

## Karagöz Co-Opted: Turkish Shadow Theatre of the Early Republic (1923–1945)

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*During the early Turkish republic karagöz shadow theatre's Ottoman patterns were transformed. Reformers attempted to restrict coffeehouses where the art had flourished and developed written texts to replace the improvised practice of the past. They sponsored performances in government-supported community centers and created shows to promote government policies. The efforts meant that an art, which had grown from lower-class satire of the elite was purged of obscene elements, characters were changed to conform to modern ideology, and government control was asserted on what had been a domain of free speech. It is possible that the efforts to restructure the once vibrant art helped hasten its decline.*

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Ottoman Empire *karagöz*, the shadow theatre of the coffeehouses, was characterized by sexual and political humor, characteristics that it shares with genres like *tolubommallata* of India, the *wayang* of Indonesia, and other puppet traditions of Asia and Eurasia.<sup>1</sup> This mixture of sexual liberty and lampooning those in power is characteristic of rural and lower-class entertainments. One of the conundrums that shadow theatre from Indonesia to Turkey has faced is, what happens to such forms with modernization? In Turkey, as with India (Tilakasari [1968]: 25–28) and Indonesia (Foley 1979: 248–261; Weintraub 2004),

the government has intervened in traditional puppetry, enlisting the art to support modernization. Language reform, public health, and governmental economic and social policies may be promoted. While Indian and Indonesian puppet theatres are still in the midst of their transformations, which began only after national independence in the mid twentieth century, the *karagöz* went through a cycle of reformation prior to World War II and, since then, a process of folklorization. This paper intends to look at the reformist phase and will note that the process of revision probably contributed to the demise of the genre as a living art. While government officials were successful in implementing changes, those changes alienate the genre from its roots. While the Turkish experience cannot predict the outcome of these other puppet theatres, I hope that this effort can fill in a little-known era in the history of Turkish shadow theatre, and I believe the episode may provide an instructive model of what not to do if such arts are to be preserved.

During the Turkish Republic, founded in 1923 and led until 1945 under the single party rule of the Republican People's Party, there was a struggle over the Turkish shadow theater. The ruling elite and the common people contested what messages the theatre would

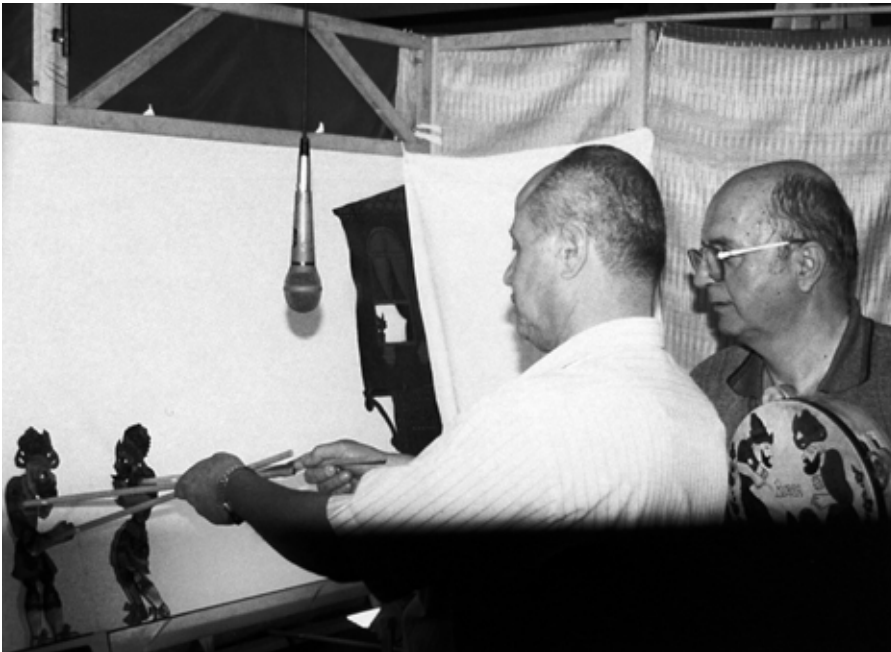


FIGURE 1. The *karagöz* puppeteers Tuncay Tanboğa (Hayali Torun Çelebi) and Orhan Kurt in a view from behind the screen. (Photo: Courtesy of *The Traditional Turkish Theatre* 1999: 21)

carry, where it would be staged, and whose voice it would represent. This disagreement resulted in a transformational process. The art began at the Ottoman coffeehouses as a ribald theatre full of political satire; it moved to government cultural centers where the sexual content of the performance was excised and the political messages were aligned with government ideology. Finally, this gentrified theatre was returned to the coffeehouse of the early Republic. My chronological account of this transformation will highlight how *karagöz* changed in both location and content, pointing out how radical the displacement was and the degree to which it distanced the art from its primary function in Ottoman society.

### **The First Period: *Karagöz* and the Culture of Coffeehouses**

Theatrical performances such as the Turkish shadow theater (Tietze 1977: 19) spread with the increase of coffeehouses in the Ottoman Empire dating from about the seventeenth century and continuing on into the nineteenth century. Especially during Ramadan, the fasting month, theatrical performances by the nineteenth century attracted audiences interested in the political satire and sexual humor in *karagöz*. Throughout this most holy month in Islam, no food or drink was consumed during the day, so feasts and entertainments were held after sundown. People flocked to coffeehouses for food for the body and the mind through enjoyment of a *karagöz* show (22).

The political stance of the *karagöz* had always been that of the little guy criticizing the powerful. Puppeteers and audiences in the coffeehouses were largely common people, and the theatre presented a bottom-up critique of the powerful of Ottoman society and the social constraints that framed their normal life. Even the myth about the theatre's origin tells of a man who wanted to make the sultan see his officials' corruption. He created shadow figures and performed a *karagöz* presenting such behavior before the sultan. The sultan, impressed by the play, punished his corrupt officials and appointed this puppeteer as his grand vizier. Many people followed the example of this *ur*-puppeteer, infusing *karagöz* shows with critique (And 1963–1964: 39). The performances of *karagöz* at nineteenth-century Ottoman coffeehouses were full of political satire, and high officials and grand viziers were fair game.

*Karagöz* was commonly employed as a political weapon to criticize political corruption (Hattox 1996: 106). European visitors regularly noted the extreme freedom which puppet masters exercised. Méry (1855) noted, "*Karagöz* defies the censorship, enjoying an unlimited freedom." In comparison, Méry found that France, America, and

England were much more restricted in political criticism. For him, “*Karagöz* was a daily newspaper, without security, without stamp, without a responsible editor, a terrible newspaper because it can not write, it talks and sings in front of its numerous subscribers.” Méry claimed that “if in another country a newspaper were to write even a single line of the numerous plays of *karagöz*,” it would be sufficient to bring about the arrest and exile of the journalist (cited by Kömeçoğlu 2001: 94).

In the words of another nineteenth-century observer, Louis Enault:

In Turkey, a country governed by an absolute monarchy and a totalitarian regime, *Karagöz* is a character who never deceives himself or is soothed into a sense of security by shutting his eyes to the ills surrounding him. On the contrary, a *karagöz* show is a risqué-revue, as



FIGURE 2. Hacivat and Karagöz are the major characters in the traditional shadow theatre. Karagöz represents the voice of the common man, while Hacivat, who represents higher class ideas, is often mocked. (Photo: Courtesy of *The Traditional Turkish Theatre* 1999: 25)

brave as a militant newspaper. No one is spared, except maybe the Sultan. Karagöz passes judgment on the Grand Vizier and sentences him to the prisons of Yedikule. His gibes prove disturbing to foreign ambassadors; he hits out at the Allied Admirals of the Black Sea fleet, and the generals of the Crimean armies at the time of the Turkish-Russian war of 1854–6. (Cited by Kömeçoğlu 2001: 94–95)

In the same period, traveler Gérard de Nerval wrote about the political content and effect on Istanbul coffeehouse clientele. Nerval clarified that *karagöz* always represented the opposition. Karagöz, he believed, was always the representative of the folk who mocked the nobles or criticized the ruler's mistakes (cited by Kömeçoğlu 2001: 57). For example, the French traveler Wanda reported that Hüsrev Paşa, the grand vizier of Mahmut II, was mocked by Karagöz for his homosexual preferences (Mehmet Süreyya 1996: 682–683). Wanda witnessed the criticisms against high officials and even the sultan in *karagöz* plays. For example, in one coffeehouse shadow play a young man wants some advice from Karagöz on which profession he should choose. Karagöz replies, "Since you do not know anything, I advise you to become a chief admiral." The young man becomes an admiral and attacks rats. The sultan rewards this admiral after his victory, marrying him to his daughter (And 1963–1964: 39; see also And 1985: 294).<sup>2</sup>

Within the hierarchically stratified society of the nineteenth century, Karagöz exercised extraordinary license. Karagöz's sexually loaded puns themselves are revolutionary. "Even when there is no political theme or figure, the performance has a subversive political character which expresses itself symbolically in the deliberate violation of officially held cultural norms, values, and linguistic codes" (Kırlı 2000: 164). One finds evidence of *karagöz*'s licentiousness not only in the report of Western travelers' observations at coffeehouses but also in the texts written by Nazif Bey, a court puppeteer. Karagöz, the main character of Nazif Bey's play, utters words with sexual connotations. For example, "*kaldırmak*," which literally means "to lift," connotes the erection of the penis; "*yapmak*," which means "to perform," connotes sexual performance; "*aybaşı*," which means the first day of the month when salaries are paid, has a connotation of menstruation (Mizrahi 1991: 136). Karagöz's sexual liberation clearly cut across classes, but textual analysis does little justice to the phallocentric imagery on the screen.

The image of Karagöz's penis was often featured. A photograph shows Karagöz with a phallus (Martinovitch 1933: 2). In the words of Mizrahi, "There were special words in the puppeteers' jargon for a performance that contained a phallus: *zekerli* or *toramanlı Karagöz*" (1991:

22). Even court puppeteer Nazif Bey stated that sometimes you could see women check on Karagöz's male organ in the play (22).

Western travelers reconfirm the fact that sexuality was abundant in nineteenth-century performance. Charles White stated that the dialogues in *karagöz* "were beyond all enduring obscene" (1845: 121). Gérard de Nerval was shocked when he saw children playing with *karagöz* images, given their association with sex: "It is incredible that this indecent figure be put without scruple at the hand of the youth. This is, however, the most frequent present that a father or a mother gives to their children" (cited by Kömeçoğlu 2001: 96). G. A. Olivier stated, "We had every evening, in a coffee-house open to all the curious and all the amateurs, a sight much relished by the Turks, and frequented even by the most decent women, although it most frequently presented scenes at which European families, the most shameless, would have blushed to be present" (1801: 137).

As Boratav (1942: 30) as well as And (1964: 15–18) note, some have claimed such reports must be spurious since they believe *karagöz* was a mystical play. Yet research clarifies that this mysticism is confined to the "Curtain Poems"<sup>3</sup> at the beginning of plays, and most nineteenth-century reports highlight the obscenity and satire that pervade the whole of the performance. Even if the show may have had older linkages to either agrarian fertility patterns as we see in the puppetry of India (UCLA Museum of Cultural History 1976: 16) or Sufi or tantric patterns as we find in forms like Indonesian *wayang*, by the nineteenth century these ties were no longer clear to Turkish puppeteers. By then the function of the Curtain Poems was merely to disguise the political and sexual character of the play and to buy immunity.

*Karagöz* is not simple pornography but rather "symbolic inversion of commonly held norms and behaviors through the medium of sexuality" (Kırlı 2000: 170). As Kırlı points out, *karagöz*

Involves the elements of degradation and debasement of the higher, precisely because it takes place in the context of a dialogue with Hacıvat, who was depicted to represent the higher culture of elites in every conceivable way ranging from the way he speaks, which is unintelligible to Karagöz, to his cultured manners, from his selfishness to his constant attempt to domesticate Karagöz. To the extent that Karagöz beats and trashes Hacıvat, the former brings down the privileged symbols and officially authorized norms associated with the latter. To the extent that Hacıvat represents [the] upper body with refined manners and symbols of high culture, Karagöz emphasizes the lower body with eating, cursing, defecation, and [the] phallus. To the extent that Hacı-

vat epitomizes culture, Karagöz symbolizes nature where everybody is alike and nobody can claim a higher status. (170)

Thanks to the detailed descriptions of European travelers we know that in the nineteenth century *karagöz* was a people's theatre, which attacked the corruption of the rulers and provided a respite from the sexual repression that normal society espoused. It was a free-for-all art form where the spirit of carnival abjured the everyday. Political satire was an essential element in the shadow theater, but this changed in the reigns of Sultan Abdülaziz (1861–1876) and especially Abdulhamid II (1876–1909), when censure suppressed open political discourse (And 1963–1964: 38; Kırılı 2000: 165).

### **The Second Period: Controlling Content**

Starting from the late nineteenth century, political and sexual restrictions were imposed on what had previously been an uncensored theatre. Puppeteers would be forced to speak more metaphorically about issues that had traditionally been out in the open. At the same time court puppeteers began reforms and created fixed scripts. This tendency toward defined texts served the impulse to control what had previously been an improvised form. All these efforts exemplify the top-down control being imposed on what had previously been a bottom-up theatre of satire and license.

An important pasha, Kıbrıslı Mehmet Paşa, a dignitary of Sultan Abdulaziz (1861–1876), along with his family was depicted embezzling money from the state (Mehmet Sureyya 1996: 1037–1038; Kömeçoğlu 2001: 96). In this play, while the pasha is “moving his hands like a windmill” and saying at the top of his voice he knows the thieves and how they have filled their pockets, we see his wife, his brother-in-law, and son-in-law in front of him, their pockets stuffed with loot. From this date, the government made clear that if performers criticized state bigwigs in performance, they would be punished severely (Kudret 1968: 38). As a result, direct political criticism of state officials was no longer to be found. Obscenity also lost its prominence because of the restrictions imposed on the *karagöz* performances. Such bans turned *karagöz* into “childish vacuity and meaningless farce” (And 1979: 85–86). This suppression of sexual content was characteristic of the modernization process of the Ottoman Empire. Since the start of Tanzimat (“turning point”) in 1839, Western moral values were increasingly important in the empire.

But the greatest shift was yet to come. In 1918, Nazif Bey, the last Ottoman court puppeteer, collected unwritten *karagöz* plays to remove undesirable political comment and crude expressions. While seem-

ingly innocuous, this step may have had more impact than all the bans and restrictions. These expurgated written plays were not the same as the improvised versions. The fixed texts with the imprimatur of the elite were, of course, held up as models for other puppeteers.

Even though overt political themes in *karagöz* were banned, the theatre continued to convey its political messages through innuendo at coffeehouses. To an extent, despite intensive police controls, *karagöz* maintained its obscene characteristic (And 1969: 135–137; Boratav 1942: 30). Still, Kömeçoğlu remarks, “Although *karagöz* could not regain the pungent trait of its character, its political essence was carried on to the newspapers, many of which had titles borrowed from *karagöz*” (2001: 96). Government and propriety was on the ascendant. While Karagöz survived as a cultural archetype, his theatrical emasculation had begun.

### The Third Period: Top-Down Politicization

As indicated before, during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz overt political comment was banned by the Ottoman Empire and the sexual comment of the theatre was curtailed; this was implemented by attempts to “set” plays via bowdlerized texts as in the version of Nazif Bey. In the early Republic of Turkey (1923–1945), the Turkish shadow theatre’s top-down political pressure continued, and the form was fundamentally coopted by its one time adversary, the elite class, with its narrow moral values. After the Independence War (1919–1922) the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the new state, attempted to modernize Turkey through one-party rule of his Republican People’s Party, which prevailed until 1945.

In this period the hegemony of the Tanzimat modernization movement moved toward completion. As clothes, laws, rights, and daily life transformed, this art seemed increasingly old-fashioned. Emasculated by bans, *karagöz* languished. The genre was both part of what the modern person wanted to leave behind and, at the same time, only a ghost of the lusty form of the past. A new shadow show, the cinema, was the art of the times. Therefore, the puppeteers attempted changes in *karagöz*, first through technical innovations such as the introduction of electric lighting and large screens, then by changing the content. The fez was replaced with a bowler, a traditional dance became the Charleston, and soon that arch-anarchist Karagöz was drafted into the nationalist enterprise. Like the English Punch and the German Kasper, Karagöz was a clown caught between past and future. The government hoped for him to set the pace for popular reform, but he changed too slowly for this. Meanwhile, he changed too quickly for his traditional



audience, who found he no longer represented them. Puppeteers, reformists, and newspapermen puzzled about his future.

The two famous puppeteers, Sefa and İrfan, were among those saying, “Karagöz must be modernized,” and Sefa asserted that Karagöz had to be “the newest American comic,” “Mick[e]y” (Feridun 1931: 3). Hikmet Feridun, an elite journalist who while not part of the government shared its ideology, claimed that *karagöz* would surpass Mickey Mouse if the theatre could reflect the innovations of the age. “Think for a while how animated pictures, called Mickey, have the world eating out of their hands. But Mickey’s many followers are children, whereas Karagöz’s witty remarks give adults fun as well as children. [Mickey Mouse] Films are like snacks, ordinary and easy to get, whereas *karagöz* is a treasure, which can never be found anywhere else for adults and children” (Feridun 1933: 2).

On the pretext of *karagöz*’s modernization, attempts were made to transform it into a top-down enterprise. For instance, in 1933 Mustafa Rahmi (Balaban)<sup>4</sup> founded Association of Friends of Karagöz (Karagöz Dostları Derneği) to modernize *karagöz* for the benefit of the new state. *Karagöz*, according to Association Chairman Rahmi, could “increase individual enterprise”: “For example, Karagöz is unemployed. He is occupied with washing laundry. Hacivat deals with find-



FIGURE 3. As part of modernization, the fez of the Çelebi (Womanizer) and the veil of the Zenne (Female) were replaced with more modern dress. (Photo: Courtesy of *The Traditional Turkish Theatre* 1999: 26)

ing a job for him. But he cannot encourage Karagöz to be a civil servant, to receive a salary, to find a job in the government service! He advises Karagöz to open a shop and trade. This means he may encourage him in dealing with individual enterprise” (Feridun 1933: 2). *Karagöz* was in such attempts a propaganda tool for Turkish modernization, which promoted reforms in language, clothing, and education.

“Karagöz and Hacivat (the core figures who are foils for one another) were likely to conform to every ‘reform’ and ‘welcome the revolution’” (Feridun 1931: 3). Yet this was a top-down process, which stood in stark contrast to how *karagöz* theatre traditionally had evolved. Adaptations to each age were realized by the *negotiations* between the coffeehouse clientele and the puppeteers, not by a dictum from above. Clientele of coffeehouses and the puppeteers, not rulers in the court, traditionally brought innovation to *karagöz*.

For instance, the drunkard Tuzsuz Deli Bekir, a character in *karagöz*, represented the tough Janissaries. The Janissaries formed basic military force of the Ottoman Empire prior to annihilation of these units by the Sultan Mahmut II in 1826 when they sparked rebellions from their own coffeehouses. In *karagöz* plays this rowdy character has a dagger in one hand and a wine pot in the other. He lets out a yell and is proud of killing his mother, father, and 999 others. This character was removed from the plays when the Janissary force was eliminated (Siyavuşgil 1941: 167–168). Soon a new and larger figure named Swashbuckler (Efe) took his place. During the time of Sultan Abdülhamit II (1876–1908), Rowdy (Külhanbeyi) replaced Swashbuckler, since he better reflected that period (Kudret 1968: 31). These innovations were part of the natural evolution of the art to reflect a changing society. These alterations were not dictated by those outside the natural circle of performer and audience.

### The State Intervention in Karagöz at Coffeehouses

In Anatolian cities, districts, boroughs, and villages during the early years of the Republic, ordinary coffeehouse audiences still watched modern *karagöz* plays, which employed both technical innovations (cinema-sized screens and electric light) and content changes (reflecting the reforms in the framework of the Western modernization)<sup>5</sup>. Even in Istanbul, where the cinema, radio, and modern theatre that began to emerge during the early Republic years competed, people were still addicted to watching coffeehouse *karagöz* plays. Some evidence of sexual and political critique exists. For example, in 1932, a coffeehouse puppet show depicted the effects of the World Economic Depression on Turkish society:

The play of this puppet company is really strong. On the screen are a wife and a husband. Both of them complain about hunger. The wife at some time offers:

My dear husband, this can't go on like this. Why don't we eat each other?

The man agrees:

Alright! Let me eat you first. Then you can eat me. ("Kuklaya Gel Kuklaya!" 1932: 2)

In response came a Ministry of Internal Affairs decree ordering the police to severely monitor such improvised productions ("Tiyatro Temsilleri" 1932). Toward the end of the same year, the ministry issued a second decree, which emphasized the improvised productions had "obscene" and "harmful" elements, so every police station had to control the coffeehouses in its own district. In addition, the puppeteers who performed these kinds of plays were to be prosecuted ("Geceleri Karagöz" 1932).

In 1933 came yet another decree curtailing hours for cinemas, theatres, and the coffeehouses at which *karagöz* and folk storytellers performed. All these entertainment places were to close at 23:00 instead of 24:00 (APM, Catalog 030.10/88.581.13) to protect the physical and mental health of people. In all developed countries, according to the decree, such places closed around this time, so if Turkey was to compete with developed countries, the populace needed their sleep to work harder. However, the newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, which was the official voice of the government, singled out the root problem: coffeehouses could not represent the new state, and they had to be modernized completely ("Kahvelerin Gece Onbirden Sonra Açık Tutulması Yasak" 1933). Though we lack descriptions of the actual performances that prompted the decrees, these restrictions prove that *karagöz* was still popular at coffeehouses, the number of people going to coffeehouses was high, and the content was certainly obscene and probably political.

### **A New Place for Modern Karagöz: People's Houses**

Considering the power of *karagöz* journalist Ercüment Ekrem Talu (1938) said, "*Karagöz* is one of the best means of propaganda" for the government, if "it can get this play under control" (3). He continued, "*Karagöz* can inspire everything because of people's interest in him. People not only love him, but also believe and accept every word coming out of his mouth" (5). Journalist Derviş Edesan (1942) agreed: the form was ripe for "suggestions" and "ideas" and had potential for the scientific and technical education of the people (5).

After 1932, the government took the initiative in bringing the theatre under fuller control by changing the location, purifying it of immoral, ill-mannered messages, and filling it with its own ideology. *Karagöz* was employed at People's Houses, which the government set up in 1932 to spread its ideological principles. These were government-funded institutions that were to educate the populace, familiarizing them with reforms and new ideology. Republicanism, nationalism, statism, populism, secularism, and revolutionism were the principles of the Republic of Turkey.

A *karagöz* screen was to be set up at every People's House in order to deliver the political messages of the government (Talu 1938: 3–5) and intellectuals claimed “*Karagöz* should become widespread by using every People's House” (Edesan 1942: 5). But which plays could be performed there? Of course, modernized plays were approved by the intellectuals. Thus, on 23 April 1932, National Sovereignty and Children's Day, for the first time *karagöz* was taken into People's Houses (“Çocuk Bayramı Kutlamaları” 1932). In 1935, when the arguments on the Turkish shadow theater reached their peak, another approved *karagöz* play was sponsored at Eminönü People's House, Istanbul. Puppeteer Hazım, who performed coffeehouse *karagöz* in the 1920s, spoke at “Karagöz Night” on the topic “Why do we liven up *karagöz*?” and then did his show (“Karagözcü Hazım Anlatıyor” 1942). People's House *karagöz* was a tool of government propaganda: “We must play *karagöz* in a corner of People's House and insert our principles into it. Thus, we can easily spread our ideas. Besides, *karagöz* could attract people to People's Houses when, for example, a conference is held. It is possible to add some variations to classical *karagöz* plays and turn them into modern ones” (“Karagöz Oyunu” 1939: 9). So, in 1939, the Republican People's Party ordered that all People's Houses perform modernized *karagöz* plays in every village and town (“Karagözcü Hazım Anlatıyor” 1942). From now on, these new scenarios would be performed at People's House.<sup>6</sup> *Karagöz*, the anarchist, was now a government propagandist. While coffeehouse performance, which had to be responsive to its audience, continued, this new phenomena of People's House *karagöz* would have deep impact. Let me give an example of such new plays in order to explain how *karagöz* changed.

### A *Karagöz* Play at People's House

İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, the owner and editor of *Yeni Adam*, wrote a modern *karagöz*, *Karagöz in Ankara* (*Karagöz Ankara'da*) in 1940. Even the title informs us of the transformation. In 1923, Ankara was proclaimed the capital of the new state in place of Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Ankara represented Turkish modernity,

and a new and modern *karagöz* would inhabit this new and modern capital. Coffeehouses and Istanbul were part of an imperial past. People's Houses and Ankara were the present and future of a modern nation-state. The object of the political satire, the characterizations, and the clientele were all in flux, as we see in this script.

*Karagöz in Ankara* is political, but instead of criticizing state authorities, it reversed the direction and speaks in favor of the state. This meant a reversal of roles for Karagöz, who goes from being a lower-class anarchist to a new, model citizen. In the traditional shadow theatre of the Ottoman Empire, the realist Hacivat is educated, respectable, and cultured (if selfish and insincere), an Arabic speaker who always works to maintain the status quo. Karagöz is uneducated and flouts conventional morality; simple, albeit arrogant, he understands only bits of Arabic and is always eager for new ideas. As Smith states:

In the *karagöz* plays, it is Karagöz himself who is the fool that is raised to power. That power is often seized at the very beginning of the play, where Hacivat, the morally upright and intelligent character, gives power to Karagöz and is immediately beaten. Once Karagöz has power, situations arise, either from the acts of Karagöz himself or from other characters, which opens up the normal societal controls on sex and violence. At the end of most plays, Karagöz loses his power and society returns to normal: the dandy gets the courtesan, and Karagöz loses his fantastic job and returns to his normal place in society. (2004: 190)

There is a basic difference between the traditional and modern plays. When Hacivat spoke in Arabic during the Ottoman Empire, the coffeehouse clientele laughed because his language belonged to the palace. Karagöz, the person who represented ordinary person, could not understand what Hacivat said. The duty of defending the status quo was given to Hacivat in the traditional play, and in Karagöz viewers laughed at but acknowledged their inferior status. In the modern play, Hacivat fell behind the language revolution.<sup>7</sup> Suddenly the duty of linguistic status quo is the responsibility of Karagöz, for the new state adopted Karagöz and his language as part of its revolution and rejected Hacivat's Arabic. By the end of the play Karagöz's efforts to get Hacivat to speak in Turkish, purified and modernized by language reform, succeed—even Hacivat joins language reform! Their roles have been reversed.

In *Karagöz in Ankara* the parade of traditional characters, representing the old Ottoman order, are gone. In the traditional *karagöz* Opium Addict (Tiryaki), Womanizer (Çelebi), Drunkard (Tuzsuz Deli Bekir), Female (Zenne), and representative ethnic types (Greek, Jew, Albanian, and Arab)—all have their roles in the play. After Karagöz

and Hacivat open with their joking and fighting, these stock characters appear and misunderstandings and comedy ensue. But, in the modern *karagöz*, Charlie Chaplin (Şarlo), Tarzan, Mickey Mouse, Greta Garbo, and famous Turkish writers replace the traditional characters. Karagöz, as representative of the new Turk, is given superiority over the Western characters as well as Hacivat.

In *Karagöz in Ankara*, Hacivat owns a company called Wrong Order Company but will earn a commission provided he finds a new job for Karagöz, whose career as a coffeehouse shadow puppet is finished. Hacivat tells Karagöz that he knows all the stars working for Wrong Order, and Karagöz should talk to them to find a new job with the company (Baltacıoğlu 1940: 19). These encounters form the bulk of the play. The Wrong Order Company consists of Hacivat, a traditionally Ottoman figure, and the Western stars, representing the threats of Western culture. They are the “wrong,” whereas Karagöz represents the “right.”



FIGURE 4. Traditional characters included the female Zenne and Matiz. (Photo: Courtesy of *The Traditional Turkish Theatre* 1999: 23)

The prevailing feelings of the founders of the young Republic can be summarized as the new, developed, anti-imperialist Republic against both the old, decadent Ottoman Empire and against the strong Western states with their imperialistic motives. To modernize, the new state separated religion from state affairs and adopted secularism. But it also hoped “to Westernize despite the Western” (Berkes 1965: 127–128). Karagöz was the perfect character to represent this new order, because he was neither the Ottoman nor the Westerner. *Karagöz* plays were good for embracing this Turkish nationalistic culture. *Karagöz in Ankara* demonstrates the superiority of the Republican modernist.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN: In fact, I want to produce a film and there must be a stupid, supine, gullible clown in it. Would you accept this role?

KARAGÖZ: Would you like to have this slap? (*He slaps Charlie Chaplin.*) [ . . . ] In *karagöz* plays, we have this kind of slap.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN: Maybe, but we, Americans, don't love the *karagöz* art so much. [ . . . ]

KARAGÖZ: Bandy-legged, look and listen how much we understand this art. We had had our *karagöz* for ages before you had your cinema. Second, you memorize and then play, whereas we play in improvisation. You play with the help of electricity, but we do it by the candlelight. Lastly, you are dependant on machinery, while we perform live. Can you see the point, bandy-legged? (Baltacıoğlu 1940: 11)

*Karagöz* is better than the cinema because the shadow theatre puppeteers improvise whereas the cinema uses a set script. Ironically, *Karagöz in Ankara* ignores the fact that the modern *karagöz*, as this script itself exemplifies, had adopted a set text.

After overcoming Charlie Chaplin, Karagöz meets Tarzan, and the formerly immoral, ill-mannered Karagöz is upset because Tarzan is naked. Tarzan argues that civilization means naturalness and invites Karagöz to strip. Karagöz, representing Turkish modesty, rejects such uncivilized behavior (22). The foul-mouthed actor of coffeehouses is gone and Karagöz is now a polite, philosophical, and civilized character.

Positivism, which the new state welcomed, is also praised. When Tarzan coughs, Karagöz warns him that he ought to live in society, not in the forest where no one takes care of him when he falls ill. Tarzan replies the forest is full of herbal medicines. Karagöz, the modern man, counters that an ill man should go to a doctor and not take quack medication (27–28). After dismissing Tarzan, the hero takes on Garbo. Nationalistic feelings lead Karagöz to claims that the Turkish woman

has a unique beauty that the star cannot rival. Karagöz is politicized and Hacıvat too becomes a supporter of the existing order. Hand in hand, they cheer, “Long live the Republic of Turkey, God save the Republic of Turkey” (52). Now that *karagöz* had been tamed, the genre would return this re-envisioned character to his natural habitat.

### Modern *Karagöz* Returns to the Coffeehouses

In 1938—two years before *Karagöz in Ankara*—that city’s People’s House had already started to organize Ankara coffeehouses for communication via *karagöz*:

One of the practical solutions to raise the cultural level of people is coffeehouses. We try to turn some of these coffeehouses in the city into our branches. We have put some books into some of them like the ones in villages. We often hold conferences; we show decent movies and *karagöz* plays suitable for people at these coffeehouses. This year, forty-seven films and twenty-one *karagöz* plays have been shown to people. (Ankara Halkevi 1938–1939: 3–4)

The message on “the superiority and advantages of the regime of Turkish Republic and the profundity of the Kemalist Revolution” and films and *karagöz* on health, public life, and agriculture were shown in coffeehouses until World War II (Ankara Halkevi 1941: 36–37) and revived in 1944 as the war drew to a close. At coffeehouses, villagers, who came weekly to the city for shopping, watched *karagöz* plays on health issues and scientific methods of agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as the political reforms of the new Republic. A famous puppeteer employed by the Ankara People’s House was Hayali Küçük Ali, who emphasized “the harms of wastefulness, alcohol and gambling and the importance of good health.” (“Halkevi Köycülük Kolunun Çalışmaları” 1944). *Karagöz* characters repeated the lectures given by education staff members (“Halkevi Köycülük Kolunun Çalışmaları” 1945).

But not all People’s Houses sponsored shows, nor were all puppeteers employed by such institutions; freelance artists still changed their scripts according to the coffeehouse clientele’s level of education and reactions. For example, Hayrettin Altuok, who performed *karagöz* at The Big Coffeehouse (Büyük Kahve) in İzmir, continued improvisational performances into the 1940s, playing the servant of two masters:

The way I follow in performing *karagöz* plays is this: To give satisfaction, I please everyone, both the common people and the intellectuals, both the old and the young. For example, when Karagöz falls over after his fight with Hacıvat and starts complaining, I make the intel-



lectuals laugh by saying, “For goodness’ sake! My fragile part, my back!” and I make the common people laugh by saying, “Ouch, my ass.” (1943: 11)

The famous puppeteer Hayali Küçük Ali of Kemalpaşa town in İzmir employed a similar strategy at Halk Kahvesi (Populace Coffee-house) (Interview with Ömer Seyfi Çelik, 26 August 2004). Though those who used the theatre for public education recognized that modern *karagöz* scenarios needed to be taken to village coffeehouses (“Maraş’ta Karagöz” 1943: 9), not all the intellectuals supported this modern *karagöz*. Burhan Felek was against the idea that *karagöz* was to be politicized and transformed on the pretext of modernization:

*Karagöz* could not be successful in the theatrical attempt of People’s Houses. It is so unsuccessful that even Karagöz has lost his personality: Now he is sometimes a scientist, sometimes too clever. On the screen, he praises this and that. These are the “tortures” which Karagöz never deserves. If Karagöz goes on acting like this, he is doomed to go down more than today and to die not to come back again. (1944: 18)

### Conclusion

*Karagöz*, until the end of the nineteenth century, was a politicized and sexually explicit genre that represented the voice of the



FIGURE 5. Two people peddling wares and a bagpiper represent the lower class origins of the art. (Photo: Courtesy of *The Turkish Theatre* 1999: 23)

lower class. Censored in the late nineteenth century, the theatre retained subversive traits, but resorted to innuendo rather than direct attacks. Under governmental control beginning in the late Ottoman Empire and accelerating in the early Republic, puppeteers participated in the process of transferring the improvised plays into scripts and cleaning up *karagöz* acts. These efforts contributed to loss of agency by performers to the government. The evolution by negotiations between the puppeteers and the coffeehouse audiences, which I have termed a bottom-up process, was replaced by a top-down reformation. Obscenity was expurgated and the plays were filled with the government's own messages. Characters' roles were radically changed and customary characters were excised. Use of the theatre was formulated in the People's Houses and was exported back to the coffeehouses. The political process of *karagöz* was reversed: a potent theatre was made innocuous.

As governmental and nongovernmental organizations have approached other puppet traditions such as the Indonesian *wayang* or Indian puppet traditions, seeing them as tools of education and political suasion, it is useful to consider the Turkish example where *Karagöz* became the obverse of the character who won a wide following. While the intellectuals used this character for what *they* considered the betterment of their fellow citizens and established associations to support the continuation of the genre, their efforts were instrumental in killing *karagöz* as a living art.

#### NOTES

1. Scholars And (1963–1964; 1964), Kudret (1969), and Boratav (1942) have emphasized this. Corroborating accounts by European travellers of the Ottoman period make the assertion convincing.

2. The chief admiral depicted in this play was Mehmet Ali Paşa. In April 1866, when he was appointed as the chief admiral (Kaptan-ı Derya), he was married to Adile Sultan (Mehmet Süreyya 1996: 957).

3. The following is an example of a Curtain Poem, as translated by Andreas Tietze (1977: 31–32):

To the eye of the uninitiated this curtain produces [only] images  
 But to him who knows the signs, symbols of the truth.  
 Sheikh Kushteri has founded this curtain making it a likeness of  
 the world;  
 He made the pictures resemble the various creatures, what a  
 power of observation!  
 To watch it amuses those who are looking for entertainment,  
 But to those who behold the truth learn a lesson from it.  
 No one knows what is behind the curtain, but this is the truth:  
 It relates the reality of the world through a language of symbols.

If one carefully watches Karagöz and Haji Evhad [Hacivat]  
 To an understanding person who has attained the state of  
 perfection this will mean something quite different.  
 Behold the meanings which are hidden under this (play)!  
 It is a show of subtlety intended for the expert ones to understand  
 its subtle points.  
 When the candle goes out, at once the pictured persons cease  
 to exist.

4. A farmer's son, he was sent to Switzerland to study pedagogy. He could speak French, German, English, Italian, Arabic, and Persian. He was a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Education. He taught pedagogy, sociology, psychology, and philosophy at school. He wrote or translated more than eighty books and nine hundred articles (Bilgen 2005).

5. I collected this information from Nazmi Özalp (a surgeon, seventy-six years old, living in Ankara, which is in the middle region of Turkey) and Ömer Seyfi Çelik (a farmer, eighty-four years old, living in İzmir, which is in the west of Turkey). I am also grateful to Hakkı Topal, a journalist and a writer living in Elazığ, which is in the east of Turkey. Topal sent me his interviews with some senior citizens (Mustafa Süer, a music teacher, who died in 1974; Bahattin Topal, a retired civil servant, who died in 1981; M. Ali Güler, a retired coffeehouse owner, who died in 1971; and Nurettin Memişoğlu, a retired worker, who died in 1997). Such interview information will be cited in the text and notes and not repeated in the bibliography.

6. As mentioned earlier, scripted *karagöz* plays were introduced by Nazif Bey in 1918. But instead of puppeteers themselves reforming older stories, for the first time completely new stories were written by the elite to reflect government ideology.

7. In 1928, Turkish alphabet was Latinized. The alphabet reform was like slamming the door on the past and opening up a Westernized future. Arabic with its alphabet was the language of the Koran. The symbolic break from the past was, therefore, a profound transformation (see Williamson 1987). In the 1930s, the Turkish language was purged of both Arabic and Persian influences.

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