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Early Acquaintances with Modern Mass Culture in Late Ottoman Istanbul: The Experiences of Child Audiences at Direklerarası

Fatma Tunç Yaşar | Onur Güneş Ayas

Abstract

Direklerarası, the core of Ramadan entertainment in late Ottoman Istanbul, rose to prominence toward the end of the nineteenth century at about the same time as entertainment hubs in Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, and New York. Thanks to the legitimacy provided by the Holy Ramadan, which played a positive role in reducing public suspicion and uneasiness among Muslim families towards the products of early mass culture, Direklerarası seems to draw a larger children's audience compared to Pera and Galata, the epicenter of European-style entertainment and a location where non-Muslims were heavily populated. As a result, many children were introduced to emerging modern mass culture at Direklerarası, which offers a large variety of shows and spectacles grouped under the name of *lubiyat* in the Ottoman world, including theater, musical plays, juggling, circus, concerts, shadow theater and cinema. This article focuses on childhood experiences at Direklerarası using a wide range of primary sources from archival documents and official regulations to Ottoman periodicals and memoirs. It aims to discuss the moral and aesthetic concerns arising from the fact that the spheres of adults and children were not yet clearly separated from each other, as well as how this experience at Direklerarası was remembered later as a childhood memory.

INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the experiences of child audiences in Direklerarası, one of the most significant cultural and entertainment hubs of the late Ottoman Istanbul. Direklerarası is the name of the street with porticoed colonnaded sidewalks in the Şehzadebaşı neighborhood of intramural Istanbul (Tunç Yaşar, 2023). The significance of Direklerarası, which rose to prominence toward the end of the nineteenth century at about the same time as entertainment hubs in cities like Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, and New York, comes from the fact that it was among the first locations in Ottoman Istanbul where the large crowds including children were introduced to early mass culture.

Department of Sociology, Yildiz Technical University, Istanbul, Turkey
Correspondence: Fatma Tunç Yaşar. Email: ftyasar@yildiz.edu.tr
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Examining the experiences of child audiences in an Ottoman neighborhood with a wide range of entertainment options may provide fresh data and insights into the body of research on the role of child audiences during the rise of the early mass culture worldwide.

The rise of Direklerarası as an entertainment hub is closely related to the changes in entertainment culture and practices in Ottoman society. Entertainments, which were previously experienced mostly in connection with special occasions such as marriage and circumcision and by the communities associated with these occasions, and festivities organized publicly by the Ottoman political authorities for various reasons, gradually took the form of continuous commercial activities that appealed to an anonymous crowd in a certain place (Nagata and Egawa, 2021, p. 67). With its rows of shops on a narrow street and its diversity of entertainment alternatives for this new society of consumers and spectators which is the hallmark of modernity, Direklerarası is also an example of the idea of the entertainment quarter, a recent occurrence in late Ottoman Istanbul. Walter Benjamin (1969, p. 165) draws attention to the fact that modern consumer spaces have likely been organized in close proximity to one another as "a world in miniature" and connected to the rest of the city by transportation lines. Direklerarası, a region where various theaters, coffeehouses with music and games, juggling houses, music and theater schools, restaurants, shops and central transportation lines were clustered together and new lighting technologies were used at night, played a crucial role in transforming the crowds lining the streets of Istanbul into a society of consumers and spectators.

Direklerarası also had a significant advantage over Galata and Pera, which were the epicenter of European-style entertainment, home for drinking houses, brothels and gambling houses and heavily populated by non-Muslims. Despite being a vibrant and energetic hub of entertainment for people of all nationalities and religions, Galata and Pera seem to be considered sinister by the larger Muslim population residing in intramural Istanbul, particularly by some Muslim parents who are concerned about their children going astray.[1] Historical, moral and religious anxieties about the other side of the Golden Horn as well as spatial barriers seem to make it difficult for the emerging modern mass culture to reach potential audiences and consumers among children. Memoirs and documents from the period show that Muslim children were constantly warned not to go to Pera and Galata, both by their families and by the authorities. Direklerarası, located in the middle of three monumental mosques built by Sultans, was a place identified with Ramadan, the holy month of worship for Sunni Muslims (Georgeon, 2018, pp. 116-118). The legitimacy provided by Direklerarası's hosting of Ramadan entertainment and the fact that the same content was typically presented to a mixed-age audience including adults and children, has facilitated the emerging commercialized popular culture to meet wider child audiences. As a result, at a time when the venues for adult and children's entertainment in Europe were becoming more clearly separated from each other (Sennett, 2002, pp. 92-94), Direklerarası was able to continue to be a place where children and adults share the same venues as the audience of the shows with the same content for a while longer. In fact, it would not be inaccurate to presume that Direklerarası was among the first places where many Muslim children were introduced to theater, cinema, phonograph, gramophone, circus, and various commercial music activities produced for a public audience.

There have been relatively few valuable studies focusing on the experiences of late Ottoman child audiences in early cinema and Karagöz performances[2] (Odabaşı, 2022; Okay, 2002; Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2016). Nevertheless, it can be stated that this research topic has been neglected for a long time in academic literature. This lack of research may be attributed to certain trends that, up until recently, have dominated the study of Turkish modernization and cultural history. Under the influence of the modernization paradigm and elitist perspectives, the study of Ottoman-Turkish modernization has focused for a long time on the steps taken by the political and cultural elite to modernize Turkey and the history of their intellectual ideas that supported these actions, seeing the inhabitants of the city as passive figurants of this process.[3] The experiences of modernity in the daily lives of ordinary people have only entered the radar of these studies to the extent that they can be part of this grand narrative (Kaynar, 2012, p. 32). As the approaches based on this paradigm have lost ground, studies focusing on the city's daily life, popular culture and entertainment experiences have become more prevalent. A similar pattern can be observed in the field of cultural history. The earlier approaches of cultural history that undervalued popular culture

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had concentrated solely on elite culture and its creators instead of the experiences of the broad masses who consumed the products of popular culture. The new cultural history, on the other hand, focuses not only on artworks and their creators, but also on the experiences of audiences and consumers, and it also recognizes the importance of the products of popular culture, which were previously deemed unworthy of academic study but with which society is intensely engaged (for a critique of the elitist approach to culture and the new understanding of cultural history, see Burke, 2008; Gans, 2008; Hunt, 1989; Tunç Yaşar, 2022). In the Ottoman studies, themes such as self-narratives, manners, image and representation, entertainment culture, and leisure time became the focus of historians' attention and has begun to be scrutinized from the perspective of new cultural history (Çelik, 2005; Esenbel, 2012; Faroqhi & Öztürkmen, 2014; Hafez, 2021; Kafadar, 2009; Kula and Özlü, 2023; Tunç Yaşar, 2016). This article follows the paradigm shift in studies on Ottoman-Turkish modernization as well as the new perspective of cultural history. We embrace an understanding of modernity as an urban experience "shared by men and women all over the world", as Berman (1982, p. 15) puts it, an experience of "life's possibilities and perils." This approach provides a helpful framework for discussing the early acquaintances of Ottoman children with the early mass culture as part of the global trends and city life, going beyond the dichotomies such as modern/traditional, state/society, East/West etc.

Among the sources to be consulted to explore and interpret the child audience experience in Direklerarası are the relevant regulations issued by the government, the inspection reports and documents regarding the complaints, city letters and journalist records on Direklerarası entertainments in periodicals of the period, and the memoirs by the writers who experienced Direklerarası entertainments as children. The article first discusses the crucial role that Direklerarası played in the emergence of early mass culture in late Ottoman Istanbul as well as the attitude of the authorities in this regard. It then goes on to discuss the circumstances that allowed children to share an experience with adults in this setting, as well as the moral and aesthetic concerns arising from this experience. In the last part of the article, it will be discussed how the way in which the childhood experience in Direklerarası is remembered by the Turkish writers after the 1920's has been affected by the changing understanding of entertainment and art and the conditions of daily life in Turkey.

EARLY MASS CULTURE IN LATE OTTOMAN ISTANBUL AND THE SPECIAL ROLE OF DIREKLERARASI

The earliest roots of what came to be known as mass culture "goes back as far, at least, as the eighteenth century", when "its terms were first defined in the period of the rise of an urban commercial culture" (Hall, 2005, p. 53). While the historical research on mass culture has mostly focused on American culture and particularly the post-war culture industry, the urban commercial culture of the nineteenth century in other parts of the world -such as popular theaters, French vaudeville, commercialized music organizations, and early cinema-has also been regarded by some scholars (Schwartz, 1999; Terni, 2006; Weber, 1977) as the examples of early mass culture. What characterizes early mass culture is the "impersonality of the relationship" between the audience and the performers, "the exploitation of a broad public" by the commercial enterprises (Weber, 1977, pp. 6-7), spectacularization and commodification of city life for the consumption of spectators (Schwartz, 2-12). Alimdar (2016, p. 168) associates the transformation of entertainment culture in Ottoman society with the rise of early mass culture in the nineteenth century and emphasizes the significance of printing, publishing and education on a large scale, as well as the role of technological and commercial advancements in bringing the masses together around shared consumption habits. According to Ekrem Işın (1995, p. 91), the nineteenth century was a time when Ottoman social life moved beyond the scale of the neighborhood, different parts of Istanbul engaged in more intense cultural interaction, and various lifestyles started to blend. The first foundations for modern mass culture in Istanbul were laid in the first part of the century as a result of a number of circumstances, including population increase (Duben & Behar, 2014), a stepping up of economic and cultural contacts with Europe, educational reforms, and improved transportation

infrastructure (Gül, 2018). Ferry and tram lines connected various regions of Istanbul and broke the restricted patterns of neighborhood life (Çelik, 1986), improved lighting made nighttime entertainment possible (İleri, 2017), printing capitalism (Anderson, 1982) united the city around a common culture and language, increased literacy created a public opinion that followed this common cultural agenda (Kırlı, 2009), integration with the capitalist world economy changed consumption habits and transformed this public into a society of consumers and audiences. If the transformation of urban life into a spectacle is one of the defining characteristics of modernity (Schwartz, 1999, p. 3), it can be said that the late Ottoman Istanbul was transformed into a modern capital city where people started to share a common urban culture through the products of mass culture they consumed together (for the role of theater in this process see Koçak, 2011).

In the nineteenth century, Istanbul's entertainment scene consisted of two main lines below and above the Golden Horn. The significance of Direklerarası below the Golden Horn and Pera above after persisted even if Üsküdar, Kadıköy, and the other Asian side districts were eventually added to this line. Direklerarası was less European and more Muslim in character than Pera, despite a few exceptions to this broadly defined contrast (Erdoğan, 2017, p. 60). The Ottoman public was first exposed to the European-style products of mass culture in Pera and Galata, specifically around the Grand Avenue (Cadde-i Kebir). Throughout Ottoman history, Pera had come to be associated with non-Muslim culture and had uncanny connotations for many Muslims symbolically, which made it difficult for these new cultural products to be more widely consumed.[4] Although it is known from the memoirs and novels of the period that some members of the Muslim community spent time in Pera for entertainment, shopping and strolling along the street, as Edhem Eldem points out, Pera is equipped with negative images for Muslims in many respects (Eldem, 2006). Ahmet Rasim (1922, p. 145) remembers that during his childhood years, the school principal warned the students not to go to Galata, and even forbade them to go there. According to Rasim's barber in Şehzadebaşı, it was "a den of vice" where Muslim children should not go. Compared to Pera which alternately appears to the Muslim populace as a potential danger and an object of desire representing the secularized Europe, Direklerarası was the center of legitimate entertainment. In his memoirs, Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (2008, pp. 737–738) contrasts late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey, stating that crossing the Galata Bridge once required great courage and that the only pleasures given to Turkish people were listening to *incesaz*[5] music in Şehzadebaşı coffee houses or having fun at the shabby theaters of Abdi and Hasan in Direklerarası. Burhan Felek (1974, pp. 10, 200–201) writes in his memoirs that thousands of people in Ottoman times had never crossed from the Istanbul side to Galata, and he also notes that the main hub of entertainment for the city's Muslim masses was located around Şehzadebaşı and Direklerarası.

The fact that Direklerarası, located in the middle of three monumental mosques of Istanbul and adjacent to government buildings, is identified with Ramadan entertainments has played a legitimizing role, allaying concerns about the new experiences of modernity and the new products of mass culture that it hosts. As a month when tradition was remembered in a modernizing and European-oriented society, Ramadan entertainments in Direklerarası also served to create a fruitful interaction between traditional cultural forms and habits and new experiences of modernity as well as secular culture and religious life. During Ramadan, people from all walks of life gathered in Direklerarası, which became one of Istanbul's most crowded sites, eroding and blurring the boundaries between classes, age groups, and diverse identities. According to Georgeon (2018, p. 25), many social categories such as children, adults, young students, laborers, men, women, intellectuals, the rich, the poor, and high bureaucrats were in elbow-to-elbow contact in Direklerarası. Nagata and Egawa (2021, p. 68) states that Direklerarası had almost the same characteristics as the entertainment centers that emerged in places such as Montmartre in Paris, the West End in London, and Asakusa-rokku in Tokyo during the period known as *La Belle Epoque* in French. According to Haldun Taner (1988, p. 6), Direklerarası around the turn of the century was the Istanbul equivalent and *alla turca* version of Shaftesbury Avenue in London, Broadway in New York, and Kurfürstendamm in Berlin.

Direklerarası was appealing to children because it was associated with Ramadan, a month of fun and freedom for children who eagerly awaited its arrival (Araz, 2013, p. 138). During Ramadan, schools were closed, and children were allowed to roam the streets more frequently than usual, stay out later, and watch various shows, particularly

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Karagöz. Cüneyd Okay (2002, pp. 75–76) highlights a notable consensus among memoirs regarding Ramadan, affirming that the predominant leisure activity for children during this period was watching Turkish theater and shadow play. Children appear to have occasionally served to justify their mothers' leisurely strolls down Direklerarası Street (Georgeon, 2018, pp. 70–79, 81, 121), or they participated in various shows with their fathers. All of this has made Ramadan entertainment in Direklerarası a memorable experience for children, allowing them to break free from their everyday routines, experience something like a temporary rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, and encounter brand new forms of cultural expression. As it is revealed from the articles published in the periodicals of the period about the spectacles and performances, which will be discussed in detail below, children make up a sizable portion of the Direklerarası audience and their existence also influenced the content and character of the cultural practices there. This is due to the fact that those who supplied early mass culture to the Direklerarası market had to consider the demands of a large child audience and organize the content and order of the shows accordingly.

CHILDREN'S POSITION IN THE MODERN SPECTACLE CULTURE

Given that the Ottoman public closely followed the new manners and norms in European spectacle culture and that writers and critics frequently compared Ottoman experiences with those of Europeans, as will be demonstrated later in the text, it may be useful to briefly look at how European spectacle culture transformed in the nineteenth century, with a focus on child audiences. The spectacularization of city life, the emergence of mass culture, and the transformation of crowds into a society of spectators were all closely connected (Schwartz, 1999, p. 2) in Europe. From the nineteenth century, social relations were increasingly experienced through consumer-audience practices connected with mass culture, and the status system in society was reinforced by the codes that guided these practices. As a result, the modification of stage setting and manners became particularly important in this process (Terni, 2006, p. 227). The typical stage setting and manners for artistic activities today, where the audience sits quietly and watches a certain performance from beginning to end in a section reserved for them, were established only after the middle of the nineteenth century. For example, in the famous La Scala opera, built in 1776, people could eat, drink, talk and socialize during an opera performance, and if they liked the music, they could immediately ask for it to be played again. Until the late nineteenth century, it was possible to hear the audience shouting, eating and talking among themselves during such events (Byrne, 2012, p. 19). Richard Sennett (2002, p. 206) states that even in the 1850s, theater audiences were able to converse among themselves and express their reactions during the play, while in the late nineteenth century, audiences who could not control their emotions began to be criticized and scorned. So, "the final quarter of the nineteenth century", as Altman (1999, p. 37) shows with reference to contemporary sources, "witnessed a stern disciplining of audience conduct". According to Metin And (1999, pp. 107–116), the author of the primary reference sources for the history of Ottoman theater, one of the most significant challenges faced by the Ottoman theater was to create and cultivate a proper theater audience. This challenge persisted for a long time, even as of the 1910s, effective disciplining of such an audience had not been fully achieved (And, 1971, pp. 15–26).

Modern culture liberated art from the patronage of the courts and religious institutions and directed it to the market. This made it accessible to the general public, bringing the tastes of the uneducated masses to the forefront, which alarmed the cultural elites. They responded by reformulating art as an aesthetic experience separated from ordinary entertainment, which can be learnable. Since this aesthetic experience required a certain education and self-discipline, those who were deprived of it were scorned and excluded from the art scene. According to Larry Shiner (2001, pp. 213–219) and Richard Sennett (2002, p. 206), the norms of behavior adopted for venues like theater and music halls in the late nineteenth century were reformulated by cultural elites in such a way that aesthetic education and self-discipline of the audience became crucial, which pushed to the forefront new discourses and practices excluding children, who lacked this self-discipline, from the public areas they once shared

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with adults. Child audiences had a complicated relationship with the early mass culture, as Gubar (2014) shows with special reference to popular theatre. On the one hand, children were the ideal spectators of light entertainments, and because they drew their parents to these shows, producers had to consider the demands of both groups when creating content. On the other hand, the presence of child audiences and adults in the same environment raised aesthetic and moral concerns that children, who were associated with innocence, may be exposed to inappropriate content, and that the aesthetic level would suffer because of the childish content of the shows. Thus, popular culture that appealed to mixed-age audiences were labeled as immature, childish and having low artistic value. This also applied to the early cinema which was scorned by some critics and adult audiences because of its childish content and low artistic value (Düzcan, 2022, p. 577).

In his study on shadow theater in France, Schoemaker (1997, p. 64) points out that the Theatre de Seraphin, which started out as folk theater, was first adapted into high culture by the Court of Versailles, then transformed into popular culture that primarily appealed to children, and then once more became the focus of artistic and intellectual interest with the advent of the cabaret in the 1880s. West's study on the nineteenth-century circus entertainment (1981) is a stunning example of the fact that whether a type of entertainment appeals to children or adults is shaped by the sociohistorical context in which it was produced rather than its essence. According to West (1981, pp. 266–269) American circus entertainment in the nineteenth century was mainly intended for adults and even considered inappropriate for children, but in the twentieth century it was transformed into a children's entertainment. Marah Gubar (2014, pp. 2–3, 27–28) criticizes the lack of the analysis of age factor in American cultural studies and argues that the nineteenth-century American popular theater, which appealed to a mixed-age audience of children and adults, blurred the lines between age generations and held a deep ambiguity about the dominant discourse on the innocence and vulnerability of children. These plays were also viewed as childish, vulgar works undeserving of serious evaluation. Similar ambiguities concerning children's place in contemporary spectacle culture as well as some aesthetic and moral concerns arising from performances intended for mixed-age audiences are also evident in the Ottoman case, particularly at Direklerarası.

SPECTACLES IN DIREKLERARASI: REGULATIONS FOR CHILD AUDIENCES

Direklerarası emerged as a center of *lubiyat* in the intramural Istanbul in the late nineteenth century. The term *lubiyat* is used to describe all forms of entertainment and amusement in the Ottoman world, including theater, *kanto*,[6] cinematograph (live photography), panorama, phonograph, circus, juggling, acrobatic performances and café-chantant (Abdülaziz Bey, 2000, p. 523). The Ottoman authorities issued regulations on all types of these spectacles, which can be used to reveal how political authority saw, monitored, and controlled the emerging and rapidly changing entertainment culture, as well as how the consumer audience was positioned within it.

The correspondence in the Ottoman archives regarding the first attempts to open theater in the intramural Istanbul reflects how the Ottoman political authorities treated the historical peninsula, where the Muslim population was predominant, differently from Beyoğlu. In 1850, Hâzi Hüke, a non-Muslim Ottoman citizen, petitioned *Meclis-i Vala* (the Supreme Council) to open a theater in the intramural Istanbul, comparable to the one in Beyoğlu (BOA. A. DVN. 57/82) was rejected on the ground that the historical peninsula is different from Beyoğlu, that the theaters in Beyoğlu were mostly attended by non-muslims living around Galata who were familiar with the theater environment, and that various improprieties might arise here because the theater was a night entertainment and the people of the intramural Istanbul were not acquainted with the procedures and etiquette of the theater (BOA. A. MKT. MVL. 26/33).

In 1860, the first regulations to organize spectacles in a certain order were issued. Yaver Bey, one of the officers of *Mızıka-i Hümayun* (The Imperial Orchestra), applied for a license to open a theater in the intramural Istanbul. The decree written in response to his request reflects the moral concerns of the political authority regarding the opening of theater in the historical peninsula. As a matter of fact, the theater was allowed to open on

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the conditions that the peace of the audience was ensured, no restaurants or sleeping quarters were built for the audience other than those for the residence, accommodation and cooking of the theater staff, no alcoholic beverages were sold, and no women were allowed (BOA. İ. MMS, 16/691).

Based on the 1860 regulation of the Naum Theater (BOA. HR. TO. 472/21), a new regulation consisting of 31 articles (BOA. MVL. 430/18931) was prepared for this theater, which was permitted to open in Tatlıkuyu district in the intramural city. In contrast to the Naum Theater Regulation, the third article reiterates the main requirements for the theater's operation and specifies that women were explicitly forbidden from entering. The articles of the Regulation containing rules on the audience are identical to the relevant articles of the Naum Theatre, except for two statements. Both regulations prohibit entering the theater with sticks and umbrellas, interfering with the play with whistling, shouting, and insulting expressions and behaviors contrary to order and decorum, smoking tobacco except in assigned smoking areas, and throwing insulting objects at the scene of the play. In contrast, articles 25 and 27 of the regulation for the new theater in the historical peninsula state that "especially those who are drunk will not be admitted to the theater" and "if children are brought to the theater and behave contrary to the instructions, those who bring them along are responsible for their actions." As Okay (2002, p. 76) argues, admission to the theater is not an issue as long as children are kept under control.

The 1896 Regulation on Theatre, Ortaoyunu, Karagöz and Puppetry (BOA. Y. PRK. DH. 9/28) which deals with issues including morals and manners, respecting religions and sects, not engaging in political issues, and not using prohibited words in detail, did not include a regulation for child audiences. In 1903, the ninth article of the regulation (BOA. Y. PRK. AZJ. 46/16), titled the Conditions of the Privilege of Screening Cinematograph in the Ottoman Empire (*Memalik-i Şahanede Sinematograf Temaşa Ettirilmesinin Şerait-i İmtiyaziyesi*) stated that "Privilege holders will strive to display the most decent and popular images, taking into consideration the health and upbringing of children, as well as family life, and work towards improving general morality." Also, the 1903 Cinematograph Privilege[7] aiming to regulate cinema in a centralized and systematic manner does not impose any restrictions on children, but rather approves children as moviegoers under certain conditions.

Finally, in a report submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on December 14, 1916, (BOA. DH. EUM. VRK. 28/22.), it was proposed that children should not be permitted as spectators in some entertainment places. In the report, the Istanbul Police Directorate stated that in Europe, which had taken advanced steps before Ottomans in this regard, theaters and cinemas serving the scientific and spiritual upbringing of the society, were kept separate from the café-chantants, which were the abodes of pleasure-seekers, whereas in the Ottoman Empire, no such regulation had been made so far. The report claims that the theaters throughout the Ottoman Empire, with a few exceptions, put on plays with the themes of love and murder, women conduct indecent shows and *kanto*s on stage and these theaters were popular among the debauched populace. It argued that these indecencies threaten to corrupt the morals of school-age children and Islamic women, and the murder-themed performances lead children to sadness, and thus to laziness and immorality. In order to protect the chastity of the future generation, it is requested that children under the age of sixteen who are in need of education and protection, be prohibited from entering cinemas, cafes and theaters and only on Fridays, school children together with their teachers should be allowed to watch films and plays allowing them to develop their knowledge and ideas, and the police should take measures to enforce these rules. Following the report's evaluation, it was agreed on December 24, 1916, that children under the age of sixteen were prohibited from entering public cinemas as it was considered morally objectionable and harmful for children, with the exception of entertaining and beneficial films for children and decided to add this article to the relevant regulation about theaters and other performance venues which was approved in September 1916 (BOA. DH. EUM.VRK, 28/13). However, Çeliktemel-Thomen (2016, p. 7) states that despite being revised several times, this regulation was not put into effect. Apart from cinema, there was no prohibition on children entering theaters until the 1920s.[8]

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VARIETIES OF SPECTACLE IN DIREKLERARASI: EXPERIENCES OF CHILD AUDIENCES

Direklerarası is a row of shops built by Damad İbrahim Pasha in the early eighteenth century on the historical Divanyolu to generate income for the madrasah of which he was the founder (See Figure 1). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Direklerarası, which stands out with its porticoes and colonnaded pavements, turned into a famous promenade street with theatres, literary cafés, tea houses and shops and also an entertainment hub where modern and traditional shows coexist. Described as a 200-step street (Aksel, 2011, p. 4), Karagöz, *meddah*, theater, *kanto*, *incesaz*, cinematograph, phonograph, circus, tightrope walkers, horse acrobats, dog acrobats, clowns, all side by side on this street. Apart from holding alternative entertainments, Direklerarası offers a multifunctional area where various entertainment elements are offered together under a single ticket, especially during the Ramadan months. In this sense, it has had a considerable impact on the Ottoman spectatorship culture.

Direklerarası is the district introduced as "Var Oğlu Var" (It's all there) by *Çaylak* magazine (22 March 1876, p. 1). The coexistence culture in Direklerarası can be expressed with the concept of conviviality, a term that is associated with sociable, friendly, and festive characteristics (see, Freitag, 2014; Yaşar, 2023) considering both the variety of entertainment and the diversity of consumer-spectators. The diversity and coexistence in Direklerarası have also attracted child audiences to this location. Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey (2001, p. 223) writes that Kalpakçılarbaşı is an entertainment venue for the elderly, while Beyazıt and Şehzadebaşı streets are popular hangout spots for the young. In a children's newspaper (*Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete*, 3 January 1901, pp. 2-3), two children named Nihad and Sami talking about the places they visited during Ramadan mention the entertaining shop windows, candy stores, theaters, puppet shows, Karagöz and the music at Fevziye Kıraathanesi in Direklerarası. Direklerarası's daily entertainment agenda is closely followed by reporters from prominent newspapers of the time,

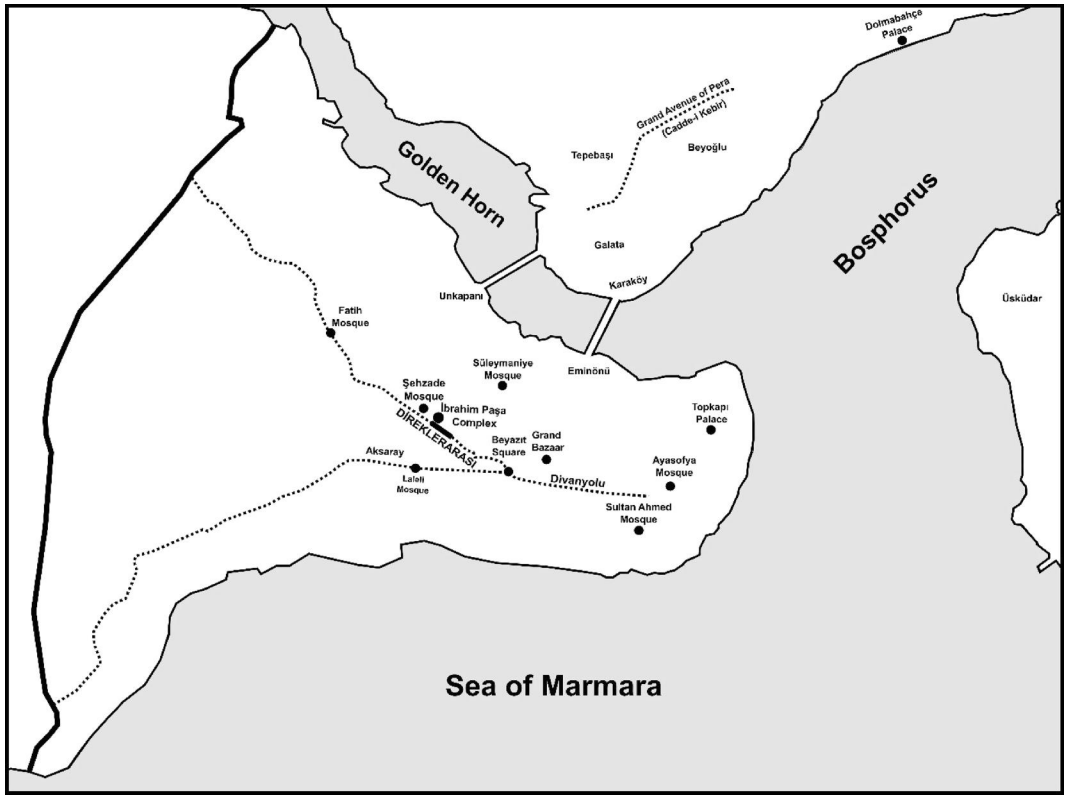


FIGURE 1 The Location of Direklerarası in Late Ottoman Istanbul.

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who offer spot suggestions for leisure and entertainment to their readers. These texts also reveal experiences of children as spectators in Direklerarası.

From Obscenity to Decency: Transformation of Karagöz into a Play for Children

Among the spectacles most favored by children in Direklerarası is traditional Karagöz play. Despite competition from the growing popularity of theaters in Direklerarası starting in the 1880s, Karagöz had managed to hold children's interest. According to Ercüment Ekrem's article in the *İkdam* newspaper (12 May 1921, p. 3), deciding which theater to attend is a matter for adults. Karagöz in Direklerarası was always the first choice of children, especially during Ramadan.

Originally performed in adult male-dominated coffeehouses, Karagöz evolved into a sort of entertainment enjoyed by both adults and children during the nineteenth century. Öztürk (2006, p. 292) characterizes Karagöz in the Ottoman world as a rural and lower-class entertainment characterized by sexual and political humor. Balan (2008, p. 181) draws attention to the "liberating elements" in Karagöz, "such as its critical approach to political affairs, its sexually charged jokes, albeit from a male point of view", as well as "European travelers' astonished view on the sexual and political freedom displayed by Karagöz." Antonelli (The Hekim Bashi) was surprised that Karagöz, which he described as a "grossly obscene drama," was seen as a proper exhibition for ladies and children by respectable Turks (Sandwith, 1864, p. 97). Nerval (2002, p. 47), who traveled to the East in the 1840s, witnessed the sale of Karagöz puppets in all toy shops in Istanbul and couldn't understand why families would put a puppet of this character, who spoke very obscenely, into the hands of children without worrying about the moral danger it might pose. Edmondo de Amicis (1896, pp. 121–122) also draws attention to the obscenity and coarseness to which children watching Karagöz are exposed and characterizes Karagöz as "a profound corruption lurked beneath the mask of Muslim austerity". However, Lady Hornby (1863, p. 335), who was in Istanbul during the Crimean War (1853–1856), mentions that the front row in the Karagöz play is entirely filled with children and expresses her admiration for the Karagöz play with the words "The first row are all children, and never did I hear childish delight and ringing laughter so joyous and free."

In 1876, an Ottoman journalist who saw the Karagöz play performed at Rıza Efendi's *Hayalhane* (a Karagöz stage) stated in an article (*Mecmua-i Maarif*, 10 October 1876, p. 2) that he could not remain silent about the scandals he witnessed in Şehzadebaşı. He expressed his displeasure over the immoral and indecent language used in the Karagöz play. The journalist was particularly disturbed by the fact that the boys and girls present there were exposed to indecent comments and conducts that should not be heard or witnessed. He felt a sense of responsibility to write this article as a warning to parents not to send their children to such places. In his article published in *Maarif* newspaper (13 April 1892, p. 154), Mehmed Celal writes that children are eager to watch Karagöz, but it is not appropriate to expose them to this play, which contains obscene words. He expresses his surprise at allowing children to watch Karagöz's empty chatter. Mehmed Celal is also pleased to hear that puppeteers started to perform more decent and well-mannered plays over time and wishes that this trend will strengthen.

The correspondent of *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* magazine (7 April 1892, p. 2) in Direklerarası during Ramadan, confirms the evolution and metamorphosis in Karagöz plays with the words "that boring and child-deceiving curtain has been lifted and it is being performed like a theater." The correspondent speaks of Katip Salih's stage as the "newly invented imaginary theater" and expresses that children can be sent to this harmless entertainment with confidence because Katip Salih completely abandoned the old language prevalent in Karagöz performances. The pioneer of this advancement in Karagöz play is Hayali (puppeteer) Katip Salih who is a well-known Karagöz performer in Direklerarası. In the 1880s, as theater gained popularity in Direklerarası and competition became difficult for Karagöz, Katip Salih introduced some innovations in line with the spirit of the time. As *Sabah* newspaper (7 January 1900, p. 2) described, "Traditional Karagöz curtains have changed into theater curtains. With the ringing

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of the bell, the *incesaz* team begins to perform, and the curtain opens as in theaters. First comes the dialog of Karagöz and Hacivad, which makes one laugh, it is within the limits of decency and morality, and does not contain the slightest disgraceful word, and then the *kantos* begin."

The mobile correspondent of *Malumat* newspaper who follows Direklerarası and Divanyolu describes the atmosphere of Karagöz performance in a literary café that provides light on children's experiences from various perspectives (4 January 1902, p. 2-3). According to the observations of the correspondent, the coffeehouse where the play is performed is filled with children in the front rows, as well as elderly people around. Unlike 10 years ago when Karagöz was described as "obscene play" (Mehmed Celal, 13 April 1892, p. 154), not a single offensive sentence or word that goes against decency is uttered in the play. Karagöz, which originally had elements of adult humor and obscenity, has progressively evolved into a children's extravaganza. According to Metin And (2014, p. 43-44), Karagöz, whom he regards as a representative of infinite freedom, encountered criticism from the ruling elites due to its political satire and explicitness. Additionally, he points out that the influence of European theater in the Ottoman culture had a restrictive impact on the content of Karagöz, leading to its "childification" (And, 1985, p. 303). Öztürk (2006, p. 298) associates the removal of obscene content from the Karagöz plays with the process of modernization. It is interesting to note that Karagöz, which had been previously criticized for its inappropriate content for children when performed in a more traditional manner, was now criticized for its childish content after being tamed under the influence of European style theater with which it was negatively compared. This paradoxical situation seems to be caused by the ambiguity regarding the role of traditional entertainments in modernizing cultural life, as well as the fact that the spectacles and plays for children and adults have not yet been clearly separated from one another.

The main complaint of the correspondent of *Malumat* newspaper about the Karagöz performance he saw is the short duration of entertainment for the payment of three and a half *kuruş*.[9] The correspondent suggests extending the entertainment with a three-person musical ensemble and subsidizing it by charging five *kuruş* from adults and one hundred *para* (two and a half *kuruş*) from children, as Katip Salih Efendi did in Direklerarası. The practice of determining different fees for adults and children in the performances is also observed in other spectacles such as panorama priced at forty *para* for adults and twenty *para* for children (*Sabah*, 25 January 1898, p. 3), and the show of Beni Zuk Zuk Company, first-class ticket priced at 10 *kuruş*, second-class ticket at five *kuruş*, and children's ticket at three *kuruş* (*Vakit*, 20 August 1881, p. 4) in Direklerarası.

As a sort of entertainment, panoramas displaying images of wild, bizarre, and intriguing creatures became popular among the famous amusements of Direklerarası in the 1890s, attracting more attention from the public, especially curious children, than puppetry, Karagöz, and theater. The discounted price for children resulted in a comical incident at Direklerarası. An elderly man with one eye, eager to witness a large African snake coiled around a tree, inquired about the adult ticket cost. He humorously stated, "You see, I'm blind in one eye, so I'll pay 20 *para*." After a moment of hesitation, the panorama company's announcer allowed the one-eyed elderly man entry for 20 *para*. When others in the ticket line, inspired by the humorous exchange, covered one eye and offered the same price, the announcer reluctantly agreed, leading to a large crowd entering (*İkdam*, 24 January 1899, p. 3). In 1908, adults had to pay 40 *para*, while soldiers and children had to pay 20 *para* to see a girl who appeared as a monster, two crocodile siblings, a five-legged dog, and a dragon measuring five meters in length *(İncili Çavuş*, 2 October 1908, p. 2).

Children generally pay half the price of adults for spectacles. The discounted pricing for children in these shows implies that the presence of children is regarded as legitimate, regardless of the debate about whether their presence is appropriate in terms of health, morality, and pedagogy. Children, who hold significant weight among the audience, play an important role in shaping the entertainment sector and have the capacity to influence the content presented on stage. For example, *incesaz* music performed by Kemençeci Akribas and his friends as part of the Karagöz show in Kadıköy were removed from the performance because the children did not like them (*Malumat*, 4 January 1902, p. 3).

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Determining whether various performances at Direklerarası, such as horse acrobatics, tightrope walking, juggling, pantomime, puppetry, Karagöz, and the circus, were specifically targeted for adults or children proves to be a challenging task. For instance, the renowned novelist Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil and the distinguished poet Tevfik Fikret, probably attended the screening of the film "Snake Dance" at the circus of Don Ramirez in Şehzadebaşı, along with children (Altuğ, 2016, pp. 47-51). Similarly, in 1900, a very entertaining clown show attracted the attention of both children and adults. When a child threw an orange onto the stage and the clown caught it, other children also joined the show, and subsequently, adults also threw oranges onto the stage and had fun with the children (*Sabah*, 7 January 1900, p. 2).

Theater in Direklerarası as a Childish Entertainment

From the 1880s onwards, theaters had an active role in determining the entertainment concept and customer profile in Direklerarası (Tunç Yaşar, 2023, p. 135). By the 1900s, children seem to make up the significant portion of theatergoers, as suggested by the periodicals of the period. However, there were no theater performances specifically targeting children apart from adults in that period. After 1908, children's magazines published texts of children's plays, but these were plays performed by children at the end of the semester as part of the school representations. Children's theater was first established in 1935 by Muhsin Ertuğrul under Istanbul Municipal Theatre (And, 2014, p. 187).

According to an article in the *Sabah* newspaper dated 16 January 1899, children congregate in front of the theaters rather than sweet shops in Direklerarası. Even though children's enthusiasm for theater was well known, Ottoman periodicals found it problematic for them to attend performances. Public theaters were considered to be places established to promote decency and educate people of all ages. Therefore, greater attention was expected to be given to the content of the plays and the behavior exhibited within these venues. Theater owners were asked to choose funny and harmless plays to entertain the young audience. The play *Devr-i Alem* (Age of the World) performed at Şevki Efendi's theater was viewed as a play that children could easily watch, in line with its European counterparts (*Sabah*, 25 December 1901, p. 3).

In the periodicals of the period, the protectionist discourse on girls among children seems much more dominant. It is noteworthy that theaters and cinemas were seen as particularly dangerous for vulnerable girls. According to an article published in *Hayal* magazine (26 October 1873, p. 1), especially during Ramadan, girls as young as eight, ten, and twelve are present in these places, where they witness immoral situations. Mehmed Sıtkı (*Musavver Terakki*, 10 September 1903, p. 204) believes that theater, like reading novels, is harmful for girls. Theaters, he claims, are venues where love stories from novels are played. There is a Drama Company led by Mınak Efendi, which resembles theater as much as possible, but it is also not suitable for girls. Mehmed Sıtkı believes that Şevki Efendi's Company is more cautious in this regard. Examining the official agenda regarding female and child viewers from the Ottoman archival documents, Çeliktemel-Thomen (2016, p. 4) also reveals that the Ottoman elites saw certain films' content as "contrary to morality" especially for child and female viewers and disapproved of the atmosphere in theaters and the diversity of the audience in terms of age and gender.

The term "childishness" appears as a decisive criterion in the critiques discussing the quality of the plays and the profile of the audience at Direklerarası. For example, Hasan's theater, which is notable for entertaining children the most, is belittled because its audience primarily consists of children. In an article published in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (3 October 1908, p. 3) just after the Revolution of 1908, the author compares the theatrical performances of Mınak, Hasan and Şevki Efendis who perform in Direklerarası during Ramadan and complains that the theaters are only seen as a means of entertainment. According to him, these theaters were frequented mostly by children instead of those who were knowledgeable about theater and considered it as a means of moral and aesthetic education. Mehmed Sıtkı (*Musavver Terakki*, 10 December 1903, p. 247) enjoys Hasan's theater, but prefers Şevki's theater, stating "there are indeed many laughs, but those who laugh are always children."

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The exclusion of Mınakyan's Company, which is praised for its quality plays, from the patronage of the Theater Association (*Tiyatro Cemiyeti*) is criticized in the humor magazine *Karagöz* (31 August 1911, p. 2), which expresses concerns about the decline in the quality of theater with the words, "then the Mınakyan Company becomes a child's play like the other companies." In texts where the theaters in Direklerarası are evaluated from an artistic perspective, those that aim solely to entertain audiences and have low artistic value are considered childish, while those with a powerful artistic aspect, seriousness, and European style are seen as free of childishness. It is noteworthy that Alus (2005, p. 50) refers to Mınakyan's theater as being "without children's commotion" while praising it for its European order and discipline.

In the Second Constitutional Era (1908-1918),[10] Hasan's theater was criticized not only for being a place for children but also for having obscene and immoral elements, making it unsuitable for them. *Karagöz* magazine (31 August 1911, p. 2), questions how fathers could send their children to these plays full of obscene jokes and dirty antics. In the Islamist-conservative publication *Sebilürreşad* (18 June 1914, p. 31), an article titled "Şehzadebaşı'nda Cereyan Eden Rezaletler" (The Scandals Happening in Şehzadebaşı) argues that in theaters, the audience is made to laugh with jokes containing profanity and obscenity, and even the words that will embarrass the women *kanto* performers (*kantocu kadınlar*) are uttered in front of innocent children and unwary women. The magazine even considers it a shame for the country that such plays are not outlawed. However, the theaters in Şehzadebaşı seem to be considered more suitable for children when compared to those in Pera. *İkdam* newspaper (29 November 1900, p. 3), announces that despite there is a decision by *Şura-yı Devlet* (the Council of State) affirming that plays were not permitted in the theaters in Şehzadebaşı, *Şehremaneti Meclisi* (the Municipal Council) requested the issue to be reconsidered since some ignorant young men and children were going to Beyoğlu, which was claimed to be causing the corruption of their morals. It is interesting to note that, according to Ozansoy (1968, pp. 116-121) during the short period when theaters were outlawed at Direklerarası, a group of children had played amateur theater and performed *kanto* music by imitating professional theater players at their private houses under the supervision of their mothers, and as a result of a complaint they were beaten by the police.

Music was also an integral part of theater, Karagöz, and circus performances in Direklerarası. Children were frequently exposed to kanto and incesaz music, both of which were in different ways associated with adult culture. Many of the *kanto* songs contained sensual and suggestive lyrics and were performed by non-muslim female dancers in a sexualized context (Blackthorne-O'Barr, 2018, p. 50). As previously stated, erotic performances of *kanto* in front of children drew criticism for moral reasons. On the contrary, the popularized version of Ottoman classical music, *incesaz* was mainly for adult listeners due to its solemn and often melancholic mood (Gill, 2017, p. 95), which seems to be boring for children (Gezgin, 2019, p. 199). Considering that many theater performances involving children also included excerpts from European operas and operettas as well as folk tunes of Istanbul (Ayas, 2023, pp. 665-6), it can be said that Direklerarası entertainments exposed children to a wide range of music.

Direklerarası: The First Cinematograph Experience in Intramural Istanbul

The first cinema screening in Istanbul took place approximately one year after the Lumière Brothers' first screening in Paris on 28 December 1895 (Özuyar, 2008, p. 11). It was organized by the Frenchman Henri Delavallée on 11 December 1896, in the hall of Sponeck Beerhouse in Beyoğlu (Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2016, p. 158). The screenings in Beyoğlu primarily attracted the attention of non-muslims. Ercüment Ekrem Talu (1943, p. 5) recalls that when he was around eight or nine years old, he watched the first screening at Sponeck with his brother. He mentions that he did not have difficulty getting permission from his father to watch the cinematograph; on the contrary, he even received encouragement. They entered the cinema by paying ten *kuruş* and found seats in the front rows, as the hall was not yet full. He also notes that the people of Istanbul did not show much interest in daytime entertainment.

In the intramural Istanbul, the first cinema screening took place in February 1897 at Fevziye Kıraathanesi located in Direklerarası (*Sabah*, 9 February 1897 and Özuyar, 2013, pp. 20-21). According to Erdoğan (2017, p. 77),

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Delavellée's strategic project was to move the film screenings, "that was likely to face resistance just because it comes from the infamous Beyoğlu district" to "a more respectable area of Istanbul, Şehzadebaşı," and promote cinematography as Ramadan entertainment. This initiative facilitated the acceptance of this new form of entertainment. Refik Halit Karay (2009, p. 100), who witnessed the screenings at Fevziye Kıraathanesi as a child of around nine years old, states that for most people living on the Istanbul side, crossing over to Beyoğlu was not just a long and laborious journey but also considered improper and resembling a crime. Therefore, he points out that the "true Istanbulites" watched the cinematography in Direklerarası.

The cinematograph as a new type of spectacle, also known as live photography, is integrated into the vibrant and diverse entertainment package offered to the audience during Ramadan nights in Direklerarası. Until the Second Constitutional Era when independent cinema halls began to emerge, cinematograph was an intermediate form of entertainment shown during theater intermissions, circus performances, acrobat shows in coffeehouses and reading rooms and generally used to prepare the audience for the main show and increase their interest in the venue (Saydam, 2020, p. 46). Advertisements published in 1909 reveal that cinematography was still being presented to the audience at Direklerarası's Fevziye Kıraathanesi with *kanto* and duets (Gökmen, 1989, p. 22).

Analyzing the advertisements of the period, Erdoğan argues that three program formats gradually came to the fore in the process of presenting cinema to Istanbul's audience: the presentation of live photography on its own as a scientific-technological wonder, as a segment within the flow of entertainment, and as the main element in a venue organized for screening. As Erdoğan points out for the Ottoman audience, who expected at least three hours of entertainment in a venue in the early twentieth century, it was not possible for short-lived cinematograph shows to compete with the existing entertainment format on their own (Erdoğan, 2017, pp. 125-126). Indeed, Karay mentions that for a while, cinematography could not compete with Karagöz (Karay, 2009, p. 103). What made Direklerarası appealing to both adults and children was the extended duration of the entertainment programs. In multi-functional venues such as reading rooms, teahouses, wig shops (*perukar*), and acrobat houses, entertainment was presented to the audience as a comprehensive program package. In 1901 (*Malumat*, 19 December 1901, p. 2), a journalist writes that theater performances lasted approximately five hours. Next year, a reporter from the same newspaper criticizes a venue that offers entertainment for nearly two hours in exchange for one ticket (*Malumat*, 4 January 1902, p. 3).

It wouldn't be entirely wrong to say that the first cinema screenings were perceived as children's entertainment. For example, an article in *Stamboul* newspaper (6 February 1908) suggests that cinematograph programs resembled clown shows, with a constant focus on children's films. Therefore, it criticizes these cinema screenings for being artistically weak and only capable of entertaining children in their current state. Düzcan (2022, p. 576) also emphasizes that in the early 1900s, when the distinction between childhood and adulthood was not very clear, cinema had a childish content and a significant portion of the audience worldwide consisted of children. Balan (2010, p. 226) notes that this might have changed "especially after the development of narrative style cinema or the notion of cinema as the seventh art in the mid 1910s", with reference to revisionist film historians.

In his study based on articles published in children's periodicals during the Second Constitutional Period, Odabaşı (2022, p. 157) states that cinema was associated with science as a technological innovation. It was perceived as an indicator of modernity and promoted as a beneficial leisure activity for children. In an article published in the *Çocuk Duygusu* magazine in 1914 (p. 2), which includes a dialogue between a father and his son, a twelve-year-old child asks his father for permission to go to Direklerarası to watch a movie with his nanny. The father emphasizes that every parent is obliged to support their children's legitimate desires. In other words, watching movies in Direklerarası is seen as a legitimate request for children.

On the other hand, Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's (1995, p. 217) story "Çocuklara Yasak" (Forbidden to Children) revolves around the conversation between a child who goes to Direklerarası with his father to watch a movie but is sent back home and his mother at home. According to the child's explanation, a sign saying "Tonight, children will not be allowed inside" was hung at the cinema's entrance, and children were not admitted because "indecent things" were being shown. Although the child's exclusion from the cinema surprises the mother, the household

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maid confirms what the child narrates based on what she heard from her neighbors. Indeed, there was no regulation preventing children from entering cinemas in 1908. The last-minute arbitrary placement of the prohibition sign demonstrates that decisions regarding child audiences could be made on a situational basis. The *Karagöz* magazine caricatures the situation of a girl and a boy leaving home with their fathers to watch cinematograph at the theater but being taken to a tavern by their fathers due to the theater being closed (*Karagöz*, 29 January 1910, p. 4). As Çeliktemel (2016, p. 9), who published this cartoon in her article, asserts, a last-minute decision by the political elite, deeming it inappropriate for children to attend the theater, resulted in the sudden resolution by the children's father to take them to a tavern, a place considered to be entirely within the realm of adults.

Odabaşı (2022, p. 177) notes that in the children's magazines of the Second Constitutional Period, cinema was identified with modernity, technology and science and presented as a positive innovation that should be experienced. However, some periodicals highlighted the negative effects of cinema on children's health, moral development, and education, as well as the measures taken by European countries in this regard. According to Refik Halit, cinema, which was once a pleasurable, elegant, and refined entertainment and a useful invention, later evolved into the public's worst enemy as the teacher of immorality. He argued that the tolerance displayed to cinema while talking about the harm of alcohol, the evil of gambling, and the vileness of prostitution was a remarkable weakness and lack of common sense given the blinding damage that movie theaters have caused. In his article titled "Sinema Derdi" (The Cinema Problem), published in *Yeni Mecmua* (9 May 1918, pp. 321-322), Karay describes these films as "the dirty underwear of the West which was expelled from every country" and expresses astonishment at showing them to children:

> "At night, the father takes his son to the cinema, where he is taught how to climb over walls, open locked doors, how stolen money will be spent, and then how the blame will be shifted onto others through deceitful tricks. This nonsensical and thieving lesson is given in front of the father's eyes, applauded all the while."

In his critical article on "cinemas and children" published in 1920, Hakkı Süha Gezgin (2019, pp. 23-5) describes a cinema in Şehzadebaşı that was crowded with schoolchildren who had skipped classes. These children, with an age of no more than fifteen and wearing school uniforms, managed to enter the cinema by pooling their pocket money, saying that the "naked actresses" would perform. They watched a play in a hall filled with cigarette smoke, where breathing was impossible, and both the subject matter and the actresses' dresses were far beyond decency. In 1920, (Y.K., *İkdam*, 29 October 1920, p. 2), there were complaints about the lack of necessary precautions regarding children's entry into cinemas. It was mentioned that in some parts of Europe, there were laws prohibiting children from entering cinemas, and measures were taken against excessive cinema engagement.

Another important aspect to mention regarding children's theater and cinema experiences in Direklerarası is who accompanied them in these experiences. Ercüment Ekrem watched the show in Beyoğlu with his brother. In Hüseyin Rahmi's story, the child went to the cinema in Şehzadebaşı with his father. Refik Halit criticizes the father who takes his child to the cinema. The character from *Çocuk Duygusu* magazine plans to go to Direklerarası with his nanny. Enis Behiç, who encountered cinema in Thessaloniki in the 1900s, was taken to the cinema by his father. Zekeriya Sertel's little sister, Belkıs, was taken to the cinema by her brother Yusuf [Sertel]. Ziya Osman Saba mentions in his memoirs that he went to the cinema with his father (Odabaşı, 2022). It appears that due to the restrictions on women watching these public performances in Direklerarası until the Second Constitutional Era, girls and boys have experienced cinema with adult males who were their fathers, relatives or close acquaintances. After 1908, it is likely that child spectators were accompanied by their mothers.

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DIREKLERARASI AS A PLACE OF CHILDHOOD MEMORY

Many notable writers who wrote their memoirs in late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey associated Direklerarası with childhood as a place of memory. Especially for those who spent their childhood in the conservative atmosphere of Abdülhamid's regime, Ramadan represented a period of tolerance and liberalization (Tunç Yaşar, 2023, p. 131). Children experienced the entertaining aspects of this holy month more than its religious obligations, spending time out with adults until late at night and encountering modern mass cultural products and shows, perhaps for the first time. The first years of the twentieth century -the heyday of Direklerarası-were sometimes remembered as a childhood dream when compared to the protracted period of war and occupation, excessive inflation, and other troubles suffered by broad masses from 1913 to 1922. However, writers who lived through the profound changes following the Young Turk Revolution (1908) and especially the Republican Revolution (1923), started to view their childhood experiences in Direklerarası from a different perspective as something immature and outmoded. The pivotal position of Direklerarası was badly impacted by changes such as Ramadan ceasing to be the focal point of the cultural season and Istanbul's entertainment scene expanding to all seasons and regions of the city more so than in the past (Georgeon, 2018, pp. 207-18).

Direklerarası entertainments started to be perceived as a representation of the immature, childish cultural life of a transitional society in the infancy of its modernization process. Refik Halit Karay (1918b, p. 1), for instance, recalls how during his childhood's Ramadan entertainments, his "uncouth, inexperienced eyes were charmed by the vulgar performances of shabby theaters", and how he placed "a vulgar, worthless actor on the throne of artistry". He expresses his disappointment that he can no longer enjoy the things he considered valuable in his childhood because experience and age no longer allow him to be tricked as easily as a child. Sadri Sema (2008, p. 279) wonders how he had spent so many thrilling moments in front of the "sloppy" entertainments intended "not only for children but also for adults during the years of Hamid's oppressive regime." The novelist Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (2008, pp. 737-739), who frequently attended the Direklerarası entertainments in his childhood, wrote that compared to the opportunities of the Republican youth, late Ottoman youth were "deprived of the free outpouring of material and spiritual forces" and "the means that would bestow joy and consolation to the souls." However, in the Republican era, the city was teeming with life and activity. The only pleasure of the last generation of Ottoman youth, whom Uşaklıgil calls miserable and helpless, was to listen to *incesaz* in Şehzadebaşı cafes from Ramadan to Ramadan or to spend time in the shabby theaters of Abdi and Hasan. Hakkı Süha Gezgin (2019, pp. 198-201, 227), who revisited a Karagöz show in the early 1920s, reflects on the fasts he observed as a child in order for his father to take him to see Karagöz and the times when he believed Hacivat to be the greatest scholar. He also wonders how he could have been hungry all day for such a worthless thing. He finally realizes that what he misses is not Karagöz but directly his childhood. Sait Ulvi (1925, pp. 8-9) attributes the reason why they can no longer feel the pleasure of the old Ramadan entertainments to changing ideas, entertainment trends, and new lifestyles.

The fact that the performances of famous Direklerarası comedians like Kel Hasan and Abdi, were remembered as vulgar, unadvanced and childish shows devoid of artistic value compared to more serious theater institutions who had a more European understanding of art, was the product of a new aesthetic view that separated artistic expression from the entertainment-oriented mass culture and considered the first superior to the latter.[11] In other words, this semantic relationship between the childishness of these entertainments and their artistic immaturity was a symbolic expression of the contrast between "genuine" art, which appealed to educated adults, and mass culture, which appealed to the child-like crowds. One of the most succinct expressions of this is Cenab Şahabettin's (2012, p. 213) article in which he depicts Ramadan as a crowd of freaks wandering around Şehzadebaşı and Vezneciler. According to the author, every crowd is a bit of a child, its intelligence is reduced to zero, while its sensitivity rises at an astonishing rate. Its laughter or rage can be sparked by the simplest and smallest stimulus. In short, Direklerarası has been remembered as a place of childhood entertainments associated with immature and vulgar cultural impressions that appeal to childish crowds, as well as a symbol of lost innocence, leisureliness, and

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comfort. What facilitates this way of remembering is the fact that the authors who produce this discourse have experienced the most active days of Direklerarası as a child spectator.

CONCLUSION

Direklerarası, the center of Ramadan entertainment in late Ottoman Istanbul, attracted a large children's audience thanks to both the legitimacy provided by Ramadan and the variety of the shows it offered. The late Ottoman child audience was introduced to early mass culture in this narrow street, which houses all the shows and spectacles grouped under the name of lubiyat in the Ottoman world, including theater, musical plays, juggling, circus, concerts, Karagöz, cinema, etc. When compared to Pera, the epicenter of European-style entertainment, where non-Muslims were heavily populated, the Ottoman authorities paid more attention to monitoring and controlling Direklerarası entertainment, yet they did not issue specific regulations for children until 1916 (Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2015). One could argue that, for a long time, the Ottoman government considered children to be a part of the adult world and formally acknowledged the presence of children as legitimate spectators of Direklerarası entertainment. In order to reach large audiences, producers had to generate content that appealed to both children and adults, since the spheres of adults and children in public space were not yet as clearly segregated as they were in Europe. Even though different price tariffs were applied for children at events, there was no separate content or presentation for them. They watched the same programs alongside adults in the same places. These shows, which were meant for a mixed-age audience, were criticized on the one hand for lowering the aesthetic level and violating the European norms for aesthetic behavior that required the self-discipline of the audience during the performance. On the other hand, they raised moral concerns due to the regular exposure of children to inappropriate content.

In the Republican period, the components of the spectacle culture, which had previously been gathered under the title of *lubiyat*, were reformulated more strictly in terms of art rather than entertainment. Institutions that redefined and demarcated these cultural activities took shape, and a more radical Westernization program tended to underrate the traditional or hybrid cultural expressions of Ottoman origin. All these factors reshaped the image of the late Ottoman Direklerarası. While it was reconstructed in the memoirs of the writers who spent their childhood in Direklerarası as a place of childhood memory, its cultural life was described as aesthetically immature, childish, vulgar, and insufficiently modernized. Further research on the discourses based on the symbolic association between childhood and childishness and vulgarity of mass culture and/or backwardness and underdevelopment in Turkey may provide insightful information on the cultural history of Ottoman-Turkish modernization.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors.

ORCID

Fatma Tunç Yaşar https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8623-4822
Onur Güneş Ayas https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5317-271X

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ENDNOTES

[1] For Pera/Galata as a place that "became associated with the influx of European fashions" and "a magnet to all those who wanted to escape the controls of the more staid society of the old city to imbibe a more 'European' atmosphere" see Boyar & Fleet, 2010, p. 313. For the negative image, expensiveness, fearful atmosphere of Beyoğlu in the eyes of some Muslim families and "family pressure and social unacceptability" as deterrent factors for their children see Boyar, 2019, pp. 174-176. For the advantages of Direklerarası over Galata and Pera in this context see Blackthorne-O'Barr, 2018, pp. 34-35.

[2] The shadow play entered the Ottoman world from Egypt in the sixteenth century, and the shadow play, Karagöz as a form, emerged in the seventeenth century when the Ottomans processed the images with their mastery of leather art and developed them by adding their own creativity, taste and artistic power (And, p. 44).

[3] For the two most influential representatives of this tendency, see Lewis (1961) and Berkes (1964), which shaped the study of Ottoman-Turkish modernization up until the late 1980s.

[4] As Edhem Eldem points out, the image of Galata and Pera is based on clichés and myths that have been reproduced in different contexts since the conquest of Istanbul, rather than comprehensive and in-depth research based on historical sources. The image of Galata and Pera, which had previously been constructed through exoticism and foreignness for Muslims, began to change with the impact of the Tanzimat reforms, and these districts, which were seen as a pathetic imitation of Western metropolises for Europeans, were transformed into an attractive but foreign showcase of modernity (Eldem, 2006).

[5] Popularized form of Ottoman classical music, known as *incesaz*, was performed indoors by small ensembles, particularly at coffehouses, in the nineteenth century, and appealed to more cultivated people who had artistic expectations from music. See Ayas (2023) for a sociological examination of the *incesaz* ensembles in Direklerarası.

[6] *Kanto* (canto) is an Ottoman popular music genre that peaked in popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which was mostly performed by non-Muslim female dancers in a flirtatious manner as part of theater performances and shows. This genre, which had European origins yet assimilated into Ottoman music culture, especially in Direklerarası, came to be used to describe all forms of popular music other than Ottoman classical music over time. See Blackthorne-O'Barr (2018) for the emergence of kanto in late Ottoman Istanbul.

[7] According to Çeliktemel-Thomen, there is no definite evidence regarding the implementation of the 1903 Cinematograph Privilege, which was drafted by the Abdulhamid administration to grant specific permission for cinema activities within the empire to an institution or individual. It is most likely an abandoned "project" that remained on the shelf (Çeliktemel-Thomen, 2013, p. 26).

[8] For the theater posters indicating the age of children for entry, see. Nagata and Egawa, 2021. See also "Osmanlı Tiyatro Afişleri Sergisi", https://osmanlitiyatro.aa-ken.jp/#

[9] "*Para*" and "*kuruş*" were monetary units used in the Ottoman Empire. 40 *para* were equal to 1 *kuruş*, and 1 *lira* was equivalent to 100 *kuruş*.

[10] The Second Constitutional Era is the period between the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the end of World War I in 1918, during which parliamentary government was re-established in the Ottoman Empire.

[11] Examples of such an aesthetic hierarchy can be found in Nagata and Egawa, 2021, pp. 60-61, 70, 85; And, 1971, pp. 16-26 and Sevengil, 1985 [1927], pp. 166-69.

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