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“Tradition” as a Site for Feminist Intervention in Modern and Contemporary Art in Türkiye: Maide Arel (1907-1997), Gülsün Karamustafa (b. 1946), Canan (b. 1970)

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by

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Abstract

Modernism in Türkiye developed in alignment with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's (1881–1938) nation-building project, which sought to construct a Westernized, modern, secular, and symbolically monoethnic Republic (1923) following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922). Central to this vision was the use of visual art to break from the Ottoman past and articulate a new national identity rooted in Western European modernist forms. Within the Republican ideology, while an assumed, authentic "Turkish culture" was seen as a source for subject matter compatible with Western modernist visual language, Ottoman cultural heritage—shaped by various ethnicities and the Empire's Islamic and Eastern domains—was deemed backward, ill-fitting for modernism, or more commonly, "traditional." This binary between tradition and modernity has continued to influence the trajectory of art in Türkiye throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. This thesis is grounded in the observation that art historical accounts of Turkish modernism's negotiations with "tradition" often center male artists and rely on romanticized or conformist frameworks such as *sentez* [synthesis], which presume a harmonious blending of Western modernism and Turkish national identity. In contrast, employing feminism's "standpoint theory," this study identifies a persistent feminist trajectory in which female artists in Türkiye—long positioned as ideological symbols within the tradition-modernity binary—have actively engaged with "tradition" to destabilize the binary itself. Through case studies of Maide Arel (1907–1997), Gülsün Karamustafa (b. 1946), and Canan (b. 1970), it traces how female artists across generations have redefined "tradition" as a critical and generative site of agency and feminist intervention according to their respective historical and socio-political contexts. Ultimately, understanding how these artists' feminist interventions to the tradition-modernity binary intersect with broader structures of gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and class will be essential to reframing Turkish modernism as part of an inclusive and critically engaged global modernist discourse.

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Introduction

Maide Arel (1907–1997), Gülsün Karamustafa (b. 1946), and Canan (b. 1970) are three artists from Türkiye,[1] whose works engage with the country's shifting cultural, social, and political contexts in ways reflective of their respective generations and social status as women. Collectively spanning more than a hundred years—and thus covering the entire history of the Republic of Türkiye since its founding in 1923—these artists' creative output provides the ground for this thesis to investigate a long-standing art historical trend within the broader history of modern and contemporary art in the country.

It is a consensus among art historians that Turkish modernism developed as an integral part of the Republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's (1881–1938) project to build a modern, secular nation-state through Westernization, eliding the Ottoman Empire's (1299–1922) previous multicultural Islamic governance.[2] Mustafa Kemal saw visual identity and artistic production as critical conduits for manifesting his ideology.[3] As such, he tasked early Republican-era artists with abandoning Ottoman visual arts—generally characterized by Islamic calligraphy, ornamentation, and miniature painting—and instead adopting the visual tools of Western

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[1] In 2022, the country's internationally recognized name was officially changed from "Turkey" to "Türkiye" at the United Nations. For historical accuracy, I used the new official name "Türkiye" throughout this thesis.
United Nations, "Turkey's name changed to Türkiye," *United Nations in Türkiye*, June 3, 2022, https://turkiye.un.org/en/184798-turkeys-name-changed-t%C3%BCrkiye.

[2] For more information on the current state of discussions on Turkish modernism see Duygu Demir's recent dissertation: Duygu Demir, *A Syncretic Modernism: Articulations of Painting in Turkey (1910s–1940s)* (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022).
For a timeline of and details on late-Ottoman and early-Republican modernization processes, see the Appendix.
Additionally, I acknowledge that Türkiye includes many ethnicities and the adjective "Turkish" in "Turkish modernism" oversimplifies the artistic output of this region. However, to engage my analysis with the history of the modern nation-state; I opted to use this term which was determined by this construct.

[3] Mustafa Kemal's ideology is known as "Kemalism," and is also referred to as the "Republican ideology." Kemalism consists of six fundamental principles: Republicanism (creation of the Republic), nationalism, populism, statism, secularism, and revolution (also known as reformism). It was the official state ideology carried by the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP) [Republican People's Party], Türkiye's oldest political party founded by Mustafa Kemal in 1923. The single-party regime ended in 1950 with Türkiye's first free election resulting in the Demokrat Parti's (DP) [Democratic Party] victory.
"Kemalizm," *Atatürk Ansiklopedisi*, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Başkanlığı, accessed April 1, 2025, https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/kemalizm/.

European modernism.[4] The challenge set by Mustafa Kemal for these artists, however, was to preserve markers of "Turkish culture,"[5] inherently ingrained in the nation's multiethnic past, through subject matter within their modernist works serving the development of the Westernized modern nation-state. Responses to this dilemma between past and future—or more commonly referred to as *tradition* and *modernity* in scholarly literature—dominated the artistic landscape of the country until the end of Mustafa Kemal's single-party regime in 1950.[6] Yet, as its effects lingered in politics and society, many artists continued to engage with this binary in the following decades, whether through perpetuation, extension, criticism, or subversion.

The three artists examined in this thesis are among those who have engaged with this major trope in modern and contemporary art in Türkiye at different, though overlapping, moments in the country's history. Maide Arel, born in 1907, witnessed the nation's transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. Her work, accordingly, responds to the core Republican ideal of creating a Turkish national art by depicting local subject matter through the visual vocabulary of Western modernism—specifically, Cubism in her case. Gülsün Karamustafa, born in 1946, came of age during another pivotal historical moment: Türkiye's transition to a multi-party system in 1950. The political landscape diversified in the wake of this shift, providing fertile ground to critique long-imposed Republican ideals and the binary between tradition and modernity that lay at the heart of the Republican project. In response, Karamustafa challenges this binary in her works through a social-realist lens, setting it against the lived realities of the nation in the post-1950s period. Canan, on the other hand, was born in 1970 and

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[4] Specifically, visual vocabularies of Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism were favored in Republican ideology, as they were thought to align well with the future-looking nation-building project.
Hatice Türkyılmaz, *Çağdaş Türk Resminde Gelenek Sorunsalı* [The Problematic of Tradition in Turkish Contemporary Art] (Master's thesis, Hacettepe University, 2013), 21.

[5] An important project for Republican theorists was to define what the independent, pure "Turkish culture" was, which they sought to find in practices of Anatolian folklore and creative expressions of prehistoric and ancient Anatolia, the latter specifically to position Türkiye within the West's Greco-Roman lineage.

[6] Türkyılmaz, *Çağdaş Türk Resminde Gelenek Sorunsalı*, 21.

developed her career during the rise of postcolonial theory globally and the emergence of Neo-Ottomanism in Turkish politics beginning in the 2000s. These developments prompted Canan to revisit the period of transformation from Empire to Republic and, as a response, engage both formally and conceptually with the nation's relinquished Ottoman past in her work.

A throughline that connects the work of these three artists—and constitutes this thesis's foremost contribution to the literature—is their focus on the female figure and their critical engagement with this figure in relation to the constructed binary of tradition and modernity. Each of the three artists' depictions of women demonstrate an acute awareness of how women have historically been used as ideological symbols in the construction and perpetuation of this binary in Türkiye. Accordingly, examining their works reveals that women's cultural, social, and political experiences in Türkiye serve as the genesis of a distinct mode of engagement with the fraught notion of "tradition" in the country's modern and contemporary art.

In this thesis, I present Arel, Karamustafa, and Canan chronologically and position them within the broader history of feminist movements in Türkiye to trace an art historical trend that has been largely overlooked in existing scholarship. Through case studies of their works, I propose an alternative, *feminist* art history to the historiography of the question of "tradition" in Turkish modernism. This alternative art history reveals that since the early 20th century, female artists in Türkiye found ways in their works to respond to women's instrumentalization in the construction of the tradition-modernity binary, as well as its origins and extensions, that serve the ideologies and interests of male politicians. Their interventions to this construct are characterized by an interest in referencing "tradition" within the context of modernity—through subject matter, style, medium, or conceptual approach—in ways that interrogate, complicate, and ultimately seek to dismantle the binary itself.

a. The Question of "Tradition" in Turkish Modernism

As I have mentioned above, the role of "tradition" in modern and contemporary art in Türkiye has been a significant topic of discussion beginning in the early 20th-century, with Republican efforts to preserve Turkish national identity while adopting techniques of Western European modernism. So far, I have put the word "tradition" in quotation marks to indicate the need to identify what this term entails in the context of this thesis. "Tradition" is generally defined as "a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people; a set of these beliefs or customs."[7] However, the Turkish word *gelenek*, which directly translates to "tradition" is frequently used by art historians from Türkiye as an umbrella term to refer to the aesthetics, visual art, material culture, fashion, customs, and other expressions that in some way fall outside the ideological parameters of the Westernized modern Turkish state. It is also almost always contrasted with the word *çağdaş* which includes the meanings of both "modern" and "contemporary."[8]

The parameters of the Republican ideology were premised on two main motivations. The first was the need to unite people under a homogeneous national identity after the Kurtuluş Savaşı [Turkish War of Independence] (1919-1922), instead of the Ottoman model of governing heterogeneous populations under a religious regime.[9] The second was the desire to level the new

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[7] **"**Tradition,**"** *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Oxford University Press, accessed April 1, 2025. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/tradition.

[8] See for example Sezer Tansuğ, *Gelenek Işığında Çağdaş Sanat* [Contemporary Art in the Light of Tradition] (İstanbul: İZ Yayıncılık, 1997)., Nilüfer Öndin, *Gelenekten Moderne Türk Resim Estetiği* (Turkish Painting Aesthetics from Tradition to Modernity) (İstanbul: İnsancıl Yayınları, 2011)., Türkyılmaz, *Çağdaş Türk Resminde Gelenek Sorunsalı* (2013), Erol Kılıç, "Çağdaş Türk Resminde Geleneksel Etkileşim" [Traditional Interaction in Contemporary Turkish Painting], *The Journal of International Social Research* 6 no. 25, 327-340., Oğuz Tunçel, "Gelenek/Modern Ayrımında Sanat" [Art in Tradition/Modern Separation], *İdil Sanat Dergisi* 7, no. 47 (2018): 863–72.

[9] Zeynep Yasa Yaman, *Suretin Sireti: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Merkez Bankası Sanat Koleksiyonu'ndan Bir Seçki / Beyond the Apparent: A Selection from the Art Collection of the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey* (İstanbul: Pera Museum, 2011), 143.
The Ottoman population also included Christians, Jews, and other religious minorities who were organized into self-governing communities known as *millets*, but Sunni Islam was the official religion.

state with Western Europe, who held much of the world's economic, political, and industrial power at the time; thus, who represented improvement, future, and modernity. To borrow Zehra Arat's words, "once Europe became 'modern' and asserted its hegemony over other regions, it fixed both the parameters and paradigms of modernity" and adoption of Western ways became "necessary to achieve the economic development that would enable a country to resist the Western economic and political domination."[10] Due to Islam's predominantly Eastern domain, this task similarly required implementing secularization in governance to distance the nation from the Empire's Islamic identity. As such, the constituents of Ottoman culture, most importantly those characterized by Islam were dismissed for not fitting into the modern identity constructed for the nation-state, and Ottoman culture as a whole was conceptualized as the opposite of modernity. The word "tradition," due to its inherent quality of relating to the "past" was as such attributed to "things Ottoman," doomed to be left behind.

The dismissal of Ottoman culture directly manifested in artistic reforms implemented during the early years of the Republic. Ottoman artistic traditions such as calligraphy and miniature painting were systemically excluded from education and replaced by European modernism's techniques such as oil painting, sculpture, figuration, and perspective. As early as 1924, Mustafa Kemal sent a group of artists to Paris to study at École des Beaux-Arts [School of Fine Arts] with the goal of training a new generation of artists in European painting, for them to become educators upon their return. In 1926, he restructured the Sanay-i Nefise Mektebi [Fine Arts Academy] founded in 1883, into the İstanbul Devlet Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi [İstanbul State Academy of Fine Arts] and modeled its curricula after that of École des Beaux-Arts. He

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Deniz Kandiyoti, "The Pitfalls of Secularism in Turkey: An Interview with Deniz Kandiyoti," interview by Feminist Dissent, *Feminist Dissent*, no. 5 (2020): 136.

[10] Zehra F. Arat, *Deconstructing Images of "the Turkish Woman"* (Macmillan, 1998), 10.

also invited European artists—most notably the French artist Léopold Lévy—to the Academy to help train artists in Türkiye and modernize the country's art institutions at large.[11]

This conceptualization of the nation's Ottoman past can be understood as an internalized version of the West's historical subordination of the East, as theorized by Edward Said in his influential 1978 book *Orientalism.*[12] As a strategy to position itself on equal footing with the West in the global arena, the Turkish state adopted the West's fantasized view of the East as a homogeneous, primitive, and backward "opposite"—and subsequently projected this fantasy back onto the West itself. In discussing this "fantasy of the West," Meltem Ahıska introduces the term "Occidentalism" (also used as "internal-Orientalism" and "self-Orientalism" throughout this thesis) "to describe how the West figures into the temporal and spatial imagination of modern Turkish national identity."[13] According to Ahıska, Türkiye has always positioned itself as temporally behind the West, perpetually striving to "catch up with" modern civilization. She further explains that, due to its geographical location, Türkiye has often been stereotypically defined as a "bridge between East and West." However, since the founding of the Republic, it has been trapped in a state of "self-conscious anxiety," caught on the bridge itself—stuck in both time and space—while attempting to cross it.[14]

This internalized sense of inferiority toward the West is evident in Mustafa Kemal's famous statement from his 1933 speech on the tenth anniversary of the Republic: "We will elevate our national culture to the level of contemporary civilization."[15] Art historian Wendy Shaw interprets this statement as a "double-edged sword," writing, "Through the

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[11] Türkyılmaz, *Çağdaş Türk Resminde Gelenek Sorunsalı*, 19.
[12] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).
[13] Meltem Ahıska, "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003): 353.
[14] Ibid., 352.
[15] "Onuncu Yıl Nutku" [Tenth Anniversary Speech], *Atatürk Ansiklopedisi*, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Başkanlığı, accessed April 1, 2025, https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/onuncu-yil-nutku/.

self-consciousness of this objective, the nation becomes always already excluded from the benchmark of contemporary civilization."[16] It is this taken-for-given and internalized opposition between East and West during the Republic's formative years that underpinned the construction of the long-standing tradition–modernity binary. Within the Occidentalist mindset of Republican ideologues, tradition—embodying the past—was naturally associated with the "backwardness" of the East, while modernity became synonymous with the "advanced" West.

Therefore, to return to my earlier point, "tradition" in this thesis—as in other similar studies—refers to what falls outside the modern–Western–Turkish trilemma that came to define the identity of the new state founded in 1923. I refer to this construct as a trilemma because of its inherent contradictions, which not only twitch my eye but also deeply troubled Republican-era ideologues. As Duygu Demir explains in her dissertation on Turkish modernism, the challenge of locating the source of "Turkishness" within this constructed identity persisted throughout the 1930s, and the answer was often sought in pre-Islamic and pre-Ottoman Anatolia:[17]

> Turcologists, art historians, archaeologists and architectural historians of different bents—Turkish as well as European—were invited to Ankara to undertake archaeological digs, make sense of and theorize Anatolian material culture as the source of Turkish art, write texts and arrange museum displays that offered and reinforced a narrative of Turkish history. While not always in agreement on details, these efforts all attempted to formulate a Central-Asian and Anatolian narrative for Turkish identity, save for its Islamic phase, and its non-Turkic inhabitants, resulting in confusing, paradoxical, fictive narratives. (...) Though these attempts were largely pseudo-scientific and resulted in various selectively targeted interpretations of Turkish identity and its material culture spanning multiple eras (Bronze Age to pre-Islamic, Seljuk to Ottoman), lands (Central Asia and Anatolia), and civilizational demarcations (Greco-Mediterranean, pre-Islamic, even Aryan) they were intended to create and reinforce a historical-mythical national narrative, which had been partly vacated by secularism's undoing of the

[16] Wendy M. K. Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 173, quoted in Demir, *A Syncretic Modernism,* 35.
[17] Anatolia (also called Asia Minor) is a large peninsula in Western Asia that makes up the majority of modern-day Türkiye. It is bordered by the Aegean Sea to the west, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, and the Black Sea to the north.

> society's Islamic heritage and partly by the replacement of Ottoman cosmopolitanism with nationalist cultural homogenization.[18]

Therefore, the "Turkish culture" that was compatible with being "Western"—that is, untainted by the Ottoman-Islamic heritage—was to be extracted from contemporary Anatolia and used to define the "Turkish" component of the state's modern-Western-Turkish identity. The goal was to replace organic historical continuity with a curated and ideologically coherent narrative of "Turkishness."[19] In line with the earlier definition of tradition, this imagined, pure "Turkish" identity located in Anatolia was often referred to using the word "culture" instead. This was a deliberate discursive choice aimed at avoiding the connotations of "belatedness" or "backwardness" associated with "tradition."

The problem with this narrative—and what makes it "confusing" and "paradoxical," as Demir puts it—lies in the fact that the Anatolian culture championed by the Republican ideology was deeply intertwined with the very elements it aimed to leave behind due to their association with the "past." In other words, many aspects that did not fit into the narrow definition of a "modern, Western, Turkish identity" were, in fact, integral to what was considered "Turkish culture." For instance, while the Republic rejected the multicultural and multiethnic structure of the Ottoman Empire, it showed interest in Anatolian material culture that was in fact the collective product of various ethnic groups—such as Kurds, Armenians, Greeks, and Circassians—who had lived in Anatolia for centuries. Moreover, in rural areas (often referred to as *köy* meaning "village") where the modernization project had limited reach, Ottoman and Islamic customs continued to shape everyday life. As a result, when artists were asked to represent these communities in their works, they inevitably engaged with the Ottoman-Islamic heritage that the Republic officially sought to reject. After all, to borrow Demir's words, "the

[18] Demir, *A Syncretic Modernism,* 278.
[19] Yasa Yaman, *Suretin Sireti,* 143.

assumption of a pure Turkish culture located in the life and figure of the [rural, Anatolian] peasant was an essentialist trope."[20] The task assigned to artists during the early Republican period to create art that was Western/modern and Turkish at once was an impossible one.[21]

The early Republican-era thinker Ziya Gökalp, who was more inclusive of Islam in his nationalist ideology than Mustafa Kemal, also proposed the term "culture" as a middle-ground concept to tackle this paradox. In his *hars-medeniyet* [culture-civilization] theory, culture is a concept that encompasses religious customs as well, without instantly carrying the burdened connotation of "belatedness."[22] In this thesis, I intentionally use the word "tradition" to refer to both scenes of rural Anatolia and folk life, as well as elements of Ottoman-Islamic customs, in order to challenge the fictive, clear-cut division between these two categories. This choice also serves as a reminder that neither the practices of prehistoric and ancient civilizations of Anatolia nor contemporary rural Anatolian folk culture fully align with the constructed identity of the "modern, Western, Turkish" nation—the former due to its temporal distance, and the latter because of its inescapable ties to the disavowed Ottoman-Islamic legacy. Therefore, my use of the term "tradition" still adheres to the definition that it includes anything falling outside the parameters of the "modern, Western, Turkish" identity, in a way that highlights the inherent contradictions within that classification.

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[20] Demir, *A Syncretic Modernism,* 279.

[21] This idea is also suggested by Demir on page 285 of *A Syncretic Modernism.*
Also see: Ayşe Kadıoğlu, "The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 177–93.

[22] Yücel Bulut, "Sosyal ve Siyasal Arasında Sıkışmış Bir Düşünür: Ziya Gökalp ve Hars-Medeniyet Kuramı" [A Thinker Stuck Between Social and Political: Ziya Gökalp and His Theory of Culture and Civilization], *Sosyoloji Konferansları*, no. 52 (2015): 79–110.
Also see Ziya Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslâmlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* [Turkism, Islamism and Modernism] (İstanbul: Ötüken, 1918).
Another version of the tradition-modernity binary that comes up frequently in the literature about this topic is *yerel-evrensel* [local-universal], which also avoids this connotation.

Because the ideological separation between tradition and modernity was so strongly established at the onset of the Republic, it became a lasting reference point around which political agendas in Türkiye developed over the following decades. As the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, Arel, Karamustafa, and Canan each respond to the manifestations of this binary within their respective historical contexts. In their works, one finds references to Anatolian customs and folk/village life, as well as Islam, Ottoman art, architecture, and material culture—all of which fall under the term tradition, according to its definition proposed in this thesis. Beginning this study with Arel—whose artistic career coincides with the early Republican era—and tracing connections between her works and those of Karamustafa and Canan, who engage with the aftermath of this formative period's cultural policies, allows me to underscore the artificiality of the early limitations imposed on the concept of tradition—and, by extension, the enduring binary of tradition versus modernity.

b. Literature Review

In her recently published doctoral dissertation titled *A Syncretic Modernism: Articulations of Painting in Turkey* (1910s–1940s), Duygu Demir identifies and challenges a prominent concept in the historiography of Turkish modernism: *sentez* (synthesis). The concept of synthesis, which refers to the process of combining multiple elements to form a new whole, carries the implicit assumption that the distinct elements involved are compatible and can be unified smoothly. This notion was particularly suited to describing works that appeared to fulfill the Republican ideology's aspiration to visually merge "Turkishness" and "Westernness" in a harmonious manner. However, Demir problematizes this assumption, arguing that early Republican-era artists did not, in fact, achieve a perfect fusion of Turkish national identity and

Western modernist visual language. Rather, she contends that this relationship was inherently "syncretic"—a mode in which the elements remain distinct yet coexist in a heterogeneous manner. She describes this as a "formal coexistence of components," stating: "Unlike synthesis, the seams of syncretism remain evident, relations dynamic."[23] Demir's argument is crucial in disentangling the state's ideological aims for Turkish modernism from the individual artistic approaches, that are what ultimately shaped modern art in Türkiye in a tangible way. Her perspective provides a foundational framework for this thesis, which aims to highlight artistic interventions that challenge institutionally and ideologically imposed binary constructs in Türkiye.

Furthermore, over the years the concept of *sentez* has become a catch-all, neutral, and convenient framework within the field—one that can be applied not only to early Republican-era art as a whole but also to virtually any modern or contemporary work that engages with "tradition" in some capacity. A notable example to this is the major curatorial project "Gelenekten Çağdaşa: Modern Türk Sanatında Kültürel Bellek" [From Tradition to Contemporary: Cultural Memory in Modern Turkish Art], which opened at İstanbul Modern in 2010. In contrast to Demir's study, the exhibition focused on the implications of the tradition-modernity binary in post-1980 art in Türkiye. Despite the increasing interests of artists during these politically fraught years in questioning the long-standing tradition-versus-modernity trope, the exhibition catalog's foreword makes clear that the museum aligned itself with a stereotypical and romanticized narrative—one that positions Türkiye as a "bridge" between East and West, a melting pot of opposites forming a "vibrant cultural mosaic." Written by Oya Eczacıbaşı, the text repeatedly returns to the concept of synthesis, employing vague and

[23] Demir, *A Syncretic Modernism*, 28.

generalized expressions such as how each selected artist "reinterprets tradition through modern forms of expression" or "presents tradition in a modern and contemporary narrative."[24]

While my methodology in defining Turkish modernism aligns with that of Demir's, it diverges in its interpretation of nationalism's role in artists' engagements with tradition. Demir does not hesitate to describe artists' turn to Anatolian folk elements during the rise of nationalism in the 1940s—coinciding with Arel's period—as "modes of self-inflicted primitivism and orientalism."[25] Interpreting nationalist interests in local folk elements through the framework of Primitivism is, in fact, not new. The Russian avant-garde, for example, pursued a similar nationalist project by combining elements of Russian folk art with Western European modernist visual language, a movement now known as "Russian Neo-Primitivism."[26] However, I am reluctant to use the label "Primitivist" to describe the practices of such artists (both Arel and her male counterparts). Although the state ideology in Türkiye was indeed underpinned by Orientalist frameworks, nationalism, especially at the individual level, complicates the narrative.[27] Unlike Western Primitivists, artists in both the Russian and Turkish contexts felt a

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[24] Oya Eczacıbaşı, "Sunuş" [Foreword] in *Gelenekten Çağdaşa: Modern Türk Sanatında Kültürel Bellek* [From Tradition to Contemporary: Cultural Memory in Modern Turkish Art], (İstanbul: İstanbul Modern, 2010), 5.
The selection of artists in this exhibition also reflects another major gap in the literature: histories of Turkish modernism's negotiations with tradition have largely been told through male artists' works. This exhibition reflects this tendency—out of the nine artists, seven are men.

[25] Demir, *A Syncretic Modernism*, 283.
Primitivism in art refers to a movement or tendency—especially in Western art—where artists draw inspiration from the art, aesthetics, and cultures of non-Western or pre-industrial societies, often idealizing them as more "authentic," "pure," or "closer to nature" than modern Western life. Primitivism and Orientalism are two sides of the same colonial coin: they are both Western ways of looking at and using the "other."

[26] See Jane Sharp, *Russian Modernism Between East and West: Natal'ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). In Chapter I, I elaborate on this movement and use it as a transnational parallel to explain Arel's critical engagement with Primitivism in her works.

[27] There were also nationalist artists who were strongly opposed to Western influence. Demir explains in page 254 that artist Ali Sami "identified the cause of all new artistic ills in the country" to be "European teachers of the new generation who had corrupted the young Turkish artists." Elif Naci, similarly wrote "Turkish painting is like a dress that faded under the sun. Both those of yesterday and today [artists of the old and new generation] are repeating their European teachers like children who have memorized their lessons well. The wind from the West is making people shiver in our exhibitions." For more, see Ali Sami, "Ali Sami Bey Yeni Resme Ateş Püskürüyor" [Mr. Ali Sami Spits Fire at New Painting], *Akşam,* August 5, 1933 reprinted in Adnan Çoker, *Cemal Tollu*, Ankara Galeri B Yayınları, 1996: 64, quoted in Demir, *Syncretic Modernism*, 254.

personal connection to their subject matter through a shared national identity. I believe it is indeed precisely this realization that makes pushing back against the concept of synthesis productive, as doing so aids in highlighting the ways in which artists worked outside the ideological limitations of the state.

In departing from the term "Primitivism," this thesis also enters into dialogue with broader deconstructivist approaches within the field of Global Modernisms in art history. In 1996, aligning with the seminal theorist Geeta Kapur's rejection of applying Western paradigms to define non-Western or peripheral modernisms,[28] Asia Society organized an exhibition titled "Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions." As curator Apinan Poshyananda explains, the project sought to demonstrate how artists in Asia "intervene and arbitrate the fixity of such simplistic dichotomies as East versus West, Orient versus Occident, Asia versus America, us versus them, history versus modernity, tradition versus contemporaneity."[29] Perhaps due to the long-standing entrenchment of such binaries in Turkish politics, it has taken curators and art historians from Türkiye nearly two additional decades to fully adopt similarly transnational and poststructural perspectives. Pera Museum's "Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art" exhibition, held in 2020, exemplifies the current methodological turn among curators and art historians in Türkiye, aligning closely with the Asia Society's vision. "Miniature 2.0" similarly brings together contemporary artists from across the Middle East[30] and, by rejecting binary

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[28] See Geeta Kapur, "When Was Modernism in Indian Art," in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000), 297–324.
Earlier published versions appeared in South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol. 92, No. 3, Summer 1993; and in Journal of Arts & Ideas Nos, 27-28, May 1995.
[29] Apinan Poshyananda, "Preface," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (New York: Asia Society, 1996). 15.
The countries included in "Traditions/Tensions" are India, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand.
[30] The countries included in "Miniature 2.0" are Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye.

frameworks like East-West and traditional-modern, aims to foster a deeper understanding of contemporary artists' engagements with miniature beyond such oppositions.[31]

While I value the conceptual goals of both exhibitions, their methodologies are not fully applicable to this thesis. First, Türkiye's distinct position—never colonized, geographically situated between East and West, and historically self-Orientalizing in its pursuit of Westernization—distinguishes its modernism from that of previously colonized Asian nations. Although parallels can be drawn with Iran, for example, which experienced a similar modernization trajectory, events such as the 1979 Islamic Revolution generated tensions between Iranian artists and the frameworks of "tradition" in ways that Turkish politics did not.[32] Still, a more expansive and transnational engagement with Turkish modernism—though beyond the scope of this thesis—would be a valuable direction for future research, both locally and globally. Second, at the local level, this study addresses a critical gap between the cliché narratives of Turkish modernism such as the one presented in İstanbul Modern's "Gelenekten Çağdaşa" exhibition and the more deconstructive, transnational approach of "Miniature 2.0." Between these poles lies an overlooked art historical trajectory: one in which artists have intentionally worked with the tools of the tradition-modernity binary to critique, subvert, or reformulate the very logic of that binary. This thesis, therefore, returns to the early 20th century and traces a lineage into the present to uncover alternative practices that remain underexamined.

Thus, rather than simply "moving beyond binaries," the central aim of this thesis is to apply a feminist lens to understand how artists working in a context where such binaries are

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[31] Azra Tüzünoğlu and Gülce Özkara, *Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art* (İstanbul: Pera Museum, 2020), 8.
One of the artists featured in this exhibition is Canan, whom I discuss in Chapter III. The curators of the exhibition strategically chose to showcase Canan's more recent works that align with this theoretical framework, rather than her politically charged pieces that center on and explicitly critique the tensions between tradition and modernity in Türkiye.

[32] The Islamic Revolution refers to the 1979 overthrow of Iran's secular, Western-oriented monarchy with a theocratic republic, where Islamic law (sharia) became central to governance.

politically instrumentalized engage with and problematize them from within. Feminist methodology not only offers an alternative to the male-dominated focus of existing studies on Turkish modernism, but also helps uncover new interpretive frameworks through which to read artists' engagements with "tradition." Much of the literature written in Turkish remains bound to broad narratives of "synthesis" due to their lack of a critical theoretical foundation capable of attending to divergent and politicized uses of tradition. In this way, this thesis shares a methodological kinship with Eran Sabaner's *Politicizing Ottoman Art: Neo-Ottoman Style in Contemporary Turkish Art* (2019), in which he uses queer theory to expose critical adaptations of Ottoman visual culture by contemporary artists.[33]

Ultimately, this thesis offers two key contributions to the literature: First, it reconfigures the prevailing narratives of Turkish modernism by foregrounding the feminist strategies artists have employed to engage, critique, and reimagine "tradition" within politicized cultural contexts. Second, it introduces new critical vocabularies for interpreting tradition in modern and contemporary art, not only within Türkiye but also across global art histories, where the legacies of Orientalism, nationalism, and gender politics continue to shape how "tradition" is seen, used, and understood.

c. Feminism in Türkiye & Standpoint Theory

To understand the nuances of Arel, Karamustafa, and Canan's engagements with feminism during different times in Türkiye's history, it is imperative to realize that women's rights movements in Türkiye were shaped by both top-down reforms of the Republic and

[33] See Eran Sabaner, *Politicizing Ottoman Art: Neo-Ottoman Style in Contemporary Turkish Art* (Undergraduate Thesis, Tufts University, 2019).

bottom-up activism dating back to the late Ottoman era.[34] The foundations of feminist movements in Türkiye were laid during the Ottoman Empire's Tanzimat [Reformation] period (1839-1876), when Ottoman women began to demand access to higher education. The publication of Terakki-i Muhadderat [Progress of Muslim Women] in 1869—the first women's magazine—marked a turning point in the articulation of women's voices. Legal milestones such as the abolition of slavery (1856), the granting of equal inheritance rights (1847), and the standardization of marriage contracts (1871) were followed by the opening of İnâs Dârülfünun [Women's University] in 1914, enabling access to higher education. The early 20th century witnessed the formation of women's organizations such as the Teâli-i Nisvân [Society for the Elevation of Women] and the Müdafaa-i Hukuk-u Nisvân [Society for the Defense of Women's Rights], which advanced political and social rights. In 1923—the year the Republic would be declared—Nezihe Muhiddin founded the Kadınlar Halk Fırkası [Women's People's Party], the first attempt at a political party for women, which was rejected by the state. Undeterred, Muhiddin helped establish the Türk Kadınlar Birliği [Turkish Women's Union], which continued to lobby for women's enfranchisement.

Shortly after the Republic was established by Mustafa Kemal, the adoption of the Türk Medeni Kanunu [Turkish Civil Code] brought sweeping reforms for women's rights. The new code—based on the Swiss model—abolished polygamy, allowed civil marriage and divorce, and granted equal custody rights to women and men. In 1930, women gained the right to vote in municipal elections, and in 1934, full suffrage was extended at the national level. By the 1935 elections, 18 women entered parliament, placing Türkiye second globally in terms of female parliamentary representation at the time.

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[34] The information in this subsection was taken from Pelin Batu, "Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi" [The History of Women's Rights in Türkiye], in *Cumhuriyet İstanbul'unda Kadın* (İstanbul: İBB, 2022), if not noted otherwise.

However, as Deniz Kandiyoti points out in "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," many scholars agree today that these reforms were ultimately part of Mustafa Kemal's political strategy in his nation-building project.[35] Şirin Tekeli, in "Women in Turkish Politics" argues that for the Republican ideology, women's rights were instrumental in dismantling the theological Ottoman framework and presenting the new Republic as a modern, democratic state on par with its Western European neighbours. Women were symbolically positioned as the primary victims of religion—through practices like veiling, polygamy, and gender segregation—to justify the state's secularization reforms.[36]

The Şapka Kanunu [Hat Law] of 1925, enacted by Mustafa Kemal, is often used as an example to illustrate Tekeli's point. This law sought to eliminate religious headwear in the public sphere; and while formally targeting men's headwear, its symbolic implications extended to women's clothing. Veiling was stigmatized during this time; and women from the modernized urban elite soon began to remove their headscarves in public and dress in Western-style attire—often a blazer-skirt combination.[37] The image of the unveiled, educated, and urban woman came to represent the ideal Turkish citizen. However, Mustafa Kemal also famously declared in a speech he gave in 1923 that "a woman's highest duty is motherhood."[38] Women were expected to be educated—not primarily for their own emancipation, but to better fulfill their national duty of raising future citizens. In this framework, women's empowerment was justified primarily through their reproductive and maternal roles in the Republican ideology.

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[35] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 320.
[36] Şirin Tekeli, "Women in Turkish Politics," in *Women in Turkish Society*, (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 293–310.
[37] Fatma Keser, "1923–1950 Yılları Arası Türk Kadını Kimliği ve Moda" [Turkish Women's Identity and Fashion Between the Years 1923–1950], in *Cumhuriyet İstanbul'unda Kadın* (İstanbul: İBB, 2022), 496–497.
[38] Atatürk Döneminde Kadın Hakları," [Women's Rights in the Atatürk Period], *Atatürk Ansiklopedisi*, accessed April 4, 2025. https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/ataturk-doneminde-kadin-haklari/.

Moreover, this Republican image was largely limited to urban elites. As Jenny White explains in "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman," the Turkish state's project of modernization created a model of womanhood inaccessible to the rural majority.[39] These disparities became more visible with increasing rural-to-urban migration in the country during the 1940s and beyond. Women from rural backgrounds experienced alienation in modernized and secularized urban spaces where their appearances and lifestyles did not align with the dominant Westernized norm.

By the 1950s, under the Demokrat Parti [Democratic Party], the presence of women in politics declined sharply: only 12 women served in parliament during the entire decade. Nonetheless, associations such as Kadınları Koruma Derneği [Women's Protection Association] and Türk Kadınlar Birliği [Turkish Women's Association] remained active in civic education and welfare. Afterward, the global resurgence of feminist movements in the 1970s reinvigorated women's activism. Organizations like the İlerici Kadınlar Derneği [Progressive Women's Association] began to integrate class analysis with gender struggles. The 1980 military coup disrupted this momentum but indirectly catalyzed the emergence of Türkiye's independent feminist movement. The 1987 Dayağa Karşı Yürüyüş [March Against Domestic Violence] marked a critical rupture with prior state-centered feminism and ushered in new paradigms focused on bodily autonomy, domestic violence, and reproductive rights.

Institutional developments followed. In 1990, the Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı [Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation] was established to support women escaping domestic violence. In 1997, KA-DER [Association for Supporting Women Candidates] began advocating for political parity. With intense lobbying, civil society pushed for significant legislative gains:

[39] Jenny B. White, "State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman," *NWSA Journal* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 145.

the 2001 revision of the Türk Medeni Kanunu [Turkish Civil Code] removed "head of household" status from husbands, equalized property rights, and guaranteed professional autonomy for women. In 2004, the revised Türk Ceza Kanunu [Turkish Penal Code] criminalized marital rape and strengthened penalties for honor killings. In 2012, the Law on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women was adopted in tandem with Türkiye's ratification of the İstanbul Sözleşmesi [İstanbul Convention]. These victories were not bestowed but won through determined feminist mobilization.

However, under the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Party) [Justice and Development Party], which came to power in 2002, politicization of women's bodies has taken new forms. The lifting of the headscarf ban in public institutions was celebrated as a milestone for religious freedom, yet it also reinforced the image of the *başörtülü kadın* [the headscarved woman] as a political emblem of the regime. Much like the unveiled Republican woman once symbolized the state's secular identity, the headscarved woman became a marker of a new ideological order. This shift reveals how women's bodies and visual representations have been persistently manipulated to serve state ideologies in Türkiye over the span of more than a century.

In my analyses of Arel, Karamustafa, and Canan's works, I utilize feminism's "standpoint theory"—seminally utilized by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her famous text "Under Western Eyes" (1986)—which posits that being outside the centers of power can provide a clearer, more critical understanding of how power operates.[40] As such, I emphasize that Türkiye's history of politicization of the image of women within the tradition-modernity binary is one that women artists are uniquely positioned to confront.

[40] See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 (Spring–Autumn 1984): 333–358.

d. "Tradition" as a Site for Feminist Intervention: Three Cases

The first chapter centers on the early Republican-era artist Maide Arel, whose work exemplifies an early feminist engagement with the tradition-modernity binary central to Republican cultural policies. While aligning with state efforts to synthesize Anatolian folk themes with Western European modernist forms, Arel also sought strategies for challenging the Republic's ideological framework by depicting village women not as mere nationalist symbols, but as autonomous, self-contained figures. This chapter puts Arel's oeuvre in dialogue with Russian Neo-Primitivist artist Natal'ia Goncharova's work to reveal how she reclaims traditional female imagery as a feminist site of resistance within Turkish modernism. By monumentalizing "traditional" female figures and emphasizing their agency, Arel offers a feminist nationalist critique of both Western cultural hegemony and domestic patriarchal nationalism. Her refusal to join male-dominated artist collectives and her active role in women's cultural organizations further underscore her critical stance. Ultimately, this chapter argues that Arel's practice constitutes an important precedent for later generations of feminist artists in Türkiye who likewise mobilize the figure of the woman to challenge entrenched binary constructs.

The second chapter introduces Gülsün Karamustafa, focusing on her early works from the 1970s, and examining her references to textile in relation to her leftist feminist perspective. Through a close reading of her *Hapishane Resimleri* [Prison Paintings] series and a group of works depicting the experiences of women who migrated from Türkiye's rural Eastern provinces to Western urban centers during the 1960s and 1970s, I argue that Karamustafa constructs a visual language of female agency and endurance materialized through various forms of textile. This chapter also challenges prevailing interpretations of Karamustafa's work as products of "neutral observations," restoring the political motivations that underpin her engagement with

migration, belonging, and the lives of "others" in a rapidly modernized society. By foregrounding Karamustafa's critical use of traditional aesthetics as both an affective and ideological strategy, the chapter positions her as a central figure within a feminist lineage in the art history of Türkiye, bridging Arel's nationalist-feminist interventions with the postcolonial critiques of artists like Canan.

The third chapter centers on the contemporary feminist artist Canan, examining how her subversive engagement with tradition—particularly through the medium of Ottoman miniature—functions as a critique of Türkiye's post-1980 political landscape, the rise of Neo-Ottomanism, and the instrumentalization of women's bodies in political conflicts. Through analyses of Canan's works spanning a diverse range of media, the chapter explores how Canan employs the tactic of "subversive affirmation" in her self-Orientalist works to dismantle binaries like East/West and secularism/conservatism. The chapter also explores how in recent years, Canan's interest in Islamic cosmology and mythological imagery prompted her miniatures to evolve from pointed political critiques to a broader exploration of imagination, prophecy, and symbolic interpretation. Rather than "reviving tradition in contemporary art," Canan reframes the miniature as a living visual language embedded in daily life, challenging the Republic's linear view of cultural progression. Ultimately, this chapter positions Canan's practice as one that complicates and transcends imposed binaries through layered references, symbolic storytelling, and a feminist, postcolonial critique of power.

Chapter 1: Maide Arel

Feminist Nationalism at the Intersection of Cubist Visual Vocabulary and Anatolian Folk Subject Matter

Armenian-Turkish artist Maide Arel (1907-1997) remains outside the mainstream art historical canon of Türkiye, despite her active involvement in the local artistic movements of her era. Born during the last phase of the Ottoman Empire—a period marked by modernization/Westernization efforts in the face of political and economic struggles against Western imperial forces—Arel's youth coincided with the early years of the Republic of Türkiye, when these efforts led to widespread reforms.[41] Arel was not merely a witness to the nation's transition from Empire to Republic; she was an agent of this change, both as a woman and as an artist. Women's visibility in the public sphere—including the arts—was one of the most crucial indicators of modernization for the new Republic, as was the development of a national modern art in accordance with Western European modernism. It is this identity as a modern female artist and an agent of change, during a pivotal time in Türkiye's history, that informs Arel's engagement with the binary of tradition and modernity in her works.

Arel's early works, influenced by her father-in-law Mehmet Ruhi Arel's teachings, consist of landscape paintings with Impressionist touches.[42] Although some of her works are not dated,[43] it was when she went to Paris in the early 1950s to continue her art education that she began using a distinct European modernist vocabulary to depict Turkish folk scenes, primarily

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[41] Huri Büyükgüner, "Factors that Shaped the Art of Turkish Painting in The Republic Period," *Sanat, Tasarım, ve Bilim Dergisi,* The Republic Special Issue (2023): 85.

[42] At the Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi [Fine Arts Academy, formerly Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi], Arel took lessons from Mehmet Ruhi Arel (who became her father-in-law later), Nazmi Ziya, and Hikmet Onat, who primarily made Impressionistic landscape paintings. Hence, Maide Arel's early paintings were mostly landscapes painted in an Impressionistic manner.

[43] SALT Research Archives in İstanbul houses a copy of an exhibition catalog titled "Maide Arel" from 1998. This catalog provides the dates of *Sepetçi Kız*, *Çiftetelli*, *Türk Hamamı*, and *Anne ve Çocuk*. The dates of the other works examined in this study are inaccessible.

populated by female figures.[44] In works like *Sepetçi Kız* [Basket Girl] (1956) (Fig. 1.1) *Çiftetelli* (1961) (Fig. 1.2), *Türk Hamamı* [Turkish Bath] (1969) (Fig. 1.3)*, Anne ve Çocuk* [Mother and Child] (1968) (Fig. 1.4) and *Gergef İşleyen Kadın* [Woman Embroidering] (Fig. 1.5), she employs flat planes of color, reduces objects and forms to geometric shapes, and uses dark contour lines—all inspired by Cubism. Together, these elements in Arel's works often constitute depictions of women dressed in traditional village attire and engaged in everyday activities. Whether showering in Turkish baths, dancing, caring for their children, embroidering, or simply sitting and contemplating, each woman Arel depicts emanates a sense of self and autonomy.

Arel's interest in depicting Anatolian folk scenes and village women through a Cubist visual language was rooted in the social, political, and cultural demands of her time. She created these works during a period when artists in Türkiye increasingly sought to incorporate markers of national identity into their art, aiming to resist the danger of a complete dominance of Western modernism in their works. As Duygu Demir explains, in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, artists "would become more directly involved with these questions [preserving national identity while adopting the tools of Western European modernism] as the Turkish state itself had begun to look for answers, with hopes to find it in Anatolia, and in its inhabitants, in the supposedly pure figure of the Anatolian peasant."[45] For example, male-dominated artist collectives like the "D Grubu" [Group D] (1933 - 1947) and later the "Onlar Grubu" [Group of Ten] (1947 - 1955) turned to Anatolian folk life as a source of reference to produce art that was stylistically aligned with Western European standards but remained "Turkish" in subject matter.

This turn to Anatolian themes was not limited to artistic circles—it was also mirrored in the Republic's broader ideological treatment of women. While enacting laws in the name of

[44] Pelin Kabataş, "Çağdaş Türk Resim Sanatında Maide Arel" [Maide Arel in Contemporary Turkish Painting], *İdil* 63 (2019): 1424.
[45] Demir, *A Syncretic Modernism*, 280.

women's emancipation that aimed to Westernize women's appearance in metropolitan centers, Mustafa Kemal found it useful to associate symbols of tradition and national identity with the village women living in rural areas. He believed these women's clothing and style of living did not restrict them, and thus they did not need to be "liberated" through modernization.[46] For Arel and other male artists, then, depicting village women was a safe outlet to exercise nationalism in the face of Western influence while adhering to Republican standards.

Therefore, Arel conformed to the Republican ideology's expectations of her as an educated and modern artist whose visual language aligned with the standards of Western European art, while still upholding a nationalist sensitivity. In many ways, she was engaging in the same practices as the prominent male artists of her time. Perhaps because of that, the few existing studies on Arel's art tend to be limited to brief statements that she was one of those artists who synthesized European modernist visual language with Turkish folk elements in her paintings.[47] When examined through a feminist lens, however, Arel's oeuvre reveals that she intentionally distinguished herself from her male counterparts, not only by refusing to join their artist collectives but also by depicting images of women as autonomous entities, rather than as tokenistic representations of caregiving and self-sacrificing Turkish women idealized by the Republican ideology.[48] In doing so, Arel also demonstrated, unlike her male counterparts, her keen awareness of the gendered dynamics within the Primitivist strains of European modernist painting. As such, she presented not only a nationalist, but a feminist nationalist critique of Western cultural hegemony in her works.

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[46] Batu, *Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi*, 146.
[47] See Kabataş, *Çağdaş Türk Resim Sanatında Maide Ar*el, and Menekşe Karadal, "Türk Resminde Geleneksel Motifler: Güzin Duran, Fahr el nissa Zeid, Maide Arel," [Traditional Motifs in Turkish Painting: Güzin Duran, Fahr el nissa Zeid, Maide Arel] *International Journal Entrepreneurship and Management Inquiries* 2, no. 3 (2018): 247-264.
[48] Batu, *Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi*, 150.

Arel was regarded as a prominent artist in Türkiye from the 1950s into the 1970s. However, archival documents reveal that she was almost always under the shadow of her husband Şemsi Arel and father-in-law Mehmet Ruhi Arel, who were also artists. Her paintings have often been presented and discussed by contemporary critics in relation to her family's practice.[49] Additionally, not only is her generation of painters from Türkiye are outside the global canon due to their remoteness from the Western art world, but Arel's current archives in Türkiye remain highly limited as well. Some of her works lack dates, there are no accounts of her artistic manifesto, and her personal writings or letters are not readily accessible.[50] These factors resulted in Arel's marginalization among artists from the 1950s to the 1970s, who are frequently discussed by art historians from Türkiye and included in the curricula of many art history programs in the country.[51] Nevertheless, there is enough information available today to examine Arel's works autonomously and understand them as more than mere experimentations of synthesizing the traditional and the modern.

Arel's biographical information provides insight into her upbringing and hints at her worldview, which should be considered when examining her paintings. Arel was born in İstanbul during the İkinci Meşrutiyet Devri [Second Constitutional Era], the last phase of the Ottoman

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[49] See *Arel: Ruhi-Maide-Şemsettin-Orhan Aile Resim Sergisi* [Arel: Ruhi-Maide-Şemsettin-Orhan Family Painting Exhibition] May 6-16, 1957. Identifier: TAKAF225, SALT Research Archives. https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/41094 and *Arel Maide, Arel Şemsi, Resim Sergisi* (Arel Maide, Arel Şemsi, Painting Exhibition) October 27-December 12, 1951. Identifier: TAKAF227, SALT Research Archives. https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/37569 among others.

[50] SALT Research Archives in İstanbul houses most of Arel's archives, open to the public, but does not have information on the dates of some of her works or any document written by Arel about her art. Duygu Demir, in *Syncretic Modernism*, mentions in several footnotes on pages 62 and 63 two private archives: the "Arel family archive" and the "Esin Arel Tunalıgil family archive" which house letters by Arel addressed to her artist friends Hasan Kavruk and Şevket Sayan and to the Ministry of Education in Türkiye regarding the rejection of her copies of André Lhote's *La Moisson* (1935) and Pablo Picasso's *La casserole émaillée* (1945) to be acquired by the İstanbul Resim ve Heykel Müzesi [İstanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum] in 1951. To read Demir's impressive research and findings regarding this incident and Arel's persistence and character as an artist, see Demir, *Syncretic Modernism*, 62-65.

[51] Kabataş, *Çağdaş Türk Resim Sanatında Maide Are*l, 1429-30.

Empire, during which women's movements in metropolitan areas like İstanbul were on the rise.[52] By the time Arel graduated from the Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi [Fine Arts Academy, formerly Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi] in 1930, the Republic of Türkiye had been founded, and women's movements had begun to receive support from the state.[53] Not only did she grow up in a time and place where women were slowly finding their voice in public spheres, but she also witnessed the emergence of the first wave of Republican feminism in Türkiye (1923-1935), as a young woman during her Academy years.[54] It was against this backdrop that she shaped her identity as a modern, educated woman and artist; thus, it would not be surprising to find traces of feminist intervention in her paintings.

Arel came from a privileged background, as indicated by her ability to attend the Academy during the early years of the Republic and carve out a place for herself in the male-dominated art world. This privilege later allowed her to go to Paris in 1949 with government funding to further her studies in European modernist painting, alongside many other (mostly male) artists.[55] The Turkish government's decision to send artists to Paris at this time was the continuum of the Westernization project set by Mustafa Kemal, aimed at enabling them to learn Western modes of painting and sculpture, with the hope that they would "elevate" Turkish art upon their return.[56] In other words, the groups of artists who were sent to Paris—both in 1924 and in the 1950s—were expected to transform Turkish modernism to align with Western artistic ideals.

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[52] Batu, *Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi*, 118.
The Second Constitutional Era began in 1908 when the Young Turks successfully restored the constitution of 1876, establishing a constitutional monarchy. This era was marked by political reforms, increased nationalism, and efforts toward modernization, leading to significant changes in the Empire's governance and society. It lasted until 1920, culminating in the aftermath of World War I and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.
[53] Kabataş, *Çağdaş Türk Resim Sanatında Maide Arel,* 1423-30 and Batu, *Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi*, 123.
[54] Batu, *Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi*, 123.
[55] Kabataş, *Çağdaş Türk Resim Sanatında Maide Arel,* 1423.
[56] Sezer Tansuğ, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatı* [Turkish Contemporary Art] (Remzi Kitabevi, 1991), 14.

What was regarded as the "Western artistic ideal" in Türkiye at this time was mainly Cubism, although by the 1950s, Cubism had already given way to avant-garde movements in France and the United States. As Türkyılmaz reflects on "the problematic of tradition" in Turkish modernism, Cubism was not the natural continuum of artistic developments in Türkiye as a result of social, industrial, and political changes, as was the case in Western Europe. Rather, it was adopted by the Republic as the most suitable visual language for its futurist and constructivist cultural politics and was manually incorporated into Turkish art until the 1960s.[57] Like many artists sent to Paris since the founding of the Republic, Arel took lessons from the late-Cubist artists André Lhote, Fernard Léger, and Jean Metzinger in their ateliers in 1949 and 1950. This was the turning point in her artistic career when she became interested in the figure and abstracting forms with a Cubist style rather than continuing with Impressionist landscape paintings.[58]

The most notable influence during these years was Lhote, as Arel spent the most time under his guidance, receiving a diploma from his Académie.[59] Lhote combined elements of Post-Impressionist painting with Cubism, specifically employing forms inspired by Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, and the Fauves.[60] Arel's early portraits—probably corresponding to these years—show a clear stylistic connection to Lhote's works. In a painting depicting a woman from a three-quarter view (Fig. 1.6), for example, we can observe the impact of Lhote's portraits

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[57] Türkyılmaz, *Çağdaş Türk Resminde Gelenek Sorunsalı*, 19.
[58] It is important to note that she was appointed by the Turkish government to make landscape paintings of Hatay (a province in the southeast of Türkiye) in 1957. The landscapes she painted during these years were upon special request. See *Maide Arel*, Identifier: TAKAF219002, SALT Research Archives, https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/36567.
[59] *Maide Arel*, 12 April 1985. Identifier: TAKAF219, SALT Research Archives. https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/36567
[60] Anna Jozefacka, "André Lhote," The Modern Art Index Project, Leonard A. Lauder Research Center for Modern Art, 2015. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. https://doi.org/10.57011/MLGW6639
Lhote taught at the Académie André Lhote, which opened at 18 rue d'Odessa, near to the Montparnasse station in 1925, until his death.

from the 1920s. Here, Arel depicts a female figure through a highly angular and sculptural rendering, similar to Lhote's *Portrait of Marguerite* (Fig. 1.7) or *Head of a Woman* (Fig. 1.8). In particular, the sharp transitions of light and shadow that Arel uses to portray the cheekbones, eye bags, and the bridge of the nose parallel Lhote's portrait style.

Considering Arel's affinity for Lhote's style in the 1950s, it would be safe to assume that an early "village woman" painting Arel made would have been one that embodies Post-Impressionist and Cubist influences. This brings us to her painting of a woman dressed in "traditional" attire—specifically, in garments characteristic of Ottoman women's domestic dress. The earliest forms of Ottoman women's clothing typically included *şalvar* [baggy trousers], an inner chemise, an *entari* [long robe], and a *hırka* [cardigan] for indoor use.[61] The woman in Arel's painting appears in a stylized version of this attire, also wearing a *fes*—a cylindrical, usually red felt hat with a flat top, traditionally worn in the Ottoman Empire. She is seated against a landscape-like backdrop, rendered in Cézanne-esque washy brushmarks (Fig. 1.9). The abstracted landscape elements in the background also echo Lhote's work, where plant forms are reduced to semi-geometric shapes (Fig. 1.10).[62] The female figure has a monumental presence: centrally placed and nearly as tall as the picture plane. Her upright posture, coupled with her gaze directed away from the viewer, suggests a strong sense of self, inwardness, and autonomy—characteristics that later become a recurring thread in Arel's depictions of women.

Arel's representation of a village woman in this painting rather than a metropolitan woman dressed in modern clothing is a key aspect of her practice for several reasons. Despite being a modern, educated woman from İstanbul who also traveled internationally, Arel's interest

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[61] Lale Görünür, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Son Döneminden Kadın Giysileri* [Women's Clothing from the Late Ottoman Empire] (İstanbul: Mas Matbaacılık AŞ, 2011), 12–13, quoted in Fatma Keser, "1923–1950 Yılları Arası Türk Kadını Kimliği ve Moda" [Turkish Women's Identity and Fashion Between 1923 and 1950] in *Cumhuriyet İstanbul'unda Kadın* (İstanbul: İBB, 2022), 492.
[62] Kabataş, *Çağdaş Türk Resim Sanatında Maide Arel,* 1427.

in images of Turkish rural life and women in traditional attire stems from the Turkish contemporary art world's heightened involvement in nationalism at this time. During the years 1945 to 1965, revolutionary practices took a pause in Türkiye while conservatism and nationalism were on the rise, as was the case in many countries in the aftermath of World War II. In turn, women's movements that gained a strong momentum prior to this period were also in decline, with rising conservative views idealizing women's roles as wives and mothers.[63] The result of this new climate among artists was an interest in folk scenes and traditional motifs in general, and images of the "Turkish woman" as a responsible mother and wife figure in particular.[64] Therefore, finding feminist interventions in Arel's seemingly conforming images of the "tradition-bound" Turkish woman during this time is especially significant. Arel also revisited this composition (likely a few years later based on the change in her visual vocabulary) with her work called *Mücahit Kız*, meaning "Warrior Girl" (Fig. 1.11). This time, a similar village woman is seen against a natural landscape, holding a gun with her right hand, and gazing to the side. Arel's initiative to signify the figure's power as a warrior in this version suggests that her depiction of the village woman with such monumentality was always underpinned by feminist intent.

Türkiye's fourth artist collective Group D (named after the fourth letter of the alphabet) had inaugurated this nationalist turn in art between the years 1933 and 1947.[65] The Group D was founded by artists of Arel's generation who were also trained in Paris during the same period; most prominent of them are Nurullah Berk (1906-1982), Turgut Zaim (1906-1974), and Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu (1913-1975). After an initial phase of experiments more derivative of Western

[63] Batu, *Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi*, 150.
[64] Erol Kılıç, "Çağdaş Türk Resminde Geleneksel Etkileşim" (Traditional Interaction in Contemporary Turkish Painting), *The Journal of International Social Research* 6 no. 25: 329.
[65] Ibid.

European painting, the Group D began to include references to Anatolian folk life in their works.[66] Like Arel, they were also working mainly with the visual vocabulary of Cubism, employing thick contour lines, abstracted forms, and flat planes of color, which were juxtaposed by the use of traditional elements.

The Group D's efforts, particularly Eyüboğlu's, yielded more tangible results after the 1950s, with the "Group of Ten" founded by ten of Eyüboğlu's students.[67] Seeking to merge markers of national identity with contemporary painting practices, the Group of Ten created more seamless syntheses than their predecessors.[68] They also moved away from Cubism, working in a wider range of visual vocabulary. Although Arel would have inevitably engaged with these artists, there is no record that she officially joined an artist alliance in her artistic career. However, it would be fruitful to examine Arel's works in relation to those of the Group D artists after 1950, not only because there are strong parallels between their practices, but also because such a comparison gives us reasons to why Arel might not have wanted to join these groups.

Moreover, a transnational parallel which we can examine to better understand these artists' interest in folk elements is the Russian Neo-Primitivist movement from the early nineteen hundreds. As Jane Sharp explains in *Russian Modernism Between East and West: Natal'ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde*, artists like Natal'ia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, and Il'ia Zdanevich, "reclaimed Russia's Eastern heritage at a time when nationalist rhetoric throughout Europe was strident."[69] These artists were similarly combining elements of Western European modernist painting with native and traditional references such as Russian peasant art

[66] Gültekin Akengin and Asuman Arslan, "Türk Resim Sanatı ve Gelenek" [Turkish Painting and Tradition], *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Art* 3, no. 3 (2017): 2.
[67] Karadal, *Türk Resminde Geleneksel Motifler,* 249.
[68] Kılıç, *Çağdaş Türk Resminde Geleneksel Etkileşim*, 329.
[69] Jane Sharp, *Russian Modernism Between East and West: Natal'ia Goncharova and the Moscow Avant-Garde*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.

and lubki (brightly coloured popular prints during the early nineteenth century), to counter Western European artistic hegemony.[70] In Sharp's words, "Artists would borrow selectively from Western modernism to demonstrate difference within the local cultural environment while reasserting a cultural attachment to the East/Orient to differentiate their history and experiences from the European."[71] This is utterly similar to the Group D's process of growing critical about European influence in Turkish modernism.

However, what is especially relevant to Arel's work is Sharp's emphasis on Goncharova's status as not just an artist but also a "colonial subject" who targeted Western Primitivism and Orientalism by engaging with existing racist and gendered stereotypes, such as the Orient as primitive and "decorative as feminine."[72] Arel's contemporaries associated her works with Orientalism as well, as stated in a 1985 exhibition brochure: "Maide Arel, Daha çok bir Oriyantalizm, bir Doğu tutkunluğu etkisi uyandırır." [Maide Arel more so invokes a sense of Orientalism, an enthusiasm for the East.][73] Therefore, her engagement with Orientalism was also apparent to the contemporary critics, but this engagement was not evaluated in light of Orientalism's gendered dynamics. When considered in relation to Goncharova, Arel's methods of reclaiming agency as a female artist become clearer. Unlike Goncharova, however, Arel was not and still is not canonical, partially because of her personal choices of not officially entering any mainstream movement—which makes this discussion even more significant.

Upon returning home, Arel continued to experiment with figure, Cubism, and geometric abstraction. An early work of this kind that has not received enough attention is *Sepetçi Kız*

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[70] Ian Chilvers and John Glaves-Smith, "Neo-primitivism," *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* (Online version) Oxford University Press, 2015, accessed October 10, 2024. https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100228453
[71] Sharp, *Russian Modernism*, 5.
[72] Ibid.
[73] *Maide Arel*, SALT Research Archives, https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/36567.

(Basket Girl) painted in 1956 (Fig. 1.1) This work remains unmentioned because the only places it appears are an archived exhibition catalog from 1998 and in the background of a picture from the opening of that exhibition (Fig. 1.12).[74] In *Sepetçi Kız*, Arel demonstrates a move away from the Post-Impressionist brushstrokes and semi-transparent layers of color. Here, she is interested in fragmentation, distorted perspectives, and reducing the figure and the interior to geometric forms. She also applies a consistent sense of flatness across the composition. We can see that although Arel is interested in Cubism, she does not fully adopt the Cubist compositional principles such as depicting multiple perspectives at once. Similarly, in her famous painting *Çiftetelli* (Fig. 1.2) dating 1961, geometric and flat forms dominate the composition. Arel also applies dark contour lines to accentuate some forms in this painting, which remains consistent in her practice moving forward. In both works, Arel maintains a certain level of resemblance to Cubism; however, these paintings also demonstrate an individual style, one that is no longer derivative of the artists she worked under. Cubism for her stands as a symbol of the idealized modernity—with which she juxtaposes ideas of tradition—instead of an end goal.

Just as Arel's early painting of a village woman (Fig. 1.9), these paintings also show women dressed in traditional attire who emanate a sense of inwardness, self, and autonomy. The "basket girl" bends her neck down, fully engaging with the basket in her hand and owning her role, perhaps as a basket seller. *Çiftetelli*, on the other hand, shows three women engaged in a folk dance, called "Çiftetelli."[75] The woman on the right hand side plays *darbuka* [a type of hand drum] while the woman on the left hand side plays a stringed instrument called *mandolin*, or *saz*.

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[74] *"Maide Arel" sergisinin açılışı* (Opening of "Maide Arel" exhibition), 5 September 1988. Identifier: MSG030, SALT Research Archives.https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/213490.

[75] "Çiftetelli" is a rhythm and belly dance of Anatolia and the Balkans. In Turkish the word means "double stringed," taken from the saz playing style that is practiced in this kind of music.

The woman in the foreground, positioned centrally, is dancing to the music with her arms up and bending her right knee.

Arel's depiction of village women in such a freeing moment, despite the surrounding nationalist views of the ideal Turkish woman as domestic and self-sacrificing mothers and wives, is not arbitrary. In fact, Arel was involved in feminist circles just around the time she made these paintings. In 1960, she brought the Turkish Women's Rights Protection Association's art exhibition to Paris and later joined the "Club International Féminin" [International Women's Club] exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne [Museum of Modern Art].[76] As Pelin Kabataş explains, Arel was also highly influential in Turkish female artists' local organizing efforts.[77] Arel's involvement in women's organizations and particular interest in bringing Turkish female artists together could be one of the reasons she might not have wanted to join the Group D or later artist alliances, as they were male-dominated groups.

However, Arel's reasons for distinguishing herself from her male counterparts likely run deeper than mere gender differences. She also had a distinct, more feminist way of engaging with the tools and methods of Western European modernism. Her painting *Türk Hamamı* (Turkish Bath) (Fig. 1.3) from 1969 is especially explanatory of her attitude toward the gendered and racist underpinnings of Cubism. This painting depicts a woman taking a bath, sitting with an upright posture, with her hands wrapped around her head. What seems to be a towel (wearing a thin towel in public baths is common practice in Türkiye) wraps around her body, with her right breast exposed. Although not directly visually apparent, the arched niche in the background and the comb in a small bowl next to her give the impression that she is in a traditional Turkish bath,

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[76] *Arel Maide, Arel Şemsettin, Örnek Rasim Retrospektif Resim-Heykel Sergisi,* (Arel Maide, Arel Arel Şemsettin, Örnek Rasim Retrospective Painting-Sculpture Exhibition), April 26- May 11, 1974. Identifier: TAKAF22602, SALT Research Archives. https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/36570.
[77] Kabataş, *Çağdaş Türk Resim Sanatında Maide Arel,* 1423.

and, Arel further clarifies this with the piece's title. Here, Arel shows a more private scene from a (Turkish) woman's life compared to her other paintings. What indicates "tradition" in *Sepetçi Kız* or *Çiftetelli,* namely traditional attire, is obsolete in this piece, and the only clothing the figure has does not even fully cover her body. However, through the title, Arel once again creates a tension between the Western style of the painting and its Eastern subject matter.

Arel's stylistic choices—contour lines, flatness, and geometric shapes—in *Türk Hamamı* are not the only ways she puts her work in conversation with Cubism. The female figure's pose in this painting bears a direct parallel to the renowned Cubist Pablo Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* [The Women of Avignon] painted in 1907 (Fig. 1.13).[78] Considered a revolutionary work of art and a critical piece in the development of Cubism, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* has been criticized by theorists and art historians for being misogynistic and colonizing. A prominent critic in the field, Anna Chave, argued in 1994 that Picasso's depiction of a group of women naked in a brothel scene, with angular and voluminous features was a reflection of his anxieties as a white heterosexual male. The prostitutes in the scene seem more powerful than the male viewer, with their non-inviting gazes, sealed off genitalia, and the scene's flattened and compressed space—allowing no "penetration."[79]

Also, some of these figures wear traditional African masks, which were objects of great interest for Picasso during his Primitivist period prior to Cubism. Their bold, stylized forms and geometric shapes allowed him to depart from Western European art's focus on realism at the time. As Chave discusses; however, Picasso's approach to African masks was colonizing. Just as women, particularly prostitutes, were passive figures for men, Africa was a passive, virgin piece

[78] *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was acquired by MoMA in 1939, and thus had been in a public collection for many years by the time Arel painted *Türk Hamamı* (both 1964 and 1969 versions). Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, June–July 1907, oil on canvas, 8 ft × 7 ft 8 in. (243.9 × 233.7 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, accessed April 14, 2025, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79766.

[79] Anna Chave, "New Encounters with Les Demoiselles d'Avignon: Gender, Race, and the Origins of Cubism," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (1994): 602.

of land for Europeans to discover and exploit. The unwelcoming atmosphere of the work and its rejection of penetration (Chave argues that white male artists equated penetration with "knowing") made white heterosexual male viewers uncomfortable. The space they cannot easily enter or discover made them anxious about the possibility of "others" in society surpassing them.[80]

Arel's visual reference to *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in this painting shows her keen observations and criticism of Picasso's Cubism—in alignment with Chave's argument. Although Arel only began directly engaging with Cubism in 1949, mainly with the influence of Lhote, she likely closely observed and reflected on Picasso's work. Her interest in Picasso is evident not only in *Türk Hamamı,* but also in an undated piece titled *Kadın* [Woman] (Fig. 1.14) painted in Picasso's portraiture style.[81] The female figure in *Türk Hamamı* seems to be a combination of the figure sitting down on the bottom right corner, and the middle figure with her arms up and hands clutched behind her head in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon.* Unlike Picasso's figures, who are often described as "animal-like" and "threatening," Arel's woman exudes self-contentment, grace, and elegance. Arel engages with Picasso's Primitivism by integrating traditional elements (in this case, the Turkish bath signifies tradition) into modern painting. However, she contrasts Picasso's sexualizing and colonizing approach with her own. She is at once turning the eroticism of the scene from a threatening and violent one to a graceful one, and reclaiming the "exotic" and the "primitive" by turning to her native traditional practices. In 1964, Arel received the bronze medal at the "Club International Féminin" exhibition in Paris with the first version of *Türk Hamamı*

[80] Chave, *New Encounters*, pp. 601.
[81] It is also known that Arel painted a reproduction of Picasso's *La Casserole Emaillee* at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in 1950. See *Maide Arel Resim Sergisi* (Maide Arel Painting Exhibition), April 1-22, 1998. Identifier: TAKAF544017, SALT Research Archives. https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/38622

(Fig. 1.15).[82] Given her direct confrontation with Picasso in this painting, it is not hard to imagine how thought-provoking it would have been to the contemporary viewer.

Arel's inclination to make connections between Western cultural hegemony and gender, through combining traditional Anatolian references and modernist visual language, is similar to Goncharova's Neo-Primitivism. Just as Goncharova referenced feminized practices and forms from Russian folklore to resist Western domination, Arel was also particularly engaging with femininity and its relation to the traditional. Understanding Arel's approach to the binary of tradition and modernity sheds light on the feminist motivations behind the other female portraits from her oeuvre. *Anne ve Çocuk* [Mother and Child] (Fig. 1.4) and *Gergef İşleyen Kadın* [Woman Embroidering] (Fig. 1.5), are especially worthy of closer examination because of their seemingly conforming subject matters to the gender roles imposed by the nationalist Republican ideology.

Anne ve Çocuk, painted in 1968, depicts a typical mother and child scene popular among the nationalist art circles in Türkiye at the time. For example, a prominent member of the Group D, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu depicted this subject matter frequently (Fig. 1.16 and Fig. 1.17) to signify the efforts and devotion of Turkish women for their nation. Arel, too, associated the image of a Turkish mother with nationalism, evident in her inclusion of the Turkish flag (crescent and star) inscribed on an object in the bottom right corner. Here, we see once again that Arel had similar intentions with representations of motherhood as the male nationalist artists of her time—however, there is a difference in execution. While Eyüboğlu's mother and child compositions focus on the mother as a tired and self-sacrificing figure, Arel depicts the enjoyment of the mother when caring for her child. Her collected and calm appearance, body

[82] Karadal, *Türk Resminde Geleneksel Motifler,* 258.

language, and facial expression provide a sense that motherhood for her is not only about sacrifice, it is about herself too.

In *Gergef İşleyen Kadın,* there is a similar sense of autonomy within the female figure. In this scene, a young woman is engaging in a traditional, domestic, and feminized practice: embroidering. She, like Arel's other female portraits, has no engagement with the viewer, and appears to be pleasantly focused on her work. However, the distorted perspective of the embroidery frame reveals the details of her work to the viewer. This intentional move to reveal the woman's embroidery signals Arel's interest in depicting this woman as a maker, as an artist. Moreover, the geometric and abstract shapes of the embroidery echo the forms Arel employs in the rest of the painting, which could be to show women embroiders' engagement with modern art's visual language.

Like the mother and child scene, compositions similar to *Gergef İşleyen Kadın,* showing women in domestic environments and engaged in feminized activities, were also frequently depicted by male nationalist artists. Group D's founding member Nurullah Berk's *Ütü Yapan Kadın* [Women Ironing] series is an example (Fig. 1.18 and Fig. 1.19). However, a direct parallel to Arel's *Gergef İşleyen Kadın* is Berk's painting with the same title (Fig. 1.20). Berk's figure similarly seems focused on her work and embodies a sense of inwardness, but unlike Arel's figure, she is in frontal view. The large embroidery frame covers her body and projects into the viewer's space. When examined in relation to Arel's painting, the size and position of the embroidery frame in Berk's *Gergef İşleyen Kadın* underline the embroider's role as a laborer. The composition creates a sense that her work is more important than her, and she is presenting it to others—in this case the viewer—as a service. In Arel's painting, on the other hand, the woman as a maker is the main subject, rather than her embroidery.

Examining Maide Arel's oeuvre through a feminist lens reveals many reasons for her personal choices in her artistic career, and consequently, her marginalization in both local and global art historical canon. Building a career as a modern female artist in a country rebuilding itself under constant pressure of the tradition and modernity binary, Arel found intelligent ways of mediation and resistance. She openly engaged with the male-dominated mainstream artistic movements of her time, particularly combining a Cubist style of painting with elements of Anatolian folk culture, as part of the nationalist efforts within the country's art circles at the time. Arel clearly found a meaningful purpose in nationalism, probably as many other Turkish women around her. As feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe suggests, nationalism could be an outlet from which women find "an identity larger than that defined by domesticated motherhood or marriage."[83] However, evident in her paintings is that Arel was also highly aware of Republican nationalism's use of women's image as a tool in the nation-building project. Especially in the 1950s, when nationalism surpassed women's movements in the country, Arel had to maintain a delicate balance between upholding a feminist sensitivity and participating in nationalist ideas against Western hegemony in her artistic practice. Therefore, it is likely that both because of her critical view on the Republican nationalist perspective and her preference for women artists' alliances, she has never been an official member of the male-led Group D, Group of Ten, or others.

Arel maintained the said balance by making a connection between tradition as a concept and the female figure. Unlike her male counterparts, for Arel, owning and embracing tradition against Western influence paralleled monumentalizing the female figure and emphasizing her

[83] Cynthia Enloe, "Nationalism and Masculinity: The Nationalist Story Is Not Over—and It Is Not a Simple Story," in *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics,* (University of California Press, 2014), 87.

agency. As a feminist nationalist, Arel chose to depict images of Turkish women in traditional contexts, not as mere symbols of national identity against Western influence, but as autonomous beings. The result is representations of Turkish women embracing their native roots, which corresponds to exercising agency in their lives. In other words, Arel's women participate in nationalism by reclaiming their traditions *and* femininity against hegemonic constructs. Her awareness of hegemonic views of non-Western traditions and femininity as subordinate concepts also made her critical of Cubism's sexist and racial underpinnings. She was not merely trying to find common ground between modern painting and traditional subject matter, she was emphasizing a tension between the two worlds. It was through this tension that she was exercising myriad forms of resistance.

Arel's independence from the prominent artist alliances of her time resulted in her exclusion from this genre; hence the scarce literature about her practice. This has also contributed to the lack of attention to female artists' role in Turkish modernism's negotiations with tradition. This underscores an important gap in the literature, considering the critical role images of women played in both the early Westernizing nation-building process and today's conservative political regime. Arel's exclusion from these discussions remind me of a quote from Enloe on nationalism and gender: "There is a long history of nationalist women challenging masculine privilege in the midst of popular mobilization. Erasing those women's efforts from the nationalist chronicles makes it harder for contemporary women to claim that their critical attitudes are indigenous and hence legitimate."[84] As such, this study presents Arel as a precedent to the female artists from Türkiye in subsequent generations, who likewise engage with tradition as a site to problematize the binary constructs that have long been used in the country's political spheres to manipulate images of women. Therefore, critical approaches of later feminist artists

[84] Enloe, *Nationalism and Masculinity,* 122.

such as Gülsün Karamustafa and Canan could become more historically grounded and understood as a continuum of female artists' practices since the birth of the Republic.

Chapter 2: Gülsün Karamustafa

Female Agency Embodied in "Traditional" Textile Between Rural East and Urban West

Gülsün Karamustafa (1946), unlike Maide Arel, is globally recognized as one of the "most outspoken and celebrated artists" from Türkiye.[85] Most recently, she represented Türkiye at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024.[86] Offering a new perspective on such a prominent figure is challenging, yet this chapter provides a unique context for Karamustafa's oeuvre by articulating a connection between her and Arel's practices, thereby unlocking some of its specific aspects that have so far gone unnoticed in the literature. Although their careers intersected beginning in the 1960s—when Karamustafa's professional practice began—there were significant political changes in Türkiye that corresponded to Karamustafa's childhood and early adulthood, profoundly shaping her work in ways Arel did not explore. This contextual rupture marks a major difference between the two artists, and their practices are thus generally considered separately. However, a careful consideration of Karamustafa's early works reveals links between Arel and Karamustafa's feminisms, both rooted in a critical perspective of women's relationships with the concept of tradition in the face of imposed modernization.

Karamustafa was born during Türkiye's transition into a multi-party system, a shift that emphasized defying political homogeneity, and this influenced the art world, leading to increasingly diverse approaches. Her higher education years at the İstanbul Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi [İstanbul Academy of Fine Arts] (1963–1969) were marked by a movement away from the previously dominant Cubist style toward abstraction—once again echoing the trajectory

[85] Guggenheim Museum, "Gülsün Karamustafa," accessed January 2, 2025, https://www.guggenheim.org/map/gulsun-karamustafa.
[86] Other biennials Karamustafa attended are İstanbul Biennials (1987, 1992, 1995), 3rd Gwangju Biennial (2000), 8th Havana Biennial (2003), 3rd Cetinje Biennial (2004), and 1st Sevilla Biennial.

of Western art—and by the dismissal of figurative painting as a counterpoint to modernism. Karamustafa stood out as an artist rejecting such normativity since her Academy years:

> I also have to mention the incredibly strict rules of abstractionist modernism which tormented me a lot (I have to confess that I never was on good terms with modern painting) and undermined my creativity during my education there. All my teachers repeatedly insisted that the figure was the greatest enemy, that narration was to lead the student into the utmost trap of being illustrative and therefore to the death of a modern painter (...) On the other hand, the history of art was extremely attractive to me with its full range of figuration (...) I also have to declare that being political was one of the greatest enemies of academic art then. Those were the obstacles I had to fight when I waged the lonely Great War of my artistic career at the beginning of 1970s and I had to find my own path within such chaos.[87]

Karamustafa found that path by opposing academia's imposed modernism and apoliticism, focusing instead on figurative depictions of everyday life, almost always shaped by political enforcements.

In her figurative works, which predominantly center on women and explore themes of rural-to-urban migration—as well as concepts such as nostalgia, *kitsch*[88] and *arabesk*[89] by extension—Karamustafa employs a unique social-realist style. Her approach foregrounds the experiences of various "others" marginalized in the rapidly modernized metropolitan centers of Western Türkiye.[90] Despite their stark stylistic differences, Karamustafa's works share a foundational connection with Arel's. The most concrete evidence of this link is Karamustafa's

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[87] Gülsün Karamustafa, interview by Erden Kosova, *art-ist*, no:4, September 2001, quoted in Barbara Heinrich, *My Roses My Reveries* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2007), 17.

[88] "Art, objects, or design considered to be in poor taste because of excessive garishness or sentimentality, but sometimes appreciated in an ironic or knowing way."
"Kitsch." Oxford Languages, *Oxford University Press*, accessed January 21, 2025. https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/

[89] A genre of music that became popular in Türkiye in the 1960s and 1970s and that is often described as being "kitsch." It's known for its emotive and often melancholic style, with lyrics combining themes of love, heartbreak, longing, and social issues. Arabesk music typically combines traditional Turkish folk music elements with Middle Eastern influences and Western pop. The word has also evolved to encompass more than just the music genre, referring to a broader cultural phenomenon that includes various forms of art and lifestyle.

[90] Compared to renowned social-realist artists from Türkiye such as Nuri İyem, Avni Arbaş, and Selim Turan, Karamustafa does not depict people living in rural areas; instead, she depicts the experiences of those people in large cities as a result of rural-to-urban migration.

training in the studio of Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, an artist of Arel's generation, and a prominent member of the Group D.[91] At its core, Karamustafa's work builds on the artistic legacy shaped by Eyüboğlu's generation, oscillating between expressions of tradition and modernity in Türkiye. As a feminist artist, however, her practice aligns most closely with Arel's in the way she connects traditional elements to images of women who resist different manifestations of imposed modernization during her time.

Building on this connection, I focus on two groups of Karamustafa's early works that have so far been evaluated separately: works from the series *Hapishane Resimleri* [Prison Paintings] (1972-1978) (Fig. 2.1 to 2.7) produced following her six-month imprisonment in 1971,[92] and works from her first solo exhibition at Taksim Sanat Galerisi [Taksim Art Gallery] in 1978, namely *Kıymatlı Gelin* [Precious Bride] (1975) (Fig. 2.8), *Kapıcı Dairesi* [Flat of the Concierge] (1976) (Fig. 2.9), and *Örtülü Medeniyet* [The Lacemaker] (1976) (Fig. 2.10).[93] Both groups of works were created in the 1970s, but they have often been discussed in different contexts. This separation is largely due to the *Hapishane Resimleri* series being displayed publicly for the first time in 2013 at Karamustafa's retrospective "Vadedilmiş Bir Sergi" [A Promised Exhibition] at SALT's Beyoğlu and Galata locations. Karamustafa herself attributes this delay to her emotional resistance to revisiting the series and her reluctance to view these works solely as artifacts of her incarceration.[94] Consequently, Karamustafa's other 1970s works—focusing on the domestic experiences of migrants arriving in urban areas from Türkiye's

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[91] Gizem Baykal, "Çağdaş Türk Sanatında Arabesk Kültür: Gülsün Karamustafa'nın İşlerinde Göç, Kimlik ve Estetik" [Arabesque Culture in Contemporary Turkish Art: Migration, Identity, and Aesthetics in the Works of Gülsün Karamustafa] (Master's Thesis, Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi, 2023), 68.
[92] Hazal Orgun Sinan, "Hapishanede Kadın Olmak: Gülsün Karamustafa'nın Mahkûm Kadınları" [Being a Woman in Prison: Gülsün Karamustafa's Imprisoned Women], *100th Year of the Republic Special Issue*, no. 6 (2023): 152.
[93] Heinrich, *My Roses*, 17.
[94] Gülsün Karamustafa, "Hapishane Resimleri" [Prison Paintings] in *Playlist: A Promised Exhibition*, recorded 2013 by SALT Online, SoundCloud.
https://soundcloud.com/saltonline/kat-3-hapishane-resimleri?in=saltonline/sets/gulsunkaramustafa_tr

predominantly Eastern villages—have often been grouped with her 1980s works, which explored the theme of *kitsch* as a social phenomenon resulting from rural-to-urban migration. This categorization has led to the loss and neglect of certain critical nuances in Karamustafa's early works.

In contrast to her post-1980 works, Karamustafa's pieces exhibited at Taksim Art Gallery from a decade before express a resistance to the cultural anxiety encapsulated in the Turkish concept of *yozlaşmak*—a term used interchangeably with *kitsch* that denotes a perceived degeneration resulting from the collision of opposites, such as rural-urban and traditional-modern. This term conveys a moral and aesthetic judgment against hybrid cultural forms deemed inauthentic or degraded. Rather than exploring kitsch as a concept in its own right, Karamustafa's works from the 1970s depict women resisting *yoz* culture or *kitsch*—these women strive to sustain cultural memory and aesthetic values within a transforming social environment. This expression of resistance is rooted in the material worlds depicted in these works, in alignment with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception which proposes that humans primarily perceive themselves through sensory experience, rather than consciousness.[95] Specifically, Karamustafa articulates this resistance through textiles—a recurring element in her oeuvre. An example of such engagement with material can be found in Minoo Moallem's *Persian Carpets: The Nation as a Transnational Commodity*, where she reflects on how Persian carpets hold a particular meaning for Iranian immigrants like herself. She explains that while her mother, as a modern woman, dismissed Persian carpets as mere manifestations of the "traditional" during her childhood, these objects started to evoke a sensory connection to Moallem's Iranian identity once she became a diasporic person:

[95] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 1945), 371.

> They became a spatialized site of my Iranian identity, because stepping on them daily reminded me of my Iranian-ness and my sensory connection to another place, somewhere far from the United States but in proximity to my embodied sense of belonging. For many immigrant communities, memory of home and homeland or expressions of belonging are conveyed through tactility and the sensation of one's consumptive practices, from furniture to food and clothing.[96]

The connection between the *Hapishane Resimleri* series and *Kıymatlı Gelin*, *Kapıcı Dairesi*, and *Örtülü Medeniyet* lies in the relationship between the women depicted in them and the specific pieces of textiles—regarded as "traditional"—they wear and use to decorate their surroundings. In Moallem's words, these textiles provide the women with "security," "a sense of connectedness in the space," "comfort," "beauty," and "identity" in spaces where they feel alienated.[97]

The context I propose for Karamustafa's early works not only positions her practice within an alternative feminist art history—one that connects her to Arel—but also brings to light her particular political stance that is often overshadowed in analyses of her broad and dynamic body of work. Karamustafa's works are frequently discussed—in large part due to her own statements responding to the accusations that she glorifies kitsch aesthetic—as products of "neutral observations of surroundings."[98] Additionally, most analyses revolve around themes of "migration and by extension gender" only, which is an approach Ceren Özpınar rightly critiques for avoiding the political underpinnings of female artists' works; thus, oversimplifying feminist

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[96] Minoo Moallem, *Persian Carpets: The Nation as a Transnational Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3.
[97] Ibid.
[98] She states, "It is not easy to deny poor taste, and I have been criticized for allegedly elevating corrupt taste. I am definitely not in such a stance." in *Karamustafa: 'Arabeski dosyalıyorum'* [Karamustafa: 'I am filing Arabesk'], 17 November 1984. Identifier: KARW786, SALT Research Archives. https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/190598
For the said discussions, see Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 75; Çiğdem Sağır, "1980 Sonrası Türkiye'deki Sanatın Dönüşümünde Gülsün Karamustafa'nın Yeri" [The Role of Gülsün Karamustafa in the Transformation of Art in Turkey After 1980] (Master's Thesis, İstanbul Technical University, 2005); Nilgün Özayten, "Gülsün Karamustafa'nın Tanıklıkları" [The Testimonies of Gülsün Karamustafa], Salt Online, 2013, accessed January 21, 2025, https://saltonline.org/tr/2090/gulsun-karamustafanin-tanikliklari; and Nermin Saybaşılı, "ATLAS-ÇOCUK/LUK: Gülsün Karamustafa'nın çalışmalarında sanat ile hatıra(t)" [ATLAS-CHILD/HOOD: Art and Memory in the Works of Gülsün Karamustafa], Argonotlar Sanat, 2022, accessed January 21, 2025, https://argonotlar.com/atlas-cocuk-luk-gulsun-karamustafanin-calismalarinda-sanat-ile-hatirat/.

art historical discourse in Türkiye.[99] Both this approach and the frequent portrayal of Karamustafa as a "neutral observer" lead art historians to overlook Karamustafa's leftist political inclinations she developed in her student years, and that continues to inform her practice to this day. Therefore, this study also contributes to the literature by restoring some particular political motivations behind Karamustafa's practice. These motivations are specifically discussed through readings of her works engaging with the theme of *arabesk.*

Karamustafa's subjects of interest and political motivations were largely shaped by her early memories in life. Born in 1946 in Ankara, she grew up in a highly intellectual family. Her father, Hikmet Münir Ebcioğlu, was a successful journalist, writer, and radio broadcaster, while her mother, Türkân Ebcioğlu, was an educator with a deep knowledge of both Western and Turkish music, which led her to work in radio broadcasting. Much of Karamustafa's childhood was spent listening to the radio or visiting her parents at the broadcasting studio. This early and direct engagement with the radio would later inspire her references to music, particularly arabesk music, in her works from the 1980s onward, allowing her to examine relevant cultural politics around this genre through a critical lens.

It was her experiences at the Academy from 1963 to 1969 as a young adult, however, that more directly influenced her personal politics manifest in her early works. These years coincided with a period of political upheaval, during which socialist and leftist ideologies gained momentum among university students globally, particularly following the "May 1968 events" in Paris. These movements demanded education reforms, social equality, and opposition to wars, especially the Vietnam War. In Türkiye, Karamustafa's maternal uncle, Mihri Belli—a leading socialist and prominent member of the Türkiye Komünist Partisi [Communist Party of

[99] Ceren Özpınar, "Recontextualizing Gülsün Karamustafa's Shield: The Politics of Writing Feminist Art Histories in Turkey," *Art Journal* 78, no. 3 (2019): 63.

Türkiye]—played an active role in organizing Turkish university students. He advocated for educational reforms foregrounding Marxist ideology, democratization of universities, and solidarity with the anti-war movement.[100] At the same time, as Pelin Batu explains, women's rights activism began to re-emerge in İstanbul after being stifled by nationalism and conservatism that had dominated the country's political landscape from 1945 to 1965.[101] A prominent activist during this revival was Mihri Belli's wife, Sevim Belli, who fought for women's rights within the socialist movement.[102] These figures in Karamustafa's family played a significant role in shaping her political identity.

As a young painting student, Karamustafa actively participated in student protests alongside her circle of friends—artists, poets, and writers often referred to as "the 1968 Generation." Most notably, on June 22, 1968, they occupied the Academy building for a month.[103] During this period, Karamustafa also became a member of the Türk Devrimci Kadınlar Derneği [Turkish Revolutionary Women's Association] and contributed to the İlerici Kadınlar Derneği [Progressive Women's Association] by creating content for its magazines and brochures.[104] These political activities strongly influenced the themes she explored in her artistic practice. As Özpınar notes:

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[100] Mihri Belli was introduced to Marxist thought and activism while studying economics in the United States. In 1942, he was appointed as a member of the central committee of the Turkish Communist Party. He also facilitated the publication of "Türk Solu" [Turkish Left] and "Aydınlık Sosyalist Dergi" [Aydınlık Socialist Journal].
Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında,* 63.

[101] Pelin Batu, *Türkiye'de Kadın Haklarının Tarihçesi*,150.

[102] She was, along with Mihri Belli, one of those arrested in efforts to suppress the activities of the Communist Party in 1951, and met Mihri Belli during this struggle while they were both in prison.
Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında,* 63.
After their imprisonment, they also worked in the foundation of the Türkiye İşçi Partisi [Workers Party of Türkiye] in 1961.
Özpınar, *Recontextualizing,* 66.

[103] The group includes Alaettin Aksoy (1942), Gürkan or "Komet" Coşkun (1941-2022), Mehmet Güleryüz (1938-2024), Utku Varlık (1942), Nevhiz Tanyeli (1945), Feridun Aksın (1933-2005), Sevim Burak (1931-1983), and Ömer Uluç (1931-2010).
Özpınar, *Recontextualizing,* 66.

[104] Erden Kosova, "Gülsün Karamustafa: Geçiciliğin Belleği" [Gülsün Karamustafa: The Memory of Temporariness], *Hafıza ve Sanat Konuşmaları* (2020): 224.

> The point is that Karamustafa's circle at the academy and the events of 1968 and beyond suggest the renewal of her relationship with the political, in ways that, to borrow the words of Richard Noble, improved her "critical engagement with the political reality" while enabling her to explore the "subject positions or identities defined by otherness, marginality, oppression or victimisation."[105]

It was also during this revolutionary struggle that she met her husband, Sadık Karamustafa. The issues she engaged with through her relationship with him—including urban migration, imperialism, workers' rights, and class differences—became defining themes throughout her oeuvre.[106]

However, as Özpınar explains, while the student protests in Türkiye were influenced by the movements in Paris, students in Türkiye focused on the country's specific political problems and faced vastly different outcomes. Karamustafa reflects: "(...) things did not work out the way they did in Europe."[107] While students in France succeeded in their demands to some extent, students in Türkiye faced a military intervention in 1971, culminating in the executions of three revolutionary students—Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, and Hüseyin İnan. Around this time, Karamustafa and her husband were arrested, accused of harboring a fellow student who was a political fugitive. Much like her father and uncle, who had been repeatedly imprisoned for political reasons, Karamustafa was detained and spent six months in İzmit Women's Prison, while her husband spent two and a half years in Maltepe Military Prison.[108] The experiences she depicted in *Hapishane Resimleri* were drawn from this period of her life.

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[105] See Richard Noble, quoted in Chantal Mouffe, "Art and Democracy: Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space," *Open!*, January 1, 2007, http:// onlineopen.org/art-and-democracy.
Özpınar, *Recontextualizing,* 67.

[106] Sadık Karamustafa participated in the theater division of the Türk Öğretmenler Birliği [Turkish Teachers' Union], which was established in the mid-1960s when social and political dynamics were shifting. This theater division formed the core of the Devrim İçin Hareket Tiyatrosu [Theater for Action for Revolution]. The group existed from 1968 to 1971 and staged plays addressing themes such as urban migration, imperialism, workers' rights, and class differences. Sadık Karamustafa took part in these activities as an actor and also designed their posters.
Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 63.

[107] Gülsün Karamustafa, "The View from İstanbul," *The New Tate Modern,* 2016, 19, quoted in Özpınar, *Recontextualizing,* 67.

[108] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 64.

A striking black-and-white photograph from İzmit Women's Prison, taken in 1971, shows Karamustafa among other women in the ward, some accompanied by their children of various ages (Fig. 2.11). Among the women surrounding Karamustafa, some had killed their fiancés or husbands while others were imprisoned for assault or drug-related offenses.[109] What stands out in this photograph is not only the direct, confident poses of the women but also their highly patterned, presumably colorful clothing, which contrasts sharply with Karamustafa's dark and monochromatic outfit. It is reasonable to assume that Karamustafa noticed the dominance of this particular style of clothing in the prison, given her careful and intentional depictions of various textile pieces surrounding the women in her *Hapishane Resimleri* series, created immediately following her release.

The first painting of the series (Fig. 2.1), dated 1978, underscores Karamustafa's focus on clothing as a defining feature of prison life. The highly detailed and accurate rendering of the women's attire in this piece—despite the work being created retrospectively—demonstrates Karamustafa's close observation of them during her imprisonment. Layered patterned skirts, colorful stockings, slippers, cardigans, vests, and headscarves resemble the clothes of Arel's "village women." Indeed, the general profile of women in the prison, in stark contrast to Karamustafa herself, reflects economic disadvantage, rural origins, and an adherence to the "traditional" attire of the countryside, even after migrating to urban areas. These women, both through their status as "women" and their lifestyles, were "othered" in the rapidly modernizing society. Thus, Karamustafa's desire to highlight these women's experiences through her art aligns with her leftist-feminist political perspective.

The presence of these women dressed in vibrant clothing within the unsettling confines of the prison, captured Karamustafa's attention and became a central theme in the *Hapishane*

[109] Sinan, *Hapishanede Kadın Olmak*, 163.

Resimleri series. In *Hapishane Resimleri 1,* the women are depicted playing *kör ebe* [blindfold tag]. At the center of the scene, one figure is blindfolded, attempting to identify the women around her, who have formed a semicircle, clapping and making noise. The women's colorful, patterned, and layered clothing dominates the composition, creating a contrast with the bleak setting of barred windows, desaturated walls, and a leafless tree in the background. These vibrant clothes, combined with the women's interactions, create a sense of joy and connection, transforming the somber environment into a home-like space. This transformation serves as a quiet act of defiance, asserting their sense of self and humanity in the face of adversity.

A similar contrast is observed in the eleventh painting of the series (Fig. 2.2). In this piece, children and babies are also included in the scene and their clothing reflects the same vibrant colors and patterns as their mothers'. The women are shown forming a somewhat chaotic line to receive food, which is being served by an older woman standing by a pot with a ladle in her hand. The meal is clearly a simple, single-dish preparation. Despite the modest nature of the food, the women's expressions and gestures—holding out plates with visible impatience—reflect their urgency, likely driven by a desire to feed their children as quickly as possible. Amid the chaos, the viewer can almost hear the clatter of dishes, the shouts, and the children's restless voices. While this scene conveys the hardships of meal times and the noise of the environment, it also signals the presence of life within the cold prison walls. As in the first painting of the series, the women's brightly colored clothing and headscarves provide warmth and energy, visually and emotionally counterbalancing the drab surroundings. These elements, combined with the sounds and interactions in the scene, remind the viewer that there is a bittersweet vibrancy to life even in the prison. Karamustafa emphasizes the role of these colorful textiles and patterns in turning the alien prison environment into a semblance of home.

The third (Fig. 2.3), fourth (Fig. 2.4), fifth (Fig. 2.5), and sixth (Fig. 2.6) paintings in the series further highlight how textiles unify and protect these women during their imprisonment. These works depict the women sleeping side by side, closely packed together, wrapped in vibrant, patterned blankets. It is noteworthy that, despite the absence of adult men in the women's ward and the cultural norm of removing headscarves at home during sleep, these women continue to wear them, reflecting their effort to maintain their identity and sense of self. In this unfamiliar, cold, and unsettling environment far from home, these fabrics covering their bodies provide what Moallem describes as "familiarity," "security," "a sense of connectedness in the space," and "comfort" to these women. Also, in these compositions, Karamustafa divides the picture plane into two parts: the upper half depicts the prison walls and barred windows, while the lower half shows the women's shared sleeping area, with no empty spaces between them. This clear division emphasizes the difference between the cold, soulless environment of the prison and the secure, intimate space the women create for themselves.

The theme of textiles as protective, home-like elements also appears in Karamustafa's 1978 painting *Müebbet'in Ranzası* [Bed of the Lifetime Prisoner] (Fig. 2.7), a work often excluded from the *Prison Paintings* series. This is likely because it was first exhibited in 1978 at Karamustafa's solo exhibition at Taksim Art Gallery, long before the *Prison Paintings* were included in SALT's 2013 exhibition. In her 2007 monograph, *My Roses My Reveries,* Barbara Heinrich interprets the bunk bed, standing like an "island" at the center of the composition, as a sheltering space for the women.[110] The six-person bunk bed dominates the prison room, with four of the beds occupied by women and one holding a child. The figures are depicted sleeping, crafting, or lost in thought. Hooks above the beds hold various belongings, reflecting the life

[110] Heinrich, *My Roses,* 29.

created within the limited means of the impersonal prison space. Once again, textiles—whether as blankets, clothing, or headscarves—play a central role.

A fascinating detail often overlooked by art historians is that the bunk bed is shaped like the silhouette of a dress, a motif that reappears in Karamustafa's later works. For instance, the quilted vests in her 1991 installation *Kuryeler* [Courrier] (Fig. 2.12) bear a clear resemblance to the silhouette of the bunk bed. Inspired by her grandmother's stories of smuggling valuable items during migration by sewing them into children's clothing, this work reflects the emotional weight of displacement, particularly during the tragedies in former Yugoslavia. A phrase accompanying the freely hanging garments in the installation states: "While crossing borders, we hid what was valuable to us by sewing it into children's vests."[111] This again underscores the theme of textiles as protectors and preservers of precious belongings. Similarly, Karamustafa's *Mistik Nakliye* [Mystic Transport] installation (1992) (Fig. 2.13) first displayed at the 3rd International İstanbul Biennial, continues this motif. As Gizem Baykal observes, Karamustafa captures the dynamic, shifting nature of migration with mobile baskets while highlighting the protective role of bright quilts, which she presents as objects closest to the body. She conveys that, at its essence, migration can occur with nothing more than a quilt.[112]

The relationship Karamustafa established with textiles in her *Hapishane Resimleri* series of the 1970s should guide our interpretations of her other works from the same period. Although the pieces exhibited at her first solo exhibition in 1978 at Taksim Art Gallery are often grouped together with her works from the 1980s, this categorization risks losing some of the meanings embedded in her early works. Most notable among these is their focus on how women exercised agency through their connection to "tradition" during a time when, as Karamustafa herself noted

[111] Heinrich, *My Roses*, 55.
[112] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 95.

in her exhibition reflections, "traditional culture" confronted "foreign, imperialist culture."[113] Unlike her works of the 1980s, which explore hybridity and *yozlaşma*, Karamustafa's works of the 1970s emphasize women's ability to maintain their relationship with tradition as a form of resistance against such corruption.

For my discussion of these works, I would like to begin with *Kıymatlı Gelin* (1975) (Fig. 2.8), a piece that art historians often interpret in a negative light. In this work, a woman dressed head to toe in traditional Anatolian clothing is depicted surrounded by her dowry. Similar to the *Hapishane Resimleri*, the scene is dominated by colorful handmade textiles, such as dresses, pillows, sheets, and covers, arranged in overlapping layers. A similar dowry scene appears in Süha Arın's documentary *Kula'da Üç Gün* [Three Days in Kula] (Fig. 2.14).[114] Alongside the handmade materials, however, industrial products like a gas cylinder, plastic wash basin, and flip-flops are also present. Moreover, the small radio the bride holds in her lap also stands out as a product of modernity amidst the predominantly traditional, handmade items. This placement of the radio in the composition may be linked to Karamustafa's childhood connection to the object. Additionally, the Turkish flag at the top of the composition recalls the wooden object carved with a Turkish flag in Arel's 1968 painting *Anne ve Çocuk* [Mother and Child] (Fig. 2.15). In both works, the flag emphasizes the national origins of the traditional elements depicted.

Heinrich interprets the bride's full-frontal stance and neutral facial expression in *Kıymatlı Gelin* as follows:

> The face staring at the viewer is tight-lipped, earnest, and utterly devoid of the joy one would normally expect of a bride on her wedding day. This facial expression makes for a stark contrast with the bright and cheerful colors of the painting as a whole. The bride's body all but disappears among her possessions—indeed

[113] *Gülsün Karamustafa'nın Taksim Sanat Galerisi'nde (İstanbul) gerçekleşen kişisel sergisini açıklayan yazısı* [Text by Gülsün Karamustafa describing her solo exhibition at Taksim Art Gallery (İstanbul)], 1978. Identifier:KARW778, SALT Research Archives. https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/189839.
[114] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 82.

> becomes one of the objects on display, inevitably evoking associations with arranged or even forced marriages.[115]

Similarly, Baykal argues that the bride praised to be "precious" in this scene becomes merely an object to be displayed, much like her dowry, and that her body is thus objectified.[116] However, when I evaluate this piece in relation to the *Hapishane Resimleri* Karamustafa made in the same period, I arrive at an alternative interpretation. As suggested by the title, a dowry in Anatolian culture represents the value of a woman. The integration of the woman with her traditional textiles in this work—the sense of her merging with these objects—suggests to me that these items have become part of her identity. They are objects she takes with her when leaving her home as a bride, carrying them into her new life and using them to create a link between her past, her origins, and her new reality. Even within a patriarchal system—such as in the context of an arranged marriage, as Heinrich suggests—this bride perhaps exercises her agency by standing upright among the objects symbolizing her value and preserving her sense of self.

The theme of women exercising agency through the "traditional" begins to crystallize in Karamustafa's works such as *Kapıcı Dairesi* (Fig. 2.9) and *Örtülü Medeniyet* (Fig. 2.10). In these pieces, Karamustafa explores the phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration, a subject that would shape her practice for years to come. These works, at their core, respond to the fact that the social and cultural reforms aimed at modernization following the establishment of the Republic often failed to reach rural areas. The differing dynamics of urban and rural life, resistance to reforms in the countryside, and the inability of intellectuals to effectively communicate these changes created significant contradictions within society.[117] Additionally, the mechanization of agriculture reduced the need for labor in rural areas, making unemployment a growing issue. By

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[115] Heinrich, *My Roses,* 18-19.
[116] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 80.
[117] Ibid., 29.

the mid-1940s, rapid population growth exacerbated the unemployment crisis, triggering mass migration from villages to cities, particularly to Western urban centers like İstanbul. These migrants, many of whom lived in informal settlements in İstanbul, worked in low-tier jobs like factory work or concierges and viewed their children as social security for the future.[118] This migration, often driven by economic necessity, resulted in a culturally and emotionally turbulent integration process, as migrants faced disconnection from their traditional values while adapting to urban life. In *Kapıcı Dairesi* and *Örtülü Medeniyet* Karamustafa invites us into the homes of these migrants.

Concierges represent the first families forced to migrate from villages to cities. They typically lived on the ground floors of apartment buildings—in *Kapıcı Dairesi,* Karamustafa highlights the cultural conflict between the upper floors and the lower floors. The apartment is decorated with colorful, traditional rugs, lace covers, embroidered pillows, and wall hangings—objects reminiscent of the setting in *Kıymatlı Gelin.* The woman, depicted with her children, likely selected many of these items from her dowry to decorate her home. The contrast between the monochromatic wall creating a window-like frame at the doorway and the interior of the home—filled with vibrant colors, patterns, and textures—is striking. It further emphasizes that the woman brings her past rural life into the city, transforming her domestic space into a familiar environment. This becomes a way for her to preserve her identity in the face of the demands of urban modernity—just as the women in *Hapishane Resimleri* did. Of course, traces of modernity are also present in the home, such as the Pink Panther [119] T-shirt worn by the child on the right or the television on the dresser. However, these items do not dominate the

[118] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında,* 31.
[119] "In Türkiye, during the mid-1970s, the novel of the cartoon Pink Panther, which began airing on TRT, was also given as a supplement by Milliyet Children's Magazine in the same years."
Ibid., 79.

composition. In fact, the television is covered with lace to blend in with the traditional surroundings.

Karamustafa explores this practice of covering modern objects with lace more explicitly in *Örtülü Medeniyet.* The work depicts a woman in a living room knitting lace, while the modern furniture and objects around her—television, radio, sewing machine, and even a gas cylinder—are all covered with lace cloths. The woman amends the unfamiliar aesthetic of technological and modern designs, making them part of her familiar environment. Interestingly, while the English title of the piece is *The Lacemaker*, the Turkish title *Örtülü Medeniyet* directly translates to "Veiled Civilization," signaling Karamustafa's critique of the Republican ideal of "catching up with civilization." In short, as Çiğdem Sağır has also noted, in these works, Karamustafa examines the resistance of a social group struggling to adapt to a different societal structure. She explores how they refuse to abandon or alienate themselves from their traditions, instead claiming and preserving them as a form of resistance against external pressures.[120]

In the works *Star Wars* (1982) (Fig. 2.16), *Balkon* [Balcony] (Fig. 2.17), and *İstanbul Palas* [İstanbul Palace] (Fig. 2.18), which are often analyzed alongside *Kıymatlı Gelin.*, *Kapıcı Dairesi*, and *Örtülü Medeniyet*, this resistance gives way to a state of integration with the new culture in which they find themselves. For example, in *Star Wars*, Karamustafa draws from her observations of consumer culture during her summer visits to the village of Turunç in Marmaris. The painting depicts a village woman wearing a traditional *şalvar* paired with a Star Wars T-shirt, a product that had rapidly become a symbol of mass culture. Through this piece, Karamustafa critiques how, with globalization, local traditions eventually become subsumed into dominant cultures. The clothes worn arbitrarily by the villagers, such as the Star Wars T-shirt, reflect a fashion trend in which text or meaning vanishes, replaced by the popularity of color and

[120] Sağır, *1980 Sonrası Türkiye*, 63.

form.[121] Similarly, in *Balkon* and *İstanbul Palas,* we see how the newly urbanized migrants differ from those in *Kapıcı Dairesi* and *Örtülü Medeniyet*. Instead of focusing solely on their domestic spaces, they now begin to interact with the outside world, the city, and their new lives. They are more open to "transformation" and coexisting with the new culture to which they are exposed.

As hinted in the title *İstanbul Palas*, the architectural elements in these two paintings reflect the Neoclassical or Art Nouveau styles adopted during the late Ottoman period under European cultural influence.[122] Also, as seen in the Ottoman tiles in the bottom right corner of *Balkon*, these are transitional buildings that merge European and Ottoman aesthetics. Once inhabited by Greek, Armenian, Jewish, or Levantine residents, starting in the 1950s they began to be used by recently urbanized villagers whose sense of interior decoration often clashed with their surroundings.[123] In *Balkon*, we see a family—mother, father, and child—watching the outside world from the balcony of such a building. Alongside the building's intricate decorations, there are colorful and patterned fabrics and rugs casually hung on the balcony to air out or dry. These vibrant coverings, in a way, act as a shield, protecting the private space of the family and their domestic lives from the city's gaze.

However, a leopard-print rug hanging on the balcony wall and partially exposed to the outside contradicts this sense of privacy. The leopard pattern is a recurring motif in Karamustafa's oeuvre, as seen in her later works, such as *Panterella* [Pantherella] (1983) (Fig. 2.19) and *Çifte İsalar ve de Yavru Ceylan* [Double Jesus and the Baby Antelope] (1984) (Fig. 2.20). It is most likely a reference to the lion and gazelle trope in Islamic art—also appears as a leopard-gazelle pairing (Fig. 2.21) known to be a sexual innuendo. Strengthening this hypothesis

[121] Gülsün Karamustafa, interview by H.Rf, *Sanat Dünyamız* July-August 2016 (Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık), 59, quoted in Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*,104.
[122] Heinrich, *My Roses,* 20.
[123] Saybaşılı, *ATLAS-ÇOCUK/LUK*.

is the leopard-gazelle wall hanging in a bedroom scene from the 1984 film *Bir Yudum Sevgi* [A Sip of Love] (Fig. 2.22), for which Karamustafa worked on the production. This tapestry, due to its positioning in a private space, a bedroom, parallels the mosaic of a lion and gazelle created for the Caliph's private quarters in Khirbat al-Mafjar (Fig. 2.23), which is thought by art historians to carry sexual connotations.[124] The symmetrical alignment of the leopard's head on the rug with the child's head may further allude to themes of sexual reproduction.

In *İstanbul Palas*, we again see a woman, this time alone, looking out from the window of a similarly styled building. Behind her, on the wall, hangs a framed piece with an excerpt from the Qur'an, Surah Yusuf (12:64): "But only Allah is the best Protector, and He is the Most Merciful of the merciful."[125] The verse's emphasis on divine protection reinforces the idea of the woman creating a safe space within her home, tied to tradition and faith. However, the frame is tilted inward, facing the interior, while the woman herself appears to lean outward, toward the exterior, parallel to the building's perspective and the human faces carved into its columns. The duster in her hand suggests this is a moment captured during cleaning, with the other object she holds likely being a headscarf. Unlike the women depicted in Karamustafa's works from the 1970s, the headscarf is not on her head but hangs loosely, exposed to the outside. Overall, the women in *Balkon* and *İstanbul Palas* no longer resist change but instead begin to adapt to their new urban lives. As these analyses show, contrary to common opinion, there is a distinct difference in the relationship between "tradition" and the figures depicted in Karamustafa's works of the 1970s and those created in the 1980s. Starting in the 1980s, Karamustafa's approach to the theme of rural-to-urban migration shifted from examining how migrants clung to tradition as a form of resistance to exploring the hybrid culture born from this phenomenon.

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[124] See Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafjar," *Muqarnas* 14 (1997): 11-18.
[125] Quran, Surah Yusuf, Ayah 64, https://quran.com/en/yusuf/64.
Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 85.

In this context of hybrid culture, Karamustafa shifted her focus to *kitsch* and its extension, *arabesk*. Although this shift might appear to signal a neutralization of her firm political stance, the starting point of her kitsch-themed works in fact proves that her political stance persisted, albeit in a transformed manner. In his famous 1939 essay, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, Clement Greenberg defines kitsch—a German word for "trash"—as a threat to avant-garde art. According to Greenberg, kitsch represents "ersatz culture," meaning a cheap imitation of high culture, or a hybrid culture that lacks any significant aesthetic or intellectual value.[126] It encompasses art, literature, and material culture that is mass-produced and easily consumed, such as popular music, magazine covers, and Hollywood movies.[127] In late 20th-century Türkiye, arabesk—literally meaning "Arab-like"—was identified as a branch of kitsch. It was a music genre that gained popularity during the 1960s and 1970s, especially among rural-to-urban migrants whom Karamustafa frequently depicted in her works. Arabesk combines Arabic melodies with Turkish folk music and Western instrumentation, and its themes often revolve around love, heartbreak, longing, and societal struggles.[128] Over time, it extended beyond music and came to symbolize a broader culture, encompassing other modes of self-expression.

By the late 1980s, influenced by the widespread presence of kitsch objects as a result of mass production and rapid consumption culture, Karamustafa began focusing more directly on kitsch as a concept through specific objects and a broader lens. However, her initial engagement with kitsch was through the theme of arabesk, which had been labeled as kitsch by the Republic's ideological framework. Growing up in a family of radio operators, Karamustafa was aware of, and perhaps even personally witnessed, the Republic's early efforts to abandon Eastern

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[126] Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 9.
[127] Ibid., 10.
[128] Güneş Ayas, "Türk Oryantalizminin Arabesk Tartışmalarına Etkisi: Kendini Şarklılaştırma, Garbiyatçı Fantezi ve Arabesk Müzik" [The Influence of Turkish Orientalism on Arabesk Debates: Self-Orientalization, Occidental Fantasy, and Arabesk Music], *Rast Müzikoloji Dergisi* 7, no. 2 (2019): 2091.

elements in music through regulations imposed on radio broadcasting. One such example is the ban on traditional Turkish music on the radio in 1934, with Western music being broadcast instead.[129] These bans, however, were not internalized by the public. During World War II, the production of Turkish cinema significantly decreased, and Egyptian films imported through Cairo increased the influence of Arab culture. The dramatic themes of these Arabic films, paired with their music, resonated with audiences in Türkiye. Following the ban on Egyptian films in 1948, Turkish lyrics were written for the songs found in these films, further strengthening Turkish music's connection with Arab music. Meanwhile, no legislation could entirely prevent people from tuning their radios to Egyptian broadcasts.[130] The resulting arabesk music, with its themes of melancholy and nostalgia, captured the emotions of rural-to-urban migrants and became a popular genre in the country from the 1960s onward. In works such as *Yarabbi Sen Bilirsin* [My God You Know It Better Than Me] (1981) (Fig. 2.24), *Dertler Benim Olsun* [Let Sorrows Wash Over Me] (1981) (Fig. 2.25), many of which take their names from popular arabesk songs or films of the time, Karamustafa depicted the dramatic emotions conveyed by arabesk music and cinema.

The categorization of arabesk as kitsch, as Martin Stokes seminally noted, is a construct rooted in Türkiye's "internal Orientalism."[131] This construct frames arabesk as an expression of the "Eastern side of the Turkish soul," characterized by passivity and pessimism.[132] The simultaneous emergence of mass-produced kitsch objects, fueled by industrialization and a rapid consumption culture, facilitated this categorization.[133] The real issue was not arabesk's hybrid

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[129] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 26.
[130] Martin Stokes, "Islam, the Turkish State and Arabesk," *Popular Music* 11, no. 2 (1992): 215.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Martin Stokes, *Türkiye'de Arabesk Olayı* (Arabesk Debate in Turkey), translated by Hale Eryılmaz. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012), 145-147.
This book was originally published in English by Oxford University Press in 1992.
[133] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında,* 33.

nature, blending Arab and Turkish music: As Güneş Ayas points out, until Stokes, few described arabesk based on musicological analysis in their categorizations of it as kitsch or a subculture.[134] For instance, Fazıl Say, a well-known Turkish pianist, dismissed arabesk as "Middle Eastern, third-rate, philosophically representing distortion and laziness, a burden on enlightenment, modernity, and artistry." He described it as being built on "self-pity, laziness, incompetence, profit-seeking, filth, and ambiguity."[135]

The Republican ideology had in fact no objection to hybridizing Western and Turkish music. For example, *Yine Bir Gülnihâl* [Again a Gülnihâl], a waltz composed by Dede Efendi, who was a Sufi and a prominent figure in traditional Turkish music, was endorsed and celebrated by the state.[136] The real issue behind the construct labeling arabesk as kitsch lay in the belief that Turkish music, which was meant to be Western in style, was "corrupted" by Arabic and other Eastern melodies. As Stokes highlights, "Music in the Turkish state, according to early Republican ideologues like Ziya Gökalp, was to be a mixture of 'uncontaminated' rural folk music and Western polyphonic techniques."[137] Ayşe Öncü, in her article "İstanbullular ve Ötekiler" [İstanbulites and Others], discusses the hypocrisy of this construct, which criticizes arabesk culture for combining arbitrary elements into tasteless products, through a caricature (Fig. 2.26). The caricature depicts a wealthy İstanbul resident sitting in a room cluttered with unrelated objects from various places, declaring, "I hate arabesk."[138] It underscores how arabesk's labeling as kitsch in Türkiye stemmed not from its musicological or aesthetic value but

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[134] Ayas, *Türk Oryantalizmi*, 2091.
[135] "Arabesk Yavşaklığından Utanıyorum" ["I am ashamed of the vulgarity of Arabesk"], *NTV*, July 19, 2010, https://www.ntv.com.tr/Türkiye/arabesk-yavsakligindan-utaniyorum,WLfHQ4LJw0ePkf9WOWRaRg.
[136] Baykal, *Çağdaş Türk Sanatında*, 18.
[137] Stokes, *Islam, the Turkish State and Arabesk*, 215.
See Ziya Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (The Principles of Turkism), originally published in Ottoman Turkish (Ankara, 1923).
[138] Ayşe Öncü, "İstanbullular ve Ötekiler: Küresellik Çağında Orta Sınıf Olmanın Kültürel Kosmolojisi" [İstanbulites and Others: The Cultural Cosmology of Being Middle Class in the Age of Globalization], in *İstanbul: Küresel ile Yerel Arasında*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları 2000), 129.

from the Turkish state's internal othering of its Eastern populations and their preferences. Karamustafa's focus on the musical tastes of rural-to-urban migrants in her works once again reveals her leftist political stance. It also continues her career-long theme of using traditional elements as a form of resistance to societal oppression.

Evaluating Karamustafa's interest in arabesk through the lens of internal Orientalism reveals an overlooked aspect of her works about migration: the issue of ethnic minorities in Türkiye. As Stokes notes, "Many of the [arabesk] singers are migrants from remote and barbarized Turkish 'Orient,' the Arabic-speaking and Kurdish regions of Southeast Anatolia, who occupy the urban spaces between squatter towns and metropolitan centers."[139] Thus, the traditional elements—especially those found in arabesk culture—depicted by Karamustafa in her works on rural-to-urban migration largely originate from Kurdish and Arabic cultures. However, neither Karamustafa nor the art historians analyzing her work openly address the issue of ethnic minorities in Türkiye. Özpınar briefly touches on this by linking Karamustafa's work to that of her friend, novelist Sevim Burak, who often wrote about characters of various ethnic and religious backgrounds due to her mother's Romanian-Jewish heritage. She suggests that Karamustafa's interest in depicting the lives of "others in big cities, can be understood in the light of Burak's concern with the lives of Turkey's minorities, or others."[140] The omission of this issue from the historiography of Karamustafa's work likely stems from the state's censorship of Kurdish culture, which intensified after the founding of the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK) [Kurdistan Workers' Party] in 1978 and the 1980 military coup.[141] It is possible that Karamustafa's imprisonment in 1971 led her to avoid openly addressing her stance on ethnic

[139] Stokes, *Islam, the Turkish State and Arabesk*, 214.
[140] Özpınar, *Recontextualizing,* 69-70.
[141] After the 1980 coup, Kurdish was banned by the state in both private and public life, and until 1991 when the ban was lifted, many broadcasters and singers performing in Kurdish were imprisoned.

minorities as restrictions escalated. Instead, she tackled the issue indirectly, seemingly depicting her mere "observations" of the hybrid culture—including arabesk—that emerged in İstanbul due to rural-to-urban migration.

Karamustafa's artistic focus further shifted after her experience as an art director for the 1984 film *Bir Yudum Sevgi*, directed by Atıf Yılmaz. During her research for the film's set design, she closely examined the furniture and objects in migrant homes. She states, "At that moment, I definitely felt that the flat surface of painting would not satisfy me anymore. Materials were taking the lead, but I also wanted to lead them as I wished."[142] This experience deepened her familiarity with ready-made objects produced by migrant culture, leading her to explore them not as mere symbols of certain concepts but as a field of study in their own right. Later, she also directly engaged with media embodying the concepts of tradition, modernity, or hybridity, as seen in her handmade tapestries—common objects in migrant homes (Fig. 2.27). This new approach led her to move away from binaries such as traditional versus modern in her works of the late 1980s and 1990s.

When we take a broad view of Karamustafa's multifaceted, dynamic, and highly responsive artistic practice, we can undoubtedly say that she was an astute observer. However, the frequent emphasis on her role as an "observer" can sometimes overshadow the political stance that forms the foundation of her practice. In contrast, I aimed to present Karamustafa in the way Udo Kittleman, one of the few scholars to highlight her political position, described her, "...one of the leading artists of the second half of the 20th century in Turkey….not only a critical observer of migratory and globalisation processes, but also a chronicler of Turkish history as a

[142] Gülsün Karamustafa in conversation with Erden Kosova in Christian Krawagna, *Routes*, 2001, quoted in Heinrich, *My Roses,* 38.

phenomenon between enforced Westernization and occidentalist fervour."[143] When I evaluate the *Hapishane Resimleri* series and other works from the 1970s together, it becomes clear that in Karamustafa's works, the "traditional," materialized through textiles, serve as a tool of resistance for women who were marginalized for various reasons in a society that became rapidly modernized/Westernized under the Republic. In these works, traditional clothing and domestic objects function as what Moallem calls an "affirmation of identity": "The memory and sensuality that material objects manifest become expressions of sociality and the politics of affect in encounters between social subjects."[144]

This perspective challenges the labels often attributed to Karamustafa, such as "objective and distanced observer," which arose due to political concerns or accusations of producing kitsch art.[145] Instead, it reveals that Karamustafa deliberately chose her subjects and themes as a critique of Türkiye's internal "othering" practices. Analyzing her works from the 1970s as such also helps us understand her political motivations and particular ways of executing them, which tend to be lost when these works are grouped with her post-1980s pieces under the umbrella of the expression "hybrid culture resulting from rural-to-urban migration." Furthermore, understanding this political motivation provides better insights into her post-1980 works, particularly those centered around the themes of arabesk and kitsch whose political meanings are often overlooked. In other words, when we strip Karamustafa's 1970s works from the frameworks of "hybrid culture" and "observational neutrality," we can also more clearly see the underlying political meanings in her works about arabesk—often simplified under those same frameworks—produced later. Contrary to the interpretation that she explored the arabesk theme

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[143] Udo Kittelmann, "preface to Chronographia: Gülsün Karamustafa," ed. Melanie Roumiguière and Övül Ö. Durmuşoğlu, trans. Jacqueline Todd (Vienna: Vfmk Verlag für moderne Kunst GmbH, 2016), 9, quoted in Özpınar, *Recontextualizing,* 62.
[144] Moallem, *Persian Carpets*, 12.
[145] See Nilgün Özayten, *Gülsün Karamustafa'nın Tanıklıkları.*

"playfully and curiously," a closer analysis reveals her works' deeper connections to the issue of systemically othered ethnic minorities in Türkiye through the tradition-modernity binary.[146]

The analyses presented in this chapter place Karamustafa within an alternative feminist art history that uses the "traditional" as a tool of agency against political pressures. Thus, this chapter situates her in an art historical lineage linking Maide Arel before her and artists like Canan—who engage with tradition in similar ways—after her. Just as Karamustafa has a connection to Arel through their common contact Eyüboğlu, she also has a relatively direct connection to Canan. Although Karamustafa distanced herself from binaries like traditional-modern or East-West in the 1990s with her object and installation works, she later engaged with Orientalism, a topic that gained traction in Türkiye with the spread of postcolonial discourse. Drawing attention to the "self-Orientalism" phenomenon that emerged during late Ottoman and early Republican modernizations, Karamustafa remarked in an interview, "What makes this relationship more bizarre for me is the Ottomans' own interest in the Orientalist style."[147] Her late 1990s and early 2000s works, such as *Fragmanları Fragmanlamak* [Fragmenting Fragments] (1999) (Fig. 2.28) and *Oryantal Fanteziler için Pekiştirme Serileri* [Double Action Series for Oriental Fantasies] (2000) (Fig. 2.29), challenge the Orientalist gaze by directly engaging with and reinterpreting Orientalist paintings. These pieces likely served as a source of inspiration for Canan—known for her feminist and subversive self-Orientalist works—whom I will examine in the next chapter.

[146] See Saybaşılı, *ATLAS-ÇOCUK/LUK*.
[147] Karamustafa, *interview by Erden Kosova,* 36.

Chapter 3: Canan

Subversive Self-Orientalism and Contemporary Miniature in the Contexts of Postcolonialism and the Neo-Ottomanist Turkish Regime

Born in 1970 in İstanbul, Canan Şenol—known by her self-declared mononym "Canan"—is a feminist-activist artist of Kurdish ethnicity.[148] Initially a Business Administration student, she graduated from the Faculty of Painting of Marmara University in 1998. Evident in her education trajectory and ambitious career, Canan has an invincible drive for artistic expression in response to the world surrounding her. Her practice spans diverse media including performance, video, photography, installation, collage, craftwork, and contemporary miniature. Embracing the dynamism of her work, Canan infamously "rejects any conformity to artistic categories."[149] In this chapter, my goal is not to restrict Canan's art into tight frameworks, but to identify some prevailing issues and tropes found in her oeuvre that positions her in this thesis's proposed art historical lineage encompassing the works of Maide Arel and Gülsün Karamustafa. Analyses of Canan's works will prove that, indeed, they deliberately defy, complicate, and destabilize established ways of seeing bound to constructed binary oppositions.

Broadly, Canan grounds her work in the second-wave feminist maxim "the personal is political," exploring how private experiences, particularly those of women, are fundamentally shaped by political, societal, cultural, and religious constraints. Her postcolonial, non-Western feminist artistic lens, defined by her temporal and geographical position, made her especially sensitive to the political and social complexities of the post-1980s Türkiye. During her university

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[148] "Canan had first built her career using her husband's surname (Şenol). However, after her divorce, she decided against using that surname or reverting to her father's name (Şahin), refusing to comply with the patriarchal standards of civil law in Turkey. In the manifesto she published on International Women's Day in 2010, she declared that she would like to be known solely as CANAN and renounced all surnames."
Aware Women Artists, "CANAN (Şenol)," accessed February 17, 2025.
https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/canan-senol/.

[149] Ibid.

years, the heightened public presence of Islamist groups and ideologies following the military coup of 1980 brought the question of Kemalist secularism's long-standing hegemony in the public realm to the surface. This tension led to the tradition-modernity and East-West binaries that formed the basis of the Republic's ideology to manifest themselves now as secularism against religious conservatism.

Since Mustafa Kemal's Westernizing nation-building project that systemically suppressed the "visibility of objects, discourses, and issues that are marked as Islamic"[150] secularism had been an integral part of official state ideology. Among other visible signs of Islamic-Ottoman identity, Kemalist secularism had targeted women's veiling, promoting unveiling as, in Meyda Yeğenoğlu's words, "a key signifier, not only of the emancipation of women from religion and ignorance, but of the modernization of the country."[151] During the political disarray of the post-1980 coup period, Islamists found the opportunity to "challenge (...) the hegemony of secularism (...) through the issue of the headscarf among female university students [individuals in the public domain] in the 1980s."[152] Subject of heated debates between the seculars and Islamist conservatives from then on, "the issue of veiling" became a defining matter in the political landscape of Türkiye: veiling was restricted in the 1980s and eventually banned in public institutions through the "public clothing regulation" after a military memorandum on February 28, 1997. It was not until 2014 that the ban on veiling was lifted by the still-ruling Neo-Ottomanist AK Party [Justice and Development Party], who, as a continuum of the rising Islamist groups since the 1980s, made the issue of veiling a crucial part of its political agenda.[153]

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[150] Meyda Yeğenoğlu, "Clash of Secularity and Religiosity: The Staging of Secularism and Islam Through the Icons of Atatürk and the Veil in Turkey," in *Religion and the State: A Comparative Sociology,* ed. Jacks Barbalet, Adam Possamai, and Bryan S. Turner (Anthem Press, 2011), 229.
[151] Ibid., 235.
[152] Ibid., 229.
[153] Neo-Ottomanism, as adopted by the AK Party under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, refers to a political and cultural orientation that seeks to revive elements of the Ottoman Empire's legacy, particularly in foreign policy, national identity, and religious symbolism. This ideology emphasizes Türkiye's historical continuity with its

In other words, the AK Party began using veiling as a symbol to garner support from conservative segments of society marginalized under Kemalist policies.

This secularism-conservatism tension, converged with struggles for political power, informs many of Canan's works that revolve around images of women—often in relation to the concept of veiling. It can be observed, for example, in her defining work *İbretnüma* [Exemplary] (Fig. 3.1a and 3.1b) which was showcased at the 11th International İstanbul Biennial in 2009 and brought her significant recognition in the feminist art scene in Türkiye.[154] She describes *İbretnüma* as addressing "the contemporary context of women in Turkish society, imbued with tensions that oscillate between secular values and the emergent sensitivities of moral conservatives and institutionalized religion." Inspired by stories Canan heard from her close circle and created using approximately 20 images taken from Ottoman miniatures, *İbretnüma* tells the story of a girl born in Southeastern Türkiye. Canan focuses on the social pressures the girl experiences at home and the identity confusion she later faces in modernized secular environments.[155] In this sense, this piece bears similarities to Karamustafa's works depicting the lives of women migrating from the nation's East to modernized Western provinces.

Ottoman past and positions the country as a leading power in the Muslim world. One of the most prominent examples of the AK Party's neo-Ottomanist approach was the conversion of Hagia Sophia from a museum back into a mosque in 2020. Originally built as a Byzantine cathedral, it was converted into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and later turned into a museum in 1935 under Mustafa Kemal's secular reforms. By reopening it as a mosque, Erdoğan signaled a break from Türkiye's secularist policies and reinforced the idea of reclaiming Ottoman heritage, appealing to both nationalist and Islamist sentiments. Another example in architecture is the Çamlıca Mosque, inaugurated in 2019. Located on İstanbul's Çamlıca Hill, it is the largest mosque in Türkiye and was designed to reflect classical Ottoman architecture, reminiscent of structures built by Mimar Sinan. Its scale and grandeur demonstrate the AK Party's ambition to link Türkiye's modern identity with its imperial past. Beyond architecture, the AK Party's Neo-Ottomanism extends to foreign policy, with an emphasis on influence in former Ottoman territories such as the Balkans, the Middle East, and North Africa. It also manifests in cultural productions, such as historical TV series like *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, which glorify Ottoman conquests and leadership.
For further information, see Eran Sabaner, *Politicizing Ottoman Art: Neo-Ottoman Style in Contemporary Turkish Art* (Undergraduate Thesis, Tufts University, 2019).

[154] The feminist art movement in Türkiye flourished in the 1980s; pioneering figures include Nil Yalter, Nur Koçak, Gülsün Karamustafa, and Şükran Moral.

[155] Azra Tüzünoğlu and Gülce Özkara, *Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art* (İstanbul: Pera Museum, 2020), 33.

A key theoretical framework Canan employs in *İbretnüma* and similar works is Michel Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon.[156] The Panopticon is a centrally planned circular prison with an invisible guard at its center who can observe prisoners at any time, which, for Foucault, symbolizes the disciplinary nature of society, regulating behavior through constant surveillance and control.[157] Canan's works focus on the oppression and violence women experience within regulatory institutions such as family, the state, religion, and society, particularly in the cultural and political context of Türkiye. However, the Panopticon metaphor, with its allusion to "the gaze," also informs another significant body of work by Canan: those engaging with Orientalism. To address questions of power, control, and intervention on a more global scale, Canan often employs the tactic of "self-Orientalism" which refers to the reclamation, reinterpretation, and repurposing of Orientalist tropes and motifs by the very individuals whose cultures have historically been Orientalized.

An early example of this approach from the Arab world is Algerian artist Houria Niati's *No To Torture (After Delacroix's Women of Algiers 1834)* (1982) (Fig. 3.2). Niati dismantles Eugène Delacroix's Orientalist depiction of Algerian women by decontextualizing the scene and the women's bodies, as Martine Natat Antle puts, freeing them "from the veils of Orientalism."[158] Examples of later instances of self-Orientalism by female artists are—besides Karamustafa's turn-of-the-century works—Majida Khattari's *Les Parisiennes* (The Parisians) (2009) (Fig. 3.3) and Halida Boughriet's *Mémoire dans l'oubli* (Memories in Forgetfulness) (2010-2011) (Fig. 3.4a and 3.4b) Khattari and Boughriet's approaches of taking stereotypical Orientalist scenes and—instead of "erasing" their Orientalism like Niati does—recreating them in a way to return

[156] The Panopticon was originally modeled by Jeremy Bentham in 1791.
[157] Pınar Üner Yılmaz, "Canan Şenol'un Yapıtlarından Türkiye'de Toplumsal Cinsiyet Okuması" [A Reading of Gender in Türkiye through Canan Şenol's Works], *Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi Dergis*i 2 (2010).
[158] Martine Natat Antle, "Women Challenging the Norms in the Arab Diaspora: Body Talks in Contemporary Art," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 6, no. 1 (2019): 91.

the Orientalist gaze to its owner, is closer to Canan's self-Orientalism. In fact, they might have influenced Canan's video series *Türk Lokumu* [Turkish Delight] from 2011 (Fig. 3.5a and 3.5b) where she recreates the female subjects of European Orientalist paintings as self-portraits.

However, an early work by Canan demonstrates that she has engaged with self-Orientalism long before the *Türk Lokumu* series. In her installation titled *Odalisque* (1988) (Fig. 3.6), she presents the long-standing subject of the Western gaze, the "odalisque," not visually accurately, but rather conceptually in a highly exaggerated and satirical manner.[159] Naked female figures stand inside a transparent cube, entirely exposed to outsiders and available to be looked at and observed. In doing so, Canan *perpetuates* and, by extension, *exaggerates* the Western gaze on Eastern women, ultimately pointing to its absurdity. This approach can be understood through Hal Foster's concept of "subversive affirmation" that he uses to describe the Dada movement. He refers to this concept with various terms such as "Dada mime," "traumatic mime," "mimetic adaptation," and "exaggeration":

> A key persona of Dada, especially in Zurich and Cologne, is the traumatic mime, and a key strategy of this traumatist is mimetic adaptation, whereby the Dadaist assumes the dire conditions of his time-the armoring of the military body, the fragmenting of the industrial worker, the commodifying of the capitalist subject-and inflates them through hyperbole or "hypertrophy" (another Dadaist term).[160]

Thus, the concept of subversive affirmation describes a resistance tactic in which one ostensibly affirms but ultimately subverts the strategies of one's opponent. Understanding Canan's particular approach to self-Orientalism through the lens of subversive affirmation sheds light on and conceptualizes her many seemingly disparate and perhaps even contradictory works that

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[159] An "odalisque" refers to a female figure, often reclining or lounging, depicted in an exoticized, sensual, and usually passive pose in Western Orientalist painting. The term originates from the Turkish word *odalık*, which means a female attendant or concubine in a Sultan's harem. The odalisque became a major trope in 19th-century Orientalist art, especially in France. Painters such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (*La Grande Odalisque*, 1814) and Eugène Delacroix portrayed odalisques to evoke fantasies of the "Orient"

[160] Hal Foster, "Dada Mime," *Dada* 105 (2003): 169.

address both secularism-conservatism tensions and Orientalism—ranging from videos, installations, performances, and miniatures.

This chapter examines Canan's references to various markers of "tradition" both in the highly polarized political atmosphere of the post-1980 Türkiye and in relation to her position as a Kurdish-Turkish artist in the global scale. In Canan's oeuvre the "traditional" may appear as images of "conservative" women's clothing marked by the use of veil, and sometimes physically as these objects themselves. These references to clothing are aimed to critique the political manipulation of women's appearances in public by the seculars *and* the conservatives. Through their critique of Kemalist secularism, they can also be understood as critiquing the Western Orientalist view of the veil as, in Reina Lewis's words, "a proof of the oppression of Muslim women or…a marker of cultural difference in need of 'toleration.'" However, the rise of Islamism in the political sphere and the subsequent rise of the Neo-Ottomanist AK Party—which identifies visually with Ottoman arts and architecture—to power, combined with Canan's postcolonial feminist lens, provided a particularly fertile ground for Canan to reference tradition through contemporary adaptations of Ottoman miniature art.[161]

Azra Tüzünoğlu and Gülce Özkara, in the preface to Pera Museum's 2020 exhibition "Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art" note,

> Miniature painting survived these changes in the eighteenth century [transformed into an individual rather than collective practice, extended beyond the manuscript format, etc.] but was unable to survive in Iran, Pakistan, India, or Turkey, which was built on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. (...) The miniature disappeared before it could express its subjectivity and unique aspects that would become clearer with change. The one and only condition for the form to survive in

[161] Ottoman miniature art is a traditional form of painting that flourished in the Ottoman Empire, primarily between the 15th and 19th centuries. It was used to illustrate manuscripts, historical chronicles, scientific books, and literary works. These paintings were often collaborative works produced in imperial workshops [nakkaşhane] by skilled artists [nakkaş]. Influenced by Persian and Islamic artistic traditions, Ottoman miniatures played a crucial role in visual storytelling, particularly in court-sponsored historical and religious texts.

> Ottoman nostalgia or in colonial thinking is for it to remain "the same" and "as it was."[162]

The exhibition curators avoid referencing Türkiye's current political context as a curatorial choice to position Canan more broadly with her global counterparts. However, this quote touches upon an important point: Miniature today, in both the AK Party's Ottomanism and through a Western lens, is bound to the past, although with different connotations attached to this quality. Committed to complicating binaries as a feminist, Canan works with the miniature's established connotations in both "Ottoman nostalgia" and "colonial thinking," through her subversive affirmation technique—by using their own tools to critique them. Thus, Canan manages to simultaneously confront the AK Party's attribution of the miniature aesthetic to its conservative political agenda as a symbol of the nation's "glorious *past,*" and the Western or Westernized thought that regards it as a "primitive" art form. Moreover, while working with the confines of both perspectives, Canan also transcends them, engaging as well with the miniature's "theoretical potential."[163] Despite this layered and intentionally obscured approach, Canan's work culminates in a singular motivation: confronting policing and manipulation of women's images through constructed binary oppositions such as East-West, tradition-modernity, and secularism-conservatism.

The field of contemporary miniature as known today was pioneered by the renowned Pakistani-American artist Shahzia Sikander in the early 1990s. Since then, works in this manner proliferated in many countries including Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye.[164]

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[162] Tüzünoğlu and Özkara, *Miniature 2.0*, 19.
[163] Ibid., 11.
[164] Ibid., 79.
Shahzia Sikander was trained in the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, Pakistan, which opened a degree program in contemporary miniature in 1983, under the guidance of the traditionally trained master Bashir Ahmed. Awarded the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 2006, Sikander has been championed for her avant-garde response to the hegemony of Western style painting in Southeast Asia (also seen in Türkiye) through her meticulous use of traditional miniature techniques.

The exhibition "Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art" contextualizes Canan's miniature works within this trend using a transnational framework. However, it is important to note that Canan began engaging with miniatures as a response to specific political events in Türkiye. While I acknowledge her relationship to the global contemporary miniature field, examining her unique context enables me to link her artistic practice to those of Arel and Karamustafa, thus establishing an alternative narrative within the historiography of Turkish modernism. In her exhibition talk, Canan remarks:

> Why did I start to work with miniatures? Mine was really at first to criticize conservatism. I had not encountered miniatures before—as a person who received painting education, I had never encountered it. This type of training was never offered to me. [It is perplexing that] you do not know the culture of the geography you live in. For example, you know Kybele[165], you know [some] things produced in this geography, in Çukurova, but you are completely alien to miniatures. Thus inevitably, as a woman with a modern perspective, I said I can use the miniature style when criticizing conservatism, in 1998. However, I fell in love with miniatures immediately after my first encounter with them.[166]

This quote establishes the context for various facets of Canan's attitude as an artist at once. Her first incentive to use miniatures in her work in 1998 "to criticize conservatism" as a modern woman signals her broader political and religious stance as an individual. Her instinct to use the miniature, which, in her eyes, was an art style embodying conservatism, to critique the very idea it represents foreshadows the subversive affirmation technique that now characterizes her practice. Finally, the mental shift she alludes to regarding her perception of the miniature as an art form informs her attitude toward the modernity-tradition, secularism-conservatism, and East-West binaries. We understand that engaging with miniatures, for Canan, was a catalyst for wanting to push the conversation beyond binary oppositions, onto questioning the construction

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[165] See Canan, *Kybele*, Photography, 45 x 60 cm, 2000. http://www.cananxcanan.com/

[166] Pera Museum, "Çevrimiçi Söyleşi - CANAN ve Filiz Adıgüzel Toprak, Moderatör: Gülce Özkara" [Online Talk - CANAN and Filiz Adıgüzel Toprak, Moderator: Gülce Özkara], *YouTube Video*, 29:57 onward, (translated by author), September 24, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2K0YrlvMmw&list=WL&index=1.

of them.[167] In this sense, the miniature was key in Canan's realization of her voice as an artist, following the end of her university education, in 1998.

Before her sustained commitment to miniatures, however, Canan kept exploring these ideas through a diverse range of media. Her *Ayak Sesleri* [Sound of Footsteps] (Fig. 3.7) installation from 2004 demonstrates that the "conservatism" she aimed to criticize was not defined by something's appearance; for example, pieces of clothing—often only women's clothing— deemed "conservative" in the political discourse. It was the state of being intolerant to anything that does not resonate with one's own worldview. Consisting of 100 headscarves with small bells and locks of hair "from both veiled and unveiled women" attached to their fringes, this piece interacted with the wind to make its statement: as the wind blew, the "footsteps" of women long denied from the public sphere began to be heard.[168] The piece's year, 2004, was marked by the political debates around veiling in universities and government institutions, as AK Party pursued the topic in its campaign. As Canan reflects, *Ayak Sesleri* was a response to women's images as an "instrument" in politics, by both seculars and conservatives, around this time.[169]

Likewise, the photography installation *Emine/Mine* (2007) (Fig. 3.8a and 3.8b) directly and plainly responds to the same issue at a time when debates around the veil were further exacerbated. In this work, two photographs of two different women, one wearing a pardessus and a veil, and the other wearing a blazer, shirt, and pencil skirt set with her hair down, are installed in the two ends of a bus stop billboard. Neither has a face; they both appear merely with their clothing. The veiled and unveiled women's clothing materialize societal perceptions of

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[167] This attitude is also present in *Odalisque,* dated 1998.
[168] Canan, *Ayak Sesleri* [Sound of Footsteps], Installation: 100 pieces, real hair, small bell, head scarf, 2004, http://www.cananxcanan.com/.
[169] Ibid.

conservatism and secularism respectively. An installation view captures two women, arm in arm, with mirroring appearances looking at the billboards. Canan thus communicates that these ideologically separated women coexist in Turkish society, and are simultaneously dehumanized by the "'sexist oppression' that is hidden behind the cover of 'modernism' or 'belief,' by the secular and anti-secular groups."[170] Canan's *Hicap* [Bashfulness] performance (Fig. 3.9a and 3.9b) from the same year, also boldly comments on the rapid changes in women's clothing during Türkiye's Westernization reforms and urges the viewers assess whether there is any difference between "chador, headscarf, ensemble, or underwear" in the eyes of patriarchal politics.[171]

A video installation from around the same time as these three works, *Acaibü'l-mahlukat* [Strange Creature] (2006) (Fig. 3.10a and 3.10b) exemplifies how Canan's feminist intervention to the said binaries manifests in the medium of miniature. The work borrows its title from the Persian cosmographer and geographer Zakariya al-Qazwini's (1203-1283) book *Aja'ib al-Makhluqat* [The Wonders of Creation].[172] The work's miniature aesthetic visually grounds the woman depicted, the "strange creature," in an "Eastern" context, thereby pointing to her "otherness" as both a woman and a colonial subject. The apple tree alludes to the story of creation in Abrahamic religions; however, Canan alters the story by omitting "Adam" from the scene: "the only created being appears to be a woman."[173] The woman stands naked amid the other "creatures" of heaven, among them a beautiful red Simurg[174] flying over her, a snake

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[170] Canan, *Hicap* [Bashfulness], Performance, 5 min, 2007, http://www.cananxcanan.com/.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Canan, *Acaibü'l-mahlukat* [Strange Creature I], Video installation 3'52", loop, 2006, http://www.cananxcanan.com/.
"Images are from the part titled 'The expelling of Adam and Eve from Heaven' of the book Falname, the description of snake and fau has been taken as well as Simurg and some other animals' descriptions have been taken from the part titled 'Prophet Süleyman and the Queen Belkis' of the same book."
[173] Ibid.
[174] Simurg is a mythical bird in Islamic and Persian mythology, found in Sufi and mystical literature, often depicted as a benevolent, wise, and ancient creature.

crawling up the apple tree, a rabbit, a peacock, and a gazelle. As one of these creatures, she casually eats an apple from the tree. Canan remarks that there is no "forbidden fruit" in this scene, nor is there "'the appeal to sin' or 'committing a sin.'" All creatures, including the snake and the woman, simply exist and live according to their nature. Eating the apple is not a sin, but merely sustenance for the woman to live.[175] Canan created another version of this piece in 2014, titled *Acaib'ül Mahlukat II* [Strange Creature II] (Fig. 3.11), where she depicts the moment that the woman reaches the apple.

In both works, Canan disrupts the religious stories of creation that condemn the woman as a being. She targets the story depicting the woman whether as the first sinner encouraging Adam to eat the apple—as in Christian mythology—or as the one having sexual intercourse with Adam, symbolized as "eating the apple," and needing to cover her body out of shame—as in Islamic mythology.[176] Thus, the works' content critiques religious conservatism that shames women's sexuality; and its form as a miniature disrupts both the Neo-Ottomanism of AK Party *and* the Western gaze that sees the East and anything Eastern as an "other."

Therefore, these two seemingly separate groups of works, namely pieces such as *Ayak Sesleri, Emine/Mine,* and *Hicap* and miniatures are based on similar ideas and motivations. We can clearly observe how Canan merges these two types of works in her miniature pieces *Örtünme Töreni* [Veiling Ceremony] (Fig. 3.12) and *Cennet Kapısı* [The Door of Heaven] (Fig. 3.13) from 2011—perhaps the most layered and complex works in Canan's entire oeuvre in terms of their message. These pieces were likely designed by Canan as a series due to their identical dimensions, their use of the same miniature style combining photography, gold, and ink, and the

[175] Canan, *Acaibü'l-mahlukat.*
[176] Canan, *Acaibü'l-mahlukat II* [Strange Creature II], Miniature: ink and photography on paper, 62 x 47,5 cm., 2014, http://www.cananxcanan.com/.

similarity of their subject matter—in both, Canan contrasts veiled and unveiled female figures in imagined, and even absurd scenes.

Örtünme Töreni depicts a moment of transformation: a central female figure, draped in a classical-style white robe exposing part of her chest, stands elevated on a platform framed by classical columns associated with Western and pre-Islamic Anatolian architecture.[177] As this figure visually dominates the scene, flanking her are veiled female figures, reminiscent of those commonly seen in advertisements for conservative clothing brands in Türkiye during the 2000s. These veiled figures, posed confidently and holding headscarves in their hands, reinforce the concept of a "ceremony" encouraging veiling, as indicated in the title. In *Cennet Kapısı,* this visual hierarchy is reversed: two central veiled female figures, also seemingly sourced from conservative dress advertisements of the time, enter a paradisiacal garden, where women do not veil. They also stand within a structure, this time following mosque architecture complete with domes and minarets, before a "door" that opens into a paradise garden resembling the one in *Acaibü'l-mahlukat.* Additionally, other female figures with angelic wings are depicted within the garden—one of whom is depicted partially unclothed—inviting the veiled figures into heaven.

Both works were made in response to the AK Party's increasingly open assertion of its Islamist policies in the early 2010s. Despite its current strong emphasis on Neo-Ottomanism and Islamist principles, the AK Party initially avoided directly addressing the contentious issue of the veil due to the country's highly polarized political atmosphere in the early 2000s. However, beginning in 2008, the party launched initiatives aimed at lifting the veil ban in various spheres of public life. By 2010, the veil ban in universities was successfully overturned, marking a

[177] "Pre-Islamic Anatolian architecture" refers to the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman architectural traditions found in Anatolia (modern-day Türkiye). For example, classical columns like the ones depicted in *Örtünme Töreni* can be seen in the Temple of Artemis & Library of Celsus in Efes [Ephesus], built in 6th century BCE, some of which are now housed in the British Museum.

pivotal shift in the country's socio-political landscape. From then on, much like the secular state that had sought to shape national identity through the image of unveiled women, the AK Party aimed to redefine national identity by promoting a new, more conservative image for the Turkish woman. The AK Party's use of the veil as a means of political capital and the momentum its Islamist policies gained during this time serve as the starting point for the hierarchical structures observed in these works.

In *Örtünme Töreni* and *Cennet Kapısı,* Canan addresses the political Islamic ideology increasingly embodied by the AK Party regime after 2010 by seemingly participating in, but ultimately subverting it. Stylistically, by visually grounding these works in an Ottoman aesthetic, Canan provides herself with the opportunity to critique the Neo-Ottomanist identity of the AK Party. In terms of content, the veiled figures' confident presence while orchestrating a ceremony where a semi-nude female figure undergoes veiling in *Örtünme Töreni,* and veiled women's entry into paradise as a reward for their conservative earthly lives in *Cennet Kapısı*, appear to endorse the AK Party regime's Islamist rhetoric. However, Canan's satirical visual language in both compositions functions as a tool to critique the politicization of religion enforced by the AK Party.

On the other hand, this political critique also opens up these works to an Orientalist interpretation. In this sense, the miniature aesthetic also facilitates a critique of the broader binary between East and West, and thus, Orientalism itself. While the presence of veiled figures is dominant in *Örtünme Töreni,* the figure of the unveiled woman, symbolizing Westernization and secularism, is positioned on the platform, appearing visually superior to the veiled figures. Therefore, Canan also seemingly participates in an Orientalist narrative; in other words self-Orientalizes, by portraying the women as willingly and naïvely submitting to inferior roles

in society in exchange for perceived superiority in the afterlife. It is important to note Canan's self-Orientalist approach here once again, which is not a mere reversal or amplification of clichés but rather a subversion and complication through satire and absurdity. In *Örtünme Töreni* and *Cennet Kapısı,* she employs the tactic of subversive affirmation to both critique the AK Party's political Islamic ideology and dismantle the Orientalist or Western feminist interpretations that could arise from her work.

Eran Sabaner, in his thesis titled *Politicizing Ottoman Art: Neo-Ottoman Style in Contemporary Turkish Art,* analyzes similar approaches that mediate between critiquing political Islam and subverting Orientalism in the works of diasporic queer artists from Türkiye, such as Ferzan Özpetek, Kutluğ Ataman, Sinan Tuncay, and Sarp Kerem Yavuz.[178] For example, New York-based artist Sinan Tuncay's miniature-style collage *Prayer* (2015) (Fig. 3.14) disrupts the gender binary that is strictly imposed by AK Party's Islamist anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric by alluding to the forgotten queer history of the Ottoman Empire, recorded visually in a number of Ottoman miniatures depicting homosexual intercourse (Fig. 3.15a and 3.15b). In *Prayer,* a group of men praying in congregation are depicted (men and women pray in separate spaces in mosques). As they are performing the *selam*—the last action to end the prayer—by turning their heads first to their right then to their left, two of them in the bottom left corner instead turn their heads to each other. With this simple act, Tuncay aims to create an erotic tension between the two male figures.

Similarly, in *Bridal Bath* (Fig. 3.16) from the same year, women depicted in an Ottoman/Turkish hamam (bath) all gaze at the fully nude "odalisque" in the center. The Western male gaze is replaced by the Eastern female gaze in an attempt to complicate constructed binary oppositions, subverting not only the AK Party's Neo-Ottomanism, but also the Orientalist gaze.

[178] Eran Sabaner, *Politicizing Ottoman Art,* 2.

Tuncay, too achieves this subversion through affirmation—he uses the visual tools of both Islamism/Neo-Ottomanism and Orientalism to critique them. This queer intervention to complicating binaries parallels Canan's feminist approach in works like *Örtünme Töreni and Cennet Kapısı*. Additionally, both artists' Dada attitude can also be observed in their usage of collage instead of solely traditional techniques in their miniatures.

Canan's relationship with miniatures takes a related, but different shape during the time of Tuncay's pieces, however. With the lifting of the veiling ban in 2014; in other words, the resolution of the "issue of veiling" on the surface, it seems that the AK Party's perpetuation of the conservatism-secularism binary through images of women slowly began to lose force in Canan's eyes. In fact, since the mid-2010s onward, Türkiye has witnessed increasingly more inclusive strategies by all political parties regarding the veil, as veiled women began to assert their place in public life, gaining more political power. We can see how this fleshes out today in the election campaigns of the Kemalist opposition party, CHP [Republican People's Party], which specifically foreground the concept of *helalleşme* [forgiving each other] regarding the veil issue.[179] This can also be observed in the CHP-ruled İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality's recent advertisements that never fail to include veiled women.[180] In a recent article, Hale Albayrak interprets this political strategy as "Hijabwashing," like "Pinkwashing" used to describe the tactic aimed at promoting a cause insincerely and solely in order to be perceived as progressive. Albayrak argues that while Turkish political actors seem to be more inclusive of veiled women in

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[179] Hale Albayrak, "Başörtülü Bacı ile Vitrin Süsü Arasında: Hijabwashing Nedir?" (Between Headscarved Sister and Window Dressing: What is Hijabwashing?), *Arsperas*, February 1, 2025, https://www.arsperas.com/2025/02/01/basortulu-baci-ile-vitrin-susu-arasinda-hijabwashing-nedir/
The CHP is Türkiye's oldest political party, founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923. It played a crucial role in establishing the modern Turkish Republic and governed the country as a single-party regime until 1950. Today defined as a center-left, social-democratic party, the CHP was founded on the principles of Kemalism, emphasizing secularism and nationalism.

[180] İZ Medya, "BU ÜLKEDE KADIN OLMAK ZOR..." (IT IS HARD TO BE A WOMAN IN THIS COUNTRY), *YouTube Video*, December 27, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYqH7FB9AgE.

their campaigns, systemic exclusion, exploitation, or othering of veiled women persist in the realm of employment policies, institutional practices, and social relations.[181] Canan's exclusion of narratives of women's veiling in her works since 2014 may be the result of this shift in politics, which weakened the strict opposition of secularism and conservatism's materializations through women's clothing.

It is, however, also due to her long-time interest in the visual, expressive, and theoretical potential of the miniature. When she says "I fell in love with miniatures," she refers to the symbols, the colors, or the myriad tools for storytelling that characterize miniatures.[182] The worlds of jinns (spirits, usually demonic), angels, and mythological animals to which she was introduced through miniatures had captivated Canan early on, but she only began engaging with these themes extensively in the mid-2010s. *Gece* [Night] (2014) (Fig. 3.17) is an early example where she depicts herself in a dream, lying down next to a jinn and surrounded by other mystical creatures in a paradise-like setting. Jinns, often described in Islamic mythology as otherworldly creatures that may harm humans, becomes a partner to Canan in the miniature. Having sexual relationships with jinns is often interpreted in Islam as being possessed due to a sin one commits; therefore, *Gece* refers back to Canan's questioning of the woman as a sinner in *Acaibü'l-mahlukat.*[183]

In the following years, Canan also extended the medium of miniature into installations, depicting concepts such as heaven, purgatory, and creation. *Cennet* [Heaven] (2007) (Fig. 3.18) is a kinetic installation constructed with a tulle curtain, sequins, pieces of cloth, bells, and light. The cylinder made with tulle slowly rotates, filtering the light through the heaven scene depicted

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[181] Albayrak, *Başörtülü Bacı.*
[182] Pera Museum, *Çevrimiçi Söyleşi*, 30:46.
[183] For more information on jinns in relation to sexual intercourse, see Pierre Lory, "Sexual Intercourse Between Humans and Demons in the Islamic Tradition," in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 49–64.

on it. The shadows of the figures and other elements reflect on the surrounding walls, moving slowly and merging into each other with the structure's motion. In this heaven scene, women, men, and intersex human figures—all depicted in the miniature style—appear among other creatures, against the seven colors of the rainbow. The moving shadows, constantly overlapping these figures onto each other, coupled with the viewer's own shadows, further complicate the viewer's perception of them—gender becomes fluid, constantly changing in the scene.[184] Although in a drastically different form, Canan, like Tuncay, utilizes miniature's aesthetic tools and content to dismantle binaries—no longer by recreating them but by directly looking beyond them.

Canan's most recent project, the *Falname* series (2020) (Fig. 3.19) also exemplifies this shift in her attitude, and her heightened interest in symbolisms found in miniatures during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Consisting of 71 miniature paintings that borrow their subjects from Islamic mythology and Canan's personal experiences, the series constitute images of a tarot deck.[185] It was named after the fortune telling books found in classical Ottoman and Persian literatures. Crafted by renowned calligraphers and illuminators, sometimes including miniatures, fine copies of Falname would be presented to Sultans and statesmen. Canan most likely adapted the Turkish-Persian Falname (Fig. 3.20) prepared by Kalender Pasha and presented to Sultan Ahmed I (1603-1617), which is housed in the Topkapı Palace Museum Library.[186] One of the *Balık* [Pisces] cards (Fig. 3.21) from her series resembles the page about Prophet Jonah in Kalender

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[184] Canan, *Cennet* [Heaven], Sculpture: tulle curtain, sequins, rope, cloth, bell, light, motor, 2017. http://www.cananxcanan.com/.

[185] "Fal" means "fortune" in Turkish. The series of paintings were also reproduced as a limited-edition tarot deck, used in Canan's performances of fortune-telling to visitors.
Also see the video: 1+1, "CANAN ile tarot sanatı ve 2021'in falı: Şahmeranın şifası, geyiğin sezgisi" [The art of tarot with CANAN and the fortune of 2021: The healing of Shahmaran, the intuition of the deer], *YouTube Video*, December 31, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rSNvMM0tho&list=WL&index=2.

[186] Mustafa İsmail Uzun, "Falname" [The Book of Fortune], in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi 12. Cilt* (1995), 141.

Pasha's Falname (Fig. 3.22). In the *Falname* series Canan completely distances herself from miniature's connotations in the political context. Instead, by engaging with miniature as a medium, she aims to generate the viewer's ability to foretell, to prophesize by interpreting symbols. She gives the example of how people, sometimes unreasonably, feared the outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic in her exhibition talk for "Miniature 2.0," emphasizing how humans' interpretations of situations are bound to their mindsets.[187] As a response, she designed the tarot cards to have both a negative and positive meaning, which would be revealed according to their viewers' current state of emotions.

When asked about her engagements with tradition in the same talk, Canan said "I never aimed to turn the traditional into the modern (...) [My usage of the miniature] is not reviving a past style in contemporary art, [I am using] something that is already present, present in our lives, present in our houses, present in our objects, our patterns, everywhere in life."[188] With this approach, she deliberately defies the ideologically imposed binary of tradition and modernity that has restricted Türkiye's visual and material culture to temporal boundaries since the foundation of the Republic. Just as Arel and Karamustafa, Canan realizes that this binary—as well as its origins and extensions—is a construct, and women are instrumentalized in the construction of it. Like the artists before her, this awareness pushes her to complicate such binaries using the means of her own time.

[187] Pera Museum, *Çevrimiçi Söyleşi,* 43:45 onward.
[188] Ibid., 31:03 - 32:15.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced a feminist art historical trajectory in Türkiye through the works of Maide Arel, Gülsün Karamustafa, and Canan—three artists who, across different generations, critically engage with the binary of tradition and modernity that has structured Turkish modernism since the founding of the Republic. By situating their practices within the shifting political and ideological contexts of their respective eras, this study has revealed how each artist mobilizes the female figure as both subject and agent to interrogate, subvert, and reimagine this binary construct.

The first chapter explored how Maide Arel's Cubist depictions of Anatolian women reframed state-sanctioned nationalist iconography by emphasizing female autonomy, offering an early model of feminist resistance within Turkish modernism. The second chapter examined Gülsün Karamustafa's use of textile and narrative to foreground the lived experiences of migrant women in Türkiye, constructing a feminist aesthetic rooted in resistance through affective memory. The final chapter analyzed Canan's self-Orientalist engagement with Ottoman visual culture, demonstrating how her work critiques contemporary politicization of women's bodies while transforming "tradition" into a subversive feminist language.

Together, these case studies expose the limitations of reductive frameworks such as "synthesis," which have long dominated the historiography of Turkish modernism. By applying feminist standpoint theory and situating these artists within the broader history of women's movements in Türkiye, this thesis offers a new interpretive framework—one that foregrounds how women artists have strategically engaged with "tradition" as a site for feminist critique. In doing so, it offers an alternative to the monolithic narrative of Turkish modernism—an alternative art history shaped through feminist dissent, negotiation, and creativity.

This thesis contributes to the literature on multiple levels. First, it breaks the pervasive focus on male artists found in studies of Turkish modernism's engagement with tradition by centering women artists instead. Second, it introduces a critical and novel vocabulary for interpreting how "tradition" functions as an ideologically loaded construct within modern and contemporary art, both in Türkiye and in other non-Western contexts. In doing so, this study aligns with broader deconstructivist currents in transnational art historical scholarship while remaining attentive to Türkiye's specific political and cultural dynamics. Most significantly, it carves out space for an alternative art history—one that is feminist, historically grounded, and politically engaged—offering tools to rethink how artistic practice can critically operate within structures of power, and how the female figure becomes a central site of contestation and reimagination in that process.

While this thesis has focused on one historically marginalized group in Türkiye—women—there remains much to be explored in future scholarship regarding how artists from ethnic minority communities have engaged with local traditions in the face of nation-state homogenization. Such inquiries could uncover different strategies of resistance and adaptation, further complicating the dominant narratives of modernism in Türkiye. As the country stands on the threshold of a potential political transformation after more than two decades of rule under the AK Party, one can only anticipate that new and more complex artistic responses will emerge in relation to state-imposed binaries. Understanding how these future interventions intersect with gender, ethnicity, religion, and class will be crucial in reframing Turkish modernism as part of an inclusive and critically engaged global modernist discourse.

Figures

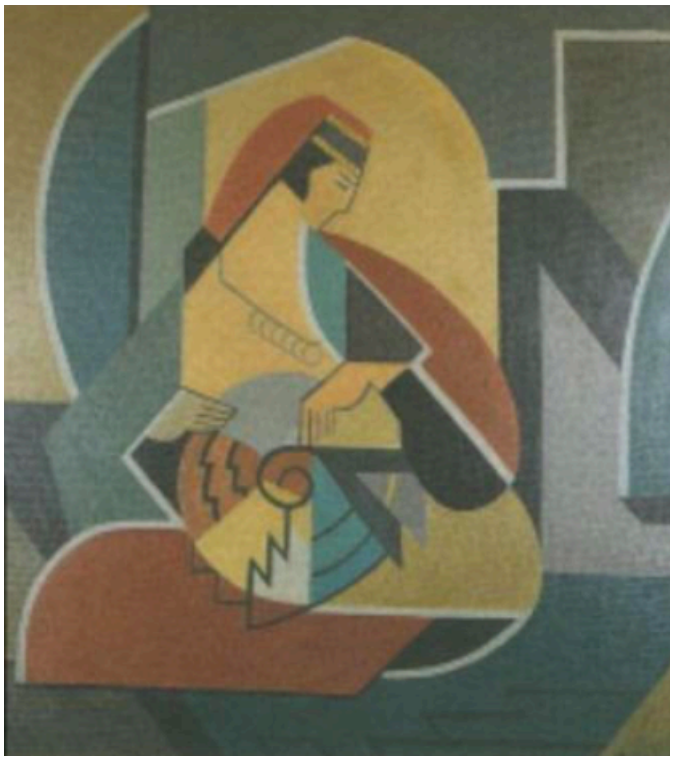

Fig. 1.1: Maide Arel,“Sepetçi Kız” [Basket Girl], Oil on Panel, 1956, In *Maide Arel Resim Sergisi* (catalog) 12, İstanbul: Garanti Sanat Galerisi, 1998.

Fig. 1.2: Maide Arel, *Çiftetelli*, Oil on Canvas, 1961.

Fig. 1.3: Maide Arel, *Türk Hamamı* [Turkish Bath], Oil on Canvas, 1969.

Fig. 1. 4: Maide Arel, *Anne ve Çocuk* [Mother and Child], Oil on Canvas, 1968.

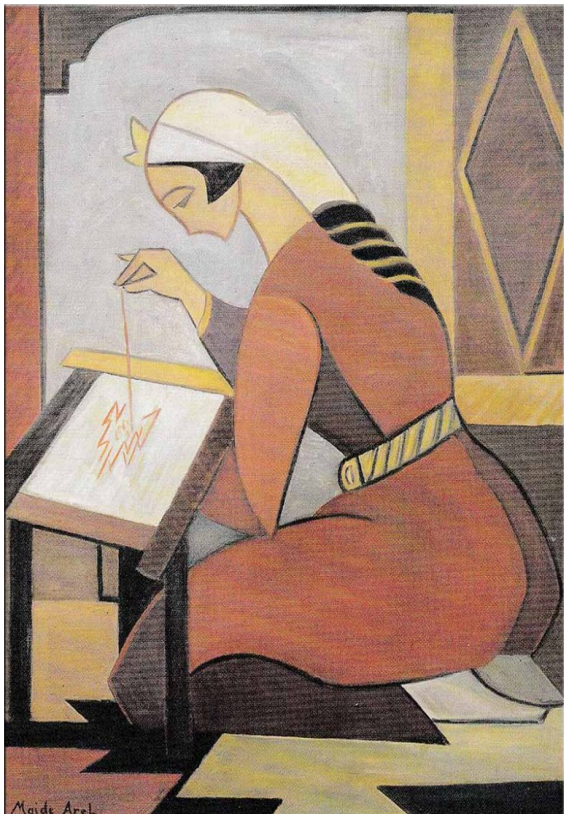

Fig. 1.5: Maide Arel, *Gergef İşleyen Kadın* [Woman Embroidering], Oil on Canvas.

Fig. 1.6: Maide Arel, *Untitled*, Oil on Carton.

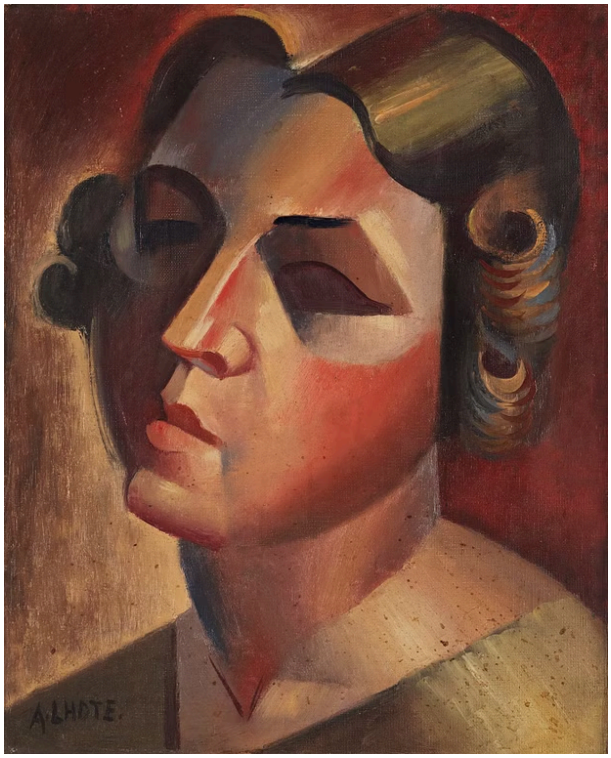

Fig. 1.7: André Lhote, *Portrait of Marguerite,* Oil on Canvas, 1918-20.

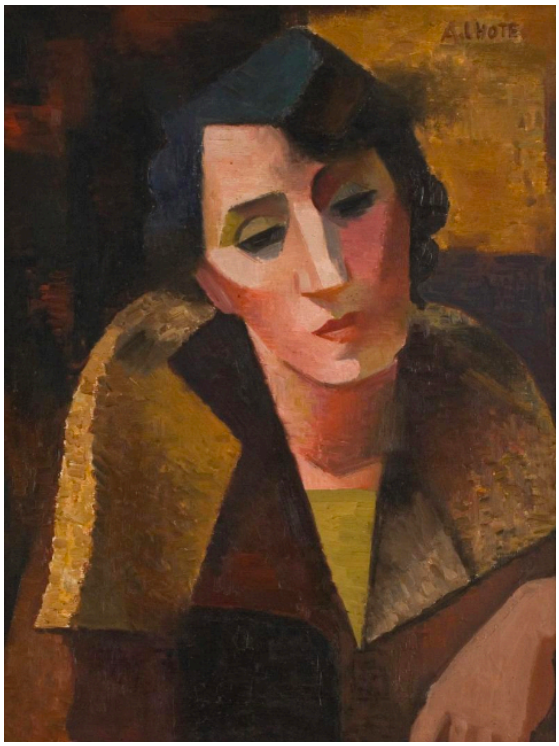

Fig. 1.8: André Lhote, *Head of a Woman,* Oil on Canvas, 1921.

Fig. 1.9: Maide Arel, *Untitled,* Oil on Canvas.

Fig. 1.10: André Lhote, *L'église* [The Church], Oil on Canvas, 1921.

Fig. 1.11: Maide Arel “Mücahit Kız” isimli işinin önünde [Maide Arel in front of her work “Mücahit Kız”] Identifier: TAKAF220001, SALT Research Archives, https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/41093.

Fig. 1.12: Photograph from the opening of "Maide Arel" exhibition, Mine Art Gallery, 1988. Identifier: MSG030008. SALT Research Archives, https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/213490.

Fig. 1.13: Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* [The Women of Avignon], 1907, MoMA.

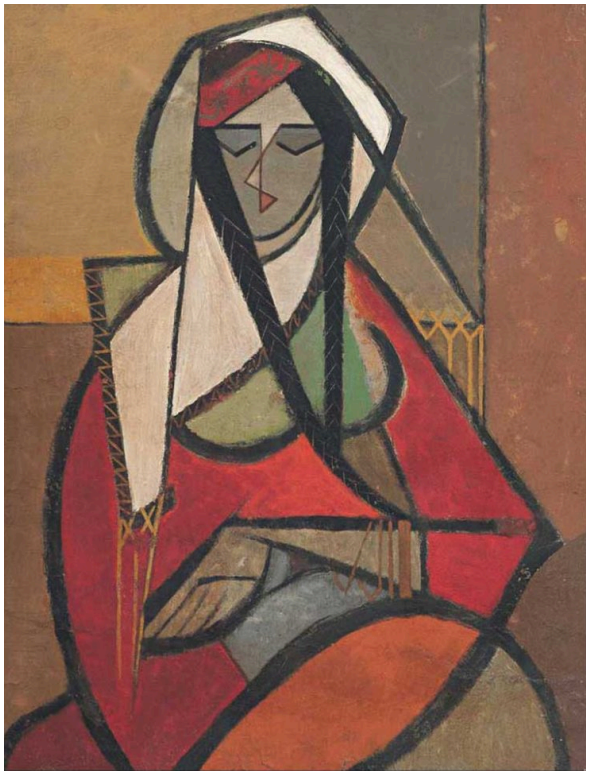

Fig. 1.14: Maide Arel, *Kadın* [Woman], Oil on Canvas.

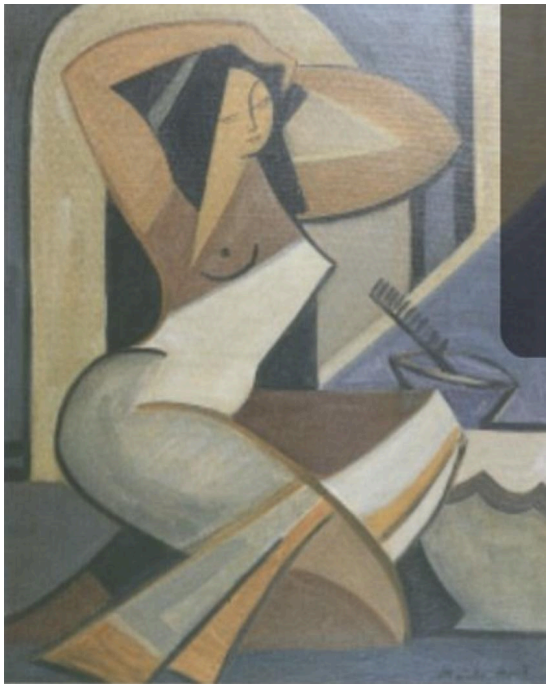

Fig. 1.15: Maide Arel, Türk Hamamı [Turkish Bath], Oil on Panel, 1961, In *Maide Arel Resim Sergisi* (catalog) 12, İstanbul: Garanti Sanat Galerisi, 1998.

Fig. 1.16: Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, *Anne ve Çocuk* [Mother and Child], Oil on Canvas.

Fig. 1.17: Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, *Anne ve Çocuk* [Mother and Child], Oil on Canvas, 1973.

Fig. 1.18: Nurullah Berk, *Ütü Yapan Kadın* [Woman Ironing], Oil on Canvas, 1950.

Fig. 1.19: Nurullah Berk, *Ütü Yapan Kadın* [Woman Ironing], Oil on Canvas, 1977.

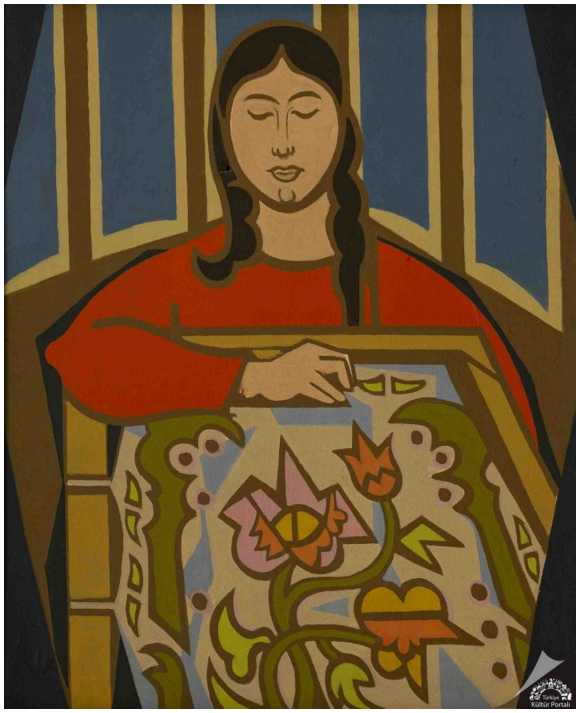

Fig. 1.20: Nurullah Berk, *Gergef İşleyen Kadın* [Woman Embroidering], Oil on Canvas, 1977.

Fig. 2.1: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Hapishane Resimleri 1* [Prison Paintings 1], Mixed Media on Paper, 65 x 50 cm, 1978.

Fig. 2.2: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Hapishane Resimleri 11* [Prison Paintings 11], Mixed Media on Paper, 60 x 45 cm, 1972.

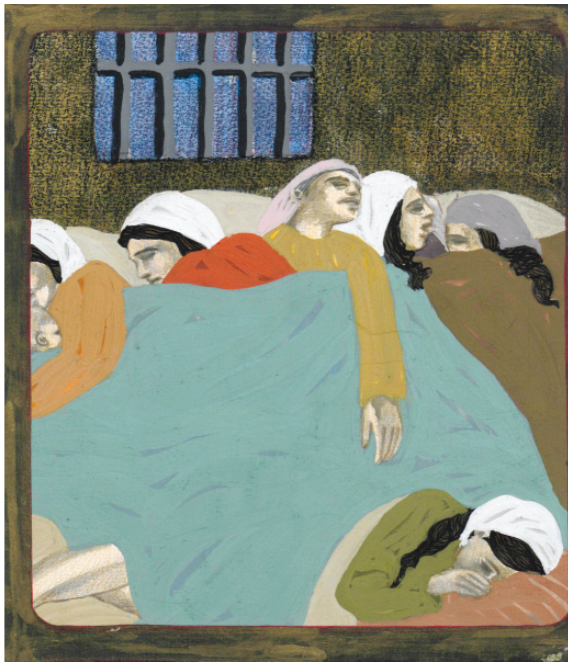

Fig. 2.3: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Hapishane Resimleri 3* [Prison Paintings 3], Mixed Media on Paper, 38 x 35 cm, 1972.

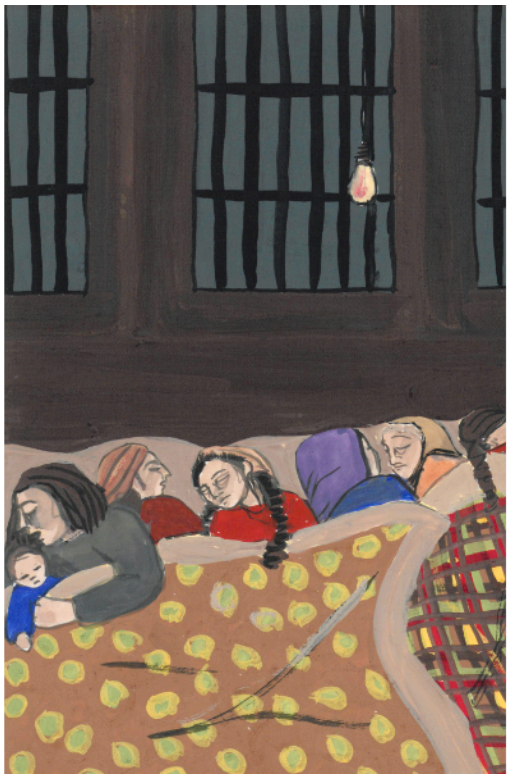

Fig. 2.4: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Hapishane Resimleri 4* [Prison Paintings 4], Mixed Media on Paper, 43 x 34 cm, 1972.

Fig. 2.5: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Hapishane Resimleri 5* [Prison Paintings 5], Mixed Media on Paper, 48 x 36 cm, 1972.

Fig. 2.6: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Hapishane Resimleri 6* [Prison Paintings 6], Mixed Media on Paper, 56 x 52,5 cm, 1972.

Fig. 2.7: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Müebbedin Ranzası* [Bed of the Lifetime Prisoner], 1978.

Fig. 2.8: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Kıymatlı Gelin* [Precious Bride], 1975.

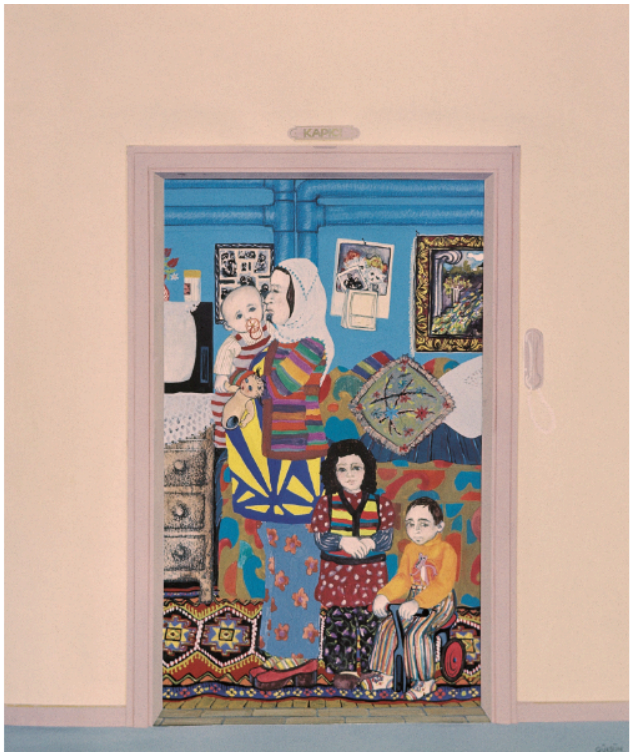

Fig. 2.9: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Kapıcı Dairesi* [Flat of the Concierge], 1976.

Fig. 2.10: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Örtülü Medeniyet* [The Lacemaker], 1976.

Fig. 2.11: *Gülsün Karamustafa İzmit Kadın Hapishanesi'nde (sağdan ikinci)* (Gülsün Karamustafa in İzmit Women's Prison (second from the right), 1971, SALT Research, Gülsün Karamustafa Archive.

Fig 2.12: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Kuryeler* [Courrier], detail from installation view. La Centrale, Montreal, 1991.

Fig. 2.13: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Mistik Nakliye* [Mystic Transport], 1992.

Fig. 2.14: Image from Süha Arın, *Kula'da Üç Gün* [Three Days in Kula], 1983, 15:55.

Fig. 2.15: Maide Arel, *Anne ve Çocuk* [Mother and Child], Oil on Canvas, 1968.

Fig. 2.16: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Star Wars*, 1982.

Fig. 2.17: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Balkon* [Balcony], 1982.

Fig. 2.18: Gülsün Karamustafa, *İstanbul Palas* [İstanbul Palace], 1982.

Fig 2.19: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Panterella* [Pantherella], 1983.

Fig. 2.20: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Çifte İsalar ve de Yavru Ceylan* [Double Jesus and the Baby Antelope], 1984.

Fig. 2.21: *A leopard killing a gazelle, an old man,* Folio from a religious text, Iran or India, 23.7 x 15.3 cm, Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, Late 17th-century, Israel Museum.

Fig. 2.22: Image from Bir Yudum Sevgi [A Sip of Love], 1984, SALT Research, Gülsün Karamustafa Archive.

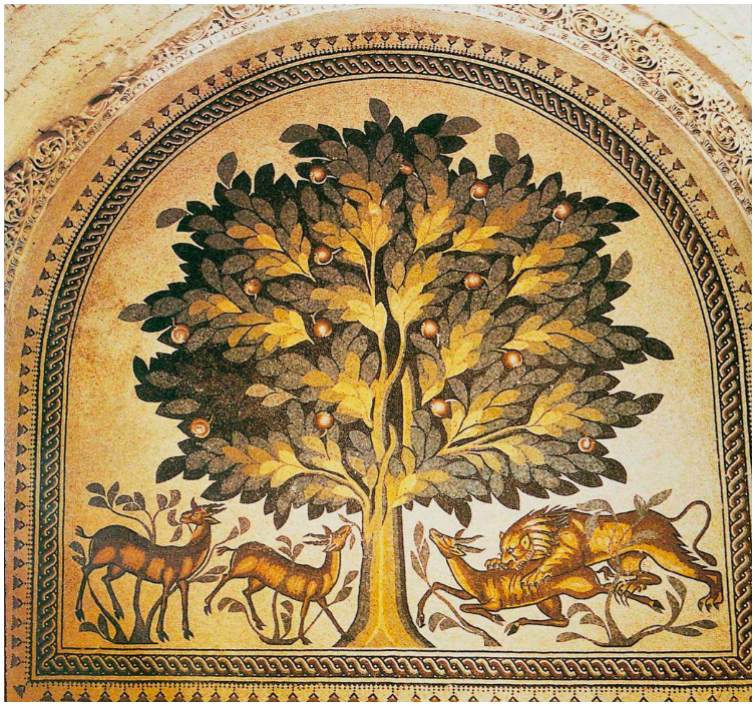

Fig. 2.23: The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic from Khirbat al-Mafjar.

Fig. 2.24: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Yarabbi Sen Bilirsin* [My God You Know It Better Than Me], 1981.

Fig. 2.25: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Dertler Benim Olsun* [Let Sorrows Wash Over Me], 1981.

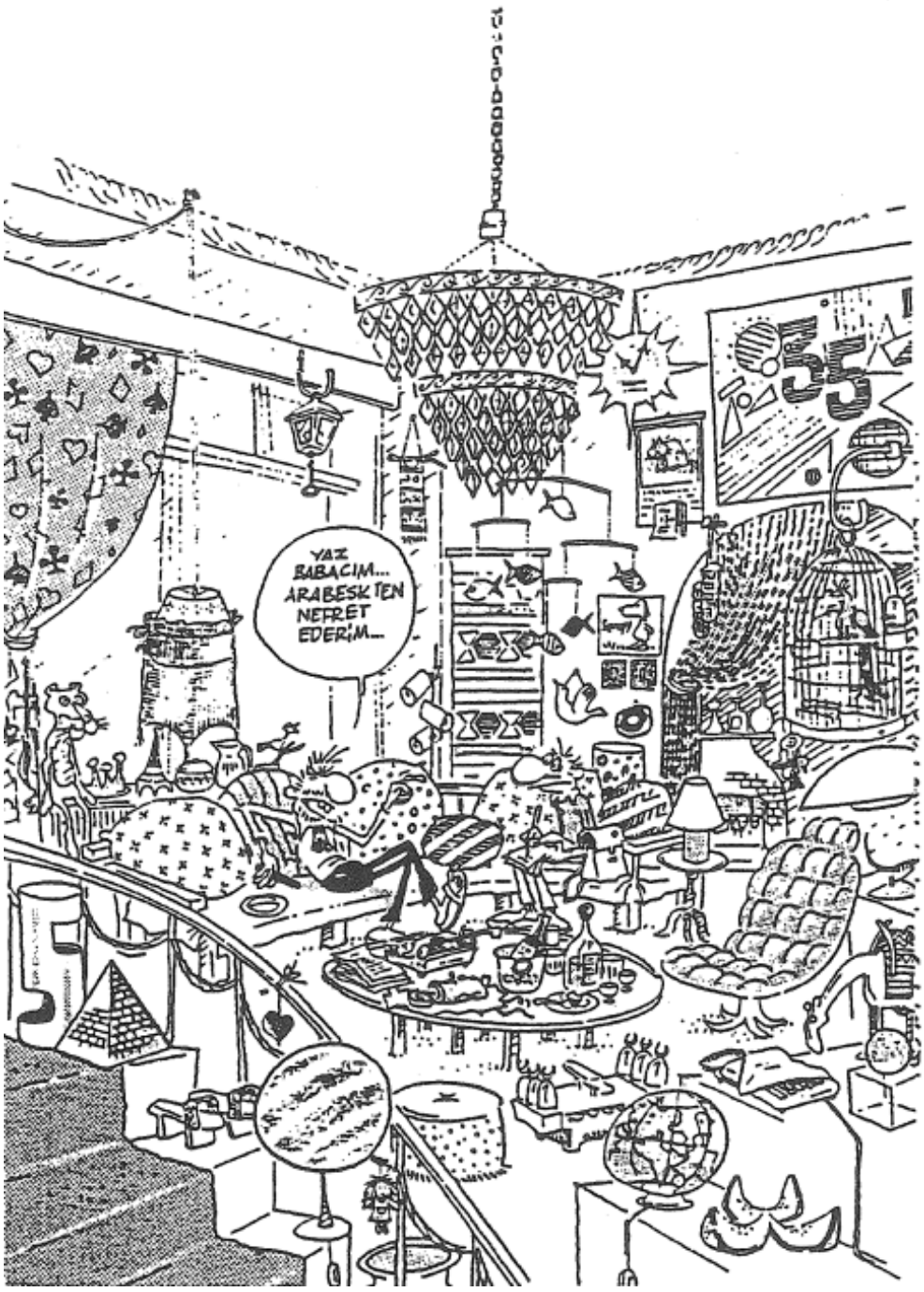

Fig: 2.26: "I hate arabesk" caricature mentioned in Ayşe Öncü, "İstanbullular ve Ötekiler: Küresellik Çağında Orta Sınıf Olmanın Kültürel Kosmolojisi" [İstanbulites and Others: The Cultural Cosmology of Being Middle Class in the Age of Globalization], in *İstanbul: Küresel ile Yerel Arasında*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları 2000), 129.

Fig. 2.27: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Postpozisyon* [Postposition], 2001.

Fig. 2.28: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Fragmanları/Fragmanlamak* [Fragmenting/Fragments], 1999.

Fig. 2.29: Gülsün Karamustafa, *Oryantal Fanteziler için Pekiştirme Serileri* [Double Action Series for Oriental Fantasies], 2000.

Fig. 3.1a: Canan, scene from *İbretnüma* [Exemplary], video animation, 27'30", 2009.

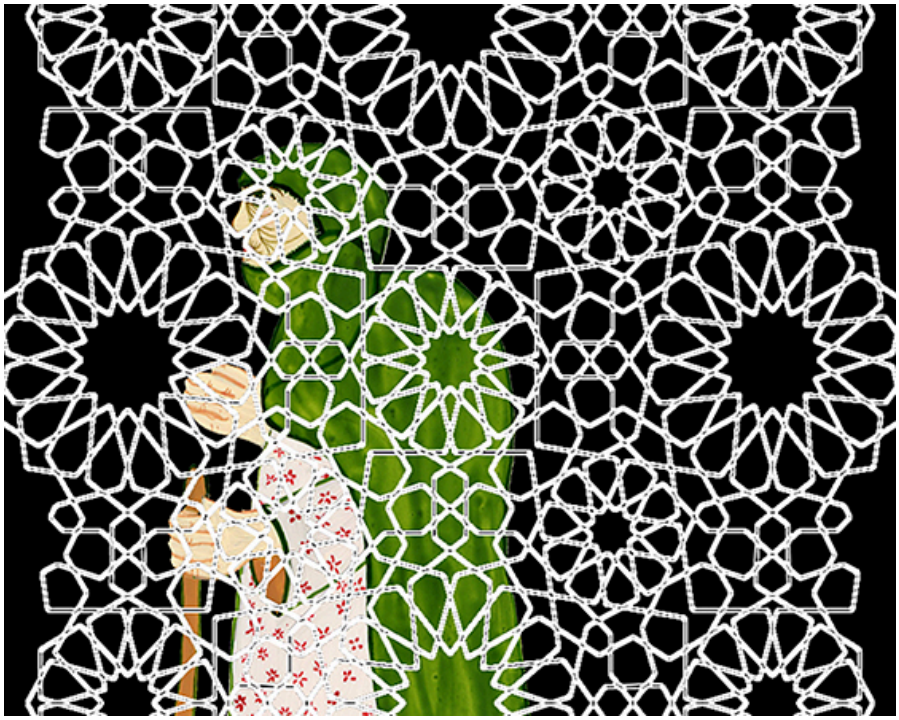

Fig. 3.1b: Canan, scene from *İbretnüma* [Exemplary], video animation, 27'30", 2009.

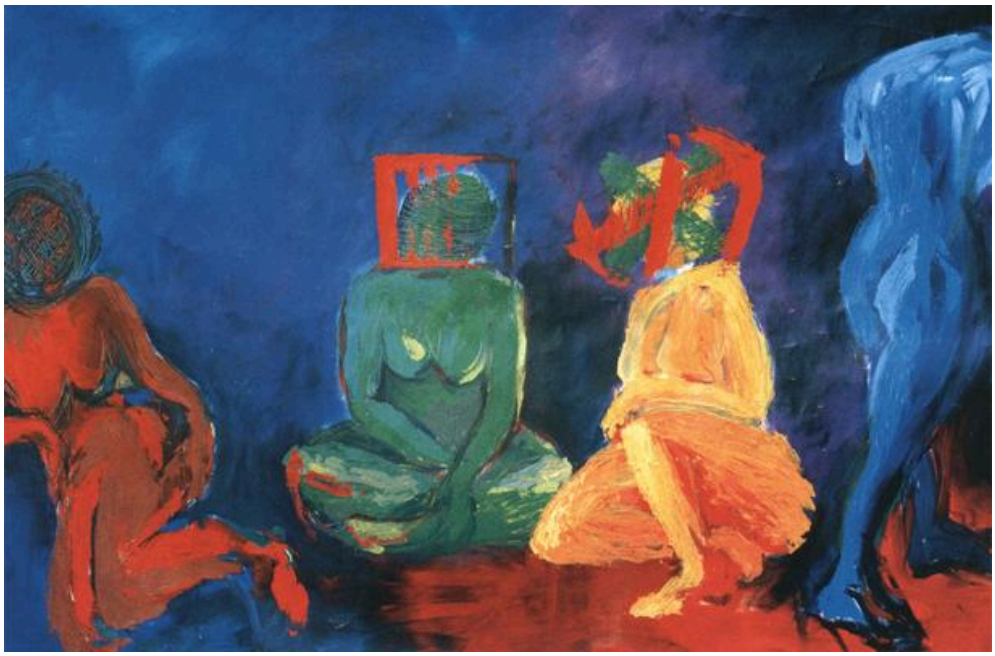

Fig. 3.2: Houria Niati, *No To Torture (After Delacroix's Women of Algiers 1834),* 270 x 188 cm, 1982.

Fig. 3.3: Majida Khattari, *Les Parisiennes* [The Parisians], 2009.

Fig. 3.4a: Halida Boughriet, *Mémoire dans l'oubli 2* [Memories in Forgetfulness], 2010-2011.

Fig. 3.4b: Halida Boughriet, *Mémoire dans l'oubli 4* [Memories in Forgetfulness], 2010-2011.

Fig. 3.5a: Canan, *Türk Lokumu* [Turkish Delight], 5 channel video installation, 2011.

Fig. 3.5b: Canan, *Türk Lokumu* [Turkish Delight], 5 channel video installation, 2011.

Fig. 3.6: Canan, *Odalisque,* photography installation, mixed media (photography on transparent film, aluminum, nylon) 220 x 170 x 150 cm, 1998.

Fig. 3.7: Canan, *Ayak Sesleri* [Sound of Footsteps], installation, 100 pieces, real hair, small bell, headscarf, 2004.

Fig. 3.8a: Canan, *Emine/Mine,* photography installation, 70 x 100 cm, 2007.

Fig. 3.8b: Canan, *Emine/Mine,* photography installation, 70 x 100 cm, 2007.

Fig. 3.9a: Canan, *Hicap* [Bashfulness]**,** performance, 5 min, 2007.

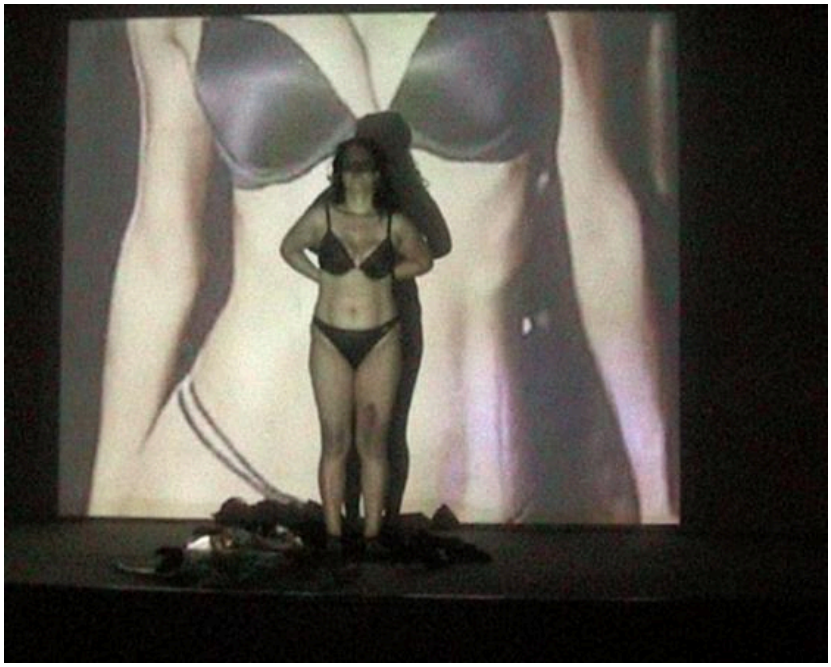

Fig. 3.9b: Canan, *Hicap* [Bashfulness]**,** performance, 5 min, 2007.

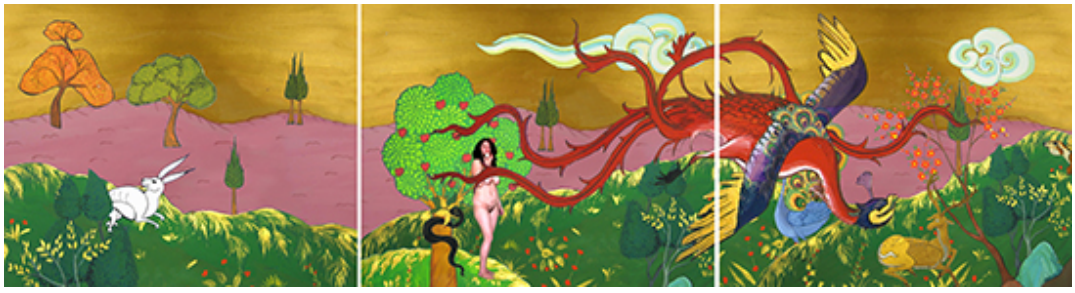

Fig. 3.10a: Canan, scene from *Acaibü'l-mahlukat* [Strange Creature I]**,** video installation 3'52", loop, 2006.

Fig. 3.10b: Canan, scene from *Acaibü'l-mahlukat* [Strange Creature I]**,** video installation 3'52", loop, 2006.

Fig. 3.11: Canan, *Acaibü'l-mahlukat II* [Strange Creature II], miniature: ink and photography on paper, 62 x 47,5 cm., 2014.

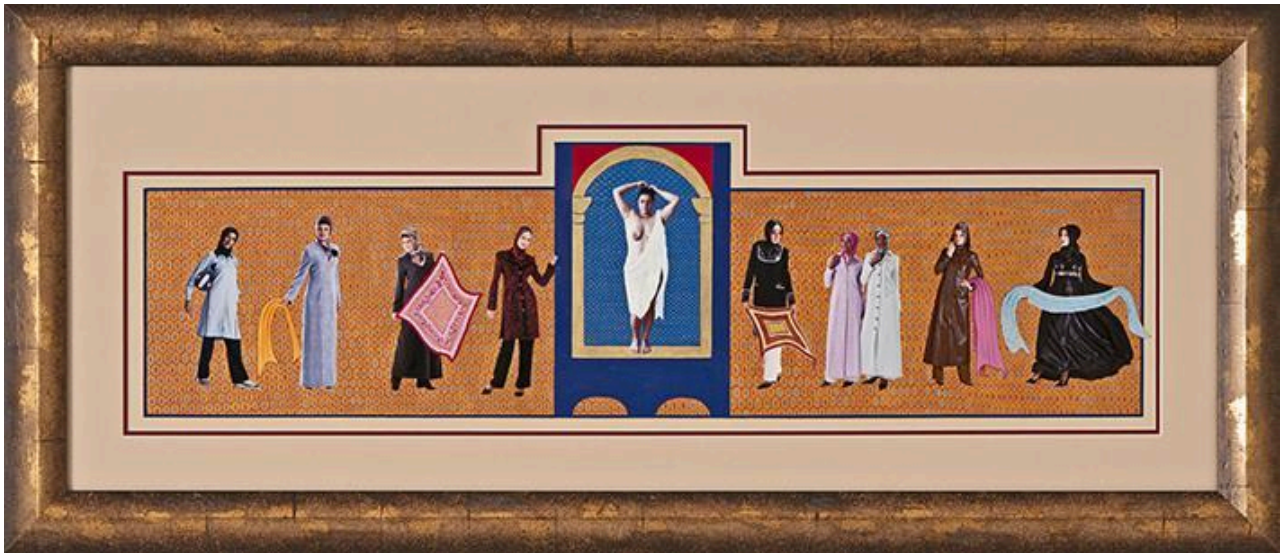

Fig. 3.12: Canan, *Örtünme Töreni* [Veiling Ceremony], miniature, Photography, gold and ink on special paper, 33 x 99 cm, 2011.

Fig. 3.13: Canan, *Cennet Kapısı* [The Door of Heaven], miniature Photography, gold and ink on special paper, 33 x 96 cm, 2011.

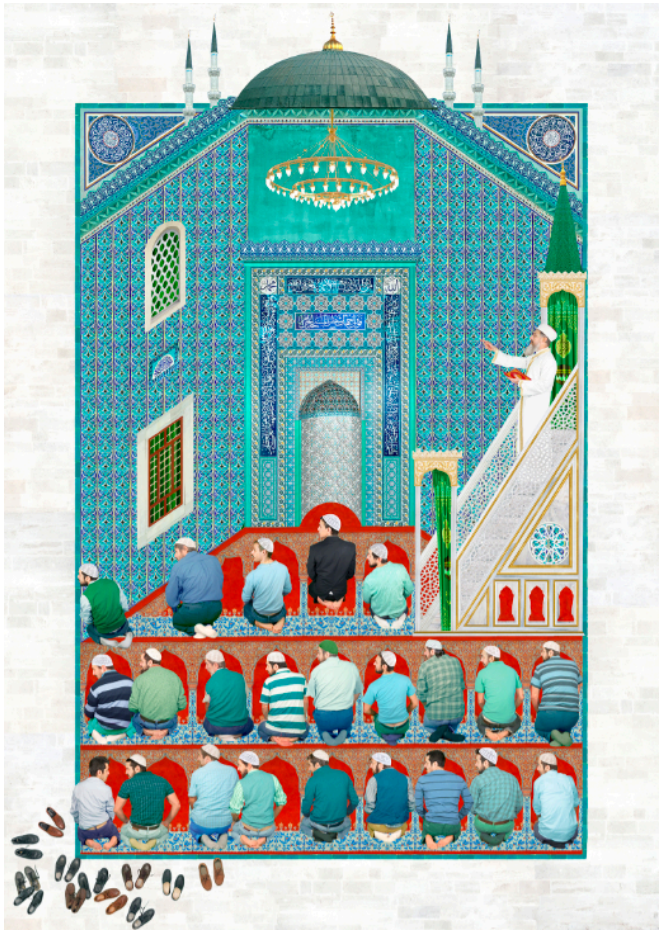

Fig. 3.14: Sinan Tuncay, *Prayer,* 2015.

Fig. 3.15a: Erotic scene ascribed to Abdullah Bukhari, probably İstanbul, 1743. Photo courtesy Sotheby's.

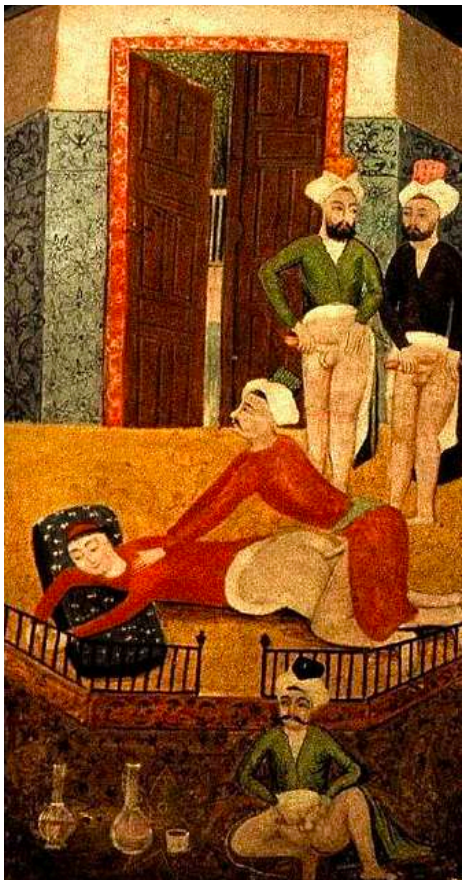

Fig. 3.15b: An Ottoman miniature from the book *Sawaqub al-Manaquib* depicting a young male being used by a group of men for anal sex.

Fig. 3.16: Sinan Tuncay, *Bridal Bath*, 2015.

Fig. 3.17: Canan, *Gece* [Night], miniature: photography, gold and ink on special paper, 35 x 60 cm, 2014.

Fig. 3.18: Canan, *Cennet* [Heaven], sculpture: tulle curtain, sequins, rope, cloth, bell, light, motor, 2017.

Fig. 3.19: Canan, *Falname*, miniature: ink, gouache, pencil on special paper, 24 x 16,5 cm., installation view, 2020.

Fig. 3.20: Two pages from the *Kitâb-ı Falnâme* prepared by Kalender Pasha for Sultan Ahmed I, one of the most valuable Falnames with miniature. (Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Hazine, nr. 1703, vr. 1b, 38b).

Fig. 3.21: Canan, *Balık* [Pisces] in Falname, miniature: ink, gouache, pencil on special paper, 24 x 16,5 cm., 2020.

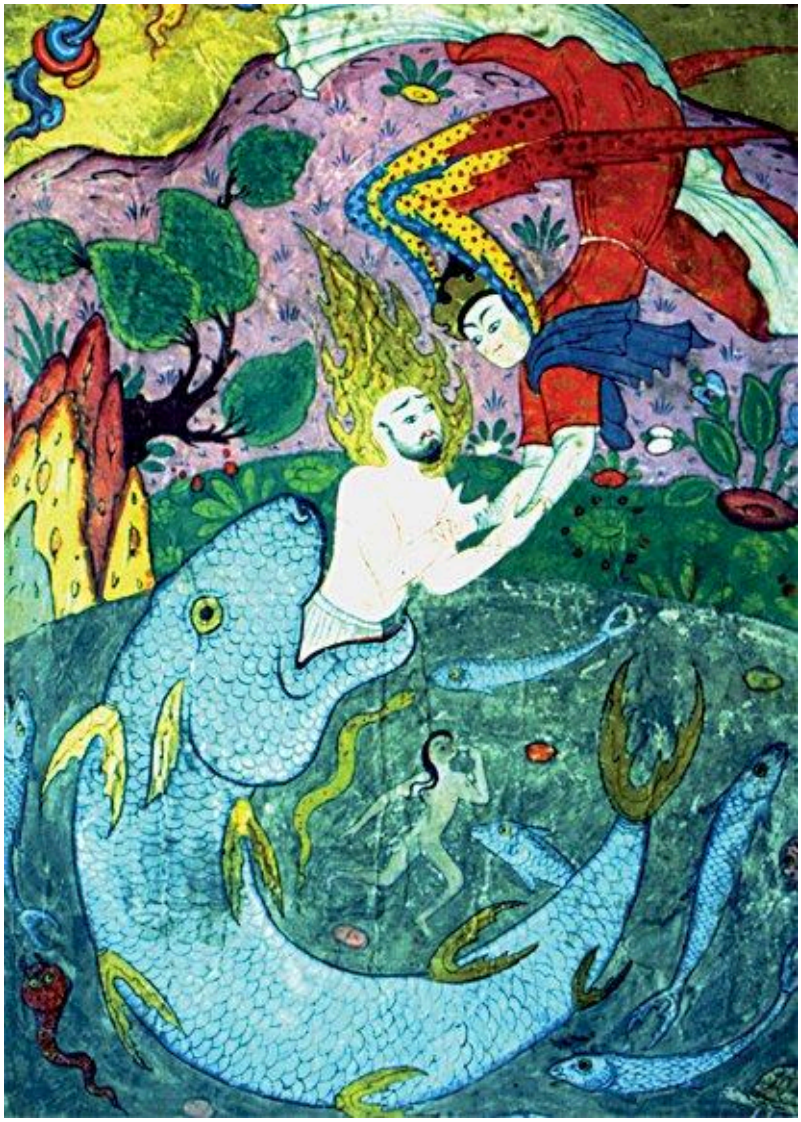

Fig. 3.22: Miniature about Prophet Jonah from the *Kitâb-ı Falnâme* prepared by Kalender Pasha for Sultan Ahmed I. (Topkapı Palace Museum Library, Hazine, nr. 1703, vr. 35b).

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Appendix

Modernization and Cultural Politics from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic

The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Türkiye was not simply an administrative change; it represented a transformation in national identity, culture, and the arts. This transformation was driven by the ideology of modernization through adoption of Western European ideals manifested in a wide range of reforms across legal, educational, economic, and artistic spheres. This appendix outlines the historical phases of modernization during the late-Ottoman and early-Republican eras with an emphasis on cultural and artistic restructuring as a nation-building strategy—to contextualize the tension between tradition and modernity that forms the basis of this thesis. It also provides context for the post-1950s period to highlight how the cultural ideals set during the modernization period transformed throughout decades, generating new responses to the tradition-modernity binary.[189]

I. Late-Ottoman Modernization (1718-1922)

- The Ottoman Empire's encounter with Western modernity began during the Lale Devri [Tulip Era] (1718–1730), a period marked by the introduction of the printing press, the first embassies in Europe, and decorative influences from Rococo art. This era initiated the first cultural and diplomatic engagements with the West.
- With the Tanzimat Fermanı [Tanzimat Edict] (1839), these engagements became systematized. A series of legal, military, and administrative reforms aimed to restructure the Ottoman state along Western lines. Significantly, Western-style art education was

[189] The information presented in this Appendix was derived from both Fatma Acun, "Osmanlı'dan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne: Değişme ve Süreklilik" [From the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey: Change and Continuity], *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 155–167, and Hatice Türkyılmaz, *Çağdaş Türk Resminde Gelenek Sorunsalı* [The Problematic of Tradition in Turkish Contemporary Art] (Master's thesis, Hacettepe University, 2013), 10-50.

introduced into military academies. As early as 1835, military students were sent to Europe to study painting and brought back techniques such as oil painting and linear perspective.

- Sultan Abdülhamid II's reign (1876–1909) saw a shift toward Pan-Islamism, although modernization continued in infrastructure, education, and culture. The establishment of Sanâyi-i Nefîse Mektebi Âlîsi [Imperial School of Fine Arts] (1883) reflected an ongoing commitment to artistic modernization despite political conservatism.

II. Early-Republican Modernization (1923–1950)

- With the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, modernization became a deliberate strategy for national survival and global parity. Republic's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) viewed Westernization not only as a cultural goal but also as a political necessity to resist colonial subjugation, as Britain and France in particular were planning military campaigns to divide the weak and declining Empire's territories following the World War I (1914-1918).
- Key reforms during the first years of the Republic included:
    - The abolition of the Saltanat [Sultanate] (1922) and the Hilâfet [Caliphate] (1924)
    - Adoption of the Medenî Kanun [Civil Code] (1926) based on Swiss Code
    - The Harf Devrimi [Alphabet Reform] (1928) transitioning from Arabic to Latin script
    - 1928 Constitutional Amendment: the phrase "The religion of the state is Islam" was removed from the Constitution.

  - The founding of the Türk Dil Kurumu [Turkish Language Institution] (1932) and the Türk Tarih Kurumu [Turkish History Institution] (1931)
  - The translation of the Arabic call to prayer [ezan] into Turkish (1932)
  - The founding of the Türk Dil Kurumu [Turkish Language Institution] (1932) and the Türk Tarih Kurumu [Turkish History Institution] (1931)
  - 1937 Constitutional Amendment: The principle of laiklik [secularism] was formally and explicitly inserted into the Constitution as one of the fundamental characteristics of the state (along with Republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, and revolutionism).
- These reforms aimed to break with the Ottoman-Islamic legacy and construct a secular national identity aligned with Western European modernity.

III. Art and Cultural Policy as Tools of Modernization

- Art during the early-Republican era became an ideological instrument for modernization. Movements like Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism were particularly found suitable for the forward-looking and structural principles of the Republic.
- State-sponsored initiatives included:
  - İnkılap Sergileri [Revolution Exhibitions] (1933–1937)
  - The establishment of Resim ve Heykel Müzesi [Painting and Sculpture Museum] (1937)
  - Yurt Gezileri [Provincial Art Tours] (1938-1946)

- These projects encouraged representations of Republican leaders and the new capital Ankara as well as farmers, villagers, and rural Anatolian populations as national symbols to aid the nation-building process.
- Republican ideology also sought national identity in the artistic heritage of pre-historic Anatolian civilizations dating back to Sumerians.
- The works by artist Maide Arel, discussed in Chapter I, correspond to this context.

IV. Post-1950: Multi-Party Period and Shifting Cultural Paradigms

- The Demokrat Parti's [Democratic Party] electoral victory in 1950 marked a retreat from top-down cultural engineering, which allowed for individual responses to the tradition-modernity binary.
- This period saw a shift from the state-sanctioned Cubism to more diverse styles, both within abstraction and figuration.
- Approaches to tradition began to include experimentation with Ottoman-Islamic arts such as calligraphy and miniature painting previously rejected by the Republican ideology.

V. The 1960s

- Following the 1960 Askerî Müdahalesi [1960 Military Coup] and the liberal 1961 Anayasası [1961 Constitution] artists increasingly embraced figuration to express themes such as: rural to urban migration, gecekondu (shantytown) life, and working-class struggles.
- The works by artist Gülsün Karamustafa, discussed in Chapter II, correspond to this context.

VI. The 1980s and Beyond

- From the 1980s onward, postmodern and postcolonial theories encouraged artists to further question the singular narrative of modernity and the tradition-modernity binary set by the Republican ideology.
- The Neo-Ottomanist politics of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Parti) [Justice and Development Party], which has remained in power since 2002, have generated new responses to Ottoman artistic heritage.
- The works by artist Canan, discussed in Chapter III, correspond to this context.