Hagop Ayvaz: An *Honnête Homme* Negotiating Life in a New Nation-state

The 'rebirth' of Armenian theatre in the Turkish 'underground'

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In December of 2020, the opening for an exhibition was held in Istanbul, the content of which invited us to reinterpret the cultural and artistic life of the era of the Turkish Republic. Titled *Coulisse: Hagop Ayvaz (1911-2006, Istanbul), A Chronicler of Theatre*, the exhibition was realized under the guidance of the Hrant Dink Foundation in collaboration with the Theatre Foundation of Turkey and Yapı Kredi Culture, Arts, and Publishing. The exhibition, which included the personal archives of Hagop Ayvaz, an Armenian actor, director, writer, and publisher, as well as Ayvaz's collection of *Kulis* (*Backstage*) magazines, revealed to the broader public an 'unknown' and 'ignored' world.[1] Both the archive (which Ayvaz referred to as his 'heaven') and the magazine collection constitute a body of primary sources that shed light on how Armenian theatre was reborn and sustained in the 'underground', maintaining a fertile existence that nurtured Turkey's social and cultural environment. Together, they demonstrate that Ayvaz worked with the self-discipline, dedication, and enthusiasm of a missionary, traits that were passed down from the Armenian enlightenment tradition. He kept meticulous records about the times in which he lived, including every single relevant name and location, such that Ayvaz, who took a humanist approach to his work, seems to have been calling on the broader public to gather around the art of theatre in his era. Ayvaz thus took on the appearance of an *honnête homme* living in the new monolingual and mono-religious nation-state of Turkey, which had been established on the ashes of the multi-lingual, multi-geographical, multi-religious Ottoman Empire. Endowed with a deep knowledge of general culture and social graces, as a man of the court and a man of the world Ayvaz was an example of an *honnête homme* who represented not just a professional intellectual, but a man possessed of a curious, cultivated mind and tastes, as French historian Philippe Ariès noted in 1947 (Ariès, 1947).

[1] For an online tour of the exhibition, please click here. The collection was comprised of nearly 600 manuscripts and printed texts along with around 500 periodicals, magazines, and brochures in Armenian and Turkish, in addition to approximately 12,000 visual materials, including photographs, posters, caricatures, clippings, invitations, drawings, and postcards.

Covers of the magazine Kulis *displayed at the exhibition. (Photo credit: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat)*

The End of the Second World War and a Rebirth from Ashes

In 1946, as the single-party era came to an end in Turkey, a new epoch was ushered in. The victory of the United States in World War II and Turkey's negotiations for NATO membership brought a new wave of liberalism to the Turkish Republic after the long years of the war. The impacts of that liberalism were as visible in culture and the arts as in the field of politics. That transformation occurred at the same time as the initiation of a new era in the realm of theatre, heralding the advent of a period of fresh beginnings.

In 1946, after World War II had come to an end, Suren Şamlıyan (founder of the Armenian-language newspaper *Marmara*), Mardiros Koçunyan (owner of the Armenian-language newspaper *Jamanak*) and Hagop Ayvaz visited Ankara, the capital of Turkey. During their meetings with government representatives, Suren Şamlıyan asked President İsmet İnönü why Armenian plays were not being staged (hearsay also had it that the question was actually directed to Prime Minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu), the implication being that it was forbidden to stage plays in Armenian. President İnönü replied that he was not aware of such an issue, that there were no such restrictions, and that, of course, Armenian plays could be staged. That meeting in 1946 was of critical importance for the history of Armenian theatre in Turkey. Afterwards, the 'restrictions' on Armenian theatre were lifted, Armenian theatre groups started meeting up again, numerous periodicals were republished in Armenian, and alumni associations were established at Armenian schools, where plays in Armenian began to be staged. Ayvaz launched the magazine *Kulis*, which was published in Armenian, intending for it to be the voice of those

communities and a venue of communications centred on Armenian theatre and culture in general. The magazine remained in circulation for fifty years, making it Turkey's longest-running theatre periodical.

Also in 1946, one of Ayvaz's mentors, the legendary actor and director Aşot Madatyan, translated Turkish writer Faruk Nafiz Çamlıbel's play *Canavar* (*Monster*) into Armenian, giving it the title *Kazan*, and the play was staged by his theatre company *Stüdyo*. Historically, Armenian had been the primary language of modern theatre in the Ottoman Empire, and the Armenians, who had been the founders of European and modern theatre in the Ottoman Empire, started to once again become 'visible' in the public sphere. This time, however, that took place in an 'underground' zone through the creation of a 'parallel realm' in the universe of Turkish and Muslim theatre as the inevitable consequence of the nationalist forces at work in the recently established nation-state of Turkey.

The Osmanlı Tiyatrosu *(Ottoman Theatre) of Mnakyan, photo of the cast of the play* Besa. *The standing figures include Ahmet Fehim, Binemeciyan Hanım, Tovmas Fasulyaciyan and Mari Nvart, and seated is Binemeciyan Efendi (Photo archive credit: The Hrant Dink Foundation)*

The theatre of a new nation-state in the making: 1922 to 1946

From 1922 to 1946, Armenians had still been taking to the stage, but the language of the plays in which they acted was either Turkish or French. In those years, plays were generally staged in the various districts of Istanbul. In the summer, plays were put on at the Büyükdere Garden of Hafız Ahmet, the Talimhane Altıntepe Garden, the Yenişehir Kuşdili Theatre, and the Üsküdar Beyleroğlu Garden, and in winter they were staged at the Beyoğlu Ses Theatre (formerly the French Theatre), the Şehzadebaşı Millet (National) Theatre, and the İnci Theatre in Pangaltı (Ayvaz, 2020, p. 7-9).

In earlier times, namely from 1850 to 1908, modern theatre in the Ottoman Empire was predominantly performed and directed by Ottoman Armenians such as Vartovyan (Güllü Agop), Hekimyan, and Beşiktaşlıyan. During the reign of Abdul Hamid II, who ruled the empire from 1876 to 1909, the political atmosphere became extremely strained, and in those times Mardiros Mnakyan (1839-1920) emerged as a prominent figure who was able to keep theatre alive during those thirty-one years of autocratic rule. He founded the *Osmanlı Dram Kumpanyası* (Ottoman Drama Company) in 1882, which staged plays until 1908. During the era of the Young Turks (1908-23) and the Second Constitution (*II. Meşrutiyet*), which lasted from 1908 to 1920, theatrical productions expanded through the increased participation of Turks and Muslims. Between 1918 and 1922, a period of time known as the Armistice Years, modern theatre and entertainment, specifically Armenian theatre, were very prolific in Istanbul, which at the time was occupied by Allied forces. When control of Istanbul was taken over by the Ankara government, many of the actors involved in Armenian theatre temporarily migrated to neighbouring countries. Between 1923 and 1946, the various languages that had been spoken in the Ottoman Empire were no longer heard onstage, as the only language used was modern Turkish. And following the Alphabet Reform that was implemented in 1928, the younger generations started to learn Turkish with the Latin alphabet, as a consequence of which they began to lose touch with their Ottoman cultural heritage, as Turkish had previously been written using the Arabic alphabet. The Armenian thespians who had been the founding members of theatre groups in the Tanzimat era (1838-1876) found that they were no longer allowed to perform in public. During the course of the re-establishment of theatre in the new nation-state of Turkey, the founders of the Republic preferred to 'start from scratch' by trying to create 'firsts' in the Republic (i.e. the first play, the first actor, the first actress, and so on) by 'officially' ignoring but 'unofficially' benefitting from the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual legacy they inherited.

In 1914, the *Dârülbedâyi* (Istanbul Municipal Theatre) was established with a staff that consisted entirely of Turks. Since enthusiasm for the establishment of a Turkish nation-state had taken centre stage in those times, 'political theatre' that touched on social events and turmoil, 'addressed the emotions', and 'motivated the masses' dominated the scene. By the 1920s, the basic requirements for modern Turkish theatre were more or less in place; Turks/Muslims were in attendance at venues and Muslim women educated at the *Dârülbedâyi* began to appear onstage. By then, the *Dârülbedâyi* was going on tour in Anatolia almost every year, and that tradition was carried on until 1942. In 1936, the State Conservatory took over

that mission, and theatrical productions in Turkish spread to every corner of the country within the borders delineated by the National Pact (And, 2004, p. 165).

Starting in 1923, theatre, which was recognized as a powerful means of shaping public opinion, was centrally controlled and encouraged by the Ankara government, and it spread throughout Anatolia. Theatre was thus tasked with the mission of enlightening the people, presenting and promoting the Republic and its principles, and teaching the public how to be 'good citizens'. The expansion of audience capacity and the growth of areas where citizens could attend plays increased the impacts and therefore the importance of artistic expression through theatre. The tradition of having separate male/female areas (*selam/harem*) for audiences was abolished as one means of driving forward the development of a 'culture of theatre' among citizens. Men and women could now watch plays together, and they were encouraged as audience members to absorb the 'messages' delivered onstage as 'equal' citizens. It was in this period that Turkish was adopted as the sole language of theatre, as a result of which Armenian was removed from the stage as a legitimate language.

The cast of the Dârülbedâyi *for a performance at the Ferah Theatre. From left to right standing are, among others, Muammer Karaca, Behzat Butak, Hazım Körmükçü, Galip Arcan, Muhsin Ertuğrul, Nurettin Şefkati, and Küçük Kemal. Sitting second from right is Neyyire Neyir Ertuğrul (Photo archive credit: The Hrant Dink Foundation).*

In addition to the *Dârülbedâyi* and State Conservatory, *Halkevleri* (People's Houses), which were community centres founded under the patronage of the state from 1932 to 1951, encouraged amateur theatre groups to put on plays and took on the responsibility of bringing 'revolution plays' to every part of the country (Faroqhi & Öztürkmen, 2014, pp. 4-17). They

presented and promoted those principles of the Republic that called on citizens to unite as Turks and Muslims and come together as a nation. Even local improvisational theatres were given similar responsibilities. At the same time, the Turkish Teachers' Union took on an active role, and writers were asked to write plays about such topics. As strong relationships were being forged with Turkey's neighbours and a modern outlook was being drawn up for the new nation-state, the performing arts took centre stage, as exemplified by the fact that the Shah of Iran attended a performance of a Turkish opera and Greek theatre companies were invited to Turkey (And, 2004, pp. 155-65). While actresses and actors such as Bedia Muvahhit, Raşit Rıza, and Zozo Dalmas visited Greece and Turkey as 'ambassadors of peace' within the scope of initiatives to strengthen international friendships in the higher political sphere, plays depicting how the Greeks were driven from Anatolia were being performed in rural Anatolia. In this period, the most important person to make a mark on the realm of theatre in Turkey was undoubtedly Muhsin Ertuğrul, who made great efforts to establish regional theatres, raise awareness about Western theatre, and develop a culture of theatre in Turkey. As an actor who was familiar with Ottoman theatre but also closely followed Western avant-garde movements, Muhsin Ertuğrul made extensive use of the country's Ottoman legacy to create a robust national theatre, and he features most prominently in histories of Turkish theatre. Ayvaz got to know and stayed in contact with leading figures in Turkish theatre such as Muhsin Ertuğrul, Haldun Taner, and Metin And by means of his magazine *Kulis*. Ayvaz's archive demonstrates how those seemingly 'disconnected worlds' established a dynamic relationship with one another, as well as how they worked together and 'collaborated' in the 'background'. According to Ayvaz's daughter, he and Muhsin Ertuğrul remained fast friends until his death (Drameryan, 2021b).

Hagop Ayvaz in 1935 (Photo archive credit: The Hrant Dink Foundation)

Hagop Ayvaz: From the *gayan*s to crossing borders

Hagop Ayvaz was born in the Yenikapı district of Istanbul in 1911. His name at birth was Hagop Ayvazyan, but as a consequence of the Surname Law that was enacted in 1934, he was forced to drop the suffix '-yan' from his surname, as it was a signifier of Armenian origins. At one point he started to refer to himself as '*Langalı Baron Hagop*' ('Baron Hagop from Langa'). Langa was a predominantly *Rum* (Greek) and Armenian district on the fringes of Istanbul that was famous for its watermelon fields.

When Ayvaz was a child, his father passed away, and after his mother's second marriage, the family moved to the district of Topkapı in Istanbul. He was only ten years old at the time. In the 1920s, many Armenians settled in Topkapı. After World War I and the signing of the armistice in 1918, a significant segment of the Armenian population that had survived the deportations and massacres that took place during the war relocated to Istanbul. *Gayan*s (camps) were set up in Istanbul to accommodate the rural Armenian populace that had moved to the city, and Topkapı was one of the districts where such camps were located (Ayvaz, 2020, p. 10). Ayvaz grew up observing how the war and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey impacted his fellow Armenians. There was a police station in the district and right next to it

was the single-storey building that housed the Armenian Association. He was introduced to theatre via the association, and on that point he once noted, 'Şavarş Boğos Karakaş's company was performing a heart-breaking drama from Mnakyan's repertoire. It was as if my destiny had pushed me towards the stage at a very young age' (Ayvaz, 2020, p. 11).

He attended primary school at the Levon Vartuhyan School in Topkapı and junior high at the Esayan School in Taksim. Because his family was facing financial difficulties in those times, he had to drop out of school and work as an apprentice at his step-father's shoemaking workshop. There he met Harutyun Samurkaş, who loved theatre as much as him and was working at the *Şafak Açıkhava Tiyatrosu* (Şafak Open Air Theatre), which was located next to the Narlıkapı church. In 1928, he asked Samurkaş to take him to the *Şark Tiyatrosu* (Oriental Theatre) in Narlıkapı, which was run by the Hagopyans, but he kept it a secret from his step-father. That day, young Ayvaz found himself onstage wearing a peasant's outfit. His enthusiasm and talent were met with approval, and Lusi Hagopyan invited him to join the *Şehzadebaşı Millet Tiyatrosu* (Şehzadebaşı National Theatre). His role was all set for their next play, thus initiating his life onstage, which would continue until his death (Ayvaz, 2020, p. 12).

In 1932, Ayvaz wrote his first play, *Bir Aktörün Hayatı Veyahut Son Perde* (*The Life of an Actor, or the Final Act*), in Turkish, and the script was later translated into Armenian in 1950. In 1935, he started to write for the newspaper *Jamanak*, penning columns about theatre. Mardiros Koçunyan, who was working there at the time, helped him progress in his work, and Krikor Hudaverdyan supported him as well. He began conducting interviews with people involved in theatre and turning them into articles. Before he started publishing *Kulis*, from 1935 to 1946 he wrote about theatre in periodicals like *Turkiya*, *Gavroş*, and *Nor Or*.

In 1936, he was drafted for his mandatory military service. He first served in Afyonkarahisar in central Anatolia, where he stayed for a year and a half, and while he was there he worked at the local cinema and screened contemporary films. In 1937, he married Arşaluys Balayan and they had two children. Like many theatre actors, he was unable to make enough money from acting, so he took up various additional jobs (such as wool dying and working as a sales representative for a textile company).

When World War II broke out in 1939, he was recalled to the army as part of a 'Three Classes' program that had been instituted by the government. In the district of Hadımköy in Istanbul, he was forced to do road and construction work for a period of forty-five days under strenuous conditions. He and his friends Torkom Sırabyan and Berç Manukyan staged plays in the army's theatre. Although he was later discharged from the military, he was conscripted for

a third time in May of 1942 within the scope of a 'Twenty Classes' programme that had been implemented as an additional mandatory military service that solely targeted non-Muslims. As part of that military service, he was sent to serve in Yozgat and Karaman in central Anatolia. Nonetheless, he still managed to get involved in theatre in those places as well, creating a new scene for the traditional shadow-puppet play *Karagöz and Hacivat*. Later he was allowed to dedicate himself to his theatrical activities for the rest of his military service, whereby he staged plays for the military's generals.

When he completed his military service, he returned to Istanbul and started to work for a textile company. In 1942, however, a Wealth Tax was imposed on the non-Muslim population of Turkey, and he did not have the means to pay the tax that the government demanded of him. An officer he had met during his military service in Afyonkarahisar intervened and saved him from being sent to the Aşkale work camp for not paying the tax. In order to make a living he started selling fabric as an itinerant merchant, but he was able to maintain his theatre connections by selling cloth to theatre companies and artists, many of whom were his friends (Atça, 2020, pp. 53-57).

From the 1930s to the 1950s, he mainly worked as an actor. After 1960, he established his own theatre group, the *Küçük Kumpanya* (*Pokr Taderahump*, the Small Company). The group, which was founded as part of the Alumni Organization of the Esayan Armenian School, eventually became a professional independent company.

Aşod Madatyan, Torkom Sırabyan, and Hagop Ayvaz (1934). (Photo archive credit: The Hrant Dink Foundation)

***Kulis*: Creating bonds within and across the community, as well as with the regional/global community**

The first issue of *Kulis*, which contained sixteen pages, had a circulation of 500 copies, but that figure later rose to 2,500. The magazine remained in circulation until December of 1996, meaning that it was published for just over fifty years. *Kulis*, which was not solely

dedicated to Armenian theatre but rather theatrical productions at large, became one of the leading publications about theatre in Turkey. Moreover, above and beyond merely being a theatre magazine, it was as a cultural publication that garnered the interest of the broader community, serving as a venue for the writings of prominent figures. A quick online search of its contents and cover pages illustrates this point.[2] Like Ayvaz himself, his magazine acted as a bridge between artists from different generations who left their mark on Istanbul's cultural and artistic life in the 20th century (Ayvaz, 2020, p. 7).

Some cover pages of Kulis *displayed at the exhibition held in Istanbul. (Photo credit: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat)*

Ayvaz started publishing *Kulis* together with Zareh Arşag and Nazaret Donikyan. After observing that a number of amateur theatre groups from the alumni associations of Armenian high schools had begun emerging in 1946, he thought, 'Why don't we publish a theatre magazine and inform Armenians living abroad about our theatre scene?' His plan was for the magazine to focus on theatre but also include humorous aspects. While it was a good idea, the prevailing political environment posed certain problems, as Armenians were vulnerable to financial difficulties brought on by the wealth tax, among other issues. Once the formal procedures were completed, the publication was launched, but financially the magazine was in the red in its very first year. So, as Ayvaz notes in his memoirs, he decided to travel to cities in other countries in the hope that he would be able to raise enough funds to keep the magazine going. Still, his decision to reach out beyond Istanbul was not just about securing new financial resources. Ayvaz's goal was to connect with the Armenian community living abroad and gather its members around the magazine. In 1950, he left his home, children, and job and hit the road

[2] See https://archive.hrantdink.org/ for the cover and content pages of issues of *Kulis* as well as materials from Hagop Ayvaz's personal archive.

with a suitcase full of issues of *Kulis*. He promoted the magazine, convinced more people to subscribe, and collected content for publication.

Most importantly, he started to create networks within the Armenian community and between communities in different regions. Had Ayvaz stayed in Istanbul, *Kulis* probably would not have remained in circulation for long or been able to operate so efficiently, and if it had been his sole means of making a living, the magazine most likely would not have survived. As he explained, he saved on cigarettes, food, and so forth so that he could keep putting the magazine out. Moreover, to help cover his losses, he took to the stage every year, and with the proceeds from those plays, he found the strength to carry on and reach out to the wider community.

His first stop was Aleppo, where he met artists and made new friends, which enabled him to broaden his circle and attract new subscribers. Later, he moved to Beirut, where, with the help of a friend, he was able to draw in an even wider readership for *Kulis*. The following year Ayvaz headed to Egypt, and again with the help of some local friends he managed to introduce more readers to *Kulis*, and he enjoyed similar successes in Alexandria and Cairo. His itinerary expanded to include Baghdad, Greece, and Tehran, followed by Athens, Sofia, and Yerevan (Noradıkyan & Çalgıcıoğlu, 2020, pp. 47-49). He also drew in subscribers from Paris and the United States in subsequent years. Within the pages of the magazine, he published updates about Armenian artists who had moved to other countries from Istanbul, and he hosted actors, directors, and playwrights from places like Egypt, Aleppo, Thessaloniki, and Lebanon at his home in Istanbul.

In 1950, Ayvaz grabbed a suitcase full of magazines and hit the road. (Photo credit: The Hrant Dink Foundation)

Between 1954 and 1956, Ayvaz published some issues of *Kulis* in Turkish with the support of the Istanbul Operetta Association. Earlier, from 1947 to 1950, he had organized annual '*Kulis* Nights', which brought Armenian and Turkish actors together onstage. Those events facilitated the establishment of channels of communication and means of connecting that led to the creation of new networks and provided a unique opportunity for people to unite around theatre. Notably, the profile of the participants was quite diverse. For example, at one such event Toto Karaca (Felegyan), whom Turkish audiences knew from the silver screen, took to the stage with Nubar Aznavuryan (along with his choir) and some Azerbaijani dancers, and the *Ses Operası Kumpanyası* (Ses Opera Company) put on a performance and the Greek Singer Zmaro Dekavalas gave a concert.

Kulis and the Istanbul Pogrom of September 6-7, 1955

Kulis was published without interruption from 1946 to 1996 despite the fact that it bore witness to multiple coups and incidents involving major social upheaval, as did Ayvaz himself, yet all the while it remained dedicated to 'its publication policy' in line with the terms of the publisher. However, the Istanbul Pogrom of September 6-7, 1955 resulted in the disruption of the issue for that month. The situation was explained to readers in the pages of that month's issue as follows: '*Kulis* has been published for a long time now without deviating from its principles and it has almost always come out on time. But on the painful night of the sixth of September, evil forces destroyed the Varol Printing House, which still remains closed. All the content for this issue of *Kulis* had been prepared in advance and it was supposed to be published on September 15, but people bearing ill intentions left nothing unscathed. We found that all the pages were in disarray as they had been thrown out onto the street, so, unfortunately, we could not put the issue out that day. In the end, after overcoming some major challenges, we were able to get to work with our typesetters. Without a doubt God is by our side. We hope to get the printing house back in working order as soon as possible and *Kulis* will continue as before, striding forward with unwavering steps bolstered by our reliance on the tolerance and support of our readers' (Estukyan, 2020).

Thanks to its class-inclusive style, the audience of *Kulis* was diverse. As Yervant Tomasyan has noted, the type of Armenian used in *Kulis* was spoken by the shoemakers,

fishermen, and small shopkeepers who lived and worked in Istanbul's districts of Kumkapı, Yenikapı, and Samatya. As a language of the streets, that form of Armenian had been widely spoken by the lower and middle classes of Ottoman Armenians. Within the pages of *Kulis*, Ayvaz focused on the social life of Armenians to the same extent that he strove to shed light on Istanbul's theatre scene, and in that process he sought to ensure that the Istanbul dialect was not lost. In 1968, he started writing his memorable column '*Lutsika Dudu*' ('Ms. Lutsika'). As his sharp-tongued persona, Lutsika Dudu 'spoke' the kind of Armenian used in daily life, and like a social media character of today, she provided news and updates about the community.[3]

While he was involved in publishing *Kulis* and busily expanding the magazine's readership, Ayvaz continued to be involved in theatre as both an actor and a director. In 1960, he chaired the theatre committee of the Esayan High School Alumni Association and directed plays with the school's graduates, which marked the beginning of his career as a director and educator of Armenian youth.

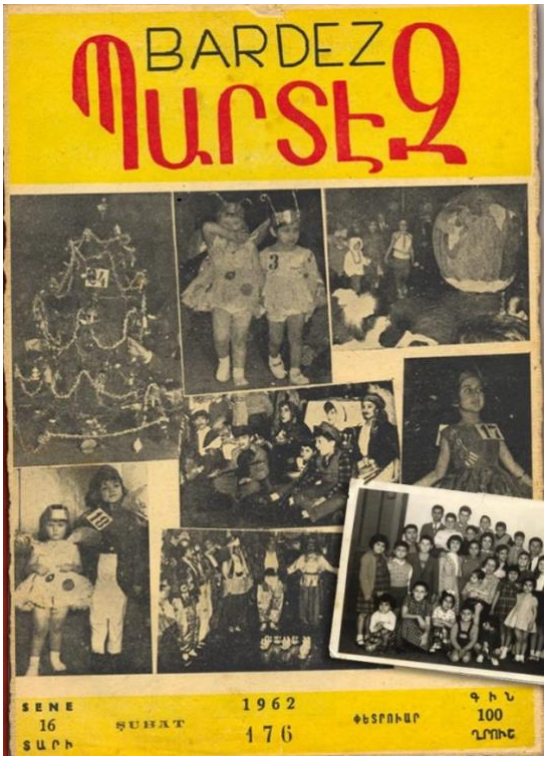
Educating new generations

Karin Karakaşlı, a columnist for the newspaper *Agos*[4] and a prominent writer in the 2000s, has noted that Ayvaz and other senior intellectuals in the Armenian community educated her generation when they were working for *Agos*. She pointed out that as young people who had just graduated from university, she and her contemporaries learned the tricks of the trade by observing those 'Barons' who served as their role models, mentoring them in terms of their proficiency in Armenian language and culture (Karakaşlı, 2020, pp. 27-30).

Ayvaz went on to establish a theatre group called the *Küçük Kumpanya* (Small Company) together with members of the Esayan Armenian High School Alumni Association. Aşot Madatyan, who was a major figure in theatre, mentored him in his efforts to educate the youth and in that way those senior figures maintained their connection with the younger generation (Noradıkyan & Çalgıcıoğlu, 2020, p. 49).

[3] Aras Publishing released a selection of the *Lutsika Dudu* series in 2003. Please click here to see the publication.

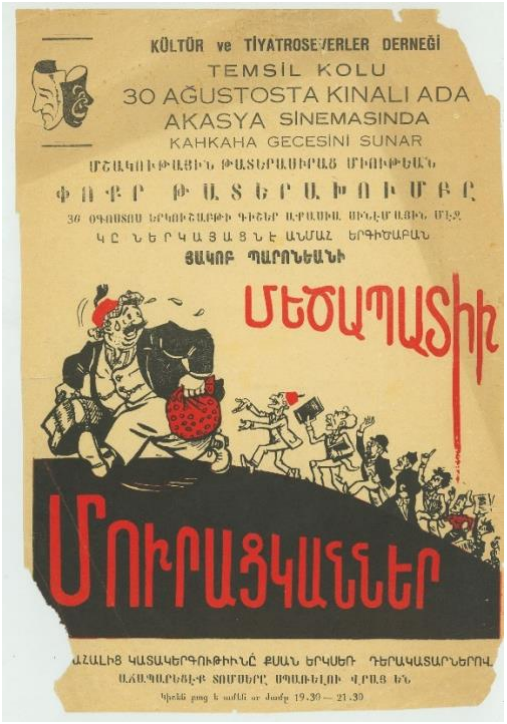
[4] *Agos* was founded in 1996 by the late Hrant Dink and a group of his friends as a means of reporting about the problems facing the Armenians of Turkey. It remains the first bilingual (Armenian and Turkish) newspaper to be published in the era of the Republic. The newspaper focuses on issues such as democratization, minority rights, coming to terms with the past, and the protection and development of pluralism in Turkey, and it also takes up pressing issues concerning Turkey and the world at large. http://www.agos.com.tr/en/home



A cover page of the children's magazine Bardez. *(Photo credit: HYETERT)*

The children who acted in the *Bardez* children's theatre company also made mention of Hagop Ayvaz. As Mariam Kevser Drameryan has reported, thanks to Ayvaz the children of her generation had the opportunity to take part in amateur theatre through the Small Company. Between 1946 and 1969, a children's magazine called *Bardez* was published by Adrine Dadıryan and Pakarat Tevyan. The *Bardez* theatre company was actively engaged in publishing and putting on theatrical performances with children for over twenty years, providing them with linguistic and cultural education,[5] and they staged plays with and for children every year at the *Beyoğlu Ses Tiyatrosu* (Beyoğlu Voice Theatre). Its repertoire was quite diverse and a number of prominent figures were involved with the group, including Tristan Bernard and Jean de Létraz from France, the Armenians Antan Özer and Aşod Madatyan, the Turkish playwright Vedat Nedim Tör, and Michael Pertwee from the UK. Ayvaz trained the young troupe, and he invited some of its members to join his own group so they could keep working in theatre by acting alongside adults. Many eminent artists such as Sosi Cindoyan and Garbis Muradyan took their first steps onstage with the troupe (Drameryan, 2021a).

[5] Some readers of *Bardez*, members of the *Bardez* theatre company, and children of those who grew up in that circle recently posted a video about their story on the YouTube channel *HyeTert* (in Armenian). **Please click here** to watch the video.



Pokr Taderahump (The Small Theatre Company), Medzabadiv Muratsganneri (The Honourable Beggars) of Hagop Baronyan at the Kınalıada Akasya Movie Theatre. (Photo credit: The Hrant Dink Foundation)

While the *Küçük Kumpanya* was also a product of the liberal years of the Republic, in the end it had to shut down its activities because of political upheaval. By the late 1970s, political violence had become a major problem in Turkey. Right-wing ultranationalist groups, sometimes operating in collaboration with the state, launched attacks against the left-wing opposition. Ultimately, that political turbulence resulted in a coup d'état in 1980. Because of the unstable political situation at the time, it was often too dangerous to go outdoors, let alone rehearse for theatrical performances, and the coup of 1980 put an end to the association's cultural activities.

***Kulis* as part of the Armenian community's tradition of publishing**

Kulis can be seen as a continuation of the Armenian tradition of publishing that had gotten started in the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat period. In that regard, Ayvaz followed the traditions of Yertvatz Toloyan (of *Gavroş*) and Hagop Baronyan (of *Tiyatro*), among others.

In the Ottoman Empire, publications started taking on a more independent character in the 1870s as the staff of publishing houses no longer solely consisted of state officials and they

were not financially supported by the state. As a consequence, Ottoman intellectuals from different communities started to publish independently, and a variety of journals and newspapers began to circulate. The press, which emerged as a distinctive force in the political and cultural sphere of the empire, started to shape public opinion in ways that were not always controlled by the government. In historicizing the Armenian satirical press, Anahide Ter Minassian has suggested that the Armenian press went through three phases in the late Ottoman era, the first of which corresponds to the Tanzimat period between 1852 and 1876 when Armenian satirical literature, newspapers, and theatrical works started being published. Notably, the connection between the satirical press and theatre was strong. The second phase started in July of 1908, which was when the Young Turk revolution took place, and it continued until 1914, the year in which the Ottoman Empire entered World War I. Those times marked the heyday of the Armenian press, as after more than thirty years of rule under Abdul Hamid II, the authoritarian regime was removed from power. In 1878, the Constitution of 1876 had been reinstated, censorship waned, and a liberal political environment prevailed, which created favourable conditions for the further development of the Ottoman press in a variety of languages, including Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Bulgarian, Armenian, and Ladino. In the third phase, the Armenian satirical press, which had almost completely disappeared during World War I, rose from the ashes and once again came to the fore. During the armistice years (between 1918 and 1923), Armenian journalists and illustrators became increasingly active in Istanbul (Ter Minassian, 2006, pp. 68-71).

By drawing on that historicization, it could be argued that, together with other newspapers that were published in the Republican period, *Kulis* initiated a fourth phase in the history of the Armenian publishing tradition. The magazine gave rise to a new enlightenment tradition in the years following the founding of the Turkish nation-state. Ayvaz perpetuated his community's heritage and maintained it in the circumstances that prevailed in the Republic of Turkey, and by doing so he contributed to the development of western Armenian language and culture. In addition to safeguarding the connection between Armenians who had left Istanbul and Anatolia and those who remained in Turkey, he also re-established bonds within the broader community via theatre. As an *honnête homme*, his works represented the continuation of humanism and the enlightenment spirit of the congregation tradition in the secular world, as Zekiyan has pointed out (Zekiyan, 2013). He kept up his work as a founder, pioneer, and educator, disseminating the fruits of his efforts and connecting people until the day of his death on September 29, 2006 in Istanbul.

After *Kulis* went out of circulation in 1996, Ayvaz continued writing about theatre in the Armenian-language section of the newspaper *Agos*. Between 1999 and 2001, he penned two series of articles about his fellow actors. As a dedicated archivist, he also collected advertisements, flyers, and brochures related to plays as well as photographs of stage staff and theatregoers, and he kept that memorabilia in shoeboxes at the shoemaker's shop and in shirt-boxes and envelopes at his home. In that way, he was able to maintain a record of every name and event that had contributed to the era in which he'd lived. In reference to the articles he wrote for *Agos*, he said, 'The reason I wrote all of this was to record that era and make sure that the actors who brought it to life don't fall into oblivion. Thanks to their efforts, Armenian theatre experienced a vibrant period in Istanbul. But in the end, I don't know if I succeeded or not. In either case, I bow respectfully before the memory of my dear friends who have passed from this world, and I wish those who are still alive a healthy life. If I have forgotten anyone, may they put it down to my advancing age. Farewell' (Ayvaz, 2020, p. 157).

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