

Metamorphosis of the Performing Arts: Understandings of sexuality and nationalism in  
the 19<sup>th</sup> C. Ottoman Empire

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
Near Eastern Languages and Civilization

University of Washington  
2013

Committee:  
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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:  
Jackson School of International Studies

The gradual and organic ebb and flow of social changes that took place in the Ottoman Empire up to the late seventeenth century gave way to more rapid reform movements through the early twentieth century in the name of Westernization and modernization. The understanding of exactly what “modern” and “Western” was and how it was to be reconciled with existing societal and cultural traditions, however, varied widely among the prominent thinkers of the time. The nineteenth century Tanzimat reforms caused quick and radical changes within Ottoman society and modes of thinking with various effects. One method to trace these changes is to take into account the relationship between literature and popular and private entertainment, their function within a particular society and how they were affected by shifting societal mentalities and outside influences over time.

Edward Said’s analysis of movements or gestures of filiation and affiliation with regards to European social and literary relationships in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, can also be used to describe the processes of change within ideas of nationality and sexuality in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire. Said describes, “the filiative scheme [as] belong[ing] to the realms of nature and ‘life,’ whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society.”<sup>1</sup> Said considers both biological and intellectual genealogies as filiative relationships. These are biological properties and chains of influence or ideas that are passed down through time. Affiliative relationships, on the other hand, break from the filiative path and create new networks of influence and cultural exchange. The shift from filial practice to affilial relationships was a product of the increased interchange between the Ottoman Empire and western Europe in the nineteenth century. That is to say that the more people saw and heard the traditions (as

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<sup>1</sup> Said, 1983. 20

well as morals and ethics) of others, the more the new ideas, sights, and sounds they witnessed influenced them, both actively and passively. The Ottoman Empire and the early Republic's attempts at modernization through Westernization were active affiliative gestures. These gestures include the banishment of what were considered deviant sexualities from the public sphere as well as attempts to create a national character (Turkishness) with appropriately modernized and de-Easternized cultural traditions.

Literature on Turkish nationalism is abundant, however primary source material and academic research on Ottoman sexuality is limited. Ziya Gökalp's extensive writings on the emerging conceptualizations of Turkishness described in his work, *The Principles of Turkism* and his collected essays *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization* put the new "Turk" in opposition to the old Ottoman societal systems and cultural symbols. These works have been commented on, researched and debated for decades. For example, Uriel Heyd's 1950 *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp*, distills Gökalp's history, philosophy, and ideals in a retrospective historiography. The many commentaries, however, do not always interpret Gökalp's intentions or goals in the same fashion. These have resulted in decades of dispute over the meaning of Turkishness and its inclusivity or exclusivity for the many people living in the former Ottoman lands of the present-day Republic.

Works dealing with historical Ottoman sexualities are more troublesome. By far, the most common texts are on modern sexuality/homosexuality in various Middle and Near Eastern countries. Often what historical analysis is available is in reference to penal codes and their respective punishments for sodomy or inter-gender sexual relationships. As Jehoeda Sofer demonstrates in "Sodomy in the Law of Muslim States", found in

*Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, anti-sodomy laws in many Muslim societies came from the colonial period and were passed down from the French, British, Italian, and more rarely, German penal codes.<sup>2</sup> The many varying attitudes toward inter-gender sex that had developed in Muslim societies of course informed how often these laws were enforced and how acceptable or not they were seen in different periods by different societies.<sup>3</sup> By far the most illuminating work is by Dror Ze'evi. His work on Ottoman sexuality and its place within other aspects of Ottoman life provides a holistic view of a difficult to research topic. That is not to say that his work is without fault. Selim Kuru, in his review of Ze'evi's work, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourses in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500-1900*, points to some large generalizations used to wrap around some of his smaller studies in the book as well as the differentiation Ze'evi sees between literary and cultural mediums and their distinctive relation to the context. Kuru rightly states that primary source material outside of the normal literary genres such as legal, medical, and dream interpretation manuscripts cannot be discounted as divorced from the literary context.<sup>4</sup>

The written primary material dealing with dance/köçeks, and its sexual and national character is vastly outnumbered by visual representations of them in paintings from palace books, accounts of festivals, and depictions of public life. Metin And's works *A Pictorial History of Turkish Dancing: From Folk Dancing to Whirling Dervishes – Belly Dancing to Ballet* and *A History of Theatre and Popular Entertainment in Turkey* provide many visual representations of male and female entertainers and

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<sup>2</sup> Sofer in Schmitt and Sofer, 1992. 131-147

<sup>3</sup> For a description of attitudes towards sodomy see Stephen O. Murray's article "The Will not to Know" in his work *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*, 1997

<sup>4</sup> Kuru, 2008. 4

dancers while also providing the context in which they would be found. The sexual aspect of these professions is not expounded upon in lieu of describing the historical progression and diversity of dance and theatre in Turkish and Ottoman territories. When looking at visual representations of dancers in public performance, royal festivals, or palace life, they are much more likely to be köçeks than çengis. Through these miniature paintings we can see that köçeks were a ubiquitous part of entertainment in the Ottoman Empire from at least the early sixteenth to mid-nineteenth century. They are shown in various company, from Sufis to buffoons, which gives light to their place and historical arc in Ottoman society.<sup>5</sup> In some studies, however, visual representations of male köçek dancers are labeled as female çengi. Given the differences between their distinct dress and appearance, I believe this points more toward the uncomfortable feelings that arise, even among researches, when confronted with unfamiliar forms of sexuality.

The works on late Ottoman performing arts are varied depending on the art. Metin And's works, mentioned above, provide a description of the types of dance and theater found across Turkey with little attention paid to the sexual connotations of the dances or theatrical performances or how these were reconciled with the laws and local attitudes. Eugenia Popescu-Judetz's "Köçek and Çengi in Turkish Culture" (1982) and

While both literature and performing arts are ubiquitous in some form in any culture, the specific phenomena are not always explored in great depth. To do this one must consider religious traditions, law, popular performance practice, specific attitudes toward public performance like dance, as well as gender roles and the understanding of sexuality. The sometimes overt, sometimes veiled sexual references to the figure of the beloved in the Ottoman gazel tradition, occasionally couched in obfuscatory language

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<sup>5</sup> And, 1976. 138-140

and mystic terms, were precursors to what would become more unconcealed carnal displays in public performance. The long and rich history of gazels set the stage, in a way, for manifest erotic or sexual entertainment. In addition, the growing ideas of nationality and the resulting nationalism and building of a national character coincided with and was part a result of decline of the Ottoman Empire.

Up to the mid nineteenth century many forms of entertainment in the Ottoman Empire had explicit sexual content. From Karagöz shadow puppetry to Orta Oyunu performances and public dance, sexual jokes and discussions as well as suggestive, coquettish, and erotic gestures, movements, and song lyrics were commonplace. In order to follow the trajectory of the objects of carnal desire in the Ottoman Empire and their sometimes-religious connotations, the sexual dialogue relating to gender boundaries and identity as well as how these were put into practice should be considered.

As Dror Ze'evi points out, when discussing sex and modes of sexual thinking it is much more useful to look at literature that examines sex and the questions the authors could not reconcile along with the belief systems held by them that permitted or prohibited certain sexual acts and modes of sexuality as transgressive than to only explore anecdotes and court cases or palace intrigues.<sup>6</sup> The everyday sexual life of past societies, what they found acceptable or not and to what degree, is infeasible. Nevertheless the literary, and by extension, artistic discussions and representations of sexuality can provide insight into the sexual understanding and conventions of the society. The ways in which society understood in theory and tolerated, abhorred, or enjoyed in practice, certain professions, like those of entertainers, and the sexual connotations carried with them help to illuminate the sexual mores held at specific times

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<sup>6</sup> Ze'evi, 2006. 7

in history. By tracing the history and personages of public performance and performers we can find, if not the origins, which are often muddled through time, a more holistic understanding of how the professions developed and bridged different mediums with distinctive attributes and objectives. Through this method, we can also discover the filiative, afiliative, and refiliative relationships between Ottoman performing arts and their respective processes of reform, modernization, and Westernization.

One can find connections by following the arc of history of the occupation of the effeminate dancing boys (*köçekler*) centered in Istanbul from their earliest accounts in the sixteenth century to their abolition by decree in 1857 and the growing negative attitudes toward the practice. The *köçeks'* physical characteristics and mannerisms reflected the earlier literary concept of the beloved in Ottoman gazel poetry.<sup>7</sup> They can be seen as the corporeal incarnation of a literary ideal. The consequences of the literary become physical coupled with the adoption of Western European ideals of morality and gender in the mid-nineteenth century as well as the growing notions of nationalism led to the official, but not total, rending of this tradition from Ottoman and later Turkish society. Thijls Janssen has observed that modern transsexuals in Turkey fulfill much the same position as their *köçek* forbearers, and indeed refer to themselves as *köçeks*.<sup>8</sup> Due to their sexual orientation and modern negative Turkish attitudes towards them, based on the Western model, they are relegated to working in nightclubs and prostitution.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that the role of modern Turkish transsexuals fills the void left by the public dissolution of the *köçeks'* profession. They perform in similar manners in similar venues and are at once both tolerated, maligned, and patronized. Where they differ is that

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<sup>7</sup> Klebbe, 2005. 105

<sup>8</sup> Janssen in Schmitt, 1992. 84

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 84-85

the idea of homosexuality and the phenomenon of transsexualism had little to no bearing on köçek sexual identity, as it did not exist in their era. Whereas modern Turkish transsexuals aim for a feminine ideal, köçeks represented beauty in a less rigid gender environment.

Poetry in the Ottoman Empire, as Walter Andrews reaffirms, held special significance for Ottoman society's elites. The value of the spoken (or sung) word was greatly admired and a meaningful conduit for cultural expression that cannot be overstated.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the recurring figure of the beloved in the Ottoman gazel tradition was a widely understood character by the educated strata of society. This is not to say that the lower, uneducated classes of Ottoman society were not also in full understanding of this idea, however among the elite is where the ideas of cultured literature and public entertainment meet. It is important to note here that while gazels are read in modernity, they would have also been sung in their own day. This means that gazel poetry, and indeed many poetic forms were performed and consumed as entertainment, not to be read alone in ones room.

Since Islam was the Ottoman Empire's state religion, segregation of the sexes was the custom and the rule. Ottoman subjects, like all other people were sexual beings and as such required outlets for this natural human quality. From the early days of the Ottoman Empire through to the seventeenth century, one outlet can be seen as the character of the beloved found in the copious gazels written in the three hundred years of their highest productivity. However contentious the topic may be due to the adoption of western concepts of gender duality in previously Ottoman lands, the beloved was, "by convention," a boy/young man. Like the gazel form itself, this tradition follows from the

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<sup>10</sup> Andrews, 1997. 4

Persianate tradition and its marked influence on Ottoman literary tradition.<sup>11</sup> This is still a sour point in academia, where researchers will favor a mystical interpretation of a poem over one of more earthly desires in order to evade any uncomfortable sexual discussions. These types of poetic interpretations serve more to betray the researcher's and by extension, their society's unease with sexual content. This is then compounded even further by Turkey's continued reconciliation with its Ottoman past and social transformation from a multiethnic empire to an imposed monocultural nationstate. This is not to say that the Ottoman Empire was a bastion of homoeroticism and debauchery any more than that it was a standard bearer of Islamic piety. In order for Ottoman society to function while composed of subjects from diverse ethnicities and religions, all with their own collective cultural memory and their own traditions and practices, an austere enforcement of Islam and Islamic practices was unrealistic.

Public life in Ottoman lands, from government positions to shopkeepers, was dominated by a male presence, with women often unseen. In most cases then, the average male Ottoman subject would have had much easier social access to those of his own gender, as was true for women and girls. The understanding and expression of sexuality within this context bred intra-gender relationships that should not be viewed from a modern Western perspective of sexual morality lest the mores of different periods and societies confuse the study of one or the other.<sup>12</sup> Therefore the (male) beloved as the ideal object of desire fit Ottoman concepts of accepted or tolerable love and relationships – at least on paper. Whereas sexual desire directed at a young man may have been considered somewhat racy and lewd, directing the same desires toward women and girls would have

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<sup>11</sup> Andrews, 1997. 14

<sup>12</sup> Kuru, 2008. 160

been a far more serious offence. This being said, racy or salacious entertainment, as it was seen by Western travelers, was quite popular in the Ottoman Empire. The practice and fulfillment of this desire was not as socially acceptable as it was through the means of literary yearnings, and this is where in later history the köçeks brought the spoken/sung literary word to life.

Following in the tradition of *şehrengizname*, Enderunlu Fazıl's 1759 *Çenginame* in his *Defter-i Aşk* describes Istanbul's 47 most well loved köçeks. This work, written during a time when köçeks enjoyed some of their most widespread popularity gives credence to köçeks' place in society. At least by this date there was no question as to the köçeks' sexual nature as Fazıl's descriptions of them by their stage names attests. Lines such as "Altıntop's bottom is always ready for his mates who are always grateful to him," and "You get an erection as soon as you see Kanarya, he is distinguished," as well as "The Egyptian's shape and figure is harmonious and unique. He is a Jew. When he starts dancing he drives everybody crazy. He has got numerous lovers. Even looking at his face or watching him walk around gives you great pleasure but to watch him take off his pants gives you more than pleasure,"<sup>13</sup> describe that the dancing boys did not only dance.

A common mistake when discussing sexuality and morals of a now nonexistent people and society is to superimpose the understanding of these concepts from one's own time and culture onto those of the subject which leads to out of context conclusions and misinterpreted criticism. Whereas Western concepts of the binary sexual relationship between men and women pertain to European Christian societies, they do not fit the understanding of these concepts in the Islamic world. Indeed Ottoman subjects lived in societies with different understandings of sexual desire and repression. According to

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<sup>13</sup> Erdoğan, 1998. 76-77

Ze'evi, within Muslim societies heterosexuality was an un-glorified necessity, but love as a homosocial/homoerotic pursuit was sexual-normalized as appreciating beauty.<sup>14</sup> That is to say that close social and sexual relationships between people of the same gender were neither abnormal nor violated culturally accepted sexual understanding. This may, however, be simplistic view of the Islamic sexual life. Sexual mores were undoubtedly as diverse in the pre-modern Muslim world as its many societies and cultures. This being said, the many period works debating, chastising, and defending boy-love, or intra-sex acts points to the fact that it did exist, was widespread from Persian lands through the Ottoman Empire to Andalusia, and had many advocates and detractors. The Islamic belief that women were underdeveloped men created different, more fluid gender boundaries than those found in post-Renaissance Western thought. Therefore, in the Ottoman context, adult men's desire for and coupling with boys or young men was not conceived of as homosexuality or abnormal as it was in Christian Europe, since boys and preadolescent men were also considered underdeveloped men. For example, a boy who had been sexually active with older men as a youth could mature into a man in a heterosexual marriage and also be sexually engaged with young men himself without being considered devious or sexually transgressive. This points more to the fact that Western understanding of homosexuality was not part of Ottoman or Islamic understanding. These terms afford the categorization of Western sexual practices into well-defined terms of appropriate and unnatural and therefore abhorrent. Effeminate dancing boys cannot be so easily be placed within these Western sexual boundaries.

The term *köçek*, borrowed from Persian *koochek* (small/little), originally taken from Turkic *kichik* (small/ little), changed meaning throughout its usage in the Ottoman

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<sup>14</sup> Ze'evi, 2007. 7

Empire. Initially, according to the Moldavian Prince Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723), a prolific composer, musicologist, and compiler of Ottoman music, the term referred to a dervish's apprentice. Their place in dervish lodges and participation in the sama, as the object of the gaze in the practice of *shahid bazi* could have led to their increased sexualization.<sup>15</sup> Köçeks and their predecessors may have earlier been the object in the Sufi practice of staring at and contemplating beauty as a means of connection with the divine, however primary sources conflict over the motives of this practice. This tradition is by no means Ottoman by invention and had been controversial at least from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries in Persian texts before being written about in Ottoman sources.<sup>16</sup> As Rigeon has observed, the well-known Persian Sufi Sheykh Awhad al-Din Kirmani (d. 1237-8), who was an advocate of *shahid baz*, had been controversial in Sufi circles not only in his own time, but also for centuries to follow.<sup>17</sup> Some of these disputes among Sufis over the practice of *shahid bazi* appear to be more driven by a desire to discredit a rival lodge in hopes of increasing adherence to their own lodge's teachings, often with contradictory or unreliable criticism.

By the mid-eighteenth century the term had morphed into demarcating an "effeminate" male dancer aged from early adolescence to early adulthood. Cross-dressing was quite common among entertainers in Ottoman urban areas. Just as in Elizabethan theatre, where females did not perform on stage, younger males assumed the female roles. Due to the separation of the sexes, young beautiful men working as köçeks expressed beauty. To call köçeks simply female impersonators misses the point of their profession;

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of beardless youths in Sufi sama ceremonies and their increasing sexual roles see Ze'evi, 2007 pp. 77-98 and Lloyd Ridgeon's "The Controversy of Shaykh Awqad Al-Din Kirmānī and Handsome, Moon-Faced Youths: a Case Study of Shāhid-Bāzī in Medieval Sufism," 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Rigeon, 2012

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

they were objects of beauty first and foremost before ideas of gender entered the mind – the female equivalent (*çengi*) also often performed in drag, assuming a male persona. Because both all male or all female dance troupes most often performed for all male or all female audiences respectively, there was no need to act in a sensitive manner with regard to the opposite gender’s sensibilities, the performances by both genders were known to be what their European contemporaries would consider quite scandalous.

Although this study deals mainly with male objects of desire in dance, a brief discussion of the *köçek*’s female equivalent will be helpful to put it into context. The term *çengi* was used to describe both male and female dancers in earlier accounts of dancers, however there were more specific terms to refer to different types of male dancers (*köçek*, *tavşan*). Even though the word *çengi* was used in reference to dancers of both sexes, there is little confusion between the two, both in their pictorial representations and performance practice. The lasciviousness of the *köçeks*’ dancing as described by European travelers is echoed in their descriptions of *çengi* dancing. Reports from primary source material provide what can be interpreted as what is now called belly dancing with the sexual connotations inherent therein then as they are now. Of course due to the changes that happens over time to any performance practice, modern belly dance can be seen as a descendant of *çengi* dancing, but not an accurate representation of the former practice. Lady Mary Wortley Montague notes in her letters to the ability of the *çengi* dancers to elicit impure thoughts in even the most devoted prude.<sup>18</sup>

Ottoman female sexuality, unfortunately, seems to not be dealt with in the available literature to the extent of male sexuality.<sup>19</sup> This is seen most clearly in the

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<sup>18</sup> Montegu, 1767. 129

<sup>19</sup> Murray, 1997. 97-103

assertion that most *çengi* were lesbians. This seems to be an erroneous assertion given what has been understood about Islamic and Ottoman sexuality pertaining to men and boys. Metin And describes how most girls who became *çengis* were runaways or orphans and were taken into a troupe by the leader, usually an older former *çengi*. These girls would have most probably been from lower strata of society; this in addition to them also being non-Muslim provided them with little other opportunity than professional performance.<sup>20</sup> This leads back to the reality of Ottoman gender access and social milieu. A female dancer in an all female dance troupe, according to the social sexual concepts of the time would have little other recourse for intimacy, outside prostitution, than with those around them. *Çengi* performances often reproduced sexual intercourse through pantomime on stage with one of the actors dressed as a man.<sup>21</sup> This is hardly evidence for determining the performers sexuality and speaks more to the necessity of assuming other gender roles in performance in gender-segregated societies. The surprisingly general assertions about *çengis* speaks more to poorly understood and researched female sexuality than to any factual conclusions. These assertions may have been perpetuated by moralizing upper-class Western travelers to the Ottoman Empire from the eighteenth century onward as well as by their Ottoman counterparts.

Like *köçeks*, *çengis* were also organized in troupes and performed both in public areas like taverns and coffeehouses as well as at private gatherings and festivals with both male and female audiences. Their function, by many accounts was similar if not the same as that of the *köçeks*, however they were reportedly at lesser a demand in public performance than their male counterparts.

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<sup>20</sup> And, 1976. 143

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

The hierarchical relationship in European and Ottoman modes of thinking concerning gender and beauty was not congruous, and neither was the societal geography of gender boundaries. Beauty could be appreciated within one's own gender and conceived of in a sexually normative way because of the high standing beauty held in Ottoman society. This veneration of beauty came from Islamic ideas of beauty as a reflection of the divine as can be seen in the practice of *shahid bazi*. The manifestation of this belief, whether in verse or dance, was neither culturally nor sexually transgressive, but a common and integral part of Ottoman elite culture and popular mass entertainment. Mystic Islamic thought was also highly prevalent in Ottoman society. The concept of the causal relationship between the understanding of this world – that of base existence and suffering – as a reflection or shadow cast by that of the other world – invisible, supernatural, and divine – obfuscates meaning within society, leading to a multiplicity of interpretations. The constant mixing of mystic religious symbols with their profane equivalents within gazel poetry points to its history, inherited from Persian mystic traditions, in Ottoman Sufi practice. It is interesting that this is also where the *köçek* was understood to have originated as well.

Poetry, music, and dance are all means for pleasure, entertainment, cultural expression, emotional release, as well as religious experience. Just as Ottoman gazels functioned as devices for communicating worldly physical pleasure as well as mystic and religious ideas, so too did music and dance. As it was found in the many Ottoman Sufi lodges, where much of the inspiration and innovations in literature, music and the arts began, was used as a means of closer communion with the divine and is where *köçek*s were first reported to exist. It would seem then that the figure of the beloved and the

köçek are entwined both in their symbolic meaning in this world and what might have been their original function as a tool of insight into the other world. After the period of their first accounts is where their history grows dark until the time when effeminate dancing-boys began performing in wine-houses, at parties and private residences.

While there were no doubt professional dancing boys before their first accounts and their organization into guilds, the periods of their highest activity in Istanbul and the reasons for their ultimate prohibition provide relevant information to view the profession as a sexual outlet for Ottoman men and women alike. This visual and fleshly representation of young male beauty, when compared with poetic traditions like that of the Ottoman gazel, brings together these two practices of similar ends and different means. Dancing boys had been depicted in miniatures since the sixteenth century in the company of dervishes, with whom they were previously associated as well as with buffoons and clowns who were members in the same dance troupes to which köçeks belonged.

Resemblances between the beloved of earlier gazels and the later professional köçek can be seen in simple physical similarities as well as in their place and function within tradition. The boys that made up the majority of the köçek ranks were non-Muslim Greeks, Armenians, Balkans, Jews, or Gypsies – like the Ottoman infidel beloved as object of desire. Gypsies are the exception in this group, being Muslim; they were marginalized in Ottoman society and officially categorized as other.<sup>22</sup> However, this is not in itself unusual, as public entertainers of all sorts in the Ottoman Empire tended to be non-Muslim due to the low status projected onto these professions. Along with dressing in extravagant women's clothing, köçeks grew their hair long and were known to where

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<sup>22</sup> Popescu-Judet, 1982, 46

makeup, increasing their beauty as they could. The historical textual accounts of them reference these qualities as well as others associated with Ottoman gazel poetry's beloved such as the eyes, cypress-like body and movements, and pure skin and appearance.<sup>23</sup> All of these terms were used in copious amounts to describe the beloved. The unconsummated desire for the beloved of gazel poetry could cause despair and bring the lover to ruin in this world; the beloved could also serve to provide insight into the other world's divineness and perfection through his rejection of the lover who would discover the renunciation of physical and worldly longing and the resulting bliss. The beloved as poetic character was understood as a symbol of this world as well as its other worldly opposite. On the other hand, the köçek's beloved-like beauty combined with their physical proximity to the audience were reported to have led köçeks to other, less desirable side professions. The fact that they were physical beings allowed for the fulfillment of base desires and led to an image in popular entertainment firmly bound in this world.

Whereas it is unclear whether professional köçeks had always practiced prostitution as part of their occupation it was used as a reason for their ultimate abolition. By the mid-nineteenth century, the purported riots caused by köçek performances and the unruly effects they had on the audience led Sultan Abdülmecid I to ban the practice altogether in 1857.<sup>24</sup> Although this was the official reasoning behind banning the profession, the internalization of Western ideas and the attempts at modernization in the Tanzimat period cannot be discounted as major factors in the attempt to change society's concepts of sexual normalcy to be more inline with those of Western Europe.

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<sup>23</sup> Klebe, 2005, 107

<sup>24</sup> And, 1976. 141

European travel accounts of Ottoman entertainment practices and the devious sexual nature described by them in slowly penetrated into the psyche of Ottoman elites. This led to a counter movement of Occidentalism where Ottoman travelers to the West firmly reified their own practices against what they saw as Western depravity. By the time efforts were made to align Ottoman social structures and morality more closely with those of Western Europe, or de-filiation from the Ottoman past in favor of Western models, these accounts had been internalized leading late Ottoman intellectuals to view past Ottoman society as sick, in need of healing, and irreconcilable with modernity.<sup>25</sup> Western European reactions to Ottoman sexuality and what they saw as crassness in public life and the arts was not the only reason for changing Ottoman social concepts that were forming in the nineteenth century. Just as Western travelers' responses to Ottoman sexuality in their travelogues served to embarrass the Ottoman elite, Ottoman travelers returning from Western Europe brought back Western concepts of morality and sexuality. Many of the ideas adopted in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire that dealt with sexuality and morality had their roots in the different medical concepts in Christian Europe and the Muslim East. European sexual understanding had shifted from the belief that women were half or under-formed men to one of gender-duality cementing the idea of two distinct and separable genders. This was separation both from within ones own gender sexually and from the other socially. The approach to new concepts of homosexuality, therefore led to its categorization as deviant and against religious law. It was not until this later period of the Ottoman Empire, in a time of increasing Western European dominance in the world, did the historical pre-modern Muslim single gender discourse with more fluidly defined sexual boundaries give way to the Western model.

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<sup>25</sup> van Dobben, 2008. 18

For eighteenth and nineteenth century travelers from the West, sexuality and governance were inextricably related with the former being a symbol of the latter. Therefore what they saw as deviant and lascivious sexual practices were emblematic of a broken Ottoman governmental system. Perhaps it was this relation, constructed by Western travelers that prompted reforms that removed sexual discourse from the public sphere. Following somewhat opposite to the Victorian model where sex and sexual understanding was not repressed per se, but flourished with new forms of innuendo and insinuations in diverse fields like psychology, medicine, and education, Ottoman sexual discourse simply disappeared.<sup>26</sup> Following the new two-gender, homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy, what had previously been open discourse on sex was silenced.<sup>27</sup>

After the abolition of the köçek profession the practice continued in different contexts. They began to appear as stock characters in Orta Oyunu theatrical performances as effeminate male dancers or in roles as women. Having men play women's roles was not unusual since Turkish women did not perform in theatrical performances until the early Republican period, and other ethnicities only in the late nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> They also performed, still in women's clothing although no longer conforming to youthful male or feminine beauty aesthetics. So whereas the modern köçek may still dress in women's clothing and dance in a feminine manner, it is not rare to find more aged men or those with the masculine symbol of a mustache continuing the dance tradition. That is to say that the köçek tradition, in some variation has managed to survive into the modern era within the context of contemporary Turkish Republican gender norms and sexual identity and connotations.

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<sup>26</sup> Ze'evi, 2005. 3

<sup>27</sup> Ze'evi, 2006. 171

<sup>28</sup> Menemencioğlu, 1983. 52, 56

The new ideas of nationalism that began in the mid-eighteenth century in the West, and the concepts of ethnic nationalism that helped spark the many wars of independence against the Ottomans throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth also contributed to the shifting social attitudes in the centers of the Ottoman Empire. The Serbian Revolution (1804-15), the Greek War of Independence (1821-32), the Romanian War of Independence (1877-78), and the Balkan Wars (1912 and 1932), all which resulted in Ottoman territorial losses, grew out of these ideas of nationalism and a mono-ethnic nation-state. These concepts were not confined to “non-Turk” areas of the empire. Indeed the same ideas and concepts were being taken hold of by Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals in the same period. The many wars of independence no doubt were factors in the Tanzimat reforms in 1839, 1856, and 1869 that redefined Ottoman citizenship as all the sultan’s subjects regardless of religion. By this point, and especially towards the turning to the twentieth century, ideas of Turkish nationalism and Turkish national identity had been developing, setting the stage for the soon to emerge Turkish Republic.

Dancers themselves were not the only performers affected by the westward shift in morality during the modernization periods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The musicians in the ensembles that performed with köçek troupes were often constituted of former köçeks. After passing through the stage of being a “beardless youth” into post-adolescence, being too old to perform as a dancer and having been musically trained, instead of leaving the troupe for other employment, their familiarity with the repertoire allowed for an easy transition to musician from dancer. Thus many of the musicians performing in Istanbul’s coffeehouses, wine houses, and celebrations with dancing were

former köçeks themselves. With the abolition of köçek performance, this avenue for musical training and professionalism was also dissolved as a side effect. Along with the alteration of public performance in terms of dance and its sexual nature, the Western conservatory system had been introduced only forty years earlier into the Ottoman Empire. This new system of instruction, where students were taught according to the European model, on western instruments, as well as but in favor to Turkish instruments, led to the performance of European and Western musical forms such as, the waltz, tango, polka, and later the foxtrot and Charleston. It also led to the incorporation of Western instruments, such as the clarinet, into Turkish musical styles and ensembles. O'Connell describes the conflict in style as between *alaturca* and *alafranga* mentalities. These terms carried ontological weight in not only music, but throughout society and its institutions. The conscious move away from being in the sense of *alaturca* toward what was conceived of as modern westernized *alafranga* modes of being was at its highest during the Tanzimat era.

Music in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire underwent a process of active affiliation with Western art music in many aspects including theory, instruction, musical notation, instrumentation, performance style, and form. Following the trajectory of modernization through Westernization, European musical practices, or *alafranga*, increasingly superseded previous Ottoman traditions. The increase of Western musicians in the Ottoman court that started under the reign of Selim III (1789-1807) and continued under subsequent sultans' reigns, as O'Connell articulates, "may have effected the formal structure of Turkish art music and court poetry, showing a preference for four-bar phrases

and four-line strophes, respectively.”<sup>29</sup> There are multiple reasons for this shift; both internal and external. Imported Western musicians brought with them not only their instruments, but also their styles and tastes. They must have been an influential force and their proximity to Ottoman court musicians could have led to the adoption of each others aesthetics, as is common between musicians in close quarters.

Reform/modernization/Westernization in this period also provided the environment for these new forms and aesthetics to be actively adopted and encouraged. This move away from Ottoman musical and poetic practices and conventions that had their roots in Persian traditions to Western musical aesthetics in form intrinsically changed the concept of what Turkish music was in opposition to Ottoman music. The affiliating process of these imported tastes altered the way musician were trained as well as how they conceived of the music they composed and performed.

While the Westernization of art music was undergoing its early stages in the first decades of the nineteenth century, another symbol of Ottoman power and culture disappeared. When Sultan Mahmud II abolished the Janissary Corps in 1826 *mehter* ensembles, due to their close historical association with the Janissaries, soon vanished as well. Eugenia Popescu-Judetiz explains that, [t]he presentation of *mehter* performance in its regular framework can be viewed as a complex theatrical event involving diverse means of expression.”<sup>30</sup> In terms of musical performance, *mehter* existed in multiple contexts, on war campaigns, as part of the sultan’s retinue, and in public performing for celebrations, commemorations, and holidays as well as after morning, noon, and evening prayer. *Mehter* performances’ unique symbolic power was accessible to all strata of

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<sup>29</sup> O’Connell, 2005. 184

<sup>30</sup> Popescu-Judetiz, 1996. 57

Ottoman society in times of peace and was a terrifying spectacle to their enemies in times of war. I will focus mainly on *mehter* in public urban spaces, however a description of their activities on war campaigns will serve to explain their symbolism in the urban environment; the music's effect in both contexts was no less dramatic. The Western world first witnessed the terrifying power of the *mehter* ensemble during the conquest of Constantinople under Mehmed II. It may seem obvious, but the world, even in urban areas was much quieter before the advent of machines. Thus, the sound produced by up hundreds of drums, cymbals, trumpets, and zurnas would have been louder than anything the population of a besieged city would have heard. The cacophony created along with rattling arms certainly would have aroused terror in the opposing army. This act sonically displayed the might of the Ottoman army and the power of the sultan.

*Mehter* performances in the public urban environment presented the same sonic symbolism for the Ottoman populace. This was not an incidental side effect of the music; its purpose always being that of spectacle. The context of urban performance included the music echoing through the streets and against the architecture creating a sound greater than the sum of its parts. These public spectacles were widely popular from the sultans down the social ladder to the lowest members of Ottoman society. Its overall accessibility, as Popescu-Judetza explains was in part to the fact that, "*mehter* music integrated urban and folk songs along with pieces of classical music and military marches within the same theatrical event," that over time, "established...a repository of the basic materials of Turkish music and thus contributed immensely to the shaping of Turkish national music."<sup>31</sup> The disintegration of *mehter* ensembles as a consequence of the

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 60

abolition of the Janissary Corps added to the fundamental alteration in what was to become Turkish national music in the late nineteenth century.

Ziya Gökalp's conception of culture and civilization, his prescription for modernizing Ottoman society, and creating a new Turkish cultural identity were also employed in creating new conceptualizations of Turkish music. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, *mehter* ensembles and musicians had started to be exported throughout Europe and became common in European courts. This marked the end of the *mehter* ensemble's power as a tool to instill fear and awe in opposing forces. Playing music "*alla turca*" became common in Western art music and operas with Ottoman/Turkish storylines. Interestingly, European adaptations eventually returned to the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century resulting in a later Ottoman reinterpretation of the European concept of *alla turca*.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon is yet another example of Ottoman music being refiliated through the process of affiliation with the West during the time of the newly growing and debated concept of Turkishness. It represents an originally Ottoman music first being exported across Europe and then the newly Europeanized version of military marching music returning to the Ottoman Empire as Western music to be adopted.

The processes of affiliating Turkish music with Western practice started first with the decision what music best represented the Turkish character desired by nineteenth century thinkers such as Ziya Gökalp. Following his concept of combining Anatolian Turkish folk music with Western harmonization resulted in new, previously unheard forms of music. *Kanto*, from the Italian *canto*, was one such music. Influenced by Italian street songs it represents a music going through the process of affiliation to the point

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 63

where it then became filiated within the Ottoman musical context of the last quarter of the nineteenth century until it fell out of popularity in the 1930s due to its perception as an Ottoman music.<sup>33</sup> This cabaret style music was performed at its height of popularity in *kanto* theaters, bars, brothels, and as intermezzos during theater performances. Münir Beken states that according to Necdet Hasgül, *kanto* was neither an Eastern nor a Western music genre, rather it was a musical form developed in an Ottoman/Turkish context.<sup>34</sup> It was the first instance of a popular music form, originally from the West that was adopted (affiliated) in the late Ottoman period and by its demise was not considered foreign (filliated). Another reason for the ultimate repression of the genre was that it was considered vulgar and the “official’ ideology in this period did not care for the culture of the ‘vulgar’ (*avam*)...[and] was repressed...not because it was Eastern or Western musically, but that it belonged to the vulgar.”<sup>35</sup> *Kanto*’s falling of favor then may not have been a product of affiliating with the West as it was thought of as a bawdy form of the masses, and it was indeed this quality that late Ottoman and early Republican reformers were trying to remove from society, which brings us back to sex.

The history of the Ottoman/Turkish shadow play *Karagöz* varies widely whether the study was done by Turkish or non-Turkish scholars. While Turkish scholars tend to overlook the sexual character of *karagöz* shadow puppetry, the many horrified reports by Western travelers point to its ubiquity in the repertoire.<sup>36</sup> Metin And asserts that foreign traveler accounts of *karagöz* performances, “are full of inaccuracies. The reason for this is that the travellers did not have a good enough command of Turkish to appreciate the

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<sup>33</sup> Beken, 1998. 113-114

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 113

<sup>35</sup> Hasgül in Beken, 1998. 113

<sup>36</sup> Ze’evi, 2006. 296

true spirit of shadow theater.”<sup>37</sup> This statement, coupled with And’s continuous attempts to prove *karagöz*’s Turkish origin at the expense of other ethnicities within the Ottoman Empire speaks more to a nationalist rewriting of history than to a true account of the character of the plays in Ottoman times. Whereas many foreign travelers most likely did not have a good command of the Turkish language, the image of *Karagöz*’s comically large phallus on the screen is not a difficult symbol to understand; neither the Turkish-speaking audience’s reaction to it. *Karagöz* was not, after all, as we think of shadow theater today, simply children’s entertainment, rather it was performed for the public in coffee houses. As Ze’evi reminds us, “[t]he image of *Karagöz*’s penis was often featured.”<sup>38</sup> These plays were known as *zekerli* or *toramanlı Karagöz*, which can be rendered in English as “penis plays.”

The image of the phallus was to come to an end as well as the ever-present obscenities, satire, and commentary on official corruption. At first, in the late nineteenth century, open political dialogue was censored and sexual imagery was banned with deference to innuendo in the Victorian fashion under Sultan Abdülaziz (1861-1876) and Abdulhamid (1876-1909).<sup>39</sup> This then led to the 1918 codification of the previously improvised, and therefore uncontrollable, plays by the last Ottoman court puppeteer Nazif Bey. He collected the unwritten plays and removed all references to politics, sex, and obscene expressions. While some obscene aspects remained despite heavy police control, “*Karagöz* survived as a cultural archetype [whos] theatrical emasculation had

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<sup>37</sup> And, 1963. 36

<sup>38</sup> Ze’evi, 2006. 296

<sup>39</sup> For an in-depth analysis of Victorian sexuality and its modern misconceptions see Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Volume 1* 3-13

begun.”<sup>40</sup> These were simultaneous moves to both quell public political dissent and dialogue and to more firmly align Ottoman sexual understanding with the new ideas of the “Turkish character.” As with the case of *kanto*, public entertainment could not be of a lewd or bawdy nature if the creation of a new national identity with Western sexual morality were to come to fruition.

The gestures of filiation and affiliation witnessed in the nineteenth through early twentieth century were both productive and destructive actions. At once, they removed Ottoman sociocultural values in deference to Western morality as represented by the *köçek* tradition, while also creating new forms of (short-lived) music like *kanto*. The circular effect of these gestures resulted in music such as that of the *mehter* ensembles leaving the Empire as an Ottoman creation that went through a period of Europeanization and then imported back to the Empire and Republic and a new and acceptable form of military music divorced from any previous relation to the Janissary Corps.

The performing arts, while often thought of as frivolous pastimes, are in fact powerful conveyers of cultural heritage and identity both inwardly and externally. The active manipulation of sociocultural norms concerning sexuality and ethnicity as well as the spontaneous synthesis of musical traditions and deliberate initiatives to create new artistic forms to conform to the officially sanctioned national character that were important facets that contributed to the Ottoman Empire’s transitioned into the Turkish Republic. These gestures of filiation and affiliation have continued throughout the history of the Republic both towards the east and the west. Turkey’s reconciliation process with its Ottoman past and the definition of “Turkish character” continues to be a point of contention in society and academia.

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<sup>40</sup> Ze’evi, 2006. 299

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