince treats the students as a relentless threat to the established order and flat recipients of discipline. As the authoritarian educator, he imposes polarizing qualities through physical and verbal violence onto the rest of the characters. The classroom in the adaptation is presented as the structure that shapes the public identity of the students in social and political relationships such as friendship, family, and marriage. As such, the characters oscillate between their roles as students and their other social identities, such a father, a lover or a nurse.

In this sense, Biliş and Özbudak's *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation connects the familial feud that characterizes the interrelationship between the characters to the larger issue of education by tracing its origins and practice in the classroom environment. This shift positions the lovers not as the victims of the family feud directly but as the victims of a disciplinarian educational system, as illustrated by the frozen image of the lovers lying dead on the desks as the play opens. In its last scene, the Shakespearean original presents Capulet and Montague shaking hands as a gesture of truce-making and shared grief, which symbolizes the belated uniting of the two houses seen in the following lines by Capulet: "O brother Montague, give me thy hand./ This is my daughter's jointure, for no more can I demand" (Shakespeare, 2012, 5.3.296-298). In the closing scene of the adaptation, however, all the characters are back in their seats in the classroom, this time facing the audience (see Figure 11). The Capulets are seated on the right and the Montagues, now including Juliet, on the left, and the Prince stands between the two parties. Here, the student identity of the characters once again takes priority over their familial and social roles. This last image in the adaptation lays bare the surrounding walls of the classroom, which transposes its assertive and vehement forms of operation onto the students, such as aggression, surveillance, and verbal and physical violence.

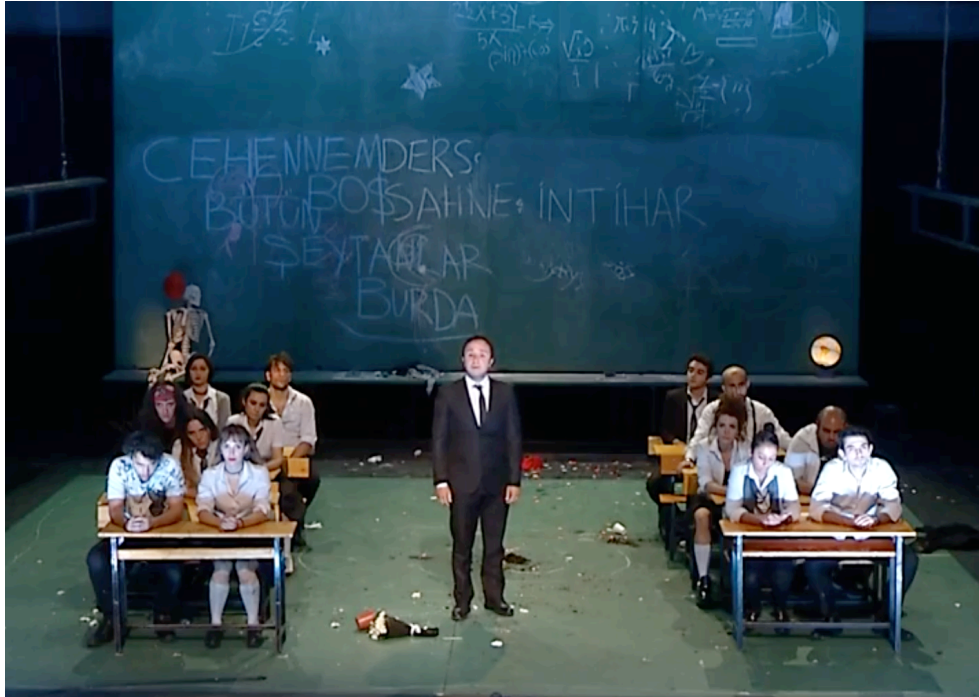


Figure 11. The closing scene

### 5.5 The classroom as “state apparatus”

In the Chorus’s prologue in Shakespeare’s dramatic text, the two families are defined as ancient inhabitants of the city, being “alike in dignity”, and the repercussions of their “ancient grudge” not only destroy the lives of the young lovers, but causes the death of many others, effecting the totality of order in the city. The first act opens with Samson and Gregory, servant men to the house of Capulets, wandering around the streets of Verona, armed with swords in case they encounter a member of the Montague house. Shakespeare introduces the feud between the noble families as a larger issue effecting different layers of society, as Gregory remarks, “the quarrel is between our masters and us their men” (2012, 1.1.18-19). Scholarship has paid great attention to the nature of this grudge and its impact on the citizens, with a particular focus on the characters of Romeo and Juliet. A common critical tendency has been to focus on the tragedy of the lovers, their iconic romance and the relationship between fate and the feud as initiators of tragedy in the play. In contrast to these debates, there

has recently been increasing interest in looking at the “star-crossed lovers” and the civil strife by paying particular attention to the social and political dynamics of the play. Biliş and Özbudak’s decision to represent *Romeo and Juliet*’s public space as a classroom resonates with discussions around familial feuds, civil strife, and public and private spaces in recent scholarship on the play. Additionally, the negotiation between the oppressive classroom dynamics and the violent, polarizing family feud in the adaptation diverges from the social dynamics of the original play in relation to the issues of intergenerational relationships and patriarchal authority.

One of the earliest voices drawing attention to the socio-political aspects of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is Coppelia Kahn (1978), who views the feud as “the primary tragic force in the play”, not as an “agent of fate” (p. 5), and further notes that the feud underpins the identities of the young characters directly in relation to patriarchy and the institution of the family, with the “paternal household” working as a polarizing mechanism since it is in conflict with another powerful “paternal household”. For Kahn, “filial allegiance” sets strict borders on the decisions and desires of the characters, for whom marriage is proposed as a negotiation in careful consideration of the strife between the two families. More recently, William McKim (2009) points out that a rather sentimental reading of the play focusing primarily on the lyricism of the love and its tragedy oftentimes ignores the psychological and cultural complexity of the dramatic text (p. 80). McKim evaluates the feud and its violent, self-sacrificial results as pertaining to already existing codes of honor in Verona:

The Montague-Capulet feud... is shown to be more symptom than cause of a more broadly cultural mindset, the erecting, defending, and promoting of one’s house serving as a means of standing tall against rivals, and other aggressive efforts to stand tall and stand above, whether through building, fighting, sarcastic discourse, or sexual conquest, functioning as invitations for put-downs and knockdowns of various sorts. (p. 81)

Here, the critic considers the feud as an extension of a broader mindset, one he defines in military terms. Erecting and defending, the idea of masculinity here is epitomized as a conqueror figure that functions as the key patriarchal mechanism of the society in the play. The critic evaluates the masculine anxiety of proving oneself as powerful and worthy in society in accordance with the feud, which symptomizes a culturally and socially conditioned patriarchal mind-set. Whereas Kahn regards the feud as the primary force and expression of patriarchal power struggle in the play, McKim contends that the feud is not the primary causation, but rather an extension of an authoritative, masculine conditioning.

On this subject, the critics Susan Snyder and Naomi Conn Liebler look at the broader context of power and ideology and draw attention to an Althusserian reading of Shakespeare's play. Snyder (1996) points out that the social institutions in the play constitute their tragic force not on an individual level, but on the level of ideology: "the feud in its operations acts like any ideology, indeed offers a model of how ideology works" (p. 88). Tracing possible instances in the dramatic text for the history and cause of the ancient feud, Snyder underlines that instead of any valid, openly stated causes, the play includes instances where we see the lack of its articulation. As such, Snyder equates the feud with ideology and remarks that the feud has an "always already quality" (p. 88), which categorizes the characters into predetermined roles. This is in line with the idea of authoritative education that Biliş and Özbudak foreground in their adaptation, in that they imagine the feud not as the ultimate cause of strife in the play, but rather as the extension of ideology: in their adaptation, the educational system is a key mechanism that prevails over all the other social institutions in the play. As we see in the opening of the adaptation, discipline

and authoritarianism operate as all-embodying mechanisms, which in turn deem the feud a repetitive, cyclical instance of violence.

Snyder (1996) further remarks that it is crucial to look at how actions are habitually repeated in *Romeo and Juliet*, because the recurrent nature of violence and strife “keep reasserting the defining distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 91). Parallel to Snyder’s reading, Liebler (2003) considers Verona as an epitome of failed civility, and suggests that the play portrays the failure of civic institutions and structures: “Their micro-function dissolves into the macro-structure that contains them, evident in the play’s last lines, the recycled, persistent contest between the two houses that confronts us in the play’s opening scenes, enclosed within ‘Verona walls’” (p. 305). Liebler considers the city’s walls as representative of authority as a macro-structure, both literally and figuratively present in the play. The walls remind us of the recycled nature of the feud that surrounds the totality of the relationship between the characters; the way that they decide and act are bound to the institutions of power representative of authority such as the family:

*Romeo and Juliet* performs an indictment of the civic institutions and structures of authority represented in the play, shifting the focus off the protagonists who serve as the agents for that performance, and on to the collective city for which they stand, and to which... they are sacrificed. Walls, too, are literally structures of authority, erected, sustained, and defended by the institutions and their human representatives that define or make up “the city.” Like the Althusserian “State Apparatuses,” both ideological and repressive (Althusser 1971: 144–5), they are the physical and figurative manifestations of a city’s identity, the visible inscription by which it knows itself. (2003, p. 305)

Here, Liebler points out that the characters become extensions of Verona’s dominant ideology as they become agents performing and replicating the operations of authority in the social circles to which they belong. Like the walls that operate as “physical and figurative manifestations” of the city, Biliş and Özbudak’s classroom signals Althusserian state apparatuses, representing the discipline and submissiveness

enacted upon the students as well as the authority and violence sustained by its rigid walls. Here, it is the power of authoritarian education that compels a constant social feud. Instead of viewing the feud itself as causation, the collaborators portray it rather as an extension of ideology, replicating the violence and authority embodied by the Prince. When he scolds the students, repeating the rhetorical question of “Who are you?” several times, he does not give any reference to their family backgrounds. Actually, the family titles Capulet and Montague are never referred to in the totality of the adaptation because their ranks are erased under the sole body of the Prince’s authoritarian gaze. Just as the walls of Verona are structures of authority, the classroom and desks, which are later erected as tombstones in the end, make up the disciplined, ordered macrostructure in the adaptation.

Indeed, in the booklet of the production, the director Biliş defines Shakespeare’s Verona as a deeply polarized place where the two sides of a split society approach each other with hatred, and adds that a totalitarian structure rules over the streets, “a sinister city where the heritage of the revenge culture slaughters the new generation, the young trees, at a tender age” (Nilüfer Belediyesi, 2016, p. 9). The director equates the image of the city and the clash between two enemy families to a struggle that pervades the streets, where the young are slain as if they are young trees, a public space that is not only a ground of vengeful menace, but also a place controlled by political authoritarianism.

At the same time, the restricting mechanism of the four-walled structure of the classroom slightly diverges from the idea of Verona that Liebler discusses, because in the adaptation the four walls also embody the crossing of borders by the youth, though in a problematic fashion. In Shakespeare’s dramatic text, Juliet has the opportunity to be in public in the party scene, but even her moments with Romeo are

either supervised or under threat. We see Juliet predominantly in the role of the daughter of the patriarchal Capulet household, oftentimes in the presence of a family member or servant. Having almost no place in public space, Juliet is marked by domesticity. In contrast, Biliş and Özbudak's Juliet occupies public space, and perhaps more importantly, the production's decision to erase the intergenerational gap between the youth and the adults renders them all into an undifferentiated group as peers.

The classroom ideally nourishes the intellectual, mental development of the individual and offers a protective space in which the young can learn, think and question in pursuit of self-discovery. Quite removed from the ideal premise of the classroom, Biliş and Özbudak's adaptation presents this space as a structure in which the young are conditioned and scrutinized by authority. In this sense, the classroom becomes an apparatus through which authoritative power exerts its influence on individuals by creating a mechanism of repetition and threat exemplified by the Prince as he disciplines the students. The sporadically seen Prince acts as a visible manifestation of political authority; however, we should note that the social mechanism of the discipline he embodies transcends his corporeal presence in the classroom. The classroom itself as the spatial manifestation of the educational system transfers its ideologies and rules. Although the classroom contains both order and disorder, that is, both the presence and the absence of the Prince, the students are always within the classroom, which has already inscribed its values on them.

If there is a direct and/or indirect affinity between the classroom and the social existence of the characters in the rest of the adaptation, the party scene also raises the question of whether the characters can ever liberate themselves from the walls of the classroom even when they strip off their student identities and choose to

express themselves freely. In the Shakespearean original, the party is a masquerade held for an exclusive list of guests that include relatives and friends of the Capulet family. It represents a state of controlled publicness for Juliet because it is not only held indoors with the company of her parents, but also her socialization takes place among an invited list of guests determined by her father. After Paris asks for Capulet's consent for Juliet's hand in marriage, Capulet invites him to the "old accustomed feast" (Shakespeare, 2012, 1.2.19) held at his household, where he seeks to introduce his daughter to the young nobleman. This occasion also gives Capulet the opportunity to observe whether Paris might be interested in other women instead of his daughter, as he suggests that the young man weigh his interest in Juliet in the presence of other worthy women at the feast. Of course, the irony here is that Romeo and his friends sneak into the party in disguise, and it is the occasion where the legendary love between Romeo and Juliet flourishes. The veiling of identities at the party provides the young lovers with a temporary release from parental and social restriction as they fall in love unaware of the fact that they belong to enemy families.

Whereas Paris is invited to an already planned occasion in the original, Capulet decides to throw a party so that he can introduce Paris to Juliet in the adaptation. Özbudak entitles the scene before the party "Negotiation" and characterizes Paris as an overly self-confident and dominating young man, who brags about his wealth in exchange for Juliet. From this angle, the party in the adaptation is an extension of this negotiation with its visual extravaganza. We see Capulet wearing several jackets on top of one another with countless cash pinned on them while he welcomes the guests to the party. This image of Capulet both underlines the bride price offered by Paris, objectifying Juliet as material the young man desires to

possess, and illustrates the father as a stereotypical nouveau riche having sealed the deal.

At first glance, the party scene with its visual extravaganza, loud outbursts, the free spirited moves of the characters and their vulgar attitudes seems quite disorderly, sexually overt and autonomous. It creates the impression that this is an atmosphere of liveliness and self-expression taking place beyond the controlling eyes of the Prince. Participants seem to shun their flattened identities as students who are scrutinized by the Prince, as evidenced by their attempts to express their personal choices by shedding their uniforms. Interestingly, many of their costumes and masks are symbols of a liberating and progressive classroom environment, including a brain cube, a palate, the planets and pencils (see Figure 12). This scene ironically discloses that these education-oriented artefacts do not exist within the actual working of the militarized classroom, rather, they are mere costumes that point at the lack of a mind-broadening teaching pedagogy. As mentioned earlier, the post-1980s army-oriented educational policies perceived the student as a threat posed to the established order, and thus sought to exclude any means of schooling that would provide one with the necessary tools to be autonomous individuals questioning the school's central message of patriotism.



Figure 12. The party (*Capulet in front of the black board*)

This rigidity is also emphasized by the use of desks in this scene because they are symmetrically ordered around the party room, bordering it in perfect shape. Since the desks are the main props maintained throughout the production, they portray the different manifestations of this coeducational public space, oscillating between what restricts the youth and what serves as their private and/or public space, exhibiting their decisions and desires. Hence, the desks duplicate the dual meaning and purpose of the classroom as a constrained space on a micro scale. Throughout the majority of the play, the desks serve as constant reminders that one has to abide by social norms and rules and they illustrate the extension of the power exerted by the educational mechanism on the corporeal life of the individual. Although the party scene presents an ironic treatment of the limitations of post-1980s education in Turkey, it does not convey a liberating experience and a coming out of their shells for the youth.

Besides, the party itself is an outcome of the negotiation between Juliet's father and the wealthy suitor Paris, an arbitration that is the determining parameter of the event.

## 5.6 The classroom vs. the balcony

In their *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation, Biliş and Özbudak reimagine Shakespeare's canonized, tragic love story as a classroom tragedy in the contemporary world of high school students in an unnamed city. Their decision to stage *Romeo and Juliet* in a classroom takes the dynamics of publicness and privateness in the original as intertwined issues, this time embodied within the authoritarian domain of co-educational publicness with reference to 1980s Turkey. For Biliş and Özbudak, the classroom is the central, binding element of the adaptation that brings together the issues of civil strife, family feud, youth culture, sexuality, forbidden love and paternal authority in relation to the larger issue of militarized education's impact on society. The collaborators look into "education" as an oppressive mechanism that operates on different areas of social life and creates a cyclical turmoil for the characters. This is connected to the unique cultural context associated with educational policies in post-1980s Turkey, making the classroom a readily available symbol for talking about social conditioning and authoritarian oppression. Their choice scrutinizes an image of publicness where the disciplinary and forceful undercurrents of the classroom extend upon the familial and social beings of the characters who are first and foremost portrayed as students, though they bear double identities as members of two feuding families.

Biliş and Özbudak further complicate the manifestation of publicness in the adaptation by endowing women with visibility, the youth with overt sexuality, and the friends and parents of Romeo and Juliet with freedom of speech in the public arena. To achieve this, they draw inspiration from the complex cultural panorama of post-1980s Turkey, especially from the issues of depoliticization and controlled democracy. On the one hand, this shows that what the students/family members

perceive to be self-expression and transgression outside the immediate reach of an authority figure is illusory and ambiguous. In other words, they live under the illusion that one is free outside the immediate working of power whereas they experience rather deceptive manifestations of liberation and inclusiveness initiated by controlled democracy. This goes parallel to the flattening aspect of the militarized understanding of education, which erases the intergenerational gap between the characters under the severe discipline of the classroom. Thus, the characters at times turn into caricatured versions of Shakespeare's original *dramatis personae*, which uncover the flattening aspect of social conditioning and authoritarian oppression. As such, the adaptation discloses the irony behind experiencing a seemingly transgressive autonomy in the public arena, while at the same time re-establishing the language and forcefulness of the classroom in the social and familial circles. We see in analyses of the excerpts from the adaptation that gender discrimination, female oppression and sexual harassment are observed in the relationship between the characters with no truce between the families in the end.

On the other hand, Özbudak and Biliş also take the flattening "peer" quality of the classroom as an emancipatory gesture that can defy the authoritarian underpinnings of co-educational publicness, as they evaluate the totality of the adaptation. When Biliş pulls the balcony metaphor in the limelight, he calls out to the youth, not limiting his appeal to *Romeo and Juliet*. The balcony becomes an extended metaphor in his reading, an inspirational space where there is peace and a breaking of taboos for the politically otherized youth, which goes against the local context applied to the play. The adaptation revisits the ancient feud, along with the sub-themes of the original, to look at the destructive impact of the post-1980 militarized pedagogy and its repercussions on the youth, but the collaborators alter

the ending of the play, which negates the possibility of a belated truce between the characters. The ambivalent attitude here is a question of adaptation: even as Biliş and Özbudak's interest in collaboration lead them to practice adaptation as process, Özbudak's recognition of Shakespeare's legitimating author-function validates the adaptor's authorial position and provides him with a degree of self-recognition. In line with this aspiration, the production relies on Shakespeare's original ending to envision liberation, but the "local" filters of the adaptation in fact point to liberation as an illusion.

At this juncture, we come to the conclusion that the negotiation between the Shakespearean original and the local filters the collaborators apply poses certain contradictions about the adaptation parameters in this case, even though they present the audience with a substantially dramatized locality. Struggling with the anxiety over the centuries-long cultural hegemony of the name Shakespeare, the collaborators reflect a discrepancy between their envisioning of the project and its realization on stage. This not only brings up the issue of the multilayered hierarchies of adapting Shakespeare on stage in Turkey, but also calls for a consideration of yet another hierarchy within the dynamics of working through locality. As evident in my earlier cases as well, collaborative negotiations of working in and through adaptation and locality exemplify that there is not one "Shakespeare" that the theatre practitioners engage in. Their own journeys with the playwrights are multilayered, heterogeneous practices, which lays bare the fact that today access to and engagement in Shakespeare is in itself a hybrid process.

## CONCLUSION

In mapping the landscape of political Shakespeare adaptations in contemporary Turkish theatre, I evaluate five distinct cases from well-known, independent theatre companies and collaborators, Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası* (1980), BGST's *Kim Var Orada?* (2015), Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* (2013), Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus: A Five Act Maganda Tragedy* (2010), and Serdar Biliş and Sami Özbudak's *Romeo and Juliet* (2016). These "local" Shakespeares engage in diverse cultural and political agendas across different times and spaces; their filters of locality include the Gezi Park Protests, the *maganda* discourse of the 1990s and the militarized educational policies and youth culture of the 1980s in Turkey. All of these cases involve complex, multifaceted interrogations around the practice of adaptation, locality and politics as well as Shakespeare's politically loaded legacy. In this regard, *Bahar Noktası* and *Kim Var Orada?* are key cases that respectively explicate the methodological, theoretical and historical backbone of my study as they shed light on my analyses of the ways Moda Sahnesi, Semaver Kumpanya and Biliş and Özbudak receive and engage with Shakespeare's plays while at the same time grappling with the still-valid anxiety over the "authority" of the playwright. My case studies reveal that the practice of adaptation is carried out as a collaborative process, which results from theatre artists' aspiration to include oftentimes neglected performance dynamics as determining features of adaptation, including their immediate socio-political agendas, the historical and cultural background of their theatre sites, the practice of "co-operative" translation, and the critical feedback and improvisational contribution of company members. The overall emphasis theatre artists put on the collaborative, experimental features of adaptation also goes parallel

to the major adaptation tendency they display in addressing the local: to revisit the issue of identity politics and unearth ethnic difference and/or political otherness in debating political fault lines in Turkey's recent history. The practice of adaptation as process provides a liberating space for theatre practitioners to work on their theatrical principles, emancipatory struggles and/or self-identifications with Shakespeare. It also gives them room for untangling the issues of legitimacy, fidelity, cultural hegemony and identity politics and for stepping outside the binary logic that surrounds the "original/adaptation" opposition, though these negotiations come with limitations and contradictions in each distinct case.

The adaptations I analyse lay bare the fact that the renascent interest in modernizing Shakespeare's work through the local calls forth a critical consideration of certain dualisms such as "original/ adapted", "East/West", "foreign/local", "traditional/modern" and "surface-level locality/ substantial locality", which correspond both to larger global discussions around "adaptation/translation" and to issues of locality, theatre practice and identity politics in Turkey. As I elucidate in my first chapter, a careful evaluation of the recent criticism on multicultural and non-Anglophone Shakespeare adaptations allows us to clarify the intertwined relationship between the experience of coming to terms with the authority of "Shakespeare" and the political contextualization of his plays with a particular focus on Turkey's history of ethnic diversity and/or political otherness. In response to the depoliticizing strategies of the 1980 military intervention and the surrounding prohibitions, violence and state oppression, Yücel and the Tepebaşı Experimental Stage company re-contextualize Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, alluding to Republican Turkey's non-Muslim cultural heritage and adapting Shakespeare's global imagery to Ottoman minorities. My analysis of Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası* demonstrates that

adaptation becomes a collaborative and inclusive practice when constituents like the critical contributions of the director and the cast members and the ideological goals of the company are dealt with as integral parts of the process. Resonating with Susan Bassnett and Margaret Kidnie's call for viewing the dramatic text and the performance text as elements of a theatre production rather than as fixed points of origin, Yücel and his colleagues filter Shakespeare's play through the local by engaging in translation and adaptation outside the binary logic of author/translator and text/performance dualisms. Both the preparation process and the production of *Bahar Noktası* cast doubt upon assessing Shakespeare adaptations under firm categories of legitimacy and fidelity as the project reworks the definition and practice of "adaptation/translation." As such, *Bahar Noktası* becomes a process in and through which the theatre site transforms into an emancipating space, however limited and contradictory this emancipation may eventually appear.

The case of *Bahar Noktası* marks a tendency that haunts the decision-making strategies, aspirations and ideals of theatre practitioners in adapting Shakespeare's plays to the local; through Shakespeare's political hegemony, they endeavour to accomplish highly political projects, which aim to position a solidarity between their political opposition in their contemporary moments in Turkey and the history of ethnic diversity and/or political otherness in the country. An Adaptation Studies lens discloses that this complex endeavour brings along a critical struggle with the name "Shakespeare" due to the ambivalent place the playwright occupies in Turkish theatre. It is evident in my case studies that theatre artists often claim to problematize a dualistic approach to adaptation and identity politics, as they articulate a stance against political and theatrical authority; however, their authorial aims in adapting Shakespeare necessarily places them in conversation with the politically loaded

legacy of the playwright. Therefore, Shakespeare becomes a site for the negotiation of dualities and leaves theatre practitioners in a state of contradiction, as their authorial aims usually turn out to be at cross purposes with the locality that shapes their adaptations as a distinguishing feature.

Access to and engagement with Shakespeare's work played a crucial part in theatre's role as an operative agent in the projects of Westernization/modernization and nation-state building in late Ottoman Era and Republican Turkey. In my second chapter, I chart the issues of cultural hegemony, identity politics and locality that emerge during these eras and argue that Shakespeare's legacy in Turkey is embedded within the constant re-establishment of the aforementioned dualities. Borrowing Margaret Litvin's theory of the appropriation of the playwright in the Arab world, I argue that Shakespeare entered the Ottoman theatrical scene through a "global kaleidoscope of indirect experiences" (p. 36), and his works were accessed through dispersed sources and multiple languages. In contrast to the legitimating authority that "Shakespeare" provides theatre practitioners today, Shakespeare's incipient legacy in the late Ottoman period flourished via a fragmented, changing pattern of dramatic texts and performances in various languages. This variable and oblique relationship with the playwright blurs the inclination to impose a foundational essence on the adaptations of his work. Before Shakespeare gradually acquired a preserved, authorial status in modern Turkish theatre, the figure of Shakespeare oscillated between distinct dispositions such as a canonical playwright that influenced Armenian dramatic literature. Recognizing the fact that Shakespeare was gradually adopted and glorified with national pride in the Republican Era allows us to understand his role in forming an understanding of translation and adaptation as "secondary" to the adapted work and forming a hierarchical relationship with

European literatures, setting major Western literary figures as markers of knowledge. In this framework, my analysis of BGST's *Kim Var Orada?* illustrates the intertwined impact of Shakespeare and "legendary" theatre director Ertuğrul on Turkish theatre history. Against the broader background of Turkish theatre history, Shakespeare is at the heart of the indeterminate relationship between "an elite Western culture" and a "local" Ottoman one, a dualism that further encompasses the complexity of the long-ignored cultural heritage of non-Muslim communities as "local foreigners" defined in opposition to "authentic" Turks. Meanwhile, Ertuğrul's theatrical career cemented Shakespeare's "local" reputation as a symbol of Western-influenced Turkish modernity and an authorial figure praised with national pride in Republican Turkey. Through the case of *Kim Var Orada?*, I point out that contemporary concerns over legitimacy, fidelity and self-authorization recall Turkish theatre's hybrid, heterogeneous cultural heritage and the erasure of non-Muslim and Ottoman performance practices from the theatrical scene of Turkey. The erasure of a non-Muslim cultural heritage in particular reverberates in and through the politically resistant inclination to revisit the issue of identity politics in the adaptations of Yücel's *Bahar Noktası* and Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* as well as BGST's *Kim Var Orada?*

In light of the theoretical and historical background I outline, I evaluate the stakes of adaptation in Moda Sahnesi's *Hamlet* by examining how the company challenges political as well as literary power in the context of the 2013 Gezi Park Protests. The company reimagines Hamlet as a dissenting character of frenzied motion who resists the propagated "truths" of a power centre based on the exclusion and silencing of dissent. Through this portrayal, the company enunciates the way they choose to wrestle with the ambivalent place Shakespeare occupies in their

mindset: a legitimating canonical figure that satisfies their need for self-authorization as well as a symbol of authority that should be contested. Based on the notion of adaptation as process, I analyze Moda Sahnesi's theatrical and visual claim of collectivity, demanding public space, and shattering literary and ideological narratives of authority and power. On the one hand, the company foregrounds the immediate body of the theatre practitioners, the presence of the audience, the formal choices of adaptation and the non-Muslim cultural heritage of the neighbourhood as vital, distinguishing features of locality. In challenging the political fault lines of their immediate socio-political context, the company exhibits a process similar to that of Can Yücel's *Bahar Noktası*, as their adaptation is actualized through a sensibility that tries to avoid assigning greater value to one of these contributing factors. On the other hand, the complex and hybrid nature of their adaptation does not prevent Moda Sahnesi from adhering to the "authority" of Shakespeare by nonetheless defining the practice of theatre within Western frames of criticism. The company ironically leaves aside their consideration of the dramatic text as a crucial element of adaptation. Parallel with William Worthen's emphasis on the author-function, Moda Sahnesi's recourse to Shakespeare marks the limitations and contradictions they experience in adapting the playwright's work, as the hierarchical distinction between "original" vs. "adaptation" is replicated in the performance arena, even as they claim to defy such dualisms.

In my next case study, Semaver Kumpanya's *Titus Andronicus: A Five Act Maganda Tragedy*, I lay out negotiations around identity politics and locality in an adaptation that is twice removed from the Shakespearean original. The company adapts translator Sinan Fişek's contextualization of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, which is a rewriting that attaches the play's bloody revenge cycle to honour killings

and gender violence in Turkey. Fişek portrays an image of racial and ethnic otherness from the socio-political and cultural panorama of 1990s Turkey by positioning the maganda figure at the core of his work and imagining the play as a farce with an “Eastern” twist. Semaver Kumpanya’s adaptation process reflects much less concern over disputing Shakespeare’s authority as the company does not approach Shakespeare’s dramatic text as a fixed point of origin in working on Fişek’s version. Rather than Shakespeare’s “original” work, the company takes into consideration Fişek’s dramatic text along with their stated ideals as determining features of adaptation. Like Moda Sahnesi, Semaver Kumpanya is a company that greatly values collaboration, claiming public space, the improvisational contributions of its cast members, and the neighbourhood culture that surrounds its theatre site. In fact, the idea of bringing theatre to the margins is a defining principle for Semaver Kumpanya, an ideal that they have sustained for two decades. As a question of adaptation as process, however, Semaver Kumpanya’s context for problematizing contemporary political fractures works against their stated ideals, which is evident in my analysis of the differential impact of political violence on different communities in their *Titus Andronicus*. In the Turkish context, both the maganda figure and honour killings have specific ideological connotations that coalesce around a vague image of “otherness”. In the play text, this surface-level locality is observed through the East Anatolian dialect Fişek inserted into his rewriting to suggest an idea of patriarchy and feudal dynamics in Eastern Turkish culture. Even though the company members prefer to highlight violence against women in Turkey in the adaptation, they handle this issue by connecting it to a unique, ethnic identity and its “traditional” customs, distinguishing the modern “us” from the traditional Kurds and/or Eastern population. At this juncture, Semaver Kumpanya’s theatrical choices

and local filters pose conflicts over both the politics of representing violence in contemporary Turkey and the process of theatre making. In contrast to my previous cases, in which theatre practitioners commonly recall Turkey's non-Muslim cultural and political history as a context for problematizing contemporary political fractures and the struggles of artists for an emancipating cultural and political domain, Semaver Kumpanya's turn to identity politics through implied references to ethnic otherness replicates the dualities of "East/West" and "traditional/modern" on the flexible surface of Shakespeare. In Semaver Kumpanya's adaptation preferences, the integration of locality excludes the very "otherized" position the company seeks to embrace in their foundational principles and theatrical decision-making processes.

My last case study is Serdar Biliş and Sami Özbudak's *Romeo and Juliet*. In this adaptation, Biliş and Özbudak situate the issues of civil strife, family feud, youth culture, sexuality, forbidden love and paternal authority within the cultural climate of 1980s Turkey, and focus specifically on a militarized educational system's destructive impact on society. When the collaborators negotiate the local filters they apply to the Shakespearean original, the parameters of adaptation pose a discrepancy between authorial intentions and the actual stage performance, even though they present the audience with a substantially dramatized locality. Biliş and Özbudak take the flattening "peer" quality of the oppressive classroom as an emancipatory gesture when they evaluate the totality of the adaptation. This is particularly related to director Biliş's evoking of *Romeo and Juliet*'s famous balcony scene as an extended metaphor for a liberating space that can contest the authoritarian underpinnings of co-educational publicness. For the director, politically otherized youth can come together in solidarity once they attempt to break taboos, claim freedom of expression and sexual emancipation. This envisioning of the balcony is in discordance with the

manner in which the artists recall Turkey's cultural climate in the 1980s, demonstrating in the adaptation itself that neither freedom of expression nor sexual emancipation are straight-forward experiences. The production is inspired by Shakespeare's original ending to envision liberation, but its elements of "local" adaptation actually point to liberation as an illusion. The contradiction here is again a question of the intertwined relationship between political Shakespeare adaptations in Turkey and theatre artists' struggle with the cultural hegemony of the playwright's legacy. Although Biliş and Özbudak reflect collaborative, inclusive efforts that mark their adaptation as process, Özbudak's recognition of Shakespeare's legitimating presence validates the adaptor's authorial position and provides him with a degree of self-recognition.

Within the scope of this study, I explore the complex phenomenon of political Shakespeare adaptations in contemporary Turkish theatre. Through my case studies, I explicate that the collaborative efforts of working in and through adaptation and locality pinpoint the vital issue that there is not one single "Shakespeare" that the theatre practitioners engage in. Their journeys with the playwright are multidimensional and heterogeneous "processes" of adaptation, as each distinct case study reflects a desire to actualize adaptation outside the confines of the "original/adaptation" dualism. Although Shakespeare's politically loaded legacy continues to haunt theatre practitioners, independent theatre practitioners' interest in identity politics, ethnic diversity, and political otherness impact the manner in which they negotiate Shakespeare's preserved, authorial presence. Even though Shakespeare "adaptation" seems to allow theatre artists the necessary tools to achieve these multifaceted negotiations simultaneously, the version of Shakespeare that they inherit from Turkish theatre history comes with its own hierarchies and

complications. In grappling with the authority of Shakespeare, they necessarily end up with a very complicated product. Thus, in problematizing vital hierarchies around identity politics, cultural hegemony and the practice of theatre, they re-establish, reclaim certain authorial positions or pose an ambivalent standpoint in this process. This indicates that today access to and engagement with Shakespeare's work is in itself a hybrid process, which ironically recalls the initial entrance of the playwright to the Ottoman theatrical scene. It might be anachronistic to draw a direct parallelism between Shakespeare's early career in Turkish theatre and the inclusive, collaborative engagement with his work that has emerged in the twenty-first century. However, I believe that the renascent interest in contextualizing Shakespeare's plays in relation to distinct socio-political agendas from modern Turkey is not a coincidence. Rather, it is a tendency that emerges "naturally": negotiating Shakespeare's preserved, authorial status necessarily involves the questions of difference and identity that have marked modern Turkish history.

As I look at the contemporary case studies within the scope of my dissertation, I attempt to evaluate them as permutations of political Shakespeare adaptations in Turkish theatre in the light of a broader historical background. Actual case studies from the context of Republican Turkey have become a rising interest in global Adaptation and Shakespeare Studies. On this subject, a vital part of my contribution is to take into consideration the longer Ottoman engagement with Shakespeare and its complex and multi-layered reverberations in the practice of political Shakespeare adaptation in modern Turkey. As I explore the bond between the historical dynamics and the contemporary cases, my study further calls for interrogations around the issues of alternative memory making, varying dynamics of adaptation on both textual and gestic levels and the connection between responding

to a particular set of hybrid theatrical dynamics that are unique to contemporary moments of cultural and political transformations like Gezi Park Protests, the political agenda of *Kim Var Orada?* and the possible connections between these experimentations with the larger fields of Adaptation Studies and political theatre in the twenty first century.

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