

SCENE OF TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN SPACE, POLITICS,
NEGOTIATIONS, COMMUNALITIES, AND INTERACTIONS: THE CASE OF
INDEPENDENT THEATERS IN ANKARA AND İSTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

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The subsidized theater groups have dominated the theatrical field in Turkey from the early republican period. However, from the late 1950s, private/non-subsidized theatrical groups have also begun to develop an institutional structure. Early in the the 1990s and more so in the 2000s, the country's shifting socioeconomic conditions led to a divergent and pluralized theatrical landscape. Most theater practitioners nowadays produce plays for smaller audiences in unconventional theatrical venues, offering their audiences a variety of artistic languages, different means of expression, as well as novel spatiality and encounters. Although these theater companies seem to to play a minor role in daily life, particularly in Istanbul and Ankara, it is worthwhile to examine them from a sociological perspective, through a wide range of layers including the rising number of independent theater groups, their members, the production styles, their position in urban life, and their connectedness to social phenomena. Accordingly, this study examines how the theater industry has changed since the 2010s, as well as the individuals who make up these independent theater companies, the plays they produce, and the venues in which they do it. In this framework, how independent theaters founded in Istanbul and Ankara since the mid-

2000s have turned into a new experience area, and new public space for local urban audiences will be discussed. The dissertation also attempts to comprehend how such theater groups contributed to the development of new political meaning and a new understanding of urban culture.

Keywords: Independent Theaters, Occupational Sociology, Politics, Urban Culture, İstanbul-Ankara

ÖZ

KENTSEL MEKANIN DEĞİŞİMİ, SİYASETLER, MÜZAKERELER, ORTAKLIKLAR VE ETKİLEŞİMLER SAHNESİ: İSTANBUL VE ANKARA'DAKİ BAĞIMSIZ TİYATRO GRUPLARI ÖRNEĞİ

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Türkiye’de tiyatro bir gösterim sanatı olarak erken cumhuriyet döneminden itibaren ödenekli tiyatroların hakimiyeti ile varlığını sürdürürken, özellikle 1950’lerin sonlarından itibaren özel/ödeneksiz tiyatrolar da alana dahil olmaya ve kurumsal bir yapı kazanmaya başlar. Ülkenin değişen sosyo-ekonomik iklimi, 1990’ların başında ve daha da çok 2000lerde farklılaşan, çoğullaşan bir tiyatral alan ortaya çıkarır. Bu alan çoğunlukla konvansiyonel tiyatro mekanları dışında az sayıda seyirciye ekonomik sınırlılıklar içinde üretim yapan, yeni mekansallıklara ve karşılaşmalara imkan sunan, farklı sahne dilleri ve çoğul anlatım biçimleri ortaya koyan topluluklardan oluşmaktadır. Gündelik hayat pratikleri içinde küçük bir yer işgal ettiği düşünülse de, özellikle İstanbul ve Ankara’da sayıları gün geçtikçe artan bağımsız tiyatro toplulukları, üyeleri, üretim biçimleri, şehir hayatı ve toplumsal olaylarla kurdukları ilişki gibi pek çok katman üzerinden sosyolojik bir bakışla incelenmeye değer bir görünüm arz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, 2010’lu yıllardan itibaren dönüşüm gösteren tiyatro alanında üretim yapan bağımsız tiyatro gruplarını oluşturan tiyatro üreticilerini, yapımları ve üretim yapılan mekanları ve bu grupların sosyal ve ekonomik alanla olan bağlantılarını incelemeyi amaçlar. Bununla birlikte,

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Bağımsız Tiyatrolar, Meslek Sosyolojisi, Politika, Kent Kùltürü, İstanbul – Ankara.

To my father whom I miss so much,

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKM	Atatürk Cultural Center
AST	Ankara Art Theatre
BGST	Boğaziçi Performing Arts Company
DT	State Theatres
DTCF	Ankara University Faculty of Language, History and Geography
IATP	İstanbul Amateur Theater Platform
İKSV	İstanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts
MKM	Mesopotamia Cultural Center
ŞT	İstanbul City Theaters
TAL	Theater Research Laboratory
TÜSAK	Turkish Art Council
TUIK	Turkish Statistical Institute
VAT	Value Added Tax

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After the crisis and weakening of representative democracy, a multi-sided, wider sense of civil society has re-appeared as an ultimate condition for a democratic environment which is expected to fit into the fluid, complex, and intersecting social world. So, it seems much more appropriate to define politics beyond its representative liberal democratic meaning, as the right to have a say in everyday politics and living together with differences in a plurality. In line with this, art becomes a new way of renouncing and challenging the traditional ways of doing politics. Thus, the collective spirit emerging out of the long-lasting relationship between art and politics is combined and interacts with the unintended, unexpected features of new paths of doing politics. As the definition of the “political” changes, the theatrical productions with their producers, space of production, content and forms are also effected by that change. During this process, public space turned into a concrete presentation, which is occupied, appropriated by those who had no right to be a part of it before. Contingent directly or indirectly on that transformation, theatrical performances, with their usage of the space, bodily existence and expression within that space, have a potential to trigger a kind of collective impact on audiences.

In Turkey’s case, as in many historical instances where the main channels of opposition and self-expression were obscured, theater has turned into a source for affirming people’s claim about their existence, choices, daily life problems, and resistance to political pressure. Recently established independent theaters offer a new fragmented publicness within smaller spaces by means of the theatrical productions inspired by various artistic disciplines. From that perspective, they seem to enable a new kind of representative practice of democratic polity.

In his article “Performance and Democracy”, Nicholas Ridout claims that although it can no longer “restore the mythic community of the Athenian *polis*”, the theater might at least “constitute a temporary space of public appearance, representation, and participation” and express to some extent a kind of “democratic resistance” against the threat of “post democratic future” (Ridout in Davis: 2008, 19). According to Ridout, “Here politics is made to reappear, not by means of a “political theatre” that proposes agendas or even critiques specific injustices, but by means of a politics *of* theatre, in which the form’s entanglement with the constitution of political relations is exposed” (Ridout in Davis: 2008, 19).

Thus, the main purpose of the current study is to understand the social role and function of the independent theater experience and its actors after the 2010s in the metropolitan city İstanbul and the capital city Ankara. The role of independent theaters in the creation of a new socio-political meaning as a new regenerator of city culture also constitutes a crucial point of investigation in the thesis. From that perspective, it aims to pursue continuities with and detachments from the conventional way of performing in theater venues in Turkey and to understand how they are a part of today’s sociality. The limits of independence of these theater institutions is also investigated through self-perceptions of those involved in this field one way or another. During the field process, I searched for possible answers to the questions below:

- How are the actors involved in the theatrical field, what were their motivations and intentions? What kinds of organizational practices did they use? What are the features of the theatrical community they are involved in?
- To what extent did the ownership of this new type of theater, so called independent theater in alternative venues, contribute to artistic, expressive independence?
- Does the flourishing of independent theatrical area provide a new democratic public space?
- How do the novelties in type of stage, stage design, audience-actor relationship, way of acting, and dramaturgy serve to keep alive the invisible bond between today’s actors and audience?

- Do today's theater spaces serve to enlarge what is public in one way or another? Where can the term "political" be positioned in these new ways of theater production?
- How do the impacts of globalized capital reflect on this emerging site of representation? Does it constitute an obstacle or a facilitator for artistic expression?
- Can the performances occurring within these recently established artistic places open a channel for new ways of doing politics? Or at least can they occupy a place in the reformulation of the term politics today?
- Or can they only enable the creation of small closed communities mostly in gentrified areas?
- How can the spatial existence of those groups be evaluated within today's fragmented sociality? Within Turkey's turbulent political atmosphere?
- What does being a part of independent theaters, doing theater in an independent company mean for actors, directors, dramaturges, writers?

Despite different namings, such as alternative stages, alternative groups, independent groups, black box stages, private companies, those formations seem to open up channels for creation of new meanings in those turbulent times. Those theater groups performing their productions within different unconventional spaces and with multiple spatiality/forms seem to be forming a public space where a kind of social interaction and social contact occur between different groups and individuals.

From the 1990s onwards, with the initial attempts to establish such stages and companies, many definitions have been used, including private/non-funded theater, other theater (1990s), alternative theater (2000s), alternative stage (beginning of 2010s), and lastly independent theater (late 2010s). Throughout these years, many initiatives have emerged under those names to come together and act in unison in order to gain an official status and defend their legal rights vis-à-vis state institutions (Öteki Tiyatro/ Alternatif Tiyatrolar Platformu/ Alternatif Sahneler/ Bağımsız Tiyatrolar Birliği/ Kadıköy Tiyatrolar Platformu / Tiyatro Kooperatifi/ Tiyatromuz Yaşasın İnsiyatifi).

The term “alternative” gained currency in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s, but its impact continued until late 1990s. It designates a loose movement of individuals, groups and venues that grew around a set of theatrical ideas opposed to the mainstream. Baz Kershaw describes it as follows:

Alternative theatre was created (initially, at least) outside established theatre buildings. Hence, every aspect of performance had to be constructed in contexts which were largely foreign to theatre, thus making it easier to perceive the ideological nature of particular projects. Next, the audiences for alternative theatre did not come ready-made. They, too, had to be constructed, to become part of the different constituencies which alternative theatre chose to address, thus providing another way of highlighting the ideological nature of the movement’s overall project. Finally, alternative theatre grew out of and augmented the major oppositional cultural formations of the period (Kershaw: 1992, 17).

“Alternative” is a much more contested term in Turkey’s case because of the ambiguity about the definition of the “mainstream” and the subsidizing dynamics. There are also many stageless groups performing outside the conventional ways of acting, with new texts etc. So “alternative stage” could limit the scope of the current study. So, in this study the nomenclature “independent” will be employed due to its recent use. “Independent” theater does not indicate solely a specific type of performance or a specific spatial form (alternative stage), nor does it include a clear-cut assertion such as being against the “conventional”. Therefore, the usage of this term will cover the multiplicity of cases included in the fieldwork. Besides, this usage seems beneficial to question the relationship with capital (private enterprises, sponsorship etc.), state, city and audience, together with form and content of the performance.

Considered as a performative art and a literary branch, the theater has found a place in the works of many pioneering sociologists as a field of sociological study since the 1950s. Sociologist Georges Simmel wrote essays on the construction of the roles of actors.¹ Also, Pierre Bourdieu’s significant study *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* includes the examination of the theater audience with its class

¹ Lawton, Philip, Georg Simmel: Toward the Philosophy of the Actor (January 10, 2017). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2897044> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2897044>
Lawton, Philip, Georg Simmel: The Actor and Reality (February 11, 2017). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2915587> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2915587>

origins. Besides these general works, theater has found a special place in the sociology of art with the writings of Georges Gurvitch and Jean Duvignaud.

Russian-born French sociologist George Gurvitch first used the term “sociology of theater” in 1956 in his article “Sociologie du théâtre”, in *Les Lettres Nouvelles*, n° 35. He claimed that it is necessary to demonstrate the affinity between society and theater and to treat theater as a social phenomenon. In his own words, “It is undeniable that it represents a social situation, a social gathering; it constitutes a certain social framework in its own right, within which the actors are integral parts. We go to the theater in order to re-experience certain social situations, a social gathering; it constitutes a certain social framework within which actors are integral parts.”²

In Turkey’s case, independent theaters did not function and are not only functioning as a mirror, which reflects socio-economic transformations and continuities. They should also be studied as a social phenomenon as Gurvitch argued, with its whole elements (spatial existence/non-existence, audience, member, productions, artistic and economic network involved in etc.). To be more specific, Gurvitch defines possible sub-branches of sociology of theater as the study of;

- Theater public or audience
- Theatrical performance within a specific social framework
- Actors as a social group, both as companies and more widely as an occupation
- Relationship between the content of the plays and the actual social system, which can in turn highlight the social function of theater in a specific type of society.

Jean Duvignaud is another sociologist whose works established a direct bond with theater (from both a performative and literary aspect) from the sociological perspective. Jean Duvignaud also argued in his “Sociologie du théâtre”³ written in 1965 that turbulent times, the times of anomie open new channels of artistic creativity and this boom is mostly seen in literary and performative aspects of theatrical production.

² Gurvitch, George. (1973) “The sociology of theater” in E& T Burns, *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, Penguin Books, UK.

³ Duvignaud, J. (1965) *Sociologie du Théâtre: Essai sur les ombres collectives*, PUF, Paris.

These studies, which have an affinity with the sociology of literature, gained a different dimension with Howard Becker's book "Art Worlds".⁴ Theater as collective artistic production occupied an important place in this work in which Becker underlines the organization and dynamics of theatrical institutions by illustrating various cases. Eleanor Lyon (1974) studied a small theater company in the Bay Area for her Ph.D. thesis supervised by Howard Becker. She gained access to the field by taking small and unskilled responsibilities for the company. Her article entitled "Work and Play: Resource Constraints in a Small Theater" published in *Urban Life and Culture* journal constitutes an important contribution to understanding the resources of a theater company and the limitations that the company has to overcome while making their productions.⁵

Again, in 1989, Howard Becker, M. McCall and Lori Morris published their article titled "Theater Communities: Three Scenes", in *Social Problems* in a dramatic form.⁶ Their field study includes interviews with seventy actors, directors, and other theater workers in three metropolitan areas: Chicago, San Francisco, and Minneapolis/St. Paul. Another fieldwork research on a theater, carried out as a Ph.D. thesis study in the field of sociology, is that of Celia Bense Ferreira Alves (2007). Her paper "Staging the Social Drama of Work: Ethnography of a Theater Company as a Means of Analyzing Theater Activity" published in *Qualitative Sociological Review*, includes the data of her ethnographic study about the organization as well as the artistic activity of a theater venue and company, Circle Theater (CT).⁷ Another example of occupational sociology studies on theater groups, the ethnographic study by Valerie Fox and Virginia Dickie in 2010, "Breaking in: The Politics Behind Participation in Theater" is designed to examine and understand the formation and organization of a university theater company.⁸ These studies, which were carried out with the members of various theatrical groups in different time periods, contributed substantially to the fieldwork of this thesis.

⁴ Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art Worlds* London: University of California Press.

⁵ Lyon, E. (1974). *Work and Play Resource Constraints in a Small Theater*, *Urban Life and Culture* Vol: 3, No: 1, April, Sage Publication.

⁶ Becker, Howard; McCall, Michal M.; Morris, Lori V.; Paul Meshejian (1989). "Theater communities three scenes", *Social Problems*, Vol 36, No1 (89) pp 93-116.

⁷ Alves, C.B. F. (2007). *Staging the Social Drama of Work: Ethnography of a Theater Company as a Means of Analyzing Theater Activity*, *Qualitative Sociological Review*, 3-2, 78-99.

⁸ Fox, V. & Dickie, V. (2010). *Breaking in: The politics behind participation in theater*, *Journal of Occupational Science*, 17:3, 158-167.

Recently, a research group named Sociology of Theatre and Performance Research Group (STPRG) was formed under the direction of Professor Maria Shevtsova in 2007 at Goldsmiths, University of London. By incorporating diverse fields of study like sociology, history, historiography, anthropology, cultural theory, politics, and semiotics, this interdisciplinary research group aims to study a wide range of performance forms and styles as integral aspects of sociocultural processes. They focus on social and cultural embedding of texts and their reflections on the performance.⁹ Shevtsova's research with the Research Group is also collected in a book titled *Sociology of Theatre and Performance* published in 2009.¹⁰

Lastly, a specific course of *Sociology of the theater* is taught at Université Catholique de Louvain since 2006 by Emmanuel Wallon, a professor of political sociology who also wrote many articles about Duvignaud and Gurvitch's perspective of sociology of theater. The course aims to analyze the relations between political authorities and theatrical institutions and companies in Europe by utilizing the methods and concepts of the social sciences in the field of performance and theater.¹¹

The theater area has not been an object of investigation in social science literature in Turkey until the late 1990s. However, especially within the last 15 years, an academic tendency to work on the theatrical field in Turkey from a social scientific perspective has developed. Some of those studies are the historical analysis of a particular type of production in a particular time scale, such as Eren Buğlalılar's MA thesis completed at METU Sociology Department, analyzing the Political Theater movement in Turkey in the 1970s or Erdem Ünal Demirci's MS thesis at Sakarya University, entitled "Political Role of the Theater in Turkey in Single Party Rule (1850-1950)". Besides these analyses, Jale Karabekir's MA thesis titled "Performance as a Strategy for Women's Liberation: Practices of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Okmeydanı Social Center" written in 2006 at Boğaziçi University Sociology Department and Benan Havva Baran's MA thesis entitled "The use of art as a form of protest in women's liberation: A case study of Ankara Tiyatro Öteyüz" written in 2016 at Adnan Menderes University Sociology Department are two

⁹ <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/5912/>

¹⁰ Shevtsova, Maria. 2009. *Sociology of Theatre and Performance*. Verona: QuiEdit. ISBN 9788864640136.

¹¹ <https://uclouvain.be/en-cours-2021-lthea2120>

examples of field study on the instrumental and emancipating aspects of theater. In 2014, Cansu Karagül's MA thesis written at Mimar Sinan Sociology Department offered an analysis of the alternative theater field after the 2000s on Taksim-Mecidiyeköy axis based on Bourdieu's sociology of art. Within the same year, another work, Deniz Başar's MA thesis titled "Performative Publicness: Alternative Theater in Turkey after 2000s" was written at Boğaziçi University Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History. In her thesis, Başar has dealt with the public character of the alternative theater movement after the 2000s from a historical perspective.¹²

Besides those studies in social science departments, in many universities' theater departments independent theatrical field is considered as a field of investigation from a social science perspective. Two recent master's theses from Haliç University Theater Department written by Derya Aslan and Emre Yetim are examples of case studies of two specific companies DOT and Galataperform.¹³ Two other research studies by Özge Ayşegül Bayduz and Tamer Can Erkan are examples that investigate the impact of high school theater companies on the independent theatrical field in terms of human resources and the problem of sustainability in independent companies.¹⁴ One of the recent works mentioning today's independent theatrical area in Turkey is the doctoral thesis entitled "Dramaturgies of Recycling: Nostalgia, Metatheatre, and Utopia in 2010s Turkish Theatre" completed by Eylem Ejder in Ankara University Theater Department in 2022.¹⁵

This growing academic interest in a way reaffirms what Gurvitch claimed about taking theater as a social phenomenon. However, the fieldworks mentioned focused especially on Beyoğlu-Mecidiyeköy axis and on companies with established stages.

¹² Başar Deniz. Performative Publicness: Alternative Theater in Turkey after 2000's, Boğaziçi University Boğaziçi University Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History, Unpublished Master's Thesis, İstanbul: 2014.

¹³ Aslan, Derya. Türkiye'de Çağdaş Bir Tiyatro Örneği: Dot, Haliç Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tiyatro Anasanat Dalı, Unpublished Master's thesis, İstanbul: 2017.

Yetim, Emre, Alternatif Tiyatrolarda Proje Üretiminin Verimli Bir Kaynak Olarak Kullanılmasına Bir Örnek: Galata Perform, Haliç Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tiyatro Anasanat Dalı, Unpublished Master's Thesis, İstanbul: 2017.

¹⁴ Bayduz, Özge Ayşegül, İstanbul'da Geleneğini Oluşturmuş Okul Tiyatrolarının Alternatif Tiyatro Alanında Var Olması, Kadir Has Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Unpublished Master's Thesis, İstanbul, 2015, Erkan, Tamer Can, Alternatif Tiyatrolar ve Sürdürülebilirlik Sorunu, İstanbul: 2015.

¹⁵ Ejder, Eylem. Geri Dönüşüm Dramaturgileri: 2010'lu yıllar Türkiye Tiyatrosunda Nostalji, Metatiyatro, Ütopya, Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tiyatro Ana Bilim Dalı, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Ankara: 2022.

For instance, after the 2010s, Kadıköy emerged as an important region for newly established venues. Besides, there are many attempts to open new areas for independent theatrical productions in Ankara and other cities. Many stageless groups are also performing on multiple stages or theater venues in various locations. The diversification of the field in terms of both formations of companies and productions is another point that is aimed to be highlighted in this dissertation. Another aspect is that in order to take the recent independent theatrical area as a social phenomenon, the perspective of not only insiders but also outsiders may be beneficial. This is due to the fact that the independence of theaters is often associated with producing outside the frame of the subsidized institutions. Another point is to illuminate the oppositional position of those companies and ask whether those novelties that seem to emerge out of new social interactions and movements (e.g. Gezi) have a risk of turning into a part of marketing goods.

Between the years 2015-2019, which cover the fieldwork of the thesis, there were political and economic developments with profound social implications. Hence, while accepting the Gezi process as a breaking point for the independent theatrical institutions and their actors in İstanbul and Ankara, terror explosions, the July 15 coup attempt, the state of emergency, the economic crisis, and most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions also affected the field of independent theater in many ways.

Considering all of these aspects, it can be concluded that the point of departure of this study is the curiosity about the stance of the members of independent theatrical formations in such turbulent times. Although the perceptions of actors, dramaturges, directors, playwrights are at the center of the study, the content of the field study comprises nearly all aspects of sociology of theater put forward by Gurvitch.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: MAPPING THE THEATRICAL TERRAIN IN TURBULENT TIMES

Theater offers a multidimensional field of sociological investigation to the researcher with its actors, productions, the spatiality it creates and its involvement with the social and economic spheres. In this study, I aim to examine the independent theater phenomenon in both İstanbul and Ankara, which is currently evolving from a traditional branch of art into a new kind of social experience for its audience in big cities. The thesis tries to establish appropriate bounds of this process that the independent theatrical field has witnessed within the last 10 years in line with the local and global social transformations. The basic incentive for this research was my personal curiosity about how small-scale independent theater companies emerge, dissolve, re-emerge, and their sphere of influence, their organization, as well as their interactions.

The desire to analyze the transformation of this artistic area within the socio-political context led me to take an interpretive approach. This approach allowed me to look at the personal experiences of the theater workers and to elaborate on the subjective meanings they attached to the theatrical field as well as the social environment in which this field is located. Such an approach also facilitated looking at this small-scale theater community holistically. As how the actors of the field make sense of their own experiences constitutes the center of the fieldwork, gathering and describing a plurality of experiences from a variety of respondents was essential for the study. Becker claims that to describe the activities of a small segment of society properly, the researcher must focus on the largest possible number of people involved in the subject. Even though it is not always possible to reach all the voices

involved in the independent theatrical area, reflecting on the voices of such a variety of people serves to understand the dynamics of the field (Becker: 2016, 268-269). In his article “*Whose side are we on?*” Becker uses the notion of “*hierarchy of credibility*.” He argues that the researcher can be biased by the idea that those who are at the top, at the administrative or ownership position can more appropriately define the way things really are. The information gathered from the other groups will be relatively distorted and partial so that interviewing those at the top will be sufficient (Becker: 1967:241).

I also tried to reflect the voices of more than one group of professionals in the field. Thus, the sample of the study consisted of actors, playwrights, directors, owners of performance venues, dramaturges, as well as technical staff, stage managers, and support staff. Besides, one performance artist, three academicians from state/private conservatories having their own independent companies, and two former general art directors of the State Theaters and İstanbul City Theater were interviewed. In terms of the theater company members involved in the fieldwork, the random choice of the respondents also created its own variety. Multilingual theater groups, feminist theater groups, politically oriented theaters, improvised theater companies, university graduates-based groups, child theater companies, performance-based works, and café-theaters were a part of the field study.

The notion of grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1964 supported my fieldwork process. In their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Glaser and Strauss defined this method as a process within which data collection, analysis, and possible theorization are closely linked to one another. Relatively, grounded theory indicates a method of research as well as the product of this research (Glaser and Strauss: 1964). In relation to this, Glaser and Corbin defined grounded theory research as follows:

A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind (unless his or her purpose is to elaborate and extend existing theory). Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the “reality” than is theory derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation, (how one thinks things ought to work). Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to

action. Although grounding concepts in data is the main feature of this method, creativity of researchers also is an essential ingredient.” (Glaser and Corbin, 1998: 12)

Besides allocating a free space for the creativity of the researcher, at the beginning the grounded theoretical approach resided in the positivist tradition. For those scholars, the theory embedded in the data implies “one reality” that needs to be discovered by the researcher whose value-neutrality and distance towards the research objects should be preserved. Despite small differences, the founders of grounded theory mostly adopted such a positivistic stance. Recently, a growing number of scholars have aimed to move grounded theory away from its positivist legacy. Kathy Charmaz, one of the scholars adopting the constructivist grounded theory, underlines the importance of taking a reflexive stance for the researcher in the field. In her article, *Grounded Theory in the 21st century: Application for Advancing Social Justice Studies*, she defines the features of constructivist grounded theory research as follows:

It does not assume that data simply await discovery in an external world or that methodological procedures will correct limited views of the studied world. Nor does it assume that impartial observers enter the research scene without an interpretive frame of reference. Instead, what observers see and hear depends upon their prior interpretive frames, biographies, and interests as well as the research context, their relationships with research participants, concrete field experiences, and modes of generating and recording empirical materials. (Charmaz in Denzin & Lincoln: 2005, 509)

As Charmaz notes, the interpretive frame that the researcher has before entering into the field, her interest in the field, and her relationship with the participants walk hand in hand with the research process. Her subjective standpoint or perspective and personal feelings are used as “a piece of the empirical puzzle that helps us understand how people ‘accomplish’ social reality” (Garfinkel in Marvasti: 2004, 5). Another aspect of grounded theory research is that, besides dealing with a microscopic study, it also strives for encompassing larger circumstances that have an impact on the subject of the study such as economic situation, cultural values, political tendencies, social movements.

During the fieldwork, although the main concerns of the respondents did not change, I could clearly perceive the differentiation of their agenda from the first interview, through the social and political process. The first interviews mostly mentioned their hope that emerged after the Gezi process. After 2015, the impact of the terrorist

attacks, the explosions created a deep feeling of hopelessness for the respondents. After the June 2016 coup d'état attempt, the most frequently repeated notion in the interviews was the issue of censorship and self-censorship and the pressure of the state of emergency on the theatrical field.

The latest interviews conducted in 2018 were basically about the newly established connections of capital resources with the independent companies and the popularization of the field. With the transformation of economic conditions, the issues that came to the fore in the last interviews were mostly economic support mechanisms, communities supported or not supported by capital groups and the state, and the popularization of the independent theater field with the opening of large theater venues like Uniq Hall, Zorlu Performance Center. Again, even if the fieldwork was over after 2020, it is possible to comment on the current situation in the light of the interviews of theater practitioners I followed from secondary sources since then. Besides the economic challenges that they have to face and the usage of limited theatrical spaces, new topics like live streaming opportunities, as well as the socio-economic impact of the lockdowns during Covid-19 over independent companies became the common areas of discussion of theater producers. In this sense, it has to be pointed out that the content of the interviewees' responses were considerably influenced by the basic contextual turning points of the time.

In such an ever-changing environment, the necessity to look synchronically to the outside circle together with multiple realities within the investigated field emerges. In relation to this, Corbin and Hold underline that “the constructionist viewpoint acknowledges ‘multiple realities’ or multiple ways of interpreting a specific set of data” (Corbin & Holt in Somekh & Lewin: 2005, 49). Thus, admitting the existence of multiple realities and using various ways of interpreting these realities like in-depth interviews, observations, various documents, biographies, videos, and photographs open up new ways of thinking.

In accordance with Corbin& Holt's claim, throughout my fieldwork, to uncover the conditions of independent theater companies and to understand the background of the perceptions of the informants, I had to refresh and multiply my methodological tools. As the primary data gathering method of the research, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions were carried out. With the semi-structured questions and occasional

conversational dialogues, a much more flexible, dynamic, open process of investigation was achieved. Brenner, Brown, and Canter define the possibilities offered by the interview to the researcher as follows:

Probably the central value of the interview as a research procedure is that it allows *both* parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers involved. There is an implicit, or explicit sharing and/or negotiation of understanding in the interview situation, which is not so central, and often not present, in other research procedures. Any misunderstandings on the part of the interviewer or the interviewee can be checked immediately in a way that is just not possible when questionnaires are being completed, or tests are being performed (Brenner, Brown & Canter, in Darlington & Scott 2002, 49).

Besides in-depth interviews, in order to discover the field fully, I made participant and non-participant observations. In this way, I could witness a part of the creative process; have an overview of the inner dynamics of the companies and the management process of a theater. For this reason, I attended openings of theater venues, theater award ceremonies, public meetings and discussions (against the destruction of AKM, Akün, Şinasi stages, against the dismissal of actors from İstanbul Municipality theater, and recently on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for the independent theater companies), voluntary performances, concerts given by actors to support the survival of some alternative stages, rehearsals of some plays, public discussions after the performances, and World Theater Day celebrations organized by various independent companies. By participating in the joint organizations of those companies, I had a chance to gain a deeper insight into their interactions, their similarities and differences, which in turn has enriched my perspective on the field. The personal conversations I had with the people I met before or during the thesis process were also a supportive resource for the fieldwork. I made the transcription of all of the interviews I conducted in the field. Along with the interview transcriptions and field notes, I also followed the staging of plays, the reports, webcasts, and reviews published about independent theater companies and their plays in newspapers, art magazines, internet portals and websites of theater companies. During the fieldwork process and afterwards, all these secondary resources enabled me to follow the dynamism of the field shaped by social, economic and political transformations. The fieldwork of the thesis does not cover the Covid-19 pandemic period, the economic impact of the pandemic on the actors, the organizations as well as the productions of the independent theater companies.

However, in this process that started with Covid-19, these secondary sources I followed regularly helped me stay connected with the field.

The fieldwork of this study was conducted between March 2016 and November 2019 in İstanbul and Ankara. The sample of the study included actors, playwrights, directors, dramaturges working with independent groups, as well as owners of theater venues, one performance artist, three academicians from state/private conservatories, and former general art directors of the State Theater and İstanbul City Theater.

İstanbul was an important part of the fieldwork since it is a city with a long history of private theaters. Moreover, in the past twenty years, it became the center where independent theater has flourished. Besides, despite the hegemonic existence of the State Theater, Ankara, with its political theater and university theaters tradition, recently has begun to reveal its potential for an independent theatrical production. In this sense, the inclusion of these two cities in my fieldwork allowed me to do a comparative analysis from different aspects.

To elaborate more on the issue of independence in the following pages, I preferred to use the word "independent" theater throughout the thesis, which can serve as a common denominator. This umbrella concept has allowed me to conduct a study where I can meet with groups that differ in their production, formation, and use of performance space outside the realm of state/municipality subsidized theaters. Besides, along with the sampling process, the field also created its own variety. Many companies such as multilingual theater groups, feminist theater groups, politically oriented theaters, improvisational theater companies, university graduates-based groups, child theater companies, performance-based works, and café-theaters were part of my framework.

The sample of the study was selected especially by means of my personal connections, through social media channels (via Facebook, Twitter accounts and websites of theater companies, e-mail addresses) or by getting in touch with the theater company after performances. Besides the interviews I conducted, I made transcriptions of interview videos from TV programs and also used written interviews from various journals, magazines, and books, which supported the fieldwork. The participants were selected randomly but by taking into consideration

the diversity of the field. The accessibility of the respondents and their time constraints were also important factors in the selection process of the sample.

During the research period of more than two and a half years, fifty three in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. A considerable part of these were informal and included casual conversations with the members of the theatrical community. Thirty-three of them were made in İstanbul and twenty of them were conducted in Ankara. The interviews lasted about one and a half hours. Most of the participants gave consent for the interviews to be voice recorded except two actors from İstanbul who preferred to participate in the study through written responses. While conducting the interviews, I paid attention to let the informants' voice to be heard more by not interrupting the stories they narrate. Similarly, in the analysis chapter, I pursue the same course and I aim to open a wider place for their narration. Those long quotations include more detailed material about the field and the community they are a part of.

Most of the interviews were conducted with a single person, but in İstanbul, six interviews were conducted with a group of people (five interviews with two people, one with more than two people) and in Ankara, six were conducted with more than one people (three with two people, three with more than two people). In this way, I had an opportunity to observe group dynamics and norms in a more reflexive atmosphere.

The total number of respondents interviewed during the field research is seventy-one. Of these, forty-two were men (twenty-two in İstanbul and twenty in Ankara) and twenty-nine were women (twenty-one in İstanbul and eight in Ankara). At the beginning of the research, I planned to pay attention to the distribution of age. However, due to the concentration of the age of practitioners in a certain range brought by the working conditions of the independent theater field, the age distribution balance was broken, especially in group interviews. In other words, the generational gap emerged as a significant differentiating factor during data analysis. Looking at the ages of the interviewees, the most crowded group was between the ages of thirty and forty, with thirty-seven participants. The second most crowded group was between the ages of forty and fifty, including nineteen interviewees. The number decreases considerably outside the range of thirty to fifty, with four of them

in their 20s, five of them in their 50s, and four of them in their 70s. My oldest respondent, who was eighty years old, was one of the co-founders of the first independent initiatives in İstanbul (BİLŞAK and TAL-Theater research center) in the 1980s. The dynamics of this age density will be more deeply elaborated in the following chapters of the thesis.

As for my respondents older than sixty, besides being a part of independent companies, they were retired actors or directors of institutionalized theaters, and their narrations served to compare and contrast the institutionalized positions of theater in Turkey with independent artistic attempts. Moreover, their comments about the recent developments in theatrical areas contributed to the historical framework the study aims to draw. Therefore, due to these intersections, another axis of the research is to form a broad and detailed theater map of two major cities in Turkey. Nearly all of the respondents are currently a core member of an independent company or temporarily take part in a production of an independent company. Due to the scarcity of economic revenues and difficult living conditions and necessities of metropolis life, a considerable number of the respondents have to perform in more than one company simultaneously. With respect to the educational background of the respondents, while acting and dramatic arts-writing departments of state conservatories were predominant, many of them had completed their education in private conservatories, some in private drama schools (mostly in İstanbul) or in university theater companies such as Boğaziçi University, METU, Gazi Üniuersity, İTÜ, YTÜ among others. Besides, there were people who dropped out of university before finishing their degrees and continued their education in state or private conservatories.

There is a difference between the theater workers in İstanbul and Ankara in terms of the basic sources of their income. Most of the interviewees living in İstanbul, which is the center of the entertainment sector, have to work in TV series, commercials, drama training courses, dubbing sector or in a totally different job in order to sustain their daily lives. They usually get paid on a daily basis and cannot even receive any payment for rehearsals. Therefore, despite their university degree in dramatic arts, their training in major acting courses, or their long-time experiences in university theater companies, the theater cannot turn into a primary source of income for the

respondents. Especially in Ankara, where the State Theater dominates the theatrical area with its twelve stages opening its curtains every night, earning money from the theater requires much more effort. Thus, nearly all of the interviewees were doing other jobs related to performing arts education (those having a conservatory degree) or other jobs in order to continue doing theater. Working in many different places, some take part in different company projects. People who want to earn their living mainly by doing theater prefer to take part in different projects of various companies. Such a decision is certainly linked to their professional and artistic targets.

Besides this precarious occupational situation, when we look at the numerical data of performing spaces and theater companies, a similar lack of sustainability has been observed. At the time of the research, the number of independent theater companies that the interviewees were involved in was 18 in Ankara and only seven of them had their own stages. However, recently in the spring of 2019, one of them was closed and four of them were disbanded. Thus, a total of 13 theater companies whom I have interviewed continue to perform in Ankara. A similar tendency can be perceived in İstanbul. Thirteen out of 30 theater companies that the interviewees were actively involved in had their own stages. Recently, four of them have closed their performance venues and one of them was disbanded. Currently, 22 companies out of 30 continue their theatrical journey in İstanbul. In total, my sample consists of theater workers that are members of 33 active theater companies in İstanbul and Ankara.

Some black box theaters are closed due to economic reasons such as high taxes, rents, low income or because of few audiences. Some others are closed for security reasons or because of the process of urban regeneration (e.g. Mekan Artı, Şermola Performans, Tiyatro Küp, Kuzguncuk Sanat). There were other companies (Kurdish theater companies such as Seyr-i Mesel, MKM) that I had intended to reach out, but they were banned by new legal regulations following the attempted coup d'état in Turkey on July 15, 2016. On the other hand, some theaters established new stages in İstanbul and Ankara, which I had the chance to include in my research. After I completed the fieldwork process, many novel companies have been established and new stages have been opened. Kültürel Performing Arts, Cihangir Atölye Sahnesi, Boa Sahne, Koma Sahnesi, Bereze Gösteri Evi, Hann Sahne, Sahne Beşiktaş, TiyatroOps, Bahçe Galata in İstanbul; Çankaya Sahne, Sahne 367, Aralık Sahne,

Yakın Tiyatro in Ankara are some of the companies and venues that I was not able to include in the study.

Apart from the discursive data, many details I encountered before and after the interviews gave me the opportunity to experience the daily life practices of the respondents. For example, I kindly asked the interviewees to choose the interview place. They mostly preferred to meet in their theater venues, in their ateliers or at some cafes in İstanbul (Kadıköy, Beyoğlu, Karaköy, Beşiktaş) and in Ankara (Kızılay, Tunalı, Maltepe, Beşevler, Batıkent, Macunköy). Through this selection, I was able to observe how they use the urban space. Both the spatial existence of theaters and the use of urban space by their producers indicate the transformation of the two cities in the last twenty years. Considering the increasing population in urban centers, the urban regeneration-gentrification processes and the displacement of city centers towards the periphery, the theaters, like many other cultural spaces, have to relocate within the city. I will elaborate on the transformation of this regional distribution more extensively in Section 3.4.

The questions were gathered under four main headings: the motivations of the respondents to be a part of the field, the changing and stable features of doing independent theater in terms of content and form, the place of performance (the city and performance venues), and the economic and ideological framework within which the independent theatrical area's members produce. It was necessary to draw a historical framework in order to make sense of this phenomenon's development from past to present and its continuities and discontinuities, as well as its relationship with social, political and economic dynamics. In this respect, some of the interview questions are related to those historical, social and political backgrounds. Bearing in mind that the ranking of the questions have an impact on the way the data is acquired, the questions are arranged from a micro to a macro level. Under the political and economic headings, I aimed to understand the relationship between independent theater, ideology and economy through the experiences that the interviewees have gained throughout the production process. Different aspects of the notion of independence were discussed under all these headings.

During the interviews, I tried not to interrupt the interviewees' comments, especially when they were narrating their professional life stories, except in cases where the

subject deviated too much from the topic being discussed, since those narratives can provide detailed information about the nature and the organization of the field. In the analysis part, I deliberately used large verbatim quotations from interview transcripts to let the voice of the informants to be heard with few interruptions, as was the case during the interviews.

While doing the fieldwork, I usually had different reflections about where I stood as a researcher. The time period that encompasses the fieldwork, and later on the writing process, can be described as full of social, political, cultural and economic turmoil. Thus, as many of my interviewees underlined, the transformative-interactive relation of this process with the theatrical area and theater practitioners was something that I personally experienced during the fieldwork process.

While I found common patterns or distinctive features in my data, I discovered another kind of life that I had walked slightly around. Evaluating the meaning the interviewees attribute to the artistic field together with the way they interpret the social offered me an opportunity to construct a new perspective beyond my own. In this sense, doing an ethnographic study expanded the boundaries of my mind; it also turned into a transformative process that affected my personal life. Above, I used the expression "slightly walk around" the field due to my personal relationship with theater and the theatrical field. To put it differently, this research is the product of the curiosity of a Ph.D. student who, from her adolescent years on, has placed the art of theater in a distinct, sacred position, collected many materials about the history of Turkish theater, and examined them sometimes with hope and admiration, sometimes with frustration and sorrow. Unable to throw out any tickets, brochures or playbills I collected during many years, I had always taken refuge in them against all kinds of turmoil in my personal life and in the social environment as Gurvitch points out in his article. Burns & Burns quoted his words as follows:

Gurvitch describes the phenomenon of theater as a ceremony where we re-experience certain social situations that suppress us, through which we can get rid of this pressure.” (Gurvitch: 1956, in Burns, E& Burns T, 72)

Although an institution separate from everyday life, theater was located in the midst of my life just like an antidote. My curiosity about the issue has also many diverse

roots: living in a city like İstanbul -the center of art worlds-, being a part of a family whose members have an affiliation with theater, music and painting. With my family's interest in art and guidance, I realized that I could not have a happy and peaceful life journey without being interested in any branch of art.

The presence of theater in my life was directly related with my parents loving and taking us very often to plays in AKM (Atatürk Cultural Center), İBBŞT (İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality City Theater) or İDT (İstanbul State Theater) and all kinds of artistic facilities offered in İstanbul. Starting with the children's theater, my bonds with theater and my practice of going to the theater evolved from a wish to become a loyal spectator to a desire to be a part of the production process in the field. In this way, I joined the school's amateur theater group during my high school years. Thanks to those three years of experience and the contributions of our director, I began to look at the art of theater from a different and much more critical perspective. Rather than placing theater in a sacred, inaccessible position, I began to discover its links with daily life and with social, political and economic areas. The readings that we have made during the preparation process before staging also triggered my already existing interest in social sciences. During my BA in Political Science and Master's Education in Sociology, I could at least remain as a loyal spectator. After completing my Ph.D. courses, I intended to pursue an undergraduate degree related to the textual (literal) part of theater and I started to study at İstanbul University Theater Criticism and Dramaturgy Department, from which I graduated in 2018.

In the last five years I have spent in theater criticism department, I realized that most of my professors and classmates who are earning their lives from theater productions have been working or had worked once or more in non-subsidized theater companies. The period during which I finished my Ph.D. courses was a time when many socio-political transformations were taking place before our eyes. This five years' period in which we intensively felt the impact of urban transformation, migration, and increasing violence in all spheres of our lives, the content and the extent of productions of those small theater companies with their laborers, seems to be worthwhile to think over and work on. Those companies, assembling and disbanding, those stages opening and closing in İstanbul and gradually in other cities seem to, in

a way, create or at least collect a kind of memory of their time and of the city they are located in. Thus, my curiosity about the production, the functioning, and the social space- the relationship they establish with the city- constitutes the basis of the fieldwork of this thesis. In addition, my special interest on non-subsidized theaters came from my enthusiasm and desire to examine and discuss "the question of independence" together with its pros and cons within a socio-political framework and by means of personal narratives, which led me to carry out interviews with members of those companies and take their viewpoints into consideration. Moreover, as I mentioned in the introduction part, the rarity of the theses written in social sciences about subsidized and non-subsidized theaters in Turkey, a fact that I was more or less acquainted with from the field, and the desire to know more about theater, with which I was already familiar with, were the reasons which also led me to study this subject.

My first step into the field was by means of my personal relations with my colleagues from the theater criticism department. Relying on my proximity to the field, I thought I would easily enjoy the convenience of using my personal contacts in reaching the interviewees, but this was not enough to get in touch with every person/company I intended to include in the research. The data collection was a long, time-consuming and labor-intensive process during which I was faced with practical constraints as a researcher. Throughout this process, online networks and social media channels constituted an effective support for me in forming the sampling. These channels also helped me discover and communicate with a variety of less known companies that can be labeled under the heading "independent". These online means were especially effective in reaching the respondents in Ankara. In turn, the snowball method and one-to-one personal connections were much more useful in gathering my sample in İstanbul.

While having personal relations in the field offered me some opportunities for reaching the interviewees, having a sensitive bond with and a long commitment to the field brought me some difficulties in dealing with the fieldwork process. Especially my second university education, which was itself a self-regenerative process, went hand in hand with my fear of being too much involved, or more precisely, of being too much biased. One reason for this is that I already knew some

of my respondents and I witnessed some of their professional experiences through our daily conversations long before the interviews. Those acquaintances turned into a kind of partnership that both restricted and enriched me from time to time. However, the fieldwork was a process in which I not only realized the inaccuracy of some of my predictions but also learned and experienced many things overall. The fieldwork of the thesis covered a relatively long period due to personal reasons (my second university education, working conditions, and difficulties in reaching the interviewees) and due to the socio-political atmosphere in Turkey. This time span had positive reflections that contributed to the development of the thesis although it also frightened me. As a long-term study, it provided me with the opportunity to communicate over again with the people I have already interviewed and to see the continuities and discontinuities. In this process, where socio-political economic agenda has changed rapidly, an ongoing field study offered me the chance to follow the changes in the staged plays, differentiation in the professional experiences, and the transformation in the perception of theater as a branch of art and entertainment sector. On the other hand, as the scope of the historical background of the thesis expanded, the number of issues that I had to take into consideration increased such as national elections, explosions, the attempted coup d'état, state of emergency, economic crisis and recently the Covid-19 pandemic. My thesis writing process, which lasted longer than I expected, especially with the pandemic, allowed me to work on the transformations that took place in the field of theater over a long period of time. In addition, the mobility of the interviewees and the fact that most of them were simultaneously occupying positions in more than one theater company production enriched my data about the functioning of a variety of theater groups and enabled a comparative analysis among different theater communities. At this point, the fact that some of the people I interviewed worked or are still working not only in independent theaters but also in subsidized institutions also gave me an opportunity to make a general comparison between different theatrical institutions with different structures and organizations.

During the fieldwork, there were other more technical challenges that I had to cope with. The most fundamental of these was time management. As my daily routine and the interviewees' daily routine usually did not match, it was difficult to arrange meetings with my respondents. Their spare times mostly overlapped with my

working hours. During the period when I was doing the fieldwork, I was working in a peripheral neighborhood of İstanbul, far from the centers where theater actors produce and live. In addition to this distance, due to the complicated and very engaged daily schedules of the actors, directors, and dramaturges, I had difficulty in arranging meetings especially in İstanbul. The interviews with theater practitioners in Ankara were integrated into my short-term travels. Thanks to this narrow time frame and the ease of access between different locations in Ankara, it was possible for me to organize the meetings more easily. At this point, the slower flow of city life in Ankara, as opposed to İstanbul, and the freedom of theater practitioners to act more harmoniously, enabled me to hold multiple meetings in the same day. During the theater seasons and the rehearsal periods before staging a play, the interviewees always had limited time. Thus, I mostly found the possibility to speak with the respondents just before or in the middle of a rehearsal, or late at night after the performances.

Besides this technical obstacle about organizing the fieldwork agenda, I could not get in touch with some of the companies I wished to include in the field. There were many theater practitioners who did not reply to my messages via e-mail or social media channels. Some others, who promised to give me an appointment for an interview, unfortunately did not keep their words, and after a while I lost contact with them. Internet sites and e-mails of the theater companies, or their Facebook accounts constituted convenient channels for me to reach the interviewees in Ankara. In İstanbul, I basically used many informants to find and reach my potential interviewees, but for members of some companies, social media channels were also useful. Although the primary aim of the thesis is to work on the members of small independent companies outside the mainstream theatrical area, whose voices are usually not heard, I tried to gain access to some of the more famous and middle-scale companies for the sake of comparison, but unfortunately, my attempts to reach the members of many of these companies were unsuccessful.

Apart from the problems in reaching the interviewees before I went to the field, I also had some problems with the comportment of some of the respondents during the interviews. Few of the respondents' specific tendencies of self-expression have made the interviews a little problematic. Rather than sharing their perceptions about the

field, some of the informants responded to the questions of the interview as if they were answering the questions of a journalist and extolling their own productions and careers in mass media. Denzin names this kind of obstacle in the field as “the problem of self-representation” and “the problem of volatile, fleeting relationship” which is usually seen in the early phases of the interview (Denzin in Silverman: 1963). Although this tendency of self-prizing distorted the functioning of the field process from time to time, most of the interviewees enriched and facilitated the fieldwork by sharing their experiences and perceptions frankly.

The fieldwork part of the study ended in November 2019 before the pandemic. Afterwards, with the pandemic process, the theater venues were closed for long intervals starting from March 2020. Thus, independent theater companies began to search for different platforms to survive against hard economic conditions. The digital medium offered them the possibility to at least save the day and maintain their audience through the internet.¹⁶ Again, a considerable number of theater venues were closed, thus many theater companies were displaced or at risk of being displaced. These problems brought about many discussions about the transformation of independent theaters both as a field of artistic production and as an economic sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, meetings, forums were organized online or in different venues. Solidarity organizations, cooperatives were established or already existing inactive organizations were activated to develop new economic support mechanisms.¹⁷ During this period, following the digital productions, the

¹⁶ As many performing arts institutions around the world did, since the beginning of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, subsidized theater institutions as well as independent theater companies in Turkey opened their archives to masses, they started to share their recorded performances and to broadcast simultaneous online performances for free or for a charge via different digital platforms. Moda Sahnesi made a series of online screenings of new plays simultaneously performed on their stage named “Livestream from the Stage (Sahneden Naklen)” from 2020 to 2022. Similarly, Galataperform Theater has realized its New Text Festival via its online platform yeniperform.com. Zoom program has turned into a new venue for live digital performances. Platform Tiyatro’s “Map to Utopia” which has been conducted via Zoom with the active participation of the audience was a pioneering digital theater. Also, BGST’s production “A Case for Each Day (Her Güne Bir Vaka)”, Onur Karaoğlu’s videolog series on Youtube “Read Subtitles Aloud”, Kadıköy Emek Theater’s Memory Fest plays, Kadıköy Boa Sahne’s “Boa’s Shortplays” and Kültürel Performing Arts’ online screenings can be mentioned as some of the significant examples. İstanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSV) has also held a considerable part of İstanbul Theater Festival online for two years.

¹⁷ Kadıköy Theaters Platform (Kadıköy Tiyatrolar Platformu), Actors Union (Oyuncular Sendikası), Tiyatromuz Yaşasın İnsiyatifi (Long Live Our Theater Initiative), Theater Cooperative (Tiyatro Kooperatifi), Ankara Theaters Platform (Ankara Tiyatrolar Platformu), Independent Theaters Association (Bağımsız Tiyatrolar Birliği) are some of these solidarity organizations and cooperatives struggling for the rights and the survival of theatrical institutions and their members.

academic discussions, online forums, seminars and making some readings on digitalization of the theatrical performance helped me stay up to date within the field. I will briefly talk about the productions made during the Covid period, the sustainability of the groups and the discussions in this field in the relevant sections. Besides, the pandemic brought the obligation to make some projections about the future of the theatrical field, the transformation of independent theater productions in the conclusion part of the thesis.

In the light of the researcher's observations about the field, the traces of this new independent formation will be underlined through the transformation of the social, of time-perception, of the economy, and of the meaning of politics. In the remaining part of the thesis, after drawing a historical framework of the theatrical area in Turkey, three chapters on the actors and the communities; the production process, the place of the production and its audience; and economic and ideological sources will follow in a related order. I will discuss the data gathered from the field under four main headings which encompass diverse aspects of the theatrical field: the theatrical laborers and their motivations which impelled them to make independent theater, the inner relations within and among independent forms and content of the productions, the place/location of the performances, and lastly the ideological and economic aspects of the independent theatrical area.

The first part of the third chapter aims to investigate the reasons behind the emergence of this wave through the perceptions of the interviewees about the art of theater in general, their motivations and goals to do theater as well as their motivations to be a part of independent theater. During the interviews, respondents were asked to evaluate this new theatrical movement and share their own experiences from this field. The comments of the respondents on professional ethics, internal organizations, social-professional relations within companies, and their conceptualizations of the field will serve to distinguish the current wave from the older ones. Group dynamics and organizational structure of the independent companies constitute the second part of this chapter. The second part of this chapter will include the organization scheme, the group dynamics of the theater communities, commitment to the group, theater culture of the companies, and the relation among the members of the groups and with other companies.

The production process of the independent theatrical formations will be dealt with in the first section of the fourth chapter of the thesis. In this chapter, while re-reading elements such as play scripts, staging, acting techniques in the productions of independent ensembles within the history of theater in Turkey, I will look at the breaks and similarities in independent theatrical productions in terms of form and I will analyze how this transformation is perceived by the theatre practitioners in the field. To elaborate more on this section, the first part of this section focuses on play script from a historical standpoint, the second part on the history of Turkish play writing tradition until the 2000s, and the third part on changes in the content of new plays. The last part concludes with a discussion of the modifications in staging components in independent theater productions.

In the second section of the fourth chapter, the spatial existence of independent theater companies first as the place of performance, and then including the theater building, the street, the neighbourhood and the cities İstanbul and Ankara where the performance venues are located, as well as the audience of the cities will be opened to discussion. Accordingly, impact of their transformation on the public space and urban culture and the audience in the city will be discussed in light of the interviewees' experiences and perceptions. In this sense, the first part of this section includes theatrical space, which encompasses the stage and play space, which is the innermost ring of theater spatiality. While the second part tries to understand the interaction between these spaces and the urban space in which they are located, and the third and fourth parts try to understand the relationship of the urban space with the audience and the theater space. Finally, in the last sub-section differences in terms of theatrical culture between İstanbul and Ankara as well as its impact on the independent theatrical area will be elaborated.

The fifth chapter of the thesis aim to open to discussion the ideological and economic roof of these independent theatrical formations and the relationship they establish with the political field, which encompasses all of the previous headings. This chapter is divided into five sections. While the first section provides an overview of the theater-politics relationship, the second section discusses how groups and their members politically position themselves and the work they do, the third section outlines the relationships they maintain with units of power, how political sanctions

affect them. In the fourth section focuses on internal politics, primarily on forms of solidarity and competition among independent theater companies.

The final section of the thesis aims to cover a critical dimension, the economic dimension, which has always been an insurmountable obstacle to independent theatrical productions. Their economic resources, incomes, and expenditures, the sustainability of independent theater companies and venues, support mechanisms provided by the state, municipalities, and private institutions, commercialization, and the scope of dependency are just a few of the topics that will be covered in this final section of the study.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL PATHS TOWARDS THE RESEARCH AREA: THEATRICAL FORMATIONS IN TURKEY

Theater, as a branch of performance art that has a long history in the geography of Turkey, maintains its existence along with various social and historical processes through continuities and disruptions in line with social transformations over time. While preserving historical ties, it also maintains its relationship with Western theater on the one hand and with the traditional theater on the other, both in terms of form and content. For this reason, in order to understand today's independent theatrical formations, it is necessary to look at the background of Turkish theater history, to underline the turning points and to establish a link with the functioning of today's theatrical field.

As mentioned in the previous section, the history of independent companies goes back to the late Ottoman era. Although there were many ruptures because of wars, socio-economic and political crises, and the state-formation process at the beginning of the 20th century, the history of theater in Turkey covers a long and diversified field. The current independent formations can be perceived as a continuation of a wider frame of productions and companies from the late Ottoman period until now. This framework encompasses a wide path with various kinds of theater and opera companies composed of non-Muslim members of the Ottoman society. It also includes the first private companies established by the first graduates of Ankara State Conservatory, İstanbul Municipality Conservatory or the Public Houses in the 1960s, the political theater companies in the 1970s, The University theater companies, and alternative theatrical formations of the late 1980s and early 1990s (The Other Theater in the early 1990s), and lastly the small independent companies established in the

2000s. Especially the productions made after the late 1980s had a great impact on the form, language, content, and organization of theater life in the 2000s and beyond.

The 12 September 1980 coup d'état brought a kind of stagnation for the theater life in a socio-political atmosphere where freedom of expression was blocked, social turmoil dominated economic inequalities, and the impact of the consumption culture widened. However, at the end of the decade, theater history in Turkey witnessed a variety of new productions with diverse forms and contents. With the effect of the changing socio-economic climate of the country since the 1980s (simultaneous economic liberalization and censorship policies) on the one hand and the dominance of entertaining theatrical productions dominated the stages, on the other hand, some of the theater practitioners were started to search for a new form of expression. This search founded its way in the 1990's when the policies of censorship eased to an extent. One of the notable theater theoreticians in Turkey, Dikmen Gürün, described these emergent formations as "alternative theaters," which started to have a great influence in the 1990s. These theaters continuously reckoned with their own methods and tried to establish their own unique language. Limited in number, alternative theaters are the representative of a formation or structure different from the general and conventional theatrical understanding. According to Gürün, "Those companies were not audience-centered and commercial formations but instead they were designing their own audience from a different perspective. The point that should be emphasized here is not that these alternative formations are evaluated as a total reaction against the general theatrical understanding but that they were able to form their own theatrical language. In other words, in the 2000s, the theatrical soil was re-aerated" (Gürün in Erayda, 2002, 15). The reflections of these innovations made in the theatrical field during the 2000s will be elaborated in the next chapter of the thesis.

Basically, the troupes that initiated this new aesthetic language, usage of unconventional spaces, and interdisciplinary forms created in the 1990s can be listed as *Kumpanya*, *Beşinci Sokak Tiyatrosu*, *Bilsak Tiyatro Atölyesi*, *Tiyatro Stüdyosu*, TAL (Theater Research Laboratory), *İstanbul Sanat Merkezi*, *5. Sokak Tiyatrosu*, *Tiyatro Oyunevi*, *Stüdyo Oyuncuları* and so on.

One of the most important pioneers, the troupe *Kumpanya* was formed by Naz Erayda and Kerem Kurdođlu in 1991 in an old building at Tarlabası, a run-down district in İstanbul. With the formal spatial experiments it introduced to the theater scene in Turkey, the troupe paved the way for later attempts. One of its founders, Kerem Kurdođlu describes the background of its formation process in an internet-broadcasting channel as follows:

After 12 September we, those who were involved in theater, that is we begin to question the ontological meaning of theater. There is always a boon in such questioning; it has a very positive impact on future works. Other functions of the art of theater, other than gathering people and persuading them for a cause also began to be appreciated. In other words, analyzing finer aspects of life, questioning them, and doing something with them...After the coup d'état, intellectuals and people with a sense of social responsibility tried to explore a different theatrical existence. It is in this period that four or five important formations, *Kumpanya*, *Bilsak*, *TAL*, *Stüdyo Oyuncuları* etc. emerged. The reason d'être of *Kumpanya* was our unwillingness to practice already existing theater models... Another motive was to adopt a distinct political content, wording, and genre in our works. The theatrical mode was based only on rhetoric, good wording. To put it differently, the actor was basically using his oral capacities and his body to accompany his mouth and his words. So theater meant something like that for the audience....But we believe in all elements of theater, lighting, scenery, the body of the actor, the voice emanating from their body. We felt that theater should encompass all of them, should be a holistic art. Although we did not directly adopt a ready-made model, the examples from the world scenes that we had a chance to watch excited us and we were influenced by them. Also, even the pictures in the book of Grotowski *Toward a poor theater* that my high-school teacher gave me as a gift opened my mind. In those photos, space is used in an unusual way. The audience is not located in its traditional place but all over the stage. Those technical and contextual attempts mostly overlapped with our theatrical desire with Naz. Before establishing a theater, we were both working on theatrical set design. This practice has a considerable impact on the way we perceive theater.¹⁸

As in the words of Kurdođlu, many directors, actors, performers, stage designers, theater theoreticians, such as Grotowski, Peter Brook, Pina Bauch, Eugenio Barba, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Theodoros Therzopoulos had a great influence on the new productions staged in the Turkish theatrical field after the 1980s. Theater people who studied abroad or who had a chance to experience and to observe foreign theater productions contributed to this transformation within the theatrical area. İstanbul Theater Festival, which has a long history since 1989, was a crucial opportunity for

¹⁸ Kerem Kurdođlu interview, Şeyler & Şeytanlar (2): 90'lar ve sonrasında alternatif tiyatro hareketi, Mediascope.tv/24 May 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skxwOWA9-2k>

conservatory students as well as professionals of the field to follow experimental, innovative works produced throughout the world and, in a way, it contributed to their artistic development as well.

Another company of the 1990s was *Tiyatro Stüdyosu* established by Ahmet Levendođlu, an actor-director graduated from Robert College and Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. This company was also a training platform for brilliant theater people who would constitute the human resource of the next decade's theatrical field, especially in İstanbul. *Stüdyo Oyuncuları* Company of Şahika Tekand is another important contributor to the field both with her acting technique based on bodily performance and the human resource she trained in her workshops and classes. *Stüdyo Oyuncuları* is still an active area of production and acting school in İstanbul. On their internet site, the production process of the company is described as follows:

Stüdyo Oyuncuları set out with the principle of researching and implementing the 'contemporary' in the performing arts, in the arts of acting in particular. The company with the Performative Staging and Acting method that Şahika Tekand developed within 30 years put on stage various important performances both in Turkey and throughout the world.¹⁹

One of the respondents who was trained in *Stüdyo Oyuncuları* for many years and who has been a part of the independent theatrical area since the beginning of the 2000s narrated her experience in *Stüdyo Oyuncuları* as follows:

I was first a student there, and then I became the teaching assistant of Şahika and her co-director as well. It was really an intense process... There is a huge experience, an extraordinary accumulation there.... Şahika has a different state of mind. She always helps me to find my way, to overcome my confusions, to make my thoughts fall into place, to put my ideas in appropriate place... She will always be my master, my professor. *Stüdyo* is an institution where I learned a lot in that sense. There were 80 to 100 new students each term, perhaps even more. You are in contact with new people on the stage or in theoretical lectures. It was a very enjoyable process (Respondent 57).

Apart from those independent companies, Beklan Algan and Ayla Algan, two notable names in the history of Turkish theater, established Theater Research Laboratory (TAL) in 1988 as a semi-independent theater institution of İstanbul Municipality Theaters. In the interview with her, Ayla Algan explained the foundation and experimental works of TAL by comparing it with current productions as follows:

¹⁹ <https://studiooyunculari.com/studio-oyunculari-hakkinda/>

Of course, there are children who are experimenting today. We had an experimental theater, but behind us, there was also a municipality theater and Muhsin Ertuğrul who supported us. In addition, there was stubborn Beklan Algan, my husband, both a researcher and a director who traveled around the whole world to learn what's new in the theatrical environment to bring them to Turkey's stages. We established TAL, a theater research laboratory. We made this work as a lab... Municipality Theater pays the actors. A person who can get money, can at least feed himself, and pay his rent, of course, can develop his/ her ability by making theatrical researches more ambitiously and more accurately. He does not waste time by gossiping with his colleagues in cafés.²⁰

The decrease in the economic support provided by the state to the theatrical area, as Ayla Algan highlighted, was a crucial turning point for the transformation of the field and of the theatrical culture, which will be elaborated further in the following parts of the thesis.

The issue of naming the totality of these above-mentioned experimental productions has been the subject of a heated debate for theater critics and theoreticians in the 1990s. As the state and municipality theaters were and still are evaluated as the “theatrical centers”, small companies established in the 1990s were called the “other theater”. However, as the term “the other” could easily be considered as a term of discrimination, a new term was found; theater academicians named this new branch of theater as “alternative”. One of my respondents, who was artistically trained in *Kumpanya* and *Theater Research Laboratory* in the late 1990s elaborated on the debates about naming at that time in an interview as follows:

In the 90s, especially after the small theater companies started to make productions, people around them began to talk about how they should name these companies... Finally, they began to call them the “other theater.” At the beginning, theater people liked this naming but then they were disturbed by calling them “the other.” First, they liked it because yes, they are doing something other than the institutional framework of state or municipality theaters, as they are not economically subsidized by the state or municipality; we are not a repertory theater like them. Our acting technique is based on research, our play scripts are much more innovative, we form them at the end of collective improvisation etc. However, why are we the other, they are disturbed by this term. They perhaps tell that they are in search of something different, but we are not the other because theater itself should already be totally like that...Gypsies, homosexuals, conscientious objectors became the main characters of theater productions for the first time. (Respondent 58)

²⁰ Interview conducted by the author

Another respondent from *Boyalı Kuş*, one of the pioneer theater companies of the theatrical area after the 2000s with a feminist dramaturgical framework, claims that nearly all of the alternative groups of the 1990s were formed by actors/actresses/directors who were or once had been members of state-subsidized theaters. As they felt uncomfortable about the productions they were a part of in state theaters, they wanted to do other kinds of productions. She also added that while the roots of alternative production should be traced to the political theater tradition of the 1970s, yet their aims diverged largely. The main issue of those political theater companies was the existing political system, but the alternative companies primarily deal with transcending the boundaries of the mainstream theater. The naming issue in the 1980s is still an ongoing debate in today's theatrical area, which will be scrutinized deeply in this chapter.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a new generation of independent groups including companies such as *Ve Diğer Şeyler Topluluğu*/Galata Perform, *Boyalı Kuş*, *Altıdan Sonra Tiyatro* regenerated the field with new texts written by young playwrights, experimental staging with a new dramaturgical perspective, and small-scale black-box stages outside conventional stages at the cultural center of İstanbul, Beyoğlu.

GalataPerform, the production space of *Ve Diğer Şeyler Topluluğu* (VEDST) became the center of an important attempt, "New Text New Theater Festival" which contributed to the contemporary theatrical production process in Turkey. The festival, which has been going on since 2006, includes panels, discussions, workshops conducted by foreign playwrights, and readings of the plays created in the workshops by famous actors/actresses. Thus, thanks to the festival, young generation of playwrights were encouraged to produce new texts about actual issues, problems, currents, doubts, and sorrows. Besides an enlargement of the repertory of theater literature, the productions of those playwrights found the opportunity to be staged in various theater venues throughout the years, especially in Galataperform.

Altıdan Sonra Tiyatro, another independent company, was formed almost simultaneously by a group of graduates of Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ). They established their own venue *Kumbaracı50* in Beyoğlu in 2005. As alumni of a university theater group, the members who already had jobs got together to do theater as their secondary profession. Till today, with the scope of the plays they

performed, the new interpretations they brought to well-known texts, and the new theater experiences they offered to their audience, *Kumbaracı50* became an important step for today's independent theater area.

Boyalı Kuş Theater Company established by a group of women dramaturges graduated from the İstanbul University Theater Criticism and Dramaturgy Department brought a feminist dramaturgical perspective to the theatrical areas in İstanbul in the 2000s. An interviewee of the study, who is one of the founders of the company *Boyalı Kuş*, highlighted their contribution as follows:

For us, it was very fundamental and precious to stage a play with a feminist dramaturgy. We are still not perfect but we are continuously trying, trying to do the best we can.... I think we at least instilled in the minds of people, at least of those interested in theater, that there is a concept called “feminist dramaturgy”. We proved our existence in such a way (Respondent 21).

Apart from these companies, *Semaver Kumpanya*, which still makes productions in *Çevre* Theater in Kocamustafapaşa, a relatively peripheral location, was founded in 2002. It constitutes a significant example in terms of the spatial integration of theater venue and audience, which will be dealt with in detail in the third section of the chapter.

The last theater to be mentioned in İstanbul is the DOT Theater Company. Established in 2003 in İstiklal Street, it constituted a distinctive case in terms of their choice of space of performances, their economic opportunities/supports, the audience, and the plays chosen for staging. DOT Theater Company, affected young generation actors, directors in the field by its preferences to put on stage translated plays from a specific theatrical form that emerged in England. *In-yer-face Theatre* (IYFT) wave came up within the neo-liberal environment of Margaret Thatcher in the 1990s, with its harsh language and striking forms of expression. According to the literary critic Sierz, in-yer-face aims to shake the audience with ordinary representations of violence, open sexuality, rape, child abuse, drug use, cannibalism, and vomiting (Sierz: 2001). For some critics, those plays hold a risk to banalize violence detached from its social background. This theater wave emerging out of the blockage of political theater channels initially targeted the working-class audience in England, but found response among the upper middle class and white-collar audiences in Turkey. The current reflection/status of that new habit formation will be

evaluated further in the section on the economic dimension of theatrical activity. In one of his newspaper interviews, Murat Daltaban, the founder of the company DOT explains their selection of plays as follows:

While we are choosing the play-texts, we are not looking at the swearings in them but the conditions in which the characters are located define their way of talking, their language... Did you ever see two men who fight in the street, saying “please, gentlemen” to each other? Or can you ever imagine one day in your daily life where you are not exposed to direct or indirect violence? Or, every day, sex is highlighted by TV broadcasting, newspapers, and shopping malls and so on.... Of course, I’m not saying that all plays should include these elements. You can also make a kind of sterilized theater, I’m not against that. But I’m against the conservative position in art. While looking at a Roman statue, only seeing the statue's penis is a little shameful, a little ignorant attitude. It’s strange not to differentiate make the difference between the slang in the play and the colloquial usage of slang. The authors of those plays are not working on rude folk comics; they are significant writers guiding the contemporary world theater universe.²¹

According to one of the interviewees, in-yer-face plays, which allowed putting every action, every subject on stage, encouraged a young generation of writers to write on current critical issues in Turkey (such as urban regeneration, gender politics/LGBT’s, violence against women, ethnic-religious identities, conscientious objection). In her words;

In-yer-face enormously affected the young, ambitious 1980s generation writers. Such impact helps them to find their own voice by asking themselves what we can say more.... Relatively, such a movement triggered the formation of small companies, which are eager to stage their own plays. (Respondent 66)

The innovative efforts of the stages and companies in İstanbul mentioned previously constitute the infrastructure of today’s independent theatrical formations, which will be elaborated in the following sections of the thesis. When we look at the independent theatrical area from the 1990s till now, it is also necessary to mention the contributions of university theater companies such as Boğaziçi University Performing Arts Club (BGST), İstanbul Technical University Stage, İstanbul University Science Actors, İstanbul University Student Cultural Center- ÖKM. In addition to providing the human resource of today’s active theater companies, their

²¹ <http://www.radikal.com.tr/kultur/artik-hepimiz-hastalandik-968206/> retrieved in 3 November 2019

experimental, interdisciplinary performances and academic studies enriched the theatrical field.

In Ankara, the second city where the fieldwork was conducted, the independent theatrical area has moved through a different path compared to İstanbul in terms of both its roots and the opportunities. One of the reasons for this is that in Ankara, as the capital city of Turkey, many branches of art activities are conducted by state institutions such as the State Opera and Ballet, Presidential Symphony Orchestra, and Ankara State Theater. With twelve stages in Ankara, the State Theater founded in 1949 continues to dominate the theatrical area. Although the state theater tradition is ingrained in the minds of the audience, many theater companies that have been involved in the political theater movement for more than half a century constitute another tradition in this city. Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu, Ekin Tiyatrosu, Ankara Birlik Tiyatrosu, Ankara Çağdaş Sahne and Ankara Deneme Sahnesi can be cited as the most important examples of long-lasting companies inclined to put on stage mainly politically oriented plays. Even today, some of them still continue to make political theatrical productions for the residents of the city. Besides these formations, university theater companies' alumni (ODTU, Gazi, Hacettepe, Bilkent Oyuncuları) in Ankara are also crucial for evaluating today's independent theater field in Ankara in terms of the new companies they try to establish or keep alive.

Within the last fifteen years, the theatrical field transformed itself into a very diverse, intense production area, especially in big cities such as İstanbul and Ankara. This revival was much more visible in the establishment of independent companies, the increasing number of productions and new theatrical venues. Especially after 2016, even though this upward trend has been reversed due to the effect of the state of emergency processes, the economic crisis and the lockdown during the pandemic, it should be said that with the ending of the pandemic restrictions, the production processes and the interest of the audience began to be recovered.

As the independent theater field is a very dynamic area, it is not possible to reach the exact number of actors and ensembles included in it, but it seems possible to determine the number of the productions venues and screenings, and the number of new texts written within a certain period of time through a few sources. TÜİK (Turkish Statistical Institute), the only official institution that gathers numerical data

regarding the theatrical field, publishes the cinema and theater statistics every year in June. These statistics encompassing both the subsidized and unsubsidized theater companies, venues, and performances constitute an important source in terms of showing the general trends. However, the accuracy of the data seems debatable especially for the independent theatrical field since the data is mostly based on personal statements of the founders of the theater companies. One of the respondents underlined this unreliability by explaining the data gathering process they face as follows:

I've been doing theater for fifteen years in an unsubsidized theater. Every year for the last fifteen years, TÜİK calls, to ask how many spectators we have, first and then ask for our e-mail address and receives it again and again every year, sends us a form to our e-mail asking questions like how many plays we played in that season, how many spectators we reached, ticket money we gained, etc. We are obligated to send it; otherwise there is a certain fine we have to pay. Many times, I also ask my friends, and most people make it up. I think it is not a very reliable method to gather information. (Respondent 31)

The numerical data about the overall picture reflects the impact of the socio-economic atmosphere on the independent theatrical area especially after Gezi, with the coup attempt, the state of emergency, the economic crisis, terrorist bombings, and lately the lockdown processes that lasted from March 2020 till the end of the bans in May 2022.²² For instance, the latest statistics published by TÜİK, on 14 June 2022 indicates that the number of theater venues decreased by 44 percent, the number of performances decreased by 78,8 percent and the number of spectators decreased by 84 percent in 2021 compared with the year 2022.²³

As the area of these theatrical formations is so dynamic and diversified, it is necessary to look at different unofficial sources to see the broader picture. It is possible to verify this overall trend to some extent with the numerical data from other informal channels. Here, it is possible to access certain numerical data through the members of some cooperatives, theater workers' unions, the reports they publish, their web pages. For example, the theater cooperative, which started its activities in 2000, has close to eighty members. In the Kadıköy district of İstanbul, the number of

²² <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Sinema-ve-Gosteri-Sanatlari-Istatistikleri-2021-45743>

²³ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/tyatro-salonu-sayisi-yuzde-44-seyirci-sayisi-yuzde-84-azaldi-haber-1569290> 14 June 2022 retrieved on 24 September 2022

companies that are involved in the solidarity platform Kadıköy Theaters Platform is almost thirty.

Additionally, the list of the independent productions prepared by *Direklerarası Audience Jury*, a voluntary audience community which gives prizes annually to the productions chosen by its members, can be cited as a numerical source about the developments in the independent theatrical area. The list for the last season before the pandemic (2018-2019 theater season) included 273 plays which were performed by 177 independent companies in İstanbul.²⁴

Finally, the website *tiyatrolar.com* has recently emerged as an important theater database. This resource, which mostly includes plays performed by both subsidized and unsubsidized companies based in Istanbul, also shares the recordings and scripts of some plays performed and written by members of independent companies. In this way, the site records the history of the contemporary theater field especially in İstanbul. According to the online theater platform, the number of plays currently being performed on İstanbul's independent stages is 185 and 55 of them are new plays that will make their premiere in the 2022-2023 theater season²⁵.

To sum up this part, independent theater groups that showed presence after 2000 and increased their number and influence in the 2010s especially in big cities such as İstanbul and Ankara continue to be active despite the negative socio-economic dynamics. Besides the considerable increase in the number of productions and companies, the variation and multiplication of forms and contents of the plays, new stage settings, more dynamic audience-actor interaction, and the co-existence of traditional and innovative forms of staging accelerated the revival process in the independent theater area. This revival even has a visible positive reflection on the productions of subsidized theater institutions.

The global impact of the “performative turn” mentioned above is now obviously seen in the production process of these new theatrical formations. As Fischer-Lichte claims, new theater productions have turned into a dynamic performative event with simplified or diversified stage indicators rather than being a static art object

²⁴ The data was compiled by the author from the database of the Jury members collected during the 2018-2019 theater season.

²⁵ <https://tiyatrolar.com.tr/sahnedekiler/?il=34>, <https://tiyatrolar.com.tr/sahnedekiler/?tip=4&il=34>, retrieved in 24 September 2022 the data was compiled by the author from these web sites

performed in a proscenium stage with vast stage settings where spectator-audience zones are clearly defined (Fischer- Lichte, 2008, 20).

Recently, the effective use of technological facilities (audiovisual signs-lighting, sound design etc.), the body signs, auditory signs instead of the dominance of words and the break-up of the dramatic structure are now frequently seen in the theatrical space of this geography. Especially after the 2010s, theater companies at least partly adopted performative features and technological possibilities in their productions. However, the international theater festivals which have taken place in İstanbul since the late 1980s, the increasing habit of actors, writers, directors to follow recent productions performed outside national boundaries, international professional workshops, seminars they participated in can be mentioned as the small nodes increasing impact of the global developments on the Turkish theatrical field. This process made possible the changes in traditional forms and the formation of a universal language on the stage.

Together with this global impact, the historical evolution of independent companies, which was elaborated in detail in this chapter, always went, and is still going hand in hand with the socio-political atmosphere in Turkey. Accordingly, the socio-economic and urban transformation seems to accelerate the productivity of the field, which will be dealt with in the following sections. Within the last fifteen or twenty years, the growing number of independent companies and new small-scale stages especially in İstanbul and lately in Ankara demonstrates that there is an increase in supply corresponding to the increase in demand in the independent theatrical field. From that point of view, it is possible to evaluate theater as a mechanism, which evolves simultaneously with the changes taking place in the social sphere. In this sense, in a socio-political environment where concepts became blurred and the possibilities of expression narrowed, today's theater seems to fulfill various functions. Independent theater area corresponds especially to the need for a new form of expression for the younger generation of theater workers such as actors, playwrights, directors, and dramaturges.

The Covid-19 Pandemic, which we are still going through today, has a significant impact on the theatrical productions and economic and social conditions of the theatrical field, especially of the small and medium-scale independent theater

companies and their workers in İstanbul and Ankara. On the one hand, the quantitative increase in digital productions mentioned in the previous section will inevitably be reflected in current productions that take place in the living space. While, the economic conditions brought by the pandemic caused some small stages to be closed, it also affected the selection of the plays and staging and acting techniques of the companies (low-budget plays that require few actors, minimal decor etc.). In addition, it can be said that independent theater companies are trying to get rid of the negative effects of the pandemic, especially after the ending of the lockdown process; this recovery may be seen in the establishment of new stages of new companies, the organization of national/ international festivals, and the audience's regaining interest in the plays.

In the following chapters of the thesis, I will try to analyze the independent theatrical area from a bird's eye view in terms of occupational sociology, and then to discuss the dynamics of the field within their spatial, economic and ideological contexts through the perception of theater practitioners of independent companies in İstanbul and Ankara. The next chapter will cover the characteristics of these independent theater practitioners, their motivations and their individual experiences and later on, in-group dynamics will be elaborated.

3.1. As if my life was getting longer: Being a member of an independent theater company

“I will repeat here what we said from the mouth of Thomas Fasulyeciyan: What is theater? It is solely two planks and a passion. This passion is more important than the planks. Without the planks, theater can still be made but we can reach nowhere without passion. How could the theater develop if this passion is undermined by the state's indifference or by the actors' greed”.

Haldun Taner, a famous Turkish play writer, cited in his newspaper article in 1960, based the practice of theater on personal motivation, independence, self-education and a place to perform. In line with these words, Jean Duvignaud, in his book *The Sociology of Art*, first published in 1967, defines artistic production “as the endless formations of dynamic creativity and collective movement that evolves in the society which likewise never get a final form” (Duvignaud, 1967, p. 21). From that point of

view, the revitalization of the theatrical area by new productions and new theater companies in İstanbul and Ankara indicates dynamism in human resources, economic resources as well as in the socio-political environment.

Basically, the characteristics of human resources constitute one of the crucial subtexts of this refreshment in the theatrical area in İstanbul and Ankara. As mentioned in the section above, despite the wide range of generational and educational backgrounds, the most active and populous age group in the area is the one between 35 and 50 years old. This age scale indicates the indispensability of establishing convenient social networks and providing economic capital to be able to make sustainable artistic theatrical productions and reach a certain number of audiences. One of the respondents compared the age scale of independent groups with the European case as follows:

The owners of theaters in Europe are always young people in their 20s, at most early 30s... I think I was 29 when we set up the theater. In fact, I think it's not as it must be, it's not an early age, even too late in my opinion....We would like to have appropriate conditions to establish our own theater at an earlier age than our 30s (Respondent 2).

In addition to the age scale, considering the variety of the educational backgrounds of the interviewees and their viewpoints about theater and the theatrical field also provides clues about the features of the area. Besides the graduates of state conservatories, a considerable number of alumni of acting departments of private universities are a part of the independent theater production process. The number of those who quit various university departments before completion in order to enter the conservatories is also significant. The dissatisfaction they felt in various disciplines led some others to be a university student for a second time after graduation in private or state conservatories or be involved in a master's program in those acting departments. Besides university-based education, almost a quarter of the interviewees were trained in private institutions/acting courses where notable theater people give workshops in acting, directing, and play writing. And a considerable number of them got their basic training in university theater companies and established their independent companies after graduation.

Age is a major factor that determines the educational background of the respondents. The older group over 50 years old was all state conservatories' graduates. Among

those between the ages 40 and 50, there were a considerable number of respondents who were once a part of a university theater group. All of the private conservatory graduates or those trained in private acting/playwriting courses were under the age of 35.

Overall, it is possible to claim that with the opening of a large number of private conservatories and courses, a considerable young human resource with the expectation of livelihood and success emerged in the theatrical field. An upper middle-aged director of State Theater who also works with independent companies mentions that the quantitative increase in educational institutions of theater brought about a disproportionate decrease in the quality of education.

Too many young people are graduating. Previously, we had *Hacettepe Ankara State Conservatory* in Ankara, *Mimar Sinan, İstanbul State Conservatory* in İstanbul, and *Ege and Dokuz Eylül* in İzmir. In Erzurum, Antalya, Adana, Konya, Isparta and many other cities there are acting departments... You can ask what's wrong with that but there are few qualified professors. The students are graduating without a strong foundation and without technical, intellectual or vocal progress. In addition, many private universities opened acting departments and acting courses Even the most famous of those turned into a business, a marketplace nowadays (Respondent 53).

Another respondent, a young academician in an acting department, associated the abundance of young generation of theater workers with the recent establishment of private educational institutions. She highlighted the obligation to offer new job opportunities to the increasing number of graduates with these words:

If you allow private universities to open theater acting departments and admit 50-60 students a year, then you should propose them new areas of employment. Too many people are graduating from acting departments.... Too many young actors are trained there. Of course, from another point, it creates a vital environment for the profession (Respondent 19).

The popularity of the profession due to the increase in the number of TV series has stimulated the demand for training. The increasing number of acting departments in private universities, the larger numbers of students enrolled in those departments and the high value attached to fame by those graduates are some of the reasons behind this vitality in the theatrical area. According to one respondent, “those alumni have ideals, they want to be an actor, and they want to do their profession.” Due to the scarcity of job opportunities in the subsidized theatrical area, the alumni mostly

choose to establish their own companies and/or stages. On the other hand, this vitality created a very competitive environment for those newly involved in the field. Apart from institutional education, an important change in the field is the disappearance of the apprentice system, which was once an important part of formal education in the theatrical culture in Turkey. While explaining their theatrical path, a limited number of respondents over 35 years old talked about the bond between an apprentice and an older mentor in a noteworthy theater company. In the youngest generation, it is almost impossible to see the continuation of such a tradition. The closing of long-lasting institutionalized private theaters due to their masters' deaths or economic difficulties also brought out a necessity for a new area to be able to make independent productions. A 37-year-old informant, who has been a part of an apprentice education, explains this transformation as follows:

It was not like that before, there used to be a master in the theater. Already, a very few number of such people are alive now. Once you began to work with a master, you began to learn every little thing about theater there. Once you are there, this master definitely pays your daily wages for the plays you performed in, meets your travel expenses, and trains you. In some cases, you wouldn't have a regular wage at the beginning but, in a while, you would start to get paid for it because these people are those who know what the theater is exactly and they value this profession very much. (Respondent 55)

As the respondent points out, the tradition of the apprenticeship survived mostly in long-established private theater companies (such as *Kenter Tiyatrosu*, *Dormen Tiyatrosu*, *Altan Erbulak Tiyatrosu*, *Gönül Ülkü Gazanfer Özcan Tiyatrosu*, *Tevfik Gelenbe Tiyatrosu*) which are closing one after another due to economic-spatial reasons or due to the death of their owners. These closures create a kind of rupture and a gap in the theatrical area, which manifests itself as a necessity for the emergence of a new independent theatrical organization. Obviously, many organizational differences exist between the old and new formations that will be dealt with in the next part of this chapter.

The plurality and the numerical increase of human resources alone are not sufficient to make sense of the revitalization of the theatrical area. Nonetheless, the decision to do independent theater lies deep in the respondents' vision of and motivations for their profession. The bonds they establish with theater and the expression of these bonds are diverse. Nearly for all interviewees "theater" represents an instrument of self-expression, a way of communication, a continuous attempt to challenge oneself,

a way to make them feel much freer, to get out of the chains, and an unlimited self-journey and also a journey in the society where they live. In their own words:

We really have so many issues, so many problems that people want to scream or to do something to make their voice heard. However, we live in such a terrible situation that on the one hand you can't do anything; you ask yourself how I can express myself within such big chaos! Then theater emerges... (Respondent 6)

For me, it is like always being on the road both mentally and aesthetically, this is the point of the private theater, it unchains me, lets me free (Respondent 2).

Theater attracts me with the uncontrollable and unconquerable space it creates (Respondent 20).

For the thespians, the scope of the search for freedom from time to time is related to the availability of other sources of income. As noted in the methodological part, the largest number of respondents considers theater as their primary occupation area but a small group gains their earnings from many other jobs. One of the interviewees, both a white-collar worker in a company and a play-writer/owner of a theater company and venue, refers to their theatrical space as the only place where he can breathe.

I work in a bank five days a week. In the evenings and at weekends, we come to that place despite our fatigue....We feel much better, freer then... Our company is composed of a banker, an insurance agent, and a family physician. Theater is not our primary source of income... (Respondent 49)

Fox and Dickie labelled this commitment expressed by the above interviewee as “the addictive power of participation”. They argue that “The addictive power of theater acts as a different sort of barrier, keeping people in rather than blocking people out. Depending on the individual, the addiction may relate to the transformative power of theater on the members, the flow-like experience, or the opportunity for escape” (Fox and Dickie, 2011: 164). This channel of escape from the rigidity of daily problems creates a sense of belonging and community among the members of the companies and triggers the personal development of those individuals as underlined by many respondents in the field.

Although at first, theater was a hobby to spend our free time in a pleasant way, after the university, with our increasing common productivity and our close friendship, it began to take most of our time; we call it our second job.

We have other professions butWe live a double life in a different fashion in the morning and at night (Respondent 37).

To clarify the meaning that the respondents assign to their profession and its characteristics they put forward, the interviewees were asked to compare their profession with others. A number of them, mostly from the older generations, sanctify their profession and claim that it is unique and can never be compared with other professions. However, the majority of younger respondents tend towards the opposite view. According to them, it is unrealistic to overestimate the indispensability of the profession. It has a value in itself, as other professions do, so sanctifying it is useless.

We are swinging between what is and what should be... Yes, the theater has to have an alternative word to assert but not an absolute one ... For me, the theater is a place for play. I enjoy being involved in a play, being a playwright, to think about and dream on the lives of others... But can I actually do this? I cannot...Unfortunately (Respondent: 61).

I always evaluate myself as a qualified worker because I have always thought that I have been doing my job in the best way that I can. My artistic worries were always secondary. I always have a professional point of view about theater. When I was young, I never thought that I would be an actor. For instance, I have never idealized this job. But personally I believe I'm good at this job, yes... (Respondent 62)

I give a personal response to that question by guarding my interest. I'm still struggling to do my job first to maintain my living conditions. I'm not a romantic man about my job. I won't say without theater, my life will be over. I'm not obsessed with my job because I'm aware of the fact that I have only one life to live, and I want to live it as I like ... My expectations are not very much related to economy... I love my job and try to make it as better as possible, that's all. Nevertheless, in this country it's a bit difficult... (Respondent 51)

As the respondent above underlined, the field showed that most of those theater practitioners do not have a strict legal framework of work. Thus, they usually have difficulty in protecting their economic and social rights owing to the flexible political and economic conditions of the country. The last part of the thesis will cover in depth the way theater practitioners earn their income and their experiences, struggles for their living conditions, and the networks of solidarity (unions and cooperations) they established within the last 10 years, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although almost all of the interviewees sense the difficulty of equating their job with another, many focus on the appealing opportunity to be a multi-professional thanks

to the variety of roles they can play on the stage. Regardless of their generation, they usually equate their profession with rare, almost extinct artisanship or handcraft which requires intensive manual labor and enormous patience. The words of one of the respondents illustrate this argument: “We are like the last tinsmiths the last copper engravers of Mardin... Like a small community which tries to take refuge in ourselves...” (Respondent 30)

One of the informants, a play-writer, argued that it is unfair that theater activity is regarded as a regular commercial activity in the eyes of the state. The intensity of the creativity of professions should not be forgotten while doing such a comparison. The play-writer highlights this feature as follows:

Perhaps, we are traders in the eyes of the state but maybe we’re carpenters because we look at a log and imagine a table. (Respondent 29)

There were also those who associate theater work with discipline and hard work like military service. Some of them evaluate their profession as one which can only be performed by isolating themselves from reality, ironically being like a space traveller, who pushes the limits of the planet, or a pilot, who is free to fly. Overall, despite the lack of opportunities offered by the profession and the challenges it encompasses, most of the interviewees have a sense of commitment to their profession, and they are professionally satisfied to a great extent. This feeling of satisfaction is related to the emotional capital that the theater as a profession offers to its members. This relationship will be discussed further while elaborating on the economic opportunities of the profession in Section 5.2.

The arguments of the respondents about the relationship of theater with the social give clues about their involvement in the independent theatrical area. The definition by Georges Gurvitch serves to expose this relationship. Theater according to Georges Gurvitch is “a sublimation of certain situations whether it idealizes them, parodies them or calls for them to be transcended. The theater is simultaneously a sort of escape-hatch from social conflicts and the embodiment of these conflicts. From that point, it contains a paradoxical element or rather a theatrical dialectic which is supremely a dialectic of ambiguity” (Gurvitch in Burns & Burns, 1956: 76). The words of an interviewee illustrate the escape-hatch role for the member of the theatrical area:

The reason why I'm on this path is that you actually forget most of your daily life, the social life outside when you step in there. You have to forget and it's fun to forget. This is an extra satisfaction for me. Then if people take things from what you are telling, that's even better. (Respondent 15)

At this point, the concept of "reality" and the bonds that the respondents wish to form with "the reality" through their profession, offer another key to determine their inclination towards independent theatrical productions. This issue is referred to as the contrasting feature of mimetic representation with post-dramatic expression in many theater scholars' research. The wish to create their own reality by staying outside the reality they have to face with, to express the reality as they wish in their own language or to make their own dreams come true was a recurring theme during the interviews. The emergence of the need to do theater outside long-lasting conventions and norms seems to be directly related with this ambition. The technical reflections of this aspiration will be discussed in the following subsection, which is about the production process.

One of the respondents who was a student of Şahika Tekand and a leading director applying alternative staging techniques from the 1990s emphasized this ambition as follows:

Şahika opened my mind enormously about the concept of reality. She once told me a phrase. I thought about it for a long time. She told me that I'm making counter-realistic theater because I don't want to reproduce the reality of life. It's not my reality, I don't like it, and I don't want it. I believe I can construct my own reality. (Respondent 57)

In this quotation, there is a strong emphasis on "one's own reality". Similarly, in the subtexts of many respondents' discourses, the presence of an individualistic perspective was again felt deeply. Especially respondents younger than 40 years old are much more engaged with the notion of "self" which is also at the center of their quotations about the theatrical area. Thus, this primacy they put on the "personal" and "individualistic" also affects their artistic positioning and their theatrical understanding. The revitalization of the independent theatrical area after the 2000s and the features of the productions it encompasses have much to do with this increasing impact of the "personal" or "individualistic." A couple of interviewees worded their motivations as follows:

I am doing what I want to do or explaining what I want to explain. It will touch somebody or nobody... To be honest, I care much about this. I have

realized and seen something and I want you to see it in the way that I have seen it (Respondent 17).

Personally, I chose to satisfy my ego by means of theater. It's a big pleasure but also there I have a chance to share my words aesthetically with the audience, to produce a spark in the lives of others. Saying what I want to say, sharing with others... It seems a little bit egoistic perhaps, but that's what I feel (Respondent 9).

Here, "To share my own words" seems like an oxymoron. However, this individualized need is usually highlighted as the only form of "expression," a "form of struggle", especially for younger generation residents of the theater area. "I am doing theater because other ways are always closed", "there is nothing else I can do," are the phrases often repeated by the informants. However, it can also be said that bringing people together can be the result of performances where different individualities intersect. This can be evaluated as a reflection of the compound, fusional position of the current individual in network societies who is both trying to preserve his or her individuality and trying to find those who resemble himself and escape from loneliness at the same time. These motivations will be elaborated further in the following part of the thesis that deals with the organization of the theatrical community.

We really have so many issues, so many problems that people want to scream or to do something to make their voice heard. However, we live in such a terrible situation that on the one hand you can't do anything; you ask yourself how I can express myself within such big chaos! Then theater emerges... Till now we have always made productions according to our own doubts, our own worries. From that point, the theater is a political thing, within a system that expects you to be completely apolitical. However, my identity, the geography in which I was born does not allow such a position. You naturally become political due to the problems you face within your daily life first in your own geography and then in the city, the metropolis in which you live. (Respondent 6)

From that viewpoint, when asked whether the art of theater exists for its own sake or for the sake of the society, the response from the most active generational group of respondents seems to be none of them. What makes them creative and what triggers their experimental capacities appear to be the inclination toward the personal. A forty-year-old respondent, a play-writer who wrote a play on the current problems of this geography, explains her creation process as follows:

Sometimes they say you have chosen many painful, vicious issues in Turkey. No, I have not... I wanted to write plays about the issues that hurt me....

Many other plays must have been written by now. There should be many more. So my point of departure has not changed. I depart from a much more personal point. I don't write on something which does not hurt me. For instance, I wrote the play *Babylon*. Of course, the death of workers in construction sites hurt me, but the thing which hurt me more, was that as a white-collar, I go and buy apartments from housing estates, which those workers had to build, by taking bank credit. Actually, I wrote about that... I'm telling this there but I'm not asking if any worker has died during the construction of these sites... My aim was to make them ask this question to themselves because none of the audience is a blue-collar worker. So relatively, it still is my personal point of view. It's like asking if there is someone who thinks like me, do you share the same pain with me? (Respondent 66)

From a similar perspective, the words of the respondents above 30 years old indicate without exception that their viewpoint about theater converted from a personal form to a more social one. To put it differently, although the social meaning and function of the work they accomplished are hidden behind their personal motivations and sense of belonging, it still stands there between the lines of the script or as a part of staging. Relatively, the meaning attached to the profession is both personal and social, which cannot be separated from one another. The theatrical scene for the informants, rather than solely a job, is a way of being, an ontological matter. One of the respondents named his job as "self-discovery." In his own words:

It's more of a self-discovery, the discovery of certain stories and characters there. And in the first place, it's something that enriched my point of view about life because every story you are involved in, every work you do somehow leads you to find your own faults. It's kind of a confrontation, if you have the courage of course. Sometimes I can't be courageous enough for that. Also, you can only catch this confrontation with the help of the third eye of the spectator. This is also essentially what is occurring for the audience I think. To break up the vicious circle you are in and to take notice of the outside space from a social perspective. It operates like that. (Respondent 8)

This picture seems to indicate a different perception of sociality, a much more fragmented one such that the individual does not sacrifice his/her subjectivity. Compromising the personal with the social seems like a common ground especially among the most active generational group of respondents. However, some minor dissimilarities were also perceived in terms of their mission they can accomplish through theater and the meaning they attach to it. Respondents over 50 years old stressed the "mission" of the theater more. They are mostly concerned with the

“social role” of theater as a way of “educating”, “enlightening”, “demonstrating what true/false is or what just/unjust is to their society.”

While doing theater, I both train myself and gain the necessary knowledge. Also, I train other people and inform them. (Respondent 28)

Theater is an area of life that affects people's position, behavior as well as the whole political and social environment (Respondent 18)

The emphasis on the instructive role of the art of theater is mostly noticed in the words of the interviewees who have worked for a while in state or institutionalized theaters, especially in Ankara. One of the respondents compared and contrasted the role he attaches to the theater in his own life and the place it occupies in Turkey as follows:

I don't think that theater means much in my country. Unfortunately, it's just for fun. For me, it's the whole life. It means to me humanity as a whole. In the theater, we actually demonstrate the distorted parts of human life, the deficiencies of humanity. Theater educates. Those who hold power always know that theater educates so well, thus they try to limit that power. For me theater is life, a place of salvation and education. I don't know how life progresses in a country where theater doesn't exist. I can't even imagine anything like that. (Respondent 33)

Despite the different meanings of theater for the practitioners and the audience as emphasized in the above quote, in most of the narrations it is noticeable that “having fun” was frequently mentioned as one of the main functions of theater not only for the audience but for the thespians as well.

One of the points that most of the informants agree on is that theater does not seem to be an ultimate necessity like bread or water. However, it has a capacity to enlarge the point of view of the society, to offer the society a different window or lens to look through, to create a considerable amount of social memory, and to make social life more supportable. Thus, except some pessimistic informants, most of them underline the possible “transformative power” of theater. An upper middle-aged informant explains this power he realized throughout the journey in the theatrical stage as follows:

We started to ask the question of what theater is. First, we like applause. We like to be applauded, applauded, approved, but after a while, you notice that this is not enough. Okay, 'cause yes, you like it, yes you are applauded, but this applause is not enough to answer the question why am I doing my theater. Then, at the same time, you realize the transformative role of the

theater on people. From this point of view, you begin to behave much less selfishly. Therefore, the passion for applause is not enough. And this childish politicized situation in which you find yourself during your youth begins to evolve into a more mature politicized situation. Yes, with the theater, efforts to be involved in the life of people, cities, countries, and the course of the world. The transformative power of the theater is there (Respondent 1).

On the other hand, the words of an upper middle-aged dramaturge and an actor of one of the long-lasting independent theaters in İstanbul indicate a definite turn in the minds of the members of the theater area from a holistic and clear-cut view about the social to a more fragmented glance on micro worries and the problems of daily life. Such a transformation can be linked with the historical-contextual transformation of “the individual”.

I gave up my old habits producing something, working on a text, or staging current political issues etc. I’m also not the man that I was 20 years ago, so a story which impressed me 20 years ago does not impress me today as much. Probably it will not impress me 20 years later. The reasons behind this are both about my own personal history and about the transformation this country faces. I’m changing, too, as the country is changing. Such a transformation inevitably has an impact on my theatrical, artistic position, and on the productions I make. Of course, this usually happens, I see some troubles occurring outside our geography and read about foreign lives, and tell myself this very much resembles our local troubles, local daily life problems... And then, I begin to make some comparisons, find similarities and differences compared to our socio-political environment. I reflect them in my staging, put them on the stage. You can only do something like that by means of comparing and contrasting. Otherwise, it will look very artificial, inorganic. Formerly, I used to do like that but now I don’t believe in such an artistic position. The new one seems much more sincere to me. (Respondent 7)

I began to do theater in high school before the 1980 coup d’état. This school was one of the most politicized high schools in İstanbul, so the theater was at first an area of struggle and confrontation for me, but then as I got older and confronted myself, my main concern moved away from there and closer to smaller issues and more individual, personal issues (Respondent 4)

This transformation of the political positioning of upper middle-age generation theater workers will also be elaborated more in the second Section 6.2. Nevertheless, this overall change of the political and social mindset seems to be an important reason behind the increase in the number of independent theater companies in Turkey. While considering all of the meanings and roles attached to theater, nearly all of the respondents agreed upon the need for an independent theatrical space where they can express their feelings and ideas freely, sincerely, without being bounded to a socio-political stance they do not feel a part of.

Nearly all of the informants are in search of a sincere and free space to produce theatrical works. This desire is directly or indirectly linked to the changing socio-cultural atmosphere and the simultaneous changes in the economic and political dynamics in Turkey in the 2000s. Social upheavals, economic instability, the transformation of the city, bombings, the 2016 military coup attempt, and the long-lasting state of emergency were cited as the factors positively or negatively affecting the motivations of the producers to do independent theater. Especially, the respondents who began to do independent theater after 2010 underline the sense of political pressure that led them to the decision to establish their own independent companies. The words of the members of a company from Ankara, alumni from METU theater company *ODTU Oyuncuları* confirm such a decision. While working on different segments of the private sector, after the June 2013 Gezi Movement protests, they took action to establish their own independent company. They summarize the formation process of their company as follows:

During the Gezi uprising, people were withdrawn outdoors. We were frequently meeting spontaneously in the streets. We were talking, exchanging ideas there... What if we rented a shop in a central district like Kızılay for instance, called it the x theater, and spent the whole day there? These spontaneous meetings during Gezi gave us an intense ambition to do something. We have to do something, what can we do? We can do theater and once we begin, we will decide on the way. Thus, this process triggered our desire to do something that we are good at doing, something we enjoy doing. The starting point of our company was there. (Respondent 48)

In accordance with this argument, the Gezi uprising as a social movement had a significant impact on the creation of new theatrical formations. Apart from this apparent reason to make their voices heard by others in a politically confused environment, another reason was the ambition to produce and to experience different forms of plays with daily life contents. Some of the informants underlined this ambition in their narratives.

It impelled people to tell something. After this process, many small companies emerged in Taksim. All of the people freed their wishes to express themselves. This was a very positive and hopeful situation for us. (Respondent 25)

It was like I was re-born. This process was a valuable experience for me in terms of opening a new space, providing a new meaning to my life. (Respondent 22)

Georges Gurvitch expresses the opportunities offered by the theater through a similar perspective. He argues that “The theater offers transcendence and relaxation such that the theater itself remains a completely integrated part of society and expression of it and occasionally capable of guiding it” (Gurvitch in Burns & Burns, 1956: 76). He positions theater as a representation, a social gathering, a social framework in its own right. He adds that, “it is undeniable that it represents a social situation social gathering; it constitutes a certain social framework in its own right within which the actors are integral parts. We go to theater in order to re-experience certain social situations, which have occasionally been oppressive, and free ourselves from that oppressiveness”. (Gurvitch: 1956, in Burns, E & Burns T, p.73)

From that point of view, it seems obvious that the existing state- or municipality-subsidized theaters are not able to provide an area to fulfil this aim. As the dominant theatrical institutions in Turkey since the Republican period, state-subsidized or municipality-subsidized theaters are not opening enough space for young theater workers especially with their scarce number of permanent staff, the old-fashioned plays they stage, and their hierarchical structure in which the young generation cannot easily get involved and progress their professional abilities appropriately. One of the respondents expresses these difficulties young theater workers face with as follows:

Even though State Theaters opens a competition for admission, they do not make us play the role of Hamlet at our young age. There are much more experienced masters/ senior fellows within the institution, they have to play, and the priority is theirs. Nevertheless, I’m at the age of Hamlet and I don’t play this role at this age. There is such a mentality in State Theaters. Since we know this situation, we didn’t insist on being a part of it. Well, we decided to establish our own company. Our friends who didn’t have the courage to do non-subsidized theater are only holding a spare in plays in which 100 people take part. If we were there, we would also hold a spare... However, we told ourselves let’s do it as freely as we can, let’s stage the plays we like, work with the people we want. Then we chose accordingly. (Respondent 33)

Apart from those young founders of companies such as the respondent quoted above, there are those who are both working in subsidized theaters and in their own independent companies. The discomfort they felt with the subsidized theater is compensated by the “comfort zone” of the independent theatrical area as they call it. Of course for some, apart from subsidized theatrical institutions, the independent theatrical area is the only place where they can be active and practice their

profession. One of the three respondents who worked for a while in a state theater, then established his own theater, explained his journey as follows:

The reason why I worked in a state theater is that I earned a good amount of money there. I worked in İzmir and Ankara. Then I asked myself what do you want to do? If there is something that you will regret in the end, then establishes your own theater and does what you want to do in your own theater. This is how I started my journey, because I didn't want to get involved in such a struggle. I could continue to work in the State Theater, but my decision was to make solely theater. (Respondent 51)

Together with the Gezi process, the transformation of the city through urban regeneration projects within the last 20 years especially reduced the number of long-existing theater venues in İstanbul and Ankara. The lack of places to perform necessitated the formulation of a new solution. Search for new places synchronously followed went hand in hand with the establishment of new companies. One of the respondents illustrates this relationship as follows:

For instance, the closing of Atatürk Cultural Center had a direct impact on the formations of these new companies. The audience of the AKM was composed of a considerable number of people, mostly students, doing theater or not. With the closing of this building, the primary cultural center of the city, this old habit of watching plays in the AKM was taken away from these people. So, the audience was in a way de-functionalized. This gap is filled by small venues. The audience dispersed in black box stages, but of course, the number of the audience decreased inevitably due to the tightness, the spatial capacity of these new theater venues. I'm not sure about the numbers but if 10,000 people were coming to AKM, now the number of the audience of these venues is about 2000-3000 perhaps. (Respondent 56)

The major developments causing a change in the style of theatrical activity in Turkey can be listed as follows: The increase in the number of human resources trained in newly established private courses and conservatories, decrease in the number of venues to perform, lack of new cadres in state or municipality-subsidized theaters, the emergent socio-economic environment which necessitated new areas of expression for both the theater people and the audience, contemporary artists' search for new forms-content outside the mainstream, and the popularization of the profession by TV serials. In summary, all of these seem to be the underlying reasons for the proliferation of independent groups especially after the 2000s.

When I think of the reasons behind this wind, I realized a kind of process. First, TV and cinema have begun to turn into an industry since the 2000s. Then many TV channels began requesting productions for TV series. Then

many TV series were broadcasted and are still being broadcast. Besides, new universities are opened, with acting departments which are used as a kind of showcase of these universities. Many graduates wanted to do theater but at the end, they had to be a part of TV series industry... Then those people saved a small amount of money, came together, and established those theatrical formations... One of the basic reasons is like that I think..." (Respondent 4)

The productions that have emerged and still emerging in that process are indicating both in terms of form and content a multi dynamic, differentiated field of research which has been fed by rapid social transformations, and which in turn spontaneously responded to these changes. A middle-age informant, who made theater in various companies in his career describe this feeling about doing independent theater in this period argued that;

There are many troubles in theatrical areas such we still don't have a lively, dynamic theater tradition yet. However, nowadays we are experiencing such a time, but we can't give it a name, that we can't fully identify it, but we can clearly see an enormous theater movement rising there. I don't know how it will be fully described in 20 years' time, but trying to make theatre in such a brilliant period is exciting for us. (Respondent 4)

The matter of conceptualization of their productions is one of the issues that the producers interviewed are mostly confused with. However, today the most common usage that latest circle of companies agree upon and that could encompass a wider number of companies after the 2010s is the term "independent theater." When the respondents were asked to name their theater company, a considerable part of them entitle it in relation to the place of performance, some others indicate the novelties they brought about while the staging of their productions and new ways of expression they use. For some others, the political position and opposition defines the boundaries of this conceptualization process. Similar to Britain, the opposition to the mainstream theater is used as the determining element for describing their productions. The most frequently used phrase in the interviews was, "Our productions can only be defined by staying outside the conventional way of making theater." Apart from the content, the forms of productions, the venues used for the performances, the complexity of the financial resources and necessary networks make it difficult to describe what the mainstream is. As mentioned in the historical framework, since the early republican period with the westernization process, the theater field became to be dominated by state theaters' western oriented productions. In one of the few documentaries about independent theater companies in İstanbul,

“Stages without a Curtain,” a theater academician defines mainstream as follows, “It is still a necessity to define what mainstream is. If a person is able to form a sentence whose subject is theater and supposed to be understood clearly, that image is the mainstream. Thus, despite alternative attempts, the mainstream or conventional is still a westernized, illusionary, and realistic theater, still represented with a raised stage, a curtain, the actors performing as if there is a 4th wall and no audience.”²⁶

Similarly, the fieldwork indicated the state/municipality-subsidized theaters as the conventional way of doing theater. On the other hand, commercial plays promoted by big production companies are also mentioned as a part of the mainstream together with state/ municipality-subsidized theaters.

The boundary of the theater categories in Turkey is a rather bit blurred and the categorization made by the respondents generated untangled and rough categories. Nevertheless, the way informants rank the categories of the productions and relatively the variables chosen to name these categories gave clues about the artistic self-positioning of the informants and their motivation for practicing their profession outside the realm of the state or municipality subsidized theater field. While making such categorizations the informants mostly highlighted theatrical elements, such as types of staging, acting techniques and stage-designs, the content of the productions, repertory selection, the scale of opportunities, the reputation of the companies, types of venues, and relationship with the economic resources. Salary of theater workers is not a determining factor for the classification due to the lack of a regular income, and the scarcity of economic support mechanisms in the field in Turkey. According to one of the few sociological studies, which were made by Howard Becker, Michal McCall and Lori Morris (1989), these categorizations signify “the structure of opportunities” or the variety of workplace for the theatre practitioners.

A considerable group of informants classifies the productions under three headings. First, state-municipality subsidized theaters with usually a more conventional branch of acting, directing, and stage-design. Second, commercial theaters, frequently producing comedy plays. The third category is a wider and diversified route in production, which constitutes the field study of this research. On the one hand, the

²⁶ Beliz Güçbilmez, *Perdesiz Sahneler* Documentary, Hakan Dursun, 2018
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQUfvabEojQ>

term “private theater” is used as the main heading by the upper middle-aged group of respondents especially for the companies outside the realm of subsidized theaters. On the other hand, “independent theaters”, “non-subsidized” theaters, chamber theaters, “alternative stages”, “alternative theaters”, “experimental theater/ performance group”, “boutique theater”, “physical theater companies, and “Kurdish theater companies” were used to describe the theatrical field that the respondents are a part of. One of the respondents put the distinction among the theater companies outside the realm of subsidized theaters as follows;

I can mention three categories in the terrain basically, a main group of central companies making popular productions for the average audience. Those are commercialized – market theaters aiming solely to satisfy the audience’s need for human issues, staging their productions in alternative stages outside the mainstream. And the third one much more alternative-marginal group of companies, politically oriented, ethnically oriented or semi-professional ones. (Respondent 8)

It seems significant that their earning and their work opportunities took no place in the grouping of companies made by the informants. They based their categorizations on the type, the content, and the scale of the productions rather than wages and work opportunities. Since the members of most of the unsubsidized/private companies in Turkey do not have a regular salary, the different criterion for categorization seems comprehensible. Besides, it is also notable that despite economic necessities, a transfer or mobility of the personnel does not usually occur among three or four basic categorizations. However, artistic and especially technical staff of the companies usually works in a variety of companies for particular productions. The number of these “one-shot participants” as named by Lyon (1974: 76) is increasing due to the necessity to work in more than one company to earn their living. Also, very recently with the involvement of independent companies’ play-writers and directors in the co-productions organized by big performance venues (e.g. Zorlu Performance Center, UNIQhall) transferability of the staff of independent companies became something much more probable. As new networks of collaboration are opened, work opportunities for independent theater workers in more commercialized venues and productions increased proportionally. While making the above categorization, informants had a difficulty in putting a name on their own company. This issue always became a controversial one for the theater workers outside the state or municipality-subsidized theatrical area. As mentioned at the beginning of the

chapter, the debate goes back to unsubsidized theatrical formations in the 1990s and 2000s.

To summarize this naming debate briefly, the works of the few independent companies that emerged in the 1990s were collectively named as “the other theater” by theater critics and theater academicians. Afterward, due to the discomfort felt by the producers about the discriminatory aspect of the term, it was turned into “the alternative theater”. With the second generation of companies formed in the 2000s, the naming matter was directly linked to the new spaces of performance. A majority of the companies accepted the naming “alternative stages” and established a solidarity platform under that name.

The notion “alternative” was taken from the initial usage of the alternative theater in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s, to represent individuals, groups, and venues gathered around a set of theatrical ideas opposed to the mainstream productions. According to the *Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, “Generally, the term was applied to any theatrical practice that offers values in opposition to those of the predominant drama” (Chambers: 2002, 19). Thus, the concept was used within a flexible framework, which includes all of the productions possible to be positioned outside the mainstream or conventional ways of making theater of its time (e.g. lately for subsidized theaters against commercial theater). Throughout this transformation and the emergence of new concepts to describe new theatrical formations, a small portion of the informants, who are a part of the oldest and more institutionalized companies, use the word private theater. Besides, a significant number of the informants use the word “alternative” by only taking into account the “place of performance” or “forms of staging.”

What is alternative is not the way of making theater but the venue itself. We can put this play on stage in a pub or in the living room of your apartment with such a stage prop but we can't name our company as an alternative one. (Respondent 55)

For a short time, we used the name alternative but now it is much more proper to name us as alternative stages. We establish places for performance as an alternative to conventional stages. Therefore, we are alternative in terms of our places of performance. (Respondent 8)

The most common description of the job they do is solely theater, nothing more than that. A considerable number of especially middle-aged respondents emphasized that

they were purely making “theater”. According to them, even having a claim to be alternative, seems like rudeness, an arrogance, a big assertive word, because for them theater in its nature has to be alternative and has to propose alternatives.

I can only say that I’m doing theater solely, I can only conceptualize my work as such. Some of my friends are angry about that but my theater is not an alternative one because the theater itself is alternative. That’s to say, whose alternative am I? Am I the alternative of Shakespeare’s gorgeous Twelfth Night? If I am, I’m done then; it’s too difficult...So we are only doing theater... Alternative is not the right word to be used... the word independent is much more significant because state and municipality theaters are not independent... We are also trying to survive in a way, we are bounded to rules and regulations but at least we are trying to make ourselves much more independent, I totally disagree with this conceptualization, we are only making theater. (Respondent 1)

We are doing basically, essentially, purely theater. I don't really like the concept alternative. While naming our work as alternative, we put the works of subsidized theater or commercial theater companies at the center. At that point this concept is a bit problematic. (Respondent 2)

As mentioned in the quotation above, the younger group of respondents attributed a kind of falsity to this definition because the conventional or mainstream theater is still not fully established and in this geography. Another argument is within the last 30 or 40 years, what can be named as the mainstream, the state-subsidized and municipality subsidized theaters has witnessed a huge administrative transformation that now it is impossible to talk about a form of mainstream theater in Turkey. A considerable number of respondents also argue that the top-down efforts of western adaptation dominated the stages in Turkey for a long time and its traces are still alive, so in such an environment, it is not possible to talk about “the alternative.” In their own words;

It’s similar to politics, if there is no government party how can an opposition party survive. What will you oppose then and challenge then? (Respondent 5)

One of our directors once asked us why alternative theater did not exist in this country. Do you know the reason? It is like that because we didn’t watch a real Ibsen on those stages. I agree with him. We will talk about the alternative of what? It’s a big question mark. Perhaps the State and Municipality theaters have some kind of responsibility on that. (Respondent 34)

As in the narration above, a large number of informants frequently repeat this self-criticism. For many of them, the productions are far from being a bad imitation of the mainstream.

This cannot create its own alternative way of making theater. Is it the alternative of state- subsidized theater, are we doing poor theater of Grotowski or theater of the oppressed of Boal... Is it a rebellion in terms of theatrical quality...We have no responses to those questions I think. (Respondent 62)

In non-subsidized alternative theater companies, we also began to follow the same path as the mainstream but under much poorer conditions. This means in case of lack of opportunities, the naming “alternative” emerges as a kind of solution, compensation. In much more primordial conditions, you pay less for rents for the venues, you decrease the expenditure. When 10 people are watching, it is a big success for your company! (Respondent 55)

The point emphasized in the narration above, or to put it differently the scarcity of economic opportunities, spatial resources, and human resources are some of the triggering factors for the rapid emergence of these independent companies. Few interviewees criticized the way the members of the companies ascribe meaning to the concept of alternative. That complained about is moving away from a kind of stage aesthetic by being stuck to the idea that everything ugly and plaguesome can be done in the stage as claimed by one of the middle-aged informant from Ankara;

Let's take an actor who acts only with her voice and gaze and who is trained with a classical acting technique. Let's transform him into an uglier and unnatural type. This transformation can be an alternative sight in my opinion but I have to do this for a purpose. That's because the theater shouldn't lose its aesthetics while it brings something to the stage just because someone watches it. There are some examples among those who call themselves alternative (Respondent 31)

That being said, there are some informants who say that recently being alternative seems like a trend and the productions that began to resemble each other. At the same time, they are popularized and commercialized in order to attract mass audiences. For some of the informants, even the name “alternative” is instrumentalized in order to increase the number of spectators;

The very few alternative theatrical works produced day-by-day resemble each other. It seems to me that it is like a disease, a contagious disease once it appears; all of the companies are infected by it. You don't even realize that you are infected. (Respondent 17)

In the beginning, people have the courage to confront difficulties and they got something in return. The next generation also noticed that space of freedom and attempted to do something, and then the number of independent companies multiplied. This process was marvelous but it lasted a short time. The audience is also fed up with those productions. (Respondent 9)

Putting the headline as the alternative, presenting the work done here as an alternative but using a popularist discourse, continuing to exist with a popular mentality... Not totally being one way or the other... I think some companies are like that, they are in limbo. (Respondent 65)

For instance, *Dot Theater* was a very alternative company for some people. Then the company *İkinci kat* emerged. More alternative than DOT.... We should not be inclined to behave like a trendsetter. What is the thing we put on stage as the real alternative then? (Respondent 57)

The point about the similarities in the content of the current productions and their popularization can be evaluated within the framework of continuities and discontinuities with the productions of the 1990s. The discussion among the respondents about the issue indicates that for nearly half of the informants the alternative productions have already been initiated by the oldest companies of the 1990s, thus, the current works constitutes a continuation of an ongoing process. A middle-aged actress trained in one of the first alternative companies *Studio Oyuncuları*, is one of the respondents who disagree with the view that today's theatrical companies and their productions are structured from scratch. After spending a relatively long period in *Stadyo Oyuncuları* Company, she was involved in the productions of newly established independent companies. She exemplifies the point of view about these discontinuity- continuities issues of the theater workers within her narrative as follows;

From that point, this concept of alternative is an interesting one for me. When I started to work on my first play in a young generation company, one of those people asked me, you are doing alternative theater for the first time, how do you feel? I have been working for years within the field. He nullifies all of the works done before in a way... It was already done there, we didn't discover it today. Of course, it evolved very nicely between us with the forms of staging, acting techniques, contents of the scripts and it became more powerful. However claiming that his age group came out and made an alternative theater by making a revolution suddenly is unfair.... There was no such thing, a history was already there. Therefore, to use the word independent is more appropriate in my opinion, the fact that you do not depend on anything while producing... I prefer the concept of independent due to this idea. (Respondent 57)

As in the narrated experience of the respondent above, a small number of informants, rather than pointing to the historical reference of oldest the earliest experimental theater works, associate the current independent productions as a part of a new wave that flourished after the 2000s and diversified especially after the Gezi protests. Besides, some of the upper middle-aged respondents accused the first generation

theater workers of not lending a hand to the younger theater companies' members. According to them, due to this rupture with the past theatrical formations, as time goes passes, new works tend to approach to the mainstream productions of subsidized theaters more easily.

Nevertheless, there was a problem in the transfer of experiences from the 1990s... so in Turkey, there is such a problem. Every generation usually has to start anew. After 2000, when new spaces emerged with the name alternative, then they refused to define themselves as the alternative because they thought that they were not. They are doing the same theater, if they have a theater stage, they will put the same texts on stage or make similar stagings, I don't know... Therefore, the alternative of the 90s and the alternative of the 2000s are very different. Today's alternative is perhaps more spatially alternative. (Respondent 4)

Although space of performances stimulates experimental forms and contents of productions, the informants mostly described the condition being spatially alternative in terms of the financial impossibilities and constraints as mentioned in the quotation. By transforming slummy apartments, old small factories, shops, warehouses into theater venues nearly a quarter of the informants created a new space for experimental performance as an alternative to Italian (frame) stages. Apart from those who express their opinion about the naming issue, nearly one-third of the informants declared that it is too early to label the current productions or companies with a clear-cut concept since their formation is still going on. In a 40-year-old play-writer's words;

I think we are too hasty in the naming these formations; we started to talk about it while we are still discovering what to do, we are still dealing with it, but simultaneously we started to name it, as alternative stages, as independent theaters, or alternative venues, alternative theaters...It is not clear if we named the plays, or space of performance or directly the building...It's too early I think, we need 20 years or more to name it appropriately. (Respondent 66)

Besides these discussions, a very recent name offered by İstanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSÜ) in 2014 İstanbul Theater Festival was; "The New Wave". A 37-year-old play-writer commented on the usage of such a name as follows;

The inclusiveness of the naming is significant in an environment where the productions of new theater companies began to gradually resemble each other. Yes, I think it was like the emergence of a new wave really, perhaps not much like the companies in 1980s which were like a milestone. Those companies are not like *Ortaoyuncuları*, *Dostlar Tiyatrosu* or *Ankara Sanat*

Tiyatrosu in terms of their organization, their audience, their techniques, etc.
(Respondent 51)

In the light of all of these narrations, three quarters of the interviewees find it appropriate to associate the use of the concept “independent” with both their own theater productions and the field they are a part of it. This common ground led me to use the same word throughout the thesis and to discuss it in the following parts in relation to the content of the production, the space of production, the political structure, and the economic structure.

To summarize, the formation of the independent theater field has professional, technical, economic as well as emotional reasons for the theater workers in İstanbul and Ankara, who participated in the study. They either formed an independent company or were involved in the productions of an already existing independent company because they wish to practice the profession they were trained in, by a sense of sincerity, peace, and moral satisfaction, during the rehearsals and the performances with their company and their audience. The sense of intimacy and sincerity is associated with the proximity of the audience with the actors, the obligation of the theater workers to take part throughout the entire production process, and the closed relationship established in the company. Two actors from two different theater companies in Ankara express the reason behind this sincerity as follows;

People find it sincere, transparent... I cannot lie to you from that distance. I may not get you into an illusion. I think this is an experience, an exciting trial with 40 people in a chamber theater. It opens us to different spaces. Actors and Audience, we are as we are... (Respondent 33)

We are searching for something sincere, the audience...If you manage to be sincere, you are successful...The audience believes you, understands easily whether you are sincere or not while watching you. We are staging a rock musical, *Woyzeck's* tale nowadays. During the performances, we saw clearly that our spectators are open to watching something sincere and new... (Respondent 34)

In the fourth chapter, this mode of interaction that is used during the performance and the whole production process will be elaborated. In this first part of the field analysis, I tried to discuss the reason behind the flourishing of the independent theater area by means of the personal and social motivations of its workers. In the second part of this chapter, the inner organization of and the bonds within

independent theater companies, will be discussed further, with a comparative analysis with the subsidized theaters.

3.2. “Sharing life”: Transformation of the organization, the profession and inner group dynamics

As mentioned in the section above, the background, the personal, and the social motivations of the theater public are crucial to understanding the nature of the independent theater area in Turkey. Besides those factors, elaborating on the internal dynamics, modes of operation and interactions of the theater companies, which Georges Gurvitch defines as a branch of the study of theater sociology, is also important to understand the transformation of the field. Independent theatrical area provided an opportunity to examine in details a network of occupations with its history, tradition, culture, and bonds within the community. From that viewpoint, the definition of the term of “art worlds” of Howard Becker,²⁷ the networks of cooperation and assistance through which work gets done”, is useful in clarifying the organizational aspect of independent theater companies and the relations among their workers (Becker: 1983, xxvi). As in Becker’s comparative methodology for understanding both the general social relations and the artistic ones, looking at different categories of companies within a variety of scale serves to understand the inner organization of the independent theater area. Especially after the 2000s in İstanbul, and recently in Ankara, some divergent and convergent features can be discerned in the organizational scale of those independent companies. However, during the field study, the first reference point in the respondents’ perceptions about their own working conditions and the networks seems to be primarily the subsidized theaters and their colleagues working in those institutions.

The main difference between the organizations of subsidized theaters and independent companies is related to the level of specialization of the staff. With their fixed budget, the state or municipality-supported theaters distribute tasks among a wide range of very specialized technical and artistic staff.²⁷ For independent

²⁷ According to the State Theater Duties and Working Directive, the organizational structure of the State Theater staff consists of actors, directors, dramaturges, sound-light designers, stage designers, costume designers, make-up designers, theater photographers, choreographers, prompters, light operators, sound operators, stage managers, dressmakers, wig makers, event managers, stage machinists, stage carpenters, stage shoemakers, prop makers, general manager, technical director,

companies, the organizational framework is much more simplified. However, depending on the level of institutionalization, and the historical background, the distribution of tasks may be made in much more detail and with a larger staff. For instance, a theater company with a 20-year history in Kadıköy is presented with a relatively large specialized staff in its web site. It comprises a general director, a general art director, stage manager, lighting designer, sound-effect designer, stage officer, and caretaker²⁸. One of the respondents, the founder of a ten-year-old company also described a relatively specialized staff with administrative staff, a stage manager, lighting and technical staff, a graphic designer, and a permanent group of actors and directors. (Respondent 54)

A relatively new company in the same district has a smaller number of less specialized staff but a new, much more populous position is added to the distribution of its tasks; the assistants. This position denotes various types of responsibilities. In particular, it involves many tasks that do not require much artistic skill or qualification or many years of experience. That staff is particularly common in middle-scale, relatively well-known theater companies due to economic constraints. Another name given for this position is the “company’s voluntary group.” It is not always possible to form such a support group for a smaller company, as it has a lower level of recognition than others and as modest works can only be produced with a small circle of core staff. However, recently a considerable number of independent theater companies in İstanbul began to recruit a number of volunteers to help the production process of the plays.

In her study about the Western Theater, Lyon indicated that voluntary groups expect a part of to be a part of the actors in the company and to have a chance to act in a play. This would, in turn create problems for the internal organization of the company according to Lyon (1985:85). During my fieldwork, the voluntary position that is frequently mentioned by the informants was approached from an opposite aspect than that in Lyon’s study. A 36-year-old informant finds this kind of expectation or commitment motivation meaningful and natural in such a close, intimate environment where the bonds among the members of many independent

artistic director, play-writers, marketing director, correpetitor, public relation officer, the front of house manager, box office staff (retrieved from Culture and Tourism Ministry web site in 06.03.2019 <http://teftis.kulturturizm.gov.tr/TR-14893/devlet-tiyatrolari-gorev-ve-calisma-yonergesi.html>)

²⁸ <https://www.oyunatoiyesi.com/hakkimizda>

companies are established by means of feelings rather than the institutionalized structures, positions, and material provisions.

This position is definitely problematic in terms of taking-giving balance first. Secondly, for example, I want to pay money to people working with me as much as possible while doing a job, this also motivates me to work more efficiently. Otherwise, my job turns into my own comfort zone. Nobody's getting money anyway. I offer him a project, but I don't have money. That's ridiculous... I can't tie up anybody for three months. Once, I've met a boy in the past. He told me that he worked as a volunteer for years for a theater company with many others... However, despite the need for actors for new plays, they didn't take any of these voluntary people in the group, they opened an audition, they choose the actors by the audition. They even don't accept those volunteers to the audition, and don't let them try their chance.... The boy got crazy, so he says, they told us, and we're a family, such a lie! You know, the trouble is the emotionality that is attributed there. On the one hand, the company is not obliged to accept those people as actor or actress if those people are not able to act as it should be but on the other hand, they should not create such an expectation from the beginning. A thin balanced should be established appropriately if not the process turns into a kind of exploitation. (Respondent 57)

Similarly, another respondent; the 35-year-old director of an independent company criticizes the position and responsibilities that was attributed to those young volunteers by the members of the companies as follows;

We don't like this kind of invitations; we're looking for volunteer assistants. This means come and work with us for free. That's not fair. Most of them are students, perhaps they are trying to learn something from us, but they give money for transportation, for lunch. You can have more experience in the area but all of us have something to learn from each of other. Now there is such a great voluntary assistant explosion... This position turns into be used as a utilitarian tool by the companies. We are already like volunteers if you look at the amount of money, the daily wages we can earn from that job (Respondent 2).

The lack of economic opportunities that influence the company 'members artistic and daily life conditions that the respondent above points out will be elaborated further in the last part of the thesis. Becker emphasizes the centrality of the artistic positions for the companies. According to him, a special meaning is attributed to the artistic activities, and the remaining ones seem like a craft or an artisanship and their crew is evaluated as a support staff less worthy to respect. However as the possibilities offered by those staff for the production are transformed and increased with technical development, their status may also change (Becker in Tanner: 2003, 87).

The different values attributed to artistic and technical staff distinguish one theatrical community from another. Becker illustrates the difference of these positions by quoting from Pevsner as follows: “Art worlds differ in how they allocate the honorific title of artist and in the mechanisms by which they choose who gets it and who does not” (Pevsner, 1940 in Becker: 2003, 87). For the relatively large-scale independent companies in İstanbul and Ankara founded by actors, dramaturges, or directors; the artistic qualifications come to the fore during the production process. This priority can also be observed in the publicity tools (flyers, web sites, etc.). However, apart from more institutionalized companies with permanent venues, few independent companies have an opportunity to form a stable technical staff. The members of the least populous ones have to manage both artistic and technical tasks by themselves, or relatively bigger and more celebrated companies have a semi-professional/voluntary supporting staff for technical posts. In state or municipality-subsidized theaters, a much more visible and stable technical post is a part of the production process. One of the crucial points to be mentioned about the theater staff is the recent tendency to hire, a staff to arrange social media accounts. Nowadays the post of social media officer constitutes an important channel to publicize the productions and to increase the number of the audience. The respondents emphasized that many companies are working with a social media officer. Its economic benefits and effect on the audience will be elaborated in the second part of this chapter but the perceptions of the informants about the post are crucial to evaluate its impact.

I realized a few years ago that social media is a crucial factor. In the past, the newspaper was used for advertising. Let's look at the television, let the journalist write an article in a newspaper about one theater, but it doesn't work because the newspaper is not sold anymore. The news is already being tracked over the internet, so the issue of contact with that old audience and the issue of self-disclosure are now shifted to social media today and there are experts. Therefore, it is necessary to use social media well. We have a professional friend who is engaged in this business, he is doing this job scientifically. He showed us this with some data that the audience had an increase of 400%. If an extraordinary figure of 400% is just an increase in social media, it is important to take social media seriously, not to have dinosaurs (Respondent 7).

Many respondents compares the over specialized organization scheme in the State Theaters and the simplified one in independent companies within their narrations.

For instance, a former general director of the State Theaters who currently has her own independent company relates this abundance of specialized staff as follows;

In the State Theater, you snap your fingers, then your stylish decor comes... You do like that and then your costumes come... You look at them and if you do not like them, you can tell the designer to change it, to design a new one... If the director does not like the decor, huge iron-made decors can easily be removed, remade. Billions can be spent on them...An actor or actress can ask where my foot carpet and sleepers are? Or she /he will wear his/ her coat, she waits for the dresser. It seems like a caprice but, the organization in State Theater is like that (Respondent19).

Similar to her perception, another ex-actress of State Theater who recently formed her own independent company emphasizes that apart from subsidized theaters, the level of specialization in the division of labor depends on the size, and human and economic resources of the company.

There is such a system in the State Theaters, all you need comes to you by itself, is prepared for you by specialized staff. The wig is matched to your eye color, skin color, and of the color for the historical setting of the stage. The shoes are well fitted for your foot size. The costumes are tailored according to your size. The system runs like clockwork. Nevertheless, in independent companies due to economic reasons, it is unrealistic to dream about such specialization. Of course, it depends on the company on the conditions of the company. Perhaps DOT Company is not dealing with such problems. However, small-scale companies produce in such limited conditions. On the other hand, such limitation brings out a more creative, an intimate environment (Respondent 19).

Likewise, another informant indicates the level of the division of labor in a much more clear-cut institutionalized non- subsidized theater as follows;

One of my friends began working as an actor in Oyun Atölyesi a well-established company in Kadıköy. His first play was based on bodily performance, thus he sweats frequently. During the intermission of his first play, many assistants wanted to help him to take off his clothes to wash them immediately. They told him it was their job; don't hesitate for that....This behaviour seemed a bit strange to him because in his former small company, everybody was dealing with their own clothes, accessories and all kinds of staff. (Respondent 34)

Yet another interviewee describes the specialization in the subsidized theater as a privilege that facilitates the operation of the production process. However she underlines that this multi-tasking increases the commitment of members within the independent companies.

Of course, it is very different subsidized institutions. It's a very luxurious thing. There, the actors enter the backstage one hour before the play, put on their costume, get their make-up done, the hairdresser comes and does their hair, the stage design team has arrived hours before the actors. The lights are already prepared. The responsibilities are well defined. Of course, this is something that makes the organization much easier in subsidized companies. There is no such opportunity in independent groups; we have to do everything together. But I love it; we love it, in fact, in terms of adopting the job, touching everything about the play, being able to face the audience without escaping, hearing their ideas waiting here at the exit. This is a very good thing (Respondent 9).

Apart from many independent companies, in some companies in which the informants are involved, while there is a division of labor, it is unrealistic to speak about a well-established specialized staff due to the lack of economic and spatial facilities as well as human resources. Such a more flexible division of labor seems opposed to the claims of Becker that non-specialization in art is only applicable in some communally shared art forms such as square dance or semi-professional artistic attempts (Becker in Tanner, 2003: 87). On the one hand, the reason behind that non-specialization is the diverse features of independent companies. Those companies who do theater as a secondary professional job, are the least populous ones, or have their roots in semi-professional university companies are still continuing to realize productions within a much more collective and unspecialized structure. On the other hand, the structure that most of the interviewees described is a heterarchical one²⁹. The way the companies are managed can vary according to the changing circumstances; the authority is distributed to a considerable extent. Together with the transitivity of the roles in necessary cases, the interdependency that Becker emphasized is still preserved. When asked about whether the companies prefer to work collectively or not during the rehearsal period and during the performances, these heterarchical structures, as well as the networks of cooperation, become apparent. The horizontally organized collective work based on heterarchical networks of the companies is described by a middle-aged director and founder of a theater group as follows;

Each of us has his own area of specialization, as a sound designer, a stage designer, an actor, a costume designer... However, in many cases, we decide together which costume is to be used, or we install then remove the stage equipment together. I am an actor so, after my performance, I can run out of

²⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/heterarchy>

the theater, there is no such thing... Of course, it may change according to the theaters. Of course, there is a director, actors, but we work together collectively. (Respondent 2)

Certainly, theatrical production should be 100% collective but the theatrical structure is also a professional one. It's organized collectively from the actor to the gatekeeper, to the box-office officer; the behaviour of the director is also included. None of them has a priority over the others, they are all equal. Nonetheless, at first, the description of the work that all people have to do is defined. (Respondent 1)

In their work about the occupational structure of a theater company in US, Fox and Dickie, conceptualized the organizational structure of a theater company as group-based hierarchy and heterarchy (Fox & Dickie: 2010, 161). As indicated in the quotation above, different members of a theater company produce a common task, the roles are defined according to the abilities of each member whose work is crucial for the success of the production. Thus, despite some of the basic directions given by the director, the structure of those independent companies should be called a heterarchical one. Hence, this obligatory communal-like position of independent companies seems to be connected with the long-existing conventions in the theatrical area as well as with a new and more democratized way and horizontal route for making artistic productions. Despite the innovations and experimental attempts, in the organizational aspect, independent companies make mute compromises in some of the steps of the production.

Especially for the middle-aged or upper middle-aged informants who were trained in the state conservatories and worked in subsidized theaters after graduation still think that some of the norms and shared understandings need to be preserved during the production process of a play. Becker use of the term "conventions" in *Art Worlds* fits such an agreement. He describes the agreement process as; "people who cooperate to produce a work of art usually do not decide things afresh. Instead, they rely on the earlier agreement now become customary, agreements that have become part of the conventional way of doing things in that art." (Becker: 1982, 44)

The position of the director in the companies can be considered as one of the distinct examples of the conventions in the theatrical field. Although not as much as in the subsidized theaters, the priority of the director throughout the production process is frequently mentioned for the independent companies. Apart from a few companies, the director functions as a guide who opens the channels to follow during the

rehearsal process. Some of the respondents even called it an obligatory undemocratic practice to put the play into its final form within a limited time period with scarce resources. Together with those interviewees with such a director-centered approach, there were many theatre practitioners in the field who were attributing such an approach to subsidized companies groups and arguing that a horizontal organization much more appropriate to adopt for independent theater companies. Quotations from these two opposing views are given below.

The collective work is constrained by the existence of the director. Some of my friends get angry with me when I say that but the director means a lot for the production of the play. To clear up the staging, to extract/ rasp the excesses, to show the deficiencies the director's position is irreplaceable; its priority facilitates the organization of the company. (Respondent 10)

Rather than an aesthetic designed, directed and shaped by a director or a leader we are trying to establish a decentralized theater, that is, something where everyone, from an actor to a lighting technician, can contribute to this collective whole with their artistic capabilities. But this is a very difficult thing, our habits are damaged. Because everyone wait for a direction coming from one single point. It's a very difficult thing. The actor is not used to it. The actor is waiting for the director. We are trying not to establish anything hierarchy. There is no specific center, no specific authorities; the person sitting in the chair of the director does not have the final say. I guess we're trying hard with that a little bit. We are trying to learn, to find that transitive area where the individual and that collective can put their own existence, but this is very difficult even sometimes you can't help but think about saying, okay let's just leave that". (Respondent 3)

Similarly, in their occupational study about the theatrical culture of a theater community, Fox and Dickie labelled the director as "the gatekeeper of the company". They added that "the director has a vision for every production and looks for certain characteristics and/or individuals to play particular roles. New participants to the theater community are forced to rely on directors to get cast in plays. Even older members are required to prove their abilities over and over again and their continued participation in theater is dependent on the director" (Fox and Dickie: 2011; 164).

However, as pointed out by Becker this convention is not a rigid one and varies within the organizational scheme of independent companies. Relatively, it is not always possible to preserve the priority of the director in small-scale companies. This hierarchical position is inevitably broken in those companies as opposed to subsidized theaters or more institutionalized theater companies as words of the respondent below indicates.

For instance before beginning to work on our last play, the director of our company asked my dream about the playscript, and my expectations from this performance. We talked so long with him and with other actors before beginning the read-through. The same sharing process continues during the rehearsals. It is so valuable to have such a relationship with the director. (Respondent 57)

For example, I am one of the founders of the theater with my wife and I am the director of this company. When you consider the case at the State Theater, being a director is at the top of every other position, it is something divine but I stand here at the box office. I sell tickets and I serve tea to the audience. The existing structure is broken then, it should be everyone has to deal with everything in order to make the theater run. Sometimes you find yourself alone, sometimes you find yourself in the crowds. It's a mess. (Respondent 65)

In line with the words of this owner of a small theater venue, many conventions have been changing with the limitations and obligations arising from the socio-economic conditions. The ownership of a theatrical venue is also a crucial denominator for such changes, which will be further elaborated in Section 5.1.

Apart from the director, the position for play-writers, who were outside of the theatrical production after the dealings about the copyrights, was regenerated. The theater, which was once considered to be only as a branch of literature, regains its literary features especially in the 1990s and 2000s. Some of those young contemporary play-writers established their own companies and they have been staging their own plays.

Moreover, during the production process, they are engaged in multi-functional roles such as producer, play-writer, dramaturge and even one of the actors of the companies. This type of playwrights' theaters may seem to be a new convention for the theatrical area in Turkey. However, in her book "Notes from the Turkish Theater" Ayşegül Yüksel reminds her readers that even Karagöz puppeteers, and the Tuluat (improvised Turkish traditional drama) actors had their own companies as well. Haldun Taner (*Devekuşu Kabare Theater*) Ferhan Şensoy (*Ortaoyuncuları Theater*) can be mentioned as important play-writers who had their own theater companies, dealing with multiple tasks in the productions of their own companies long before the 2000s (Yüksel: 2011,91-98).

Apart from this, if we look at the current situation, many long-standing conventions valid for subsidized theaters are also considered as guiding principles for many

independent companies, such as the rehearsal process, the duration of the rehearsal period, the preliminary works before rehearsals. Nevertheless, the independent theatrical field reshaped its own conventions related to the content and forms of production. Moreover, when discussing conventions, the differences and the heterogeneity of the field must be taken into consideration. The intervention of independent companies' formation in the theatrical creation and aesthetics and the relationship with the audience will be dealt with in the fourth chapter of the thesis.

Those conventional ways of doing things are bounded to the whole theatrical culture that companies carry on, which is important to understand the inner dynamics of their organization. In his book *Outsiders*, Becker elaborates on the subculture that the dance musicians in US are a part of. Here, he quotes Everett Hughes' the definition of culture that goes beyond the anthropological view and includes different smaller groups in modern heterogeneous societies like, religious groups, ethnic groups as well as occupational groups sharing common values and understanding or a common culture. According to Hughes, "Wherever some groups of people have a bit of common life with a modicum of isolation from other people, a common corner in society, common problems and perhaps a couple of common enemies, there culture grows" (Hughes in Becker, 1966,81). Accordingly, in their work titled as "Theater communities: Three Scenes" Becker, McCall, Moris, and Meshejian define theatrical culture as one of the resources that a theater company has, through which the company is defined, remembered, with which the members take the pain (Becker, McCall, Moris, Meshejian: 1989:101).

Some of the elements that need to be considered in order to evaluate the theatrical traditions of the companies are the variety of the actors involved in the field and the plurality of their theatrical backgrounds, the differentiated paths toward the memberships of the companies, the temporality or permanence of memberships, the historical background of the companies, and the relationship with their frequenters. All of those factors indicate an area in which many theatrical cultures co-exist.

With a 70-year-old history, its own organizational schemes, departments, networks, and administrative relations, the State Theaters has stabilized its own norms and conventions. Like the State Theaters, İstanbul Municipality Theaters, established in 1914 under the name *Darülbeydi*, still tries to preserve its ongoing theatrical culture

despite changes in artistic policies and artistic doubts with the transformation of the administrative cadres. Leaving the discussions about the indispensability of their reformation to the last chapter, such an institutionalized structure implies a sustainable and permanent theater culture for both its members and its audience.

Such persistence was also realized in some of the independent companies both in İstanbul and in Ankara throughout the years. Established in 1963 in Ankara, Kızılay district by Asaf Çiğiltepe and his friends and a major company making political theater in Turkey, *Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu* (AST) is a valuable example to illustrate the tradition in independent companies. Asaf Çiğiltepe expresses their mission as follows:

Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu will adopt an understanding that will exalt not only the emotions but also the human rights, the human reason, the resistance is exalted, and it will be an indispensable part of a theater community (Çiğiltepe in Yüksel: 2011, 164).

The company still preserves its theatrical culture with most of its core members (despite the decrease with the transfer of many members to İstanbul), its frequenters, its own theatrical language, and work order and performance venue despite the negative impact of social and urban transformation in Turkey. The company is associated with its building and stage and accepted as one of the artistic symbols of the city that is still alive. AST has been a school for a large number of respectable actors, and directors who still preserve their bonds with the company. In a symposium organized for the 51st year of the company, a former actor and the new general manager of the company talked about these bonds as follows;

I first met AST in 1990, with “The Lower Depths” of Gorki. When I saw the play, I decided to be a part of the company in some way. After my graduation from the conservatory, my journey with AST began. Since 2009, I’ve been working as the general manager of the company. We not only learned how to be an actor but also gained a perspective on life, a point of view, a position, we learned how to be human, and we learned the meaning of peace, labor. There was a real sincerity, we shared our small secrets, and we had a common life experience, a pearl of wisdom there.³⁰

As mentioned above, the theatrical culture of a company also encompasses a collective way of life for its members in which people not only produce the theatrical

³⁰ Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu 50+1 Yıl Sempozyumu, 24 Mayıs 2014, İstanbul: Kadıköy Belediyesi Yayınları, 2018: 116

works but also spend their free time together, have fun, laugh and eat together. As the members of the companies share more and more of their time with one another; the sense of belonging gets stronger. At this point, getting to know each other well before the establishment of the company is another factor that facilitates the formation of the theatrical culture. The fieldwork of the thesis indicated that the common experiences or shared history of the members of a company who graduated from the same university or conservatory make the organization of the company much easier. It also nourishes the creativity process and ensures the permanency of the company, which is one of the basic issues that most of the companies have to deal with.

Lyon makes a sort of distinction between the members of a company in terms of membership as one shot-participant and the core members of the company. The degree of commitment of the first group who are involved in the group for a specific project would possibly be less than the second group. Besides, the stability and devotion of the core members are more crucial for the maintenance of the company according to Lyon (Lyon: 1974, 80). The fieldwork data demonstrated that more than two-thirds of the interviewees are the core members of companies; more than half of them worked or are still working in other companies projects as well. Moreover, the rest of the respondents, namely one-third of them are nearly once worked or are still working freelance in different theatrical projects. On the other hand, as in the claim of the respondent above, in some companies, the old and the new participants can easily get used to each other with their ability to produce effectively together.

After I quitted the company in which I have been working from an early age, I felt like I quitted my home because it was the place where I learned how to do theater. In my new company, there, I first produce with my colleagues and meanwhile, we became friends and I love them too much... My ex-director told us once, it is not necessary that you love each other too much but you have to learn to produce together, learn how to do theater together with love perhaps this is crucial. Of course, now after being good friends, producing together is much more pleasant. (Respondent 57)

The decision to start working with a different company, as in the example above is particularly challenging for young theater workers who have been a member of a well- established company for a long time. In return, it is considered by most of the respondents as a necessary step for artistic development. However, as indicated in the interviewee's narration below, a considerable number of people, mostly oldest

members of the theatrical area, do not see this kind of transitivity as a professional necessity for the progress of the young artist and this can even be a source of serious conflicts within companies.

This is such a profession that you have to improve yourself. You must not forget your own wishes, what you want to do, how you want to do it. If you've been in a community for two or three years, and there are those who have been acting in that community for 20- 25 years. You look at them, they have already reached to a point of perfection and you are playing the similar plays, preparing stage prop, lightings, etc. Yes, you like it of course, but after a while you feel like you're being used ... Nevertheless, those people may think that once you begin to work with them, you should work with them regularly. If you attempt to be involved in other companies, you will be at odds with them. It is not right and fair I think (Respondent 57).

The compulsory move from the city, the obligation to be involved in other branches of the profession or working in more than one company due to the lack of satisfactory economic income somehow destroys the continuation of the companies' theatrical tradition. Apart from those having other sources of income, the mobility of theater practitioners is much more probable, especially for theater companies of İstanbul. The fieldwork indicated that more than half of the respondents work in more than one company, acting in TV series, doing voice-over in advertisements or movies, giving diction or acting lessons in İstanbul/Ankara and other cities.

Fox and Dickie define those theater ensembles with high mobility status as "open group" where the degree of commitment and group cohesion is low (Fox and Dickie: 2011, 161). Although some criteria still exist as barriers of entry to the field, the openness of independent theaters especially small-scale ones is embodied in their search for members by posting advertisements on social media from time to time. While admission to these groups may be easier than to a subsidized theater institution, at the same time it is difficult for the founders of the company to hinder the mobility of the members and consequently maintain the sustainability of the group.

Although it may be claimed that, those companies with high mobility are composed of people with shared experiences, commonalities', and educational background, many independent companies also have a similar level of commitment based on their overlapping personal motivations for being included in the theatrical area as mentioned in the first part of the thesis, the effort to express their own troubles, and a

common madness as some interviewers humorously claimed. Thus, some of the small independent companies – including diversity also manage to survive and not to break up. This sense of commitment based on different backgrounds, as well as a common goal in forming a theatrical community is expressed by one of the informants with the following words;

Our company is composed of graduates from different universities and departments. The theater is not the basic source of income for most of us, this is luxury, a comfort, but we have also graduates from conservatories, they have different worries, much more deeply- rooted worries, we know that. We are all trying to create a homogeneous group so that we can understand each other well. And you know our differences are our richness; it is so beautiful because we complete each other. (Respondent 38)

Similar to the words of the respondent above, *Ankara Deneme Sahnesi*, a semi-professional company established in Ankara in 1956 by Prof. Nurhan Karadağ, a theater academician, constitutes a significant example of a company that has succeeded in creating this kind of unity and continuity. A member of *Ankara Deneme Sahnesi* describes their long-standing tradition with these words:

Ankara Deneme Sahnesi is the longest-running amateur theater in Turkey. It was first established under the name of Theater Lovers Community. From the time of its foundation until now, the company made various productions especially based on Turkish folk theater traditions (village plays (*köy seyirlik oyunları*), semah/ Alevi- Bektashi rituals, etc.). The company is still proceeding with the enthusiasm of its members. Our company is composed of people from different segments of society, students, teachers, public officers, workers, actors, dramaturges, retired officers, new beginners, old members...We are a kind of mixed company, we have a long history with its own tradition in Ankara. (Respondent 52)

The member of the company interviewed above defines their company through its theatrical style, as “a folk or ritualistic” theater. Similarly, many other respondents associate their company with a definite form of doing theater that is also known and accepted by their audience. This kind of stable artistic line that the companies pursue while preparing their productions can be mentioned as a part of the theatrical culture that distinguishes one theater community from the others. Another factor that strengthens the theatrical culture and that is related to the artistic road followed is the relationship between the regular audience and the members of the company. The stability of the performance venue, the city, the district that the venue is located, and the profile of the audience influence the formation and the permanence of the

theatrical culture. Especially the upper-middle-aged informants attach a primary significance to the experience and the continuity. One of them, the founder of a long-lasting puppet theater company in Ankara emphasized the role of the permanence of the theatrical culture as follows:

In my opinion, devoting oneself to theater seems incompatible with other things, to put it differently, a person who is making alternative theatrical works at the beginning, lets the theater aside after a while, then the accumulation evaporates there. After three days, another one begins to work in the same company/venue and he/she should learn all from scratch.... It was my luck that I did not do anything other than theater from the beginning of my career, from my young ages. Today, I profit from my own 20-year-old personal experience. Therefore, the permanency and experience, the accumulation of knowledge and of course the continuous transfer of this knowledge and experience are very crucial. *Tiyatro Tempo* is a 12-year-old company now, and we see the advantages of this time period now, in our current productions. A person making a project for the first time, can do something very brilliant but if he or she is not continuing to do theater, the people who can benefit from the project can only be those who have watched it. Thus, I think, continuity and dedication are important in the theatrical area (Respondent 44).

However, generally, the theatrical area in Turkey has witnessed so many ruptures due to political and economic turmoils that such a long-lasting, continuous theatrical culture could not be established in the companies. From the 2000s, the flourishment of the theatrical field was marked by its own dynamics, its own conventions which differ from previous theater traditions especially in terms of heterogeneity and plurality. Thus, the area of theatrical production has turned into a much more heterogeneous, impermanent, fractured, fluid, and mobile one with a variegated theatrical culture nourished by diverse resources, artistic techniques, and ideological positions as well. Thus, in such a fragmented area of production, a renewed sense of community emerged out of the necessity to get away from the feeling of insecurity faced by theater workers faced with, the desire to work more efficiently and to provide the basic conditions to produce collectively. Especially for the independent companies where participation does not provide a considerable income, maintaining a sense of group belonging (groupness) seems to be indispensable. Such a sense of belonging could be linked with the need to escape from loneliness, to feel secure, and to be able to stay together with those having the least common denominator (some resemblances). This kind of formation of a theatrical community creates a space for differences as well as commonalities within itself. Thus, the companies, both

individually and collectively constitute a kind of community/communities with their members, audience and spatial existence.

The boundaries of the theatrical community resemble those which Anthony Cohen defines in his book *“The Symbolic Construction of Community.”* Cohen argues that within a community a plurality of individualities may co-exist, a variety of meanings could be assigned to different symbols, practices, and behaviors and different means of expression may be used by the members of the community. However, the boundaries of the community have to be preserved and re-affirmed by some rituals, some events. He adds that, “the boundaries are *relational* rather than absolute; that is, they mark the community in *relation* to other communities” (Cohen, 1985:21). The mission that one of the respondents, a 38 year old playwright believes to have indicates such a common ground within the community. She argues that while writing her play, she only asks herself whether is there somebody who is thinking like her about the issues that hurt her deeply. Similarly, another narration indicates that transformation into a community liberates the members of the theater companies and they feel free, confident to produce what they want without any hesitation.

We can tell bold stories because we are like a closed community we get to know each other, we are friends in social media channels, our company, and our audience; like a small community. The voters of a conservative party do not come to watch our play Jean Genet, *The Balcony* for example, in which the character frequently swears to God. I can easily use nudity in the performance if I want. We used it, my colleague told me that the dialogues in the play can clearly be a reason to be arrested but nothing happened because people are not disturbed. You know our theater but even the man in the next building does not know it. (Respondent 5)

Thus, both by its uniting nature and by the new resources it offers in terms of content and forms, the independent theatrical area creates a suitable environment for the establishment of a community that can reciprocally alleviate the sense of loneliness of its members; the theater workers and the audience. As mentioned in the narration above, social media (communication networks) plays an important role in the formation of such a community. A considerable part of the respondents stated that the theater companies of which they are a part frequently use the social media as a means of announcement of the performances and the company’s promotion (self-representation) and they get positive results in general. This feedback indicates that along with concretely formed communities, the independent theater companies

comprise virtual communities, which support their permanency and their survival. Delantly's definition of virtual communities as loosely tied, polymorphous, highly personalized and lifestyle-oriented may serve to illustrate the independent theater communities' social media network (Delantly: 2003, 134). The words of an interviewer clearly demonstrate this analogy:

The change within the theater community can be illustrated even by iPhone, yes the transformation is iPhone. It is individualized, it can enter everyone's pocket and everyone's screen is different. Let's look at everyone's screen, all of them are individualized. It is a kind of very personalized change... Independent theater companies also do that by building a one-on-one relationship by talking to each one of the audience. (Respondent 66)

This emphasis on the individualized-personalized relation within the theatrical community can also be found in what is shared on social media. The video of backstage shared by the theater workers on the companies social media accounts, the intimate rehearsal notes published in the companies web sites and the quick feedback they get from their audience in these accounts depict that an individualized relationship reinforced by the virtual networks solidifies the companies' sense of community. One of the respondents' ranking of the impact of their sharing shows the principality of one-to-one relation, sincerity, and personalization as follows:

Social media has a very interesting effect. It has its own rules. For example, when you share a photo, there is a big difference between posting a play poster together with writing promotional article underneath and publishing a backstage video or trailer of a play. Such a video attracts more attention. In addition, the backstage video, a sincere personal video is much more influential than a trailer. I can clearly realize that, in our sharing more. People like our personalized sharing. We are still thinking what should I share more to increase our visibility? (Respondent 65)

As in cases of other virtual communities the question of how this virtual community numerically corresponds to the audience in the performances is also noteworthy. Apart from the well-known companies composed of popular actors, there is a relative discrepancy between the number of people who are a part of the social media networks of the companies and the actual audience. This difference is evident in a brief investigation by the researcher on those social media accounts of the theatrical communities. The numbers of followers of the most frequented independent theater companies' social media accounts are between 10.000- 20.000. However, the total

number of the audience attending the independent companies' performances expressed by the respondents in 2019 is between 4000-5000.³¹

This difference between the virtual and factual number of the audience can be explained by the definition of virtual community of Manuel Castells. Delanty quotes from Castells that a virtual community is a thin community that is able to support the existing relations and add a new dimension to those relations, but rarely able to create new ones. One of the distinctive features of those communities according to Castells is that they are composed of a variety of individuals (Castells in Delanty: 2003: 143). In turn, Craig Calhoun emphasizes the similarities of the members within virtual communities. According to him, "these are then more likely to be communities based on the sharing of a single concern rather than networks that bind people together across many areas of activity" (Calhoun in Delanty: 2003, 145). The narrations of the informants indicated that such a claim seems much more relevant for the independent theatrical companies. Most of the respondent admits the formation of a sense of community-based on commonalities, which is bounded to the necessity of security and belongingness. However, a part of them is uncomfortable with the introversion and the closeness that can provide a feeling of self-satisfaction by means of commonalities. For some of those respondents, this seems inevitable especially at the beginning of the formation process of the community.

I think we need such introversion to some extent. Especially, since the time we started to use the social media, we started to face people who are not like us. Previously, we already knew that there are people like us but it was only a thought. Now we usually see something, particularly awful in twitter and so we need a group of people that can convince us that there are people like us. Of course, we have a big risk there; you should be attentive about the fact that the work you do is or is not turning into a mean of social satisfaction. It can construct an environment where the blind are leading the blind. (Respondent 45)

From my point of view, to be fair, I should say that they are the compulsory stops in this work. First, those who resemble each other come together under the feeling of pressure or uncertainty but after a while, they can easily get used to being tools they used to keep their commonness, give the impression

³¹ Since March 2020, with the restrictions for the Covid-19 Pandemic, the number of the audience attending the performances has decreased enormously. Hence, we have witnessed various attempts by theater companies to look for different ways to keep their community alive. Different patterns of solidarity search for individual- or collective economic supports, agreements with local/central administrations may be listed as some of these attempts that will be discussed in details in the last part of the thesis.

that they like it. Therefore, they can also easily ignore the outside. Such a risk of ghettoization for the independent theater communities emerges. Even if that is not the point of departure, throughout the production process the closeness became one of the aims or basic feature of that community. The closeness that I mention means creation of its own niche, people coming there are from similar social classes, their way of behaving is approximately the same that seems a bit spooky to me. It is obvious that such kind of ghettoization has existed in artistic space everywhere for a long-time, but I don't like it. (Respondent 30)

There were some interviewees who said that similarity within the community would have reflections on both the form and content of the productions. Thus, the informants usually highlighted that the creativity and variety of the theatrical performances decreasing day by day.

There is almost a commonality in all productions; a very similar language is perceived including our company. We are talking about a group of theater venues and theater companies that have a successive and almost common audience, and then yes we are a community. If I attend a play today, I don't only say that I know all the actors, I even know the audience; I came across them many times in other performances... How can something like that happen, in a city of 17 million people! (Respondent 4)

Despite all the arguments of the respondents about being a community, the last thing to be mentioned is the conflicts, disagreements, and clashes of interest they usually witness. One of the informants expressed that she encountered the disintegration of many independent companies where group closeness could not be established and the people did not feel a part of an intimate collectivity due to the clashes of inflated egos.

In her own words:

The theater means enthusiasm, so as in a well-known idiom, two planks and a passion are sufficient ... The matter is not only to earn money but also to be appreciated with your work... The theater is a collective business but should not be like that just it is as usual.... Communication with the writer is broken. It's based on misunderstandings and people are constantly taking their guards against each other, conflicting frequently. Group closeness is a necessity there but, but sometimes it is not possible due to personal greed, egos, interest. (Respondent 55)

A part of the theatrical community is a very isolated one. They established some cliques in themselves. We, as an actor or playwright search for space to develop our skills. Nevertheless, you cannot be a part of some circle because people have now formed groups within themselves. You can't be invited to the premiere performances, or to their performances. You feel lonely in such an environment. (Respondent 26)

Some of the respondents relate the conflicts they experience within the theater community to the inequality of opportunity and the scarcity of professional resources. Additional trainings and workshops to strengthen the acting, directing, play-writing abilities or the physical and vocal capacities offer those members of the theater public a better professional position within the theater community. The narrations indicate that those kinds of additional education, together with the reputation of the university the respondents graduated from and the existence of a family member within the same community contribute to the status of the respondents. Besides, as a theater worker living in a city other than İstanbul, the current center of independent theater productions may also constitute a serious obstacle for finding a secure and a powerful place within the theatrical community, especially for young theater workers without any support. In line with this, the words of two actors from Ankara illustrate this unequal position and their effort to stand within a competitive and conflicting community as follows:

There are many criteria's to be a brilliant member of that community...For instance, Erik Moriss came last year, gave courses on his acting techniques. It was very expensive... 5000 Turkish lira for a workshop...This should not be that expensive ... There are many famous actors or actresses who elevated their professional status as well as economic status by those training. One of our friends from the university did like that. He went to the "Actor Studio," took many courses, now he is very famous both in TV, and cinema and he has his own theater venue and company. However, few of us have such opportunity and those who have do not share their knowledge because this is their etiquette, his label, his basic resource... Another thing is you should attend to certain places in order to be a part of that community, if you don't go there, you are not admitted...*Siyah Beyaz* Pub in Ankara for example...Also, another thing is that, we graduated from Ankara Language, History, and Geography Faculty (DTCF) Theater Department. For a long time, we were not accepted as conservatory graduates due to the faculty that our department is affiliated with. Many times, when we met someone from State Conservatories in İstanbul especially, we felt a kind of disdain against ourselves. Even for a long time, actors from DTCF were in a disadvantageous position in admission to state theaters (Respondent: 61).

To summarize, in this section, the internal dynamics, organization and the relations among the members of the theatrical community(s) were discussed. Over the last 20 years, in response to the feeling of insecurity and fragmentation experienced by both the audience and the producers, the independent theater area has developed its own sense of togetherness/belonging, a theatrical culture differentiated from that of the subsidized or old and more institutionalized companies. The members of those

companies pursue a collective process within which the roles are unclearly defined, while preserving the sense of individualism in productive as well as organizational aspects. The informants basically mentioned that such a collectivity is usually related to the scarcity of resources, the necessity to be a part of the whole process and also the intimate relation that independent theater offers them. Meanwhile, commonalities among and within the companies are as numerous as the divergences. While a considerable number of the respondents are disturbed by the increasing similarities in the current productions, we can still describe the independent theatrical field as a heterogeneous artistic area. Despite the necessity to preserve the sense of community, conflicts and competition are frequently experienced by the members of the theatrical community due to the same reason, the scarcity of resources and opportunities and personal egos as they mentioned. The next chapter of the thesis will cover the content, form and the spatial dimension of the performances of the independent companies produced within this group dynamics.

CHAPTER 4

PRODUCTION PROCESS OF INDEPENDENT THEATERS: HOW AND WHERE TO MAKE IT?

4.1. Transformation of the theatrical productions of independent companies

“The goal of theater is to get as many people as possible to overcome fear by taking action. We create reality wherever we go by living our fantasies”

Jerry Rubin (1970:143)

This quote from American political activist Jerry Rubin which underlines the social function of guerrilla theatre seems to indicate the general intention of the independent productions in İstanbul and Ankara. In the Chapter 3, the theatre public of the independent companies as individuals and as a social group was analyzed and the occupational status of the members of those companies is discussed. This part will cover another branch of the sociological analysis of theatre that Gurvitch mentions; the transformation in the content and the forms of the artistic productions and the production process of the plays (Gurvitch, 1956: 196-210). Looking at the theatrical productions made by independent companies in İstanbul and Ankara in the last two decades, the coexistence of continuities and discontinuities could easily be perceived. The form and content and role of the playscripts changed and the degree of theatricality also lost its weight with plural staging and acting methods that began to be used by the independent companies. Besides that, various other stage elements such as lighting, sound effects, extended use of live or recorded music, and new make-up techniques came up with the development of technological instruments. All of these novelties provided diverse channels of creativity for theatre workers of independent companies.

In this section of the thesis, I will discuss these innovations mentioned above, using concepts from performance theory and post-dramatic theory, along the following axes; the use of local versus universal elements in the content (in the choice of the plays and dramaturgy), the forms of the productions, the representation of reality/theatricality incorporated into the productions, the feeling of collectivity/individuality felt by the respondents during the production process.

In his book *“The field of Drama”* refers to stage indicators from Tadeusz Kowzan. Kowzan listed thirteen sign systems in a stage production; “words, delivery of the text, facial expression, gesture, the movement of the actors in the dramatic space, make-up, hair-do, costume, properties, sets, lighting, music, and sound effects”(Kowzan in Esslin 52, 1975). Although this hierarchical list suits the traditional Western form of drama; it could also serve as a point of reference to understand the innovations in current independent theatre productions in Turkey. To elaborate on the changes in terms of content and form of those companies’ productions in İstanbul and Ankara, these stage indicators had to be taken into consideration. Throughout the history of theater, from Ancient Greek plays to current theatrical productions, the stage indicators have increased in number, their weight, importance, and hierarchical rank have changed and in the current theatrical field, the boundaries between them have become uncertain and transitory. The change in the use of these stage indicators listed here has also been one of the most underlined by the interviewees the recent theatrical productions.

4.1.1. Dramatic Structure: A Worldly Glance

From a more general historical framework, this change is related to the transformation of the dramatic structure. The dramatic structure, one of the bases of theatrical literature, began to figure out in the Renaissance period. Elements such as dialogue, characters, closed structure and plot constitute some of the usual sine qua non of the theatrical plays in the Classical Western theatre literature. In his book *“Theory of the Modern Drama”*, Peter Szondi described this aesthetic theatrical form as ‘absolute drama’. Drawing on the Aristotelian *Poetics*, Szondi claims that an ideal absolute dramatic play should be in line with classical unities or three unities rule which includes the unity of action, unity of time, and place unity of place. Thus, it should have one basic action and it should occur in a unique location over a period

of no more than twenty four hours. Besides, the dramatic character should be an autonomous individual able to make conscious decisions and to solve interpersonal conflicts through dialogues. Therefore, the exact time and place of the play are here and now, which strictly excludes the historical, the past from the stage. This linear progression of the plot may at most have traces of the future (Szondi in Höyng, 2009).

According to Szondie, at the end of the 19th century, absolute drama witnessed a crisis due to the changing social and political atmosphere in Europe. On the one hand, the reliability of the power of individual action declined, the absolute present left its central position to the invincible past. On the other hand, a new way of reasoning, considering the reflections of history of past human actions on the present emerged. Under the pressure of social and political conditions, the conflict between the individual and the world turned into a useless attempt and the function of dialogue as a bearer of action diminished accordingly (Karacabey: 2006:15).

The works of Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, and Maeterlinck were labelled by Szondie as some of the attempts to rescue dramatic forms. Their plays tried to maintain the dramatic form by bringing some changes and new techniques like using monologues, creating small gaps in the plot in terms of three unities and transforming the character of protagonists from independent individuals to the ones sharing the common destiny.

The historical avant-garde theater movements between the 1890s and 1940s had a great impact on the dissolution of the dramatic structure and the transformation of the form of the performed text. The marionette theater of Alfred Jarry, Oscar Kokoschka's expressionist productions, and Marinetti's revolutionary *Variety Theater*, and the works of Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich can be given as pioneering examples of those avant-garde theatrical movements. Although the notion of the written artwork does not completely disappear, a new critical usage of the dramatic form is perceived in their plays. Monologue and poetical proses begin to dominate the playscripts. Bodily presence becomes more important than the presence of the text on the stage. The notion of theatrical representation or mimesis which has been the subject of a long debate since Aristotle's *Poetics* is reevaluated and transformed. These historical avant-garde movements, by opposing the absolutization of art's

world challenged the idea that art is disconnected from life itself. They rejected the separation between art and life, which is a political call for the audience to respond to this call. Here, the aim of the plays was not being text-oriented and meaning-oriented; this was something that everyone would create in their minds later. Karacabey points out that, the avant-garde theatrical movements with the desire to be an autonomous art branch problematize the dramatic form and underline the performative opportunities of theater by revealing the old tension between the visual and the linguistic indicators of theater (Karacabey, 2006, 23; Çelik, 2003, 37).

Under the impact of these avant-garde movements, a new theater aesthetic began to emerge in the mid-1920s with radical theater directors, such as Meyerhold, Brecht, Piscator, and Copeau. Meyerhold developed an approach to acting called biomechanical acting. He aimed to create a constructivist method in which gestures would not be governed by words. He considered the dramatic text, only as a universe of conflict and dialogues which excludes theater from the outside world. Indeed, in line with his acting method, the words did not go beyond a certain tool in the movement map of his staging. According to Meyerhold, the director is the author of the theatrical production, and s/he only assists the actor/actress in creating the tone and the style of the play. Therefore, the position of the theatrical expression on the stage or the *mise-en-scene* is always located above the text, and the theater is essentially an art of acting rather than a text-centered staging (Karaboğa: 2010, 143)

Meyerhold used the term ‘theatricalization of theater’ to refer the change in the hierarchical position of the playscript and the primacy of the visual stage indicators. This notion will be underlined with details in the subsequent parts of this chapter while dealing with the acting techniques adopted by the respondents.

As a milestone in the crisis of the dramatic theatrical tradition, Bertolt Brecht introduced epic elements into dramatic theater, destabilized dramatic form, and redefined the social function of theater by transforming the actor-spectator relation. He developed a crucial device, the alienation effect (*verfremdungseffekt*) to eliminate the impact of the catharsis, emotional involvement, and identification of the audience with the actor and the play. According to him, this preservation of distance will allow the audience to make rational judgments about any social problem presented on the stage.

“We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights, and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself” (Brecht and Willet, 1966, 190.)

As in mentioned in his quotation, despite his intermittent relation with the dramatic text, Brecht focused on historicizing a social issue within the framework of a story (with Brecht’s own words, *the Fabel-theater*), a narrative structure of the written plot taken for granted. To put it differently, the drama should not be based on an emotional catharsis but based on a story that will push the audience to think about it critically.

Instead, another pioneering theater practitioner, Antonin Artaud drew his attention to the search for a totally new language in theatre. He viewed theater as a poem or as a painting and sought ways to rediscover the primitive forms of the theatre where the actor/actress aims to infect the audience with his/her the feelings. This is the reason why he likened the theater to the plague. According to Artaud, the Western institutionalized theater is a text-centered one, and this is why he intended to work on a theatrical staging independent from the text. Thus, he first attacked the text to object to its domination on the stage. As the audience of Western theater first evaluates the play through language and expression, he dealt with the development of pre-conceptual forms of expression in theater, which emphasize the phonetic structure of words (timbre, stress, intensity) and the physical aspects of language such as screaming and sound of linguistic expression. For Artaud, all the means and vehicles of theater must be redefined to reach what he called the “Theater of Cruelty”, a primordial and popular form of theater. In this form of theater, the stage has to create its own language, which should not reside in the story/plot, but in the body of the actor/actress. This geometric language, as labeled by Artaud, is different from the language of written words and it has formulated its own image, its own grammar on the stage. The possibilities of expression of this language will be equivalent to the language of words, but it will take its essence from a deeper and more distant point of thought. In this language, there will be no distortions and word traps, and in this way, the language will be embodied in sounds and tones.

Similar to Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, language is also problematized in absurd theater playscripts. After the Second World War, with the influence of existentialism, playwrights such as Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter and, Stoppard portrayed the loss of meaning in human life, circularity, unhappiness, inability to act, and the impossibility of interpersonal communication with absurd plays on the stages. According to Güçbilmez, "absurd playwrights reflected the crisis of human existence with the crisis of writing, speaking and being on stage, and they were nourished by the irony of telling the disharmony with the language and tools of disharmony and expressing this incongruity with the construction, the form and the language of the texts they produced." (Güçbilmez, 2003: 132)

Theater critic, dramatist Martin Esslin evaluates these plays as a part of non-literary theater literature that dysfunction the language and reduce it to a very subordinate position and also they created a plural space of freedom with the devaluation of language, sometimes meaningless and sometimes completely invisible on the stage (Esslin in Matosoğlu: 2012, 83). These texts, without a strict frame of time, place and plot as well, are made up of nonsense words that do not serve to communicate, but rather look like a repetitive delirium.

Along with the absurd playwrights, all of the above-mentioned writers and theater producers had a great impact on today's theater writing and staging. It is important to note that the interviewees participating in the field research were often inspired by names such as Brecht, Artaud, and Beckett in their productions, both in terms of writing and staging. Their impact will be reaffirmed in the following discussion in this chapter on new acting and staging methods.

Despite many innovations introduced by these theater practitioners, to talk about a break out of the modernist patterns, it is necessary to come to the end of 1960s, a period called by Erika Fischer-Lichte "the performative turn". According to her, the performative turn includes "the dissolution of boundaries in the arts, repeatedly proclaimed and observed by artists, art critics, scholars of art and philosophers" (Fisher-Lichte: 2008, 22). The performative turn showed its effectiveness in the field of performing arts, in Europe especially in Germany and the US, but has significantly left its traces in the field of theater throughout the world. The performance emerged as a pluralist area of performing arts where personal narratives, liveliness, the

audience-performers' interaction, action-space relation have their primacy over traditional elements of drama such as a predetermined written script. With this aspect, performance studies institutionalized in the academic field since the 1970s were also initially positioned as the opposite of theater studies. However, a dynamic exchange of methods occurred between theater and performance art. The upsurge of performance art during the 1960's with different genres like Fluxus, happening, spectacles, body art, dance theaters, and video, multimedia performances constituted one of the milestones for the total disruption of dramatic theatrical form. In this way, performance began to occupy the center art of theater with its priorities such as bodily presence and motion on the stage, new audio-visual tools, spontaneity, elusiveness, and copresence of actors and spectators, and the use of unconventional performance areas. In this sense, the emergence of this new form of aesthetic, *performative aesthetic* as labeled by Fisher-Lichte redefined the relationship between actor and spectator in the theatrical field; the reception of theater by the audience also transformed and the theatrical space began to pluralize and differentiate. Erika Fisher-Lichte denotes the relationship between performance art and theater as follows:

“Theatre had since incorporated methods and approaches from performance art such as its use of non-traditional performance spaces; its presentation of aberrant and sick bodies onstage; or its infliction of violence onto the performer's body. Meanwhile, performance art uninhibitedly employed theretofore frowned upon modes of narration and the creation of illusions” (Fisher- Lichte: 2008, 49).

The study of theater which once took its grounds from theater literature shifted its focus from written text to a variety of methods of staging. Meanwhile, performance art used fragmented forms of narrations and the sense of catharsis, one of the basic features of the traditional Aristotelian drama. Marvin Carlson underlines this interaction as follows:

Although in emphasizing physical activity and embodiment rather than the presentation of a literary text, the traditional concern of theatre studies, performance studies opened up different material for study as well as providing new critical tools for this work (Carlson: 2018, 74).

The performative turn that had a considerable impact on theatrical works throughout the world after the 1970s has also influenced the productions of independent companies in Turkey since the 1990s. The increasing presence of body and sounds,

the instantaneity, unrepeatability of the performance, the collective experience between the spectator as the active participant and the actor as the playmaker, and the interdisciplinary characteristics of the productions are some of the features of the performance that informants use on stage. The impact of the performative turn on staging techniques will further be elaborated through crucial changes in terms of representation and theatricality in the following parts of this section.

When we look at the history of theater so far, we already see a modernist narrative form that is transforming step by step. For theatrical text productions that emerged after the intersection of theater with performance German theater researcher Hans-Thies Thomas Lehmann introduced the concept of postdramatic theater. According to Lehmann postdramatic theatre takes theater beyond the dramatic genre. He describes the post-dramatic form as an interdisciplinary understanding of art, a coexistence of divergent theater forms in which text is considered as one of the elements of the scenic tradition but not as its master. By eliminating the text-centered structure of the theater and its hierarchical superiority over other stage indicators, the post-dramatic aesthetic brings the text to an equal position with other indicators (such as acting, light, music, decor, and costume). In these theatrical works, the hierarchy of the theatrical signs disappears or all signs may exist on stage all at once, or some signs may be omitted to create a free space for the audience. It embodies an action-centered orientation rather than an event-centered orientation, where corporeality comes to the fore, with an auditory and visual dramaturgy, a language created with accents, intonations, sound, and music, where reality is made and distorted. Lehmann listed those features of post-dramatic theater in his book as; parataxis (non-hierarchy of signs), simultaneity, play with the density of signs, plethora (accumulation of signs), musicalization, scenography (visual dramaturgy), warmth/ coldness, physicality, concrete theater, irruption of the real and event/ situation (Lehmann: 2006, 86). In his own words, post-dramatic theater is “more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information (2006, 85).

When we look at the plays staged on the world stage today, we often come across the decreasing functionality of the playscript, an open nonlinear temporality and

spatiality, a broken causal connection, blurring boundaries of characters of the plays, the fragmentation of the organic integrity of the dramatic structure and the plot, and monologues instead of dialogues. All these features coincide with the fluidity, disorder, distrust of meta-narratives, perishability, fragmentation, individuality, and self-signifying status of postmodern discourse.

On the other hand, although it bears the traces of postmodernism, Lehmann does not use the term postmodern theater. Instead, he evaluates this new form as the post-dramatic category that deconstructs the cornerstones of a long-standing dramatic theatrical aesthetic and that includes both a break from and continuity with it. Another important theater academician, Patrice Pavis, draws attention to the heterogeneity within the conceptualization of postmodern theater and underlines its features as follows,

The only memory which one can preserve is that of the spectator's more or less distracted perception, or the more or less coherent and concentrated system of its reprises and allusions. The work, once performed, disappears forever. Paradoxically, it is during the age in which technical reproducibility is nearing perfection that one becomes aware of the non-reproducible and ephemeral nature of theatre, and the futility of trying to reproduce the score so as to repeat the performance (Pavis: 1992, 65).

In this sense, he points out that the prevention of the performance from being at the disposal of the text signifies the transformation of the theater into an equalizing, directing and liberating form of theater that cannot be easily followed and managed. In short, instead of the totality of Aristotelian dramatic structure, postdramatic theater offers a heterogeneous, decentralized, digitalized form full of bricks and potential of meanings which both resist the status-quo and flow in line with the spirit of its time. In the following parts of the chapter, the reflection of digitalization and resistance on theater in terms of staging will be further discussed.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, we encounter many numerous staging of post dramatic playscripts in different parts of the world. Peter Handke, Heiner Müller, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Robert Lepage, Heiner Goebbels can be mentioned among the theater producers who makes post dramatic productions. Today, the influence of post dramatic form continues in the field of playwriting in the global theatrical field. It would be appropriate to discuss the data of the field research on

features of current productions of independent theater companies in the light of this historical development of the theater literature.

4.1.2. Playwriting Tradition in Turkey till the 2000s

While the theatrical text in the history of World Theater followed the course briefly explained above, in the history of Turkish theater since the Tanzimat period, we come across various attempts of play-writing both in terms of form and content. Those attempts include the introduction of epic elements within the dramatic system, openness to symbolist influences, humoristic plays based on language subtleties, parodies, and new genres kneaded with other stage indicators like cabaret. Nevertheless, we see a sharper departure from the dramatic structure and loss of primary position of the text-only in the works of pioneering alternative theater groups in the 1990s. Today in the current play-writing tendency in Turkey's independent theatrical field, the dramatic form with narratives, and with the support of other stage indicators like music, sound, lighting and visual scenography seems more accurate and dominant. When asked about postmodern theater and post-dramatic playscripts the respondents mostly had a say about whether this new theater aesthetic is or is not applicable to Turkish theater literature. Although the term has been mentioned numerous times in the interviews, the respondents mostly asserted that the existence of such a form in Turkey can be only be traced in Turkey's independent stages by only particular elements. Thus recently, even when the representation level of character changes, the dramatic structure breaks down in terms of continuity of space and time and the words are scripted in everyday language we observe the dominance of plot and characters and words in the play scripts staged in independent stages in İstanbul and Ankara. In this sense, it seems difficult to say that it is a form that is fully present on Turkish stages, although it affects the productions with specific features.

One of the interviewees, in her late 30s, underlines the fact that the audience does not like the plays in which the usual dramatic string is broken, the text is fragmented, without the possibility of making sense. She adds that even for the theater practitioners in Turkey, it is difficult to keep up with the current trends. In this sense, she points out that many innovations applied in the past playscripts in Turkish theater

can easily keep up with their times and at that point she consider that the diversity in theater literature has recently decreased. By her own words,

We should question the purpose of the existence of the theater, that is, we are not a kind of bourgeois entertainment, and there is a reason why we are here. Actually, we are not here to give you what you are used to, to make you laugh. Our theater has its own dynamics and we are trying to compete with time, of course, with this technological age, but I think we cannot do it. We can't do other things, for instance we don't have critical comedy texts like the works done in the past, in this sense, like Metin Akpınar's play *The Fools*, we cannot adopt Brechtian epic approach appropriately or like Ferhan Şensoy, he is the last one to play on language, frankly, I haven't come across any new texts like these. I have not come across anything like this in comedy; the number of comedies is very few. So there are innovations in the text, but innovations are also one type. Everything is so dramatic, everything is so real, everything is so here and now, it is dangerous I think (Respondent 66).

Accordingly, for some of the interviewees, the companies in 1990's like BİLŞAK, Kumpanya which are considered the pioneers of independent theater companies, have a very crucial place for the playwriting area and have produced much more innovative playscripts than those written today. The following quotation of a playwright indicates that playscripts in the 1980s were much more innovative in terms of form than the playscripts currently staged by the independent companies.

What is happening today is like a little bit of youth breath for the play-writing area. The greatest gift of alternative theaters to Turkish theater is that they contribute to the training of too many new young writers, including us. Ok, we are in search of a new language of writing, but I cannot say what it is exactly now, at the time. In fact, alternative theater plays do not possess totally a new language or a new power that we have never experienced before. Both in terms of performance and as a form of writing.... (Respondent 5)

Before discussing the innovations in the content of the playscripts, it would be appropriate to talk about the rise in the number of these new generation playwrights as well as their motivations. After 2000, an increasing tendency to stage new plays of young writers emerged first in İstanbul and later on in Ankara. Especially after the Gezi movement in 2013, this inclination became widespread in the last 10 years and new texts written by young playwrights are chosen by independent companies rather than classical ones.

Some of these playwrights are a permanent member or founder of those independent groups; they have multiple tasks within the companies as underlined in Chapter 3. Some of them work with several theater companies for various productions.

The increasing interest in playwriting can be explained with the some of the technical reasons expressed by the interviewees. The economic burden of paying the royalty of the playscripts is one of the crucial points behind this growing trend of playwriting especially in the independent theatrical area. At this point, it is possible to talk about the impact of economic conditions on the form and content of independent theater productions. One of the directors and founders of an independent company expresses a skeptical argument about the obligation as follows,

Everyone started to write their own play. It is so mostly because of the material condition I think... Well, this is also a very good thing, it is increasing creativity. But when there is no place where those works are evaluated, this can be very open-ended and very meaningless (Respondent 51)

As the director in the quote above shows, many respondents argue that they could not find a place for plays to be staged in the repertoires of the institutionalized subsidized theaters. Although the institutional theaters, especially the State Theaters, seems to promote new Turkish playscripts, with the impact of new government policies in line with the re-emphasis of local values, the works of these young playwrights cannot find a place in the repertoire of these theaters. The interviewees mostly attributed this inability to the lack of social-political connections of young writers especially in Ankara, where the State Theater is the most widespread institution.

In this sense, the fact that existing texts are not sufficient for the young generations to express themselves on the stage has an effect on the increase in the interest of young people in terms of playwriting. Many respondents mentioned that the texts from classical Turkish theater literature that have been staged for years, especially in corporate funded theaters (state or municipality theaters), do not meet the desire of young theater practitioners in expressing their daily life troubles, so writing their own stories was a necessity for the new generation of writers. This ambition to tell “their own story” directs independent companies to stage “their own plays”. In this sense, it is possible to say that these texts have started to turn into the preference of theaters in

recent years, rather than a kind of obligation for the reasons cited above. One of the interviewees expresses this need as follows:

We are now telling smaller stories, micro-stories, to each other more clearly, compared to huge, universal words in old texts. It seems to me that it is evolving towards the story of a little man much smaller than Brecht's big plays and towards direct contact with the audience (Respondent 42)

Accordingly, the demands of theater practitioners to "make their voices heard" and "to be able to explain their own problems" are repeated themes both in the formation of the independent theater companies and the writing of the playscripts.

It is possible to associate the increasing interest in playwriting in recent years with the increase in playwriting courses and short-term workshops, the spread of private conservatories and playwriting competitions organized by nonsubsidized or subsidized institutions like Nilüfer Municipality Theater, İzmir City Theaters, Bakırköy Municipality Theater, and İstanbul State Theater. Those competitions served to encourage young playwriting and to rejuvenate theater literature in Turkey were one of the reasons of this increasing interest as stated by the respondents. Besides these competitions, some of the independent companies organize playwriting festivals and seminars annually. Yeni Metin Tiyatro Festivali (New Text New Theater Festival) is the most famous one in İstanbul which is realized by Galataperform, an independent theater company that has been making productions since 2003. The festival includes workshops, seminars and readers' theaters staging in which many foreign as well as local playwrights, directors and dramaturges, mostly trained previously in the same festival workshops take part. It constitutes a crucial occasion for independent playwriting area, a source of motivation especially for the independent companies in İstanbul. In his interview in a research article, Özsoy mentions that in the early 2000s, no one was looking for new writers and nobody valued new writers, and she explains the reason why so many independent theaters have been opened in Turkey. According to Özsoy, mostly the writers who want to make their own plays formed the current independent theater movement in Turkey (Belkıs, 2017: 15).

Short Garaj Plays Festival (Kısa Garaj Oyunları Festivali) is another example of playwriting festivals organized in Ankara since 2015 again by independent company 1112 Garaj Theater. Similar to Yeni Metin Festivali, this competition and festival

create an occasion for young playwrights to put their plays on stage in Ankara. The director of the creative team for the 1112 Garage Theater comments on the festival and the content of the plays written as follows:

We are both responsible for and a part of everything that goes on in this land, so they all affect us. What does it signify for us? What can we do? We usually talked about this with our company. In this, too, a lot of work falls on the writers. We do something here, we organize short garage days for the writers for two days every year, and we ask the writers for plays.... Last year, for example, after the Gezi events, all of our writers wrote about death. All of them were about death; coming to life at the moment of death, state of death, being in limbo, all of the plays written were immersed in the theme of death, so it was an incredible thing (Respondent 36).

A well-known playwright in her late 30's draws attention to the new social and mental atmosphere emerging after 2013 which triggered the flourishing of such a new channel in the playwrighting field.

The point that should be debated is not the reason behind the emergence of so many young playwrights now, but why we didn't see such kind of abundance before that time. Why we didn't see a trans person on the stage as a leading actor telling his own story. For the first time we see such a thing can happen on the stage. What kind of a denial, a denial of existence. We have not seen people speaking Kurdish on the stage for years, so all of this is of course an output of a process but this kind of delay also hurts me.... Once we begin to do it ... Actually, we should begin to throw a stone and then many other come behind. It's coming now, for example, a lot of people started to produce. There should be more and more..., so it hasn't changed much. My starting point is always the same, I start to write from a very personal point, personal area, I don't write on anything that doesn't hurt me, that does not disturb me so sometimes they say, you took the hurting issues in Turkey, you turned them into a play or something. I didn't take the painful subjects in Turkey, I wrote the subjects that hurt me in Turkey (Respondent 66).

The quotation above underlines an important feature that has become evident in the play texts produced in recent years and is frequently emphasized by the interviewees. Even though these playscripts do not contain grand narratives and do not directly aim to cover huge social events, they follow a course that starts from personal stories but touches upon severe social problems. In this sense, it would not be wrong to say that in recent years, most of the topics of the playscripts that independent groups have chosen to stage have been starting from micro-stories but evolving to a macro narrative. A leading Turkish theater academician Sevda Şener underlines the fact that the playwright can be up-to-date as long as he can connect his personal approaches with social events. Accordingly, Şener express that the basic skill of the playwright is

the ability to place the important details of social life within the ordinary flow of the personal, and underlines that the writer should be able to do all of these in a way that the product would be legible in the perception of the audience (Şener: 1971,13). The legibility of these new texts by the audience, especially by the young audience, is one of the recent reasons for the increased visibility of independent theater in Turkey.

Similar to Şener, in light of the development of theater in Europe, Jean Duvignaud underlines the relationship between playwriting, staging, the social structure and social dynamics in different societies and he categorizes societies according to these distinctions. Nevertheless, he does not evaluate theatrical works like other branches of art solely as an image of the collective reality. Accordingly, he argues that the sociology of art should see artistic products as a part of an irreducible individuality together with the collective life (Duvignaud: 1972, 21).

While evaluating the playscripts recently staged by independent theaters within an historical framework, attention should be paid to the fact that they have many features that both differ and converge with the preceding theater literature in Turkey in terms of both content and form. In this sense, it will be appropriate to briefly look at the historical course of theater playwriting in Turkey.

With the impact of the Westernization process which started with the Tanzimat period and accelerated with the Republican period, the improvisational, traditional open formed theater based on oral literature has usually been positioned against the Western-style closed dramatic form.³² This dichotomy of foreign import versus local structure has been the subject of a long discussion which is still ongoing in the theatrical field. Since the first years of the Republic, in terms of form, the government prompted Western forms of theater rather than traditional anti-author, anti-literary forms. Besides, Darülbedayi, the first state subsidized theater institution under the management of Muhsin Ertuğrul, encouraged young writers to write plays for the institution's repertory. Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic of Turkey has

³² Pekman argues that all of the traditional Turkish theater genres are spontaneously demonstrative, that is, in this type of theater, the audience is not put into an illusion in this type of theater, and the reality of the stage and the reality of the audience do not intermingle (Pekman: 2002, 23). Thus, like Brecht's epic plays, which are grounded in practical knowledge of stagecraft and writing for the stage, in the traditional theatrical forms like Karagöz (Shadow theater), Ortaoyunu (Improvisational stock figure theater), Meddah (Story tellers) we cannot talk about a 4th wall but rather of a loose episodic structure. In this sense, these plays are flexible and variable and they are based on narrations as opposed to rigidly integrated classical European drama.

accelerated this process by ordering plays to writers engaged in other fields of the literature. Despite all of these attempts most of the plays put on stage are consisted of translated western plays or plays adapted from Shakespeare, Ibsen, Gorki, etc. Muhsin Ertuğrul, who was one of the authors in *Darülbedayi* magazine, wrote in one of its issues published on March 15, 1930, with the pseudonym curtain operator to express this lack angrily as follows:

And how is our literature of drama? Once we want a stage work they say that there is no artist to represent, as if there could be a fish without the sea, a bird without air and an actor without a play? Like a father who wants a child from his barren wife, we want to adopt other people's children. Those who say that the translation is badly adapted, if you are not sterile, if you are jealous of the works of others, write plays then, give birth to them so that we can see our own children (Translated by the author).

In this sense, the effort to create a national theater literature dominated the early Republican playwriting area. In terms of content, the topics covered in Turkish theater literature have been changing periodically depending on socio-economic transformations and the political atmosphere in Turkey. As art education was seen as one of the cornerstones of modernization, from the 1920s onward theater playwriting was one of the main tools for the construction of national identity and the strengthening of official ideology. Thus, until the early 1940s, the national struggle, the Republic, conflict of Western versus Eastern/ old and new values, nationalism, the nostalgia for the Turkish history, the suffering of the individual who cannot adapt to social change, the primacy of higher interest of society over the individual, external-internal enemies, Turkish language were some of the prominent themes emphasized in the plays. Besides these nationalist themes, melodramas involving interfamily relationships, intergenerational conflict, ethic and family values, and the cultural polarization among the society that came out of the Westernization process are also frequently encountered in the new theater literature of this period.³³ In this

³³ Melodrama emerged at the end of the Revolution in France and remained prevalent until the 1830s. This genre as a product of French Revolution, developed simultaneously with the rise of the bourgeoisie and its values. Patrice Pavis and Christine Shantz describe this process and the character of melodrama as follows: "At the end of the eighteenth century, melodrama, this "bastard son of Melpomere" (GEOFFROY) became a new genre of popular plays that, by showing the "good guys" and the "bad guys" in terrifying or touching situations, set out to move the audience at little textual cost but with much effort on stage. [...] There is no tragic choice possible for the characters, who are clearly labeled as either good or bad. They are steeped in good or bad sentiment, certitudes and beliefs that leave no room for contradiction. Their feelings and their speeches, taken just short of parody, promote easy identification and cheap catharsis in the spectator" (Pavis& Shantz, 1998, 2008). In this sense, melodrama, with its intelligibility and instructive character, affected Turkish theater since the

sense, the issue of the search for identity, which was always present in the background of the themes, continues to permeate in the playwriting styles together with the themes.

The establishment of People's Houses (community centers) in 1935 was an important development for Turkish theater literature. According to Kemal Karpat, People's Houses were designed for instructive purposes by the republican intelligentsia. In his words:

Their purpose was to bridge the gap between the intelligentsia and people by teaching the first of these the national culture which lay among the Anatolian masses and, the second, the rudiments of civilization, and an indoctrination of the nationalist secular ideas of the Republican régime. In their essence the Houses were considered the agents of the new régime, whose main practical purpose was to uproot the vestiges of the Sultanate and its ruling group and familiarize the masses with the ideas of the Republic (Karpat, 1996:55).

In this sense, 476 People's Houses and 4322 People's Rooms (sub-branches of People's Houses in villages) were showing a well-organized ideological model which was used as a vehicle for modernization. In this route, art and especially theater as a direct way of communication were positioned as the founding element in the emotional repertory of the Turkish nation. Thus, while the People's Houses spread all over the country, playwriting was encouraged by the intelligentsia governing them. By this means, the repertoire of plays expanded, and new plays were often staged. In this period, the ruling elite asked the playwrights, writers, or people who were eager to write educational, progressive, pro-change, Kemalist plays that include national issues, national feelings, self-sacrifice of the individual for the benefit of the society, the definition of modernization and modern society. In this sense, most of the plays written in the period were used as a vehicle for the transmission of national ideals and the construction of national identity. In the beginning, especially in the Houses in the villages outside İstanbul, amateur, nationalist and educational playscripts mostly sent by Republican intelligentsia, similar to school plays were performed. However, later on, plays with a more

Tanzimat period. Namık Kemal's plays *The Motherland or Silistra* (Vatan Yahut Silistre), *Gülnehal*, *Poor Child* (Zavallı Çocuk) can be mentioned as some examples of melodramas of the time. As a genre of sharp transition periods, until the end of the 1920s, it also offered a model mostly based on the themes of heroism, courage and loyalty to segments of Turkish society and it was also promoted by the early Republican elite. Reşat Nuri Güntekin, Müsahipzade Celal were two of the important melodrama writers in the early Republican Period.

sophisticated dramatic structure and higher functionality for the construction of national identity were written by various well-known writers³⁴.

The transition to the multi-party system, the climate of democracy, and the socio-economic transformation are reflected in the themes of the playscripts produced in the 1940s. The moral corruption resulting from modernization, the rapid change of traditional values and the clash between the Western and the Eastern (Alafranga vs Allaturca) within the households, Westernized women's issues are expressed by stylized characters in the plays. In addition, the virtues of the Turkish nation, the criticism of the Ottoman Empire, and the old Turkish heroes took place in the scripts. In the playscripts written in this period, we come across one-dimensional characters, which can frequently be encountered in traditional Turkish folk theater, rather than multi-layered characters. Even though writers like Nazım Hikmet³⁵ took playwriting seriously as a separate artistic genre and made formal use of the western dramatic form in their plays, mostly adapted versions of western plays continued to be produced due to the lack of prior in-depth knowledge of dramatic structure and the political atmosphere in which realistic form of drama can be take root.³⁶ Besides these shortcomings, it has been constantly emphasized that the tradition of adapting and translating Western plays will not be enough to enrich Turkish theater literature. In this sense, the importance of creating a national theater literature by blending local and universal elements has been frequently emphasized, and playwriting incentives

³⁴ Examples of the plays written in the 1930's: Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel: Akın, (1932), Özyurt (1932), Kahraman (1933), Yangın (1933), Münir Hayri Egeli: Bayönder (1932), Bir Ülkü Yolu (1932), Taş Bebek (1932), Behçet Kemal Çağlar: Çoban (1933), Ergenekon (1933), Attilâ (1935), Halit Fahri Ozansoy: On Yılın Destanı (1933) Peyami Safa: Gün Doğuyor (1937), Abdülhak Hâmit Tarhan: Hakan (1935) Nahit Sırrı Örik: Sönmeyen Ateş (1933), Müsahipzade Celal: Bir Kavuk Devrildi (1930), Reşat Nuri Güntekin: Hülleci (1933), (Tan : 2001).

³⁵ Nazım Hikmet wrote twenty-two plays the best-known of which are *Ferhat and Şirin*, *The Traveller* (Yolcu), *Yusuf and Menofis*, *The Skull* (Kafatası), *The Cow* (İnek) , *This is a Dream* (Bu bir Rüyadır), *Did Ivan Ivanovich Exist or Not?* (Ivan İvanoviç Var mıydı yok muydu?). In addition to these plays, adaptations of his poetry continue to be staged by independent groups and some of the subsidized theater institutions. Yüksel describes the reason why Nazım Hikmet's poems are often adapted to stages as his ability to establish naturally a dramatic structure in his poetry, to have a theater-like dynamism in terms of form and content (Yüksel: 1997, 11).

³⁶ The past, on which dramatic texts feed with and the issue of confronting the pains of the past are clearly seen in the plays of drama writers such as Ibsen and Chekhov. In the Turkish theater literature, after the establishment of the Republic, a confrontation with the past was a compelling phase due to the political conditions of the country. In this sense, decades must pass for a historically fundamental encounter to take part in the playscripts

have been provided by various public institutions.³⁷ For example, Dikmen Gürün underlines that the first playwriting competition for motivating young playwrights was organized in 1945 by the branches of the Republican Party with the support of Muhsin Ertuğrul under the name “Sanat Mükafatı” (Art Reward). The jury was composed of prominent figures of Turkish literature, namely Reşat Nuri Güntekin as the chairman of the jury and Muhsin Ertuğrul, Nurullah Ataç, Ertuğrul İlgin, Bedrettin Tuncel, Sabahattin Eyüboğlu, Ali Süha Delilbaşı as the other members of the jury (Gürün: 2011,156).

The 1950s was a decade when private theaters had not yet become widespread. Despite this fact, it was possible to perceive the influence of the two subsidized theater institutions (Municipality and State Theaters) and the literary committees (Repertory Boards-Edebi Kurul) under their management was decreasing. In this period, the debates on playwriting in Turkish theater were remarkable. In the articles they published, young generation playwrights criticized the system play selection by those literary committees for the repertoire of the theatre institutions. In this period, the topics covered and the problems discussed in the plays diversified considerably. With the increasing social mobility and the transition from a rural to an urban society, the playscripts written generally started to deal with problems such as internal and external migration, social problems arising from the urbanization process, squatting, cultural gaps in the urban area, incompatibility of migrants to the city, alienation and high cost of living in the cities. Thus, the thematic focus of the plays by the 1950s generation playwrights is based on society and social issues rather than the individual and his existential problems. However, even though the individual and his existential problems were left out in the playscripts and social problems were criticized, one would have to wait for the political theater examples of

³⁷ Ahmet Kutsi Tecer's play *Köşebasi* can be given as an example of such a reconciliation effort. The play written and first performed in 1947, deals with the painful and enjoyable events that take place within a single day in a traditional neighborhood (mahalle) that some of its houses will be demolished because a road will pass through it. The play consisting of a prologue, three acts and an epilogue is stylistically reminiscent of the traditional Turkish theater (Orta Oyunu, Meddah) especially in terms of the linguistic reflections of the clash between the modern and the traditional. Pekman claims that.” Thus, Tecer's theatrical language departs from the traditional, but moves away from a rough locality. His play shows that he succeeded to a certain extent in transforming traditional material into a brand new, free and more importantly universal structure” (Pekman: 2010, 91-92). This reconciliation effort continued in the following decade's theatrical area, and is still continuing to be discussed in today's independent theatrical environment which will be elaborated in the following parts of the thesis.

1960s and 1970s for a much deeper social perspective with a relevant social-effect relation. In addition to the novelties in the content of the plays, the 1950s was a period when, for the first time, the playwrights established their relationship with their plays not through theater literature but also through staging. In other words, playwrights began to construct their texts as stage-texts beyond being literary works. Refik Erduran, Aziz Nesin, Turgut Özakman, Necati Cumalı Çetin Altan, Melih Cevdet Anday, Haldun Taner can be mentioned as pioneering playwrights of the 1950s .

With the changing social-political atmosphere due to the new constitution that came into force after the 1960 coup d'état, freedom in the field of art, press, and intellectual life has begun to proliferate in Turkey. While this atmosphere was instrumental atmosphere in the diversification and enrichment of theatre companies, their productions and venues, the playwriting field also showed a similar kind of enrichment in terms of both form and content. In this period, publishing houses increased in number and variety. Many more playscripts both translated from foreign languages, and newly written in Turkish were published by those publishing houses. Ministry of National Education Publications (MEB yayımları) had an important place in this field. The establishment of the Language History Geography Faculty Dramatic Writing Department in the 1960s is one of the important developments of this period for playwriting history in Turkey. All these developments constituted an important incentive for the playwrights of the period.

Thus, until the 1980s, a dynamic process of production continued in the playwriting field in Turkey. Unlike in the 1950s, in the 1960s, the plays began to question the political and economic system in all its aspects. The effects of the disorders and conflicts in political and economic system on the individuals' daily life have been one of the leading issues that were at the forefront of the plays in this period including their causes and effects. Apart from the previously used themes such as urban migration, dissolution of the feudal structure, in the theatre scripts written in the sixties the topics such as the problems of people living in slums, the cost of living, insecurity about the future, corruption and malfunctions in state institutions, blood feuds, abductions, individual dilemmas, pressure and prejudice of the society on the individual came to the fore (Pekman: 2010, 207).

While dealing with these controversial social issues in the plays, the playwrights of the sixties usually constructed the main characters as anti-heroes, individuals outside the criteria of heroism who encourage the society against social injustices and inequalities and give them strength to resist. Belkıs describes these anti-heroes as follows: “The disorder was emphasized by the public's placing their hopes on the heroes from outside the order. In this sense, we encounter the most colourful anti-heroes of the Turkish Theatre” (Belkıs: 2010, 73).³⁸ With the influence of political activism dominating the society, on the one hand the writers tend to focus on current social and political problems. On the other hand, this transformation also requires a search for a new theatrical language, a new form and new methods in the playwriting area. Thus, in the 1960s and later on in the 1970s Turkish playwrights engaged in a search for new forms together with the contents they work on. The most important place of this search is given to the political theatre movement initiated by Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator. Based on the teachings of these leading theatre theorists, the playwrights began to use the episodic form of the epic theatre and merged it with elements from the Turkish theatrical tradition. This kind of plays break the dramatic structure and takes the audience away from a constant sense of illusion with an episodic narrative. In this period, unlike the previous decades, it is possible to say that a political perspective about social issues is much more deeply settled both in the form and content of the playwriting field. For example, the first example of epic theatre, *Foot and Leg Factory* (Ayak Bacak Fabrikası) written by Sermet Çağan, is the product of such a socialist realistic perspective ingrained in the 1960's artistic area. Besides that, Haldun Taner's plays in the theatrical form of Cabaret constitute the most brilliant productions of the period as a musical theater form that enables the coexistence of epic form and traditional Turkish theatrical elements. Keşanlı Ali Destanı- the Ballad of Ali of Keshan (1964), Gözlerimi Kapatırım Vazifemi Yaparım- I Close My Eyes, Do My Duty (1964), Sersem Kocanın Kurnaz Karısı- Cunning Wife of Stupid Husband (1969) are some famous examples of Haldun Taner's cabaret plays Yüksel states that writer Haldun Taner, by staging his own

³⁸ Some of these plays which have a real or fictional anti-heros are Haldun Taner's Keşanlı Ali Destanı, Cahit Atay's Karalar Mehmetler- Kerpiç Mehmet, Orhan Asena's Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı and Atçalı Kel Mehmet.

plays in the Devekuşu Kabare theater, revealed the concept of writer's theater in Turkish theater history.³⁹

In addition to the epic form of plays, one-person and two-person playscripts were written by outstanding writers of that period, Melih Cevdet Anday, (Mikado'nun Çöpleri- Mikado's Sticks), Oktay Rıfat (Yağmur Sıkıntısı- Boredom of the Rain), Adalet Ağaoğlu (Tombala Bingo). These plays created a universal area of discussion about individual problems, interpersonal issues, and relationships by examining the psychological dimension of events and by using abstractions from time to time. From the 1960s to the present, the writing of a one-person (monodrama) and two-person plays have continued and is still active in today's Turkish playwriting area. Those plays are frequently preferred to be put on stage by independent companies due to economic and practical-spatial as well as health conditions during the COVID-19 Pandemic. These plays will also be evaluated through the research data in the following sections within the framework of the concept of "narrative theater". To summarize, the sixties can be described as a decade of playwriting that pioneered the following decades of theater literature in terms of both quality and quantity, both content and form.⁴⁰

The 1970s was a period when political polarization increased rapidly and political clashes spread all over the country. In these years, the play-writing area was also dominated by politically-oriented epic plays. Until the 1970s, political theater playscripts served as a mirror of social problems but in the 1970s these playscripts tended to ensure that the leftist ideology is accepted by the society. Thus, the social role of theater, which was opened to public discussion many times in Turkish theater history, came to the fore again as a means of raising awareness among of the audience. Although a part of the theatrical plays were written to raise class consciousness like the slogan-centered agit-prop type of theater, many others were written in the form of epic theater which also includes traditional Turkish folk

³⁹ Yüksel defines playwright's theatre as follows: "Playwright's theatre refers to the kind of theatre that bases most of its repertory on the work of a single playwright who is also a permanent member of the company as actor, director, dramaturg, stage designer, artistic director, or manager" (Yüksel: 2009:125). Many independent theaters established after the 2000s such as Galataperform, Tiyatro Pera, D22, İkinci Kat, Mekansahne can also be named as examples of playwrights' theater.

⁴⁰ Güngör Dilmen, Sermet Çağan, Adalet Ağaoğlu, Güner Sümer, Vasıf Öngören, Turan Oflazoğlu, Haldun Taner, Turgut Özakman, Çetin Altan, Aziz Nesin, Melih Cevdet Anday, Necati Cumali, Rifat Ilgaz, Orhan Aşena, Hasmet Zeybek, Refik Erduran can be listed as famous playwrights who first published their plays in the 1960s (Belkıs: 2010, 69-81).

theatrical elements of Köyseyirlik and Ortaoyunu. Oktay Arayıcı's *Rumuz Goncagül/ Pseudonym Goncagül, Nafîle Dünya/ The Futile World, Bir Ölümün Toplumsal Anatomisi/ The Social Anatomy of a Death*, Vasıf Öngören's *Zengin Mutfağı/ The Kitchen of the Wealthy*, Ömer Polat's *Aladağlı Miho/ Miho from Aladağ* can be listed as the most remarkable plays of the decade. Those plays, far from being a direct imitation of Western epic plays, blended local and universal elements, and dealt with conflicts in the village and urban life in Turkey. An ongoing search for identity in Turkish theater literature and the effort to keep local and universal form and content in one pot will be discussed by means of the quotations of today's independent writers in the following parts of this chapter. Beside those epic plays, documentary theater scripts which were also popular in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s were written by famous playwrights in Turkey.⁴¹ Ergin Orbey's *From the First Liberation (Birinci Kurtuluşan)*(1971), Orhan Asena's *Hunting in Chili (Şili'de Av)* (1973), Haşmet Zeybek's *Alpagut Incident (Alpagut Olayı)* (1974), Macit Koper's *Sabatoge Game (Sabotaj Oyunu)* (1975), Uğur Mumcu's *Objectionable Infantry (Sakıncalı Piyade)* (1977) can be listed as examples of documentary theater plays written in the 1970s. These plays were basically about the history of the Turkish revolution, the conditions created by the 12 March memorandum, and the workers' movement in Turkey. Thus, it is possible to claim them those plays served as a kind of political record, a source of social memory about crucial turning points in the history of Turkey.

⁴¹ Pavis defines documentary drama as a combination of documents with fiction. In his own words, "It is the opposite of theatre of pure fiction, which it deems too idealistic and apolitical, and rejects the manipulation of events by in turn manipulating documents for partisan ends. It often employs the form of a trial or inquiry in order to quote proceedings". (Pavis, 1998: 111) The roots of documentary theater go back to the theatrical practices developed in Eastern Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. Erwin Piscator's usage of documentary films and other materials to create a mass involvement of the audience can be counted as the beginning of documentary theatrical productions but the spread of this theatrical genre was initiated by the confrontation of the post Second World War generation with their past. In Europe, especially in Germany, playwrights who wrote documentary plays in the 1960s and 1970s were influenced by Bertolt Brecht's technique that distance the audience from the event on stage and questions the dominant ideology. Heinar Kippar's *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* and Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* are prime examples of this genre. These documentary plays focused mainly on Nazism and the ruin of the Holocaust by using transcripts from War Crimes Tribunal. In Turkey, in the 1960s and 1970s, Dostlar Tiyatrosu and Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu added new documentary theater playscripts of Turkish and foreign writers to their theaters' repertoire. Hasibe Kalkan Kocabay's book "Gerçek(lik)le Yüzleşmek Belgesel Tiyatro ve Politik Tiyatro Geleneği" is one of the few sources that focused on political theater especially on the documentary theater history in Turkey (Kocabay: 2003).

Briefly, the 1960s was a period in which the playwrights have made new experiments by fusing the epic form with local material, (which is in parallel with the usual open form of Turkish folk theater). When we look at the political theater texts of the 1960s and 1970s, the change in political themes encountered in today's independent texts is remarkable. While today's texts stay away from socialist realist writing that deals with the problems of the individual in the social context, they point to a new political positioning. This transformation of the political standing of the theater practitioners will be discussed in detail in the following parts of the chapter and in the last part of the thesis.

The 1980s was a period of stagnancy for the playwrights in Turkey. The changing political and economic conditions prevailing in the country after the 12 September 1980 coup d'état led to a sense of sterility that dominated the production of the plays written at that period. In this sense, the censorship issue and economic concerns had a great impact on the production of the playscripts of the time. On the one hand, political theater was in decline. New writing experiments that contain mostly introverted abstractions and harmless commercial entertaining plays that do not risk being rejected by the audience were mostly written. On the other hand one of the most productive playwrights of this period, Ferhan Şensoy, by staging his plays in his theater Ortaoyuncuları, continued to exercise the playwright theater tradition shaped by Haldun Taner. In his plays, Şensoy put the words at the centre of his plays, defended the richness of language, and made use of different features of traditional Turkish theater like imitation-based expression. Apart from Ferhan Şensoy, writers such as Ülker Köksal, Sevim Burak, Melih Cevdet Anday, Bilgesu Erenus, Tuncer Cücenoglu, Murathan Mungan, Erhan Gökücü, Mehmet Baydur, and Turgut Özakman are some of the playwrights that have made important contributions to theater literature in Turkey in the 1980s. One of the most common types of plays written in the 1980s was one-person plays.⁴² Although one-person playscripts written in the 1980s had a variety of subjects and forms, nearly all of them turned into a space of sharing of feelings and thoughts in an environment where people were

⁴² Patrice Pavis defines one-person play or monodrama with a single character or a single actor playing several roles as follows, "The play is centered around one person and explores his innermost motivations, subjectivity or lyricism" (Pavis: 1998, 217). In these plays, the audience became the partner of the protagonist of the actor on the stage. Those plays were popular at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe.

deeply depressed under the social as well as political pressure. This play genre continued its existence in the 1990s and after 2000s and became one of the basic tools of expression as the narrative theater for independent companies, which will be elaborated in the following paragraphs. During 1990's writers and theater professionals like Ferhan Şensoy (*Felek Bir Gün Salakken*), Atıol Behramođlu (*Mutlu Ol Nazım*), Metin Balay (*İnadına Yaşamak, İnadına İnsan*), Savaş Dinçel (*Meraklısı için Öyle Bir Hikaye*) wrote, adapted and staged many one person plays.

Even though the pressure of the coup period has diminished in the 1990s, it marks an uncertain period in the history of Turkey with the conflicted environment in the east, the economic and political stalemates, and unidentified murders. In this period, the playwrights have just started to come to the fore either directly or indirectly with the violent environment of September 12th 1980. Eşber Yağmurdereli's *Akrep* (The Scorpion), Ferhan Şensoy's *Çok Tuhaf Soruşturma* (A Very Strange Inquiry), Erhan Gökğücü's *Giordano Bruno* can be cited as some of the examples of new playscripts of confrontation. Besides, with the rise of political Islam, the increasing debates on regime and secularism brought along plays about the War of Independence and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, since the second half of the 1990s.

4.1.3. A New Phase in Playwriting in Turkey from 2000's

The 2000's opened a new page in terms of introducing both new playwriting and staging techniques. At the beginning of the 2000s while the phenomenon of playwright's theater continued in many independent theatre companies like Galataperform and Tiyatro Pera, Ayşe Selen and Şehsuvar Aktaş brought an important innovation in by integrating the puppet shadow play into their plays. Again, the playwrights began to set up their plays like a performance text from the beginning of the 2000s. In these new texts, bodily signifiers as well as other stage indicators began to gain weight besides the words expressing the plot. In this sense, the performative turn that Richard Schechner evaluated as a paradigm shift in dramatic arts began to be applied and extended in the play writing area in Turkey after 2000. The increasing variety of acting and staging techniques in the independent stages, the use of new technologies, and the entrance of taboo subjects in the playscripts became the common denominators of the playscripts. The respondents mostly referred to this holistic feature of the recent theater productions

which will further be elaborated under the novelties about the mise-en-scène in the following parts of the chapter.

In the 2000s, translated and staged in-yer-face plays have left a considerable trace on the texts written by young playwrights of the period. In-yer-face plays that originated in Great Britain are described by Sierz as “rude and crude, sexually explicit, and often violent plays by young and (usually) male writers” (Sierz, 1998: 324). The theater audience of İstanbul began to get familiar with those types of plays from the beginning of the 2000s with establishment of the theater company DOT in Beyoğlu in 2003. DOT formed their theater repertory mostly from translated in-yer-face plays of playwrights from Europe and US (such as Mark Ravenhill, David Harrower, Martin McDonagh, Phillip Ridley, David Greig Zinnie Harris). The content of the plays staged includes provocative subjects like violence, open sexuality, pornography, rape, child abuse, drug use, cannibalism, and vomiting. Those translated playscripts influenced the writing style of young playwrights and the subjects they dealt with in their own plays.⁴³

However, there are many heated debates about the social and liberating power of this genre of play texts. In his article Eren Buğlalılar poses the question” Can the staging of acts like violence, rape, murder unconditionally be understood as progressive or reactionary?” and he underlines the loss of social and political tendency of these texts by isolating the facts of life from their social context (Buğlalılar: 2008: 91). In this sense, since the 2010s mostly after the 2013 Gezi events, young playwrights began to produce new playscripts originating from an individual issue but having deeper social layers. One of the interviewees expresses the declining interest in in-yer-face genre of playwriting as follows:

It does not seem sincere today, so today, not so many groups continue this trend. Such plays were once a political confrontation area in Britain describing the daily troubles of the working class. British playwrights

⁴³ Some of the significant plays written in 2010s are: *Limonata* (Lemonade), *Sürpriz* (Surprise), *Küçük* (Little), *Altı Buçuk* (Six and a Half), *Yuva* (Home), *Yalnızlar Kulübü* (Lonely’s Club) and *P*rk* by Sami Berat Marçalı; *Aynur Hanımın Bebeği*, (Mrs. Aynur’s Baby), *Kar Küresinde Tavşan* (Rabbit in the Snow Globe), *Şekersiz* (Sugarless) and *Fü* by Murat Mahmutyazıcıoğlu; *Barselo* and *Aut* by Alper Kul; *İz* (Trace) by Ahmet Sami Özbudak; *Disko 5 No’lu* (Disko Number 5) by Mirza Metin; *Şiddet Üçlemesi* (Violence Trilogy), *Kök* (Root), *Bizde Yok* (We Don’t Have It) by Ufuk Tan Altunkaya; *Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir Günün Ertesiydi* (It Was The Day After The Day No One Died) by Ebru Nihan Celkan; *Kuş Öpücüğü* (Bird Kiss), *Hak* (The Right) and *Yirmi Beş* (Twenty-Five) by Berkay Ateş and *11’e 11* (11 to 11), *He- Go*, *Kasap* (The Butcher) by Halil Babür.

interrogated topics like drugs, pornography rape, incest, abuse, pain, torture, and paedophilia etc. But once it impetrated Turkey, playwrights assumed that they could do anything on stage. I can say that it even turned into an object of satisfaction that appealed to the middle class audience. Also today, the reality of life has surpassed the reality of even very sharp plays, especially when we look at what has happened socially and politically in the last 10 years, so the audience does not want this sharp language anymore. People are looking for sincerity. A new language is needed (Respondent 66)

In this sense although the texts inspired by in-yer-face wave lose their effect in current stagings of independent companies, it can be said that this genre marked a transition period. It gave the playwrights of the post-80s the courage to write on new issues, to create a new look, to search for a new language. The contribution of this genre to the independent theatre field is expressed by an interviewer as follows;

It came to us very late, of course. It had already lost its impact in Europe and in America or It brought us a kind of novelty, movement. The audience needed to get closer to the actor so what did this genre serve? It invited the audience inside the performance, inside the performing space. It paved the way for the ability to contact with the audience (Respondent 26).

Based on the above quotation about the in-yer-face movement, many interviewees underline the feeling of sincerity that the audience expects. In fact, the feeling of sincerity, which is described as one of the most important pursuits of the independent theatre audience, is also related with the long-lasting debates about imitation of Western theatre both in terms of form and content. Usage of local subjects and forms versus universal one has always been a part of this discussion which is still continuing among independent theatrical practitioners. When the interviewees were asked to what extent they attach importance to the local versus universal themes and contents of the playscripts, a wide scale of sensitivities about the degree of local elements used in the plays performed were mentioned. There are few interviewees who completely thought that plays written on local themes would not be attractive and motivating for the audience, and would not be preferred by the audience for this feature by the audience so they stayed away from local content considering this supply and demand balance.

In terms of the subjects, we pay attention to the universality of the content of the plays as much as possible. Locality seems to have some drawbacks today. People may say that I even had this kind of similar experience just yesterday, people feel uncomfortable seeing the thing they are constantly exposed to in their daily life and they see it on the stage. It's already in the news, if you put

it in front of me, you don't give me anything more than that” (Respondent 20).

Again, as opposed to them, a small number of interviewees, often above middle age, predominantly emphasized the priority of local themes and theater techniques, and added that due to the existence of very serious political and economic issues specific to Turkey; most of the new playscripts could not address universal problems.

You must first have solved your local problems to deal with the global, universal ones. There is of course a big gap between our anxieties and the ones of an actor in Manhattan or Iran. We are doing the same job, but in each geography we experience something different. In order to do something purely universal encompassing about we have to be satisfied with our attempts to give voice to the problems of our lands, this is what we deeply desire at the end (Respondent 23).

A contribution to this locality based view came from some of the interviewees, especially those living in Ankara. They have complaints about the absence of local themes could not find the place it deserves in new texts and that local theatrical forms stayed underdeveloped.

We are always trying to catch up with something. The theatre has also suffered from these attempts instead of developing its own local culture. From the beginning Western writers were imitated, Western instructors educated the actors. Of course it's important but we could not do anything like developing what is local. Muhsin Ertuğrul has always vilified the local, for example. He is a primary figure for Turkish theatre, he progressed theatre in turkey but unfortunately, he made it by killing the local, folk theatre, storytelling (meddah) Orta oyunu, puppet theatre etc. and was against them (Respondent: 61)

In addition to those respondents who put emphasis entirely on local or universal themes in their productions, broader part of them highlighted the combination of local and universal traits in terms of both subjects of the playscripts and the forms of expressions. To put it in another way, they basically preferred to tell local stories, through the axis of universal values and forms. One of the members of Ankara Art Theater (Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu) one of the oldest independent theater companies of Ankara underlines the necessity of a kind of synthesis.

I think universality has something to do with the expression of language. The stories told have to carry local motifs apart from certain subjects. In other words, the way I feel, the way I perceive and the way I express my feelings will inevitably carry the impacts of the local culture and the culture of the geography in which I live. Our way of expression should evolve from local to

a much more global one, our language should both have local as well as global layers. (Respondent 35)

The necessity for the playscript and the stage indicators have a local characteristic was a crucial point frequently emphasized by most of the respondents. For them the addressed audience and the place of performance should determine the frequency of local or versus universal motifs in the staged playscripts. This debate is also relevant not only for new playscripts but also for the literary adaptations that are often produced by new independent theatre companies. The following sections, about new staging styles and space of performance, will also include narratives about the usage of local-universal elements on stage. In this sense, the narrative of the founder of a company in İstanbul that has been making productions in Kurdish language for years is noteworthy:

Some plays don't really need a change, even if you don't use a definite name for a character. But now, I'm going to tell you about the marriage of a 15-year-old girl to a 60-year-old man, which may mean nothing to an audience in the UK. I wouldn't make a play like that under those conditions. After all, the tones in this geography affect you. You want to create an artistic language here. It is necessary to make use of the motifs of this place and create something so that you can catch the audience from one end. Maybe you can localize it, maybe it's not in the streets of Denmark, but in the Hacıhüsrev, of course, it's about the choice of the theater company and of the director, but these are points that can grasp the audience even with such little things. (Respondent 6)

As underlined by the respondent above, the key concept repeated by many is the sense of familiarity. Another interviewee draws attention to this feeling, which facilitates the establishment of a close relationship with the audience.

I think, something like, Jonathan what's up", it seems foreign on the stage now. In fact, what we call novelty has to start from very simple places, namely, hearing familiar names on the stage for example. To witness a familiar ritual, that was experienced before serves the audience to identify itself with this performance more easily. (Respondent 26).

Recently, we come across many new or adapted playscripts that create this affinity on stages of independent theater companies. Adapted plays recently staged by independent companies include adaptation and localization from classical plays or from other literary genres. These adapted productions include both the changes made

on the texts and on all the elements of the staging.⁴⁴ While some of the interviewees mentioned that the adaptations will weaken the theatrical writing practices in Turkey, a wider part of them believes that they will contribute to the development of the local playwriting area.

Re-reading the classics, these new interpretations will bring a kind of dynamism and improvement to the independent theater productions. Besides, these re-readings make an important contribution to the establishment of the universal- local balance in the new playscripts and stagings. (Respondent 65)

The intensification of the independent theater practitioners' interest in adaptations again reminds the relationship they have established with the collective memory reconstruction. It may be interpreted as another channel of playwriting which opens up a space for the rewriting of past stories that the audience is familiar with. Re-transforming what is familiar coincides with performance theorist Richard Schechner's definition of *Restored Behaviour*. His term underlines the repetitiveness and the reformulation of old behaviours, events, stories in a theatrical performance which open up new possibilities for the theater practitioners as well as the audience to make and remake who they are and what they do. Accordingly, Schechner compares the restoration process with a movie director's reusing a film strip. It can also be claimed that new playwrights while adapting classical plays and other literary genres to the stage, are on the one hand transferring those texts to the present language of the stage but on the other hand restoring the cultural discourse, reproducing cultural codes with universal norms.

The increasing importance of adaptations for current independent theater companies signifies the bonds that those theater practitioners established with the past and the position they attribute to the re-establishment of collective memory. The new playscripts, mostly staged by independent companies open up a space for the rewriting of the past through personal stories. As mentioned above, it served as an opportunity for confrontation with the past which was once compelling due to the

⁴⁴ Some of the adapted plays put on independent stages within the last five years are *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak*, (Becoming a Man by Creeping), *Beş Sevim Apartmanı* (Five Sevim Apartments), *Delibo* (Tiyatro Alesta), *Sevgili Arsız Ölüm* (Dear Shameless Death Tiyatro Hemhal), *Tehlikeli Oyunlar* (Dangerous Games, Seyyar Sahne). Examples of reinterpretations of classic plays include, *Şatonun Altında* (Under the Castle), *İki Kişilik Kabus: Macbeth* (A Nightmare for Two: Macbeth, Tiyatro Bereze), *Schizo Şeyk* (Kumbaracı 50), *King Übü, Düğün* (The Wedding, Sarı Sandalye), *Nora: 2* (BahçeGalata).

social-political conditions as well as cultural traits within which Turkish theater evolved. Although Western realism in theatre has been taken as a model for the Turkish playwriting field since the Tanzimat Period, as Güçbilmez claims in her book *Space and Manifestation (Zaman/ Zemin/ Zuhur)*, “something happens in the past, its shadow falls on this day” formula of Western realism was transformed into “one day something happens and events unfold” formula. Güçbilmez describes this aesthetic form as the “miniature fiction of the historyless Turkish theater” (Güçbilmez: 2016). Therefore, it will not be inappropriate to suggest that the recently written playscripts broke this chain that dehistoricizes the plot, and began to evaluate the roots of “here and now” in the past.

We see that the common features of the texts that provide this closeness, familiarity and warmth with the audience is based on a narrative and they are mostly single or few-person plays. Narrative theater plays tell the audience familiar stories, re-enact their daily life experiences by establishing empathy with the audience, and also keep the personal and collective memory alive. The dramaturgy and staging techniques employed by independent theater companies are also designed to serve the narrative form of the plays.

The roots of narrative theater go back to the storytelling tradition. Mostly associated with Eastern and African popular theatrical traditions, by means of sharing a variety of experiences, oral narrations establish bridges among different communities and locations. The story-teller addresses the audience directly, by using his/her words and gestures, imitating different characters and navigating among stories. Pavis mentions that “The story-teller (who most often composes his texts himself) seeks to reestablish direct contact with the audience, assembled together in one place as at a festival or in a theatre. He is a performer who carries out an action and delivers a poetic message that is directly transmitted and received by the listener-spectators” (Pavis, 1998, 370). In this quotation, storytelling, which is defined by Pavis as a relationship of transferring a poetic message between the spectator and the performer, is also described as an area of experience sharing by Walter Benjamin. In his article “The Storyteller”, he suggests that all storytellers are nourished with the intergenerational and intercultural experiences transferred to one another.

Storytelling can be listed as one of the most famous type of popular entertainment in the Islamic countries. Meddah (praiser), the most well-known form of narrative style, which has an important place in the theater tradition of Turkey, shows itself in different forms in today's independent theater stages. Metin And, one of the most prominent theater historians, claims that “The storyteller knows various methods of creating and holding suspense and introducing surprise, and employs diverse techniques: inserting pauses, switching from conversational speech to chanting, moving the arms and head in sweeping gestures, whispering, screaming, and pounding the feet. Thus, he imparts to the audience the wide range of passions and feelings experienced by the narrators” (And, 1983, 21). In this sense, the narrative theater in Turkey derived significantly from the Meddah tradition, constitutes an important source of familiarity for the Turkish audience.

At this point, Tiyatrotem, a pioneering independent theater company of the 2000's has made a great contribution to the current narrative theater productions. In her Ph.D. thesis covering the traditional theatrical forms and their reflections in the contemporary Turkish theater, Başar underlines that the productions of Tiyatro Tem offered to the audience a combination of Turkish traditional theatrical elements, storytelling, puppetry, shadow plays with the classical elements of dramatic theater. According to Başar, “This reduction of everything on stage except for the performers' bodies was relevant to the question of how far they could push the possibilities of the medium of theatre. This performer-oriented stance was dramatized within a narrative mode rather than the conventional Western realist style of “showing” or “becoming” the character” (Başar: 2021: 350-351).

The traces of these pioneering productions of Tiyatrotem can be found both in the newly written or adapted plays and in the intimate relationship established with the audience. The stories and experiences that the storyteller carries from different cultures and geographies to the present and performs create this warm expression. The interest of narrative theater in the independent theater field can also be related with such an intergenerational and intercultural transfer of experience. Today, most of the narrative theater plays currently staged by independent companies are newly written or adapted one person plays. Here the functional relationship between the content as well as the style of the plays with the current social dynamics that

Gurvitch mentioned can be linked to the abundance of this type of playscripts.⁴⁵ As the respondents' underlines, the pressure on public expression and shrinking of the public spaces canalized the independent theater stages to open plenty of room for one person plays. In addition, due to the economic difficulties, lack of financial resources and the social- health conditions that emerged out of the Covid-19 pandemic, the individualized motivations of theater practitioners constitute the reasons behind the increasing production of one person plays in the independent stages. In this sense, it can be said that this aesthetic area of experience, which is mostly shaped by the presence of a single person on the stage, continues to be produced as a result of a political choice rather than a political necessity, which is slightly different from the one person plays of the 60s and 70s mentioned in the paragraphs above. At this point, while the transformation in the social structure affects the forms of the play, it also creates a transformation in the social function of the theatrical area. Many plays, in which the characters re-enact the daily experiences emphasize with the audience, have conversations with the audience and open up their heart to the audience contribute to keeping the personal and social memory alive.⁴⁶

While looking at the perceptions in the field, some of the interviewees approached narrative theater plays as a social need and a re-introduced aesthetic form that combines the traditional with the universal and some others underlined that their effect on the independent stages will be short-lived and they evaluate the theatrical

⁴⁵ In his *Dictionnaire of theater*, Pavis defines monodrama as "In the everyday sense, this is a play with a single character, or at least a single actor (who may take on several roles). The play is centred around one person and explores his innermost motivations, subjectivity or lyricism" (Pavis: 1998, 217).

⁴⁶ Tehlikeli Oyunlar (Dangerous Game), is an important example of monodrama adapted from of the novel Oğuz Atay and staged by Seyyar Sahne since 2009. Another brilliant monodrama, Sevgili Arsız Ölüm (Dear Shameless Death: Dirimit) written by Latife Tekin, was first staged by Tiyatro Hemhal in 2017. The play combines a simple expression with storytelling tradition on nearly empty stage by a single actor playing a variety of roles with different cultural traits like a meddah in the tradition Turkish Theater (the storyteller).

In addition, important examples of this are given by the texts of the Kurdish theater companies in İstanbul like Şermola Performance. The company blends the features of the Dengbej tradition which has an important place in Kurdish theater, with bodily theater aesthetics, brought the narrative theater to the stage with mostly newly written monodramatic scripts. Disko Number 5 (Disko 5 nolu), is one of their significant plays including the story of a political prisoner in Diyarbakır Prison which has a long history of pain and torture after 1980 coup d'état. For more information about Kurdish Theater History in Turkey, the unpublished master thesis of Bilal Akar "Transformation of the Kurdish theater field in Turkey between 1991 and 2017, the unpublished PhD. thesis of Duygu Çelik Dengbêji tradition and its effects on Kurdish theatre in Turkey and Mirza Metin's book "Jerzemin: The Journey of Kurdish Theater" and Çetoye Zedo and Yavuz Akkuzu' s book "Kurdish Theater History" can be examined.

work produced by means of the familiar as an ease rather than a new creative attempt. Two quotations of the respondents above, who were intensely trained in bodily theater and worked on postdramatic aesthetics, express their opinions in this direction.

People love such things. A good story, a story with good words, a mediocre and overly fictionalized story, it is enough for us to be told in a mediocre way. There are people who love it too. Right now, that kind of productions is pretty booked up. By the way, I watched many of those narrative plays and like them, and I do not want belittle the people who produce this kind of work. But they become a kind of repetition of something after a while. Yes, there can be this kind of works, but the main problem is what you search for. It's not something that I will watch with love and attraction each and every time, my enthusiasm will end the second time I watch them. Because I know the story, what she or he is going to tell (Respondent 56).

The play of kindness is beautiful, sweet, but I can't say I love it to death, no. It didn't seduce me theatrically, to be honest. But the audience is in love with it. Let's not be unfair, of course, especially in the last narrative plays I watched, the actors completely devoted themselves to the play. For instance in one of them the actress has a sweet and successful Aegean accent creates sympathy for the audience, for me, too. When I watched the play, I immediately empathized with that character, I got closer to her. Even this is also a sign for the interest of the audience; I guess people don't want to see anything far away from themselves. The audience does not like very strange stories that they cannot relate to. They say tell me something personal. The story of a little girl is something very sweet for them, so they want to see a naive work both in terms of technique and content. This is because they are very bored of watching grand things, grande stories and heroes on the stage, they are very bored of feeling crushed, so when they see something very naive, they immediately like it but at this point, how you use the text, how you use the locality becomes really important. Because sometimes it can be one dimensional. In that sense, I don't want to see easily identifiable characters and events (Respondent 57).

Besides these transformations in the form of the playscripts, one of the most obvious changes in the currently written playscripts of independent companies mentioned by many respondents is the “new subjects” covered. The key subjects of the plays arise from a personal pain or doubts which often have a touch with current social issues and social sensitivities that have bear traces of the current political atmosphere. Basically, the plays focus on minority rights, the state of being of immigrants, gender and identity issues (ethnic, religious, gender identities, masculinity, LGBTI etc.), violence, family ties, love relationships, social miscommunication, the impacts of media and consumption, gentrification, unsolved murders, refugees and forced

displacement issue and human rights violations. While dealing with all these subjects, these new texts have unifying themes such as forgetting, confrontation, quitting the house or the homeland, addiction, independence, interdependence, the near and distant past of the cities in the country etc. These common points can frequently be countered in the background of the plot of the playscripts.

The fact that many taboo subjects previously considered as prohibited can now be discussed in these new plays was described by one of the respondents as a sense of being too late. In her own words,

Hundreds of such plays had to be written about domestic violence until today in a country where three women are killed every day. It's debatable why it wasn't written until 2015... Why didn't we see a transgender person on the stage as a protagonist telling his own story, for the first time we see how such a thing can happen. What a denial. What a denial of existence. We haven't seen people speaking Kurdish on the stage for years, so all of this is actually a bit of a thing in the process... A lot of plays like this started to appear for example (Respondent 66).

Indeed, it is possible to argue that although the subjects of the playscripts recently staged by independent companies vary widely, they frequently intersect with each other due to the impacts of recurrent social and political phenomena. Hence, it can be said that the most important common point regarding the general characteristics of the texts, written and staged by independent companies, is that the plays take on a significant role that refreshes the collective memory of their audience. Jan Assman underlines that even the most personal memories are formed through interaction, and we remember what we learn from others, what is told, and what is emphasized as meaningful (Assman in Sancar: 2007, 41). Thus, collective memory includes not only the totality of past memories but a kind of reformulation of the relationship with the past. From a similar perspective, theater theoretician, critic and director Marvin Carlson defines theater as follows; "It is the repository of cultural memory but like the memory of each individual it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts" (Carlson: 2001, 2). This is why Carlson defines the theater as a *haunted stage* and every theatrical playscript as a memory play which is rewritten in each performance and staging by means of the collective memories or the ghosts of the past of the communities. These approaches also reveal a fundamental feature of the plays recently staged by independent theater companies. In many new playscripts, it can be

observed that the past is rewritten and remembered through the memories of different social groups, as expressed in Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective memory. In this sense, this act of re-remembering and re-writing in these theater scripts also constitutes a possibility for political hope, a channel of confrontation, justice and rehabilitation for the society. Relatively, many social issues and past collective traumas, which were once avoided or omitted from the theater literature, take place in the plots of the theater scripts staged by current independent companies. Biographies or stories inspired by real life come to the fore in those playscripts which again offer a possibility of refreshing the history writing area. This turned into a distinctive one of the recently written plays in the Turkish theatre literature. In many of them, the past is rewritten and remembered through the memories of different social groups. In this sense, those biographical plays can be evaluated as a new platform for the reformulation and refreshment of formal history writing. One of those plays, *Zabel*, is a story of confrontation written by Aysel Yıldırım and Duygu Dalyanoğlu, two members of Boğaziçi Performing Art Community (BGST). First staged in 2017 and still on stage, the play is about the life of the Turkish-Armenian woman writer Zabel Yesayan who struggled to stand by and resist preserving her multiple identities from her homeland İstanbul, Üsküdar to Siberia.

One of the recently written and staged playscripts is the *Gomidas* of Ahmet Sami Özbudak, a prominent playwright in the independent theatrical field. The play tells the story of Gomidas Vartabed an important Armenian composer, musicologist, choirmaster and priest who was born in a village of Kütahya and died in a sanatorium in Paris. The play is centered on a single actor accompanied by a 40 person church choir and performed in the Surp Vortvots Vorodman Church which was once frequented by Gomidas Vartabed. Thus these features increased the memory regenerator role of the play by removing scabs of collective pains regarding the 1915 deportation for the Armenian society.

Relatively, we often come across new texts about the memory of the city. Most of those plays include the physical transformation of the urban structure as well as the demographic and social transformation of its citizens and the collapse of the city culture. *Cambazın Cenazesi* (Funeral of the Acrobat) is another example of narrative theater written by Firuze Engin. The plot of the play includes the events after the

death of Acrobat Rasim, one of the beloved residents of a town and the urban renewal process that this town faced with.⁴⁷

Another popular play is *Sen İstanbul'dan Daha Güzelsin* (You are more beautiful than İstanbul) written by Murat Mahmutyazıcıoğlu from BAM İstanbul Theater Company, takes the personal history of three generations of women (the daughter, the mother, the grand mother) at the center, and constructs the plot by associating it with the transformation of the city of İstanbul over the decades.

In many recently written playscripts, such as *You are more beautiful than İstanbul*, the stories of women from different generations, social classes and ethnic identities stand at the center of the texts. *Lal Hayal*, written by Sevilay Yıldırım and staged by Boğaziçi Performance Art Ensemble (BGST) includes the story of a woman who is trapped between death and life after an accident and 7 other women from different classes and origins who are somehow brought together. The play, where Lal's dream and her life somehow intersect, is told through the performance of a single

Nihayet Makamı (The Last Maqam) is another women's play, staged by Kumbaracı 50. It takes place during the occupation years of İstanbul and tells the story of two women from different classes, the poet Şehvar Hanım and Sabriye, her maid for years and a brilliant composer at the same time. While these play scripts question gender norms from a feminist perspective, they are also staged with a feminist dramaturgy.⁴⁸ Within a multi-layered intersectional space of representation, these plays make a variety of social phenomena like migration, gentrification, and urbanization visible.

⁴⁷ The director of this narrative play, which stands out with its traditionally inspired staging technique, tells how she handled the text in the interview: "At the play *Funeral of the Acrobat*, there was a recent urban transformation project, but I first asked myself how can I express it in terms of theatricality? I can't just express it in words, because everything was a narrative story everything was put into words in the scripts. I said I will convey the plot as a photo because photos are things that stay in one's mind. Actually, I know the tradition of meddah, Hacivat Karagöz shows that I watch in every Ramadan. Then, I went through shadowing in this play. I made references to them and I built the play on it, for example, when there was a town, I put photos of skyscrapers rising by using shadowplays for example" (Respondent 6).

⁴⁸ Throughout the history of theater in Turkey, we come across many plays that tell women's stories from the perspective many writers such as Adalet Ağaoğlu, Sevim Burak, and Tülin Tankut. After 2000, a new generation playwrights and the stagings with feminist dramaturgy begun to be performed. Jale Karabekir and Zeynep Kaçar, as mentioned in the first part of the thesis, are among important feminist theater practitioners of 2000's. Today while many women's stories continues to take place on the stage, those plays often turn into a common space, a an intersectional area where different identities are experienced.

In this sense, together with women stories, the new plays and stagings of independent companies has become the meeting point of the "others" belonging to various silenced, suppressed, ignored and denied identities. In other words, the playscripts of those heterarchically organized independent theater companies offer an expanded site to occupy for those who have been left out of the stage for a long time. Many new playscripts whose main characters are LGBTI+ people or, Armenian, Kurdish, Jewish citizens have been recently written and staged by independent theater companies.⁴⁹ *Eylül* which narrates the story of a transgender sex worker, is one the most prominent examples of those playscripts. Staged by SFRPZTF Theater Company and rewarded by various theater competition juries, *Eylül* was written, played and directed by Uğur Kanbay, a young graduate from İstanbul State Conservatory. Here, like the theater company SFRPZTF, the writer's theater as mentioned in the previous parts of this chapter, which continues to maintain its validity for many independent theater groups in Turkey. Again the play named *Kadercan* of a playwright's theater company BAM, focuses on the story of a young man living in Bağcılar, an outskirt district in İstanbul, before and after performing his military services. This play can also be given as an example of one of the recent playscripts focusing on the daily life experience of people labelled with their suppressed, omitted, ignored identities. Although recently written playscripts mainly reflects the social and cultural position and values of their playwrights (middle- class, secular, university graduate, from 25 to 45 year old), the main characters usually are usually the members of the excluded/ stigmatized identities of the society. At this point, the characters in the new playscripts are usually people that can possibly be encountered in daily life, who are far from being heroes with excessive qualifications like power or beauty. Accordingly different, imperfect, incomplete bodily forms are encountered on the independent stages. Besides, the main characters of the new texts, having significant features of identity move away from being a mere collective representation of specific groups of people. Considering the potential for the representation of multiple identities, the staging of stories of new writers by

⁴⁹ *Kimsenin Ölmediği Bir günün Ertesiydi* (It was the day after a day when no one dies- Ebru Nihan Celkan), *Kadınlar, Aşklar, Şarkılar* (Women, Loves, Songs-Şamil Yılmaz) , *80lerde Lubunya Olmak* (Being a Lubunya in the 1980's- Ufuk Tan Altunkaya) *Benimle Gelir Misin?* (Will You Come with me- Ebru Nihan Celkan) are some of the plays that underline the experience of a womanhood together with the problems faced by LGBTI individuals.

independent companies transforms the theatrical space into a new public space that will be more deeply elaborated in the next chapter of the thesis.

During the Gezi Park resistance, which began in June 2013 with the influence of the intervention in the lifestyles of a large part of the society and the increasing political pressure; art manifested itself as a channel for making politics in the public sphere. In this sense, while opening a different political space, Gezi Park events encouraged the establishment of new theater companies and an increase in the number of theatrical productions. One of the respondents from an independent theater group founded by the graduates of a university theater company in Ankara after the Gezi Park resistance talked about this process as follows:

Well, after the GeziPark resistance, we made some conversations during the protests, what can we do, we need to do something. I don't know how many times we met each other in the street without an appointment during the protests. Each time we felt that we need to do some other things. Maybe if we can rent a place in Kızılay, we will name it X Theater and we will spend some time there every day where everyone can also come. Then we decided that establishing a theater company first would be good ground, so I can say that Gezi ignited us. It was not something that will happen all the time; you can't be on the street all the time. You have to do your work in the best way possible. So we said let's take a road first, you know, we'll make up as we go along. In short, our theater company has its roots in the Gezi resistance process (Respondent 49).

Besides being a motivating factor for the emergence of new companies and theater, as an important social and political experience, GeziPark resistance has gained a considerable weight in the content of the plays written and staged as a part of the collective memory of the society. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that the GeziPark resistance, which crystallized a variety of social discontents and turmoils, revealed the necessity to for facing with the social and political problems to some extent in the playscripts. At this point, it should be underlined that many GeziPark resistance-related plays have been written and staged. While a part of these were written while the process was still going on, some others were written and staged in the following years. In those plays, the playwrights explain Gezi resistance through their own personal stories, observations and experiences, but few of them took a much more politicized, agit-prop like stance.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Some of the examples of playscripts about GeziPark resistance staged are; *Pa*rk* (İkinci Kat Theater Company), *Taksim* (Talimhane Theater), *İşgalde Rapsody* (Rapsody in the Occupation,

Gezerken (While Wandering) was a pioneering example of the plays produced out of GeziPark movements. It was composed of four monologues written by four playwrights about their experiences during the protests and staged simultaneously both at the Park and other local Forums in different parks in İstanbul. Besides this multi-authored play performed in İstanbul, *Artık Hiçbii'şii Eskisi Gibi Olmayacak Sil Göz Yaşlarımı* (It's Never Gonna Be the Same: Wipe Your Tears) was another leading example of the playscripts about GeziPark resistance written by Şamil Yılmaz, one of the founders of the ensemble Mekan in Ankara. Although the play does not directly refer to the Gezipark resistance, the audience listens to the story of the only character on the stage, Avzer, a lonely boy living on the streets during the protests.

The play which came to the fore in the theater seasons between 2013-2015 creates a confrontation area for the audience by intertwining the loneliness of Avzer, who can be labelled as the other of the audience and the GeziPark process. The actor of the play described the play in his conversation with the audience after the performance as follows;

We have never made propagandist plays. While Şamil was trying to write an Apache story, Gezi process broke out. To write something like this came in Şamil's mind, while we were participating in the protests at Tunalı Street. Those children from the slums were also with us. There was such a good togetherness there. From there this situation caught Şamil's attention and he went into the process of writing such a story. In other words, the play cannot be called a Gezi Play, but maybe we can say that it is a play that takes place on Gezipark resistance. 51

In the field, the respondents' views diverged about these writing trends. Although the majority of the interviewees said that GeziPark resistance was involved in the playwriting and theatrical productions at an early stage, there were some who found the inclusion of this issue appropriate and necessary to keep up with the daily flow but they mostly drew attention to the way the issue was handled. Hence, some of the interviewees argue that profiting from Gezi movement to attract more audience may be instrumental for the theater practitioners who are trying to afford their living.

Kadıköy Theatron) *Aradığınız Topluma Şu Anda Ulaşamıyor* (The Society You Have Called Can Not Be Reached At The Moment- Aksine Tiyatro), *Karabatak* (Cormorant, D22 Theater), *Yol* (The Road, Tiyatro Tekağaç)

⁵¹ Retrieved from the meeting with the audience after the performance, *It's Never Gonna Be the Same Again: Wipe Your Tears* (Artık Hiçbii'şii Eskisi Gibi Olmayacak Sil Göz Yaşlarımı), 6 October 2015 at Şermola Performance).

However, in terms of the artistic and ethical framework, they found this decision problematic.

I think that these processes need to be brewed a little bit, when we look at it from an artistic point of view. As long as we don't commodify it, of course, I'm not against it. This unfortunately brings with it a kind of commodification. Let's say we went through a process, some attributed a lot of meaning to it, some devalued it completely, but we saw its reflections and how effective it was in after a time. But there were people who made plays just in time of the GeziPark process, but actually I think the point was not making propaganda for something or agitating things, this is what makes these productions or creations valuable. For example, if we are going to evaluate the impact of the production over the audience the language you use is important here (Respondent 6).

Another interviewee criticizes the commercialization and popularization GeziPark protest in the plays, but he also underlines that this may be a necessity to attract a considerable number of audience in the difficult economic conditions they are living.

It's scary, so you realize why they are doing this because they want the play to sell. He wants to make money because he's hungry. What can they do, they should go on from a populist subject, they should instrumentalize GeziPark resistance so that those who participated can come to his play and he can earn money. Or I am playing "Being a Lubunya in the 80s", for example, why because I know that the LGBTI crew, whose activism is strengthened by Gezi resistance or those who met with LGBTI people with Gezi and love them, would come to my performance. We, theater practitioners are at such a desperate point, that we have no other choice, either we will stage a play with famous actors from TV series, so that people will come to watch them live, on stage, or we will go hungry (Respondent 5)

Here, the point that Georges Gurvitch underlines is the inevitable reflection of social facts on theatrical productions, but he also finds the necessity to re-imagine, re-configure, and recreate social realities with those theatrical works. In his own words;

It is undeniable that it represents a social situation, a social gathering: it constitutes a certain social framework in its own right, within which, the actors are integral parts. We go to the theater to re-experience certain social situations which have occasionally been oppressive and to free ourselves from that oppressiveness, or perhaps we go because some driving enthusiasm which we used to have and which is beginning to fade requires reviving by some spectacle which will rekindle it. And what we find at the theater, when driven by the problem of real social life is- all kinds of novel perspectives (Gurvitch in Burns, 1973: 73).

Here, the sociologist Jean Duvignaud argues that theater can not be primarily considered as a mirror of collective reality he also emphasizes that social structures and dynamics have a great influence on the playwriting, staging, and organization of theaters.

In his article “The theater in society: Society in the theater” he argues that, “A social system never replaces another without dramatizing the classifications and myths of its predecessor, as if to grant it a last image of itself, to make permanent its survival on another plane, and reveal in its passing waist” (Duvignaud in Wilson, 1967, 9).

Here, we can also see many traces of social memories, structures as well as social tensions that have been made permanent in many plays in the history of play-writing in Turkey, which has been discussed so far. Here for Duvignaud, the concept of anomy is the spark that leads to an increase in the individual and as well as collective creativity in artistic productions, especially theatrical ones. Although changes in the social structure do not constitute the sole reason for increasing creativity, he argues that it is not a coincidence that such periods of conflict and creativity intersect. In his book “The sociology of art”, he gives many examples of periods of upheavals that lead to the imaginary and creation of new productions like Greek Theater, and European drama. Although Duvignaud talks about very sharp political social and economic turns in world history, when we look at today, we also come across many historical events which influenced to a great extent the number and content productions.

In Turkey, although the social dissatisfaction and conflicting environment that Turkey that has been going through has crystallized with the Gezi Protests, the political developments that have emerged in the last 10 years, like the fifteen July Coup d'état attempt, the state of emergency, increasing political pressures and social polarization, the economic crisis, the migratory movements emerging after the Syrian war. All of those tensions have diversified the field of playwriting and theater productions in terms of number and content. In very recently written plays after the emergence of COVID-19, we can observe the predominance of themes like closure, loneliness, and health issues. Thus collective tensions blended within the individual stories reveal in a way the reflection of the social facts in theatrical productions. In

this sense, we can say that the collective and individual experiences are once again re-affirmed through the productions made by independent theater companies.

The pandemic process has on the one hand transformed the production process of theatrical works negatively; on the other hand, it is also debatable how many products increasing the creativity of theater producers could reach large masses. The respondents established a varying degree of relation between the social and political events and the plays they produce. While some of them argue that there is an inevitable bond between them, others think that it is not right to make plays giving direct messages about current political issues. While the discourse that the reality of the theater cannot pass over the reality of the street is common among the interviewees, with this approach some theater actors underline that they feel the need to keep a distance between their productions and politics.

We experienced this contradiction in our play *Arturo Ui* mainly. While gas bombs were being thrown outside during the Gezi events, we performed at a theater venue, Stage Pulcherie in Beyoğlu. All of our tickets were sold-out and people were coming to the play by passing under the gas bombs. While there was a protest outside, the police were throwing tear gas, and we were wondering if anyone would come, the play we were performing inside turned into another kind of communion or action. The social and political background of the play *Arturo Ui* also overlapped with that time. You know, we didn't tell about a social event, but it found its place within these social events. We didn't have the desire to turn it into a protest, but the fact that people came here, watch it and share it, was as if it is another way of protest. We felt good in that regard, too. As a theater company, we only have a desire to say something on the stage. We do not have a political approach and a certain political identity as a company that all actors should participate. Everyone in the theater may have a different personal approach, from the actor to the stage manager to the light maker, or they may be involved in the act of protest or not be present at all. But personally, I find it inappropriate, ugly too. Actually, we try not to be didactic with the words we say on the stage, but in the end, our plays tell about our troubles to everyone as much as everyone can understand, so it's an action for us. (Respondent 54)

Another interviewee, who is working both in an independent and subsidized group, underlines the inevitability of the direct or indirect interaction of the staged plays with social political events and he gave an example over the word "Çapulcu"⁵² used by the sultan for the yeni çeri military uprising in the text of Kösem sultan's play, a

⁵² The same word was used by the President for the protesters during Gezi Events.

historical play the İstanbul State Theater staged in times of the Gezi events in Harbiye Open Air Theater. The quotation below is another example he gave for such an overlapping of social and political meanings with playscripts staged.

Naturally, the current political atmosphere also overlapped with the play in a historical sense. In the same way, the decor of the Shakespearian collage play, *A Kingdom for a House* was made. In the play, the decor was like this, a Chevrolet hit the wall and all those characters that represent all kinds of evils from all Shakespeare's plays, like the greed for power, the violence, the cruelty came out of that car. A week after the play has made its premier, the *Susurluk* issue, the car that got under the truck in *Susurluk* and the revelation of the mafia-state relationship got on Turkey's agenda. In sum, you can overlap the play the dramaturgy the staging with the current social events knowingly or unknowingly in a historical sense; specifically you don't have to write something over it. (Respondent 18)

Aside from the close relationship between this social and the theater, many interviewees do not find it right to convey all these social realities in the texts of the plays. They claim that these texts were produced very quickly, as a reaction without a pause to think about current events, and therefore they would possibly be insufficient both in terms of form and content as the respondent below underlines,

If we're talking about art, it must have some kind of magic. I'm not a passionate believer that theater is like a mirror of society. If I'm going to see what I'm already living right on the stage, that's the point, you have to create a new language for me. Art comes into play there, there must be a creation, but if you give the same reality, if you give the same fiction, for me, this is not much different from art, but craft. There is creativity in it, too, but that language of creation is important, it can be with music, the human body with the stage arrangement, but there must be a new theatrical style involved. (Respondent 37)

Also, some interviewees believed that watching the freshly lived reality on stage would be more harmful than beneficial to the audience and that even most of the audience did not demand something like that. Two interviewees from Ankara give examples through the social trauma caused by the terrorist bombings occurred between the 2015- 2017.

A social frenzy is going on right now, but nobody is aware of it, but I come across a lot of people talking to themselves in Ankara. I was getting on the subway the other day, an old woman goes and come and tell us continually that if it explodes, who knows if we all die etc. Metro station is full, nobody in the subway could say that it won't explode, the woman was like the inner voice of all of us but we had nothing to do, of course we got in. In short, I try

to say that everyday life is so harsh and absurd that you can't pass the street no matter what you do on the stage... (Respondent 36)

Today, it will naturally bring to the stage a trauma recently experienced by the society, but this also happens as a result of an oriental cunning, there is such a door ready to open now, let's make a play from here. These are populist things and I don't think they serve a purpose. But the situation is somewhat between meaning and content, form and meaning. So maybe there is a good intention there, but when there is no care in the form and content of the text and staging as well it becomes ridiculous and sloppy. In other words, even if the intention is good, it makes the result bad and does not work. (Respondent 51)

Based on this quote, it may be seen that the respondents underlined the necessity of making innovations about the forms rather than the variety of contents of the recent productions with social issues.

Of course, social events capture you, but it is important how you handle them, if you are sincere, I think if the theatrical language is strong or you are trying something new... although there is nothing untested, we are in search of a new play, yes, those plays have been played hundreds of times, those topics have been covered hundreds of times, but what are you saying, how can I do it? You try to find something new it gets you excited when you tackle social issues. (Respondent 5)

Wish to create own reality in their independent theatrical productions against the reality they have to face is a repeating theme and also a common novelty mentioned by many interviewees. In this sense, they evaluate this attempt to recreate reality as a new way to retell or recycle the world. A considerable number of interviewees underlined that the audience's reception is much higher for this kind of the plays.

These new theatre companies, these venues consist of people who are sensitive to sociological and political events. In fact, we breathe together, an event happens and we sleep and wake up with those events, and also we inevitably have to live in the conflicting days in terms of politics and economics. And we do theater, so the question is, what can I do as a poor theater actor when there is all this violence or at a time when there are so many deaths and even the law of war is transcended? But yes, I can keep doing theater stubbornly and create my own reality here. (Respondent 4)

If we're talking about art, it has to have magic. I'm not a believer that the theater is like a mirror. If I'm going to see what I'm already living, right on the stage, what's the point then... You have to create a new language for me. Art comes in there, there must be a creation, but if you give the audience the same reality, if you give the same fiction, for me, this is not much like an art, but only a kind of craft. There also is kind of creativity in the craft, too, but that language of creation is important here, it can be with music, the human bodily

movement in the stage, with the stage arrangement, but always a new theatrical style must be involved (Respondent 6).

As mentioned in the quotations above, argues that the fictional world created on the stage especially in the stagings of subsidized institutions, which they call mainstream theater, no longer refers critically to the current facts, but those of independent companies mostly constitute the truth itself.

It is possible to evaluate an important step about the novelty in the theatrical style of independent companies mentioned by the interviewer above through the breaking of the mimetic structure of the dramatic tradition. Concerning this; Arnzten, in his article about the geo-cultural structure of theatre, talks about new productions in Europe and America, where a new narrative broken by illusion is enriched with technical possibilities with new forms of expression. In his own words,

Re-telling the world or even as a new-mimetic movement which is reflecting illusion as something virtual. Recycling deals with the way textual materials are used in visual theatre, as well as understanding text as a free intermediation of references, without being obliged to be psychological, but rather working on the basis of non-illusion. These references may be related to cultural identities of both an urban and an ethnic kind, and thus creating a new theatre of energies (Arntzen, 1998)

Similarly, the theoretician Richard Schechner broadly defines the performance including different types of theater and he argues that performance has to create its own reality, and its own relation with daily life (Schenhner, 1998, 160). In this sense as many respondents also underlined, independent theater productions are experienced by the performers as well as the audience as a life-like event and relatively they be defined as an area where the reality and representation of reality are usually questioned.⁵³

Georges Simmel approaches the reproduction of reality on stage through actor's artistic performance. In his article, *On the Theory of Theatrical Performance*; Simmel points out that unlike other art forms, the final form of theater goes beyond being an objective creation; it is a production that needs to look realistic while getting rid of reality (Simmel: 1968 in Burns&Burns, 304).

⁵³ The issue of reality has always been a discussion point in terms of theatrical production from Ancient times now on. On the one hand, Aristotle sees imitation as the basis of theatre; on the other hand Plato's evaluated and criticizes the theater for being a bad copy of life. Herber Blau the stage is a place dedicated to putting an end to the mimetic productions.

According to Simmel, the actor has to create such a real-like form at the end. Simmel explains this paradoxical situation by saying, “Apart from being a simple representation of reality, the actor creates a kind of synthesis which includes a part of reality but is not totally a part of it” (Simmel: 1968 in Burns&Burns, 305-307). To put it differently, it is the actor himself who will turn the one-dimensional playscript written by the playwright into a “three-dimensionality of complete sensuality” (Simmel in Lawton: 2017, 1).

Similarly, while the interviewees say that in independent stagings, actors try to move away from pure realism and they try to reconstruct the reality on the stage by mixing their own history, identity and memories. Here the concept of theatricality comes to the fore. A crucial term, meaning the gap between reality and its representation on the stage, was mentioned by many respondents as a part of excessiveness in acting that they try to omit in their performance. Many respondents associate that inability to free from theatricality to a great extent while acting with anti-sincerity. According to the interviewees, in independent theater productions, actors should move their acting style away from the level of representation and excessive theatricality that classical plays requires and they should turn the performance area into a common ground of sharing among the audience and the actors.

Many interviewees said that many different acting styles are used in independent productions; they also underlined the names of many theater practitioners they were impressed with in terms of staging and acting techniques like Brecht, Artaud, and Grotowski. In addition, some interviewees said that some of the acting styles and staging techniques adopted by theater labourers in independent productions in Turkey are not understood appropriately in this geography. For example, a respondent educated at an important physical acting school Jacques Lecoq, expressed his critics about the misuse of the concept of physical theater ⁵⁴ which recently

⁵⁴ Thomas Leabhart defines physical theatre, as a kind of type of hybridized non-cultural theatre that does not initiate with a playscript but certainly makes use of the words, and also necessitates a considerable level of physical virtuosity (Leabhart in Pavis, 2013: 182). This form of theater which prioritizes the body of the actor more than the words has a long history which took its roots from mime and corporeal mime and later on Grotowski’s and Peter Brook anthropological forms of theater, Jacques Lecoque’s mimodynamic method. For a detailed analysis of this physical theater; Jacques Lecoq, *Theatre of Gesture and Movement*, trans. Joel Anderson, David Bradby, Luke Kernaghan and Dick McCaw, London, Routledge, 2006/ Thomas Leabhart, ‘Physical theatre’, in Dennis Kennedy (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 1031 / Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body*, London, Nick Hern, 2001.

became very popular among the independent theater community in İstanbul and, the audience's reactions against this acting technique.

Who is the physical actor? Nowadays such a concept is introduced and become very popular. Here you can also ask what non-physical theatre is. Or who is non-physical actor? Is there something like that? When the actor goes on stage, he doesn't say something like, sorry, I forgot to take my body with me. Therefore, everyone has started to call what they find eccentric, which they cannot understand, as physical these days. We receive criticisms for our plays like "we do not understand your plays". There are two aspects to this, as far as I can observe. The audience wants to be consolidated. He/she wants exactly to define the things he/ she is watching. In general, those people are a part of the theatrical community, actors, directors, etc. people who make theater. After watching our plays, my mother who has nothing to do with the theater, a retired primary school teacher woman, came, I ask my mother, what she understood from the play. Then, she told me many things about what we wanted to express in the play, this happened, this happened, there is this, there is that ... well, look... it can be understood but on the other hand, for the other group, it means they do not want to understand in a way or it is like telling that you are not explaining by the way I said. So the most conservative people are usually those who are a part of the theatrical community. (Respondent 56)

4.1.4. Changes in other stage indicators

In addition to the transformations in the playscripts and acting styles mentioned above, there are other important innovations that the interviewees emphasized in their productions like dramaturgical approaches, staging techniques. In line with the contemporary productions in world stages, many independent productions broke the hierarchical positions of stage indicators. Thus, we can come across the coexistence or absence of playscript, lighting, music, voices, theatrical scenery etc. The priority to visual dramaturgy (scenography) on the stage, changing the weight of the playscript, simultaneous usage of different forms of expressions and making use of technology are some of the features that independent companies applies. Thus, we can find various types of plays, theatrical forms, and dramatic techniques ranging from narrative theater, storytelling, monodrama, adaptations of classical texts from music theater to in-year face plays, and physical theater to puppet plays in independent stages. Interviewers especially underlined that by making use of various acting techniques, stage indicators such as light and sound and the different uses different corporalities, the staging have become much more simplified and the

theater practitioners continuously have to find new ways of expressions to deal with similar subjects in their performances. The narrative of an interviewer's involvement in one of the recent experimental performative theaters can be given as an example of this search for innovation.

In a process where I wanted to experience something new as an actor, I came across such a project panopticon. Because I was so tired of words on stage, I was very attracted to a play without dialogue, a performative play, based four women bodies in the stage. (Respondent 57)

However, a considerable number of respondents also attribute this simplification in the stagings to economic constraints and to limited number of technical and technological opportunities as well. They argue that this lack of technological opportunities, and prevented innovation in staging. The pandemic process has highlighted the necessity of digital opportunities for the companies. With the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to reaching the audience and making the audience-actor relationship sustainable, digital possibilities that independent theaters have, also contribute to the formation of a new theatrical language and new theater aesthetics on the stage. In the conclusion chapter of the thesis, a discussion out on the current and future possible effects of this process on face-to-face theatre will be carried out. Accordingly the founder of a community that uses digital opportunities and visual technologies in their staging before the pandemic expresses this need as follows,

Till now, so many things have been done. There are a lot of new experimental attempts that have been realized. It is as if there is no unspoken word in the world, everything has been said before, in theater like in literature and painting etc. So what are we doing? Are we doing something totally new? No, but we reshape what has been done from another points of view at another times, at another locations. However, today independent theaters are able to do courageous works in terms of their relationship with the audience, also in terms of use of performance space. More daring and innovative theatrical attempts emerged. We are always pondering how we can create a new aesthetic, so let's set up this play like this or let's use such kind of a visual system here.. It is a continuous search for new types of staging. Maybe similar things were already made abroad. In every production, we are always trying. It is a bit of experimentation. For instance, we use 3D mapping technology in a play. In another play, we only use actors and a chair as a stage set. Of course, we do not claim to have found something brand new, but we only make a journey within ourselves that we have an audience that will follow us in each single journey. It is exciting for them to be exposed to a different aesthetic form every time they come; I think this is positive for the audience as well. We are usually taken to stage the serious plays of famous writers. At that point, it turns into a challenge for our audience. They have a

hard time watching them, a torture scene for example. Or in an avant-guard play they can also be abandoned by scene reflecting the stream of consciousness of a character etc. gives us pleasure. We do not want the audience to sit comfortably in their seats and watch the play silently. We are trying to do things that will and force the audience. We are trying to do this by finding new ways of staging new way sto make the text somersault; this is what we are searching for. (Respondent 2)

Going out of the frame (Italian) stage and small performance venues where the small audience-player distance is broken have an important role in this search these new aesthetic forms of independent theater companies. At this point, for many interviewees, the space they of their performance basically determine their theatrical language.

These alternative scenes, transformed from warehouses, shops and garages, led to the formation and application of new theatrical language, new stagings and acting techniques in independent theater companies. We got used to the Italian stage for years, and we got used to the actor creating the fourth wall in these Italian stages, and these stages, these performance venues broke that a bit. You can play in such a close distance with the audience. You can even talk to the audience by sitting across from each other at a table in many stagings. We also started to make plays outside the stages, in different public venues or in the streets. (Respondent 55)

The transformation of the independent stages and the space and the theatrical production relation will be discussed more deeply in the next chapter of the thesis. Besides the space, the length of the stagings is another technical point, which was highlighted by the respondents as a novelty in the productions of independent companies. Most of the interviewees said that unlike the subsidized institutions, independent theaters do not prefer to keep the plays duration too long, and therefore shorter texts are preferred. According to them, the perfect length of a play that a theater company will stage should not exceed one and a half hours at most. For that reason, rather than the plays composed of two acts, independent companies usually prefer to stage more compact plays that will end up in a single act. For a group of interviewees, this necessity is associated with the decrease in the tolerance of the audience due to the time compression and long distances they have to deal with in city life.

Apart from these factors, respondents also point out the existence of many channels of entertainment like social media, cinema and televisions offering much more attractive opportunities for the audience. According to them, the audience of

independent companies then is demanding a product that can promise something different than in the TV, and that can give him a return for the money and effort they puts in. Thus, as independent theater companies have to compete with those channels long plays may constitute a handicap to attract the audience. A 36-year-old theater group founder attributes the obligation to choose short plays to those dynamics as follows,

Of course, both the audience and the perception have changed; so the patience and the perception of time.... You can't keep the audience in the theater for that long, you should not too. Because people start the day at seven and finish the same day at 7- 8 o'clock, even when they can barely catch the starting hour of a theater performance after work. You can't hold back a person when they haven't even changed their working clothes and they even haven't eaten their lunch. There are long many long plays enduring four hours like *Crime and Punishment*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*. If you choose those kinds of plays, the audience will sleep and will get angry. There is also impatience, it is not the same as before, and the audience is also different... But theater companies take precautions for this, chose short plays with one act or shorten classical texts and reduce the four hour play to one, one and half hours. They also give a short break of ten minutes in every 50 minutes. So that it can give the taste a pretty like a good movie (Respondent 19).

Based on the quote of the interviewee above, it can be claimed that the transformation of the productions on independent theater stages are also associated with the transformation of the audience and the audience's tastes, reactions and expectations. In the last part of this section I will shortly deal with the relation between the changing relation between the audience and the novelties in the productions of independent companies in İstanbul and Ankara and in the next part I will deeply elaborate relations of the audience with the cities İstanbul and Ankara.

The audience, which is a part of collective theatrical production, plays a much more decisive role in today's independent staging than in the past. Most of theater practitioners and academicians attribute the co-creator role to the audience in the collective production process of the plays. For instance, Bertolt Brecht points out this role by mentioning that 'In theatre, the audience regulates the performance' (Brecht in Balme: 2008, 34). Like Brecht, Maria Shevtsova underlines that spectators 'affect a particular rendition of a performance' (Shevtsova: 1989: 188). Erika Fischer-Lichte also argues that 'whatever the actors do elicit a response from the spectators, which impacts the entire performance' (Fischer-Lichte: 2008, 3). Jacques Ranciere in his article "Emancipated Spectator" makes important observations about the current

theatrical works and their audience. For Ranciere, "Theater is the place where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilized" (Ranciere: 2009, 3). Thus, the basic requirement for today's theatrical performances is the lack of spectators but the existence of active participants. Here, he makes a categorization of two types of spectators in contemporary stages, based on Brechtian and Artuadian theatrical understanding. First type of new audience, without simple empathy and identification, switch to an experimenter who actively observe what is going on the stage and think of its causes. The second type of new audience is totally a part of the theatrical production which is also a kind of communitarian action. In this sense, theater-going turns into a collective action and the theatrical audience as a part of theatrical community. On the one hand, most of the interviewees underline that the compathy established with the audience in independent companies during, after and before the performance, cannot be formed in subsidized institutions. On the one hand, in subsidized institutions, after the audience sits calmly in their seats, they look to understand the object of contemplation on the stage and only experience a singular emotional reception through what is meant to be conveyed to the play. Accordingly, it is possible to say that most of the plays in the groups that produce in the field of independent theater include an invitation to participate, in this sense; the audience wants to be involved in the process by taking an active responsibility, rather than being a passive receiver. What is meant here, of course, does not mean that the plays staged are just an interactive play or a play in which the audience has to be one-to-one in an open public space. Apart from predetermined way of participation like cheering or clapping, the voluntary participation and sharing of the audience, which is an example of this active indispensable relationship established in independent theaters, took place at a moment when I witnessed it as a researcher.

The audience comes to see something, comes with an expectation, or comes without any expectation, maybe just because it's a friend, just to see it, maybe it's a different evening, but it definitely establishes a communication. For example, what happened in today's performance, I liked this communication very much, when the electricity went out, I said, I guess we won't be able to continue, so we will get people's numbers or names to invite them to the next performances. But then an offer came from the audience, they told us let's keep the lights on our phones, and you keep going to play on the stage. We were very excited in hearing this proposition but at first, I was thinking how we can play appropriately like that, without stage lighting and effects. Then

the audience shed a light on us and we came across something amazing, gratifying... When one's flashlight went off, another's was opened at the other side. They opened it because the light is dimmed there. In other words, the audience has one-to-one getting into the play; it's a kind of total interference with the play, interaction with the company (Respondent 37).

To remove the distance with the audience is evaluated as one of the biggest break up with the past theatrical experiences of those new companies by many of the respondents. They claim they in the independent stages, the close distance between the actors and the audience serve to increase the impact of this communitarian feeling. At this point, this role of spatial dimension on the productions, organizations and relations of independent which will be mentioned in the next subchapter of the thesis is an important determinant for this new bond or new sense of empathy of the actors and their audience.

Beyond the change relationship the audience establishes with productions, it should also be noted that, the theater audience both in İstanbul and Ankara is transforming in terms of number and qualifications. However it should also be noted that while the audience of the city is expanding culturally, it is not diversifying in terms of class at the same rate. One interviewee summed up this situation as follows.

The cultural diversity and the age diversity of the audience increased. We can talk about that for sure. They come from different cultural layers, but because of the price policy, I can't say that we have included various classes in the audience. As independent theaters, we unfortunately do not have an argument to say this but we have attracted more students. A younger generation, a newer generation, of audience is formed so we provided a kind of diversity in that sense. (Respondent 66)

According to the theater producers, the reactions of this expanding audience against the new artistic attempts of the independent theater companies follow two directions. On the one hand the interviewees said that most of the audience of the independent ensembles has a positive attitude towards the innovations made in the texts, staging and acting and techniques. They underline a considerable number of spectators that they are first puzzled by some of the novelties they encounter but they are easily incline to adapt to those novelties. This easy acceptance is usually linked with the considerable number of young, educated, middle-upper middle-class audience that those independent companies have. On the other hand, they also underline the existence of a small group critical of these innovations, who is accustomed to the culture of subsidized theaters mostly inclined to preserved the forth wall between the

actors and the audience. Accordingly, many interviewees underline that the audience's positive approach to new theatrical experiences is determined within the limits to which they can more or less relate with the more or less customary, traditional and familiar one.

We have always encountered comments like it was an interesting experience. The audience reveals the good and the bad in plays in staging forms, which he likens to know better. But when you do something completely different from all these, then you get the reaction with the word very interesting but not more than that. In fact, some viewers are very open to the novelties. There are not too many brave audiences; we should admit that fact (Respondent 56).

In many interviews I read from secondary sources, the productions of independent companies' period are described as "new valuable efforts" for old generation theatre practitioners. For instance, the words of Genco Erkal, one of the pioneering names in the field of Turkish political theater since the 70s, are in line with this perspective.

Our theater world is within a framework of very active pursuits. I see the movement of independent theaters or alternative companies in a very positive way, small groups, and new writers are looking for new narrative forms in small venues... New brilliant actors are coming out, there is a great activity, I see this as a very promising situation for the future of Turkish theater.⁵⁵

Although the audience's openness to technical and artistic innovations is a controversial area for the interviewees, it can be said that the independent companies created their own audience who is more than a mere spectator but rather is a participating actor in the theatrical experience. In other words, the productions of independent theater companies have a great impact on the audience's transformation from a passive-receiving community to a more interactive position with the theater's entering a performative process today and becoming an active participant-receiver who goes beyond taking rather what is offered to them. Similarly, the members of independent companies interviewed usually argue that their theatrical productions offer the audience, not only witnessing a complete story but being a part of a process as a whole. Thus, within this process the audience- actor relationship is also redefined. In the next sub-chapter of the thesis the relationship of the independent theater audience with the city and the theatrical space will be also discussed.

⁵⁵ Retrieved from the internet broadcasting of TV programme, Aykırı Sorular, 03.01.2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tH6T37F0YU>

The ideas of the theater producers about the novelties in productions of the companies also show a similar degree of diversity. While some of the interviewees find the plays produced by independent companies to be very diverse in terms of genres and staging styles, others mention that the texts and staging of the plays are very similar to each other. They also underline that the gap between quantity and quality of the theatrical works produced in those companies has widened according to the influence of certain trends that attract attention from the audience spread very quickly. Also, a significant part of the interviewees mention that some works that were presented to the audience on stage were similar in many respects to previous periods' productions. They evaluate those works as a renewal process that started in the 80s. They also think that even though the stories told in the plays are up-to-date, independent groups lag far behind world productions in terms of staging and technique.

These new venues and groups want to put out plays as soon as possible and meet with the audience, and they act hastily. Even if they are not satisfied financially, what they mean to say is at least we got the result and we met with the audience. But this is not enough; we really need to look for a new form. In other words, it is necessary to make a deep research; otherwise writing and staging a play is actually a job that can be done in 1- 1.5 months. Many theaters are already doing this, but we need to be in search of a new form and content (Respondent 3).

This pursuit of new forms and content in their theatrical works, a considerable number of the respondents admitted that either traditional/local elements or the aesthetical formulation of performances from European or American Stages inspire them. Artistic meetings and crossings with their increasing participation in domestic international festivals and co-productions with different companies deeply influence theatrical aesthetics of independent companies.

To summarize, while the production in the field of independent theater today maintains its ties with the main lines of the Turkish theater history, especially in the last fifteen years there have been significant breaks both in terms of form and content. The fact that the playscript, parallel to western theater forms, was a main stage indicator that has occupied a top position at the stage hierarchy especially in funded and institutionalized theaters left its place to the increasing dominance of different non-textual signs, the physical presence of the actor, sound, lighting etc. in independent theater companies. The field data also pointed to the simplification of

the decor in independent productions, the adoption of acting-centred dramaturgical approaches, usage of different forms of expression in staging, the diversification of the form and content of in recently written plays and the use of more diverse and more fragmented theatrical aesthetics in current productions. The emotional bond that the audience establishes with the performances of independent ensembles and also the transformation of the actor-spectator relationship should be underlined as the important breaks with the past. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lock-down periods had a significant negative impact on the production process of the independent theater companies and the social and economic conditions of both the companies and its members. Unlike during other social phenomena that occurred in the last 10 years in Turkey, the most special feature of theater, the liveness⁵⁶ has been under discussion by theater practitioners during the lock-down process with the digital theatrical attempts has been under discussion by theater practitioners. At this point, with the theatrical productions made in the digital field, the theatrical experience happening here and now the gained a different meaning. The digital space gave theater producers the opportunity to meet with the audience in a different kind of spatiality at the same time/ (concurrently). These digital works that stayed outside the field research time zone of the thesis increased the interaction of the theater with the digital space and somewhat, it makes one think that it may have more impact on the theater productions of the companies in the stage later on. However, by considering the economic difficulties that the companies have to deal with and in such a mediatized society that the audience is surviving, it is possible to claim that theater companies will continue to follow a more minimalist, pared down theater aesthetic with simpler staging techniques on nearly empty stages.

Accordingly, in the next chapter, the spatial dimension of the productions of independent theaters in Istanbul and Ankara will be examined by associating them with the city, the theater building as a performance venue, the stage as the performance area and the audience of this stage.

⁵⁶ Phelan argues that theater is different from all other forms of theatrical presentation because it is live..." (Phelan: 1993, 148). Similarly, Auslander underlines liveness of theater by claiming that "At the heart of experience, then, is the performer-audience relationship: the immediate, personal exchange, the chemistry and magic which gives theater its special quality". He adds that liveness also increases the political potential of productions" (Auslander in Davis 2008, 107).

4.2. The house is rented but the district is ours”: The performance venue, the city, and the audience

4.2.1. Theatrical Space as a Claim of Existence

“A theater building is needed; this city of Istanbul needs a theater building first of all... This building is more important than anything else, even more, important than a slaughterhouse, a public place, a bridge, a hospital, or even a school... That's why I want a theater for this city.”⁵⁷

(Muhsin Ertuğrul in Pekman, 2010:22)

That call addressed to the state administrators by the theater man Muhsin Ertuğrul who has an important place in the history of Turkish theater, reveals one of the vital and long-lasting problems in the field of Turkish theater from the past to the present. Since the early years of the Republic, the subsidized institutions and especially private theater companies frequently encountered a scarcity of theatrical venues to stage their productions. Today, this lack of a place to perform continues to constitute one of the primary agendas of independent theater companies. In big cities like Istanbul and Ankara, where the number of spectators and companies is high, we see that there are many independent theater companies without a theatrical venue that have to rent a venue to perform. Although this deficiency is related to one of the most visible forms of the relationship between the theater and the space, the spatial meaning of the theater draws a multidimensional picture for the theater companies. From this point of view, it is possible to make a multi-layered conceptualization of space including the place of performance (the stage), the theater building, and the urban context within which the building is located.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ BEN BİR TİYATRO İSTİYORUM. Bir tiyatro binası lazım, bu İstanbul şehrine her şeyden önce bir tiyatırı binası lazım... Bu bina her şeyden daha mühim, hatta mezbahadan, halden, köprüden, hastaneden, hatta okuldan daha önemli... Onun için bu şehre bir tiyato istiyorum. Efendim, beyim, paşam, bir tiyatro, bir bina lazım. (translated by the author).

⁵⁸ Apart from the theater house, the stage, and the urban context, many researchers from theater studies made various conceptual contributions defining the spatial reality of theater, like the fictional world created on the stage. Here, again, multi-layered terminology is used. For example, Anne Ubersfeld offered five terms here; the stage space, the scenic space, the theatrical space, the theater space, and the dramatic space comprising the stage, the staging features, the fictive world of the play, the imagined world beyond it, the whole theatrical universe (McAuley, 2000, 18). But eventually, those conceptualizations are beyond the limits of the field of this study.

In this subchapter of the thesis, I first tried to look at the spatial dimensions of independent theater companies in İstanbul and Ankara; the formation of small stages, the advantages and disadvantages they bring out to the theater workers, and their impact on the artistic production process in lights of informants' perception. Besides, as theater constitutes a crucial part of urban experience and urban culture in İstanbul and Ankara the transformation of the position of independent stages within urban experience will comparatively be elaborated, along with the data gathered from the field. The relationship established between the urban audience and those theatrical venues will also be dealt with in this subchapter.

The stage as an architectural construction is, on the one hand, defining the aesthetic character of the productions of the companies but on the other hand, it is a place of encounter of the spectators and actors where new meanings are produced, and new experiences and interactions take place. From a historical point of view, the proscenium/ the picture frame or the Italian stage turned into a dominant architectural form in the theater after the Renaissance. From the last periods of the Ottoman Empire, the westernization attempts lead to the establishment of new frame stages mostly in İstanbul, Beyoğlu and this stage structure continued its dominance in the subsidized and unsubsidized theater institutions during the republican period. This stage structure embodies an architecture that symbolizes a clear division between the performer and the spectator. Thus it allows the creation of a 4th wall that puts a certain distance between the spectator and the actor; increases theatricality hides some information from the audience and forms an illusion and cathartic effect on the audience.

Throughout the history of Turkish theater, the institutional theaters' buildings mostly included this conventional architectural form of stages except for some of the experimental attempts in İstanbul and Ankara like Aziz Nesin Stage within the old Atatürk Cultural Center building, Tepebaşı Deneme Sahnesi of İstanbul Municipality Theater Theater Research Laboratory (TAL) and Üsküdar Stüdyo Sahne, Mecidiyeköy Stüdyo Sahne, Stüdyo Sahne (Macunköy) and İrfan Şahinbaş Sahnesi of State Theater's which are still in use. Together with the subsidized theater venues, many private theaters established after the 1950s' still used this stage form.

The use of a versatile and open forms of the stage; brought an important transformation in the aesthetic language of independent theaters, the content of their productions, and the relationship they establish with the social sphere. Marvin Carlson underlines that “the idea of such a neutral space, possessing no decorative features of its own and thus totally open to the semiotics of the individual performance, has been enormously influential in modern experimental theatre design, and the flexible "black box" has become one of the most common theatrical configurations of our time” (Carlson: 1989, 196).

This architectural structure, the black-box theater which became a widespread typical stage type in England with the in-face theater wave in the 1980s, was first visible with the stages of early forerunner alternative theater companies like "Kumpanya", "Studio Oyuncuları (Studio Actors), and Bilsak Theater Workshop (Bilsak Tiyatro Atölyesi) in Turkey. These theater troupes applied different stylistic experiments for each of their productions and used the opportunities of an empty space in black-box stages. From the beginning of the 2000s', the number of those stages gradually increased and Beyoğlu district with its center and periphery became the first center of black-box stages in İstanbul. One of the most prominent ones, DOT Theater's stage was established in Mısır Apartment in 2005. Another stage, “Garage İstanbul” was transformed from a car parking into a black-box theater by the founders of 5th Street Theater in 2005. Kumbaracı 50 is also one of the first examples of black- box stage in Beyoğlu, Kumbaracı Street, opened by its Altından Sonra Tiyatro in 2006. The proliferation of black-box stages endured till mid-2010 in Beyoğlu. However, with the impact of urban transformation and change in socioeconomic and demographic structure, those black box scenes were transferred to the Asian side of İstanbul. Black-box stages such as Küçük Sahne, Entropi Sahne, İstanbul Impro, Kadıköy Theatron, Moda Sahnesi, Craft Tiyatro are opened and Kadıköy turned into the center of independent theaters in İstanbul. Apart from these black box stages, many others like Oyun Atölyesi, Baba Sahne, designed as a frame stage are located in Kadıköy. It should also be noted that as a result of worsening economic conditions, many stages are closed in İstanbul⁵⁹. When we look at the stages used by the independent groups in Ankara, due to the dominance of the state theater and its

⁵⁹ In the field study, only 23 of the 63 theaters represented by the interviewees had a stage, while 40 theater groups continued their performances on various stages.

theatrical culture, it is mostly possible to come across conventional stages and very few black-box stages. An interviewer who was one of the founders of one of the first independent stages in Ankara in 2005 underlines this difference between the two cities' theatrical cultures as follows;

Yes, yes... Let me tell you, how we in started in Ankara. Apart from the stages of state theaters, there was no other stage in Ankara. Only the conventional stage of Ankara Art Theater, AST... We aimed to take the theater out of those conventional theater buildings that have been turned into a museum. I'm talking about 15 years ago, and then we tried. So, for the first time in Ankara, I made a theater on the 4th floor of a building. It was surprising. The audience was not used to it. Some of them said I can't climb the four-floor stair and threw a ticket in my face, for this, saying that you have to indicate that point in the ticket sale channels, etc. Also as Ankara's audience is a classical state theater audience, the stage, the simplified staging, simple costumes did not meet their expectations. Now they got are getting used to it but again we still have a hard time in this regard in Ankara. I think the Istanbul audience is more open to these. (Respondent 31)

In the following parts of this subchapter, this difference will further be discussed based on the perceptions of the respondents. A prominent theater director Peter Brook also mentions the audience expectation that disturbs the interviewer about the spatial dimension of theater in his book *Empty Space* (1996).

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged. Yet when we talk about theatre this is not quite what we mean. Red curtains, spotlights, blank verse, laughter, darkness, these are all confusedly superimposed in a messy image covered by one all-purpose word (Brook: 1996, 7).

Accordingly, the black box stage is an easily convertible empty space with four walls a ceiling a floor painted black which has also the potential to soften the boundaries between the audience and the actor, weakening the actor's hierarchical power in the theatrical field and creating a common liberating area of experience. Most of the respondents underline the value of that transcended distance between performer and spectator which lead to the formation of a theatrical community. An owner of a theater stage in Kadıköy affirmed her contentment with this proximity as follows;

We're directly in touch with the audience. Alternative stages created a different viewing position, that is, a different space for the audience. You get involved in the play from the stairs, some plays start from the foyer. When you enter the performance venue another atmosphere is created, with the lights and sounds, with the actors. Even in some stages for some productions,

the actors and the audience interchange their places with the performance areas. In fact, our alternative position originates from the type of stage we perform a bit. (Respondent 22)

Here, a considerable number of the interviewees think as the conventional architecture of the stage limits their productivity and imagination and the usage of different staging techniques. However, one of my academic interviewees evaluate the total rejection of the proscenium stage as a current trend that has nothing to do with innovation or liberation, she continues her words as follows,

This turns into a total rejection of the frame scene. In fact, it becomes such a disease that we almost burn the frame, and we will bless everyone who stays away from the frame. Such a fashion... It's only a tool. I don't really get it. That's not the point, because it's not about you doing theater in the garden of the museum or on the stage of the theater. Something else sets the difference between them. So what? You performed the same play in the garden of a museum as a venue. Yes, well done. Maybe you created another awareness about the perception of the audience, but you also did this because of fashion. (Respondent 30).

At that point, the comparative analysis of theater theoretician Baz Kershaw of open space theater with proscenium stages in terms of their political meaning seems functional to remember. By labelling the proscenium theatre as a model of capitalist bourgeois theater he refers to Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of “abstract space as space of domination” for the proscenium theater structure which is directed by the ruling powers as a tool to control the society (Lefebvre in Kershaw 1999:31). Based on his experience, he also underlines that as a theater professional; he does not feel at home in these traditional theater buildings. In this sense, it is not always possible to evaluate the theater space as an empty area for democratic expression, rather, it can be evaluated as an area where certain hierarchies are reconstructed and certain groups are excluded. In this regard, theater scholar Marvin Carlson asserts *in his book Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theater Architecture* that theatrical spaces (theater building and stage) generate cultural and social meanings, and these meanings influence and reshape the social experience shared by the audience and theater producers in diverse manners. According to Carlson, throughout history, performance spaces represented ‘a cultural monument, a site of display for a dominant social class, an emblem of depravity and vice, a center of political activism, a haven of retreat from the world of harsh reality’ (Carlson: 1989, 8).

In Turkey, in the early republican period, the role of the theater as the illuminator of the public and the bearer of the values of the republic became evident with the spatial appearances of the newly established theatre buildings. The audience who came to these buildings furnished with fancy seats, huge stage curtains high ceiling, long stairs, and big proscenium stages, are thought about the behaviour codes –the dress codes and other theater conventions⁶⁰. This purpose of theater with its spatial existence continued to dominate as a public duty till the 1950s 1960s. However, a sharp challenge occurred with the change in the performance spaces of independent companies in the 2000s. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to deny the role of State theater buildings and stages in establishing a bond with the audience, especially in small cities or peripheral districts of big cities like İstanbul and Ankara. On the other hand, a broader spatial exclusion in the theater venues is perceived in large multi-purpose performance halls sponsored by big capitalist firms, which are mostly located in entertainment and shopping areas, in various districts of Istanbul. The fact that these theaters are located in the middle of luxury consumption areas, with high ticket prices and seat categorization suitable for different ticket prices, regardless of the content of the performance, cannot prevent these spaces from reproducing the existing class hierarchies and paving to the creation of a new consumption pattern.

Although the center of Ankara has not been too much affected by the urban transformation, here, the spatial dominance of the State Theaters and the dominance of the theater culture created by these institutions come to the fore. Consequently, the interviewees say that the density of its theater buildings over the city and the audience preference to attend the plays in these buildings reduces the sustainability of small theaters where they usually perform. Still, there are also a considerable number of independent companies staging experimental plays on small frame stages in both İstanbul and Ankara.

⁶⁰ We can see the traces of this educational task in the articles published in the period. For instance, in the 72nd issue of the *Türk Tiyatrosu* Magazine of Darülbedayi (İstanbul Municipality Theater), Muhsin Ertuğrul under the name of *Perdeci* (Curtain Operator), writes about the audience eating hazelnuts during a play as follows, “So, let me tell you right away that the main things that distinguish a person from a savage are his manners in public places, sitting and standing, courtesy, and good treatment. In my opinion, a man who does not know how to sit in a theater, how to watch a play, how to enter and leave the theater building is not a human yet, he is at most a draft/a scribble of it (Perdeci: 1936,1)

A basic issue mentioned by many respondents was that the transformation of an old warehouse, a carpentry shop, an auto repair shop, a textile mill, a garage, a hangar, and an apartment, to construct theater stages emerged to a great extent out of the economic scarcities. For those groups that do not have the opportunity to perform in large-scale theatrical venues, these transformed buildings are like a way out both economically and practically. Here, an interviewer from İstanbul confesses sincerely, “I would not say no, I would not play here if I had a place like Atatürk Cultural Center (Respondent 5).

At this point, most of the interviewees describe the idea of owning their own theater as a claim of existence and relate it with being independent and having a comfort zone while the interviewees who run or have run a theater mention that the difficulties of the job outweigh its the comfort, especially due to the difficulty of economic sustainability. In this sense, some of those who don't have a stage see the lack of a stage as the biggest problem, while some of them describe it as a kind of freedom.

The interviewees, who run the venue, say that the most disadvantageous sides are the obligation to take care of every single work that has to be done in the venue, also the necessity to make new productions continuously to manage certain economic sustainability, and to be constantly present in the venue.

Unfortunately, the negative aspects outweigh, for example, we are no different from the grocery store. We opened at the same time as Akin our grocer in the street. We opened our places in the same month. I always say to Akin, “I stay at my place longer than you, but I make less money.” He laughs at me a lot. At least, his father is there some days of the week. I don't have such a chance to leave the theater” (Respondent 10)

Stability is my biggest problem. When you have a stage, you have to constantly produce something here to keep the theater alive. The place makes you impracticable, uncreative after a while; it can push you to repetition. You are stuck there. Being constant, being obliged to open and close the theater every day is keeping you from being fed. It keeps you from going places, eating, walking, and looking. I think the disadvantages are more than the advantages. (Respondent 65)

They also complain that they cannot transport their play to different stages designed for their own space. The fact that they could not find the opportunity to do something for their own professional development, and creativity (watching plays on different stages, participating in workshops) was also stated as a negative result by many

interviewees. In this sense, some of them defined themselves as dependent on the place.

We started this work by thinking that it was advantageous; thinking that having our stage will liberate us. Yes, it did to some extent, but the most important reason for closing this place is because we see that it restricted our creativity and disrupted our productions. During the two years we were here, I realized that I could not produce anything when I was drowning in the troubles of this place. Yes, we tried to do something, but it did not satisfy us because there is a job that needs to be carried out somewhere, unfortunately, our productions were left unfinished because the responsibilities of that place did not leave us alone. Of course, some companies can achieve this, if we could only stand in the production part, everything would be very different, and it would be very nice. But we did not have such an opportunity, we did everything ourselves and prepared it. The audience will come, is the toilet clean? Is toilet paper inserted? When we cleaned the stage, the crew had a problem, then the spotlight exploded; I had to deal with it. It's crazy. (Respondent 9)

If you have space, you have a wife, a husband to take care of, and a child to rise. There is a dog that is always hungry that you need to feed, it's like at home... It's waiting for care; you have to play with it. You never think only of your play the moment you walk through the door. I have a play today; you can't say I should concentrate on it right away. Just because the handle of the door was like this and that it OK, that is not... You never go out with your identity as an actor or actress. You have to think of many when you enter through that door. Two electricity bills are not paid, what would I do if the electricity was cut off today? I can't rehearse then; the plays can not be performed without electricity. Only the owner of the place is interested in this. This is the biggest disadvantage. (Respondent 1)

Having a rehearsal space, an area to put the staging props, being free to determine the rehearsal time as they wish and having the possibility to design the play according to the venue from the beginning of stagings are mentioned as some of the advantages mentioned by respondents running a theatrical venue.

The main advantage is that since you know well the characteristics of the performance area, you can quickly find an answer to the question of which plays should be played in this venue and with which style of directing can be used here. During the creation process, at least you know what materials you have. And also the thing that independent groups have the most difficulty with is the freedom to find a place to rehearse and always put a play on stage every time they want. I can come and rehearse at 3 am. I got my own free space, as long as I pay the rent (Respondent 11)

It should be underlined that, as the interviewee above humorously implied, very few of the independent theater buildings operated as such are owned by theater companies, most of them are rented. In this sense, the interviewees frequently used

the motto “the house is rented, the neighborhood is ours” while referring to theaters located in certain regions in Istanbul and Ankara. Especially during the pandemic period, many small-scale theater venues in Istanbul and two in Ankara were closed due to economic reasons.⁶¹ The four founders’ of theater stages, whose comments on stage ownership were mentioned above, had to close their venues and they are currently staging their plays on different stages. Again, the theatrical venue of the Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu (Ankara Art Theater) located in the center of Kızılay, which is an important representative of the political theater tradition since 1963 in Turkey, was one of them. On the date of the interviews, the interviewee mentioned the difficulty of paying rent, saying that “AST is a 30-year-old institution at the time we became a member of it, the venue was rented at that time and unfortunately is still paying rent for this stage.” During the pandemic period, this theater first took a break from the performances, then had to close its stage on December 6, the day of its foundation in 2020, and had to move its stage to a private university theater hall in the city's periphery in 2021.

Besides its aesthetics and political steadiness, the theatrical venue can be listed as one of the reasons why Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu continues to exist for more than 50 years. In this sense, the place of performance in the memory of the audience was expressed by many of the interviewees. Besides, most of the interviewees say that for the audience, the names of the stageless group working in the various stages are more difficult to remember than the names of the companies they associate with their own stages which usually serve as a reference point for the audience while they choose the play to attend. In line with this perception; Pekman sees the discontinuity of the theater venues as one of the underlying reasons for the institutionalization and identity problems experienced by theater companies. According to him, “the mobility of theatre companies resulted in the disruption of their corporate identity and history, as well as their artistic perspective which they had to be constantly redesigned according to changing conditions. It also creates a sense of nomadism in the audience” (Pekman: 2010, 384).

At this point, in terms of the ritualistic meaning attributed to the space, I observed that the few theater respondents who are over the age of 40 and are educated within

⁶¹ List of some of the stages that are closed due before and during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Sahne Aznavur, Ezop Sahne, MekanArtı,

more institutionalized theater companies have a much firm stance which leads to a state of trivialization of the theater that can be done outside the boundaries of a closed performance area. While the younger interviewees thought that besides the space, the production style, the play choices, the relationship established with the audience, and many other dynamics had an impact on the audience, few interviewees in their 40s saw the theatrical space as the main reason for commitment to the groups. This sense of belongingness is expressed as follows;

Aura is formed there, after I watched my first play at AST, it became a holy temple for me. Why does the aura affect you, the ringing of a bell as the beginning of an artistic ritual, and the feeling of watching something really good on stage and leaving there... All of these create a sense of belonging in a spatial sense. You feel a part of it. There is a ritual there that ritual creates an aura and joy. Of course, there can be a theater outside the venue, but under certain conditions. (Respondent 36)

Every space has an impact on people, it is like a feature. I care a lot about space in the theatre. Some people get mad at me, but I'm an old-school actor and I'm used to it, and I want to have a fixed place, which makes me feel as if I have a shop as a professional. I mean, if you don't have a barber shop, you can't do your job, how will you do it? First, you go and shop, you need to have a fixed place so that your customer can know what you are so frankly, I can't understand how we can keep the theater independent from the -theatrical space. Sir, the theater is made everywhere. Yes but it is a street theater, you can do it, theater needs a place to make it. (Respondent 7)

Apart from these institutional conveniences mentioned above, the theatrical space allows a collective existence of the members of the company with the audience. At this point, the spatial conditions of small and narrow spaces play an important role in creating this bond. In a significant part of the theaters, the ticket office is juxtaposed with the cafe, the restroom a common entrance-exit area, a foyer that the audience and actors have to use before and after the play, and even the stage. Thus, this proximity leads a direct contact of the audience with the members of the theater company. In line with this proximity, when the interviewees were asked about the channels through which empathy and emotional connection are constructed after the performance; the first answer is the foyer, and then in the digital medium, through social media accounts. The effect of the spatial condition in the creation of the bond between the audience and themselves is affirmed by a founder of small- scale stage located at a peripheral district of Ankara,

For example, having a cafe is an advantage for us because people from our company are standing in the cafe; a dialogue comes up there. Also, the audience arrives earlier than the exact hour of the performance to chat. In our conversations, we learn what you like or dislike in our performances, and we can even get news of the new plays from other stages, so there may even be gossip or something. Something happens there, something we like very much, and they don't want to go after the play is over, we drink tea here for hours, and chat, they want to talk to the players after the game, then for about 1.5 hours after the play is over, sometimes we get very tired. We even want to go now, but we can't go. We had such a chance, everyone who comes is making an effort to stay here longer, so we feel lucky in this regard, so what more does an actor want, the audience asks the director and the actor, why did you do this, I like it, I don't understand this. In one of them, I think they brought food to the gala at the premiere of a play, they brought pastries or something just because my sister made it and my mother made it. It's a very warm friendly thing; it's a very beautiful thing (Respondent 36).

As it is stated in the quote above, it is possible to say that theatergoers contribute to the formation of small closed communities similar to those temporary communities in gathering on different occasions in the urban public sphere. Relatively, those spaces turned out to be living areas and meeting places for both the theater practitioners as well as the audience. The desire to create this community was a point that the interviewee named as their dream: "To open a stage is the dream of many companies, so we have a stage, so let's chat there, after the audience leaves, let's sleep there, stay there, and let this place be our everything" Here, the theatrical space of a company is interpreted as a place more than a home by several respondents. Here, the respondents' interpretations of theatrical venues as a home reminds Gaston Bachelard's claim that in any living space the essence of the concept of home can be found in any living space. Bachelard emphasizes the significance of home for human existence, claiming that "Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul." (Bachelard: 1994, 7). At this point, theater venues appear to have a spatial meaning that determines the personal ties and sense of belonging that keep independent theater companies together. Accordingly, this labelling indicates that these buildings and stages are a part of the company's identity.

The members of that community meet in the place, and after a while, it starts to feel like home, you live together, you cook together, and you eat together, that common sense, common mentality starts to produce a common language. Let's produce a common language by saying let's produce a common language; it is produced by living together. It's like a marriage. By living

together, talking, sharing, fighting, laughing, you create a common language.
(Respondent 48)

In this sense, we see that the theater space, which has turned into a living area, a home for the members of the theater group, has also become a part of their identities, and *a reason for saying they exist, or they are here*, according to the words of the interviewees from the field.

In a research conducted on three amateur theater groups, Walcon and Nicholson refer to the Simmelian concept of sociability and mention that group involvement gives a strong sense of purpose, identification, and motivation to the members of the theater company. According to their respondents' claim, running a theatrical venue creates a huge commitment worth waking up every day for (Walcon& Nicholson, 2017, 27). Similarly, the field data of the thesis indicated that for independent groups both in İstanbul and Ankara, having the physical space to perform, that is, the theater building, the stage, and working collaboratively, spending times together in these spaces create a sense of commitment for the members of the company. At this point, it is also possible to say that besides the theater worker of the company, the place also gives a sense of identity and loyalty to the audience, the out circle members of the theater community. In other words, the theater space makes visible the boundaries of the symbolic community mentioned in Chapter 3 (Cohen: 1985). In this sense, it creates a meeting space, an area of sympathy, which ensures the continuity of the bond between the audience and the actors.

In this sense, similar to the State Theater deeply-rooted audience, in the past 20 years, especially in İstanbul, independent theater stages could create their own spectators. Accordingly, in the question of whether the venue or the plays occupy a place in the memory of the audience, most of the interviewees claim that the theatrical venue and the time spent in those venues left the biggest trace in the audience's memory than the name of the theater companies. Besides, several respondents also mentioned that having a theatrical space is more advantageous in this regard.

I think that some theater venues gradually created this habit. For instance, *İkinci Kat* and Kumbaracı50 theaters created the image of a place where certain types of plays are performed, so I guess that some of the audience thinks this way. I'll go to Kumbaracı50 and watch a good play there. Or I'll go to a Şermola and look what's today's performance. Because I know more or

less what I will encounter here, so I guess for the choice of the audience the name of the place is more effective than the name of the company. (Respondent 4)

As far as I can see, venues have their own audience, which is probably the reason for it. The last time we played in Oyun Atölye Theater in Kadıköy, the audience of the place also came to watch our play, as far as I understand, I love the plays performed here, so I will come to each of them. This loyalty and trust is probably the reason why. Of course, some also follow the communities, but I think the venue is more important. Especially, Moda Sahnesi has created this habit a lot. It is a living cultural center, besides theatrical performances, there are workshops, and there are seminars, and other performative events occurring there. We do not only label it as a theater group but Moda Sahnesi, the name of the place that comes to our mind immediately. I understand clearly that the venue has also its own audience. I think the audience pays attention to the monthly program, they have a sense of higher awareness, the plays here are good, I'll go to them, and maybe this comes from the tradition of subsidized theaters audience perhaps (Respondent 57).

A small part of the interviewees underline rather than the ownership or running of a theater venue; the quality of the production, the up-to-date choice of the plays in each theater season, a steady acting and directing style, the right promotional techniques, are more effective providing a feeling of stability in the eyes of the audience. Besides, a significant part of the interviewees first emphasizes the difficulty of the obligation to operate the theater as a shopping store. Secondly, they point out that besides the economic conditions, the position of being a stageless/ touring company is often a preference for them. This mobile position provides them the opportunity to play in different stages in different locations. Consequently, they can gain a variety of experiences with various kinds of audiences during and after the performances.

I think people who do their job well can compensate for the disadvantages of being placeless more easily. Of course, if successful, the group can also both be referred to as a company and as a theatrical space. But for us, when the name of our company is mentioned, perhaps the names of the members do not come to mind, but our theater formation and our acting style come to the audience's mind; I think it is something about stability and success. (Respondent 54)

At this point, the state of homelessness, which independent theater companies sometimes experience as an obligation and sometimes as a choice, on the one hand, reminds the tradition of folk theater independent of the theatrical which was performed in outdoor spaces but also follows a parallel course with the social environment in which those companies are established. The companies come

together and disperse late on for many reasons; especially for economic reasons and the venues open, close, and change location frequently. Thus the independent theater field is forming a discontinuous map lacking spatial sustainability. However, for a part of the interviewees not having a space to perform is also coded as a kind of independence and emancipation. In this way, the interviewees attributed to this state of independence their ability to be flexible and critical both in form and in the content they produce. They also associate the limited number of political censorship they have to face with the mobility and the limited social impact of their companies. According to some interviewees, mobility and stagelessness do not constitute a new state of being. However, it should be underlined that the social and political dynamics of mobility of current independent theater companies are very different from that of the 1970s. Two interviewees by giving examples from touring theaters of the 1970s emphasize this difference as follows;

We see that in the 60s-70s, theaters are opened to the streets, went to the villages, many plays were made for the working class in the strike areas, etc. Now we are not talking about such a thing. We can't even talk about this. I have 8 plays staged in Istanbul. Two of them could meet with the Ankara audience. 8 plays were staged in Istanbul. Even when we count the districts of Bahçeşehir, Büyükçekmece, let's say that only Beşiktaş Beyoğlu, maybe Kadıköy audience, we also came across with these districts' audience. We couldn't even jump into other districts. (Respondent 66)

At the beginning of the 1990s, Erkan Yücel went out and toured the village to make theater, and maybe he was happy. But at this point, our living standards and our perspective on life come into play. Today, I don't do theater by getting on a pickup truck and going from village to village because what I see, my standard of living, and my perception of theater come into play. (Respondent 5)

The next chapter will focus on these changes in the political inclinations of the actors and the companies more in detail. Again, the last social crisis that added a new dimension to the situation of deterritorialization of those companies was the Covid-19 pandemic. With the closure of the theatre venues, some of the companies moved the performances to digital platforms. For some of the theater practitioners, by losing its spatial dimension theater, becoming placeless, it has lost its main condition. According to others, it gained a new medium and a new opportunity for creativity. In the discussions that have been going on since the spring of 2020, most of the theater producers claimed that digital productions disrupted the nature of theatrical art, some defined digital theater as a new and different production form, and some thought

about the positive contributions it could offer to the theater and new productions emerged.

4.2.2. Interaction of Independent Theater Venues with the Urban Environment

Up to this point in first part of the section 4.2, the spatial existence of theater companies, their connections with the theater venues where they perform, and the connections between audiences and these theater venues have all been covered. However, in addition to serving as a zone of comfort for the majority of independent theater companies and a symbol of their claim to exist, these performing venues contribute significantly to urban culture and experience in major cities like Istanbul and Ankara. A theater theorist, Christopher Balme emphasizes the importance of urban space for theatrical production, groups and audience besides the theatrical space including the theater venues and the buildings. He argues that:

The generation of meaning in the theater is not just restricted to factors within the enclosed space of the building (if a building is indeed where it takes place). Of equal importance is the positioning of theater space in the wider cultural, usually urban, environment. This means that the place of performance is defined to a large extent by the field of relations created by the urban or rural environment (Balme: 2008, 58).

According to this, although independent theater spaces appear to be smaller in number when compared to the urban populations of Istanbul and Ankara, it would not be incorrect to say that they are an important part of the urban experience, particularly in certain districts of these cities, such as Kadıköy Taksim in Istanbul and Kızılay-Çankaya in Ankara.

From ancient Greece to the present, the theater, with its theatrical spaces, both reflects and transforms the urban experience, and is transformed by the city itself. Similarly, many scholars clearly initiate the relationship of theater within the city, beginning with the Ancient Greek Theater in the polis. According to Hanna Arendt, the polis creates an organized memory that emerges through action and speech, ensuring that the stories do not disappear. Here, she emphasizes that the theater also plays an important role in the formation of this memory by imitating directly the action and sharing the words and the actions. As a result, according to her, one of the only activities that will liberate individuals in the polis is theater (Arendt: 1958). In this sense, we can say that the theater has a public value that is concurrent with its

origins. Although it has been associated with various political and economic dynamics throughout history, the theater can be seen as a part of the public sphere in a variety of ways, from ancient theaters to medieval carriage stages, from closed proscenium stages to the box-stages where today's independent groups stage their plays. From this point, it is possible to assert that Richard Sennett's definition of public space, as quoted below, is part of the theatre's public character.

The public realm can be simply defined as a place where strangers meet. The difference between public and private lies in the amount of knowledge one person or group has about others; in the private realm, as in a family, one knows others well and close up, whereas in a public realm one does not; incomplete knowledge joins to anonymity in the public realm (Sennett, 2010, 261).

Despite the fact that such a spatial/physical definition of the public sphere has been questioned by new digital media spaces today, the coexistence of differences is still valid in many public spaces, including digital realm. Furthermore, many definitions of the public sphere share similar characteristics such as, *common benefit/ public use, easy, free and unlimited access to the general public, public ownership, area of political expression, inclusiveness*. Taking into account the common right to access, the random gathering of different segments, the creation of entertaining and relaxing spatialities, and the development of political discourse, independent theater venues are seen to fit with a wide range of definitions of public space. Similarly, almost all interviewees saw the theater as a public space, defining it as a place where strangers meet, share experiences, socialize, relax, and enrich themselves. An interviewee's explanation of the public character of the theater building to his young son is noteworthy here for highlighting the delicate relationship between the theater's publicness and privateness the theater.

I tell my kid that it is not his theater or his father's theater every time he enters through the door and says, "We have come to my theater." Yes, I might have initiated it and taken on debt to do so. Even though it was foreclosed upon me, this stage is not still my theater. It is a public space for the public at large (Respondent 1).

Although the independent theater venues appear to be privately run spaces, as the interviewee outlined in the quote above, they essentially hold a public identity in terms of their function. In his article on the limits of public space, Bart Verschaffel regards the house as an affirmation of individuality and a holder of social identity,

describing it as "a private space with a public face" (Verschaffel in Geenens, R., Tinnevelt, R. 2009: 133). At this point, it would be also proper to name this in between position the theatrical spaces as *semi-public spaces* based on their architectural borders, entry-exit conditions, inner regulations, an admission fee, as well as a specified time zone for accessibility. At that point, an interviewer provides a simple example of the problems that this in-betweenness creates in the eyes of the official authorities.

The state now considers you a public space. Because this is a place where more than one person enters and leaves, he views you as a public structure. The school, hospital, museum, and theater are all in the same category, in Turkey, you can find signs for a museum, for your school, for example, but no indications for independent theaters are placed on the streets. We built a large stage and opened theater venues here but I'm not permitted to put up an indicator outside. At the time, I discovered that the municipality has no rules regarding independent theater venues. That is where the issue arises. We are not public, in fact, we are extremely private (Respondent 31).

Aside from the aforementioned claim, it should be noted that the architectural definition of the publicness of theaters has become a definition that some interviewees should question. Accordingly, while some interviewees claim to have made street theater before beginning to produce in independent venues, they also claim that theater that is not performed on the street cannot be considered purely public. While these respondents acknowledged that they had to reduce the political/revolutionary focus in their production when they had to move to the venues, they added that making street theater in today's social and political conditions would be inconceivable in many aspects. An interviewee who has made street theater before establishing his own theater company in Ankara attributes her motivation to make theater on stage to these sociopolitical circumstances.⁶²

⁶² Street theater refers to theatrical performances that take place outside of traditional buildings, on the street, or in public spaces with large crowds. In this sense, a variety non-theatregoing audience can watch the performance of the companies without buying tickets. It has typically been adopted by young theatrical communities, political movements, and non-governmental organizations seeking to convey their messages through simple costumes and props. It has its roots in a variety of theatrical performances, including medieval morality plays and folk theaters such as Comedia dell'arte. According to Pavis, the goal of street theater is "... to create a direct sociopolitical action, to join cultural animation* and social demonstration, to find a place between provocation and conviviality in the urban environment" (Pavis: 1998, 372). As important politically oriented examples, many performances of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and The Living Theatre, as well as the carnivalesque parades of Bread and Puppet Theatre, can be cited. Again, many companies used street theater for political purposes in India and Latin America. In Turkey, Devrim için Hareket Tiyatrosu (Motion for the Revolution Theater) pioneered street theater in the 1970s and has staged a large number of plays in

Of course, if you make it on the street, you can fully expose the audience to the performance; the street is the ideal location for this. We used to make street theater. And we couldn't do street theater after the Gezi events. Everything was already based on performance. What else are you going to do about it? At this point, I felt as if I was getting closer to the stage personally, as if there was a need for a distance where I could move toward conceptualizing, discussing, and evaluating in greater depth from the stage. (Respondent 45)

When the first pilot interviews for the field study were conducted at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, the decrease in the public identity of the street due to security reasons precipitated by terrorist attacks was reflected in the number of spectators at independent theater venues. Respondents, on the other hand, frequently claim throughout the interviews that the habit of not going out is related not only to security concerns, but also mainly to economic factors. Despite this, the participants stated that the productions they created developed a remarkable sense of unity by encouraging the audience to become engaged in urban life, albeit to a limited extent. As a result, while the street's publicness is going backwards as a consequence of the diversification of the negative impacts of regulatory regimes and urban transformation, the independent theater spaces that have increased in number throughout this process have introduced a new and fragmented publicness. In his article, Verschafel reinforces his support for the shrinking publicness of the street in the cities. Here, he claims that as a result of rising consumer culture, the street has ceased to be a site of expression and freedom, and its visibility has been overshadowed by the populist worldview.

The public space is now the space where one is free to move and to look, to choose and to buy: it is the space of consumption. The dominant social logic that regulates people's relationships with what lies outside the private realm, at the same time determining the social rules in the public realm, is not the logic of community and consultation, but the logic of consumption. (Verschaffel in in Geenens, R., Tinnevelt, 2009: 141)

Almost all of the interviewees consider the theater to be a public space. However, when asked about the public position and potential influence of the theater within urban culture and on the city's audience; responses differ between theater people

street protests, prisons, and strikes. The group features prominent figures from Turkey's political art tradition. One recent example is *Sahnedışı* (Out of Stage), which was founded in Ankara in 2008 and performed various performances concerning various social and political events mainly in Ankara streets as well as other cities till the state of emergency period in 2016 years. Again, the Yenikapı Theater is one of the notable groups that carried out a street theater festival in Izmir for many years.

working in young small-scale theaters and those working in older and institutional ones. While people working in institutionalized theaters could talk about the transformative publicness of independent theaters and companies in the city to some extent, theater practitioners working in smaller theaters usually respond negatively to the question. The following two interviewees' quotes reflect these two different stances. The interviewee, who has been making theater in an old neighborhood in İstanbul for more than 25 years, emphasizes that theater and the city transform each other.

If we talk about our theater, it has transformed, albeit slowly, perhaps in a way that we may not notice. Once its existence, the existence of such a place inevitably provides a transformation, so is its nature. Something like this happens, for example, now there is a coffee shop at the entrance of our theater, there is a rice cooker; there is a barber in the passage. Assuming that 250 people come there 5 nights a week, it is an economic return for the tradesmen there. Therefore, when we look at it from the point of view of economic return, theater is an opportunity for them, so they inevitably transform themselves. The coffee shop makes the table neater, the barber tidies up. The rice cooker keeps it open until that hour or something. There was an electrician in our passage, the shop was empty, the second-hand bookstore was opened there, because every day 200-300 people come in and out of the theater. He lined up all the theater books in front of the showcase... Such a thing once again becomes an element that changes the economy of that place, so the view of the people around you starts to differ, but you also have 30 people working there, and you are there as a presence. Your presence there, your view of life, your relationship with people, I go there and shave, the topics you talk to people about. I think it's a mutual change, something that changes not only the environment you're in, but also you. You are actually face to face with the truth of whose story you are telling there, in the performances. The distance between you narrows and evolves into something that is reciprocally changing and transforming (Respondent 7).

In comparison to the quotation above, a 47-year-old director as well as founder of a theater in Kadıköy believes that although the activities of independent theaters may initiate a small-scale transformation, it will take a long time to see the results.

That's why it seems like a phrase that make no sense to claim. We opened a theater in the boulevard beazaar and we changed people in the boulevard bazaar and we made our neighborhood green all of a sudden. These are very idealistic things. Where is the data of this? How will we see this change? It looks like I enlightened the audience. I made a play and illuminated it. It is not possible for us to see the transformation in the audience. It is impossible for us to see how the audience is affected. Perhaps a general answer can be given to this. The gradual spread of theaters in certain neighborhoods and apartments may contribute to the change in the environment of those regions,

theater venues, cultural centers, but this will not be a radical revolutionary contribution. It will only be an encounter. For example, in the first days we entered here, we heard things like this from the shopkeepers in the boulevard bazaar, who they are, theater practitioners are coming. Then, these are actually good people! A lot of people come here, the audience comes, and they started to say that these people are nice people. That's all, actually. Not many of them come and watch the plays we stage here. But there was a feeling that there is a group of young people doing something good here, maybe such an encounter. That is, a person who is far from the theater maybe encounters once a month maybe encounters a theater poster. After they meet us he says they are normal people like you and me. And they say that this thing called theater is something like that. What could be the result of this encounter? His frequent encounters with the theater created something for him, so when the theater is mentioned somewhere, the theater actor in that neighborhood comes to his mind. Only this... Therefore, it seems to me that many theaters do not have a powerful transformative effect (Respondent 3).

In this context, while there are differing perspectives on the transformative power of theater within the city and its public impact, the influence of urban transformation on theater's structures and theatrical production was a point that everyone agreed on. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the urban transformation process of the city has had a much greater impact on independent theaters in big cities. In the last ten years, especially in Istanbul and with the effect of increasing immigration waves, the demographic and socio-economic structure of the old settlements of the city has changed, and simultaneously with the acceleration of urban transformation processes, independent theater venues have to change their locations. A director who closed his theater in Beyoğlu describes this process as follows,

We were also taking part in alternative stages; here we had a stage until this theater season. Now we have transferred the stage to another company, our energy is really falling apart, on the one hand, the changing face of Beyoğlu. Because it no longer has a historical texture, its profile has changed. Beyoğlu, which used to be a center of culture and art, has now become a place dominated by shopping malls, where tourists plunge into a shopping frenzy and smoke hookahs. Naturally, that audience started to go to Kadıköy. (Respondent 6)

Independent stage in Beyoğlu district, which once considered as the art center of İstanbul, soon moved to the Kadikoy-Moda axis. The district, with its restaurants, cafes, shops, bookstores, and shops that surround these theaters have become prime residential and recreational areas for much of Florida's *Super Creative Class*.⁶³

⁶³ Florida defines the creative class as the producers of the emerging new economy since the 1990s, centered on technical and artistic cultural creativity and knowledge. He makes a basic categorization

Kadıköy has become a habitat/ hub/ safety heaven for members of this class, including artists, entertainment industry workers, academics, designers, programmers, writers, as well as other cultural figures. It was frequently described as a region where the interviewees wished to create their productions as well as keep living their lives. A 35-year-old actor, for instance, differentiates Kadıköy from other districts as a location in which he can comfortably live.

People will leave work after 6 and most likely have a snack. If the play they will attend is short, it's not a problem but if it takes long.... When you go out and buy a ticket in most countries, of a round train fare also passes at the theater hall; it is indeed a way of support to the theater as it really facilitates transportation. Let's think about it: I'm going to watch a play on the European side in İstanbul that will end at 11:30 a.m. I have to get home safely. At one point on the way, I'll need to take a taxi. That is why I live near Kadıköy because the theaters and venues are nearby. In addition to your recreation and intellectual enjoyment, you can have a lovely day here. You shouldn't go home thinking about how the taxi driver will screw you on top of your relaxation, intellectual pleasure, and lovely day. Why isn't there a stage in Sarıyer, for example, because it's difficult to reach at night? You need to construct theatrical venues with different modes of transportation; I don't even want to use a taxi. A few regions, such as, have escaped the process, but there is also urban transformation in many districts. In this respect, Kadıköy is extremely advantageous. (Respondent 71)

The characteristics mentioned by the interviewee reflect the expectations of Florida's creative class. As a result, Florida claims that the reasons for creative people settling in these areas are outside of tradition, and he adds; 'What they look for in communities are high-quality experiences, an openness to diversity of all kinds and above all else, the opportunity to validate their identities as creative people' (Florida:*,9). This uniqueness,, which the interviewer also emphasizes, corresponds mainly to Richard Lyod's description of neo-bohemia he made for Chicago's Wicker-Park neighborhood in his book, *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*. Lyod analyses the Wicker Park region in this book, where the *Super Creative Class*, distinguished by its creativity, flexibility and adaptability, lives, produces, and consumes. As described in Lyod's analysis of neo-bohemian residents, a large percentage of the theater professionals interviewed for field research are producing and consuming in or around Kadıköy and make their living

between the core members as Super Creative-core and the creative professionals who are composed of those working knowledge- intensive industries like, finance, the legal and health care service, high tech and business management (Florida, 2012, 39).

by working with various theater communities in multiple tasks. Again according to Lyod, neo-bohemian regions “make(s) unprecedented cultural and economic contributions to the broader social system without ever losing (its) distinctiveness within it” (Loyd 2006, 67). In this sense Kadıköy, an old neighborhood in Istanbul, has been transformed into an artistic center, a site of cultural production and consumption, and a home for a young social segment that defines itself through their creative labor. While artistic activities are concentrated in the district, and they also breed other economic activities.

Another significant point is that Kadıköy, a center of the independent theater community with a large number of theatrical venues in the region, attracts audiences and increases the sustainability of each of the independent stages. As an old district, Kadıköy draws members of the creative class; nevertheless, some interviewees claim that the neighborhood does not always support halls as strongly as it should and respondents consider it to be natural.

Of course small scale independent stages usually operate in a neighborhood environment. So we have relationships with the people who live there, but you can't bring all of the people we meet in this neighborhood to the theatre. Here, I assume the number of the audience from the neighborhood is really quite limited. Let's talk about our stage. Assuming there are 100 household living in this street, I believe we have reached a maximum of five households I believe this is a very low number. However, these are unfavourable places, they are not cosy and comfortable places. They have no soundproofing; our noise can go outside during the performance. Also, On the one hand, the street may sometimes be overcrowded before the play people may have difficulty walking while crossing the street. These are always reasons for complaint, but no one ever does. At that point, there is a sense of belonging. If you think coming here and seeing what's been done there reflect the real sense of belonging, then you could say the acceptance of such a place seems like semi-ownership (Respondent 65).

Although the above-mentioned interviewee attributed the inability to fully establish a bond with the local residents to physical reasons, some respondents related such an absence of connectedness to the vanity of some of the theater practitioners preferring to take an exclusionary stance toward the potential audience. The 37-year-old founder of a traveling theater gives an example to illustrate this same lack of bonds between theater halls and the surrounding neighborhood as follows,

I went to a student association last week on the street where one of the alternative venues in Beyoğlu is located. A left-wing revolutionary

association. They've been there for five months, and there is a theater 20 meters away from the association, right across the street. Even though you can't name that theater revolutionary, it at least positions itself in the field of opposition that indicates they have similar opinions. These are the people who might walk together in a commemoration, a protest. An association may be unaware of the theater, but this ignorance was the theater's mistake. It was unable to inform the people on this street. Is it because only the people I spoke with didn't know about it, or is it because the association is new, it was opened only 5 months ago, and the theater was yet not able to penetrate there? I don't know exactly but it appears to be a closed structure. It is an independent theater venue but it means that every one who passes by or wanders in the street on a daily basis is not aware of its existence. You're already in Beyoğlu's backstreets... Probably 1 million people pass through İstiklal, and only those with a job passing through that street can possibly see the venue, but you haven't even touched that street yet. This demonstrates how dangerous such introversion is. If I had a stage here, after the plays in each occasion, I will drink my tea and smoke cigarettes at the door and talk with my neighbors. These are the people you should reach out and communicate first since you need persons and an audience. (Respondent 2)

The obligation to gain audience support, as highlighted by the interviewer above, is one of the most main foundations of theater venue sustainability. In this sense, unlike Beyoğlu, where very few venues remain, the presence of several theaters in Kadıköy generates this sustainability to be relatively high. The final section of the thesis will elaborate on the political economy of theaters, while also discussing the creative labor and competencies required to comply with the demands of the new regional urban economy in the theatrical field. Based on the attributes indicated above, it is possible to say that the Kadikoy is comparable to Wicker Park in many aspects. Nevertheless, a feature that Lyod emphasizes when describing neo-bohemia does not fit with the Kadıköy district. Lyod argues that neo-bohemian spaces with the wide range of creative activities they foster may increase urban inequality and legitimize neo-liberal gentrification policies.⁶⁴ After the 1990s, similar gentrification took place in Istanbul neighborhoods such as Cihangir, Galata, and Tophane Karaköy. This process of transformation was largely pioneered by members of the creative class, including famous actors, filmmakers, music artists, authors, designers, and scholars. It should be noted that many independent stages were established in those districts

⁶⁴ In his book *Places of Performance: Semiotics of Theater Architecture*, Marvin Carlson emphasizes the role of theater buildings in the gentrification process that took place in London and Manhattan in the 1960s. While The South Bank Complex and Lincoln Center, as large performance venues established in the suburban area, served as catalysts for the urban transformation process, they also became symbols of the commercial organization that surrounded them. (Carlson:1989. 92-97). Theatre historian John Elsom describes this situation as a "conscious attempt to alter London's pattern of social life by altering its geography" (Elsom in Carlson: 1989, 94).

concurrently with the urban regeneration process, particularly from the early 2000s to the mid 2010's.⁶⁵ Although there are a few venues remained open and continue to make productions, many others weren't able to survive in the region due to an incomplete urban renewal process or economic reasons. An interviewee, the founder of a stage that actually started in Taksim and later moved to Karaköy, presently stages his plays in various performance places all across Istanbul. He identifies how a neighbourhood shopkeeper implied that the establishment of the theater would quicken Karaköy's transformation as follows;

Perhaps that is the disadvantage. A theater was built here, and the man on the corner suggested that he open a cafe there, forcing the carpentry workshop next door to close. I'm not sure how much we can do to prevent this transformation, but you can't do much about it anyway. Something along the same lines occurred. There was a shop in front of us; it was a press workshop, and the owner, Oğuz was someone we did know well. He helped us a lot while this place was just being established, but they somehow were working a lot, making a lot of work during the day, so there's a very serious noise there and people made a complaint about the noise, the police officers arrived and shuttered the guy's place, at that time people knew it from us, they assumed this was our complaint. But it has nothing to do with any of us. We later discovered somebody else did it. Maybe the owner of the building has thought, I need to get that man out of the place so that I can destroy this place and open a cafe and a shop instead of it. When we first arrived, Oğuz said, "Wow, you're opening a theater here, its good but my childhood was spent here, so it'll be over soon..." We said we'd go from here that we were only temporary, but unfortunately, he was correct (Respondent 8).

Looking at the spatial configuration of independent theaters stages in Ankara, although the city's center, Kızılay, has long hosted nonsubsidized stages like Ekin Theater and Ankara Sanat Theater, with strong traditions and histories which were gradually closed after 2016. Currently, it is possible to say that small venues where young conservatory graduates stage their plays are located along the Çankaya-Tunalı axis. They are mostly concentrated around a large number of cafes, restaurants, and bars.

Apart from all the stages run by independent companies, the plays of independent theater groups that have become more popular are staged in theater halls within performance centers sponsored by large corporations. These performance centers,

⁶⁵ Here are some examples of independent theater venues that have closed as a result of gentrification and urban transformation; Karaköy- Tophane- Galata Axis: D22, Mekanartı, Noact, İkinci kat, Galataperform's stage. Taksim- Cihangir- Şişli Axis: Bosahne, Şermola Performans Maya Stage, Sahnehall. Beyoğlu Terminal, 8. Kat Karakutu, Oyuncular Tiyatro Kahve Stage.

which are typically built around business centers, include shopping areas, restaurants, and cafes⁶⁶. It appears contradictory that theater groups that portray themselves as independent, alternative, unsubsidized, and opposed to mainstream theater perform in these spaces in the heart of consumption areas. This process exemplifies John Urry's emphasis on the interdependence of the physical environment and the consumption of material objects. In his book *Consuming Places*, Urry basically notes that multiple areas in the urban space are reconfigured as consumption objects (Urry: 1995,?)The cyclical consumption pattern is also noticeable in performance venues where independent theaters occasionally perform. Harvie explains the spatial existence of these large venues and their economic role as follows 'what these theatres reinforce is a set of ideological priorities that again legitimate so called free market economics and priorities, even where those might not be best for all' (Harvie: 2009, 31). Besides these big performing venues, there are few middle- scale stages that are operated by administrators instead of theater professionals. They are rented and used by different theater communities'.⁶⁷ Considering these ongoing initiatives, it would not be wrong to conclude that independent theater groups provide resources for the newly developing field of theater management.

Within the last three years, due to the Covid-19 health requirements, small theater buildings were not suitable for performances, and additionally a substantial percentage of the independent venues had to be closed or became ineffective due to economic consequences. As a result, the significance of these performance centers for independent communities has gradually increased during this period of their rising deterritorialization. Of course, while this need helps independent groups continue to produce, it has hampered small theater venues and created an additional barrier to their sustainability. In other words, it's reasonable to question whether, as the number of these business-like theater venues and halls expands, it will evolve into an economic plane capable of absorbing and stripping away the small venues of independent companies. This question about the economic dynamics, sustainability,

⁶⁶ Uniq Hall, Tim Show Center, Zorlu PSM, Moi Sahne, Profilo Stage, and Trump Sahne are some entertainment centers where independent groups stage their plays.

⁶⁷ Bau Pera, Sahne Pulcherie, Beyaz Kundura, Hann Sahne,Sahne Dragos,Par Sahne in İstanbul, Farabi Stage, Fade Stage in Ankara are a few venues that are not run by a theater company but host several others.

and independence of independent theater companies will be discussed in detail in the 5.2 Section.

The shrinking of public space fuelled the desire of independent groups to create out their own free space. This, in turn, resulted in the formation of small theater venues, which were generally converted from buildings that had previously served another purpose. The words of a 42- year old actor from Ankara clearly summarize this need generated by the narrowing of the public sphere as follows;

Essentially, the work we do has meaning within the context. The theater can be classified as a form of public art. However, the city is now planned in such a manner!

Many decisions made for the city space, as well as social events held in public spaces, everything narrow our space to breathe. You can see the moves which will take place in this course of development; I stated that soon there will be no place for us to produce, so we needed a place, so we decided to open the theater venue. Now that we have a living space and a workspace, we can perform much as we want or even design a play particularly for this venue (Respondent 36).

At this point, I would like to open a parenthesis about the site-specific plays that have an instrumental importance to clarify the position of the independent theater companies in the public sphere. From the early 2000s to the present, independent theater companies staged many plays in different public spaces, particularly in Istanbul, where urban transformation has been at its most intense. The origins of these plays, which are referred to as site-specific in the theater literature, can be traced back to late 1960s and early 1970s site-specific artwork movements aimed at breaking up institutionalized art forms and escaping the artistic product from closed, formal art venues. Peter Brook, Arianne Muchkine, Deborah Warner, Richard Schechner and many others can be mentioned as the movement's forefathers. According to Tompkins, site specific theater can be defines as – performance that occurs outside the theater venue in a place that is closely connected to the form and function of the performance itself’ (Tompkins: 2011, 225). The plays are either be developed for a single location considering the history of that place, or they can tour other areas or be re-designed elsewhere.

For this reason, searching for a location is a significant step for the site-specific production. As a result, an unusual place which has usually been steeped in history is chosen for the area of performance. In this regard, Marvin Carlson, who describes

the theater as a stage carrying the traces and ghosts of the past, notes that site-specific plays strengthen the recall of social memory spatially. By his own words; ‘In such productions already written texts are placed in locations outside conventional theaters that are expected to provide appropriate ghostings in the minds of the audience, or, in more extreme cases new works are created that are directly inspired by the extratheatrical associations of these locations’ (Carlson: 2001, 134). As in Carlson's quote, the city's memory which have eroded over time, are frequently recalled in independent theater productions after 2000.

Some of the locations where independent groups designed site-specific plays in Istanbul after 2000 are as follows: City line ferries operating between European and Asian sides whose administration has been privatized and appearance has recently changed, Bayrampaşa Prison, a partially ruined prison in one of Istanbul's suburban areas closed after "Return to life police operations in December 2000"⁶⁸, Pera Palace Hotel, which still stands in Beyoğlu despite frequent ownership changes between members of different ethnic communities since 1895, Fener Greek Yuvamkiyon girls' high school, located in one of Istanbul's oldest and most multicultural districts, Balat, but temporarily closed, an İstanbul municipality city bus, the streets of İstiklal street with its ancient buildings.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The performance of REM Dance Company (2012) is an example of site-specific dance theater which chose a site representing a darker side of city's memory, Bayrampaşa Prison. Bayrampaşa Prison take an important place in sociopolitical history of Turkey because it bear witness to tragic events, the police operation called "Return to life" that was simultaneously launched in about 20 prisons on December 2000. 32 inmates and two troops died, hundreds of inmates were injured in the operation. The operation aimed to end the hunger strike started by the inmates to protest against the plans for "F type" prisons, intended to introduce smaller detention units for inmates. Bayrampaşa Prison was closed in 2008 for the fact that it couldn't provide humanitarian conditions. It was transformed into a museum for a short period, but it became in the end an area of urban regeneration. The audience can see the play by wandering through the corridors, between the ruinous walls and in the different areas of the site. The entire floor is wet as it is in the name of the play. Not only performers but, several objects, letters, papers, glass shards, writings on the wall accompany the audience.

⁶⁹Some of these site-specific plays are Downhill Relics- Yokuş Aşağı Emanetler (Kumbaracı 50-2011), Time of Pera- Pera'nın Zamanı (Kumbaracı50-2016), Offer- Teklif (Tiyatropol-2013), Balat Monologues Museum- Balat Monologlar Müzesi (Galata Perform 2016), Forgetting: A Remembrance Project- Unutmak , Bir Hatırlama Projesi (Tiyatro Artı-2020), and Too Far Very Close- Çok Uzak Çok Yakın (Tiyatropol-2022). Ufuk Tan Altunkaya's master thesis titled 'Site Specific Theater in Turkey After the Year 2000' completed in 2017, is one of the few studies on site-specific plays staged in Turkey since the 2000s. Based on this study, 46 performances were produced between 2000 and 2010, and 64 productions were created between 2010 and 2017 Except for eight, all of these performances took place in Istanbul, and no site-specific plays were performed in Ankara. Rem Dans Theatre, Galataperform, Kumbaracı50, Tiyatro Artı, Tiyatropol are among the companies that produced the majority of these performances. (Altunkaya: 2017, 160-172).

Those plays performed by independent theater companies in İstanbul aim to bring citizens together through generating shared spaces of encounter in the urban sphere, to minimize social exclusion, and to have a certain impact on urban life. Furthermore, site-specific performances radically alter the audience's position and role, making the audience the central actors of the performance itself. Considering Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, it is necessary to highlight the potential of these small theater spaces, which have the ability to juxtapose several incompatible settlements and temporalities, to create spaces of micro resistance (Foucault, in Stavrides 2016, 152).

Based on an interviewee's expression, it is possible to evaluate works and venues of independent companies as a kind of step towards reopening the lost urban urban spaces, a form of re-appropriation or reclaiming of public realm. But in the other hand, it is important to remember that independent theater venues established in large cities have a risk to portray a mere pose rather than expressing a stance or being a form of uprising or resistance. Accordingly, one interviewee admitted, quite self-critically, that the stages founded by independent communities had capitulated to such a loop,

We are restricted to small areas and specific neighborhoods. Can I, for example, contribute to the transformation of just what, or provide a public service, by stacking up stages in Kadıköy and opening a stage in Cihangir and charging 50-60 liras for ticket prices? How can I classify this as public art? On the contrary, it is what we say to an elite group where the door is locked: let's lock the door and see what happens here. We're currently playing Jean Genet Balcony. I notice the incoming crowd. Those who know Jean Genet, of course, come, we masturbate together, and we send people back. (Respondent 5)

To summarize, despite all of these valid criticisms, these venues, which have increased in number in İstanbul since the mid-2000s and in Ankara in recent years, are interrupting the daily lives of the city's audience and bracketing the time in the city's flow. At this point, it appears critical to look at the city's audience in order to get a full picture of the bonds between independent theater communities and the cities wherein they produce. Thus, the following section will concentrate on the transformation of the city's audience, its function and location in this theater community, and the impact of independent theater production on the daily life practices of the city's audience through the perceptions of the field respondents.

4.2.3. *A new born baby: Audience as indispensable member of independent theater communities*

“You had seen enough of what was going on on stage, laughed, cried, got excited, gossiped, and ranted from your seat. There, right where you are... Enough! Enough! You are now the topic! You are the center of everyone's attention! You are tonight's discovery.”

(Handke: 1966, 21)⁷⁰

These words are taken from Peter Handke's play "Offending the Audience," which he brought to the stage for the first time in 1966 during an experimental theater week in Frankfurt. The play, which aims to make the audience think about themselves and the sort of audience they are, can be considered an important starting point for understanding the changing role and position of the audience in today's performances, including those of independent theaters. Today, while the proliferation of independent theater groups contributes to the transformation of the audience, the audience also serves as one of the most significant economic resources for theater companies to continue making productions. Moreover, as discussed in third chapter of the thesis, theater producers, with the audience as co-players, developed a social community next to each other.⁷¹

At this point, Jaques Ranciere's text *Emancipated Spectator* provides an important interpretive framework for the abolishment of frontiers between the audience and the theater makers. From Plato and Aristotle's debate of the origins of theater and whether it is harmful or beneficial to societies and spectators, Ranciere focuses on how the role of spectators has been changed as well as the social dynamics of this transformation. According to Ranciere, today's audience, rather than sitting passively in the theater venue, takes on the role of an active interpreter, participant of the

⁷⁰ Retrieved from the Turkish version of the script and translated by the author:” *Yeteri kadar oturduğunuz yerden sahnede olup bitenleri izlediniz, güldünüz, ağladınız, heyecanlandınız, dedikodu yapıp ahkâm kestiniz. Orada, öylece, oturduğunuz yerde... Yeteri kadar! Yetti artık! Artık konu sizsiniz! İlgi odağında siz varsınız! Bu akşamın keşfi sizsiniz!”* (Handke:2020)

⁷¹ While this social community can be described as a state of being together that is flexibly organized, fragmented, far from totality, and shaped around a purpose, it can also be said that it has the potential to evolve into political activity under certain conditions. These options will be exmamplify in the following chapter of the thesis.

performance. Rather than delivering a message or dictating information, the actor's goal during the performance is to evoke emotion and raise awareness in the audience. Ranciere also asserts that the audience actually left the hall after discovering information that the actor himself didn't even know. This form of relationship nurtures egalitarian communication that is free of domination and subjection, and it eliminates externality within the theater hall. At this point, this spectatorial involvement and contribution can be interpreted as a return to the communitarian roots of theatre ⁷² (Ranciere: 2009, 1-23).

Correspondingly, one of the main goals of members of independent theater groups is to turn the audience into mentally active participants, even though they're not physically active. Almost all of the interviewees emphasize that their goal is to create productions that do not impose a message on the audience, but rather turn the stage into a sharing room and they want to contribute to the blurring of the boundaries between the actor and the audience. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that some respondents expressed concern about the audience's lack of knowledge of basic theater conventions and emphasized the importance of providing training in the this area. This approach can be regarded as a continuation of the custom of subsidized theater that goes back to the early republican period but also continues to the present.⁷³ In one of the few and fundamental studies on the audience, theater academician Susan Bennett claims that, aside from the contribution of independent theater venues to the transformation of the audience-player relationship, institutional theaters that produce in conventional spaces can not provide such a potential. According to her,

⁷² The most emphasized problem through this concept of togetherness was the need to widen the circle of the audience and create new audiences. Some interviewees emphasized that this responsibility lies not only with the state's cultural policy, but also with everyone involved in the field of theatre. In this sense, "My Neighbor Theater" project created by Kadıköy Theater Platform in order to share production process of independent theater's works should be noted as a pioneering regional effort. <http://www.kadikoytiyatrolari.com/benim-konsum-tiyatro-3-donem/>

⁷³ Muhsin Erturul criticizes the viewer's attitudes and behaviors in the theater, particularly in articles he wrote for the *Darülbeydi* magazine. He criticizes speaking loudly during a performance, eating peanuts during a performance, and not paying attention to the clothes while attending a theater play. Regardless of the small number, some of the interviewees had similar complaints. "We found chewing gum beneath his chair. I believe that exposing the audience when they do this is one of our most major duties, even more important than staging a good play" one of the respondents argues. Correspondingly, a similar reaction shared on a Twitter post by the director of an independent theater group shows that independent theater makers still prioritize conformity to theater conventions today: "Taking photos or videos during the play. The person on stage is not treated as if he or she were a vase. You have no right to bother the performers or the audience. As stupid as it might seem, theater is not television. It's not the show you're watching; it's the game. Rude. Show some respect if it's okay."

In mainstream theater companies the audience's activity centres on the interpretation of a fixed and finished product displayed in front of them; in alternative theatre, their role is rarely so predetermined and often relies on a much more direct relationship with performance and performers (Bennett:1998, vi.).

Even though the field research focuses on theater practitioners of the independent companies, different dynamics emerge when respondents have been asked about their audience assertions. In addition to the contribution of independent theater productions to the reception of the audience, the interviewees also emphasized that productions of these groups drew new theatergoers to the stages, thus expanding the audience size. On the other hand, many interviewees, on the other hand, refer to the above-mentioned state of community and define a segment of the audience as *permanent or staffed audience*. This group, who attend every play, closely follow production steps via social media pages, and interact with theater practitioners via multiple channels is mentioned and praised by respondents.

While the most recent TÜİK data for the 2020-2021 theater season shows 714 thousand 864 theater audiences, a decrease of 84% from the previous year due to COVID, theater practitioners interviewed in Istanbul emphasize that independent theaters in Istanbul can only reach around 3-4 thousand audiences per year ⁷⁴. It should be noted that this figure is much lower in Ankara, which is mostly dominated by State Theater. Through his personal observations, an interviewer exemplifies the quantitative feature of the independent theater audience as follows;

⁷⁴ Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of research data on the number of theater-goers, their characteristics, and their preferences. Recently, a significant report of a study conducted in cooperation with Bilgi University's Cultural Policy and Management Research Center (Kültür Politikaları ve Yönetimi Araştırma Merkezi) and Theater Cooperative (Tiyatro Kooperatifi) was published. The research was carried out among cooperative members between 16.11.2020 and 17.12.2020 through surveys and interviews. The study has collected quantitative data on venue ownership, number of spectators, economic income and expenses, as well as qualitative data on the pandemic's multifaceted effects. Besides that newly published research and TÜİK data, State Theaters and some independent theaters companies, conducted small-scale research, but it is difficult to say that very effective results have been obtained given the dynamic nature of the field and changing socioeconomic conditions in the country. Many theater venues were closed temporarily or permanently due to the Covid 19 epidemic between March 2020 and June 2022. As a result, the audience was detached from the stages. Although TÜİK statistics includes both subsidized and unsubsidized companies in Turkey, the results are consistent with this argument. According to the first data collected following the outbreak of the Covid 19 virus, the number of seats diminished by 43.1% in the 2019-2020 season compared to the previous year, while the number of seats decreased by 24.5% and the number of halls decreased by 20% in the 2020-2021 season, whereas the number of spectators decreased by 44.4%, the number of seats declined by 84.1%, and the number of halls lowered by %41.8 <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Sinema-ve-Gosteri-Sanatlari-Istatistikleri-2021-45743>)

We're talking about a group of theater companies that follow each other and have nearly identical audiences. So it appears that we can characterize this as a community.

I'm not sure, because we don't have any sociological data on these theatergoers but if a poll would be conducted separately to determine which plays they attend and how often they attend every month, something could possibly be found. Out of 3000-4000 spectators, 1000 - 1500 of them are theater practitioners having a stage or being a member of a company. They want to be informed about the performances in the field. Maybe that's how it works...As a consequence; also the money appears to circulate within the same community. It is essential to conduct an audience research. Nevertheless, my monitoring is that I haven't seen many newcomers in the performance of different independent companies. I mean, when I go to plays, it's always the same people; I know many of them, and we greet with many of them... but when I went to State theater plays, it is always different, I didn't know anyone (Respondent 3).

As the interviewee mentioned in his last sentence, the demographic characteristics of audiences who attend independent theater companies' performances differ from those who attend mainstream theaters' play. Furthermore, unlike the state theater audience, the majority of independent groups are composed of a relatively young person. A playwright from İstanbul evaluates the rejuvenation in the audience positively, and she also asserts that Kurdish theater communities within independent communities, as well as collaborative works with those groups, assisted to provide cultural diversity in the audience. She shares her experiences as follows;

The number of spectators is increasing cumulatively, but more importantly, who are these numbers? I think increasing diversity is a very important thing. When we started the alternative stage story and took this road, it was not possible to talk about a young theater audience. We were once talking about a group of theater audience who is old and who is regularly visiting the Municipality or State Theaters I mean subsidized theaters and few institutionalized private theaters. Then, with the independent companies, something dynamic became active, and then a younger audience started to come to the theater following this dynamic structure. So, we created a new audience, that's for sure. Another difference is that theater companies are now producing plays in Kurdish, for example. The audience that went to Ermolan's play came to our play, and our audience went to Şermola's plays, and then we collaborated on projects, as if the two spectators began to connect. Of course, there is no statistical data, but we did notice that people from various cultural groups came together. However, due to the price policy, class diversity could not be possible. I'm afraid I can't say the opposite (Respondent 66).

According to the quote above, it should be noted that the audience has changed not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. Based on field research to analyze this transformation, the distinction between the audience profiles of the two cities must be considered as a differentiating axis.

The performances of independent companies in Istanbul are mostly joined by upper-middle-class people, white-collar working over the age of 25. Aside from them, conservatory students and theater practitioners who can somehow access to tickets can participate in independent theater performance. In this regard, many interviewees highlight that they would like to include much younger groups as their target audience, such as high school or university students and middle-class people, but they are unable to do so due to production costs and the unavoidable increase in ticket prices.

Because of the ticket price, we must inevitably target a specific audience. Let me state that ticket prices bind us to a definite purpose. It's not the audience we choose. Now, to elaborate, we usually see an audience that is in their 30s, has a master's degree, or is older and retired who can follow our work. As a result of the economic conditions, the student population may not come much easier. I've noticed that in the past more students were attending (Respondent 8).

In terms of audience, subsidized theaters can expand more conveniently and draw non-working students to theater buildings with much cheaper tickets than independent groups. When Ankara audience group's occupational and socioeconomic status is examined, it is noticeable that the growing number is made up of a younger age group. Unlike in Istanbul, respondents can more easily assume that their target audience includes young university graduates and students with modest incomes. One of the founders of an independent company stresses the growing support and involvement of young people in independent theater groupings and asserts that due to socio-economic limitations of their target audience, they are unable to raise ticket prices considerably. Referring to his own words;

In fact, a specific population in Ankara seem to be the audience and receiver of art. People who are older than the average usually attend state theater, Ankara Art Theater plays, whereas university students and young people now prefer younger groups like us. Why? For instance, we used to make bar theater, which was quite popular among young people. It sounded interesting and different; while watching, they also drink beer and don't pay much for it.

Our plays received greater interest of young people. Actually, I believe you choose who will attend your plays in certain aspects. (Respondent 51)

The features of Istanbul's and Ankara's urban identities are indeed a critical indicator of the difference between the tired Istanbul audience and enthusiastic Ankara audience, as defined by the respondents. The urban texture of the two cities chosen as the field of the thesis will be discussed comparatively in the concluding part of this section through the production of independent groups and their relationship with the city.

4.2.4. From *the center of Independent Theaters, İstanbul to the city of public officers, Ankara: Differences and similarities in terms urban culture*

Kevin Lynch (1981) defines urban identity as the image formed in the minds of citizens either by city's social and cultural characteristics, as well as its geographical, architectural/physical conditions, which distinguishes it from others and makes it relevant to individuals. To put it another way, in addition to spatial characteristics, historical, cultural and socio-economic features play an important role in the texture of cities. Accordingly, many interviewees emphasize that the difference in the social, economic, and physical urban fabric of Ankara and Istanbul has an impact on many units of independent theatre companies, such as theater practitioners, the venues, the production style and contents, the organization of the community and the performances, as well as the characteristics of the audiences in these cities.

From the early republican period to the present, Ankara has been culturally defined by state organs, political institutions, branches of international organizations, universities and colleges, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). On the other hand, in terms of occupational groups, Istanbul can be characterized as densely populated by citizens working in the service sector, trade, finance, industry, and entertainment sector. Although these areas are becoming more effective in Ankara over time, a significant portion of the population living in the city center, in contrast to Istanbul's dense white-collar population, continues to remain composed of students and public officials.

Another point to consider is that the spatial structural differences between the two cities have a significant impact on the production of independent groups as well as the preferences of the audience. Although both cities were influenced by large waves

of immigration after the 1950s, Ankara differs from Istanbul in that it has a single-centered structure that it has largely preserved to this day. As a result, especially in comparison to Istanbul, it is okay to speak of a much more limited urban transformation in Ankara's center with its architectural structures. Accordingly, significant symbolic artistic and cultural venues (Presidential Symphony Orchestra Concert Hall, Grand Theatre, and Ankara State Opera House), museums (Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ethnography Museum, Ankara Painting and Sculpture Museum), monuments (Victory Statue), business centers, and parks that have been located in Ankara's center since the 1920s, continue to survive presently. But in the other hand, Istanbul inhabitants had to witness the destruction of many monumental cultural spaces as a result of urban transformation processes. In this regard, the presence of the state theater in Ankara, along with its dominance in the field of theater, should be noted as an essential component of Ankara's urban fabric. The state theater continues to stage various productions in Ankara, with a total of ten stages located in Ankara's center as well as on the city's outskirts.

Again, in addition to the state theater's dominance, the AST (Ankara Art Theater), an ingrained institutionalized group that performs political plays, has become a part of Ankara's urban identity. Even though its venue is closed, the theater keeps producing plays. The influence of this company on the city and its citizens is also revealed in the interviews conducted. All of the interviewees in Ankara have had some sort of interaction with Ast, and they all regard it as a touchstone that characterizes the city. While the state theater in Istanbul continues to perform on 12 stages and the city theaters on 11, the interviewees do not presume they are in an active position in the field.

Even though the number of independent theater venues in Ankara is rising day by day, we are also seeing new traditional medium or small-scale frame stages, several with fixed seats, instead of adjustable black box stages. On the other hand, as mentioned in the previous section, black box stages dominate certain Istanbul neighborhoods. Most informants attribute this architectural difference to the city's audience inability to break free from the state theater habit. A founder of a performance venue in Ankara analyzes how the structure of the theater, its spatial

layout, and even the positioning of the stage within the building alienate the audience's perception.

Consider our location; there is a cafe here and a theater next door. It isn't something that takes place very often in Ankara, for example. People in Ankara are accustomed to this; for instance, a conventional theater is normally down in the basement, so when they come to our venue, they instantly go downstairs, that is an interesting thing. The perception that the theater can be found down to the basement, or the sense of a close proximity to the actors.... As such places proliferate in Ankara; the point of view will alter. When people enter Ankara's state theater, they are charmed by the magnificent stage decorations; we want them to be enchanted by the play. (Respondent 68)

Differences in the culture of the city also have a significant impact on the production of independent groups and the reception of the audience. As a result, the existence of a more established notion of independent theater in Istanbul leads to innovative and diversified theatrical experiments in production, whereas Ankara's audience, generated by the state theater heritage is perceived by interviewees as a much more traditional, conservative audience by the interviewees. This position is clearly summarized by the words of a 36-year-old owner of theater venue in Ankara;

Ankara was always characterized as a gray city of civil servant origins. To some extent, this is correct. I've known is correct. For a long time as I can remember, the Şinasi and Akün stages have existed. People are aware of the presence of a theater and are accustomed to visiting it. You know, there is a considerable number of audiences in Ankara concentrate only on a single stage. Some of them, for example, only attend plays in Büyük Tiyatro. He does not visit Akün. Or she doesn't go to the Küçük Tiyatro, which is only 100 meters away. There is an audience in Ankara who only watches the plays that is performed in Şinasi and Akün. He has never been to the Altındağ Theater or the irfan şahinbaş tiyatro in the OSTİM district. There are such audiences. This is the case even in state theater stages. When they first saw our stage, many of them exclaimed, "Oh, are you playing here?" But when they sit and watch at it once, they say how nice it is. People do not easily adapt or like it because of this perception. Furthermore, we are a small group in Ankara (Respondent 32).

According to the quote above, theatergoers in Ankara have difficulty breaking their customs. Aside being used to attend to the plays of subsidized theaters, their regular daily practices and city facilities also create an impediment to the regeneration of their habit. The quote above exemplifies this difficulty;

Ankara has long been known as a city of civil servants. With 9-5 shifts, life is very predictable here. There is nowhere to sit after 10 p.m., no transportation;

how will a person return home with the kids after watching a play without a car? This is also what we are currently afraid to try anything new. It is commonly stated that we should not take risks. Istanbul is one of the world's largest cities and it is the center of independent theaters in Turkey and accordingly, the distance between Istanbul and Anatolia is very great, so closing that gap takes a long time (Respondent: 61).

To summarize, while cities shape the formation of independent theater venues, the production and reception of independent theater performances; the theatrical spaces where these performances take place began to expand, albeit slowly and limitedly, inside the cities culture, with their theatrical community; practitioners and audiences; and their limited, revitalized, and close publicness. In this regard, it should be noted that these spaces create an experiential bracket that interrupts the daily flow of urban life and introduces a new breathing room for the urban audience.

Although the research does not focus on audience studies, it is evident from the information obtained from the interviewees that the cultural and class dimensions, as well as the age dynamics, are determining of the audience's theater-going practices, and the production of independent groups in both Istanbul and Ankara is mostly preferred by a segment of the audience with higher cultural capital. Besides, based on the observations of the interviewees, it is possible to conclude that the audience group of independent companies in Istanbul has a much higher economic capital and cultural diversity, as well as a higher average age, when compared to Ankara. Here, it is worth noting that the differences in cultural dynamics and urban texture in the two cities lead in different theatrical experiences.

While the city's rapid transformation has a strong impact on theaters and production styles, the upsurge of the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic has created an atmosphere wherein theaters struggle to survive. The fact that many theaters have permanently closed their doors indicates a dual sense of homelessness and displacement for many stagless independent companies that are already currently facing spatial scarcity. On the other hand, some groups that can build necessary technical opportunities regarded digital media as a new spatial opportunity where they can share their old productions, generate a small amount of economic income through online streaming, and relatively maintain their bond with the audience. At this point, it should be recognised that online platforms contribute to the reinforcing of theater companies' communal bonds, thereby ensuring their sustainability,

particularly in the post-Covid period, and that they serve a democratizing function in terms of broadcasting their production to a wider audience.

On the other hand, particularly now that the Covid-19 restrictions have been removed, we have reaffirmed that it is not conceivable for the theater, which is often defined as the art of space by many theorists, to be non-local due to its nature; hence the physical materiality of independent theatrical companies is still pertinent.

Finally, whereas the public meaning created by today's small-space theaters does not indicate a holistic agonistic public sphere, we could indeed ask whether these companies still have the potential to create micro-resistance zones in a climate where political possibilities are restricted. Thus, in the succeeding chapter of the thesis, an answer to this question will be tried to seek by further analysing the political and economic dynamics influencing the organization, productions, and members of independent companies

CHAPTER 5

“SHAPING HOPE IN DESPAIR”: IDEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF INDEPENDENT THEATER MAKING

5.1. Remarks on the linkage between theater and politics: A general glance

“... All theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error – and this is a political attitude.” (Boal: 1974, xxiii)

These words, from the preface of Augusto Boal's book "Theater of the oppressed," an important theater theorist and producer, summarize the politics-theatre connection in many aspects. The origins of the theater's relationship with politics are as old as theater itself. As an example, the Agora, the Ancient Greek polis' expression ground, was a place where political consciousness and democratic representation could exist. The discussions and performances that took place there formed an influential building block of public space. Since the 17th century, and particularly during the nation-building process that began with the establishment of the French academy, theater as one of the branches of art has played an important role in reinforcing the monopoly of power. It has been used ideologically by various interest groups and rulers throughout history. Nevertheless, beginning in the nineteenth century, theater, like other branches of art, started to be recognised as an autonomous field with its own rules and regulations. In fact, whereas the desire to position art beyond politics has its roots in Plato's ideas, this autonomy occurred during the process through which the bourgeoisie grew stronger and attempted to legitimize its existence through the use of art. With the spread of reproduction technologies, however, this state of autonomy begins to lose significance as art works end up losing their

uniqueness and then become marketable commodities. Capitalism's inconsistencies, world wars, and the destruction they caused, spawned new forms of performance.

The political trend in theater, which began with Bertolt Brecht's assertion that theater should be an assembly where members of the public become aware of their own situation and discuss their concerns, took on a new dimension with the methods shaped by interdisciplinarity. However, the autonomy of theater art is given a fresh interpretation by avant-garde artists who appeared after the war and criticized the disconnection of life and art. And thereby, whereas the avant-garde rejects the absolutization of art's own world, it makes a political call to abolish the detachment of life and art. Accordingly, Kreft claims that after the avant-garde that declared the end of art, in a sense art became politics and vice a versa (Kreft: in Artun, 2015, 38). As a result, from Brecht to Boal, many theater actors and writers provided a rich dialogue between theater and politics. However, the impact of globalization has also resulted in a shift in the political landscape.

With the emergence of performance as a distinct field at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, political representation gave way to art movements that emphasized the materiality of the body. Thereby, the body, beyond serving as a device in artistic production, has become an end in and of itself.

On the one hand, art does seem to be stuck in the global political and economic relationships built by multinational companies inside this post-modern discourse fog which has prevailed for the past 20-30 years; on the other hand, it has embarked on a path of liberating and performative engagement with politics. In his article "Performance and Democracy," Nicholas Ridout interprets this engagement as way of opposing democratically to the danger of a post-democratic future. According to Ridout,

Here politics is made to reappear, not by means of a "political theater" that proposes agendas or even critiques specific injustices, but by means of a politics of theater, in which the form's entanglement with the constitution of political relations is exposed (Ridout, in Davis: 2008, 19).

In this context, it doesn't appear accurate to identify it only as a power relationship and hegemony between particular groups and correlate it with today's theatrical productions. Throughout this sense, a description that concentrates on a particular

area where specific experiences are held together, shared, and shaped seems more suitable and acceptable. In this regard, Kelleher offers different definitions of politics by linking it with the theater.

Kelleher defines politics as the social atmosphere created by violence, vulnerabilities, exclusions, conflicts of interest, painful and dangerous events that exist in a specific part of the world, in other words, social phenomena that have a significant impact on stage production. Organizations, inter-institutional relations, and social movements involved in these developments, in a larger perspective, belong to the realm of politics. Kelleher, while on the other hand, speaks of theater's political tendency to include the reality it represents while also breaking away from it on circumstance. By his own words" this political-ready quality of theater includes its liveness and sociality, the simple fact that it happens now and that it gathers people, who may well be strangers to each other, around the issues of disagreement but also common concerns" (Kelleher: 2009, 10). Throughout this context, Kelleher's emphasis on liveness and sense of community in the theater has the potential to transform its art work into a political encounter beneath the dominance of digital and mediatized culture.

To summarize, we can claim that all of the above-mentioned theatrical attempts and expressions served the current political stance of current theatrical works, including those produced by independent theaters in Turkey. Based on these interpretations, the following section of the thesis will discuss how interviewees from independent theaters define politics, position them politically, and connect their work and production styles to the political.

5.2. Political self-positioning

Even if the work we create tells the story of a family, I believe it demonstrates a political viewpoint. The play we recently launched, *tribes*, is a story about a deaf boy growing up with his family, but his family did not allow him to learn sign language, and when he started to learn, everything fell apart. Sure, at first glance, this appears to be a very unique story, but it can be found in many parts of today's Turkey. I believe we need a little bit of this anyway, to get rid of such names and adjectives and actually discuss certain concepts and situations in order to find a solution. Because if not, we take sides a lot, and when we take sides like this in politics, we become unable to communicate, but when we look from a distance and see from another

picture, maybe we can find this same equivalent of that story within our own story. (Respondent 8)

These statements, articulated by an independent theater director, reflect the perspectives of many of the theater producers interviewed during the field research. Although their understanding of politics and the extent of their political stance are mainly determined by their age, the majority of interviewees define their work in relation to the political field.

To generate a much more distinct typology, the interviewees' political orientation in terms of their theatrical works can be divided into three basic groups. A small group of informants from Istanbul identify their work as alternative rather than political, and they draw an explicit border between political realm, their theatrical works and their political tendencies. They stress that they are creating something alternative to the mainstream, but they keep refusing to classify it as political. This sharp border is commonly expressed through the rhetoric that, they evaluate the agit-prop theater plays in a similar manner to the mainstream theatrical works they also criticized. In this sense, an interviewee who makes theater in Kurdish asserts that every project he does is perceived as political because of the language of production, but she highlights that his task is not political but instead alternative. Using his own words,

Maybe what differentiates me from other communities is that I do this in Kurdish, but of course, my issue is to develop a universal language alongside my own distinctive circumstances. As a matter of fact, my political point of view is influenced by these variables (Respondent 6).

As indicated by the interviewee above, while a big part of theater practitioners in the field do not define their company's position as explicitly political, different representations of identity in their plays evolved into a new type of political affirmation that also regenerates the sense of belonging to the group. At this point, Maria Shevtsova's statement is also crucial for making sense of the political drama unfolding in Turkey. She underlines that “‘Political theatre’ is only ‘political’ in a particular society in time-space and place and its resonance as ‘political’ varies according to socially defined groups of people. Nothing is absolute, universal or essentialist about political theatre” (Shevtsova: 2016, 2).

A second group including only three participants in Ankara and two participants in Istanbul explicitly stated that they are making political theater, or previously worked

with politically engaged theater communities. However, these respondents emphasize that their involvement in political theatrical works primarily through youth associations, political groups during their university and conservatory years, and a few political theater companies that no longer exist.

The significant proportion of field interviewees avoids mentioning that they are doing political theater, but they do emphasize that every theater performance is already a political act, both in terms of the action that occurs on stage and, more notably, in terms of the plays they select. A 38-year-old respondent, a founder of an independent company from Istanbul, defines his production's political stance as follows:

I am not familiar with the concept of political theater, but all plays are fundamentally political. In other words, you can select one dealing with social issues, or you can select a boulevard comedy. Choosing one or the other is a political stance; that is, playing Chekhov is also political, as is acting in a Brecht play or in vaudeville and political theater. Your preference is also politically motivated. As an outcome, a vaudeville or boulevard comedy is a very political in this sense. I believe they prefer not to say anything for political purposes. That is why I believe that all theater is political. I am not performing political theater in this manner, and I am not within the borders (Respondent 2).

Similarly, another 45-year-old interviewee, the theater's founder, emphasizes that, while he has a strong politically opposing stance and articulates it in numerous locations, he could indeed demonstrate such a sharp political position due to aesthetic concerns, which is comparable to acting as an ideological missionary. These narrations highlight the non-didactic but close relationship that most independent theater producers in the field have developed with daily politics, as well as the new political activism in which they position themselves, as well as the changing perception of politics. In this respect, as stated in the preceding quote, the majority of interviewees asserted that, they are trying to tell about their own troubles in their productions and, even if they did not intend to convey a political message, they were standing in a political field indirectly through their subjectivity. Hence, while narrating their daily life stories, they are already making something political. Kershaw broadens the meaning of the political and replaces the term *political theater* with the expression *radical performance* at this point. According to Kershaw; “..... a broadening of scope from the political to the radical should produce opportunities

for a more thorough mapping of the territory gained from a fresh look at the politics of performance“(Kershaw, 1999; 17). This definition refers to the interviewees' narratives, including the assumption that the meaning of the political field has expanded, and that every play recently written and well-executed dramaturgically and sociologically is already political. As stated in Chapter 3, the subjective, pluralistic, fragmented, individualized micro-narratives of theater producers in accordance with the post-modern discursive cloud can now be interpreted as an immediate, actual, fresh, and hopeful encounter with the realm of politics.⁷⁵

At this point, a theater practitioner who works in both subsidized and independent institutions contends that, aside from politically oriented companies' plays, previous theatrical works were not as directly influenced by social and political issues as current productions. He stresses that there is a growing reflection of social political events in contemporary theatrical works as a result of increasing pressure and the shifting stances of young directors and writers. He describes the growing significance of social developments on producers as follows;

Many things have happened in the past, including theater actors being fired, starving, and miserable, including my friends, teachers, and masters. Although I say this positively, there was an insufficient and incomplete segment. They'd go on with their show as if nothing occurred. Presently, before we go to the rehearsal, we check Twitter to see what's going on. I'm coming to the rehearsal because I read in the news that a man keeps his dead child in the fridge because he can't bury it, my theater friends don't say we forget him; we're doing something else. Yes, they are saying, please include that as well. Of course, the Gezi resistance was our breaking point, and then we began to come to our senses. When you look at the plays that were staged in the aftermath of the Gezi resistance, you will not find any that were unaffected by this event. For example, currently, there is no theater work that has been accomplished in the past year that does not refer to the notion of war. But still only tacitly, not directly. That was not the case ten years ago. So, how did we become such sensitive, responsive theater artists? Since open fascism emerges everywhere in the world. (Respondent 1)

⁷⁵ The idea of *Radical Performance* (Kershaw: 1999), which Baz Kershaw considers as the hope of aligning the positive aspects of Brecht and Baudrillard and paving a new route for the political theatrical ground, recalls Mouffe and Laclau's notion of *Radical Democracy* (Mouffe, Laclau: 2001). Similar to a radical democratic environment, this new performance policy can provide a platform for cultural pluralism experiences, where identities are negotiated and new subjectivities can emerge. Nevertheless, given the emphasis on introversion, frequently highlighted in the field study, the independent theaters in Turkey appear to be relatively far from creating an image that is compatible with this proposal.

The political nature of the theatrical works produced is usually associated with notions of liveness and sense community that are inherent in theater. Nevertheless, the fact that the vast majority of independent groups detach themselves from daily politics in their productions reintroduces a completely renewed political meaning. A respondent's description of such ideological distance is provided below;

Because it is such a genuine and painful time... Real people communicate here, and also the audience perceives them to be deeply political. They do not, however, declare themselves to be political figures. They are becoming political by becoming aware of themselves on the stage. This is my understanding of the relationship between theater and politics (Respondent 2).

Several others, like the interviewer above, assume that the truth of the street; the bitter side of political truth, cannot be reached through the work they are doing, and that this will not lead in to any social benefit. As a result, they maintain a belief that requires the creation of a new reality. The respondents emphasize that they avoid giving a very obvious ideological message throughout their works and keep their work separate from actual politics. In this sense, Ranciere emphasizes that art cannot be deceived politically only by conveying social and political messages and emotions to the audience, or by expressing social conflicts. According to him what renders art political is the proximity it sets between the messages it conveys and the social sphere it represents. By his own words;

Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and this space" (Ranciere: 2010, 23).

Hence the distance the theater takes from these functions could really contribute to making the theater political. This viewpoint supports the political stance expressed by the interviewee quoted above. In accordance with that stand point, German theater director Thomas Ostermeier, famed for his political and innovative stagings, emphasizes that not every theater production can be regarded as a form of political action, but that certain productions can be evaluated as a new kind of politics that offers different suggestions to the viewing public. In this sense, he believes that

"experience in the theater helps people gather the courage to say no in real life as well" (Ostermeier and Boenisch, 2014; 23).

The political power that Ostermeier also mentions here allows us to say that theatrical productions will have a political function, whether or not they have a political purpose in the conventional sense, in these times when new forms of expression are required, when public space is becoming increasingly constrained. These potential political functions are described by a 41-year-old interviewer from Istanbul as follows:

When there is so much violence, I sometimes wonder what I can do as a miserable theater actor... I mean, I'm not sure if theater cures social ills, but it certainly raises political awareness. As a consequence, it leads to questions, gives the audience the ability to keep living, and may even remedy social violence (Respondent 1).

In regard to the political functions highlighted in the quote above, the interviewees' capacity to assess the innovative ideas they have in the theatrical production process and to be open to creativity also implies their ability have a sociological imagination. While this sense of imagination includes innovations in the content and form of playscripts and performances, it also assigns a representative, pioneering, guiding role to theater practitioners, particularly those who have the ability to create a certain number of audiences. It is possible to say that, in addition to their productions, particularly in recent years, that is, during times of crisis and social unrest that created an environment of uncertainty, theater practitioners, particularly in Istanbul, have taken a leading role in many political initiatives and campaigns, both individually and through the unions in which they are involved⁷⁶. In connection to this, Duvignaud interprets these forecasting of theater practitioners as a social function, a tendency, and compares this characteristic to the mysterious power, which anthropologists define as mana that can only sustain in "societies with hope

⁷⁶ The protest that began with the Moda stage in Istanbul is one example of action. The founder of the theatre stage declared that they will not pay their electricity bills in January 2022 due to rising prices. Following that, an interaction with a labor union occurred. Following this action, Enerji- sa union representatives supported it by taking part in one of the stagings of the play "Who Killed My Father" which tells the story of a worker who was injured at work and his son. <https://www.birgun.net/haber/enerjisa-ya-karsi-direnen-isciler-enerjisa-nin-elektrigini-kestigi-moda-sahnesi-ne-cagirdi-384112>, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/odemeyecegiz-diye-moda-sahnesinin-elektrigi-kesildi-1914659>

Aside from that, there are numerous examples of actions by theater practitioners' unions, which will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of this chapter.

for the future". The function of such a power is "to reveal in the flesh the still invisible, unrecognized tendencies of the society" (Duvignaud in Burns&Burns: 1973, 94). Aside from the social benefits of ideological leanings in theatrical productions, the risk of them becoming involved in politics-capital-production relations should not be overlooked. Those theatrical productions may sell well in a particular audience circle, causing the companies to lose its artistic freedom. According to one interviewee, theater communities that take a political stance in their productions can even be seen as part of a fashion that remains and becomes popular in a particular zone of influence;

Did people join political factions because they support that political view, or do they appear to support that political viewpoint merely because they want to be a part of that community? Are our political opinions shaped by what we hear, or do we reach that conclusion through reasoning and support it? Today, does the person who defends x leftist party X's viewpoint really defend it after much thoughtful consideration, or did he join the group because Ahmet or Mehmet were there as well? As a consequence, this point of view is in a way marketed to all members of this community as a commodity or a purchasing product. Even politics has evolved into a product, healthy elections and healthy political stances are no longer possible in Turkey. This is perhaps the reality of the twenty-first century. It makes no difference why something is produced if it is introduced to the market as a commodity. As a result, we must reconsider how strong our stance, our opposing viewpoint. This can also be a label, so it turns out that you really don't aim this in your subconscious. You are making a play about Saturday mothers (Cumartesi Anneleri), for example, and you sell the ticket for 40 liras; theater reaches at most 1000 people throughout the season. Can it really have a political, transformational objective then? (Respondent 5)⁷⁷

With his statements, Thomas Ostermeier also emphasizes this same type of dissidency that this interviewer refers to as an etiquette, as a label. He emphasizes that many independent theater producers all over the world are concerned about politics. However, just like with previous political inclinations, this tendency cannot stay outside of the mainstream as a critical viewpoint, and it is frequently utilized instrumentally. He expresses such a dilemma as follows;

Instead, it has become the ultimate selling point for artists that they seem to stand outside of the institutions, and I would suggest many artists have discovered this as their selling point. So, on the one hand, making critical and

⁷⁷ It should also be noted that the ticket prices listed here are for the 2016-2017 season, and that they have increased three to four times for the 2022-2023 season

political art affords you credibility and authenticity as an artist, but on the other hand this very authenticity is exactly what today's art market wants to buy. As artists we therefore find ourselves stuck in an extreme contradiction: the more we position ourselves outside of the dominant cultural industry and the more we articulate our radical independence, the more we become attractive for that very cultural industry (Ostermeier and Boenisch, 2014: 19).

Ostermeier's framework below is particularly pertinent to the current state of independent theater groups, particularly in Istanbul. While attempting to remain outside of the mainstream, it risks integrating into the culture industry due to a variety of factors such as its audience potential and spatial dependence. For instance, the theater halls sponsored or owned by large corporations mentioned in the previous section, providing a performance space for independent communities to stage plays, and the requirement of establishing a relationship with advertising media and social media in order to announce productions indicate this state of incorporation.

In addition to the economic dimensions of the threat of dependency, which will be discussed in the following section, establishing relations with administrative and political circles is also a tricky area for independent groups, according to data from the field. The obligation to stage their play in various municipalities' theater venues or to sell their plays to municipalities, prerequisites in choosing appropriate plays, and the eligibility requirements of public support mechanisms are all examples of this overreliance. In this sense, the ability of independent theaters to be swayed by the state or other administrative institutions, as well as the market, destroys the possibility of artistic liberation. Accordingly, it is evident that the theater has been used lots of times in this geography and throughout the world. In regards to this, the next subsection will go into greater detail about how theater makers from independent communities relate or not to the state and its institutions.

5.3. A tough connection: Independent theater companies and units of powers

The relationship with the state or public authorities in Turkey mostly proceeds along two different axes for independent groups that position themselves outside the mainstream. Coercive relationships, such as financial and spatial dependency and censorship, as well as economic assistance provided by these authorities, can be

given as the examples of these mechanisms regulating this relationship. The compelling dynamics that the state and public authorities impose over the survival and artistic production of independent theater communities will be the focus of this sub-section.

Throughout Turkish theater history, the state-theatre relationship has had ups and downs, but has mostly followed a centralized and ideological stance. Today, we see that independent theater companies mostly characterize themselves through differentiating oneself from subsidized theatrical institutions, primarily from State Theaters, in terms of aesthetic perspective and ideological position. As an outcome, company members tend to associate the autonomy of the process of production they are involved with the independence from the institutional hegemony of such a governmental or municipal institution. Hence, due to the prevalence of State Theaters in Ankara, one of the main discourses of members of independent theater companies is breaking free from supremacy of State Theater heritage.

The state theater's dominant presence has indeed been called into question especially after 2013. Public officials begin to build their narratives by highlighting the necessity of privatization, referencing the burden that the state theater brings to the culture and arts budget, the artists who are not retired and who are also not involved in productions, and the institution's cumbersome functioning. Accordingly, the preparation of the The TÜSAK Law Draft by the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism and its release on March 3, 2014 marks a pivotal point in the debate. This proposal, which was introduced with assertions such as establishing an autonomous art institution, fairly distributing the arts budget, and generating a widespread art policy all through the country, actually contained a number of highly controversial provisions. These articles leave the existence of 55 institutions, including the state theater, choirs, opera, and ballet, ambiguous, and their autonomy is threatened since they are fully reliant on an Art Committee (Sanat Kurulu) comprised of entirely authorized cabinet officials.⁷⁸ Many theater professionals,

⁷⁸ The following predictions are based on the following controversial article: ““On the date this Law enters into force, the personnel employed in the ateliers operating under the abolished General Directorate of State Theaters and the abolished General Directorate of State Opera and Ballet, except those with the title of artist civil servant, shall be transferred to the Art Institute of Turkey along with their cadres and positions”. “Bu Kanunun yürürlüğe girdiği tarihte mülga Devlet Tiyatroları Genel Müdürlüğü ile mülga Devlet Opera ve Balesi Genel Müdürlükleri bünyesinde faaliyette bulunan

including members of independent theater companies, were outraged by this proposal and it was suspended as a result of these reactions. Nevertheless, following this proposal of the government, the need for a holistic transformation of state theater connections began to be discussed more frequently by theater workers, art organizations, and foundations. In the field study, the respondents frequently mention the TÛSAK law and the importance of transformation in subsidized theater institutions, particularly State Theaters, when discussing their attitudes toward state theater connections in Turkey.

If TÛSAK says, I funds, I will give money to the project I want, implying that the state plays a primary role in decision-making. This refers to oppressed theatre institution. The audience has no idea what the draft consists of. They are only aware that the state theater is closing. No, the theater is not closing exactly, but things could get worse if the law is enforced. Its uniqueness, traditions, and regional autonomy will all be lost. As a result, I am opposed to the TÛSAK law draft (Respondent 27).

In accordance with the quote above, when participants are asked about the position and function of the state theater, their perspectives intersect and deviate in a variety of ways. A number of respondents mention that independent theaters do not have the ability to reach these locations due to financial constraints. Furthermore, they are unable to produce large-scale productions with a significant number of theater workforces, especially for classical play like State Theater. Thus, they agree on the positive social impact of the state theater tradition, with its role in the dissemination of theater throughout Turkey and its enlightening mission over the audiences in Turkey's smallest cities. Furthermore, they emphasize that independent groups should dominate the theatrical production area in major urban centers in order to make a greater contribution to the nation's theatrical progress.

Some interviewers advocate for a more stringent, disruptive approach to state theater. This small group perceives the existence of state theaters as an ideological manipulative tool of the state, and they advocate for the almost total abolition of state

atölyelerde istihdam edilenlerden, sanatkâr memur ünvanlı personel hariç diğer personel kadro ve pozisyonlarıyla birlikte Türkiye Sanat Kurumuna devredilir” denilmektedir.” <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/Eklenti/23946.tusaktasatasarisitaslagiv2.pdf?0>. The Actors Union (Oyuncular Sendikası) and İKSV, a primarily foundation in the field of Culture and Arts in Turkey, expressed their views on this law in reports which are available online at the following links: https://www.iksv.org/i/assets/iksv/documents/IKSVOpinion_TUSAK.pdf retrieved in 20.12. 2022. http://www.oyuncularsendikasi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Tusak_gorus_inglizce.pdf retrieved in 20.12. 2022.

theaters as a prerequisite for future improvements in the Turkish theater. The solution they mostly proposed is the creation of a new funding and subsidizing system in which independent companies could easily stage their plays without fear of financial repercussions.

In this sense, most of the respondents are opposed to the total abolition of State theaters, but they believe that reformation within the institution is required. Subsidized theaters, according to the those interviewees, should become institutions where play choices can be made fairly, independently of political power centers, where staging is not interfered with, implying that there is no institutional pressure on the artistic environment, and which also provides opportunities of enrolment for young theater practitioners. The interviewers are disturbed not only by subsidized theaters' reliance on the state or municipalities as an organisation, but also by the truth that many actors, directors, and dramaturges of these institutions are ideologically dependent on this institution and act obediently against several restrictions. Furthermore, some interviewees frequently criticize not only the internal dynamics of the institutions, but also the stance of these institutions' members who became civil servants. They emphasize that they were forced to leave these institutions as a result of this type of relationship.

I worked in the city theatre, while other members of our theater community worked in different municipalities' theater. We didn't like the structure there, frankly, we all resigned and left. I don't want to disparage it completely, but they mostly consist of people who have lost their energy and excitement. By being assigned as a duty, you may take on a role in plays in which you not share a common word or thought. Maybe you play the roles that you don't like at all. You take part in too many plays, too many times a week. There is an intensity of work here which is contrary to human physiology and also against the nature nature of the job. So you can't be expected to put in the same amount of effort every night. Then people get bored and it turns out to be a civil service. It's no longer art. It's a very disturbing situation (Respondent 54)

Here, the censorship mechanism is the most essential crystallized form of oppression in subsidized theaters mentioned by the interviewee above. However, aside from this justification, the threat to public morality and the conveying of political messages are the major reasons that run beneath the censorship mechanisms. In his study of *Art Words*, Howard Becker describes this legitimation mechanism as follows;

In this case, the state acts in behalf of its own interests, taking actions designed to further those causes and activities its agents think crucial or important for its and their survival and well-being. To be sure, these activities are often legitimated by reference to the general welfare, as are all government activities, but they are not undertaken, as are the activities just discussed, on behalf of some citizen who invokes the power of the state to enforce the rules of the game in his interest. The state acts because it has interests of its own (Becker: 1982, 180).

In this regard, a sizable proportion of the interviewees assert that they do not frequently encounter open political censorship in their independent theater experience. At this point, non existence of censorship is even considered as a state of lack of action, an indirect support mechanism, or even cooperation. Nevertheless, the respondents highlighted that political censorship mainly affects well-known names and that political restrictions had a limited impact on their activities due to their limited sphere of influence, their small audience and lack of visibility. Hence, they do not attract the attention of politicians as a mass and they feel relatively free. By comparing their situation to that of the subsidized theaters, an interviewer states the following assumption,

I believe that direct political and administrative pressure is very disturbing, but they haven't yet noticed us, haven't yet taken it into account till now, but there is always the probability of drawing attention and also being censured. Regrettably, the dismissal of actors by city theaters, for instance, is a straightforward political intervention in theater. Even on Twitter, DT artists must be cautious about what they write. Being famous is important because if an artist has a set of established audience, he or she has the ability to influence these people (Respondent 14).

Although centralized control appears to be less of an issue for theaters outside of directly subsidized theater institutions, many independent theater companies, particularly politically oriented ones with oppositional discourses, such as Kurdish theater companies, have always felt the pressure of governmental authorities through censorship, direct or indirect bans before, after, and during their performances. An interviewer who has been making Kurdish theater for a long period of time expressed this pressure and how they overcame it as follows,

We weren't allowed to attend the festivals, so we tried again and again, pushing a little harder each time. The stages were not allotted to us, and our posters were not displayed. We spoke out more about the censorship through various channels, and we issued a press statement. We revealed the reason for this. The play was only embargoed because it was in Kurdish. Do you know what the content is? If not, have you seen it? No, but you're doing it solely to

satisfy your prejudices. The prejudices have been broken a little bit since we made them visible (Respondent 6).

However, particularly after 2013, numerous examples of political censorship took place, such as the delegitimization of members of companies that supported the Gezi movement, the temporary closure of independent stages for security reasons, and the prohibition of those independent theater companies from accessing or using many stages. Furthermore, it is widely recognized that, in the recent nervy political climate, independent theater practitioners who have openly expressed their political opinions through various channels have faced legal punitive procedures, with very harsh judgments being issued to these people.

Furthermore, several interviewees express displeasure with the self-censorship mechanism used by theater producers in order to avoid political interference. A tiny group, on the other hand, is disturbed, and yet finds it as a coping strategy and claims that it is essential for their survival and comfort. As follows, an interviewer expresses the pressure of self-censorship over his decision to stage a play;

Our society is now dominated by self-censorship rather than censorship. This is our most serious problem right now, as I discovered while staging the play *the Crucible*. My highly respected artist friends advised me not to begin with this job because I have a child. So far, nothing has happened as a result of my actions. I was not barred. Perhaps it's because it's not a large-scale theatre. Anyway, if I had imposed self-censorship on myself that day, there wouldn't have been any purpose in opening this venue or establishing an independent theater (Respondent 1).

Aside from these limited political restrictions, most interview subjects assume that indirect economic censorship is a far more powerful barrier to both the companies' artistic productivity and long-term viability. In this sense, the economic support criteria established by state institutions constitute an indirect but fundamental form of censorship for independent theater groups. As an example of economic censorship, many independent companies were deprived of economic support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism after 2013 because of their involvement in the Gezi protests⁷⁹. The final section of this chapter will go into detail about economic support mechanisms and interviewee perspectives.

⁷⁹ Merve Erol elaborates on these censorship attempts against independent theater companies and their members in her essay, which can be found at the following url, <https://tr.boell.org/en/2015/03/26/future-theater-new-turkey-time-close-curtains-good>

It wouldn't be wrong to assert that the censorship issue, as a matter of fact of state intervention, has given most independent theater communities and their members a political significance in certain manner. In some aspects, this new state of political responsiveness, which has emerged and is shaped more on the axis of social sensitivities and injustices, as demonstrated by social media posts, has also founded the subtext of the gathering of groups that had to cease their productions, especially during the pandemic period.

Another point to note here is that, while the economic difficulties faced by independent stages and independent theater groups increased the effectiveness of existing, inadequate organizations, they also played a role in the creation of new solidarity organizations by many theater workers. In other words, while economic deprivation forces groups to band together, it also necessitates close collaboration. Thus, in the final section of this chapter, the degree and patterns of solidarity within the theater field will be briefly discussed.

5.4. Politics of independent theaters: Solidarity versus Competition

We, as the theater halls and theater companies that pay their taxes and recruit theater worker, will not choose making a splash inside popular and soap bubble rhetoric; instead, we wish everyone a respectable, productive, and ethical year on the stage by stating that in these challenging times, we should really be guiding instead of attacking each other and being destructive! 80

The text above, taken from a statement issued by 41 independent theaters and alternative stages in August 2014, still uncovers the relationship between independent theater groups, their sense of commitment to each other, the degree of solidarity among each other in other words, the characteristics of politics of independent theater domain. In this regard until this part of the thesis, the focus has been on how politics influence independent groups through institutional mechanisms, and how those groups position themselves in this political plane through their artistic works. Based on another definition of politics, solidarity practices and conflict through intra-group power relations among independent theater communities will be examined in this part of the thesis.

⁸⁰ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/85124/alternatif-sahne-ve-bagimsiz-tiyatrolar-vardir>

To comprehend the solidarity dimension of the relationship between independent theater groups, it is essential to start with the presumption that, due to the nature of the occupations, it is much quite difficult and gruelling to establish a stable solidarity bonds in the theatrical area. However, it is also completely accurate that solidarity is a must in this dynamic area where a diverse range of art producers from various backgrounds enter and exit, production spaces are constantly changing, job descriptions are uncertain, economic resources are scarce, and the audience cake is also shrinking in proportion to rising ticket prices. We can see that since the late 1990s, notably in Istanbul, independent groups have founded various organizations. Following the 2013 Gezi event and the declaration of a state of emergency, solidarity organizations sprung up to collectively reject the censorship, ban, and discrediting pattern that was being applied to various locations and groups at the moment and to support each other economically. In recent years in particular, with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, it has become evident that cooperative connections have become more efficient and structured. In this context, it's probable to suggest that organizations and associations which have already founded in the previous era and afterwards dissolved after a period of activity generate a buildup of expertise, even though the participants keep changing. Before delving into the newest solidarity networks among the independent theatrical communities and the respondents' approaches to those forms of organizations, it's worth taking a quick glance at the past attempts to highlight the continuity.

Istanbul Alternative Theaters Platform (IATP), founded in 2000, is one of the oldest and most well-known organizations. This formation which was structured with a participatory approach including both professional and amateur theater groups. Despite overall organisational disintegration, Istanbul Amateur Theater Days, organizes annually, continues with the sub-title of cultural pluralism days, in collaboration with Boaziçi University Folklore Club, Boğaziçi University Actors, ITU Taşkışla Sahnesi, and Istanbul İktisat Sahnesi.⁸¹

Another significant solidarity effort is *Alternatif Tiyatro Mekanları Ortak Girişimi*, (Alternative Theater Venues Common Initiative) which was established in the 2010-2011 season by the founders of alternative theater venues in and around Beyoğlu,

⁸¹ <https://www.mimesis-dergi.org/2012/07/alternatif-tiyatro-muammasi/>

which were on the frontlines of shuttering due to financial problems. Among the initiative's components, which include Beyoğlu Terminal Stage, İkinci Kat, Kumbaracı50, Maya Sahne, Mekan Artı, and Şermola Performance, Kumbaracı 50 is the only theater group that has not closed its venue as from today. Furthermore, while Şermola Performance with Mekanart proceeded to make productions in Germany, the founders of the İkinci Kat and Beyoğlu Terminal Sahnesi relocated their productions to Kadıköy. Apart from preparing the joint monthly program, Alternative Theater Venues organized financial assistance campaigns for social suffering like the Van Earthquake, the Soma Mine disaster, and initiated concert series, "Songs from the Backstage" (Kulisten Şarkılar) which they arranged to support the stages in tough financial circumstances and the Ankara University Theater Faculty instructors fired by the decree laws. According to a respondent whose theater was once a member of this platform, the organization and all these economic solidarity efforts are as follows:

Following the Van earthquake, we performed our plays for the earthquake victims and purchased and sent heaters, blankets, and other items with the money we had. We also solicited help from our audience. The venue Tiyatro Medresesi, for example, had a specific necessity and its roof had to be built. Each group performed plays and donated the earnings to the Tiyatro Medresesi. We collaborate for this. In fact, the organization network among these young generation actors is quite nice. When a stage is going through a tough position, we play to assist that stage. Similarly, we organized an event, songs for Şermola, where all of the actors even well-know actor took the stage. This was also a lovely occasion. Because you can sometimes create your own obstacles. You claim that this person does not come, but you see that this is not the case; it is entirely due to a lack of interaction; in fact, everyone is waiting for something similar, they are waiting for togetherness and desire to be in a state of being together. (Respondent 6)

Following this interaction and sense of unity, 41 stage and theater groups, including initiative members, issued a press statement in July 2014 titled as *There are alternative stages and independent theaters* in response to censorship attempts and discrediting activities against themselves. This statement can be interpreted as both a foundation for how they define themselves and a claim of existence⁸². *The Alternatif Tiyatro Mekanları Ortak Girişimi* (Alternative Theater Venues Common Initiative) grew to ten members and begun to organize the Alternative Stages Festival. Later in

⁸² <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/85124/alternatif-sahne-ve-bagimsiz-tiyatrolar-vardir>

2014, its name was changed to alternative stages, and it began to disintegrate and lose its effectiveness after 2015.

With the state of emergency process that started after the 2015 coup attempt and the modification of the Taksim-Beyoğlu axis, theaters have been relocated to Kadıköy, paving the way for a new organization in this location. In January 2016, the Kadıköy Theaters Platform was established by theater groups with a theater venue in Kadıköy and stageless companies that primarily stage their plays for the Kadıköy audience. The platform, which is a local organization, seeks to find solutions to local places and communities' problems in collaboration with Municipality support in some projects. Besides, it has a mission to constructing a relationship with the people of the region and creating a theater audience. Each year since its foundation, it has organized marches on March 27 World Theater Day, *My Neighbouring Theater Project*, and many theater festivals. Although it is still active, its activity has decreased, particularly after the pandemic in the Kadıköy'e district, which has become increasingly crowded in terms of both population and space and has turned into a neobohemia region as stated in the previous chapter.

Simultaneously, the *Oyuncular Sendikası* (Actors' union) founded in 2011, with representatives from various working fields such as stage, dubbing, cinema, and television, is an important actor solidarity organization. It has spoken up on a variety of social issues, including censorship, dismissals, hunger strikes, explosions, as well as rights and violence against women in the workplace, harassment, and equal pay. They published notifications, effectively used media and social media channels, and raised significant awareness about this issue.

With the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis, the financial troubles of independent theater groups has become more apparent, as the gap between taxes, rents, and revenues expanded, many small-scale halls were closed, and state regulations were insufficient. At this point, theater organizations' primary objective has turned into attract attention of the public to the economic, social, and legal conditions of independent groups and theater venues.

Tiyatro Kooperatifi which started working in May 2018 and was formally established on 26 June 2019 has been at the forefront of these efforts to improve these conditions. While the cooperative began with 13 theater groups and worked

effectively during the pandemic period, it evolved into an organisational structure with 73 independent theaters⁸³. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many projects, webinars, and solution meetings are arranged in collaboration with various university art departments, NGOs, and art foundations. Aside from these, theater festivals (Summer Meetings) and support campaigns for independent theater companies are also organized. Theater Cooperative has enhanced its visibility by utilizing social media efficiently. Furthermore, the union established *Kooperatif Birliđi Giriřimi* (Cooperative Union Initiative) which encompasses 123 theaters, contributed to the expansion of existing theater cooperatives or the establishment of new ones in regions outside the İstanbul⁸⁴.

Apart from the cooperative, another important theater initiative established during the pandemic is *Tiyatromuz Yařasın İnsiyatifi* (LetOurTheaterLiveInitiative). Members of the initiative made significant efforts to solve recurrent problems as well as to increase the sustainability of his independent theaters in Turkey. It aimed to improve the economic and legal conditions of independent theaters in many cities, particularly İstanbul and Ankara, by conveying their demands to public institutions and support mechanisms. In addition to tax cutbacks, invoice assistance, SGI premium debt reduction, and rent support, they proceeded to demand a theater law to regulate the legal status and living conditions of independent theater workers and stages. In this sense, it should be regarded as a significant collaborative initiative that makes concrete proposals and prioritizes sustainability of independent theater companies and stages.⁸⁵

⁸³Founding members: Altıdan Sonra Tiyatro/ Kumbaracı50, CRAFT Tiyatro, DasDas, GalataPerform, ikincikat, Kadıköy Emek Tiyatrosu, Mam'Art Tiyatro, moda sahnesi, NoAct Sahne, oyun atölyesi, Semaver Kumpanya, Tiyatro(Hâl), Yolcu Tiyatro First members: Alt Sahne, Altkat Sanat Tiyatrosu, Ankara Birlik Tiyatrosu, Asmalı Sahne, Baba Sahne, Balkonda Sanat, Erbulak Evi, Kadıköy Theatron, Levent Üzümcü Tiyatrosu, Öykü Sahne, Sahne3, Tatavla Tiyatro, Tiyatro BeReZe, Tiyatro Dalga, Tiyatro D22, Tiyatro.iN, Tiyatro Öteki Hayatlar, Tiyatro Yeniden, Versus Tiyatro

⁸⁴ *İstanbul'da faaliyet gösteren Tiyatro Kooperatifi, Güneydođu Anadolu bölgesinde faaliyet gösteren Ahura Tiyatro Kooperatifi, Akdeniz Bölge Tiyatro Kooperatifi, İç Anadolu bölgesinde faaliyet gösteren Ankara Tiyatro Kooperatifi, Ege Tiyatro Kooperatifi, Güney Marmara Tiyatro Kooperatifi, Karadeniz Tiyatro Kooperatifi

⁸⁵ In their press release, *Tiyatromuz Yařasın İnsiyatifi* demands from public authorities make arrangements for unsubsidized theater companies, which they define as public theater, to make debt arrangements, to provide rent support, albeit for a limited time, to enact a theater law, and to elevate theaters to the status of art institutions providing public services by disclosing them as commercial establishments, as well as restructuring the criteria of state support given to independent theater companies in accordance with the requirements of the time. <http://tiyatromuzyasasin.com>

The recent formation of Ankara's independent theater mobility, along with the DT's supremacy, bring together a later gathering and active engagement in terms of cooperation. *Ankara Tiyatrolar Platformu* (The Ankara Theaters Platform), which was debuted in the 2018-2019 season, is the first initiative to bring together Ankara's independent theater practitioners. Together with theater festival (Ay'azda tiyatro), joint workshops, panels they organized, and joint play calendars they prepared, this platform, which is mostly formed with the participation of young groups, maintains an effective organization until the pandemic period. Furthermore, following of this platform, a new organization emerged with the participation of platform members and the inclusion of more long-lasting, rooted groups. Thereby, on April 7, 2021, *Ankara Theater Cooperative* was founded as a member of the Theater Cooperative by the participation of 13 unsubsidized theaters in Ankara.⁸⁶ Recently, *AnTiYap* (Ankara Theater Producers) Platform was formed by 45 theater producers in Ankara with the goal of finding solutions to the economic problems of the theater companies.

To summarize, most organizations formed prior to the pandemic period were small-scale and local gatherings shaped by violations of rights, responses to the censoring mechanism, claims for freedom, and mostly immediate reactions to daily social phenomena. In this regard, in an conducted in 2016, the respondent states that the primary barrier to effective organization is that it only arises in certain circumstances, emphasizing the importance of concentrating on common problems.

What are our common problems, and what should we do to solve them? As a result, when we gather, we are unable to reach those points, despite the fact that these are the issues that need to be discussed. As a result, we are unable to form a complete corporation. We only do this, which is not to be underestimated, when something bad happens to one of our artist friends because of his or her oppositional opinions, or when there is painful social event; then we rally around, but it is not in complete solidarity (Respondent 6).

There are various small-scale gatherings, but it appears that there is no large, encompassing solidarity organization among theater companies. In fact, we are reacting in instantaneously to the issues that arise, there is no such large initiative solve the theaters' main problems. In fact, lack of organization has already become a noticeable feature of our life (Respondent 2).

⁸⁶ <https://www.tatavlaperformans.com/post/ankara-tiyatro-kooperatifi-kuruldu>

In this regard, while a significant portion of the interviewees claimed solidarity attempts was ineffective,⁸⁷ one of the reasons for this disorganization appears to be the complex procedures of institutional arrangements, as well as the fact that theater practitioners keep themselves away from these procedures, which they are uninformed of.

There are numerous concerns or viewpoints such as let's generate a unity and collaborate toward that. However, when it is desired to assemble, official procedures are invoked, and everyone disengages. Because this mechanism always offers you such a procedure they've already done everything they can to induce you to surrender (Respondent 6).

One of the causes of this inability is that the forerunner independent theater companies did not take quite an action before, and as the meeting of the companies was a recent thing in the 2000s, this result a lack of experience for young theater practitioners. However, in the field study, it is usually indicated that the lack of a sense of solidarity and the disconnection between groups are primarily caused by conflicts of personal interests, particularly. While expressing this disconnection, a 50-year-old interviewer emphasizes the generation gap as follows;

I have never witnessed such solidarity in the theater community; I mean, there appears to be solidarity, but when people get together, they always fight. They first prioritize their own needs. On the one hand, I see that the new generation has a greater understanding of each other that they talk among themselves more, that they attempt to get together much more, and that they start creating some platforms. I hope this would work; it seems promising, but I also think that theater actors have difficulty in working together. Also, we live in a fragmented theater world. Everyone is chasing their own interests, their own ambitions, and their own audience. So, I don't assume they are indeed able to come together, I am not optimistic, there have also been past attempts upon that issue (Respondent 7).

It should be underlined that many of the interviewees who were included in the research and expressed their hopelessness became an active part in initiatives that increased their effectiveness during the pandemic period and fought for their economic and social rights demands. In this regard, it won't be wrong to claim that these solidarity structures enable a more effective and inclusive participation than the past. While this interviewee highlights individualistic behaviours as a factor that

⁸⁷ It should be noted that many of the interviewees who participated in the study and expressed their hopelessness became active participants in initiatives that increased their effectiveness during the pandemic period, and they fought for their economic and social rights demands. In this regard, it is not inaccurate to assert that these solidarity structures allow for more effective and inclusive participation compared to the previous era.

crumbles many organizations, the focus on competition alongside solidarity remains out within the narratives of certain respondents. An interviewee describes the discord she encountered during the meetings as follows:

Many meetings were organized for these gatherings; the first time I went, I was new in the community; I can say I felt like I was still in the audience of the theater at the time; there was a closure case due to the inconveniency of the venues' fire escapes; this issue was discussed in the meeting. Then there was an event, an opening against it, they celebrated the opening of the fire exits stairway, which was a really lovely thing, but we had a celebration with the founders of the groups and the close supporters of that group, it was like we gathered within that family, no people from other theaters were present. Following this, due to the Gezi process, the state did not provide support to many theater companies. A group of theater actors met again, and it was agreed that we should do something. I stated here that I am not here as a theater founder, but as a grateful audience member; many of you were not present at previous events. You're here today; I'm not sure if you'll be here tomorrow. The most serious issue is the inability to stay together. We are present today, but we will not be present tomorrow. I said this, and they chastised me because I am a three-month-old theater practitioner. Then each theater company begin to discuss its own concerns. In other words, there are problems with cohesion which are deviating us from the main topics. Personally, I believe it is very egoistic. The emphasis on "our theater" is the primary problem here... (Respondent 55)

In line with the quotation above, the fact that the solidarity efforts brought to light pre-existing conflicts among independent theater companies was frequently mentioned by interviewees. In this regard, especially the respondents in Ankara usually emphasize that scarce resources (in terms of economy, space and in audience) increase competition, and thus solidarity cannot be easily established due to this competition between these groups. On the one hand many interviewees stated that the goal of constructing cooperation had already existed among various groups for several years, albeit in small numbers. On the other hand it seems possible to talk about a limited solidarity like production partnerships and stage sharing till the establishment of *Ankara Tiyatrolar Platformu*. Presently, Ankara theater cooperative and AntiYap, in particular, continue to operate. The field data also indicates that inter-city contact was very limited between the years 2016-2019. Nonetheless, with newly established collaborative efforts, this absence of interconnections is starting to enhance.

To sum up, the fact that these unions arose as a consequence of spontaneous societal problems, censure, and violations of rights, and later dissolved, notably during and

before field research, could be noted as a significant marker of the ideological boundary of today's independent theatrical domain. While it is difficult to identify the members of independent companies with a holistic ideological framework, as their forerunners, through these initiatives, they in a sense declare their communal identity, their reason and claim for existence more publicly. This political stance, which manifests itself through self-expression and pursuing current political concerns and themes, has an effect on the content and form productions and as well as the organization of independent theater companies. At this point, it would also not be incorrect to assert that, in addition to underlining groups' demands for rights and publicly exposing their reactions to social issues, the declarations and manifestos they publish also end up serving as another main tool to assert their claim of existence. Despite various attempts to foster a sense of community, the field reveals that from time to time, groups clearly distinguish their work, engage in a discourse that emphasizes competition over resources and their supremacy first, and occasionally express negative impressions of other companies.

All things considered, despite these disagreements, it would not be inaccurate to assert that the pandemic has enhanced the solidarity process to a greater direction. The economic and social troubles that have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have an impact on the whole field of theater, rendering many independent theaters dysfunctional and pushing the shutdown of many theaters. As a result, collective solidarity has begun to expand through newly established or existing initiatives centered on economic sustainability and professional legal protections. Although it may appear difficult to predict the outcomes of these efforts, which are associated to a variety of dynamics, these attempts are essential for comprehending the economic constraints of independent groups and the operation of potential support mechanisms. The final section of the thesis economic constraints and resources of independent theater companies will be discussed in line with the issue of sustainability and independence.

5.5. “All we need is being supported”: Economic constraints and opportunities

Economy, like in many other branches of artistic works, should be regarded as one of the existential ground for theatre productions. Financial management for independent theaters has lately re-emerged as a critical primary consideration for theater

producers that cannot be ignored, particularly because of the pandemic and economic hardships that follow. In this respect, it is worth noting that most independent theater groups, also referred as non-subsidized theaters, are not only unable to generate a significant amount of money to make a profit, but are also incapable of providing economic revenue to meet their expenses and cover their debt payments. Many respondents emphasize that they set up a theater or rented a venue by taking out bank loans or borrowing money from friends and family. Furthermore, profession-related jobs such as dubbing, advertising and television work, acting and writing workshops are fields in which actors must be involved in order to make a living and survive. Due to this requirement, the flow of human resources keeps going towards Istanbul, the center of these creative industries, enhancing the dynamism of independent theater works in Istanbul. The theater practitioners interviewed in Ankara, in particular, state that the only way for them to supplement their income in Ankara is to offer training and dubbing for public television. As a result, because job opportunities in the city are scarce, this flow is inescapable for them. Aside from those theater workers who have various jobs, many other group members questioned have entirely different careers and invest a part of their earnings in their theatrical production. At this point, it is asserted that, on the one hand, commitment to work appears harder for the theater practitioners who have to be involved in multiple tasks at the same time. On the other hand, it is well recognized that theater laborers do not receive monetary compensation for the emotional labor they invest in their work. In most of the cases, they had to work unofficially and without insurance depriving them of several legal rights such as health care and retirement.

It is important to note at this point that many theater workers are working with various groups on a project-basis, without a contract, and without being a permanent member of a group. Even though some interviewees equate characterize this flexible workspace by socialising possibilities, inspiration supplied by creative expression, emotions and liberty, in many cases it reveals a low-wage, cheap working environment ripe for exploitation.

As an example, many interviewees criticize and evaluate the practice of voluntary assistants, which is used by many companies, as a means of making money and exploitation. In other words, a structural imbalance of supply and demand, which is

impossible to maintain, especially in terms of actors, can be regarded as an important cause of the field's uncertain economy. As highlighted in the third section of the thesis, one important reason for this uncertainty is the rising supply of human resources, as well as the increasing number of private conservatories and their graduate students. In line with these statements from the field, Pierre-Michel Menger describes the general dynamics of the labor market of the creative industry, including theater professionals, in his book *Economics of Creativity: Art and Achievement under Uncertainty* and explains pertaining economic troubles consequently,

Surprisingly enough, even with steadily growing demand for artistic and cultural products and services, labor supply increases faster than demand. Thus artists show higher rates of unemployment and of several forms of constrained underemployment (nonvoluntary part-time work, intermittent work, fewer hours of work), are more often multiple jobholders, and earn less than workers with comparable human capital (education, training, and age) in their broad occupational category, that of professional, technical, and kindred workers. Artists increasingly work under contingent arrangements. Long-term artistic employment has been vanishing except in heavily subsidized and sponsored organizations like orchestras and opera houses. Casual employment and self-employment prevail. The number of small artistic and cultural organizations has been growing as fast as the number of artists (Menger 2014, 1).

As mentioned in Menger's above quote, the interviewees felt compelled to work in different domains, primarily temporary jobs in the service sector, in addition to tasks related to their own vocation. Again, considering the individual wages attributed with this uncertain working environment, it is possible to say that the distribution of income among performers is not entirely equally shared. In this sense, it would not be inaccurate to assert that the income distribution varies between theater workers who are concurrently present in works that provide reputation and attract viewers to the theater and other performers with other cast members, particularly in larger-scale groups.

Aside from individual gains and producers' ability to survive, the sustainability of companies and theatrical spaces appears to be squeezed into a narrow economic framework. After the fieldwork concluded in 2019, the emergence of the pandemic exacerbated this disturbance, which is frequently mentioned in many media platforms and begins to form the prime objective of the founded solidarity formations. Typically, the cost of production includes renting a venue or a stage or

rehearsal area/ as most companies do not own the building in which they perform and maintaining set and costumes, hiring technological equipment, salary and fees of temporary or permanent theater workers, technical staff of the company, marketing expenses via social media or banners, flyers, etc. In terms of marketing expenditures, whereas the majority of interviewees perceive social media, marketing channels, ticket sales channels, and discount sites as requisite for the communities' sustainability, some add that constructing this infrastructure on its own was indeed expensive. With the rise in the number of groups and venues over the last fifteen years, we have seen that certain venues use implementations such as venue cards and ticket promotions to increase ticket sales in addition to these marketing streams.

In addition to all these costs associated with the venue, production, and audience reach, tax payments of the theater venues are highlighted as the most significant source of expenses for the companies. Moreover, the entertainment tax that these venues must pay, according to the respondents, necessitates adjustments. One interviewee expressed his indignation in the following way:

I don't think there is a theater that doesn't have tax debts. We pay the same taxes as a restaurant and a nightclub in Bebek. We pay taxes on what Reina gives, but they earn what we would earn in 15 years in an instant. This is unjust... So, if the state and the government charge 0% VAT on things like diamonds, why do they get 18% from me? I pay 18% VAT, and 8% entertainment tax because my work is perceived as a branch of entertainment. We really need to be supported and the sanctions against us need to be reduced a little. (Respondent 31)

In this condition, depending on the interviewer's comments, the presence of a stage or venue for a theater company, results in a greater reliance on capital circulation. Theaters have evolved into something approximating a firm or corporation in order to stay alive. Many small-scale theaters created supplementary enterprises, such as cafes and art schools, and attempted to modify their venues to generate revenue in order to survive this economic cycle. An interviewee who had recently opened a theater in Ankara describes the challenges, economic dilemmas, and vicious circle he encountered as follows:

We spent more than I expected financially. It is very difficult to return the return on our investment in the short term. We also opened a cafe next to the stage. That's a problem too. As someone who has done independent theater, I may know how to communicate with a group when they come to this location, but I don't know the business side, for example. I am learning what I

do not know before. I never do things that make me feel uneasy when they are done to me. But we also need to make money. For this we will also give a variety of workshops here. If you don't have money, you can't do your PR. When you can't do your PR, the audience won't come. When the audience doesn't come, you don't have money. After all, the theater venue is a like commercial enterprise... and the product you produce is also not a basic need. So it is an area which is most rapidly affected by economic and social crises as well. (Respondent 68)

At this point, it is difficult to say that an essential supporting mechanism has developed from the past to the present for theater groups that have been trying to exist without funding within the theater field shaped by state bureaucrats since the early republican period. In contrast, independent theater in various parts of the world is supported by a variety of support mechanisms, including state channels, local administrations and sponsors, non-governmental organizations, apart from box office income. In Turkey, on the other hand, independent theater has to maintain its existence in an unfair economic competition with subsidized theater companies⁸⁸.

In this view, the box office revenue, or audience support, is the most important source of funding for independent theaters. Independent theaters, on the other hand, that can only host a limited number of performances, make a limited number of stagings, and sell a limited number of tickets due to a limited number of available seats, are unable to generate adequate funds to sustain their theatrical productions. Ticket prices have soared especially as a result of the post-pandemic social and economic realities. The audience's participation has decreased. This situation demonstrates that self-funding is unsatisfactory for the long-term viability of theater venues and groups that were unable to perform for an extended period of time due to the pandemic.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ In 2019, when the fieldwork of the thesis ended, the average theater ticket price was between 40-80 liras for Istanbul. For Ankara, it was between 20-50 liras. In the 2022-2023 seasons, when the thesis is concluded, the cheapest theater ticket in Istanbul is 100 liras. This price can go up to 400-500 liras for big-scale companies with celebrity profiles. On the contrary, the State Theaters the tickets prices range from 20 to 50 TL, for the City Theaters tickets they are between 17 to 38 TL. These significant discrepancies highlight one facet of an unfair competitive environment between subsidized and unsubsidized theaters.

⁸⁹<https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/sesimiz-daha-gur-cikmali-tiyatronun-seyircisinden-baska-destegi-yok-mu.2774>

<https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kultur-sanat/2020/04/05/salgin-gunlerinde-bagimsiz-tiyatrolar-nestiyor>

This once again demonstrates that a free market economy determines economic priorities. Theaters are making an effort to thrive in the economic system. Working in accordance with market conditions is becoming increasingly important. For example, independent theater practitioners in the field claim that they must occasionally relinquish their autonomy in selecting content and plays. While this dependence on ticket sales indicates a kind of economic contest, it is impossible to disregard the audience's preferences in this process, and it forces theater practitioners to turn to salable products, albeit in a limited manner. Only a small percentage of interviewees say that their aspirations are their primary concern, a significant proportion say that they need to take into account financial circumstances but this condition may increase the risk of each of the productions to become nearly identical, which may lead to boredom and saturation in the audience. Even if demand, or the number of spectators, increases, in order to ensure sustainability, the upper middle class audience group, which is willing to pay the rising ticket prices and is viewed as the target audience by the interviewees, should also grow at the same rate. For all of the reasons stated so far, institutional support, particularly state and municipal support, is critical to the long-term viability of independent groups and the small venues where they produce. In this context, public authorities should indeed consider theater to be a public service and act on the premise that it generates public benefits. In his article, Akdede discussed the necessity of state support for artistic productions as follows:

The production and consumption of artistic goods, which are described as economically virtuous goods, are encouraged even if there is no demand. The private sector will not produce these goods unless incentives or support are given. Therefore, the presentation and consumption of these goods will either be provided with the support of the state or produced by the state (Akdede, 2014: 58-59).

At this point, it is possible to assert that the state funds allocated for assistance by the general directorate of fine arts affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, while still not large in comparison to examples in Europe and the United States⁹⁰ has created some room for independent theater companies in Turkey.

⁹⁰ In this sense, despite a few differences, support systems are offered from a pool of sources such as ticket revenue, public funding, grants from charitable foundations, and corporate sponsorship, where government assistance played a significant role.

This support, which the Ministry announces each year, was given in four categories until the 2018-2019 seasons. *Professional, children's, amateur, and traditional* plays are indeed the four categories. After the 2018-2019 seasons, the funding will just be divided into three categories: *professional, children's play, and traditional plays*. On the other hand, the manner in which the support was distributed, as well as the transparency and objectivity of the criteria, incited intense debate, particularly following the Gezi Park protests.⁹¹ During the 2013-2014 seasons, nearly twenty independent groups, including well-known theaters like Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu (Ankara Art Theatre) Dostlar Tiyatrosu, Ortaoyuncular, and Oyun Atölyesi, were deprived of this support. As an outcome, the number of applications decreased gradually until the Covid-19 pandemic period⁹². In the subsequent years, both the amount of funding and the number of theaters receiving assistance slowly increased. Although the amount of support and the number of theaters receiving support show a slow increase in the following years, it should be noted that the number of resources and theaters companies increased significantly during the pandemic period. The economic cost of the process, the theaters' attempts to be noticeable, and the solidarity organizations and initiatives that coordinated these attempts contribute to this betterment. Thus according recently released statistics, the proposals of 441 private theaters out of 476 that applied for the 2022-2023 season funding were evaluated. A total of 32,000,000.-TL has been mentioned to be awarded in 283 professional plays, 86 children's plays, and 72 traditional plays. The amounts of subsidies and the numbers of projects supported for the last ten years derived from the website of the General Directorate of Fine Arts are given in the table* below,

⁹¹ With the changing political climate over the years, adjustments in support criteria have also evolved into an important subject of debate. Some of the changes that sparked these discussions in 2014-2015 were the requirement to send the playscript to the directorate beforehand, and the decision that private theaters, which had received support for 6 years, would not be able to benefit from its assistance this year. It was also notable that the aid was basically distributed to newly established theater groups in Anatolia rather than Istanbul.

⁹² Sacit Hadi Akdede, in his work titled *Tiyatronun Politik Ekonomisi: Devlet ve Sermaye Kısılcacında Tiyatro* discussed in detail both the economy of state theaters and the effect of state assistance (Akdede: 2020).

Table 1. The table of subsidies given to independent companies within the last ten years

Theater seasons	Amount of grant allotted (TL)	Total number of projects supported	Professional	Theater for children	Traditional	Amateur
2022-23	32.000.000	441	283	86	72	-
2021-22	13.500.000	428	254	109	65	-
2020-21	12.000.000	328	199	75	54	-
2019-20	6.102.000	256	110	53	51	42
2018-19	5.246.000	261	118	48	41	54
2017-18	5.234.000	229	109	39	40	41
2016-17	5.000.000	215	98	38	40	39
2015-16	4.590.000	235	92	40	54	49
2014-15	4.265.000	236	80	44	44	68
2013-14	4.312.000	221	67	33	40	81

*The table is prepared by the researcher.

Despite recent advances in the application process and grant criteria, which were somewhat eased during the pandemic period, the prerequisites such as requiring numerous documents, or being subject to the same procedures every year as it is a project-based grant, and the necessity to perform a certain number of performances continue to stay challenging, particularly for small-scale theater companies. At this point, an interviewee explains why more transparent and accessible support mechanisms are needed:

I am opposed to the government's involvement in art and its derivative products; it should not be an authority, but rather a resource and facilitator that maintain an objective distance from all sides. It should transfer resources for technical support, design, scene creation, and the establishment of technical equipment etc... but it must maintain very objective and transparent criteria while doing so. In this sense, the physical asset should be distributed as as evenly as possible. (Respondent 42)

Despite these negative sides, several interviewees believe that the state and local governments must operate as a supportive mechanism in the field of theater. Nevertheless, a substantial percentage of the interviewees consider the absence of a deep-rooted bourgeoisie that has backed the theater from the beginning to the present is at the real cause of this economic assistance dilemma.

Since the bourgeoisie in Turkey is not well defined, legitimizing itself through art, town capitalism, and tradesman capitalism, while all of these are at least something, are also network issues. When we speak with foreign theater staff, they don't mind that theater can be made without state support. In other words, because we lack a bourgeoisie, who invests money in art, particularly theater, it is one of the main for sustainability (Respondent 18).

Regardless of how it has been asserted that there really is no bourgeoisie who can patronize independent theatrical domain, it can be realized that the performances of many independent theater companies take place in the theatrical venues owned by large or medium-sized financial corporations. In this regard, theater workers from small companies have also been included in large productions staged by these venues such as Zorlu PSM and Uniq Hall, and joint productions of small and large venues are also staged on occasion. At this point, one could also argue that the independent theater realm has evolved into a source of talent, a generator of theater workers for the more visible segments of the entertainment industry. Similarly, some theaters produce productions outside of the mainstream realm with the help of various corporate sponsorships, while also converting their viewing public with extremely high ticket prices and well-known figures. Given all of this, one might doubt whether a segment of the independent theatrical domain has developed a complicated relationship with capital circulation. These instances point to an economic dilemma within the artistic domain.

During the fieldwork, the respondents discussed this dilemma in a range of ways. Whereas a significant portion of the interviewees attribute their existing financial troubles to a lack of institutionalized structures that can maintain oneself with their sub-branches and generate a core audience, some of them indicate that converting into such a sector as television or cinema will alleviate the motivations for the emergence of independent theater production and therefore restrict creative thinking and liberty from an artistic standpoint. This suspicion is explicitly explained in the following excerpt.

When we first opened this place, a mother came up to me and asked what was going on, and she said, "I hope one day, you'll move on to a bigger venue... I opened this venue with no purpose of thinking about the bigger one, but it implies that when you think about it and desire the larger one, you are already going through an extremely commercial process on the one hand, and on the other hand, you get into trouble with expanding your business. In the meantime, it means you're creating works that question your artistic

perspective while broadening your work... So, does our theaters truly necessitate turning into a sector? I'm not sure. (Respondent 65)

Even though a clear answer is impossible to provide for this question, it is evident that the marketization and commodification of the entire system may incorporate further the independent theater domain. To summarize, in order to exist, independent theater societies must deal with financial constraints as well as physical constraints, power relationships, audience preferences, and cultural attitudes. In this sense, especially during the pandemic period, as their economic conditions worsen, they had to struggle to confirm themselves in the eyes of the public authorities in order to be able to demand assistance. Although efforts to organize and find support to get out of this deadlock have been successful in some places, the closure of many small theaters, the withdrawal of some theater actors, and the dissolution of some groups all show that the field is in a tough position. On the other hand, the financial orientation of the independent theater field by art professionals, as well as the risk of being strongly incorporated into the economic system, may reveal many disadvantages such as changes in the structure and substance of the production, as well as the qualities of the viewing public, as well as the loss of the social significance and autonomy that the companies possess. Aside from the groups' own efforts and the development of multiple support mechanisms, the presence of a transparent and neutral cultural policy that will be created appears to be the most essential precondition for the independent theater communities to proceed their production away from the economic and political pressure.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In Turkey, the theater, like all artistic activities, has been shaped on a nation-state model since the early republican period, with the republican elites taking the lead, and the theatrical area has been dominated by subsidized theatrical establishments as the major art institutions. Nevertheless, since the late 1950s, private/non-subsidized theater companies have begun to be included in the field and gain an institutional structure. Following this period, recognized as *the Golden Age of Theatre of Turkish Theater*, we see the quantitative increase and quantitative change of unsubsidized companies in the theatrical field with independent groups emerging in big cities, establishing an autonomous space for themselves with multiple labels, distinct spatiality's, and different artistic approaches. Presently, this diverged and pluralized theatrical space is dominated by independent theatrical communities that stage their productions in unconventional theatrical venues for a small number of audiences. They also provide new spatial opportunities for new encounters, as well as different artistic languages and plural forms of expression to their viewing public.

This study aimed to examine the dynamics of the independent theatrical ground in terms of a vocation with its organizational practices, and production styles in the light of interviews conducted by theater practitioners from Ankara and Istanbul, as well as to attempt to comprehend the connection between the independent theater companies and the social realm in which they are located. Thus, while I was attempting to comprehend how independent groups in Istanbul and Ankara locate themselves politically, financially, and professionally from the point of view of their makers in today's fragmented sociability, I also aim to record the interplay of independent theater field with different social domains, the conflicts, solidarity patterns, competition, rewards and failures through the field study.

At that point, Derek Layer cites that some areas of research interest that are not be defined as a completely separate field of research, and accordingly, the researcher could use supplementary disciplines in this pool of diffused, multidimensional areas. He also recommends the researchers use approaches such as examining conceptual and non-technical literature from adjacent disciplines, utilizing journals, and documents, and engaging deeply in the field to draw conclusions from there (Layer: 2013, 180-183) Aside from a few examples, the lack of diverse field research on the domain, the inclusivity and dynamism of the field, and my academic interests in theater and sociology have indeed contributed to this dissertation entering a research process similar to the one mentioned by Layer. Accordingly, I benefitted greatly from an investigation of theoretical and non-technical literature, as well as documents, reports, recently written play scripts, performances, websites, newspaper news, and videos, apart from in-depth interviews while progressing through all fields of inquiry. Although theater is rarely researched in sociological studies, it appears prominently as a social phenomenon in the works of Georges Gurvitch and Jean Duvignaud who pioneered the notion of the sociology of theater. Hence, I should underline that the essential assertions of Georges Gurvitch and Jean Duvignaud, served as the starting point for the thesis.

While describing theater as an escape hatch, Gurvitch emphasizes the ceremonial aspect and focuses primarily on the theater's relationship with social phenomena. He defines four areas of research in the sociology of theater: Audience research, examination of theatrical performances within the context of their sociocultural settings, examination of the relationship between the content of play scripts and the structural conditions under which they are produced, including production relations and political regimes, and the study of theater practitioners as a social group and as professionals. In this regard, I conducted a field study that consists of a sociological discussion above these sub-branches of the study mentioned by Gurvitch.

Another important contributor to sociology of theater Duvignaud argues that the periods of greatest artistic production and creativity correspond to periods of anomie, when the intensity of emotion is most observed in the group or community, and he emphasizes that during these periods, theatrical productions were enhanced in both literary and performative fields. Given the increase in the number of productions,

producers, as well as the growing interest in independent theatrical productions in Turkish theater after 2000, the relationship that Duvignaud sought to establish with the theater gains significance. His work was an important starting point in this study in terms of highlighting the fragmented, mobile transitive structure of the independent theater space, which is affected by and also affects social-urban processes. Furthermore, ethnographic studies on various theater groups in various geographies⁹³ facilitated me to interpret the field from a comparative perspective. The need to incorporate conceptual frameworks from different sub-fields of sociology, such as urban studies and political sociology, that are relevant to the field of the thesis, reinforced the conceptual framework of the thesis.

As a result of the social and political turmoil the country has undergone over the past ten years, the thesis's scope has broadened and enriched significantly as the writing has proceeded. During the research, Gezi events, the terrorist explosions in İstanbul and Ankara, the election processes, the coup attempt in the 2016, 15th of July, the state of emergency process, and the economic crisis was usually referred by the respondents as social turmoil's that seriously influenced the field, the productions in the field and the viewers. This time scale allowed me to clearly comprehend how the ground of nonsubsidized theaters is influenced by the social political processes, with particular examples. Hence it was essential to evaluate the independent theatrical plays as zones of experience where a social political meaning arises and crystallizes, in addition to examining the quantitative changes in the process area. Throughout that time, many independent theater ensembles broke up while many more founded and started producing. Detached groups also became active, while amalgamated others split apart. New venues are opened as old ones are closed. Theater companies started working together on joint productions more frequently. The field's human resources' activity was compatible with its organizational dynamics. Again, this fluidity and dynamism of actors, settings, and production make it challenging to follow for me as a researcher so in order to stay up to date, I continue taking part in online/ on site gatherings, webinars, and seminars, make additional readings and news-tracking especially during the Pandemic.

⁹³ Becker, H.; McCall, Michal M.; Morris, Lori V.; Meshejian, P. (1989), Walcon, E. & Nicholson (1989), H, Lyon (1974), Fox, V. & Dickie, V. (2010), Alves, C.B. F. (2007).

Since participants have much more flexible work schedule than myself and I was working in a far-off area of Istanbul, the difficulty of arranging time for some of the interviews was occasionally even more overwhelming. In addition to these technical challenges, I was worried about one of ethnography's constraints. I was worried about aligning extremely with the groups and facing the risk of going native as a student in the theatrical department. Nevertheless, invisible community zones, which I discovered in the ground during the research, prevented me from generating such an overidentification. The fact that the majority of the interviewees have experience working with multiple theater companies, both subsidized and unsubsidized in a variety of positions was also crucial for providing a comparative picture of the theatrical field.

The labelling independent, which I utilized the word by leaving a question mark on was mostly agreed upon by the majority of theater practitioners. Along with the ideas that came out of the fieldwork, the crux of the thesis became indeed this notion of independence, whose bounds appear to be somewhat nebulous in essence. This ambiguity has turned into a useful problematization for each of the thesis's research topics. Thus, it was feasible to discuss and question the idea of independence in this way through the relationship that theater practitioners establish with economics and politics, the forms of production, the formation of communities, and the ties of solidarity among the companies. In the current capitalist environment, on the one hand the companies that presently produce their performances with limited resources without receiving any or very little allowance are also struggling with a shortage of space; on the other hand, this field of arts begun to attract the attention of capital groups. Hence, to what extent it is possible to remain financially and aesthetically independent for the companies performing plays in large theaters or participating in the productions of these capital groups is a significant topic for discussion in this respect. Furthermore addition, the idea of a democratizing community being built by companies that are unable to connect with the target audience does not seem very feasible, especially given the rising price of tickets.

Due to financial and aesthetic considerations, a sizable number of theater professionals work with both subsidized and unsubsidized groups or with a range of independent companies. This is yet another dimension of relationality that emerged

from the field study. One of the key tenets of the thesis which is that theater groups have phases of continuity and discontinuity in their structure and output corresponds with this circumstance. In this respect, these theater practitioners, who are able to work within various theatrical traditions, can also be seen as creators of counter-hegemony to the established mainstream tradition.

Although the aesthetic independence is questionable, it is possible to distinguish the substance from the style in this instance. Emancipation in terms of substance appears to be happening in many stagings nowadays, but in the 1990s we came throughout many new, liberating modes of expression in alternative productions created by theater makers who were mostly trained in social sciences and following the movements worldwide.

In this regard, even though the theater features a wide range of topics, the plays still tend to favor sincere and realistic playscript and acting techniques that are inspired by legacy instead of worldly outlook like in the 1990s. Accordingly, although the audience in this domain appears to be somewhat liberated on both an aesthetic and social level, it is also apparent that they prefer clear, concise, and sincere narratives hence familiar narrations with more or less defined plots are expected. However, in addition to the theater practitioners switchover, it is conceivable to argue that independent groups' playscripts are also transmitted to subsidized institutions, and in this way, the relationship between these two structures has begun to grow both in terms of production and aesthetic as well as human capital.

Once again, the fact that the city grows more quickly than the theater alters the city raises doubts about the potential of generating publicity that will empower the audience throughout the interaction with the urban space. However, the limitations on sustainability, the mobility of performers, and the opening and closure of little venues primarily due to economic considerations highlight the fragility of this new theatrical environment.

Besides that, this discontinuous structure actually appears as a small representation of the organizational form that rules today's social sphere due to its fragmented, transitory, introverted, extremely quick collaboration and disintegrations at the same pace. These features became apparent in the intergroup relations of the members of these companies. To put it differently, these theater practitioners who mainly have

an individualized and possibly independent political identity that is distinct from the holistic ideology of the mainstream creating occasional alliances. This feature which is partly based on the habitus and ontology of the profession offer a more fragile claim of independence and sustainability in terms of space, audience and production.

The second chapter of the thesis an historical framework is drawn which was essential to evaluate the stabilities and variations in terms of production style, spatialities, theater conventions, and the inner sense of commitment that was encountered in the field of independent theater. In terms of the significance and the motivations of working in independent theater companies or establishing these companies for theater practitioners were covered in the third section of the thesis.

Here, sincerity, self-expression, generating and having a space to breath, need to express their own story, creating a medium that could perform their profession as they couldn't find a position in existing institutions are listed as the motivating factors that drove the interviewees to being a part of independent theater domain. Here, the generation gap was evident in terms of the meaning and the functions for the theater workers. The interviewees in their 30s wanted to share individual stories and concerns, while a small number of interviewees over the age of 50 grant the theater an educational and enlightening function.

The internal structure of independent theater communities were discussed in first section of third chapter of the dissertation. Although theatrical production in independent theater companies appears to be a collective heterarchical organization, the director's dominance as a gatekeeper persists as an extension of a tradition from subsidized institutions. Subsidized institutions, on the other hand, are portrayed as a point of comparison that distinguishes their own internal functioning, according to the interviewees. On the one hand, it is completely obvious that group recognition and institutionalization are directly proportional to group specialization; on the other hand, multitasking increases the sense of belonging in smaller-scale groups while also generating with it a flexible work order open to exploitation.

The fourth chapter of the thesis discussed the production styles of independent groups as well as the spatialities in which they produce. With the assumption that the production style of independent theater groups consists of continuity and rupture with the past, a few fundamental points about the form and content of the

productions appeared. Interviewees revealed that, in addition to increased interaction with productions from around the world, social events that alter the audience's perception of reality and the inability of television works to meet their needs are important factors in the conversion of performances. It has been observed that, in recent years the audience is frequently confronted with familiar and sincere stories, and narrative-oriented play-scripts breaking the distance between the audience and the actor. Here the respondents underline that their audience wants to establish a one-to-one relationship with the performer while seeking a familiar, sincere discourse. Accordingly, the plays that can create their own reality are more receptive to the audience. In this sense, the theater space turns into an area of experience through which the individual stories of people living in similar realities are shared. In this sense, the fact that the theatrical works initiate with personal issues but also touch on social disturbances is consistent with both the respondents' motivations for joining the field and their political stances.

I concentrated on the spatial existence of productions of independent theater companies in chapter 4.2 of the study. This section's subheadings were examined from the inner circle to the outsider periphery: The theatrical space, meaning the production area; including the theater stage and the theatre venue, the street and then the city where the building is located, and the city's audience. As a last point, I added a comparative look to the theater culture of two cities where the fieldwork was accomplished.

The key points that prevailed from this section were that many of the spaces that were previously used for diverse uses were transformed by independent theater companies as an area of performance also, took a place in the minds of the spectators and give a sense of identity to the companies. Aside from the benefit of this public identity and its place in the memory of the viewing public, the rehearsal chance created by these spaces during the production process, the storage opportunities of the decor and costumes, and the possibility to generate plays according to this area were underlined. Accordingly, having a place to perform is evaluated as having as a comfort zone for the groups. The sense of belongingness of the members of the companies established by these venues, rarely owned by the companies but mostly rented was articulated with the expression "the house is rent, the district". Although

not having a space to perform constituted one of the primary concerns of independent theater groups, the disadvantages of running a venue was also one of the fieldwork's highlights. Whereas running a theater space is compared to owning a shop, it is introduced as a position where the necessity of keeping the space constantly alive, limits artistic production, causes artistic concerns to fall behind, and reduces the opportunity to follow other companies' productions. Afterward, it appears complicated to discuss the transformative publicness of those theaters within the city they are located. The city's structural changes seem to have a significantly stronger influence on theater venues, companies as well as their productions. Nevertheless, the discontinuity of spaces can be interpreted as an indicator of Istanbul's, as well as Ankara's, rapid transformation in recent years.

A further point worth mentioning is that the concentration of various theater venues in specific locations resulted in the formation of a new spatial order in which artistic production and consumption sectors are intertwined. Theater venues, particularly in regions like Kadıköy, cross-fertilize with some other economic activities from the service sector. Again, in Ankara, many small theatrical venues are arising amongst old residential areas, in addition to the subsidized theater buildings that constitute an essential part of the urban culture. Instead of the targeted young student audience, the spectators of independent groups have to include upper middle class white collar workers of mid-thirties. In this sense, while it is possible to assume that the audience has expanded especially with the plays of independent groups that are transferred to bigger venues; it also seems difficult to interpret this growth as democratization and to talk about a diversification of the audience.

The last chapter of the thesis discussed the political framework within which the members of the group position themselves and their production, how they relate to power structures internal politics between independent groups; power-solidarity relations and economic opportunities, constraints, benefits, and financial supports mechanism. It appears worthwhile to interpret the relationship of the independent theater field to politics through a postmodernist perspective. This approach, which includes difference, discontinuity, polysemy, multiculturalism, and insecurity and breaks the mechanical structure of modern politics based on predictable bureaucratic discipline, appears to be relevant in terms of the internal functioning of theater

groups, both in terms of their political positioning and forms of solidarity. Despite the socioeconomic limitations, independent theater companies that are established with the need to share their personal concerns and to make one's voice heard; present new forms of artistic expressions in as well as a new way of associations within the social field.

Finally, to summarize some question could be asked. in the midst of the legitimacy crises that exist on the social plane, how attainable is the potential of these theatrical formations to transform into identities of resistance that develop an opposing stance by producing their own meanings with different artistic instruments, using the techniques of the today's network society? Or how much conceivable for these small artistic production spaces as heterotopias to create micro power dynamics that can open a hole inside the urban space, to turn into an identity of resistance that can suspend the relations of power, even for a while? Of course, providing a clear answer to these questions is incredibly hard. One possible explanation for this is the likelihood of new forms of political subjectivity crystallized in the production and interaction of field actors being imprisoned in a political discourse that is, in a sense, discharged. Furthermore, even though the companies have positioned themselves against the mainstream, economic constraints, audience concerns, and the high likelihood of being integrated into the market system make it difficult to mention the field's high transformative public potential, according to theater practitioners interviewed.

At last, aside from some ethnographic studies conducted in Istanbul, researchers from some of the other disciplines are reluctant to work on the theater domain. The scarcity of academic researches in this field may be linked to theater's ontological historicity as a visual form of art, its presumption as a more reserved, sanctified field, or the assessment that it is an outmoded art form, as in the analogies of the interviewees.

In fact, the theatrical field, with its long history and social roots, has significant linkages on social sciences, particularly sociology. Thus, it provides a great basis, it has a huge potential for further sociological studies in many field of research, such as the work relations of the field's actors, playscripts within the socio-cultural environment in which they are written, the organizations and workings of companies

and institutions, as well as intergroup relations. At this point, one of the thesis's objectives is to serve as a starting point for future studies with the wider overview it provides and the source materials it suggests.

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APPENDICES

A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Kendinizden bahsedebilir misiniz? Tiyatro sizin için ne ifade ediyor? Tiyatro hayat hikayenizle nerede kesişiyor?
2. Daha geniş bir çerçeveden bakarsanız tiyatro toplumsal olarak ne ifade ediyor? Toplumsal olarak sizce nereye oturuyor?
3. Ödenekli tiyatro-özel tiyatro ayrımını nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Sizce bu iki farklı kanalın içinde olmak üretim sürecini nasıl etkiliyor?
4. Devlet-- tiyatro- sermaye ilişkisini nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
5. Büyük bir kent, kent merkezinde tiyatro yapmanın kent kültürüne katkıda bulunduğuna inanıyor musunuz? Ne yönde bir katkı sunuyor sizce?
6. Alternatif tiyatro tanımını nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Sizce tiyatro neye alternatif olmalı? Sizin duruşunuz nedir bu noktada?
7. Bugünün üretimlerinde sizce yeni olan ne? Mekan kullanımları, sahnelemeler, seyirciyle kurulan ilişkide yeni olan ne? Sizce bu yenilikler neye hizmet edebilir? Siz kendi üretimlerinizde hangilerini uyguluyorsunuz?
8. Tiyatroda bireysel ve kolektif üretim arasındaki ilişkiyi nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz? Sizin üretimlerinizde bu süreç nasıl işliyordu?
9. Sizce toplumsal olaylar, krizler tiyatroya nasıl yansıyor? Tiyatro bu krizleri nasıl yansıtıyor? Yansıtabiliyor mu ve yansıtabilmeli mi sizce?
10. Oyun seçimlerinizi neye göre yapıyorsunuz? Ne tür oyunlar oynuyorsunuz? Yeni metinler mi klasik oyunlar mı uyarlama metinler mi?
11. Üretimlerinizde yerellik evrensellik ne oranda önem taşıyor?
12. Toplumsal krizlerin sanatsal üretimi, yaratıcılığı nasıl etkilediğini düşünüyorsunuz?
13. Siyasal olan sizce ne ifade ediyor? Bu noktada yaptığımız işle siyasal nasıl ilişkilendirebilirsiniz?

14. Büyük kentte tiyatro yapan bir oyuncu olarak kamusal alanı nasıl tanımlayabilirsiniz? Tiyatro kamusal alanın bir temsil/ direniş/ muhalefet alanı olabilir bir parçası olabilir mi?
15. Seyirci kitesinde ve seyirci ile kurulan ilişkide zaman içinde bir değişim olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz? Ne yönde bir değişim olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?
16. Seyirciyi nasıl tanımlarsınız? Seyircinin duygusunu nerede gözlemliyorsunuz? Seyirciyle duygudaşlığı nasıl, hangi mecralarda kuruyorsunuz?
17. Seyirciden beklentiniz neler?
18. Topluluk olarak ekonomik ya da siyasal bakıya maruz kaldınız mı? Nasıl bir mücadele yolu seçtiniz?
19. Farklı gruplarla arasında şehir içinde ya da diğer şehirlerdeki gruplarla arasında bir dayanışma oluştuğunu düşünüyor musunuz bugüne ve geçmişe baktığınızda?
20. Sizce bağımsız bir mekanda tiyatro yapmanın ayrıştırıcı bir yönü var mı?
21. Sizce tiyatro mekanı dışına çıkınca oyun bitiyor mu? Hangi mecralarla, hangi yollarla oynanan oyunlar salonun dışına taşınabiliyor?
22. Mesleğinizden beklentileriniz nelerdir?
23. Mesleğinizi hangi mesleğe benzetebilirsiniz/ neden?
24. Büyük şehir yaşantısı içinde tiyatro geçinmek için yeterli bir gelir sunuyor mu?
25. Tiyatro yapmak için büyük şehirde gelmek bir zorunluluk mu sizce? Öyle ise neden?
26. Bu anlamda şehirlerarası bir insan kaynağı hareketliliğinden bahsetmek mümkün mü?
27. Yapılan üretimleri, isimlendirmeniz gerekirse nasıl bir gruplama yapabilirsiniz?
28. Para kazanabilen bir tiyatrodaki çalışmak ister misiniz?
29. Hiç çalışamayacağınızı düşündüğünüz tiyatrolar var mı? Varsa neden?
30. Sizce tiyatrodaki mekan ne derece önem taşıyor üretimin içeriği, değeri vb. açısından?
31. Mekan sahibi olmak ne derece önem taşıyor bir oyuncu, yönetmen için? Ortaya çıkan üretimi nasıl etkiliyor?
32. Sizce seyircinin hafızasında tiyatro mekanı mı, tiyatro grupları mı daha çok yer etmekte?
33. Sizce bugün seyirci ne bekliyor, yeniliğe nasıl bakıyor? Nasıl tepki veriyor tiyatrodaki yeni olana dair?

34. Tiyatronun Türkiye'deki gelişimi ve bugünkü konumu hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?

B. LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Respondent 1: Actor, director, theatre venue owner, Tatavla Sahne, ŞT- İstanbul

Respondent 2: Director, actor, theatre venue owner, Yolcu Tiyatro- İstanbul

Respondent3: Dramaturge, tiyatro sahibi, akademisyen; Kadıköy Theatron, İstanbul

Respondent 4: Director, oyuncu, theatre venue owner, Academician, Kadıköy Theatron, İstanbul

Respondent 5: Director, Actor, theatre venue owner; Mekan Artı, İstanbul

Respondent 6: Director, actor, playwright, theatre venue owner; Şermola Performans, Emek Sahnesi, İstanbul

Respondent 7: Playwright, dramaturge, director, actor, Semaver kumpanya, İstanbul

Respondent 8: Playwright, director, actor- İkinci Kat, İstanbul

Respondent 9: Actor, director, theatre venue owner, SahneAznatur, Tiyatroiş, İstanbul

Respondent 10: Director, actor, theatre venue owner, Ezop Sahne, İstanbul

Respondent 11: Director, actor, theatre venue owner, Ezop Sahne, İstanbul

Respondent 12: Director, actor, theatre venue owner, Tiyatro Küp, İstanbul

Respondent 13: Dramaturge, Actor, Tiyatro küp, İstanbul

Respondent 14: Dramaturge, actor, director, Tiyatro Alesta, İstanbul

Respondent 15: Actor, Tiyatro Alesta, İstanbul

Respondent 16: Actor, Tiyatro Alesta, İstanbul

Respondent 17: Actor, Tiyatro Alesta, İstanbul

Respondent 18: Dramaturge, former actistic director general of İstanbul Municipality Theatres, İstanbul

Respondent 19: Actor, academician, Altsahne, İstanbul

Respondent 20: Actor, director, Tiyatro Tekağaç, İstanbul

Respondent 21: Director, actor Tiyatro Boyalıkuş, İstanbul

Respondent 22: Actor, theatre venue owner, Karmadrama Kadıköy, İstanbul

Respondent 23: Actor, director, theatre venue owner, Karmadrama Kadıköy, İstanbul

Respondent 24: Playwriter, Galataperform, Karakutu tiyatro, İstanbul

Respondent 25: Actor, dublaj sanatçısı, illusionist, Dalga tiyatro, İstanbul

Respondent 26: Actor, playwright, dubbing artist, İstanbul

- Respondent 27:** Performance actress, dancer, İstanbul
- Respondent 28:** Actor, instructor, Tal, Kumpanya, İstanbul
- Respondent 29:** Playwright, actor, dramaturge, Sahne 3, İstanbul
- Respondent 30:** Academician playwright, dramaturge, İstanbul
- Respondent 31:** Actor, director, theatre venue owner, Deli Sanat- Ankara
- Respondent 32:** Actor, director, theatre venue owner, Kulis Sanat, Ankara
- Respondent 33:** Actor, director, theatre venue owner, Kulis Sanat, Ankara
- Respondent 34:** Actor, Tatbikat Sahnesi, Ankara
- Respondent 35:** Actor, Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu, Ankara
- Respondent 36:** Actor, playwright, director, theatre venue owner, 1112 Garaj, Ankara
- Respondent 37:** Actor, Director, TAM, Ankara
- Respondent 38:** Actor, Director TAM, Ankara
- Respondent 39:** Actor, Director TAM, Ankara
- Respondent 40:** Actor, TAM, Ankara
- Respondent 41:** Actor, TAM, Ankara
- Respondent 42:** Actor, TAM, Ankara
- Respondent 43:** Actor, TAM, Ankara
- Respondent 44:** Actor, puppeteer, theatre venue owner, Tiyatro Tempo, Ankara
- Respondent 45:** Dramaturge, playwright, director, Mek'an, Ankara
- Respondent 46:** Actor- AKAder, Ankara
- Respondent 47:** Actor- AKAder, Ankara
- Respondent 48:** Actor, director, Heveskar Tiyatro, Ankara
- Respondent 49:** Actor, director, Heveskar Tiyatro, Ankara
- Respondent 50:** Actor, Film Tayfası tiyatro grubu, Ankara
- Respondent 51:** Actor, playwright, director, Ankara Devinim Tiyatro, Ankara
- Respondent 52:** Stage manager of Ankara State Theatre director, actor, Ankara State Theater, Ankara deneme sahnesi, Ankara
- Respondent 53:** Former director of State Theatres, dramaturge, Ankara
- Respondent 54:** Actor, founder of a company, İstanbul
- Respondent 55:** Actor, Sarıyer Sanat ÇocukTiyatrosu, Dilek Türker Tiyatro Ayna, İstanbul
- Respondent 56:** Actor, Sarı Sandalye, İstanbul

- Respondent 57:** Actor, director, Stüdyo Oyuncuları, DAS DAS, Apartman Sahne, Şermola, Oyunbaz, İstanbul
- Respondent 58:** Actor, Academician, TAL, İstanbul
- Respondent 59:** Theatre venue owner, stage manager of Ankara State Theatre, Ertan Gösteri Sanatları Merkezi, Ankara
- Respondent: 60:** Tiyatro Özgün deneme-Ethos, Ankara
- Respondent: 61:** Actor, Nar Sanat, Ankara
- Respondent 62:** Actor, Nar Sanat, Ankara
- Respondent 63:** Dramaturge, director, Tiyatro Jiyana Nu, Mezopotamya Kültür Merkezi- ŞT, Batman Şehir Tiyatrosu, İstanbul
- Respondent 64:** Actor, playwright, theatre venue owner, Kuzguncuk Sanat Tiyatrosu, İstanbul
- Respondent 65:** Actor, Director, theatre venue owner, Küçük Salon, İstanbul
- Respondent 66:** Playwright, dramaturge, Bulut Tiyatro, İstanbul
- Respondent 67:** Theatre venue owner, director, Çağdaş Sanat Merkezi, Ankara
- Respondent 68:** Actor, theatre venue owner, Fade Stage, Ankara
- Respondent 69:** Actor, playwright, director, tiyatro fobi, İstanbul
- Respondent 70:** Actor, playwright, director, tiyatro fobi, İstanbul
- Respondent 71:** Actor, director, Tiyatro İlkayaz, İstanbul

C. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
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10 EKİM 2017

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

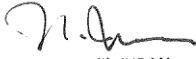
Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)


İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu


Sayın Prof. Dr. Ceylan TOKLUOĞLU ;

Danışmanlığını yaptığımız doktora öğrencisi Zeynep BAYKAL'ın "**Secene of Transformation of Urban Space, Politics, Negotiations, Communalities and Interactions: The Case of Independent Theater in Ankara and İstanbul**" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay **2017-SOS-163** protokol numarası ile **21.10.2017 – 30.04.2018** tarihleri arasında geçerli olmak üzere verilmiştir.

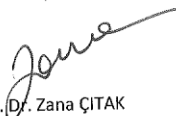
Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.



Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN
Başkan V

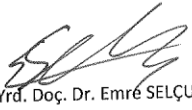

Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL
Üye


Prof. Dr. Ayhan Gürbüz DEMİR
Üye

BULUNAMADI
Doç. Dr. Yaşar KONDAKÇI
Üye


Doç. Dr. Zana ÇITAK
Üye


Yrd. Doç. Dr. Pınar KAYGAN
Üye


Yrd. Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK
Üye

D. CURRICULUM VITAE

1. **Adı Soyadı:** Zeynep Baykal
2. **Doğum Tarihi:** 18.06.1983
3. **Eğitim Durumu:**

Derece	Alan	Üniversite	Mezuniyet
Lisans	Siyaset Bilimi	İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi	2007
Lisans	Tiyatro Eleştirmenliği ve Dramaturji	İstanbul Üniversitesi	2018
Yüksek Lisans	Sosyoloji	Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi	2011

Yüksek Lisans Tez Başlığı: “Construction of Armenian Identity in İstanbul: The Case of Yeşilköy”

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Ceylan Tokluoğlu

4. Yayınlar

4.1. Uluslararası bilimsel toplantılarda sunulan ve bildiri kitabında (Proceeding) basılan bildiriler

- The Place of Ethno-religiosity for Armenian Identity in Turkey”, **2nd International Sociological Association World Forum of Sociology, Argentina Buenos Aires, 1- 4 August 2012**
- “The Role of Transnational Bounds in Armenian Identity in İstanbul” **2nd International Sociological Association World Forum of Sociology, Argentina Buenos Aires, 1- 4 August 2012**
- “Music as a Field of Social and Cultural Interaction: The case of Arabesk “ Nezihe Başak Ergin ile birlikte, **European Sociological Association,11th Conference, Torino, Italy, 28-31 August 2013**
- “Music as the Cradle of Identities: The case of Armenian Music” **European Sociological Association,11th Conference, Torino, Italy, 28-31 August 2013**

- “Urban Image and Its Cinematic Representation: The Case of Ankara” Duygu Tanış Zaferoğlu ile birlikte, **European Sociological Association, 12th Conference, Prague, Czech Republic, 25-28 August 2015**
- “Love in Turkish Cinema: I don’t know why I love you” Ozan Günel ile birlikte, **International Sociological Association Third ISA Forum of Sociology, Vienna, 10- 14 July 2016**
- “Artistic re-appropriation of public space in Turkish scenes: The case of site-specific experiences in Istanbul” Seval Ünlü Gök ile birlikte, **European Sociological Association 13th Conference, Athens, Greece, 29 August- 1 September 2017**
- “Convergences and Diversifications: the roots and development of theater in Turkey” **European Sociological Association 13th Conference, Athens, Greece, 29 August- 1 September 2017**
- “Theater as a place of representation, narration and remembering of women stories: The case of İstanbul” **7th International Conference on Gender Studies: Gender, Space & Place and Culture, Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi Kadın Araştırmaları Eğitim Merkezi, Famagusta, North Cyprus, 10-12 October 2019**
- “Gitmenin Beraber Halleri” **Beraber araştırma grubu ile birlikte “Re-thinking the Post-migrant Theatre- another story is possible only at the cultural crossroads” 27/05/2021 - 29/05/2021 studioNAXOS**
- “İstanbul’a Bağımsız Tiyatro Sahnesinden Bakmak: Yeni Metin Sahnelemeleri Üzerinden Bir Şehir Okuması” **Sosyolojinin Gözünden İstanbul: Uluslararası Sempozyum, Beykent Üniversitesi Sosyoloji (İngilizce) Bölümü- İstanbul, 27-28 Nisan 2022**
- “Understanding digital inequalities and social media usage throughout the lenses of daily life practices” **Ceren Bilgici ile, 72nd Annual International Communication Association Post- Conference, Paris- France 1 June 2022**

4.2. Ulusal hakemli dergilerde yayınlanan makaleler

- “İdealize Edilen Yeni Yaşamın Tanıdık Yüzü: Korunaklı Güvenlikli Konut Sitelerinin Reklam Filmleri Üzerine Bir İçerik Analizi”, **Nergis Denli ile**

birlikte, *Sosyoloji Arařtırmaları Dergisi* 20/ 2, Ekim 2017, 49-88,
ISSN: 2148-9947

4.3. Ulusal bilimsel toplantılarda sunulan bildiri kitabında basılan bildiriler

- “İstanbul’da Ermeni kimliđinin inřası: Yeřilköy örneđi”, **Siyasi İlimler Türk Derneđi 10. Lisansüstü Konferansı, ODTÜ, 16 Aralık 2012**
- "İstanbul'da Ermeni Kimliđinin İnřası: Yeřilköy Örneđi” **Koç Üniversitesi Sosyal Etki Forumu Türk- Ermeni Barıř Giriřimi Young Talks 10, Koç Üniversitesi, İstanbul, 26 Kasım 2014**
- “İdealize Edilen Yeni Yařamın Tanıdık Yüzü: Korunaklı Güvenlikli Konut Sitelerinin Reklam Filmleri Üzerine Bir İçerik Analizi”, **Nergis Denli ile birlikte, 8. Ulusal Sosyoloji Kongresi, ODTÜ- Ankara, 1-3 Aralık 2016**
- “İdeal Yařamın Gizli Öznesi: Güvenlikli- Korunaklı Konut Sitelerinin Reklam Filmlerinde Kadın İmgesinin Yeniden İnřası”, **Nergis Denli ile birlikte, Kent- Mekan- Kadın Sempozyumu, TMMOB Şehir Plancıları Odası, Ankara, 11-12 Mart 2017**
- “İki Kalas Bir Hevesle Tiyatro Yapmaya Sosyolojik Açıldan Bakmak: Bir Meslek Alanı olarak İstanbul ve Ankara’daki Bađımsız Tiyatro Toplulukları”, **9. Ulusal Sosyoloji Kongresi Toplum 4.0 19-21 Eylül 2019, ASBÜ- Ankara**
- “Hayatta kalma ya da zafer kazanma: TV dizilerindeki gündelik hayat pratikleri üzerinden toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin inřası” **Sinem Aydınlı ile birlikte 4. Ulusal Antropoloji Kongresi, 17-18-19 Ekim 2019, İTÜ Maçka Sosyal Tesisleri- İstanbul**

5. Diđer Yayınlar

- *Küresel Diyalog Dergisi*, Uluslararası Sosyoloji Derneđi, Sayı 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5. / 2013-2014 (Çeviri)
- Cyrano’nun Ruhunu, *TEB Oyun Dergisi*, Tiyatro Eleřtirmenler Birliđi, Mitos Boyut Yayınları, Kış 2014
- Turkey’s Rebellion: The Art of Resistance, *The Global Dialogue* 3.5, Kasım 2014, Nezihe Bařak Ergin ile birlikte

- Casanova, Jose (2014) “Modern Dünyada Kamusal Dinler”, (Bölüm Çevirisi, Public Religions in The Modern World), Sakarya: Sakarya Üniversitesi Kültür Yayınları
- “Türkiye’de Ermeni Kimliğinin İnşası: Bir Alan Çalışmasından Notlar”, *Ayrıntı Dergi*, Mart- Nisan 2015, Sayı 9, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları
- Bourdieu, Pierre (2015) “Dünyanın Sefaleti “ (Bölüm Çevirisi, *Outcast of the World*) Ankara: Heretik Yayınları
- “Demir Kafes içindeki Petrof’un Şeytanı: İvan İvanoviç, Var Mıydı? Yok Muydu?“, *Ayrıntı Dergi*, Mart- Nisan 2017, Sayı 20, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları
- Baskının Kısıyında Bir Eyleyebilme Hali Olarak Tiyatro: Brecht Oyunlarından Faşizme dair İpuçları” *Ayrıntı Dergi*, Mayıs- Haziran 2017, Sayı 21, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları
- “BBT Oyunlarından Ruh Hallerimiz Üzerine Çeşitlemeler” *TEB Oyun Dergisi*, Tiyatro Eleştirmenler Birliği, Mitos Boyut Yayınları, Sayı 38, Yaz 2018
- “Ölüm ve Özgürlük Üzerine Bir Fiziksel Tiyatro Denemesi” *TEB Oyun Dergisi*, Tiyatro Eleştirmenler Birliği, Mitos Boyut Yayınları, Sayı 41, Bahar 2019
- “Modern Ahlakla Yıkıcı Bir Yüzleşme: Yolcu Tiyatro’dan Kürklü Venüs”, *Ayrıntı Dergi*, Sayı: 32, Güz 2019
- “Erkekliğin Yıkıcı Merceğinden Yapısal Eşitsizlik Hallerine Bakmak: Babamı Kim Öldürdü?, *Ayrıntı Dergi*, Sayı: 40, Bahar: 2022
- “Tek Yön” , Eylem Ejder, Handan Salta (Ed.) Hevesle Beraberlik Arası Bir Şey içinde İstanbul: Mitos Boyut, Mayıs 2022

6. İş Deneyimi

- Araştırma Görevlisi (Mart 2011- Temmuz 2011) Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Enformatik Enstitüsü
- Araştırma Görevlisi (Nisan 2014- Mart 2020) Beykent Üniversitesi Sosyoloji (İngilizce) Bölümü
- Öğretim Görevlisi (Mart 2021- Temmuz 2021) TED Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Bölümü

7. Yürüttüğü Dersler

- Introduction to Sociology, 2020-2021 Bahar Yarıyılı, TED Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Bölümü

8. Üyelik

- European Sociological Association
- International Sociological Association
- Sosyoloji Derneği
- Antropoloji Derneği
- Tiyatro Eleştirmenler Birliği

9. Ödüller

- İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi - 2006- 2007/ Akademik Yılı Lisans Mezuniyet Derecesi: Yüksek Onur Öğrenciliği/ Bölüm İkinciliği
- ODTÜ Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2011–2012 Akademik Yılı Ders Performans Ödülü
- Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği Genç Sosyal Bilimciler Ödülleri 2011-2013 Yüksek Lisans Tezi Mansiyon Ödülü / Construction of Armenian Identity in İstanbul: The Case of Yeşilköy
- İstanbul Üniversitesi 2017-2018/ Akademik Yılı Lisans Mezuniyet Derecesi: Yüksek Onur Öğrenciliği

10. Yabancı Diller

- Diplome d'etudes en langues française (DELF B2)- Ministere de l'education nationale– Republique Française- 2006
- Yükseköğretim Kurumları Yabancı Dil (YÖKDİL) Sınavı/ 09.07.2017/ 96,250

E. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKEÖZET

Bireysel olanın, kitlesel olanla, evrenselin yerelle çatıştığı, farklı kimliklerin aynı mekânsallık ve zamansallık düzleminde iç içe geçtiği akışkanlığın, geçiciliğin hâkimiyetini sürdürdüğü bu günlerde, modernizmin akılcı risksiz bir toplumsallığının yerini alan bu kaygan düzlemin içindeki anlam yitimi sanatsal pratikleri de derinlemesine etkiliyor. Modern insanın yaşam üssü olan kent de bu süreçte yeni toplumsallıkların görünür olduğu bir sahneye dönüşüyor. Bu anlamda toplumsal tüm çatışmalar yine kentsel mekânda transfer ediliyor, toplumsal hareketler buradan besleniyor.

Bu bağlamda Arendt'in yeniden tanımladığı ve özgürleştirici eylemlere imkan sağlayacak bir kamusal alan olarak gördüğü "Polis" Berktaş'ın tabiriyle burada gerçekleşecek politik eylem belki özgürlüğü güvence altına alamasa da onun ortaya çıkması ve korunması için gerekli olan koşulları yaratabilme potansiyeli taşımaktadır (Berktaş, Özbek içinde 2015: 711). Bu "post-modernlik durumu" (Harvey: 1991) içinde dönüşen kentin dinamiklerinin yanı sıra bugünün üretim biçimleri de, yeni politik öznelliklerin, direniş kimliklerinin görünür kılınabileceği mekansallıklara kapı aralarken, tahakküm ilişkilerini askıya alabilecek, çoğul iktidar formlarının varlığına imkan sağlayabilecek kolektif eylem formları yaratıyor.

Bu noktada tiyatro sanatı diğer sanat dallarının yanında toplumla en sıkı bağ kurabilen sanat alanlarından biri olarak karşımıza çıkıyor. Tiyatro bir taraftan bir sosyal durumu, bir arada bulunma halini temsil ederken, içindeki aktörlerle birlikte bir toplumsal olgu olarak görülmelidir. Tiyatronun sosyolojik araştırmalarda nadir olarak incelenmekle birlikte bir toplumsal olgu olarak kendine belirgin bir biçimde Georges Gurvich'in ve Jean Duviagnaud'nun eserlerinde yer bulur. *Sanat sosyolojisi* kitabında Jean Duvignaud sahne ile seyirci kısmını ayıran kemer ve toplum arasındaki ilişkinin irdelenmesi gerektiğini ve bu kemerin varlığının toplumsal çatışmaları sorunsuz bir biçimde ortadan kaldıracıcağına altını çizer yine Duvignaud sanatsal üreticiliğin, yaratıcılığın en üst seviyelerde görüldüğü

dönemlerin duygu yoğunluğunun kollektivite içinde en çok yaşandığı anomi dönemlerine tekabül ettiğini söyler ve bu dönemlerde tiyatral üretimlerinde hem edebi hem de performative alanda zenginleştiğinin söyler (Duvignaud:1967). Yine sosyolog Georges Gurvitch, tiyatroyu bir kaçış kapısı olarak tanımlarken törensel yönüne vurgu yapar ve öncelikle tiyatronun toplumsal olgularla olan ilişkisine odaklanır. Gurvitch'e göre tiyatro olgusu bizi baskılayan belli toplumsal durumları yeniden deneyimleyip bu baskıdan bu sayede kurtulduğumuz bir tören olarak nitelebilir (Gurvitch: 1956, Burns, E& Burns T içinde, s.72). Gurvitch tiyatro sosyolojisinin alt alanlarının inceleme alanlarını da tanımlar. Bu alanlar; seyirci araştırmaları, tiyatral performanslarının sergilendikleri toplumsal çerçevenin incelenmesi, oyun metinlerinin, içeriklerinin, içinde üretildikleri yapısal koşulların, üretim ilişkilerinin, siyasal rejimlerin ilişkisinin incelenmesi ve bir toplumsal grup ve meslek mensubu olarak aktörlerin incelenmesidir.

Bu iki isimin toplum üzerine düşünmek ortaya koyduğu yaklaşımlar ışığında çalışmanın temel amacı, İstanbul ve Ankara'da 2010'lu yılların ortasından bugüne üretim yapan bağımsız tiyatro deneyiminin ve oyuncularının toplumsal rolünü ve işlevini anlamaktır. Kent kültürünün yeni bir canlandırıcısı olarak yeni bir sosyo-politik anlam yaratılmasında bağımsız tiyatroların rolü de tezin önemli bir inceleme noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Bu bakış açısıyla, Türkiye'deki tiyatro salonlarında alışlagelmiş temsil biçiminden hareketle süreklilik ve kopuşların peşinden gitmeyi ve günümüz toplumsallığının nasıl bir parçası olduklarını anlamayı da hedefler. Bu tiyatro kurumlarının bağımsızlığının sınırları da alana dahil olan tiyatro üreticilerinin kendi algıları üzerinden araştırılmıştır.

Özellikle Türkiye coğrafyasının değişen sosyo-ekonomik ikliminin farklılaşan, çoğullaşan bir tiyatral alan ortaya çıkarması tezin çıkış noktasını oluşturur. Tezde çoğunlukla konvansiyonel tiyatro mekanları dışında az sayıda seyirciye ekonomik sınırlılıklar içinde üretim yaparken bu toplulukların açığa çıkarma potansiyeli taşıdığı yeni toplumsallaşma biçimleri, yenilikçi üretim biçimleri sahne dilleri, konvansiyonel tiyatro mekanlarının dışına taşan mekansallıklar mekansallıklara ve bir araya geliş topluluk oluşturma halleri tezin farklı bölümlerinde tartışılmıştır.

Her ne kadar bu grupların gündelik hayat pratikleri içinde küçük bir yer işgal ettiği düşünülse de, özellikle İstanbul ve Ankara'da sayıları gün geçtikçe artan bağımsız

tiyatro toplulukları, üyeleri, üretim biçimleri, şehir hayatı ve toplumsal olaylarla kurdukları ilişki gibi pek çok katman üzerinden sosyolojik bir bakışla incelenmeye değer bir görünüm arz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, 2010'lu yıllardan itibaren dönüşüm gösteren tiyatro alanında üretim yapan bağımsız tiyatro gruplarını oluşturan tiyatro üreticilerini, yapımları ve üretim yapılan mekanları ve bu grupların sosyal ve ekonomik alanla olan bağlantılarını incelemeyi amaçlar. Bununla birlikte, çalışma İstanbul ve Ankara'da kurulan ve bu şehirlerin seyircileri için yeni bir deneyim alanı yaratan bağımsız tiyatroların yeni bir politik anlam, yeni bir kamusal alan ve yeni bir kent kültürü anlayışı yaratmadaki rolünü ve konumunu anlamayı hedefler. Detaylandırmak gerekirse, bu çalışma özellikle son 10 yıl içinde İstanbul ve Ankara'da kurulmuş tiyatro alanında üretim yapan tiyatro topluluklarına mensup tiyatro insanların alana dahil oluş süreçleri, motivasyonları, grup içi ilişkileri, mesleğe ve tiyatral üretim alanına bakışları, iç örgütlenmeleri üzerine sosyolojik bir tartışma yürütmektedir. Tez günümüzün parçalanmış toplumsallı içinde kendilerini politik, finansal ve profesyonel olarak nasıl konumlandıklarını yaratıcılarının bakış açısıyla anlamaya çalışırken, bağımsız tiyatro alanının farklı toplumsal yapılarla etkileşimini topluluk oluşturma halleri, çatışmalar, dayanışma örüntüleri, rekabet, ödüller ve başarısızlıklar özelinde kayıt düşmektedir.

Bir gösterim sanatı olarak tiyatronun Türkiye coğrafyasında bir farklı toplumsal süreçler içinde dönüşürken bir taraftan da süreklilikler üzerinden de varlığını sürdürdüğünü söylemek gerekir. Bu nedenle tezin birinci bölümünde bu tarihsel arka planda yer verilip bugünün teatral alanındaki işleyişle bağlantılar kurulmuştur. Bu tarihsel arka plan bağımsız tiyatro gruplarının üretimlerde üretim biçimlerine ve ilişkilene biçimlerindeki kırılmalar ve süreklilikleri ortaya koymak için önemlidir.

Tiyatro ilk olarak sözlü gelenek yoluyla şekillenmiş olsa da (Geleneksel halk tiyatrosu, Köy seyirlik oyunları, Meddah, Karagöz, Orta Oyunu) Tanzimat'la birlikte, gayrimüslim azınlıkların ve Levantenlerin kurduğu tiyatro kumpanyaları ile Batı tarzı tiyatro bu coğrafyada etkinlik kazanmaya başlar. 1914'de *Darülbeydi Osmani* (Osmanlı Güzellikler Evi) Müzik ve Tiyatro bölümlerini içeren Konservatuvarın kuruluşu sonrasında 1916'da verilmeye başlanan temsillerle ilk ödenekli tiyatronun temelleri atılır. Cumhuriyetin kuruluşu ile birlikte yeni toplum inşasında sanat merkezi bir rol üstlenirken ve bu amaçla tiyatro milli eğitimin bir parçası haline

gelmiştir. Yine tüm sanat eserleri gibi erken cumhuriyet döneminden itibaren tiyatro ulus-devlet modeline göre şekillenmiş, cumhuriyet seçkinlerinin öncülüğünde, tiyatro alanının devlet destekli ana sanat kurumları hakim olmuştur. Bu yönde, 1927 yılında Muhsin Ertuğrul'un başına geçtiği Darübedayi 1934 yılında İstanbul Şehir Tiyatroları adını alır. Ulusal birlik yaratma çabası Halk Evlerinin ve Köy Enstitülerinin sanatsal üretimlerde kendini gösterir. Bu süreçte modernleşme, ulusal kimlik odaklı oyunlar yazılır, sahnelenir. Batı tiyatro geleneği ile birlikte Cumhuriyet ideolojisinin yaygınlaştırılmasında en önemli araçlardan biri olacak Devlet Tiyatrosunun temelleri de 1946 yılında Ankara Devlet Konservatuarı ve mezunlarının temsil verdiği Tatbikat Sahnesi'nin kuruluşu ile atılır.

1950'li yıllara kadar türkiyede tiyatro alanının büyük oranda devletin himayesinde Devlet Tiyatrosu ekseninde şekillenmeye devam ettiğini söylemek mümkündür. 1950'lerin sonlarından itibaren devletçi politikalarından uzaklaşma, göç, kentleşme ve DP'nin sanata verdiği desteğin azalması farklı arayışları beraberinde getirir. Bu dönüşümle özel tiyatro toplulukları da alana dahil olmaya ve kurumsal bir yapıya kavuşmaya başlamıştır. Bu dönemden sonra, büyük şehirlerde eşsiz ortaya çıkmasıyla birlikte, tiyatro alanındaki bu toplulukların niceliksel olarak yayıldığını, farklı mekansallıklarla kendileri için özerk alanlar kurduğunu görürüz. 1950li yılların sonundan itibaren 1970'li yıllara kadar süren dönem kendi teatral geleneğini oluşturacak kendi mekanlarında gösterimler yapacak ve kurumsal bir yapı kazanarak bir nevi eğitim kurumuna dönüşecek pek çok özel/ ödenekli olmayan tiyatronun doğduğu yıllar olur. Pekman'ın değişimi ile "tiyatro alanının iki farklı aktörü olan sanatçı ve seyircinin ilk defa bu denli birbirine yaklaştığı görüşmüştür (Pekman: 2011,236). Yine bu dönemde Melih Cevdet Anday, Turgut Özakman, Necati Cumali, Aziz Nesin, Haldun Taner gibi pek çok yazar eleştirel metinler oraya çıkarmaya başlar. 1960'lı yıllara gelindiğinde hem küresel düzlemin ortaya çıkardığı politik hareketlilik hem de 1961 Anayasasının sağladığı görece özgürlüğün de etkisi ile önceleri sahnelerde yer almayan işçi sınıfı, göç köy gecekondulu yaşamı ekonomik sorunlar gibi konular ve yazarlar sahnelerde yer bulmaya başlar. Sahnelenen oyun sayısı ile birlikte oyun türlerinde çeşitliliğin de arttığı tiyatro ve yeni seyircinin de yetiştiği bu yıllar *Türk Tiyatro Tarihinin Altın Çağı* olarak da anılır. Beyoğlu ise bu üretim patlamasının merkezi haline gelir.

1970'lerin politik baskı ortamından ekonomik krizden, yasaklamalar ve tutuklamalardan tiyatro toplulukları da nasibini alır. Seyirci sayısı düşer, pek çok topluluk dağılma sürecine girer. Buna karşı bu duraklama süreci politik belgesel propaganda oyunları, sokak tiyatrosu, belgesel tiyatro oyunlarının yaygınlaştığı yıllar olur. 1980'lerden itibaren ise ülkenin değişen sosyo-ekonomik ikliminin; sansür ortamı ve ekonomide liberalleşmenin etkisi ile bir taraftan eğlencelik işler ağır basarken diğer taraftan baskıya karşı yeni ifade biçimi arayışlarını başlar ve tiyatro alanında bu arayışlar 1990'larla birlikte 12 Eylül askeri darbesinin ardından koyulan siyasi yasaklarının ortadan kaldırılması ile somutlaşır. Doksanlı yıllarda kurulan Kumpanya, Stüdyo Oyuncuları, Bilsak Tiyatro Atölyesi Tiyatro Oyunevi gibi tiyatro topluluklarına 2000'lerde Tiyatro İstanbul, 5. Sokak tiyatrosu, Ve Diğer Şeyler Topluluğu gibi topluluklar eklenir. Kendi sahne dili, biçemi seyircisini yaratan ticari kaygılardan uzak işler yapan bu toplulukları bugün aktif üretim yapan bağımsız toplulukların öncülü olarak değerlendirmek mümkündür. Bu anlamda buradaki farklılıklar kadar sürekliliğin de altını çizmek, ve bu tiyatral üretimlere sosyolojik bir bakışla değerlendirebilmek için bu üretimlerin milat oluşturmadıklarını vurgulamak açısından önemlidir. Bugün bu farklılaşmış ve çoğullaştırılmış bağımsız tiyatro alanı çoğunlukla konvansiyonel tiyatro mekanları dışında az sayıda seyirciye ulaşan, ekonomik sınırlılıklar içinde üretim yapan zaman içinde farklılaşan, zenginleşen çoğullaşan yeni mekansallıklara ve karşılaşmalara imkan sunan, farklı sahne dilleri ve çoğul anlatım biçimleri ortaya koyan topluluklardan oluşturmaktadır.

Bu toplulukların isimlendirilmesi 1990'lardan bu yana tartışılan bir konu olmuştur. 1990'lardan bu yana alternatif tiyatro öteki tiyatro özel tiyatro alternatif sahne gibi isimlendirmeler de kullanılırken Görüşülen tiyatro üreticilerinin önemli bir kısmı üretimlerini yaptıkları tiyatro alanını tanımlarken kullandıkları sınırları belirsiz *bağımsız* kavramını kullandılar. Bu noktada, bu şemsiye kavramın tezin ana eksenlerinden birini oluşturduğunu söylebiliriz. Bir başka değişle alan çalışmasında bu kavrama dair ortaya konulan muğlaklık, tezin araştırma alanlarının her biri , yani hem üretim biçimi hem de ekonomi ve siyasal alanla kurulan ilişki anlamında yararlı bir sorunsallaştırmaya dönüşmüştür. Böylece tiyatrocuların ekonomi ve siyasetle kurdukları ilişki, üretim biçimleri, toplulukların oluşumu, topluluklar arasındaki

dayanışma bağları üzerinden bağımsızlık fikrini bu şekilde tartışmak ve sorgulamak mümkün olmuştur.

Tezin ikinci bölümde metodolojik ve kavramsal çerçevesi tanımlamaya çalıştım. İki buçuk yılı aşkın bir süre devam eden tezin alan çalışması kapsamında İstanbul ve Ankara’da üretim yapan yetmişbir tiyatro çalışanı (tiyatro oyuncusu, oyun yazarı, yönetmen, dramaturg, tiyatro mekânı sahibi) ile gerçekleştirdiğim otuz üçü İstanbul’da yirmi tanesi Ankara’da olmak üzere elli üç adet derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirilmiştir. Cinsiyet dağılımına baktığımızda görüşmecilerin kırk dördünü erkek, otuz sekizinin kadın görüşmecilerden, en kalabalık yaş grubunu 30-40’lı yaşlara mensup otuz yedi görüşmecilerden oluşmaktaydı. Yine, 40’lı 50’li yaşlardaki görüşmeci sayısı on dokuz, 30 yaşından küçük ve 50 yaşından büyük görüşmeci sayısı ise onbirde kalmaktaydı. Bu yaş grubu alanın demografik dağılımına dair önemli bir durumu da işaret etmekteydi. Bağımsız tiyatro gruplarında sürdürülebilir bir üretim yapabilmek ve alanda varlığını ispat edebilmek için asgari becerilere, ekonomik sermayeye ve belirli bir sosyal ağa sahip olma gerekliliği öne çıkmaktaydı, bu nedenle belli bir yaş aralığında olmanın avantajları da bu alanda üretim yapabilmek adına anlamlı görünmektedir. Yaşın görüşmecilerin eğitim geçmişlerinde de belirleyici bir faktör olarak ortaya çıktı. 45 yaş üstü katılımcıların tamamı devlet konservatuvarı mezunu iken, 40 yaş altı özel üniversite mezunları ya da özel kurslar da eğitim almış kişilerdi.

Derek Layer, ayrı bir araştırma alanı olarak tanımlanmayan bazı araştırma ilgi alanlarının, araştırmacının bu dağınık, çok boyutlu alanlar havuzunda tamamlayıcı disiplinler olarak kullanabileceğini belirtmektedir. Ayrıca Layer araştırmacılara, yakın disiplinlerdeki kavramsal ve teknik olmayan literatürü inceleme, dergi ve belgelerden yararlanma ve alanla derinlemesine ilgilenerek oradan sonuçlar çıkarma gibi yaklaşımları kullanmalarını önerir. Bu noktada yapılan görüşmelerin yanı sıra araştırmam sırasında zaman zaman bulunduğum prova-oyun süreçleri mesleğe dair toplantılar, bir araya gelişler, eğlenmek, eğitimler süresinde yaptığım katılımcı gözlemlerin de bu tezin verilerine kaynak teşkil ettiğini eklemem gerekmektedir (Layer: 2013, 180-183). Alanla ilgili sınırlı sayıda araştırmının olması, bununla birlikte alanın kapsayıcılığı ve dinamizmi bu tezin Layer’ın bahsettiğine benzer bir araştırma süreçte evrilmesine katkıda bulundu. Bu doğrultuda, derinlemesine

görüşmelerin yanı sıra, teorik ve teknik olmayan literatür taramasının yanı sıra belgeler, raporlar, yeni yazılmış oyun metinleri, performanslar, web siteleri, gazete haberleri ve videolardan yararlandım.

Yine de az sayıda olmakla birlikte farklı coğrafyalarda farklı tiyatro grupları üzerine yapılan bazı sosyolojik etnografik çalışmalar (Becker, Walcon, E. & Nicholson, H, Lyon, Fox % Dckie, Celia Bense Ferreira Alves) alanı karşılaştırmalı bakışla okumama imkan sağlarken, alandan çıkan veriler ışığında sosyolojinin kent çalışmaları, siyaset sosyolojisi gibi farklı alt alanlarına ait kavramsallaştırmaların kullanılma zorunluğunu tezin alanını anlaşılır kıldı. Bu çoğul kaynak kullanımının yanında, 1964'te Glaser ve Strauss tarafından geliştirilen grounded teori (gömülü teori) kavramı, saha çalışma sürecimi destekledi. Glaser ve Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* adlı kitaplarında bu yöntemi, veri toplama, analiz ve olası teorileştirmenin birbiriyle yakından bağlantılı olduğu bir süreç olarak tanımlar ve gömülü teori hem bir araştırma yöntemini ve hem de bu araştırmanın ürününi gösterir (Glaser ve Strauss: 1964). Yine Glaser ve Corbin bu yöntemi şöyle tanımlar;

Bir araştırmacının amacı varolan bir teoriyi detaylandırmak ve genişletmek değilse zihninde önceden tasarlanmış bir teori ile bir projeye başlamaz. Bunun yerine, araştırmacı bir çalışma alanıyla yola çıkar ve teorinin alanda toplayacağı verilerden ortaya çıkmasına izin verir. Verilerden türetilen teorinin deneyime dayalı bir dizi kavramın bir araya getirilene ya da sadece spekülasyon yoluyla türetilen bir teoriden "gerçekliğe" benzemesi çok daha olasıdır (Glaser ve Corbin, 1998: 12).

Gömülü teori araştırmalarının bir diğer yönü de, mikroskopik bir çalışmayla uğraşmanın yanı sıra, ekonomik durum, kültürel değerler, siyasi eğilimler, toplumsal hareketler gibi çalışmanın konusunu etkileyen daha geniş koşulları da kapsamaya çabalamasıdır. Bu tez çalışması disiplinler arası konumu, kapsamı, çok katmanlılığı ve ilişkisellik düzlemi, alan çalışmasında ortaya çıkan ve bağımsız tiyatro gruplarında üretim yapan tiyatro çalışanlarının gündelik, siyasal, politik ilişkileri gömülü teori kullanımına uygunluk içindedir. Bununla birlikte refleksif bir bakışı mümkün kılan tiyatroya olan merakım ve önceden edindiğim bilgilerin de bu noktada önem yönlendirici olduğunu eklememe gerekir.

Bu alandaki akademik çalışma azlığı tiyatronun ontolojik tarihi ve görsel bir sanat olması, daha içine kapalı bir alan olarak algılanması ya da görüşmecilerin benzetmelerinde olduğu gibi modası geçmiş bir sanat olarak değerlendirilmesine bağlanabilirken aslında sahip olduğu köklü bir tarihi ile sosyal bilimlerin için özellikle sosyoloji için hem çalışma ilişkileri, hem oyun metinleri hem topluluk ilişkileri açısından birden çok araştırma alanı olma potansiyeli taşımaktadır. Bu noktada tezin amaçlarından biri, sağladığı geniş bakış açısı ve önerdiği kaynak materyallerle ileride yapılacak çalışmalara bir başlangıç noktası oluşturmaktır.

Alan araştırmasının kapsadığı iki buçuk yılı aşkın bu süreç içinde pek çok tiyatro grubunun dağılmasına, yine pek yine pek çoklarının kurulup üretim yapmaya başlamasına, pasif gruplar aktifleşmesine, mekanlar arası ortak üretimler yapılmasına, yeni sahneler açılmasına ve ekonomik kısıtlar nedeniyle özellikle pandemi sürecinde pek çoklarının ise kapanmasına şahit oldum. Buna karşılık tüm ağır koşullara rağmen, İstanbul ve Ankara'da oyun üretimlerinin çoğalması ve pandemi sonrasında yeni grupların ortaya çıkması beşeri sermaye açısından önemli bir hareketlilik ve dinamizme işaret ediyor.

Bu anlamda alan çalışmasının yapıldığı zaman diliminde ve sonrasında pek çok yıkıcı toplumsal olayın ortaya çıkmasının ve oyuncu, mekan ve üretimdeki akışkanlık, dinamizm üretimlere ve üreticilere dair takibimi zorlaştırsa da bu durum çok daha kapsamlı bir sosyolojik incelemeyi mümkün kıldı benim için. Araştırmaya dahil edilen grupların üyeleri, yaş ve eğitim geçmişlerine çeşitliliği de mesleki etik, iç organizasyonlar, grup içi ve gruplar arası sosyal-mesleki ilişkilerine dair zengin kavramsallaştırmalar sunmalarına ve sayede bağımsız tiyatro alanını yanında, ödenekli kurumlardaki üretimlere not düşmeye de imkan tanıdı. Farklı tiyatro kültürlerinden gelen görüşmecilerle kurumsal ve dönemsel karşılaştırmalar da yapabilmem mümkün oldu.

Alan çalışması verileri ile beslenen tezin üçüncü, dördüncü ve beşinci bölümlerinde mesleğe dair iç halkadan başlanarak tiyatro üreticilerinin deneyimlerinden toplumsal düzleme doğru bir analiz seyri izlenmiştir. Bu anlamda alan verileri aktörler, gruplar, üretimler ve ekonomik politik düzlem arasındaki ilişkisellikler başlıkları üzerinden incelenmiştir.

Tezin üçüncü bölümünün ilk kısmında, alandaki aktörlerin tiyatro sanatına ilişkin algıları, tiyatro yapma motivasyonları ve hedefleri ile bağımsız bir tiyatronun parçası olma motivasyonları tartışılmaktadır. Sıklıkla tiyatro yapacak bir yer bulamamak, nefes alacak bir alan aramak, sansürden uzak bir ifade alanı yaratamamak, tercih ettiği rolü- oyunu sergileyememek ve samimiyet arayışı bağımsız tiyatro alanının bir parçası olma motivasyonları olarak belirtilmektedir. Bu motivasyonlar, katılımcıların mesleğe yükledikleri sosyal anlamla da ilişkilidir. Bu anlamda görüşmecilerin çoğu mesleklerini kutsamak yerine her türlü zanaatkarlıkla karşılaştırırken mesleklerini “bakırcı, marangoz gibiyiz”, “modası geçmiş bir meslek”, ekmek ve su kadar gerekli olmayabilir” ifadeleri ile tanımlamaktadır. Bununla ilişkili olarak tiyatroya yüklenen toplumsal işlevin de dönüşümünü sezmek mümkündür. Görüşmecilerin büyük bir kısmı tiyatroyu bir anlatım aracı, iletişim alanı, ilişki kurma biçimi kendini aşma çabası, kendine doğru yaptığı yolculuk gibi adlandırmalarla tarif ederken kişisel dertlerini aktarma amacının en temel motivasyonları olduğunun altını çiziyor. Tiyatroya kutsal öğretici rol biçen ve çoğu ödenekli kurumlarla bağı olan az sayıda görüşmeci dışında kişisellik vurgusu alanda hep ön plana çıkıyor. Bu vurgu alana dahil olma nedeni olduğu kadar ve üretim biçimine, içeriğine, örgütlenme biçimlerinde de sirayet etmiş durumda.

Bununla birlikte, eğitim kurumlarındaki kontenjanlarındaki ve mezun sayılarındaki artışa karşın devlet tiyatroları, şehir tiyatroları ve belli başlı kurumsallaşmış özel tiyatrolar dışında iş imkanlarının kısıtlı oluşu görüşmecilerin çoğu tarafından bağımsız tiyatro yapma motivasyonlarının başında gösteriliyor. Mesleğini icra edebilecekleri bir alan arayışının yanı sıra çok nadir ve az sayıda kadro açan ödenekli kurumlar da görüşmecilerin çoğu için hayalini kurdukları sanatsal üretim alanını temsil etmekten çok uzak kalıyor. Bir başka deyişle, mesleğini aktif ve yaratıcı biçimde icra edebilme isteği pek çok görüşmeci tarafından yinelenen alana dahil olma motivasyonların başında gelmekteydi. Bu noktada görüşmeciler için ödenekli kurumlarda sözleşmeli çalışma mecburiyetinin karşısında bağımsız tiyatro yine bir konfor alanı teşkil ediyor.

Tezin üçüncü bölümünün ikinci kısmı, meslek ilişkilerini, grup içi ilişkileri incelemeye çalıştım. Bu bölümde bölümü tiyatro topluluklarının organizasyon şeması, grup dinamikleri, gruba bağlılıkları, toplulukların tiyatro kültürü, grup

üyeleri arasındaki ve diğer topluluklarla olan ilişkilere yer verdim. Genel anlamda üretim sürecinde kolektif bir çaba gerektiren tiyatro alanında görüşmeciler ödenekli ve ödenekli olmayan kurumlar arasında zorunlu bir farklılaşmadan bahsediyor. DT gibi ödenekli kurumların aşırı derecede uzmanlaşmış, sanatsal ve teknik kadroları karşında bağımsız topluluklarda halihazırda az sayıda olan ana üye – kurucu topluluk mensubu her işi yapabilmek durumunda kalıyor.

Bununla birlikte bağımsız tiyatro gruplarında tiyatro üretimi kolektif ve heterarşik bir organizasyon gibi görünse de, yönetmenin bir *kapı tutucu* olarak görev yapması, ödenekli kurumlardaki geleneğin uzantısı olarak varlığını sürdürür. Rollerin belirsizleştiği ya da içiçe geçtiği, kimi yenilerinin eklendiği, çoğullaştığı, bu üretim sürecini görüşmecilerin çoğu son kertede yönetmenin hakimiyetinden çok da ödün verilmeden kolektif bir biçimde devam eden bir hareket olarak tanımladılar Bu noktada vurgulanan yönetmenin ağırlığını erken cumhuriyet döneminden bugüne ödenekli kurumlarla süregelen ödenekli tiyatro kültürünün devamı olarak değerlendirmek de mümkün görünmekte. Burada bir diğer nokta da, ekonomik koşullar gereği birden fazla grupta, bazen proje bazında çalışma gerekliliğinin hem düşük bağlılık duygusu hem de yüksek insan kaynağı hareketliliği yaratmasıdır.

Yukarıda bahsedildiği gibi bireysellik merkezde gibi görünse de, kolektif/komünal bir yaşamı sürdürebilme yeteneği, az sayıda izleyicinin de dahil olduğu, genellikle kapalı, güvenli cemaatvari topluluğa işaret etmekte. Bağımsız tiyatro alanına dahil olmak ödenekli kurumlara katılım kadar zorlayıcı olmasa da, yani meslek alanına giriş bariyerleri çok yüksek bu cemaatleşme hali nedeniyle de alana dahil olurken, gerekli becerilere ve daha da önemlisi bir sosyal ağa sahip olma zorunluluğunu beraberinde getirmekte.

Yine, grubun tanınırlığının artması ve kurumsallaşmasının ile birlikte grup iç uzmanlaşmanın doğru orantılı olduğu açıktır. Bununla birlikte daha küçük ölçekli gruplarda pek görevi aynı anda üstlenmek zorunda kalan grup üyeleri için bu çoklu görev sahipliği gruplara aidiyet duygusunu artırırken, sömürüye açık, esnek bir çalışma düzeni de yaratmaktadır. Teknik pozisyonlar da esnek ve heterarşik bir yapılanma içinde ödenekli kurumlardan farklı olarak içinde daha görünmez bir hal alabiliyor. Bu anlamda bu gruplar arasında dönem dönem yaygınlaşan *gönüllük* görevi de önemli bir turnusol kağıdına dönüşmekte. Teknik ağırlıklı pek çok alanı

kapsayan gönüllü- asistan pozisyonunun, hali hazırda esnek güvencesiz, sıklıkla sigortasız bir çalışma alanı olan bağımsız tiyatro alanı içinde duygusal emek üzerinden sömürüye açık bir pozisyon oluşturduğu pek çok görüşmeci tarafından da ifade ediliyor. Görüşmecilerin pek çoğu sömürü halinin altını çizerken çok az sayıda bir kısmını ise bu pozisyonun tiyatro alanında dahil olmak isteyen gençlere yeni bir kapı açabileceğini düşünüyor.

Bu noktada ödenekli kurumlar bağımsız grupların üreticileri için kendi iç işleyişini ayırt eden bir karşılaştırma noktası olarak tasvir edildiğinin altını çizmek gerekir. Yine bu farklılaştırma ve varlığını ortaya koyma çabası mekan sahipliğinden, politik temsil fikrine dek pek çok alanda kendini göstermektedir.

Bir tiyatral gelenek yaratma/yaratamama konusu da alan çalışması sırasında en çok altı çizilen meselelerden biri oldu. Özellikle açılıp kapanan, dağılan yeniden toparlanan küçük ölçekli gruplar için bu sürekliliği sağlamak çok zor görünmekte. Örneğin, özellikle 1960ların sonundan itibaren kurumsallaşan özel tiyatro grupların kapanması dağılması usta- çıraklık geleneğini gibi bir geleneği ortadan kaldırırken bir taraftan da Howard Becker'in *mutabakat* olarak nitelendirdiği mesleğin süregelen üzerinde uzlaşmış yazısız sözleşmelerini de değişikliğe uğrattığı iddia edilebilir.

Diğer taraftan birbirinden çok farklı kurumsallaşmış tiyatroların teatral gelenekleri de tam anlamı ile sürdürülebilir görünmemektedir. Bugün halihazırda üretim yapan bu grupların bazıları teatral üretim biçimi anlamında kendi geleneğini yaratırken yukarıda da bahsedilen kısıtlar ve imkansızlıkların etkisi ile oluşturulmaya çalışılan gelenek de sürdürülebilirlikten uzaklaşabiliyor. Bu noktada sabit bir mekana sahip olmama, sabit bir kemik bir seyirciye sahip olamamak da görüşmeciler tarafından böyle bir geleneğin sürdürülebilirliğine engel en önemli faktör olarak görülüyor.

Tezin dördüncü bölümünde bağımsız grupların üretim tarzları ve üretim yaptıkları mekânsallıklar ele alınmıştır. Bağımsız tiyatro gruplarının üretim tarzının geçmişten süreklilik ve kopuştan ibaret olduğu varsayımıyla, üretimlerin biçim ve içeriklerine ilişkin birkaç temel nokta ortaya çıkmıştır. Görüşmeciler, dünyanın dört bir yanından artan etkileşimin yanı sıra, gerçeklik algısını değiştiren sosyal olayların ve televizyonun seyircinin ihtiyaçlarını karşılayamamasının üretimlerinin dönüştürülmesinde önemli faktörler olduğunun altını çizer. Bu anlamda bağımsız

tiyatrolar, son yıllarda izleyicinin yerelden beslenen, tanıdık ve samimi, küçük gündelik hikâyelerle, seyirci ile oyuncu arasındaki mesafeyi kıran, anlatı odaklı oyun metinlerinin sıklıkla sahnelenmek için tercih edildiği bir da alana işaret etmektedir. Burada görüşmeciler, izleyicilerinin tanıdık, samimi bir söylem ararken aynı zamanda oyuncuyla birebir ilişki kurmak istediğinin altını çizmektedir.

Bu anlamda oyun yazarlığının dönüşümü de bu anlamda dikkat çekicidir. Buna göre kendi gerçekliğini yaratabilen oyunlar seyirci tarafından beğeni ile karşılanmaktadır. Yine tiyatro mekânı, benzer gerçekliklerde yaşayan insanların bireysel hikâyelerinin paylaşıldığı bir deneyim alanına dönüşmektedir. Yine yazılan oyunlarda, susturulan ve bastırılan gruplara sahne üzerinde söz hakkı verilir. Son dönemde yazılan yeni tiyatro metinlerinin kişisel üreticilerin kişisel meselelerinden hareketle toplumsal rahatsızlıklara değinmesi, katılımcıların bağımsız tiyatro alanında dahil olma motivasyonları ve siyasi duruşları ile tutarlılık göstermektedir.

Bu noktada *gerçeklik* kavramı ve görüşmecilerin meslekleri aracılığıyla *gerçek* ile kurmak istedikleri bağlar, onların bağımsız tiyatro prodüksiyonlarına yönelimlerini belirlemede bir başka anahtar sunuyor. Bu konu, birçok tiyatro araştırmacısının araştırmasında mimetik temsilin post-dramatik anlatımla çelişkili bir özelliği olarak anılır. Yüzleşmek zorunda oldukları gerçekliğin dışında kalarak kendi gerçekliklerini yaratmak, gerçeği kendi dillerinde diledikleri gibi ifade etmek ya da kendi hayallerini gerçekleştirmek arzusu görüşmelerde tekrarlanan bir tema oldu. Uzun süredir devam eden gelenek ve normların dışında tiyatro yapma ihtiyacının ortaya çıkması, bu amaçla doğrudan ilişkili görünmektedir. Pek kişinin söylemlerinin alt metinlerinde bireyci bir bakış açısının varlığı yine derinden hissedilmektedir. Özellikle 40 yaş altı katılımcılar, tiyatro alanıyla ilgili alıntılarının da merkezinde yer alan kişinin *kendi gerçekliği*, *kendi dertleri vurgusu* benlik kavramına kişisel ve bireyci olana koydukları bu öncelik, sanatsal konumlarını ve teatral anlayışlarını da etkilemektedir. Burada "Kendi sözlerimi paylaşmak" çelişkili bir söz kalıbı gibi görünmekle birlikte bu bireyselleştirilmiş ihtiyaç, özellikle bağımsız tiyatro alanının genç kuşak sakinleri için genellikle tek "ifade" biçimi, bir "mücadele biçimi" olarak vurgulanır. "Başka yollar hep kapalı olduğu için tiyatro yapıyorum", "yapabileceğim başka bir şey yok" ifadeleri görüşmecilerce tarafından sık sık tekrarlanır. Ancak insanları bir araya getirmenin farklı bireyselliklerin kesiştiği performansların sonucu olabileceği

de söylenebilir. Bu durum, ağ toplumlarında hem bireyselliğini korumaya çalışan hem de kendine benzeyeni bulmaya çalışan ve aynı zamanda yalnızlıktan kaçan mevcut bireyin bileşik, füzyonel konumunun bir yansıması olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Gerçeğin yeniden yaratılması, günümüz tiyatro yapımlarındaki değişikliklere ilişkin yaygın bir görüştür. Kendi gerçekliğini yaratabilen sahnelemeler, katılımcılara göre bağımsız tiyatro izleyicisi tarafında daha alımlanabilir olmaktadır.

Tezin bu bölümün ikinci kısmında ise bağımsız tiyatro kumpanyalarının yapımlarının mekansal varlığına odaklandım. Bu bölümün alt başlıkları iç çemberden dış çevreye doğru ilerlemekte. Teatral mekan, üretim alanı; yani tiyatro sahnesi ve tiyatro salonu, cadde ve ardından binanın bulunduğu şehir ve şehrin seyircisi bu mekansal düzlemi oluşturmakta. Son olarak bölümün sonuna eklenen saha çalışması yapılan iki şehrin tiyatro kültürüne karşılaştırma metni ile bu mekansallığın iki şehir için nasıl farklılaştığının altını çizmek istedim.

Bu bölümde öne çıkan temel noktalardan bir tanesi, daha önce farklı amaçlarla kullanılan birçok mekanın, bağımsız tiyatro topluluklar tarafından bir performans alanı olarak da dönüştürülerek izleyicinin zihninde yer etmesi, gruplara ve izleyicilerine ayrıştırıcı bir kimlik kazandırması olmuştur. Bu kimliğin oluşması ve izleyici kitlesinin hafızasındaki yeri bir yana, bu mekânların üretim sürecinde yarattığı işlevsellik- prova şansı, dekor ve kostümlerin depolanma imkânları ve bu alana göre oyunlar üretilebilmesi tiyatronun ortaya çıkışından bu yana süregelen üretim- mekan ilişkisinin kaçınılmazlığını öne çıkarmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak mekânsal boyut açısından tiyatro mekanlarını, binaları ve sahneleri ile tiyatro üretimlerinin kolaylaştırıcısı, grupların varoluş iddiası, tiyatro kimliklerinin bir bileşeni ve kent yaşamının günlük akışını kesintiye uğratan özgürleştirici bir alan olarak görmek mümkündür.

Buna göre performans sergileyecek bir mekana sahip olmak, gruplar için bir konfor alanına sahip olmak olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Nadiren şirketlere ait olan ancak çoğunlukla kiralanılan bu mekanların kurduğu şirketlerin üyelerinin aidiyet duygusu, "ev kiralık, semt bizim" ifadesiyle dile getirilir. Her ne kadar bağımsız tiyatro gruplarının en önemli kaygılarından biri performans sergileyecek bir mekanın olmaması olsa da, bir mekan yönetmenin dezavantajları da saha çalışmasının öne

çıkan konularından biri oldu. Tiyatro mekanı işletmek, dükkan sahibi olmaya benzetilirken, mekanı sürekli canlı tutma zorunluluğunun sanatsal üretimi sınırladığı, sanatsal kaygıların geride kalmasına neden olurken, diğer grupların üretimlerini takip etme olanağını azaltır.

Bu anlamda ödenen vergiler ve salonun işlerliğini sürekli kılmak, salondan ayrılmamak açısından salon sahipliğini bakkallıkla, eczacılıkla eş gören bir çok görüşmeci mevcuttur. Bu anlamda, bu tiyatroların buldukları şehir içindeki dönüştürücü kamusal alanı tartışmak biraz karmaşık görünmektedir.

Bunun yanı sıra, sürekli değişen, dönüşen, kapanan ve açılan tiyatro mekanlarının hareketliliği aslında şehrin dönüşümüne ve kentsel dokunun akışkanlığına karşılık gelmektedir. Bu anlamda tiyatro mekanlarının küçük kamusal etkisinin yanı sıra, bu mekanların şehri dönüştürmekten çok şehrin yanında dönüştüğünü söylemek mümkün görünmemektedir. Bu noktada kent kültürüne bir katkı sunum sunmadıklarına dair sorulara verilen yanıtlarda ancak küçük değişiklikler üzerinde uzlaşıldı ancak büyük katkılardan söz etmenin zor olduğunun altı çizildi. Ayrıca içe bağımsız grupların mekansallık anlamında da sıklıkla cemaatler halinde varlıklarını sürdürmesi, yeni bir kamusal alan, politik konumlandırmalar, eylemsellikler ve dayanışma pratikleri yaratmak, yeni bir siyasal anlam üretmek potansiyelini azaltır görünmektedir. Bununla birlikte büyük sponsorlu kimi alternatif olarak lanse edilen mekanların bir pazarlama nesnesi olarak sunulduğunu görebiliyoruz. Kimi üretimlerde çerçeve sahnenin top yekûn reddinin altında böyle bir sebep de bulmak mümkün.

Ayrıca bağımsız tiyatroların özellikle İstanbul-Kadıköy gibi Richard Lyod'un *neo-bohemia* olarak adlandırabileceği bölgelerde konuşlanarak, bu lokasyonlarda üretim ve tüketim pratiklerini biraraya getirdiğini, ekonomik dönüşümün vazgeçilmez bir parçası haline geldiğini söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Ankara'da durum son derece yavaş görünse de, eski tiyatroların çoktan kapatıldığı ve son zamanlarda açılan küçük tiyatroların şehrin ana merkezinden uzaklaşmaya başladığı açıktır.

Tezin son bölümünde bağımsız tiyatro grupları grup üyelerinin kendilerini ve üretimlerini konumlandıkları siyasi çerçeve, gruplar arasındaki iç siyasetin iktidar yapılarıyla nasıl ilişkilendiği; güç-dayanışma ilişkileri ve ekonomik fırsatlar,

kısıtlamalar, faydalar ve finansal destekler mekanizması tartışılmıştır. Kentin yapısal değişikliklerinin tiyatro salonları, kumpanyalar ve bunların yapımları üzerinde çok daha güçlü bir etkisi olduğu görülüyor. Yine de mekanların süreksizliği, İstanbul'un olduğu kadar Ankara'nın da son yıllardaki hızlı dönüşümünün bir göstergesi olarak yorumlanabilir.

Burada altı çizilmesi gereken bir nokta da, bağımsız tiyatro topluluklarının ve tiyatro uygulayıcılarının siyasetle kurdukları bağıdır. Üretimlerinin içeriklerinde olduğu gibi parçalı bütüncül bir ideolojik çerçevenin dışında günlük siyasetle üzerinden kurulan bu bağ grup içi siyaseti olduğu kadar, dayanışma pratiklerini gruplar arası ilişkilendirme biçimlerini de şekillendirmektedir. Yukarıda da bahsedilen içe kapalılık halinin hem grup içi hem gruplar arası dayanışmaya vesile olmadığını, mesleki kaynakların azlığının her hem İstanbul hem Ankara'da ama şe en çok İstanbul'da gruplar arası rekabeti arttıran en önemli faktör olarak ortaya çıktığını alan çalışması ortaya koymaktadır. Yine kişisel çatışmaların, çeşitli grupların farklılaşan dertleri de etkin bir dayanışmayı zorlaştırdığını söylemek mümkündür. İdeolojik anlamda *kendilik* üzerinde şekillenen kişiselleşmiş ve belki bu anlamda bağımsızlaşmış, ana akımın bütünsel ideolojisinden uzaklaşmış politik bir kimliğe sahibi bu tiyatrolar üreticilerinin hakim olduğu bu alan yine zaman zaman ortaklıklar kuran ama bir yönüyle de mesleğin ontolojisine bağlı olarak bozulabilmekte bu da alanı daha kırılabilir ve bağımsızlık iddiasından, sürdürülebilirlikten uzaklaştıran bir hale getirdiği söylenebilir. Bununla birlikte geçmiş dönemlerde örnekte toplumsal kriz anlarında bir araya gelip, sonrasında dağılan toplulukların alan çalışmasının son ermesinden sonra, özellikle Covid-19 Pandemisi sonrasında çok daha örgütlü ve sürdürülebilir bir biraradalık gösterdiği farklı kooperatifler, insiyatiflerin çatısı altında yaygınlaşan bir örgütlenme pratiğine eriştiğinin altını çizmek gerekir.

Son olarak tezin son kısmında, bağımsız tiyatro üreticilerinin üretimlerini sürdürürken yaşadıkları zorluklar, kısıtlar, giderler gelirler, muhtemel destekler üzerine bir tartışma yürütmeyi amaçladım. Görüşmecilere göre, İstanbul ve Ankara özelinde ekonomik imkanlarda farklılaşmalar görülse de (bilet geliri, mekan kirası, mekan sayısı gibi, ek kaynak- iş imkanı gibi) özellikle alınan vergiler, yüksek faturalar ve devlet desteğinin çok sınırlı oluşu ve bu destek mekanizmalarında zaman

zaman politik kriterlerin öncelenmesi her iki şehirdeki toplulukların, mekanı olanların mekanlarının varlıklarını sürdürebilmeleri zorlaştırmaktadır.

Bu noktadan hareketle tezin sonuç bölümünde grupların kendilerini tanımlamak için yer yer tereddüt ederek kullandıkları bağımsızlık kavramı üzerine düşünmek, bu kavram üzerine bir tartışma alanı açmak yerinde olmuştur. Mevcut kapitalist düzlemde, bir yanda hiç ya da çok az ödenek almadan sınırlı kaynaklarla performanslarını üreten toplulukların aynı zamanda yer darlığıyla da boğuştuğunu; öte yandan, bu sanat alanının sermaye gruplarının ilgisini çekmeye başladığını da unutmamak gerekir. Dolayısıyla büyük salonlarda oyun oynayan ya da bu sermaye gruplarının sponsor olduğu yapımlarına katılan toplulukların finansal ve estetik açıdan ne ölçüde bağımsız kalabildikleri önemli bir tartışma konusudur. Ayrıca, hedef kitleyle ulaşamayan, hedef kitle ile bağ kurmakta zorlanan topluluklar tarafından demokratikleşen bir topluluk fikri inşa etmek, özellikle gün geçtikçe artan bilet fiyatları göz önüne alındığında pek mümkün görünmemektedir.

Estetik açıdan bağımsızlık kavramı da sorgulamaya açıktır, bu noktada içerik ve biçim konusunda ayırım yapılabilir. 1990'larda çoğunlukla yurt dışındaki akımları takip eden, sosyal bilimlerde eğitim almış üreticilerce oraya çıkarılmış alternatif üretimlerde özgürleştirici yein ipek çok anlatım biçimine rastlarken bugün pek çok sahnelemede bugün daha çok içerik açısında bir özgürleşmeden bahsetmek mümkün görünmekteydi. Bu anlamda de aynı oranda seyircinin de özgürleştiği, yeni üretimlere, paylaşımlara açık olduğu gözlemlenmemektedir. Üretimlerde pek çok konuya - yer verilse de çok geleneksel, tanıdık olandan beslenen gerçekçi, samimi oyunculuk biçimleri ve dramatik metinlerin hakimiyeti bu duruma işaret etmektedir.

İlişkisellikler, kırılmalar ve benzerlikler üzerinden okumaya çalıştığım alan çalışmasında ortaya çıkan başka bir ilişkisellik ekonomik ve bunun yanında estetik kaygıların etkisi ile hem ödenekli hem ödeneksiz gruplarla iş yapan ya da çok sayıda bağımsız gruplarla çalışan görüşmecinin hatırısayılır bir sayıya sahip olmasıdır. Bu durum tezin temel önermelerinden biri olan hem üretim hem organizasyon açısından tiyatro grupların da var olan süreklilik ve kırılmaların bir aradalığı ile de örtüşmektedir. Farklı tiyatro geleneklerinin içinde üretim yapabilen bu tiyatro üreticiler bir anlamda ara akım ve aka akımın içinden karşı hegemoni üreten neferler

olarak temsil edilebilir. Bu anlamda, bu üreticilerin ödenekli kurumların da dönüşümünde bir etki edebilecekleri söylenebilir.

Yine bu bağımsız grupların ve mekanları etki etme potansiyeli taşıdıkları kent mekanı açısından düşündüğümüzde de, kentin tiyatroyu tiyatronun kenti dönüştürme hızından çok daha hızlı dönüşümü özellikle son on yılda şehrin seyricisi için yeni bir kamusalılık yaratma, kent kültürüne çok etkin bir katkı sunabilme potansiyelini sorgulamaktadır. Buna karşılık kentin hızlı dönüşümünün tiyatroların üretim alanlarını dolayısıyla üretimleirni olumsuz yönde etkilediğinin altını çizmek gerekir. Özellikle Beyoğlu bölgesinin dönüşümü buna belirgin bir örnektir. Bir başka değışle, mekansal sürdürülebilirliğin zorluğu, üreticilerin hareketliliği, ekonomik şartlar nedeniyle açılıp kapanan irili ufaklı mekanlar, bu yeni tiyatro alanının kırılğanlığını ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Pandemi süreci de bu kırılğanlığın en net bir biçimde su yüzüne çıktığı dönem olarak görülebilir.

Bununla birlikte, bağımsız tiyatro alanının siyasetle ilişkisini postmodernist siyaset açısından yorumlamak faydalı görünmektedir. Farklılık, süreksizlik, çok anlamlılık, çok kültürlülük ve güvensizlik içeren ve öngörülebilir bürokratik disipline dayalı modern siyasetin mekanik yapısını kıran bu yaklaşım, hem tiyatro gruplarının iç işleyişi, dayanışma biçimleri açısından, hem de siyasi konumları açısından geçerli görünmektedir. Sosyo-ekonomik sınırlamalara rağmen, kişisel kaygılarını paylaşmak ve sesini duyurmak ihtiyacıyla kurulan bağımsız tiyatro toplulukları; sosyal alanda yeni bir çağrışım biçiminin yanı sıra yeni sanatsal ifade biçimleri sunmaktadır. Ayrıca alanı mekansallığı üzerinden düşünüldüğünde ise bağımsız tiyatro alanı, gruplara mensup kişilerin grupların arası ve gruplar arası ilişkilerde belirginleşen, bugünün parçalı, geçişken, içe kapalı, ortaklıklarda çok çabuk bir araya gelen ama aynı hızda da dağılabilen, süreksiz toplumsal alanının ve toplumsal örgütlenme biçimlerinin küçük bir temsili olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

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