

**Crafting Musical Narratives Around
Sociopolitical Issues in the Greater Middle
East: Personal Insights and Creative
Processes in *Constantina Pole* and *Bacha
Posh***

Onur Ali Yuce

Royal Holloway, University of London

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Onur Yuce, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Onur Yuce Date: 29.12.2023

Statement of Authorship

I, Onur Yuçe, hereby declare that the thesis entitled 'Crafting Musical Narratives Around Sociopolitical Issues in the Greater Middle East: Personal Insights and Creative Processes in *Constantina Pole* and *Bacha Posh*' is my original work and has been prepared by me following the academic integrity guidelines of Royal Holloway, University of London, Music Department.

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- 2) All sources used in the research and writing of this thesis have been appropriately cited and acknowledged.
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I further acknowledge that I am solely responsible for the content of this thesis, and any errors or omissions are my own.

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Date: _ 29.12.2023 _____

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis scrutinises the role of musical theatre in challenging deep-seated sociocultural norms and stimulating discourse on sensitive issues prevalent in the Greater Middle East, particularly within Turkish society. Through the creation of, and critical reflection upon, two seminal musical theatre works – *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* – this research elucidates the capacity of artistic expression to confront and dissect themes such as gender fluidity, cross-dressing, femininity, misogyny, the victimisation of women, societal oppression, familial dynamics, and the underlying cultural and moral frameworks of the region. These projects serve as both artistic endeavours and critical examinations of the societal constructs they engage with.

In my exploration of *Constantina Pole*, the thematic fabric is interwoven with the progressive portrayal of LGBTQ+ narratives reflected in significant Turkish theatre works, such as Ali Poyrazoğlu's *Oğlum Çiçek Açtı* ('My Son Blossomed'), which openly addresses the familial and societal implications of homosexuality within Turkish culture. Complementing this contextual framework, *The Huysuz Show* by Seyfi Dursunoğlu, one of the most seminal works in Turkish entertainment since the 1980s, was a source of inspiration for my project. Its enduring influence has profoundly shaped my approach to musical theatre, infusing the production with a unique blend of cultural critique and performance art that resonates deeply with the audience.

The production also pays homage to the historical layers of Ottoman society's male belly dancers, the *köçek*, infusing a nuanced exploration of gender roles and identity into the fabric of the

musical. The sound of *Constantina Pole* is a homage to the iconic 1980s pop genre, interwoven with the rich musical traditions of Europe and the Arab world, and is synthesised through virtual analogue renditions of the era's classic synthesisers and drum machines, crafting a musical score that resonates with a sense of timeless cultural fusion.

The second part of the thesis examines *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*, the first hip-hop musical in Turkey, which utilises all aspects of the culture – from hip-hop dancing to musical sampling – and uses rapping as the sole form of storytelling. The project addresses themes such as gender fluidity, misogyny, and social oppression, focusing on the practice of *bacha posh* in Afghanistan. The unique storytelling approach, the cultural context, and the production's contributions to the evolution of musical theatre in Turkey are analysed.

The *Bacha Posh* musical finds its roots in the tradition of hip-hop musical theatre, which emerged in the 1990s and 2000s with productions such as *So What Happens Now?*, *Jam on the Groove*, *Rent*, and *Dreamgirls*. This genre has gained prominence through successful shows such as *In the Heights*, *Hamilton*, *The Last Jimmy*, and *Box*, which have all explored themes involving social issues, history, and marginalised communities. *Bacha Posh* utilises hip-hop's historical storytelling function and its connection with the street and marginalised people to scrutinise cultural layers in the Middle East. As a composer, I drew inspiration from Turkish hip-hop, where the pessimism of Arabesque and the romance of Turkish pop blend with rap's 'coolness'. To create a Middle Eastern soundscape, I used sampled local instruments such as the *qanoon* and *oud* and Eastern string sections while incorporating universal hip-hop elements.

Furthermore, the thesis investigates the production aspects of these musicals, including collaboration with performers from various disciplines and their reception in society. It also gives a comparative analysis of the two projects, exploring the similarities and differences in their themes, artistic approaches, and impact on audiences and the theatre industry.

In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights into the power of musical theatre as a tool for challenging sociocultural norms in the Greater Middle East. By presenting these works, the thesis contributes to understanding the intersection between the region's art, culture, and social issues and the potential for musical theatre to catalyse dialogue and transformation. The role of artistic innovation in fostering an environment conducive to social progress is underscored as a vital aspect of achieving meaningful change.

Portfolio of Works

- 1) ***Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*** (at Tatbikat Stage Hall, Ankara, Turkey), 16 August 2022.

<https://youtu.be/1DhfmBy2nFE>

- 2) ***Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*** (at CerModern, Ankara, Turkey), 22 September 2022.

<https://youtu.be/UJmyGaaCBX4>

Musical	Duration
<i>Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical</i>	78 min, 44 sec
<i>Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical</i>	64 min, 25 sec
Total	143 min, 9 sec

Interplay of Film and Sound in the Performance Process

The films in this document and comprehensively listed in the Portfolio of Works section are integral to a full understanding of this work. These films encapsulate the practical aspect of the

research and illustrate the musical theatre work created throughout the process of this PhD study. They are not supplementary, but stand as the primary embodiment of my research outcomes. Thus, it is strongly recommended that they be viewed in conjunction with the written document in order that the depth and scope of the work presented can be fully appreciated.

To ensure clear understanding, the actors in my musical compositions learned their singing parts using the rehearsal tracks, for which I supplied the vocals. These tracks, paired with the films, constitute the essential performance materials for the work. To offer a thorough insight into this process, I have included in Appendix 6 the rehearsal tracks I recorded with my vocals, alongside some of the final tracks recorded live on the performance night (for *Bacha Posh*) of 22 September 2022. These recordings are examples of the resources provided to the singers to facilitate their learning process.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

This thesis explores my journey of creating and producing two original musicals in Turkey, those being, *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*. As a composer, writer, and producer, I aimed to challenge sociocultural norms in Turkey and the Greater Middle East through these innovative musical theatre projects. By using unconventional themes, styles, and production techniques, I sought to shed light on taboo issues related to gender, sexuality, and cultural norms in Turkey and the broader region. With this research, my intention was to examine whether geography is destiny in regard to gender issues, sex discrimination, and misogyny.

Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical is inspired by the life of Turkish drag queen performer Seyfi Dursunoğlu (1932–2020). The musical premiered on 16 July 2021 at the Edirne State Theatre and delved into the themes of misogyny, marginalisation, and the struggles faced by LGBTQ+ individuals within Turkish society. As the first drag queen musical in Turkey, the box office success it received demonstrates that it represents a critical artistic achievement in the country's theatre history. Through this research, my aim was to vocalise the suffering of women and LGBTQ+ communities in Turkey and the Middle East in pursuit of a more accessible and secure global future.

In contrast, *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* explores the practice of *bacha posh* in Afghanistan, where girls are dressed and raised as boys to overcome societal limitations imposed on women. Premiered on 22 September 2022, this musical is one of the first of its kind in Turkey to solely utilise hip-hop and rap as the primary form of storytelling, showcasing the power of this genre to address complex social issues.

As an artist and scholar, my intention in doing this PhD study was to question the history of the Anatolian peninsula, and to identify gender issues, femicides, rapes, honour killings, and misogyny in local myths from Greece to Persia. I want, through musicals, to unite the past with the present day, and to draw attention to a crucial and urgent need: the secular Turkish Republic has been a proud advocate for gender equality and freedom for the last one hundred years; however, with the rapid change that the Middle East is currently experiencing, the nature of emerging political settlements in high-risk and insecure environments may jeopardise stated international commitments to a women's rights agenda (Kandiyoti 2007). Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) took power in 2002, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the forefront, Turkey's political climate has transformed markedly. The government has taken a more authoritarian direction, particularly following the Gezi Park protests in 2013.¹ There has been increasing centralisation of power in the executive branch, coupled with mounting constraints on freedom of expression and media independence. State governance emphasises the integration of Islamic and nationalist principles, and this period has also been characterised by

¹ The protests initially began as a series of demonstrations against plans to redevelop Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park, but quickly escalated into nationwide rallies against perceived authoritarianism and a decline in democratic freedoms under the AKP government.

intense debates around secularism and regressive trends concerning LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights, and the imposition of limitations on nightlife.

Throughout the creation and production of these musicals I faced various challenges, including financial constraints, conservative cultural norms, and the need to work with performers from different disciplines and lived experiences. Despite these obstacles, both musicals have achieved notable success in Turkey's professional theatre scene, contributing to the growth and diversification of Turkish musical theatre. In this thesis, I share my experiences, insights, and reflections on these original musicals' creation and production, in the hope of inspiring further innovation and exploration in musical theatre.

1.2 Scope and Structure of the Thesis

Delving into the musical theatre landscape of Turkey and the Middle East, my approach melds personal artistic inquiry with the broader narratives shaping cultural discourse. In developing *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*, I interrogated themes that defy entrenched norms and taboos, particularly gender fluidity and LGBTQ+ representation.

As I undertook the multifaceted roles of writer, composer, librettist, producer, and director, I sought to infuse my work with a sense of place within Turkey's cultural tapestry. This process was driven by an urge to challenge the systemic hypocrisy, bigotry, and injustice that pervade gender

roles, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ rights in the Middle East, all framed through the lens of my Turkish identity.

The narratives crafted in my musicals mirror the cultural critique inherent in the works of influential Turkish artists like Dursunoğlu. They underscore the vital role of authenticity and self-representation in the arts. The incorporation of hip-hop in *Bacha Posh* serves as a nod to street culture's powerful commentary on social issues, thereby striking a chord with the youth who find their voice in the rhythmic rebellion of hip-hop. This artistic endeavour, steeped in autoethnographic practice, provides a reflective view of my creative output, presenting it as a dynamic cultural artefact that engages with and reflects upon the evolving societal landscape of contemporary Turkey and the broader Middle East.

This thesis is structured into two distinct parts, each focusing on one of my two innovative musical theatre projects. The first part delves into the processes involved in creating and producing *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*, discussing its themes, challenges, and impact on the Turkish theatre scene. The second part explores *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*, examining its unique storytelling approach, the cultural context, and its contributions to the evolution of musical theatre in Turkey. Finally, the conclusion comprehensively analyses the parallels and differences between these two groundbreaking projects, summarising their collective impact in respect of challenging sociocultural norms in the Greater Middle East through musical theatre.

Chapter 2. Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical

2.1 Introduction and Research Rationale

My primary rationale was to use the vehicle of musical theatre to highlight, expose, and initiate discussions on taboo issues that may interfere with individuality and notions of civil freedom, with reference to case studies I generated myself via the staging of two specific musical productions in Turkey and among the Turkish diaspora. While these two works are both context- and geoculturally specific, I hope to draw lessons that are more universally applicable from their examples, and move towards issue-based interrogations of gender and sex discrimination in working through the creative and production processes.

The first musical I composed and produced, titled *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*, is the first drag queen musical in Turkey, and is inspired by the life of a Turkish drag queen performer named Seyfi Dursunoğlu (1932–2020). The plot describes misogyny, and the marginalisation and struggle of LGBTQ+ individuals within Turkish society.

Although *Constantina Pole* is set in the 1980s, my references to Greek (Medusa) and Persian (Yazata and Ahriman) mythologies transform the work into a human–geographical debate. These mythological tales present ways in which femininity has been perceived within Asia Minor over many years.

While working as a civil servant, Dursunoğlu started performing as a drag queen comedian during the Ramadan night festivities in the 1970s. His improvisational sketches, inspired by *tuluat*² in Ottoman theatre, drew the public's attention, leading to his casino and nightclub appearances. In 1970, Dursunoğlu invented an alter ego, named 'Huysuz Virjin' ('Cranky Virgin'), during his performances in Klüp 12, a (now defunct) night club in Beyoğlu, Istanbul (Atay and Akşit 2004: 102).

I was Turkey's first-ever drag queen performer, but that was not the only thing I offered. I danced, sang, mocked, and teased people in the audience, and made two-hour impressions, thus creating a full-fledged show that lasted over forty years. (Ulusum 2016)³

In 1976, after attending a comedy quiz show in drag on TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, which was the only national public broadcaster from 1964 to 1990), Seyfi Dursunoğlu's career really took off, and his drag persona became an instant celebrity. Between 1976 and 2020, he was featured in five motion pictures, two comedy series, and two commercial films, and he additionally hosted five floor shows (2004–2018) and had a programme on primetime TV (1997–2008).

2.2 Research Context

Gender, sex discrimination, and misogyny remain critical issues in Turkey, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals and women. The government's censorship of LGBTQ+ representation in media and

² *Tuluat* is a form of Turkish theatre that has its roots in Ottoman shadow puppetry. It combines both scripted and improvised dialogue, and often includes interaction with the audience. *Tuluat* is a significant aspect of Turkey's cultural heritage and continues to influence contemporary theatre in the country.

³ Ulusum, Ece. 'Seyfi Dursunoğlu (Huysuz Virjin) Röportaj'. YouTube, uploaded by Ece Ulusum, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBJ7EqRm_dI&t=5s&ab_channel=EceUlusum (accessed 14 February 2024).

public performances, as exemplified by the 2007 ban on cross-dressing artists by the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), has led to the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ individuals and artists. Similarly, women in Turkey continue to face discrimination and violence, despite legal protections. However, artists like Seyfi Dursunoğlu have continued to push the boundaries and challenge norms, even in the face of censorship and social stigma. My primary rationale was to use musical theatre to highlight and expose taboo issues related to individuality, civil freedom, and women's rights, drawing on local and global contexts to generate universal lessons. As part of my thesis, I aim to challenge the emerging norms propagated by certain factions within Turkey that are associated with the AKP and that advocate for the introduction of sharia law. These norms pose a threat to the progress made in women's rights, as they mandate conservative dress, restrict freedom of movement, and limit women's roles in society to domestic and reproductive functions. Moreover, they also pose significant risks to the autonomy and rights of the LGBTQ+ community.

My study aims to contribute to ongoing conversations around LGBTQ+ rights, representation, and activism, as well as regarding women's rights and gender equality, both in Turkey and beyond, and to generate new insights into the potential of musical theatre as a tool for social and political change. Drawing on examples from both Anglo-American musical theatre and Ottoman theatre traditions, my research aims to deepen our understanding of the intersections between gender, sexuality, culture, and politics in contemporary Turkey. Specifically, I hope to explore how gender non-conforming artists and women artists negotiate their identities and

relationships with audiences, and how the creation and production of original musicals can open up space for resistance and expression among marginalised communities.

I used qualitative methods to conduct my research, such as observations and textual analysis of media representations of gender non-conforming artists and women artists. Observations of rehearsals and performances provided a window into the creation and production of original musicals and the ways in which these productions navigate social and political constraints. Textual analysis of media representations of gender non-conforming artists and women artists enabled me to understand how mainstream media shapes public perceptions of gender, sexuality, and women's rights issues. In her insightful analysis of gender dynamics in the Ottoman Empire, Mansbridge (2017) reveals a fascinating period where societal norms were uniquely challenged and reinterpreted:

When it was considered inappropriate for women to perform openly cross-dressing belly dancing, men thrived between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in [the] Ottoman Empire. As a result, while the wives, female relatives, concubines, and eunuchs were sequestered in the harem, boys took their place as court entertainers. (Mansbridge 2017: 22)

Male belly dancers were called *köçek*. They grew their hair long, wore female outfits, danced suggestively, and copied feminine gestures. This phenomenon worked on three levels in Ottoman society, engaging with both modernisation and conservatism: it removed most women from the stage but at the same time was somehow appreciated by people who wanted to see female figures performing; it also provided a zone within which openly queer behaviour and the fair

practice of homoeroticism was acceptable. *Köçeks* danced at the introduction section of the *Orta Oyunu*,⁴ and a group of *zenne*⁵ would come out before the main event of the performance.

The story of *Constantina Pole*, inspired by Mr Dursunoğlu's life, takes place in his living room, where he fantasises about being a drag queen performer in a nightclub in Istanbul. He fancies that he is a flamboyant diva drag queen, coming from *köçek* and *zenne* traditions, but with a Western influence, just like the original 'Cranky Virgin'; in reality, however, this is all a charade, enacted behind the closed walls of his home. Although it appears that he is getting ready for a performance, the stage setting, the floor lamp, the home telephone, the ironing board, a bergère, and a large dresser make it apparent that the character is at home. The audience learns from the incoming call that the character's mother has recently passed away, and although his sister wants him to attend the funeral, he refuses. One thing is clear: after her death, he does not have to keep his promise to his mother to stay in the closet. As he prepares for his imaginary show, he faces up to the past. After the musical stand-up comedy and his taking a bow, he calls an unknown person and then takes a handful of ambiguous pills that cause him to hallucinate and pass out. The ending is uncertain: it may be death, a blackout, or just that the new life without the presence of his mother will bring massive changes.

⁴ An improvised Ottoman theatre from the 1800s, performed in an elliptical open field called a *palanga*. Men and women sat separately in the audience: men sat in a place called the 'rank', while women sat in a 'cage'.

⁵ Male actors impersonating females.

The way the protagonist becomes the 'Cranky Virgin' follows a local moral code, hence enabling the fiction to embrace a globalised depth. Dursunoğlu describes in his own words how he chose his alias:

During the 1960s, in Istanbul, there was a famous Kanto singer called Petite Virgin. I wanted that name for myself. But at 5'6" without the heels, I was hardly petite, only a virgin. For the Ramadan festivities, I oversaw a drag act and gave directions to every performer. Leaders are always unlikable, as they criticise everything. There, I decided to call myself 'The Cranky Virgin' because it summed it all (Ozkarabekir 2017).

Overall, my research seeks to use musical theatre as a platform to engage with issues of gender and sex discrimination, as well as misogyny and women's rights issues, in Turkey and among the Turkish diaspora. Through the creation and production of two original musicals, my research aims to contribute to ongoing conversations around LGBTQ+ rights, representation, and activism, as well as regarding women's rights and gender equality, and to highlight the potential of the arts as a tool for social and political change. Drawing on local and global contexts, my research aims to generate universal lessons and insights into the intersections between gender, sexuality, culture, and politics in contemporary Turkey.

2.3 Research Methodology

This research project employed a qualitative research design that drew on multiple data sources, including academic articles, books, documentaries, newspaper articles, ethnographic observations, and critical analysis of artistic productions. The interdisciplinary approach combines insights from political developments, social shifts, and theatrical and cultural studies to examine the intersection of gender, sexuality, and culture in the context of Turkey and its diaspora.

The representation of LGBTQ+ themes in Turkish theatre offers a unique lens through which to understand the broader sociocultural dynamics in Turkey. While, historically, Turkish plays have rarely explored non-heteronormative identities, contemporary works are beginning to incorporate these themes.

'When tracing texts that address homosexuality in Turkey, apart from the play *Çıkmaz Sokak* ('Dead-end Street') written by Şahabettin Süleyman in 1911, we do not come across another play that addresses homosexuality until today' (Akin 2019: 20). Indeed, during this period, it is noted that male and female roles were represented without deviating from their established forms; it is difficult to find any representation outside of a heterosexual relationship definition.

Oğlum Çiçek Açtı ('My Son Blossomed') by Ali Poyrazoğlu is another significant work in this context. It is a play by Ali Poyrazoğlu, a renowned Turkish actor, playwright, and author, based on *Norman, Is That You?* by Ron Clark and Sam Bobrick. Just like the original play, Poyrazoğlu's adaptation deals with the topic of homosexuality and delves into the challenges, prejudices, and societal pressures faced by individuals due to their sexual orientation in the Turkish context. The story provides insight into familial and societal dynamics and reactions when a family member comes out as gay. Through this adaptation, Poyrazoğlu underscores the struggles and emotional turmoil faced by individuals and their families in a society where homosexuality is still a significant taboo. The play is a noteworthy contribution to Turkish theatre, given its direct and open addressing of homosexuality.

In Turkish theatre, there is a notable absence of musicals centred explicitly on LGBTQ+ themes or characters, particularly drag queens. This absence can be attributed to various factors, including societal conservatism, governmental policies, and cultural nuances. The lack of representation not only deprives audiences of diverse narratives but also underscores the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in gaining visibility and acceptance within broader Turkish society. *Constantina Pole* offers a nuanced exploration of LGBTQ+ issues, delves into the complexities of sexual identity roles, and integrates cross-dressing elements.

While conceptualising my PhD project titled *Constantina Pole*, I derived considerable inspiration from the life of Seyfi Dursunoğlu and his onstage persona, Huysuz Virjin; in my interpretation their artistic expressions bore semblance to musical theatre. I aspired to augment this narrative by integrating mythological elements into a drag show format to offer the audience a nuanced and multifaceted theatrical experience. Moreover, the prevailing political climate in Turkey, marked by an escalating drift towards radicalism concerning LGBTQ+ rights, freedom of speech, secular values, established gender roles, and evident misogyny and bigotry, played a pivotal role in driving the motivation and direction of my research. It is imperative to note that while other shows may have contributed to the broader milieu, none served as a direct influence. Instead, this project emerged as the culmination of years of introspection, artistic synthesis, and a response to pressing sociopolitical issues in Turkey.

The play is based on three central case studies: the life of Seyfi Dursunoğlu, and the stories of Yazata and Ahriman, and of Medusa. Combining the three stories and using a postmodern

approach to create an intertextual bricolage,⁶ *Constantina Pole* parodies the didactic and sexist absurdity of local moral norms that have remained intact for thousands of years⁷ around Anatolia. The incorporation of the reinterpreted Persian myth of Yazata and Ahriman and the Greek myth of Medusa into the musical provided an opportunity to examine the themes of androcentric expression and of new life sprouting from the spilling of innocents' blood through decapitation/castration.

The research utilised several data collection methods to examine these case studies. Firstly, archival materials were analysed to explore the historical and cultural context of the case studies; this included sources such as academic literature, newspaper articles, and historical records related to the entertainment industry in Turkey and its diaspora. Secondly, ethnographic observations were conducted both by attending productions of *Constantina Pole* and by engaging with key stakeholders in the production process, including the creative team, performers, and audience members; this provided an opportunity to examine the reception of the musical and explore how it addresses issues of gender and sexuality in Turkish society.

Finally, a critical analysis of the artistic productions was conducted. This involved close readings of the musical score examples, lyrics, and stage directions to identify how gender and sexuality are represented and performed in the production. Additionally, the research examined the use

⁶ The concept of 'intertextual bricolage' is further discussed in section 2.4.6, where its application within the context of this research is explored in detail.

⁷ Hesiod's *Theogony*, a work from around the eighth century BCE, is one of the earliest sources of Greek mythology. Considering that this thesis was primarily written in the year 2023, approximately 2,823 years have passed since the origin of the myth of Medusa, dating back to the eighth century BCE (Solmsen 2023).

of sound, stage sets, choreography, and costume design to create a 'time capsule' that takes the spectator to a specific time and location in Turkey's history. The critical analysis also explored how *Constantina Pole* engages with the cultural phenomenon of retro culture.

Data from these multiple sources was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The analysis aimed to identify key themes and patterns in the data related to gender, sexuality, and culture in the context of Turkey and its diaspora.

In summary, this research project employed a qualitative research design that utilised archival materials, ethnographic observations, and critical analysis of artistic productions to examine the intersection of gender, sexuality, and culture in the context of Turkey and its diaspora. Drawing on multiple data sources and utilising a postmodern approach to data analysis, the research aims to provide new insights into how gender and sexuality are represented and performed in Turkish society.

2.4 Compositional Approach and Personal Style

In this section, I delve into the compositional approach and personal style utilised in creating *Constantina Pole*. By examining various influences, techniques, and elements from the 1980s, I strove to produce a unique musical and theatrical experience that captures the era's essence while reflecting my artistic vision.

2.4.1 Compositional Approach

1. Musical influences: drawing from the iconic sounds of 1980s pop music, I referenced various artists and styles, such as Johnny Hates Jazz, Erol Evgin, Chaka Khan, and Miles Davis. Additionally, European pop – mainly Italian, Spanish, and Greek – and Arabic music have influenced the composition, creating a culturally rich soundscape. For instance, Johnny Hates Jazz's 'Shattered Dreams' inspired 'Medusa & Deniz', with its rhythmic feel and phrasing. The electric bass sound is also very similar in timbre to the original recording; however, the drums are heavier on the low end, and the tempo is much faster due to the dramaturgic intensity of the tune. In brief, that period's trademarks incorporated signature rhythmic rim shots, exaggerated tom fills, large percussion sets, electric guitar playing muted riffs, dissonant synthesiser attacks over solos, and extended sections with changing keys for improvisations.
2. Instrumentation and synthesiser engines: I employed virtual analogue versions of classic 1980s synthesisers and drum machines, such as the Minimoog, Roland D-50, New England Digital Synclavier II, PPG wave 2.2, Roland Jupiter 8, Ensoniq Mirage, Yamaha DX7, Fairlight CMI IIX, and Linn Electronics LM-1 Drum Computer. I used Logic Pro X to work with various synthesiser engines, including analogue, sync, wavetable, and FM.
3. In terms of the orchestration, I favoured the iconic sounds of 1980s pop songs, incorporating signature rhythmic rim shots, exaggerated tom fills, large percussion sets, electric guitar playing muted riffs, dissonant synthesiser attacks over solos, and

extended sections with changing keys for improvisations. Fretless bass, electric piano sound, synthesiser bass sound, and a Linn LM-1 drum machine became the virtual backbone of my orchestra. The immediacy of the librettos brought sudden stylistic, harmonic, and time signature changes, breaking the symmetry of a standard pop song structure. When discussing the rhythmic complexity of the piece, it is essential to note the frequent time signature changes. In musical composition, lyrical content often plays a significant role in determining the rhythmic structure of a piece. As exemplified in Example 1 (see below), the time signatures – 5/4, 4/4, and 6/4 – vary dynamically, resulting in a unique rhythmic landscape. This shift is not arbitrary; instead, it is intimately tied to the syllabic count of the lyrics. Each lyric line's specific syllable count requires a corresponding time signature to ensure the words and music align seamlessly. This symbiotic relationship between poetry and rhythm fosters a sense of rhythmic instability and variety, enhancing the piece's emotional resonance and expressive depth.

The First
Heartbreak
excerpt from minute 1:42-2:00

♩=145

Voice
Ya ra lan dım aşk sa de ce ka bul gö ren mi ol mak zo run da ta mam de dim a ma dist.

Electric Guitar

Rhodes

Violin 1

Viola

Fretless Bass Guitar

Drum Set
♩=145



6

Voice
u nut ma dım göz le ri ni ka çı rı şı ni u zak la ra

E. Gtr.

Rhodes

Vln. 1

Vla.

Bass

Dr.
mp *ff*

Example 1: The metric changes example from 'Music 7: The First Heartbreak' (transcribed to staff notation from the electronic track)

The 1980s in Turkey were a period of musical experimentation and development. Artists like Onno Tunç began synthesising traditional Turkish musical forms with global pop and rock influences. Electronic instruments such as synthesisers and drum machines began to appear alongside traditional ones, creating a new sound palette for Turkish pop. This era also reflected broader cultural shifts as Turkey became more open to Western influences, leading to a dynamic and rapidly evolving music scene.

Onno Tunç⁸ and his contemporaries often incorporated elements of Turkish folk music into their compositions. This included modal scales, folk melodies, and rhythmic structures. Traditional instruments such as the *bağlama* (a stringed instrument), *ney* (an end-blown flute), and *qanoon* (a zither) were used in new and innovative ways within the context of pop music arrangements.⁹

Onno Tunç skilfully combined elements of Turkish folk music with contemporary pop and Western harmonies. His arrangements featured lush orchestration, combining traditional Turkish instruments with Western orchestral elements. This created a rich, textured sound that was both modern and deeply rooted in Turkish musical heritage. His compositions often had an immediate appeal, yet they revealed layers of musical sophistication upon closer listening. He was keen to

⁸ Onno Tunç (1948–1996), a distinguished figure in the Turkish music industry, was recognised for his pivotal role as a composer, arranger, and producer, particularly shaping the landscape of Turkish pop throughout the 1980s and 1990s. His contributions were instrumental in blending Armenian heritage with contemporary Turkish sounds.

⁹ Onno Tunç’s signature composition style is evident in ‘Ünzile’, Aksu, S. 1986. ‘Ünzile’. YouTube, uploaded by Müziğin Ruhu, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmvfQOJtiOE&list=PLX_ZvUwNvFB2VaehmX2AYWxWTNY7ysYrF&index=14&ab_channel=M%C3%BCzi%C4%9FinRuhu (accessed 1 February 2024).

experiment with sudden changes in key, tempo, and time signature, keeping listeners engaged and adding surprise to his music.¹⁰

My composition in Example 1 draws significant inspiration from Onno Tunç's quintessential pop arrangement style, a hallmark of the 1980s Turkish pop scene. His approach to melding melodious lines with changing time signatures is echoed in my work, aiming to capture the distinct musical zeitgeist of that era.

2.4.2 Lyric Writing

To reflect the unique storytelling aspect of the project, I focused on simplifying and compressing original anecdotes rather than adhering to traditional song structures or rhyming schemes. Morphologically, Turkish is an agglutinating language, meaning that it relies on the addition of suffixes that build upon one another, and making it quite open to rhyming possibilities.

git + mek = to go

kaç + mak = to flee

gid + en = one who goes

kaç + an = one who flees

gid + en + ler = the people who go

kaç + an + lar = the people who flee

gid + en + ler + den = from the people who go

kaç + an + lar + dan = from the people who flee

¹⁰ In Levent Yüksel's 'Uçurtma Bayramları', by Onno Tunç, the song's structure is marked by sudden key changes. Yüksel, Levent. 'Uçurtma Bayramları'. 1993. YouTube, uploaded by Müziğin Ruhu, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1Pgwl1oWo&list=PLX_ZvUwNvFB2VaehmX2AYWxWTNY7ysYrF&index=19&ab_channel=M%C3%BCzi%C4%9FinRuhu (accessed 1 February 2024).

This approach allowed for greater flexibility in conveying emotions and narratives within the boundaries of the 1980s pop sound. However, in order to stay clear of conventional dramatic musical lyricism I did not try to find and match the correct rhymes and syllabic metres for most of the repertoire. Instead, I sought the shortest sentence that could describe a whole set of intricate events.

In my research, I also explored the impact of 1980s Turkish pop and rock music on the lyric-writing process for my musicals. Iconic artists from that era, such as Sezen Aksu,¹¹ Ajda Pekkan,¹² Kayahan,¹³ and Erol Evgin¹⁴ influenced aesthetics, musical composition, arranging, instrumentation, and singing styles, and inspired my approach to crafting the lyrics. These artists were known for their ability to convey deep emotions and tell compelling stories through their song writing.

In addition to the influences mentioned above, I was inspired by the rich mythological tales from Ancient Greece and Persia, incorporating some of their themes and motifs into the performance to enhance its narrative depth and cultural resonance. For example, the stories of Medusa (Erhat 2015, translated by Yuce) and of Yazata and Ahriman (Şehbenderzade 2007, translated by Yuce)

¹¹ Sezen Aksu: a legendary Turkish pop singer/songwriter born on 13 July 1954, known for her powerful voice and emotive ballads, often called the 'Queen of Turkish Pop'.

¹² Ajda Pekkan: a prominent Turkish pop singer and actress born on 12 February 1946, who has enjoyed a long and successful career, known for her powerful stage presence and catchy tunes.

¹³ Kayahan: an acclaimed Turkish singer/songwriter and composer born on 29 March 1949, known for his romantic songs and contributions to Turkish pop music. He passed away on 3 April 2015.

¹⁴ Erol Evgin is a well-known Turkish pop and rock singer born on 9 April 1947, famous for his smooth voice and popular hits.

share similar traits. Given my involvement in rendering them from their original languages, these translations offer a unique perspective and interpretation.

Two drops of blood spill from the beheaded Medusa on the soil, and her children grow from those drops on the land. (Erhat 2015: 219)

On the Earth, where his blood is spilt, a sacred Mandrake plant grows, with intertwined roots resembling a man and woman. (Şehbenderzade 2007: 35)

The themes these two stories share are those of androcentric expression and of new life sprouting from the innocents' spilt blood: decapitation is equivalent to castration (Freud 1922). The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration linked to the sight of something. Numerous analyses have made us familiar with the occasion for this: it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair and essentially those of his mother (Hertz 1983). It is possible to challenge the link between death and femininity canonised in Freud's Medusan formula 'to decapitate = to castrate' by arguing that the horror associated with the mythical Medusa is a phallogocentric construct, a product of deep-seated anxiety towards women's creative capacity (Morse 2018: 180).

Using intertextual bricolage, *Constantina Pole* parodies the didactic and sexist absurdity of local moral norms that have remained intact for hundreds of years around Anatolia. In 'Music 3: Promise Mama', Constantina's mother tries to advise him to stay in the closet, while voicing the reinterpreted Persian myth of Yazata and Ahriman:

The separated bulbs would shriek in pain, cursing whoever heard its cry nearby.
The screams would reach the skies, raining down as death and damnation.
The separated bulbs, man, and woman, departed, crying their eyes out.
All of this started because of a blink of light, because of doubt.

So, if you ever find a Mandrake, don't ever dig it up. Don't you split the roots, don't let us hear its damned screams, don't bring the scourge upon us.

2.4.3 Incorporation of Diegetic Sounds

In order to immerse the audience in the drama, I wove diegetic sounds into the compositions, such as those of crashing waves, seagulls, the hoots and humming engines of old ferries, roller washing machines, old Turkish classical music recordings, and rotary telephone bells; these sounds help to establish a vivid sense of place and time throughout the performance.

As the play is set in 1980s Beyoglu, Istanbul, I sought to create a time capsule that would take the spectator to a specific time and location, using music, sound, stage sets, choreography, and costume. In Turkey, during the 1970s and 1980s, there were nightclubs known as 'family casinos' (not related to gambling casinos) where families could enjoy watching their favourite performers live on stage over dinner and drinks. Family casinos closed during the 1990s, and nightclubs shifted to marginalised places that families did not visit. Later generations could only experience the original family casinos of previous decades by watching them depicted in movies. This phenomenon helped to create an overly romantic view of those times and places, and the perception of nightlife enjoyment began to be defined as a lost era. Change in the entertainment industry led to a yearning for retro culture, and the emergence of a new generation of retro lovers with borrowed nostalgia for bygone periods. A convergence of the following cultural and technological factors gives rise to retro culture:

- the emergence of a new generation unit
- a new structure of feeling
- new and old technologies.

The term 'structures of feeling' is defined by Williams¹⁵ as 'the intangible and fleeting felt sense of a lived culture as it is experienced at a specific place and point in time by a specific group or groups of people' (Hogarty 2017: 27). By allowing easy access to earlier popular music, new technologies such as the Internet and mobile devices enable and support the retro phenomenon and the hauntological structure of sensation. As Fisher¹⁶ puts it, 'everything coincides with everything else' on the Internet – Jimi Hendrix exists in the same temporal and spatial sphere as does Nicki Minaj (Hogarty 2017: 45). 'There's a crisis of over-availability – nothing dies. It comes back as a box set retrospective or on YouTube' (Fisher 2011).

2.4.4 Exploration of Kitsch and Camp

Embracing the cultural mosaic of the 1980s and the flamboyant personality of Seyfi Dursunoğlu, I incorporated elements of kitsch and camp into the compositions, both musically and visually. Kitsch refers to art or other objects that typically have popular appeal but are considered tacky, gaudy, or overly sentimental. Kitsch is characterised by its mass-produced, commercial nature and lack of sophistication or subtlety. It often embraces clichés and sometimes has an appeal precisely because of its bad taste or irony (Tedman 2010: 56). Camp is an aesthetic style and sensibility that regards something as appealing because of its bad taste and ironic value. It often involves a deliberate and sophisticated appreciation of the 'artifice' or 'exaggeration' of certain cultural elements. Camp can be humorous, extravagant, and theatrical, and it often revels in the absurdity and flamboyance of certain aspects of pop culture. The term was notably explored in

¹⁵ Raymond Williams, 1921–1988, Welsh socialist writer.

¹⁶ Mark Fisher, 1968–2017, English writer, music critic, cultural theorist.

Susan Sontag's 1964 essay 'Notes on "Camp"', where she describes it as the 'love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' (Rebentsich 2014: 237). The camp is strongly associated with LGBTQ+ culture and has influenced fashion, theatre, and other artistic expressions.

This approach aligns with the playful, over-the-top nature of Dursunoğlu's artistic persona, which allowed him to celebrate his queerness publicly. The costumes of *Constantina Pole* are influenced by the authentic costumes of Dursunoğlu, and they also reflect the bright and vivid fashion design and power dressing of the 1980s. Another example I derived inspiration from is Bülent Ersoy (born 1952), a singer and actress; she is a transgender woman, recognised as one of Turkey's most famous artists, whose fans have given her the nickname 'Diva' due to her larger-than-life personality and extravagant way of dressing. As Sontag states (1964), many examples of camp are either bad art or kitsch from a 'serious' point of view. Although Dursunoğlu took music seriously, his artistic quest used music as part of a drag show. 'To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension in the sensibility of the metaphor of life as theatre' (Sontag 1964: 4).

Thus inspired, the stage setting depicting Dursunoğlu's home primarily reflects the original kitschiness, with the mirror frame of the dresser ornamented with black net, the burgundy bergère, flashy over-the-top frilled evening-gowns displayed on the coat hanger, and the folding screen with pink flamingo painting (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the stage decoration and lighting).



Figure 1: Stage decoration and lighting

2.4.5 Personal Style

- 1) Emphasis on cultural fusion: my style combines diverse musical and cultural influences. Drawing from Turkish, European, Latin, Arabic, and Byzantine traditions, I created a unique sound that reflects the era's rich history and cultural mosaic.
- 2) Jazz background: as a jazz musician, I incorporated elements of improvisation as well as extended sections with changing keys and time signatures into the compositions, resulting in a dynamic and engaging listening experience.

My formal training at Berklee College of Music provided a comprehensive foundation in jazz, arranging, and the study of Latin American music. This education was instrumental in my development of a distinctive rhythmic synthesis. In my compositions, I have integrated the vibrant pulse of Latin American rhythm sections – comprising instruments like congas and timbales – with traditional Turkish percussion instruments such as the *asma davul*, *darboukas*, and finger cymbals (*zil*). This amalgamation is showcased over a 9/8 time signature, a rhythmic pattern deeply rooted in Turkish Roma music. The Latin percussion section delivers a rhythm inspired by the Miami sound, melding elements of salsa and Latin pop within an unconventional 9/8 time signature, while the oriental percussion fully embraces the odd time signature in a traditional Turkish Roma style. This fusion is not a typical mashup but is rather a creative and unique blend of genres that offers a fresh, innovative take on cross-cultural musical integration.

In the chorus of 'Song 9: Prensés', this orchestration strategy is exemplified by the blending of Latin American and oriental percussions, delivering an odd (*aksak*) 9/8 rhythm. In Turkish pop orchestration, the inclusion of a fretless bass is essential for its emotive tonal quality that goes well with other fretless instruments such as the *oud*. Moreover, the *oud* and *qanoon* form a powerful combination, offering a rich tapestry of sound, while the synthesiser acts as glue, uniting these diverse elements. The tempo is 150 beats per minute, which is relatively fast, supporting a lively and rhythmic chorus section.

The pad synthesiser's sustained chords offer a backdrop that fills the harmonic texture, while the percussion instruments contribute to a complex rhythmic layer. The score showcases a variety of percussion instruments, each adding its own distinct sound, from the sharp attack of the claves to the deep tones of the bass drums. The cowbell and triangle provide additional rhythmic accents typical of Latin music.

The arrangement shows an interplay between rhythmic complexity and melodic simplicity, with the tenor line moving through a straightforward melodic contour that contrasts with the intricate percussion rhythms. Additionally, the song's lyrics draw significantly from Turkish gay slang – '*lubunca*' – infusing the composition with cultural specificity.

Song 9: Prensés

Chorus excerpt

1:07:30-1:07:50

Composed and arranged by Onur Yuce

♩ = 150

Tenor
Ay bu ge ce

Oud

Kanun

Pad Synthesizer

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

Cowbell

Triangle

Claves

Cabasa

Shaker

Finger Zil

Darbouka

Bass Darbouka

Frame Drum

Bass Drums

Fretless Electric Bass

Drumset

2

T. gu lüm böy le Bir ka zu ke dört lu bun ya

O.

Kanun

Synth.

Bon.

Con.

Timb.

Cwb.

Trgl.

Clv.

Cabs.

Sh.

F. Zil

Darbouka

Bass D.

Fr. Dr.

B.D.

Frtl. El. B.

D. Set

5

T. N'a pim biz de ha yat böy le Her şey yo lu

O.

Kanun

Synth.

Bon.

Con.

Timb.

Cwb.

Trgl.

Clv.

Cabs.

Sh.

F. Zil

Darbouka

Bass D.

Fr. Dr.

B.D.

Frtl. El. B.

D. Set

8

T.  nda E ke riz ga cı yı naş la rız or dan

O. 

Kanun 

Synth. 

Bon. 

Con. 

Timb. 

Cwb. 

Trgl. 

Clv. 

Cabs. 

Sh. 

F. Zil 

Darbouka 

Bass D. 

Fr. Dr. 

B.D. 

Frtl. El. B. 

D. Set 

11

The musical score is arranged in a system with 16 staves. The top four staves are for the vocalists: Tenor (T.), Soprano (O.), and Kanun. The next two staves are for the Synth. The remaining ten staves are for the percussion and electronic instruments: Bon., Con., Timb., Cwb., Trgl., Clv., Cabs., Sh., F. Zil, Darbouka, Bass D., Fr. Dr., B.D., Frtl. El. B., and D. Set. The score is in 2/4 time and features a mix of traditional and electronic sounds.

T. Nak ka ben den sir kaf a yol lan

O.

Kanun

Synth.

Bon.

Con.

Timb.

Cwb.

Trgl.

Clv.

Cabs.

Sh.

F. Zil

Darbouka

Bass D.

Fr. Dr.

B.D.

Frtl. El. B.

D. Set

Example 2: Orchestration and arrangement of the chorus for 'Song 9: Prensés' (transcribed into staff notation from the electronic track)

2.4.6 Postmodern Bricolage

My artistic approach involved the use of postmodern bricolage techniques, assembling and recontextualising various musical and visual elements from different sources. This method results in a rich and eclectic performance.

- 1) The production demonstrates a fluidity in both kinetic and visual expression, as well as in the arrangement and orchestration. It is informed by diverse influences, including the stylistic elements characteristic of 1980s luminaries such as Zeki Müren,¹⁷ the narrative and aesthetic forms found in Japanese manga, the storytelling approaches of Turkish cinema, and various performance art traditions. At minute 21:04 of *Constantina Pole*, the poses are inspired by voguing¹⁸ moves, mixed with *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure's*¹⁹ characters' freeze-frame²⁰ moments, as Çağıl is an avid Japanese manga fan. In another instance, Zeki Müren's film *Berduş* (Osman Seden 1957) is a direct inspiration for the scene that takes place on a ferry at minute 23:56 of the play.

¹⁷ Zeki Müren (1931–1996) was a legendary Turkish singer, composer, and actor celebrated as the 'Sun of Art'. His career spanned from 1931 to 1996, and he was known for his contributions to Turkish music and theatre and for being an iconic figure in the LGBTQ+ community.

¹⁸ 'Voguing' is characterised by model-like poses inspired by Vogue magazine, combined with angular, linear, rigid arm, leg, and body movements. This dance form emerged from the Harlem ballroom scene of the 1960s, a space where primarily Black and Latino LGBTQ+ communities could come together to express themselves freely. The documentary *Paris Is Burning*, directed by Jenny Livingston in 1990, provides an intimate portrayal of New York City ball culture and the communities involved, highlighting voguing as a significant aspect of their expression and identity.

¹⁹ *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* is a manga series from Japan, authored and illustrated by Hirohiko Araki in 1987. David Production. (2018). *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure: Golden Wind* [TV series]. Warner Bros. Japan. <https://www.netflix.com/search?q=jojo&jbv=80179831> (accessed 31 December 2023).

²⁰ In manga and anime, a freeze-frame is a technique that captures characters in a moment of action or emotion against a detailed or expressive background, emphasising the significance or intensity of the scene.

The songs that start at 12:50 (Song 3 of *Constantina Pole*) and 25:04 (Song 5 of *Constantina Pole*) are my interpretations of 1970s/80s rock music, with an eclectic and symphonic sound, psychedelic guitars with effects, and a progressive style comprising many musical sections that lead up to an extended form, as exemplified by bands such as Queen, Genesis, Yes, and King Crimson (further information about these bands is provided in Appendix 2).

The performance integrates *zenne*²¹ dance at 7:49, fusing instrumental sounds with diegetic audio. The orchestral arrangements are enriched by Turkish pop music elements, notably synthesisers, fretless bass, and occasionally a G clarinet, *oud*, Middle Eastern percussion, strings, and electronic drums. These elements are featured in pieces beginning at 7:20, 20:14, 29:00, 33:22, 1:06:16, and 1:13:55.

The fast pace and overly dramatic quality of advertisements are used to define a new theatrical tempo; in addition, the clichéd acting of 1980s Turkish cinema helps emotions to linger longer in the air. The coy flirtation in traditional Turkish theatre and the blending of various compositional and arranging influences from diverse musical genres, such as orchestral arrangements and complex song structures, contributes to the unique and captivating experience of the performance. The rich tapestry of sounds and styles

²¹ In Turkish culture, a *zenne* is a man who performs traditional dances typically associated with female movements and roles, often characterised by elegant and flowing gestures.

elevates the narrative, creating a multidimensional and immersive experience for the audience.

- 2) Focus on storytelling: central to my style is an emphasis on storytelling and exploration of complex emotions and experiences. Through my compositions and performances, I seek to convey the intricate stories and emotions embedded within the 1980s pop sound while pushing the boundaries of traditional song structures and musical conventions.

In conclusion, my compositional approach and personal style are characterised by a fusion of diverse cultural influences, a strong emphasis on storytelling, and the usage of postmodern bricolage techniques. By combining these elements, I create a unique and engaging performance that captures the era's essence.

2.5 Production Process and Challenges

The creation of a musical theatre production involves overcoming various challenges and learning valuable lessons. Some of these challenges include:

- 1) Selecting a catchy story and developing it (literarily and musically): the foundation of any successful production lies primarily in its story and music. Choosing a captivating narrative and forming it into a cohesive script and score that will resonate with audiences is essential. This process requires creative vision, marketing-minded ideology (to a degree), strong writing skills, and musical talent.
- 2) Choosing the right team and holding auditions: assembling a skilled and dedicated team of actors, musicians, designers, and crew members is key to ensuring a successful production.

Holding auditions and interviews helps to identify individuals with the necessary talent and passion for the project.

- a) In both *Constantina Pole* and *Bacha Posh*, there were instances where the performers influenced the staging or script through collaboration. In *Constantina Pole*, actor Çağıl Özdoğan improvised a childhood story that resonated with the audience and portrayed the character's background effectively. After witnessing the success of this improvisation, I decided to incorporate the story into the script. Similarly, in *Bacha Posh*, actor Berke Can suggested using the microphone as a weapon, instead of using a prop gun. This idea was creative and meaningful within the context of hip-hop, where the microphone is often seen as an artist's weapon for expression and storytelling. I agreed with this idea and implemented it during the staging process. These collaborative moments demonstrate the valuable contributions of the performers and how their input can enhance the overall production.
- 3) Gathering the budget for the production: financing a musical theatre production can be challenging. Producers must secure funding from investors, sponsors, or grant programmes while maintaining a realistic and efficient budget.
- 4) Renting the rehearsal spaces: finding suitable rehearsal spaces that are accessible, affordable, and available for the duration of the production timeline can be a logistical challenge.
- 5) Conveying the idea during pre-production: effective communication is vital during the pre-production phase, as it sets the stage for a smooth production process. This involves sharing the creative vision with the team and ensuring everyone understands their roles and responsibilities.

Pre-production involves various aspects, such as:

- a) Stage design: balancing artistic and dramaturgic aspects with practical considerations such as materials, dimensions, weight, transportation, and storage can be challenging. The stage design should complement the story, enhance the audience's experience, and be adaptable to different venues.
- b) Costume design: this requires attention to artistic and period suitability, the material used, its comfort, weight (lightness being preferred), ease of changing, and compatibility

with headsets. Costumes should help to define the characters and be appropriate to the overall aesthetic of the production.

- c) Movement design: choreographing movements and dances that complement the story, music, and characters can be challenging, particularly in a musical theatre production with actors of varying skill levels and physical abilities.
- d) Poster design: creating eye-catching promotional materials that accurately represent the production and appeal to the target audience is essential for marketing efforts.
- e) Lighting design: effective lighting can enhance the atmosphere, set the mood, and highlight significant moments in the story. It requires a thorough understanding of the script, collaboration with the director and other designers, and technical expertise.
- f) Makeup design: this should reflect the characters, period, and style of the production while also taking into consideration practical factors such as durability and ease of application.
- g) Hair design: designing hairstyles that suit the characters and the period, while being manageable for actors during costume changes and performances can be challenging.
- h) The hire of halls, sound and lighting equipment, transportation, and accommodation for tours: coordinating these logistics requires careful planning, negotiation, and flexibility to ensure the production runs smoothly and stays within budget.
- i) Ticket sales, advertisement, and marketing: to generate interest and drive ticket sales it is essential to promote the production through email lists, social media, flyer distribution, and poster placement. Marketing efforts should target the right audience, convey the production's essence, and create excitement.
- j) Payments, accounting-related business, and taxes: the management of finances, ensuring timely payments to the team, and the fulfilment of tax requirements are crucial aspects of the production process. This involves meticulous record-keeping, budget management, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations.
- k) Storage of stage decorations: after the production ends, stage decorations and props must be stored safely and efficiently, while considering factors such as space availability, transportation, and potential reuse in future shows.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented additional challenges and lessons. At the same time as being time-saving and cost-effective, holding remote rehearsals via video call services brought limitations such as reductions in audio and video quality, latency, and restricted movement. Navigating the technical and artistic challenges of working with actors who had no formal musical or theatrical training was a learning experience, as was adapting to the ever-changing pandemic regulations and the uncertainty surrounding live performances.

2.5.1 Remote Rehearsing via Video Call Services

Due to coronavirus measures, from November 2019 to May 2020, and from November 2020 to February 2021, as the writer/director of the play I directed the reading and musical rehearsals on video call services. The obligation to utilise new technology for performing arts rehearsals resulted in both positive and negative outcomes. As an overseas company working between London and Istanbul – or under strict lockdown regulations – there were many times when the only way to keep working was to use video call services. These proved themselves to be exceptionally time saving; they also, crucially, cut the costs associated with commuting, eating out, and renting space for rehearsals: dramaturgic discussions and reading rehearsals were conducted smoothly from the comfort of our homes. However, this remote interaction posed many technical complications as well. The automatic volume adjustment was problematic for musical rehearsals, as it mutes loud sounds such as singing, instruments being played, or shouting. Rehearsals for a musical theatre regularly involve a band, a backing track, or an instrumental accompaniment for the singing actor; however, in addition to the software's

deficiencies, regular camera microphones cannot process sounds from separate sources, generally presenting the vocals in a scattered and distorted mode without any accompaniment.

Working on the angles, positioning, and levels also became incredibly challenging during video call service rehearsals. The regular webcams – which have a 60° diagonal field of view – display only a part of the setting, forcing the actor to be stable at a specific position and height in order to be visible. This inability to move affects the stage usage, causes positionings and levelling to be repetitive, and limits the simulation of the stage view for both the director and the actor.

2.5.2 Working With an Actor Who Had No Formal Musical Training

As the writer/composer/producer my preference was to work with an actor with a musical inclination and above-average singing skills. The play's songs were in the tenor register, as I wanted a high-pitched male voice for dramatic effect. The first choice of the director was Istanbul-based actor Ömer Akgüllü, whose enthusiasm to excel at singing was an essential factor in his selection, although he had had regular theatrical training that brought him a deep and expressive voice with low resonating frequencies that was efficient for dramatic speaking but an enemy when singing. His dependence solely on chest resonance put his vocal flexibility under restraint, resulting in early vocal damage during rehearsals due to the diverse musical demand of the sonic spectrum. Due to his untrained aural sense, he confused the register differences with dynamic intensity, tending to shout as the piece went into higher pitches, exhausting his vocal cords.

The counting for song entrances and performing of syncopated rhythms were complicated, and melodies that began on upbeats soon melted into downbeats. Akgüllü had difficulty with intonation when the lines or key changes involved simple Western art music-based twelve-tone chromatic movements, although he claimed to have been interested in and influenced by mainly Western music – pop and rock – since his youth. After numerous challenging rehearsals, the actor demanded that the performance’s backing track should include my vocal tracks for him to follow and use as a base, to which I agreed. During the premiere, most of the typical musical problems were parried by dramatic action, except for his incorrigible intonation, which added an uncalled-for comedic aspect to the play. The actor did an ad lib, mocking his own singing talent during the performance to engage with the audience. I concluded that this was not the right way to conduct a musical theatre production on many levels, including musicality. I then took on the role of director, which was my first attempt at directing, and held auditions for the second version of the show. This decision resulted in a significant change within the team. However, finding an actor who had appropriate musical training proved challenging, leading to my choosing for the part a musician who had less theatrical experience.

2.5.3 Working With a Musician Who Had No Formal Theatrical Training

Çağıl Özdoğan, a singer/songwriter with an electrical engineering degree, was selected as the new actor for the play, despite his having no formal theatrical training. Çağıl had previously played effeminate gay characters in several amateur theatres, and his experience in drag and comedy was particularly useful when playing the character Constantina in an homage to ‘The Cranky Virgin’s’, larger-than-life personality.

During the audition, Çağıl's ease with his musicianship was evident. However, his tall, 6-foot 1-inch, 17-stone frame presented technical challenges, such as with costume, stage design, and choreography. In some parts of the play, the character Constantina Pole dances on a chair or climbs on the dresser, so the costume needed to be tailor-made due to his stature. By March 2021, he had lost around 44 pounds after a weight cut, reaching a healthier weight-to-height ratio, yet still possessing a heavysset body.

One of the difficulties of working with an actor who has little stage movement practice is their body balance. The actor can maintain poise while performing the movements with the correct stance, but an off-balance movement with incorrect rooting causes rawness in execution. Therefore, an actor will usually warm up before each theatrical rehearsal and fine-tune their balance for approximately 45 minutes. After the director/choreographer decides on a particular movement, the action's physical centre becomes the first question the actor should address.

Walking is one of the exercises for balance, and most of the play involved walking in high heels, so foot positioning, overall balance, and usage of the lower extremity and proximal muscles were crucial. Laban's basic ideas from *Mastering Movement* by John Hodgson helped to clarify the techniques needed, such as executing every action with economy, finding the best starting position, applying the appropriate strength, employing the best use of space, and moving at the proper speed. The effective control of effort lies in combining the action and the individual applying it.

Despite not having had formal theatrical training, Çağıl's experience in drag and comedy and his musicianship made him a valuable addition to the play. With his dedication to warming up and fine-tuning his balance, he was able to execute his movements with poise and strength. His weight cut also showed his commitment to the role and willingness to put in the required effort.

In summary, putting together a musical theatre production requires creative vision, logistical planning, problem solving skills, and adaptability. Each challenge overcome and lesson learned throughout the process helps the growth and development of the entire production team, leading to a more polished and successful performance. Each step is crucial in bringing the creative vision to life onstage, from selecting and developing the story and music to assembling the right team and managing every aspect of the production process.

Working under pandemic restrictions, artistic producers had to find innovative ways to keep their teams motivated, connected, and productive. The use of technology for remote rehearsals, communication, and marketing was essential in navigating the challenges. The experience of producing a musical theatre performance during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted to me the resilience and resourcefulness of the performing arts community, as well as the importance of live theatre in connecting people and telling stories that resonate with audiences.

2.6 Conclusions and Future Outlook

In examining the power of musical theatre to contest and reshape sociocultural mores within the Greater Middle East, this thesis elucidates the role of *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* as catalysts in the dialogue on gender, sexuality, and civil freedoms.

Box office success significantly increased the fame of *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*, which became widely recognised by the Turkish audience. Over numerous performances between 22 August 2020 and 12 December 2022, 2,171 tickets were sold. This resulted in a cumulative revenue of 198,057.75 ₺, which, including additional charges, amounted to 203,688.75 ₺. The average ticket price for these shows was 91.23 ₺, indicating a steady audience demand. In comparison, regular ticket prices for National Theatre plays were around 30 ₺, while many starting theatre groups typically charged between 15 and 50 ₺. With a notable high of 358 ticket sales for one night, *Constantina Pole* has managed to attract a considerable audience, showcasing a promising foundation for future performances. Particularly in the context of a post-Covid world, when theatre attendance was affected by ongoing concerns and restrictions, these numbers demonstrate the resilience and appeal of the production, contributing to its continued success in the realm of theatre.

Inspired by the life of Turkish drag queen performer Seyfi Dursunoğlu, the musical effectively sheds light on the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community within Turkey's societal context. By referencing various cultural and mythological sources, the play provided a compelling narrative

and facilitated a broader human–geographical debate on femininity in Asia Minor. The widespread recognition and popularity of the play helped create a greater understanding and appreciation for the experiences and challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Turkey.

The success of *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* also attracted significant attention from the press, generating numerous articles, interviews, and features about the production (see the list of news and interviews with links in Appendix 5). This media spotlight helped to further amplify the play’s message and increase its reach. Additionally, the musical’s popularity led to a series of invitations from various festivals across Turkey, providing an opportunity to showcase the production to diverse audiences and spread awareness about the issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community within the country.

Constantina Pole has garnered mixed reactions from its audiences, as is evident from the comments on Instagram advertisement posts. The presence of threats and negative comments indicates that some people disapproved of men dressing up as women, considering it inappropriate or unethical. We had to report many comments and block several accounts. Some people wanted to spend a night with ‘our artist’ and openly sent a DM to our company inbox. Despite the controversy, the show’s fame has increased, attracting more attention to the performances. Audience opinions varied; some found the show to be one of the worst they had ever seen, as they disapproved of a man dressing up as a woman onstage. More intellectual spectators made comparisons with the legendary Seyfi Dursunoğlu’s performance, which others argued was unfair to the actor. On the other hand, despite acknowledging the performance’s flaws, some commenters emphasised the importance of supporting such productions. They

recognised that there are limited opportunities to see this kind of work due to restrictions and censorship and that it is crucial to encourage artistic freedom and representation of diverse stories and characters onstage. In particular, the festival appearances enhanced the play's visibility and contributed to fostering a more inclusive and understanding environment for the LGBTQ+ community in Turkey.

The case studies presented in this thesis can serve as a foundation for further research on the use of musical theatre to promote social change and challenge sociocultural norms in other regions and contexts. By examining the impact of these musicals on audiences and their reception, future research can assess the effectiveness of such artistic interventions in fostering empathy, understanding, and social progress.

The history of musical theatre in Turkey dates back to the late Ottoman Empire, blending Western and Eastern traditions. It has become a popular form of entertainment, often favoured over cabaret or standard proscenium-stage theatre. Notable figures such as Cemal Reşit Rey,²² Muammer Karaca,²³ Zeki Müren, Münir Nurettin Selçuk,²⁴ and Ayşe Ajda Pekkan have contributed to its growth and development.

²² Cemal Reşit Rey (1904–1985): a prominent Turkish composer, conductor, and pianist, who played a crucial role in introducing Western classical music to Turkey and contributed to the development of Turkish musical theatre.

²³ Muammer Karaca (1906–1978): a renowned Turkish actor, singer, and comedian, who was an influential figure in Turkish theatre, particularly in musical theatre and operetta.

²⁴ Münir Nurettin Selçuk (1900–1981): a prominent Turkish classical musician and composer, who played an essential role in popularising and modernising Turkish classical music and influenced the musical theatre scene.

In *Constantina Pole*, the actor is placed in front of a mirror, and the stage setting simultaneously resembles both a living room and a backstage scene, in order to obscure there being a clear distinction. The actor appears to be getting ready for a show, but there is no stage. The phone rings in the middle of the show – Constantina’s sister calling him – which hints at the setting’s being not backstage but at his home. In the second part, the actor begins his performance in the same setting, now using it as a stage. At this point, he can see and interact with the crowd ad lib. This breaks the fourth wall and surprises the audience as they question what is real and what is theatre. My musical offers a unique approach to traditional theatre by combining elements of a living room, backstage, and stage in one setting. This unconventional design blurs the lines between reality and theatre, challenging the audience’s perception. The musical differs from typical cabaret or standard proscenium-stage theatre productions and diverges from shows like *Rent* or traditional drag shows. *Constantina Pole* is not a real drag show; it is Constantina’s dream of being a drag queen star in 1980s Istanbul. As a show-within-a-show, my musical explores meta-levels of theatre, adding depth and complexity to the audience’s experience.

This thesis contributes to understanding musical theatre’s power and potential in challenging societal norms. With 2,252 organic followers on its Instagram page (as of 27 April 2023), our theatre company, C1-69 Sanat, has garnered diverse audience responses to *Constantina Pole*. A selection of the comments on Instagram posts provides a snapshot of the varying opinions and impressions:

- doga.gunesdeniz (11 November 2022): I don’t like things like these, but I wish an excellent show to those who do.
- ilkinyukselcaglayan (14 October 2022): Starving for art/humanity.

- Emelakgl (19 September 2022): Wonderful and impressive. I've seen it before, and I recommend it.
- Sevilevren (19 August 2022): A must-see play and performance.
- cigdem. durukanseydiogulları (28 July 2022): It was outstanding and worth seeing again.
- deibel06_ (15 April 2022): This crossdressing trend is also a thing now. People love different genres.
- fatmavakbay (31 March 2022): Tired of seeing men dressed as women.
- Kezbanyılmazbilek (24 February 2022): Great play, incredible actor. I recommend it to everyone.

These comments showcase the dynamic and varied reactions to the play, highlighting its unique appeal and the differing tastes of the audience. Aside from such civil comments, C1-69 Sanat has also received aggressive and threatening messages, resulting in the deletion of several statements. The team has had to block and report nine accounts to ensure the safety and comfort of their community.

Our team was comprised of diverse members, including from the LGBTQ+ community, who joined the show after carefully reviewing and genuinely respecting our ideology. We also had the support of authentic drag queen friends who helped and contributed to our musical. Although we received some critiques from LGBTQ+ media (e.g., that the play featured caricatured characters, had a confusing storyline, that the musical aspects seemed to overshadow the narrative, and that the author (of the posts) found it hard to follow the musical due to distracting external sounds and odd effects), these discussions were necessary for encouraging dialogue between various social groups in a country where the president has repeatedly denied the existence of LGBTQ+ individuals.

Addressing the feedback regarding some aspects of *Constantina Pole* that raised concerns about potential misogynistic undertones, it is important to note that the contentious sections²⁵ were rooted in the depiction of the complexities of Seyfi Dursunoğlu's character, Huysuz Virjin. His contentious humour, which often targeted women and unabashedly pursued men, reflected his established comedic persona. While being authentic to his memoirs and public performances, these characteristics have been perceived as problematic through the lens of contemporary feminism and gender sensitivity.

In crafting these elements of the play, I intended to provide an unfiltered dramatisation of Dursunoğlu's life and humour. However, in consideration of feedback received and evolving cultural conversations, certain scenes were recognised as being discordant with modern values of respect and equality. Consequently, I decided to excise some scenes from the production in order to honour a commitment to positive and inclusive storytelling and better align the play with feminist principles. This change was implemented during revisions in the summer of 2022, demonstrating responsiveness to audience reception and a dedication to ethical storytelling practices.

²⁵ The section in question is found in *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical, Music & Lyrics* (translated from Turkish) by Onur Yuce: the monologue after Song 11 that pertains to an anecdote about a date.

By creating spaces for dialogue, introspection, and understanding, musical theatre can pave the way for a more inclusive and empathetic society that celebrates diversity and embraces the unique experiences of every individual. Despite the governing party's political stance, one of our show's highlights was receiving an official ticket request from the presidential office, followed by a 'thank you' note from the private secretary director.

The Covid-19 pandemic tested the resilience and adaptability of the performing arts community, forcing producers and artists to find innovative ways to continue their work under unprecedented circumstances.

Conducting remote rehearsals via video call services proved to be both time-saving and cost-effective, despite being accompanied by limitations in audio and video quality, latency, and movement restrictions. Working with actors and musicians with varying levels of musical and theatrical training has been a learning experience, highlighting the importance of balancing talent and skill when assembling a team.

The lessons learned from producing a musical theatre performance during the pandemic can inform future productions, making them more adaptable, efficient, and engaging. As the world of performing arts continues to evolve, embracing new technologies and approaches, producers and artists must remain open to change and be willing to learn from the challenges and successes of their experiences.

The pandemic has also shown the significance of human connection and the role of the performing arts in bringing people together. As live performances gradually returned to normalcy, audiences and artists alike gained a renewed appreciation for the power of theatre to inspire, entertain, and unite.

In the future, the performing arts industry may continue to incorporate digital and virtual elements into their productions, expanding the reach of live theatre to wider audiences, and creating new opportunities for artists and producers alike. Furthermore, the focus on adaptability and innovation during the pandemic can inspire a greater degree of creativity in finding solutions to traditional challenges in the industry, improving the overall quality of productions and enhancing the audience experience.

Ultimately, the resilience and resourcefulness demonstrated by the performing arts community during the pandemic serve as a testament to living theatre's enduring importance and impact. This resilience will continue to shape the industry, fostering greater collaboration and openness to experimentation.

Chapter 3. *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*

3.1 Introduction and Research Rationale

The inspiration for the second musical I wrote, composed, directed, and produced, titled *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*, came from the practice of dressing up daughters as boys, widespread in Afghanistan and Pakistan among families without sons. The term '*bacha posh*' means 'girls dressed as boys' and refers to a clandestine group of girls whose parents have chosen to regard them as sons. The tradition of *bacha posh* was created due to Afghanistan's strong cultural preference for sons over daughters (Padmi 2018: 54). The first hip-hop musical in Turkey, in which authentic hip-hop artists were cast to perform on a theatre stage for the first time, *Bacha Posh: A Hop Musical* is based on female-to-male cross-dressing, a glance from the opposite angle to that of my previous work, which was the first drag queen musical in Turkey, *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*, and involved male-to-female cross-dressing. Both pieces scrutinise identity issues, the role of women, violence, oppression, and cultural morality in the Greater Middle East.

Any act, artistic work, or research concerning women's rights issues is crucial but also politically and time-sensitive in Turkey, as also in the rest of the Greater Middle East. This is because the rate of violation of women's rights in many communities in these geocultural territories is preventable even as it is increasing. In Turkey, there has been a 20 per cent increase in murders of women (Evrensel 2021) since the ratification of the Istanbul Convention²⁶ by the AKP (Justice

²⁶ The first European legally binding instrument to combat violence against women, the Istanbul Convention establishes a comprehensive legal framework, protects victims, and prosecutes offenders. In August 2014, the

and Development Party) government, as the new sentences mandated for murderers do not act as a deterrent, and judges have allowed easy remission. Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have ordered an indefinite ban on university education for the country's women (Noori 2022). The Iranian government has sentenced citizens who have participated in public protests to death – most recently in the wake of Mahza Amini's killing by the morality police (Human Rights Watch 2022) for not wearing a hijab. Turkish president Erdoğan stated that he planned to hold a referendum on the right to wear a headscarf and to outlaw same-sex marriages in order to gain votes ahead of crucial elections in 2023 (Buyuk 2022), which may mark the end of the secular regime of the Turkish Republic. As a cis-male artist, academic, feminist, and LGBTQ+ ally, I wanted to help to create platforms for the raising and sharing of the voices of those who suffer first-hand. I have attempted to do this via the composition of two pieces of musical theatre, each based on extensive academic research on, and collaborations with, women and LGBTQ+ communities.

Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical deploys a plot centred on a young girl named Aaina who is forced to be a *bacha posh* by her father. Although she at first despises dressing up as a boy and pretending to be one, she soon discovers the freedom her new identity provides. Unlike other girls, she is free to be out on the street with her new look and she takes advantage of it. This is how she discovers love with Niaz, a young boy from her neighbourhood. However, in the context of where she lives, it is a crime to have intimate relations with a man who is not her husband. The moment her relationship with her lover is discovered, through the exposure of her *bacha*

Convention came into force in Turkey. On 20 March 2021, Turkey formally rescinded the Convention, becoming the first and only country to do so.

posh cover, Aaina finds herself entangled in a complex and perilous predicament, caught in a justice system with broken scales. On one side, there is a terrorist organisation in pursuit of dominance; on the other, she is the focal point of contention between two competing suitors, each determined to garner her favour. This convergence of threats and personal entanglements profoundly disrupts the equilibrium of her existence. Taking place in an undefined part of the Middle East/Central Asia, the plot of my musical, which has received feedback from my women-actor collaborators, scrutinises identity issues, the role of women, violence, oppression, and cultural morality in the Greater Middle East.

The story of this piece of musical theatre is based on actual events, retold and paraphrased from articles, books, and documentaries about various Islamic cultures. It is based on reports on the lives of *bacha posh* women in Afghanistan, the genocide of Yazidis by ISIS in Iraq, the functioning of militant Islamic organisations, and the lives of Guantánamo detainee militants.

While I identify as cis-gender and Turkish (as opposed to Afghan), I approached these issues as an ally of those who have suffered first-hand, and also as someone with cultural positioning in Central Asia. My own lived experience, having been born in Western Asia with a Muslim background, has helped me to feel a cultural comradery with the survivors. Although I did not name any specific country or make any religious references in the musical, religious orthodoxy and the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and feminism were my main points of departure.

The choice of hip-hop as the vehicle for narration came primarily from the need for effective words and dialogues to tell an intricate story with many social layers. The emergence of hip-hop musical theatre in contemporary performance can be dated to GhettoOriginal Productions Dance Company's staging of *So What Happens Now?*, a piece presented in 1992 at New York's famous PS 122 by the members of the Magnificent Force, Rock Steady Crew, and Rhythm Techniques, including Richie 'Crazy Legs' Colon, Ken 'Swift' Gabbert, Steve 'Mr Wiggles' Clemente, and Jorge 'POP MASTER FABEL' Pabon (Joseph et al. 2006: 78). Hip-hop music was featured in off-Broadway plays in the 1990s and early 2000s, including the musical *Jam on the Groove* (GhettoOriginal Productions 1995). Rap music is featured in major musicals such as *Rent* (Jonathan Larson 1996) and *Dreamgirls* (Henry Krieger and Tom Eyan 1981). While more famous for funk than for hip-hop, the Broadway musical *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* (Reg E. Gaines, Daryl Waters, Zaine Mark and Ann Duquesnay 1996) portrays through dance the life of African Americans from enslavement to the present, and blends tap dance and hip-hop dance forms, as well as rap.

As a result of Broadway productions such as *In the Heights*, *Hamilton*, and similar shows, hip-hop and rap music styles are now an essential part of modern musical theatre repertoire. *In the Heights*, based on a book by Quiara Alegria Hudes, is a musical whose concept, music, and lyrics are by Lin-Manuel Miranda. In this story, the characters are in the predominantly Dominican American neighbourhood of Washington Heights in Upper Manhattan, New York City. The musical was nominated for thirteen Tony Awards and won four, including Best Musical in 2008. *Hamilton*, written and performed by Lin-Manuel Miranda, tells the story of Alexander Hamilton, a founding father of the United States (US). *Hamilton* received a record-breaking 16

nominations and won 11 awards, including Best Musical, at the 70th Tony Awards. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2016. *The Last Jimmy*, a musical inspired by Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow*, addresses the inequities inherent in the American prison system and their consequences for impoverished whites and people of colour. *Box* (Mehr Mansuri, Frank Sanchez, and Eric Dozier 2018) is a hip-hop musical about an enslaved African American, Henry Box Brown, who, with the assistance of African American and white abolitionists, sent himself to freedom in a box. In most hip-hop musicals, the central themes revolve around Black and South American cultures in the ghettos of the US. These writings explore social issues, and history plays a crucial role in their storytelling; the perspective of viewing history through the lens of modern life adds depth and movement to the stories. Wanita Woods, also known as D. Woods, who sang with Sean 'Diddy' Combs's girl group Danity Kane, states, 'Every rap song is a history lesson' (Banks 2010: 241). The lyrics of such musicals delineate the narratives of the marginalised or street-based communities that form the origins of the primary characters. In *Bacha Posh*, I utilised the affordances of hip-hop's historical storytelling, and its connotations with the street and with marginalised people, to scrutinise a community's cultural layers in the Middle East.

Rap music, electronic dance music, turntablism, graffiti art, breakdancing, fashion, video art, and slang are just a few examples of the many ways in which hip-hop is present in today's popular culture (Brooks and Conroy 2011: 4). *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* has the hallmarks of hip-hop culture and styles in the following respects:

- a) Rapping: the text consists of eleven rap songs.
- b) Dance: hip-hop styles, modern, and folkloric dance movements are intertwined with the music and are a key part of the theatrical staging.

- c) Stage design: industrial and city atmosphere are reflected through metalwork; the usage of graffiti carried the hip-hop street art form onto the stage.
- d) Music: the pieces were created through hip-hop DJing methods, such as sampling and beat-making.
- e) Costumes: hip-hop styles are incorporated with clothes that reflect the local atmosphere, namely shalwar kameez and Guantánamo Bay detainee uniform.

3.2 Research Context

The phenomenon of *bacha posh* has emerged as a response to the strong preference in Afghan culture for sons over daughters, and *bacha posh* translates in English as ‘girls dressed as boys’. Instead of wearing a veil and a dress, some girls are allowed to have a short haircut and wear a pair of trousers so as to appear as a boy in society. As a result, the father’s wounded pride from lacking a son is restored to an extent, and the child herself can behave more freely: she can attend school, accompany her sisters in public, and work. Similar practices also occur in Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Serbia, and North Macedonia, where the women involved are referred to as ‘Balkan sworn virgins’.²⁷

In patriarchal cultures, sons contribute to the family’s welfare; a daughter, on the other hand, will leave the family once they marry and become part of their husband’s family (Chao 2015). The notions of ‘honour’ and ‘shame’ are embedded within the description of gender power relations between Afghan men and women (Schutte 2013), and men are believed to bring honour to the

²⁷ The term ‘Balkan sworn virgins’ (*burrneshas* in Albanian) refers to Albanian women who reject their female identity and dress and live as men in the Balkans. More than a statement of sexual orientation, the choice to live as men is tied to gender norms in Albanian culture.

family, while an abundance of Afghan women may be seen as a source of shame for the family (Padmi 2018).

My first musical play, *Constantina Pole*, revolved around a drag person's life in 1980s Istanbul. For the second musical, I wanted to seek beyond Turkish frontiers, discover the Middle East's limits, and explore the surrounding cultures that have similar social and moral traits. While researching the immigrant situation in the region from post-war Syria to post-Taliban Afghanistan, I noticed that Islamic cultures in their myriad codes, representations, and ideologies geographically surpass the physical territories of the so-called Middle East.²⁸ Digging for a unifying – or, if not, then inclusive – title, I came across the term 'the Greater Middle East'. This term helped me to connect texts and stories from different Islamic cultures that had spread beyond the geographical boundaries of the Middle East, such as those from Afghanistan or Pakistan, countries which are thought in mainstream geographic mappings to be part of Central Asia.

During the late eighteenth century, the modern Middle East emerged. For some historians, the signal event was the 1774 signing of the treaty that ended the war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia; a stronger case can be made for the importance of Napoleon's relatively easy entry into Egypt in 1798 (Haass 2006: 2). The update to this regional name came after the September

²⁸ The region known as the Middle East typically includes Arabia (including the Arabian Peninsula and Bahrain), Asia Minor (the Asian portion of Turkey, excluding Hatay Province), East Thrace (the European portion of Turkey), Egypt, Iran, the Levant (including Ash-Shm and Cyprus), Mesopotamia (current-day Iraq), and the Socotra Archipelago (a part of Yemen).

11 terrorist attacks (also known as '9/11'), which brought about the formation of the US's new geopolitical vision for the Islamic world in general; this formation has led to changes in US foreign policy regarding the region (Güney and Gökcan 2010: 22), thus also resulting in the US's differently labelling the area following the redefinition of their new allies and enemies. The new label 'the Greater Middle East' was first used in a paper released by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in March 2004 as part of the US administration's preparations for the Group of Eight summits (Aljazeera 2004). This grouping included 26 countries in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East that share Islam as their uniting principle. Although all the names that describe the region have been coined by foreign actors, following various political altercations, there is a traceable cultural pattern and mutual language based upon Arabic expressions in all Islamic countries; hence, as a Middle Eastern person whose birthplace straddles Europe and Asia, I accept the labelling as adequate.

In preparing to write the text for *Bacha Posh*, I researched the Middle East, noticing similarities in the development and enforcement of patriarchy and associated notions of religious morality across the region, from Afghanistan to Iraq. One of the most defining issues in this area is Islam and its various interpretations, including the impact of fundamentalist views.

As a Turkish citizen who has experienced life under a radical Islamist government for the past twenty years, witnessing the erosion of Turkey's secular structure evoked a constant and lived pathos that influenced the creation of this musical theatre piece. Different geocultural regions in the Greater Middle East contribute to the moral complexities that shape the darker aspects of

this geocultural mosaic. My work incorporates various phenomena observed across diverse territories and communities, such as:

- 1) the genocide of Yazidi and Assyrian people in Iraq by ISIS in August 2014;
- 2) the Taliban's struggle for power in Afghanistan;
- 3) the 'prison of love' in Kabul²⁹ and the stories of the inmates from the 2010s to the early 2020s;
- 4) the lives of *bacha posh* girls in Afghanistan and Pakistan since the 1990s;
- 5) the involvement of Western forces and the existence of overseas detention camps such as Guantánamo, opened after the 9/11 attacks;
- 6) love and possession – honour killings in the Middle East;
- 7) feminism and Islam.

Artistically, a musical combines theatrical and musical narration, and for *Bacha Posh* the common ground is hip-hop; thus, my research context includes the following: dramaturgy in hip-hop expressions, examples of hip-hop theatre, composing for hip-hop theatre, and hip-hop stage design and costumes.

3.3 Research Methodology

Research for *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* started on 10 February 2022. To create a mood board of visual connotations and dynamics, I began watching documentaries on the following main topics:

- *bacha posh* women
- the Yazidi genocide

²⁹ Half of the inmates at the Badam Bagh women's prison in Kabul, Afghanistan, also known as the 'prison of love', are there for 'moral crimes', such as adultery, having sex before getting married, and fleeing the house.

- international rescue camps for Yazidi survivors
- militant Islamist organisations
- the ‘prison of love’ in Kabul and the stories of inmates
- Guantánamo Bay prison inmates.

While observing a large range of visual media and taking notes to sketch my storyboard, I came across many written documents – both academic and news-based – on these topics in English and Turkish. Apart from various previously mentioned academic articles, Jenny Nordberg’s book *The Underground Girls of Kabul* (2014) and Falkoff’s *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak* (2007) (Marc Falkoff, born in 1967, released an anthology of 22 poems by 17 Guantánamo inmates) were most helpful to me when developing an intricate story arc based on real-life scenarios.

The key story arcs I developed based on my research are themed as follows:

3.3.1 Bacha Posh

Most *bacha posh* women forced by their elders to cross-dress showed a similar pattern in their emotional experiences:

1) **refusal and intense discomfort at the beginning of the process;**

Niima displays no enthusiasm for being a boy. To her, it is hard work with little upside. Every day she complains to her mother: ‘I am uncomfortable around the boys in the store’. (Nordberg 2014: 65)

2) **acceptance and application of the freedom of the new male identity;**

Bacha Posh can also enable the greater mobility of female household members. They can play the role of mahram by accompanying their sisters, mothers, and other

female relatives in public spaces. This is particularly the case in more conservative (often rural) settings, where women's mobility is more highly restricted. (Corboz et al. 2019: 587)

3) **depression after an abrupt end to the role-play with all its privileges, mainly due to the girl's reaching marriageable age;**

When girls raised as boys reach puberty, they are usually 'converted' back into girls. This often poses a dilemma for those girls who had more freedom and mobility during childhood, only to have this freedom restricted when being required to re-adopt a feminine identity and sometimes being prepared for marriage a short time after becoming a girl again. (Corboz et al. 2019: 587)

In the text of the play, the experiences of the lead actor, Aaina, follow a similar triptych trajectory to those of a *bacha posh* person: discomfort, freedom, and an abrupt end.

3.3.2 Yazidi Genocide

The Yazidis (Êzidî) are a Kurdish religious minority living in northern Iraq, western Iran, eastern Turkey, and northern Syria (Ibrahim et al. 2018). Yezidism is a non-Abrahamic, orally transmitted religion that shares characteristics with Christianity, Islam, and other monotheistic religions. In August 2014, the so-called ISIS (Da'esh) attacked the ancient community of Yazidis of Mount Sinjar, massacring hundreds of men, enslaving thousands of women and children, and driving the population of some 350,000 Yazidis into camps for internally displaced persons in the Kurdistan region (Allison 2017). Captured women and girls have been subjected to sexual violence as an explicit ISIS tactic 'to break the dignity and the honour of the communities' (Mohammadi 2016: 409).

Journalist Fiona Lamdin spent some time with a small group of Yazidi women who have been resettled in Germany and are re-establishing their lives there. Her BBC documentary *Yazidi Survivor* shows a tiny fragment of the happenings and the outcomes from the survivor's perspective. 'Ekhlās was so traumatised by the cruelty she both endured and witnessed that she tried to end her own life. "I have my pain, and it is like 100 deaths", she said' (Lamdin 2017).

Such survivor stories come from women who endured the slavery of ISIS and found a way to break free and reach the rescue camps; thus, in *Bacha Posh*, the character Aaina ends up in the hands of a radical armed group that seeks dominance over the region, later to be sold to an elderly commander. After three years in captivity, she finally flees and joins a rescue camp.

The framing of *Bacha Posh* resonates with the conceptualisation of trauma described by Bessel van der Kolk³⁰ in his work, particularly regarding how oppressive systems impact both the marginalised and those who appear to hold power within these systems. Van der Kolk's insights into the pervasive effects of trauma underscore that it can distort the experiences and behaviours of all individuals trapped within an oppressive system, not just those of the direct victims. This can be paralleled with the experiences of the non-marginalised men in *Bacha Posh* who, despite their societal power, are shown to be psychologically and emotionally constrained by the very norms that privilege them, thus being 'oppressed' by the standards they enforce.

³⁰ Bessel van der Kolk, born in 1943, is a Boston-based psychiatrist noted for his contributions as an author, researcher, and educator in the field of trauma, particularly post-traumatic stress, since the 1970s. He penned the best-selling book *The Body Keeps the Score*, which has been recognised by the *New York Times*.

In *Bacha Posh*, this manifests in those male characters who find themselves trapped within rigid behavioural patterns and experiencing psychological distress due to their role in maintaining these oppressive norms. This perspective aligns with Van der Kolk's assertion that traumatic systems have a ripple effect, influencing and often damaging the mental states of all who operate within them, creating a cycle where oppressive systems can inadvertently oppress the oppressor, and revealing the complex interplay between power, control, and vulnerability.

The exploration of the trauma theme in *Bacha Posh* is in line with current trends in performance arts. It draws parallels with notable works such as Laura Bowler's *The Blue Woman*, which addresses the trauma of sexual violence, and Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*, which confronts the trauma of school shootings. These operatic pieces also focus on trauma and serve as a relevant backdrop and benchmark for the discourse presented in my musical. They emphasise the significance of addressing trauma in contemporary performance art and reflect the collective urgency to engage with this crucial issue within the fabric of current sociocultural conversations.

3.3.3 International Rescue Camps for Yazidi Survivors

In 2015, Kurdish-German psychologist Jan İlhan Kizilhan and his colleagues opened an office in Duhok, an Iraqi municipality close to the Turkish border, in order to search for and rescue Yazidi women survivors. As part of the group's preparation, the Turkish government and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) handed the group a list of 800 women who had escaped from capture by ISIS. Along with Kizilhan was Michael Blume, a Baden-Württemberg official who headed the project. Together with an Iraqi doctor and colleagues from the German visa office,

the two assessed every woman they could find for eligibility to emigrate to Germany, considering the criteria set by German society for integration and residency (Mohammadi 2016).

'I spoke with more than 1,400 women; each of their stories was worse than the last', Kizilhan said. 'Even for someone like me with experience in hearing such things, it was tough to deal with. I ask myself: How can humans be cruel to others? You look in religious texts, and you see nothing like this. How can they be so evil?' (Mohammadi 2016: 409). In addition to medical and social support, plans were made for the women's integration into society. German language lessons were provided to the women, along with free medical care, housing, and education for their children.

However, such efforts are not without challenges and controversy. Some psychologists argue that rescuing and sending survivors to foreign countries does not fully address the individual's or the community's problems. Unresolved issues such as humiliation, stigma, and non-acceptance persist, disrupting social and cultural bonds. In documentaries such as Lamdin's *Yazidi Survivor*, it becomes evident that the culture shock experienced by survivors who have spent months or years in captivity can compound their pain. These women, who have already lost hope for their future due to their trauma, often continue to struggle with episodes of despair and thoughts of taking their own lives. Rehabilitation processes that involve singing, painting, and learning foreign languages can help, but they may not fully address the underlying issues.

In the musical text, after her rescue and resettlement in Germany, Aaina is also sceptical about her treatment as she considers herself incurable, yet she agrees to cooperate and share her story, if only to prevent another victim's suffering and demise.

3.3.4 Militant Islamist Organisations

Over the past decade, the main characteristics of Turkish politics have been subject to radical change because of the rise of the pro-Islamist Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, abbreviated to AKP) (Ünal 2015). The government of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is also the leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), has been accused of stifling dissident voices and exerting control over the mainstream media for years. With a controversial new social media law, Turkish authorities now have the right to control and, if necessary, restrict free speech online in ways that would be unthinkable in any true democracy — or even in the Turkey of a few years ago (Aydıntaşbaş 2022). All these legislative changes point to there soon being a non-secular regime; thus, I wanted to explore the nations that are Turkey's neighbours and that have similar cultural, ethical, and religious principles, to simulate what may happen in Turkey if the government succeeds in pursuing a religious state.

At the crossroads of Central and South Asia, Afghanistan is an Islamic emirate governed by the Taliban,³¹ a fundamentalist, militant Islamic jihadist movement. Everywhere the Taliban has

³¹ The Taliban, a fundamentalist political movement and military organisation, first came to power in Afghanistan in 1996. They ruled the country until they were ousted by the US-led invasion in 2001. The group then led an insurgency against subsequent US-backed governments. In August 2021, the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan following the withdrawal of American and allied troops, marking the start of their current rule.

come to power, they have banned television, music, and dancing; prohibited women from attending school and working outside the home; carried out atrocities against Afghanistan's non-Sunni population; and allegedly supported militant Sunni sectarian groups in neighbouring countries (Afsar et al. 2008). Consisting of many tribes, the Taliban's micro-organisational, divide-and-conquer behaviour varies for each group and includes many regional power-grabbing manoeuvres that are independent of central control. These tactics consist of armed attacks carried out to establish sharia law concerning various ethical subjects, mainly around sexuality and differences between the sexes. The Taliban are also against the practices of *bacha posh* and *bacha pazi* ('dressing boys as girls') as they involve cross-dressing, which is haram³² in their interpretation of Islam.

Although remaining anonymous in the play, after the character Fettah's espionage, one branch of the Taliban is depicted as attacking the 'love prison' of Kabul to punish the stigmatised women inmates. After the capture, when they discover Aaina is a *bacha posh*, they want to execute her immediately, only to be stopped by Fettah's interference.

3.3.5 The 'Prison of Love': Badam Bagh Women's Prison in Kabul and the Stories of Inmates

Afghanistan's capital city – Kabul – has a jail called Badam Bagh (a Dari name that means 'almond orchard'), which is populated primarily by female inmates serving time for alleged 'moral' offences. Most such offences involve adultery and running away from home or forced marriage.

³² 'Haram' is an Arabic term meaning 'forbidden' in Islam. It refers to anything prohibited by the faith's scripture, the Qur'an, or the Prophet Muhammad in the Hadith. Acts that are haram are typically considered sinful, and they are prohibited for Muslims.

According to an NDTV report, many of the female inmates have tried to flee abusive situations or seek justice for domestic violence (NDTV 2013). Most women and girls are non-literate and face poverty, limited access to healthcare, and continued and widespread violence (Heath and Zahedi 2011).

The Iranian-born director of the HBO-produced documentary *Love Crimes of Kabul*, Tanaz Eshaghian,³³ argues that in Afghan society if a girl flees her home, it is assumed that she must have engaged in sexual activity (Andersen 2011). Eshaghian's documentary is set in Badam Bagh prison, where the three women she focuses on are incarcerated while they await trial for crimes, including sexual misconduct; the three women are all accused of having had premarital intercourse with their fiancé and running away from home. After visiting Badam Bagh, Lyce Doucet reported: 'In one instance, a 16-year-old girl was sentenced to 18 months in prison after a boy came to her home to propose without sending his parents first; another was arrested when her husband accused her of adultery' (The Takeaway 2010).

In the documentary *Love Crimes of Kabul*, a guard from the Badam Bagh prison says of the inmates: 'They are not good women. If they were good women, they would not be here. They would be home with their families' (Eshaghian 2011), voicing the stereotypical moral code that the Taliban wants to implement. In order to control daily social life, a special police force, the Vice Squad, is organised by the Ministry of Vice and Virtue in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Also

³³ American documentary filmmaker Tanaz Eshaghian was born in Iran on 8 September 1974. She is a New York City resident.

called the morality police, they roam the streets, enforcing the group's austere interpretation of Islamic law, with harsh restrictions on women (Khan et al. 2021). An editorial in *The New Yorker* on 11 July 2011 conveyed the troubling situation of Sabereh, an 18-year-old woman who thought that spending time with a 17-year-old boy was part of the arrangements for her marriage. In contradiction of a doctor's certification of her virginity, she received a severe and disproportionate three-year prison sentence.

In the text of *Bacha Posh*, after a vice squad raid, Aaina and her lover, Niaz, are caught 'red-handed' in bed together, which leads to their incarceration. The judge sentences them each to fifteen years in jail for adultery, and Aaina ends up in Badam Bagh prison. Aaina is worried that her family will murder her as soon as she is released from jail. According to Eshaghian's documentary, some of the fathers of the inmates are on record as saying that their daughters have embarrassed their elders and families and are thus deserving of punishment by the families as well (Eshaghian 2011).

3.3.6 Guantánamo Bay Prison Inmates

The Guantánamo Bay detention camp, often known as Gitmo, is a US prison on the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base, situated on Guantánamo Bay's coast in south-east Cuba. The Guantánamo Bay detention facility was built in 2002 and housed Muslim militants and suspected terrorists apprehended by US forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere (Nolen 2023). Following the 9/11 attacks, US national security implemented a racialised terror programme that breaks the law by imprisoning and torturing Muslim men (Steyn 2008: 8). All 780 men detained at the military prison were or are Muslims, with an overwhelming Arab majority. Gitmo came under intense

scrutiny due to allegations that detainees' legal rights under the Geneva Conventions were violated and claims that American authorities tortured or mistreated prisoners. According to Denbeaux,³⁴ the true goal of Gitmo was to act as 'America's battle lab', a facility established by Executive Order from the Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct torture and interrogation tests (Dunford 2017: 18). In their article 'Guantanamo: America's Battle Lab', Denbaux et al. discuss the issue of in-depth scientific research being carried out on detainees at these locations by several US intelligence agencies, including the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), civilian contractors, psychological operations operatives (PSYOPs), and behavioural science consultation teams (BSCTs) (Denbaux et al. 2015).

In the bestselling anthology *Poems from Guantanamo*, edited by Marc Falkoff³⁵ and translated into several languages, many inmates expressed their imprisonment experiences through poetry. Falkoff mentions that the inmates endured constant abuse in complete isolation and countless interrogations, and were subjected to stressful positions, lack of sleep, loud music, and extremes of heat and cold (2007). According to Russo (2016), US national security authorities have implemented a racialised terror regime, in which Muslim males are arbitrarily detained and subjected to cruel treatment. The Guantánamo inmates, seen in notorious photographs kneeling in the mud behind barbed wire fences, are known as the 'indefinitely imprisoned' (Russo 2016: 4).

³⁴ Mark P. Denbeaux is an American lawyer, educator, and author who was born on 30 July 1943, in Gainesville, Florida. He teaches law at Newark, New Jersey's Seton Hall University School of Law and is director of the Centre for Policy and Research.

³⁵ Marc Falkoff, a US professor of law with a doctorate in American literature, is an attorney for seventeen Guantanamo detainees.

In an interview with BBC News on 14 December 2015, one of the poets who had work published in *Poems from Guantanamo*, Shaker Aamer,³⁶ expressed: ‘at best, we are numbers. I worry that when I come home, my children will call for “Daddy”, and I will sit unmovingly. I am two three nine. I am not sure when I will ever be anything else’ (BBC News 2015).

Through poetry, *Poems from Guantanamo* presents witness testimonies relating to the following:

- claims that people were picked up by Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan for no reason;
- the existence of bounty hunters who turned people over to US forces;
- the widespread use of systematic torture;
- that the inmates are deemed guilty until proven innocent, which contravenes the Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments relating to the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Within the discussion on marginalisation and its manifestations, it is essential to consider the experiences of incarcerated people. A striking representation of this circumstance can be found in Falkoff’s work (2007), where he remarks on the alarming contradiction to a fundamental principle of justice, precisely the presumption of being innocent until proven guilty. He poignantly captures the plight of inmates, emphasising: ‘The sheer lack of any capacity to show your innocence because you remain in limbo, in legal limbo, and have no real touch with your family’

³⁶ Shaker Aamer, born in 1966, was the final detainee from the UK to be held in the infamous camp, after having been one of the first prisoners brought there in 2002.

(Falkoff 2007: 29). This quote underscores the profound disconnect and disempowerment individuals in detention often face, adding another layer to our understanding of marginalisation.

Most of the Gitmo inmates are of Afghan citizenship and are Taliban members; the removal of the Taliban leadership left the area a devastated nation, which, under rule by its warlords, dramatically boosted its opium production for the global market (Steyn 2008). Thus, as a direct result of widespread incarceration at Guantanamo, the state lost its central management in the ensuing chaos, and warlords began to rule.

In my story, Fettah, the musical's villain, who wants Aaina only for himself, joins a local radical religious organisation (a branch of the Taliban, but left anonymous in the work) known for its vicious attacks. He talks to the warlord commander and convinces him to attack the Badam Bagh women's prison (also left unnamed) to capitally punish the inmates for their immoral actions. As the story evolves, the commander becomes displeased with Fettah's acts, selling him to the American forces as a bounty hunter. Dramaturgically, Fettah tells his side of the story from his isolation cell in Guantánamo, where he receives constant abuse and torture (more information on Guantánamo is provided in Appendix 3).

3.3.7 The Onstage Portrayal of Rape with Advice and Assistance from a Rape Survivor

In the musical, after being sold to an elderly commander as an enslaved person, Aaina spends three years in captivity, enduring sexual assault and rape, until she finally flees and joins a rescue camp. The phenomenon of 'honour killings' that Aaina fears is deeply ingrained in certain cultural beliefs, where a family's honour is intimately associated with the sexual purity and behaviour of

its members, especially women. When such cultural norms are perceived to be violated, as in Aaina's case, where she had an affair with a boy, the repercussions can be dire. Further complicating these acts is Aina's subsequent subjugation as a sex slave to Taliban soldiers, an experience which, while inflicted upon her against her will, may still place her at risk of being seen as having brought dishonour upon her family. Such circumstances tragically position victims like Aaina in a paradox where they are both the sufferers of grave injustices and at risk of violent reprisals from those who are driven by a misguided sense of restoring familial honour.

The genocide of Yazidis by ISIS motivated me to write the section involving rape, as ISIS coerced thousands of Yazidi women and girls into sexual slavery while killing tens of thousands of Yazidi men in 2014. As foreign secretary of the Turkish Republic, in 2014 Ahmet Davutoglu refused to label the perpetrators as terrorists, saying instead: 'They are a group of angry young men' (Birgun 2016). As a result of Turkey's non-interventionist stance, foreign fighters were free to enter Syria and join ISIS and other violent organisations. ISIS would not be as strong as it is today had Turkey not been so accommodating of its activities within its borders, including the recruitment of thousands of foreign fighters (Yayla 2017).

Alongside the condemned relations with ISIS, the AKP government's statements about sexual abusers and rapists have created outrage among the public. According to a contentious motion by ruling party members, men who sexually abuse children may avoid prosecution if they marry the victim (*Hurriyet Daily News* 2016). Sara Tor from *The Independent* (Tor 2020) commented on the incident, saying that to call this bill disturbing would be an understatement: 'With the

president sending this message, society will not take long to accept the notion that women's rights are unimportant.' This issue was the number one trending topic on Twitter in Turkey throughout the scandal. Opponents, including parliamentarians, several human rights organisations, women's organisations, and child welfare NGOs, promptly denounced the legislation and claimed that the bill normalised child marriage (Solaker 2016).

Violation of women's rights has been on the agenda for some time in Turkey and articulating the problem is vital for any positive outcome. However, as a cis-gender man, it is especially challenging to raise in conversation – much less portray onstage – sensitive subjects involving sexual abuse and the rape of women by men. Therefore, when approaching the topic, I sought assistance from a rape survivor woman actor and friend, who wanted to remain anonymous in the thesis. She helped me to choose an empathetic way of portraying rape onstage, revealing how slight variations in a rape survivor presentation may have significant effects. Throughout the writing and staging processes, her guidance was essential in helping me not to fall into typical errors when talking about rape, such as making false assumptions, victimisation of the woman, or downplaying the horror of the survivor's experience. She also advised me about the literature on rape survivors' psychological health issues, such as despair, anxiety, fear, rage, humiliation, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Saucier et al. 2015). Through this woman's genuine guidance, Aina's character was portrayed as a rape survivor, with a focus on empowerment and resistance to oppression; this woman also gave her voice to the project, literally and symbolically, by doing voice-overs for several roles.

As an experienced woman actor, our consultant warned us about the difficulties of portraying a rape incident on stage without taking the focus away from the survivor's terror. She was also mindful of not using sexual violence to generate debate, media attention, or curiosity, which could result in ticket sales. She guided us to depict rape in a way that utilised the strengths of our female actor, Ayşenur, for an accurate portrayal that did not make the rape act a media object of curiosity. Our consultant was against the use of sexual violence as a device of artistic bravado to shock and confront the audience in the theatre. Considering that the male actors did not take part in the sexual violence according to the script, and also that Ayşenur was primarily a dancer, rather than an actor or a singer, our consultant suggested that delivering the rape scene as a solo dance would be highly appropriate for the following reasons:

- 1) this would not involve any creative text writing or imaginary dialogues;
- 2) the necessity to act or speak would have forced Ayşenur to 'create an artificial emotion';
- 3) there would be no perpetrator or action that would overshadow the terror of loneliness and desperation.

The choreographer, Onur Dilek, liked the idea and wanted to mix hip-hop dance with modern and contact improvisation³⁷ movements to unite fragility and strength. Onur and Ayşenur devised several dance routines independently, presenting them to our consultant and myself. I remember that we found many of the figures presented to be too 'aesthetic' or 'artistic' and we thus requested a rawer display of the rape scene, despite its being a solo performance. We also decided to help the narrative and dramaturgy by letting the character Niaz learn about the rape

³⁷ Contact improvisation is a form of dance that prioritises physical touch and balance as the primary means of communication and movement between partners. In this dance form, performers engage in tactile dialogue, conveying information about movement and momentum through touch (Paxton 1975: 40).

and torture Aaina went through from a mutual source, and to write letters of consolation to her. Through these letters, we learn about Niaz's part of the story, yet they are also helpful in clarifying the intricate details of others' lives.

NIAZ:

I heard everything about you after you were long gone,
I heard that you bore a girl,
She was my daughter, they said,
And I couldn't sleep a wink ever since.
I told you all about me,
Every time I lay my hand on a blank paper.
It wasn't that easy here; I can assure you.
Hundreds of pages I wrote – it all came from the heart.

The passage mentioned above is heard in the ninth song, around the 51st minute, and although the cameraman could have more closely followed Ayşenur's motions in the video, he focuses on the character Aaina's solo dance, depicting the sexual violence precisely at the very end of the 51st minute:

-51m 54s intense back fists to the abdomen

Violence pattern with repetition:

-52m 01s falling face down on the bed

-52m 07s up and down motion on all fours

-52m 13s collapsed and torn apart

-52m 16s falling face down on the bed

-52m 18s up and down motion on all fours

-52m 22s collapsed and torn apart

-52m 27s final collapse face down with convulsions

The camera focuses on the character Fettah until 53m 19s; then, we see the character Aaina lying on her back with open legs. She gets up with difficulty due to her severe exhaustion and trauma and limps towards the cage door.

3.4 Compositional Approach and Personal Style

3.4.1 Lyrics and Music

Through years of experience dealing with long texts in a musical context, I have realised that each work brings certain intrinsic qualities. These qualities may come from the text or from the director's initial idea, and, although not definitive, they can significantly influence the choice of music. Factors such as the work's period and geographical location, the target audience, and the proportion of text and dialogue can all impact the musical selections.

Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical is composed and performed entirely in the Turkish language. To my knowledge it is the first-ever full hip-hop musical in Turkey, and this unique approach allows the musical to delve deep into the cultural and social intricacies of the region while providing an authentic and relatable experience for Turkish audiences.

Turkish hip-hop emerged in the 1990s, as a blend of local and international influences, with artists incorporating elements from Turkish culture and music into the global hip-hop sound. One notable example from the mid-1990s is Cartel, a German-Turkish band that gained popularity for its unique fusion of Turkish lyrics and beats with hip-hop sensibilities. As a teenager, I was drawn to the art of rap poetry and its captivating storytelling. I found myself memorising Cartel's lyrics, fascinated by the power and expressiveness of their words.

Furthermore, Turkish hip-hop's practice of sampling from old Turkish movies caught my attention, as it added another layer of cultural depth and authenticity to the genre. This exploration deepened my understanding of the limitless expression inherent in hip-hop, where speech and external sounds become an integral part of the music's rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic aspects. The technique of sampling reinforced my appreciation for hip-hop's ability to blend various elements and push boundaries, ultimately inspiring me to explore and experiment with the genre in my work.

While studying jazz in the US in my early twenties, I delved into the works of renowned poets and lyricists such as Langston Hughes,³⁸ Saul Williams,³⁹ and Linton Kwesi Johnson,⁴⁰ appreciating the flexibility of language usage in their art. In my second year at university, OutKast released *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*, a groundbreaking double album showcasing the individual talents of its members, 'André 3000' and 'Big Boi', through an eclectic mix of genres, innovative production, and memorable tracks. The album's unique blend of hip-hop, funk, jazz, and pop has significantly impacted my musical journey, inspiring me to broaden my approach to jazz and explore new creative possibilities in my own work. During the early 2000s, Ceza, Sagopa Kajmer, and Fuat significantly impacted the Turkish rap scene with their innovative and skilful use of the Turkish language. These artists expanded the boundaries of rap in Turkey by incorporating

³⁸ Langston Hughes (1902–67) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and key figure in the Harlem Renaissance. His work focused on depicting the lives of African Americans and addressing the issues they faced in a racially divided society.

³⁹ Saul Williams (born 1972) is an American rapper, singer/songwriter, musician, poet, writer, and actor. He is known for his blend of poetry and alternative hip-hop, and his lyrics often address political and social issues.

⁴⁰ Linton Kwesi Johnson (born 1952) is a British-Jamaican dub poet and musician. He is known for his work in reggae and dub poetry, which addresses topics such as racism, inequality, and the experiences of Black people in the UK.

complex wordplay, clever metaphors, and rich storytelling into their lyrics. Their unique styles and linguistic mastery not only elevated the quality of Turkish rap but also played a crucial role in popularising the genre among mainstream audiences, paving the way for future generations of Turkish hip-hop artists (more information about the hip-hop artists that inspired me is included in Appendix 2).

Using both the Turkish language and cultural references, *Bacha Posh* fosters a strong connection between the audience and the subject matter, resulting in a powerful exploration of societal norms and expectations. The use of hip-hop as the genre for this musical not only breaks new ground but also allows for a more fluid exploration of the complex issues presented within the narrative. By incorporating these elements, *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* challenges conventional expectation and engages audiences innovatively and thoughtfully.

As a powerful medium through which to interrogate sociocultural and gender norms, hip-hop has played a significant role in challenging and examining intersectional themes in Turkey. With its unique blend of global and local influences, this genre enables artists to engage with complex issues and offers valuable insights into the cultural, artistic, and political contexts that shape how hip-hop is perceived and consumed within the country.

Some critical aspects of hip-hop that contribute to its effectiveness in addressing these themes are:

- **Conciseness:** in hip-hop, the lyrics are often packed with meaning, using precise language to convey complex ideas or emotions in a short space of time.
- **Language:** hip-hop artists employ a unique vernacular, drawing from colloquialisms, slang, and regional dialects, which adds authenticity and relatability to their work.
- **Sampling:** this is a fundamental aspect of hip-hop production, involving the use of pre-recorded audio fragments from various sources (e.g., music, movies, speeches) to create new compositions, enhancing the genre's diversity and richness.
- **Target audience:** hip-hop initially emerged from urban marginalised communities, and often addressed their struggles and experiences. However, the genre has evolved and broadened its appeal, resonating with diverse audiences worldwide.

When combined with the possibilities of musical theatre, hip-hop has the potential to be a potent force that not only strengthens but also rejuvenates theatre. This fusion of genres enables the exploration of diverse narratives and innovative storytelling methods, thereby broadening the impact and appeal of theatre, bringing it to a wider audience and fostering meaningful dialogue on contemporary issues.

The *Bacha Posh* musical takes place in a contemporary time and geographical location, and the cultural background is a crucial aspect of the story. It has an intricate narrative and is relatively long: whereas the 85-minute solo play *Constantina Pole* is 24 Microsoft Word pages long, *Bacha Posh* is 63 minutes and 40 pages long, having many spoken dialogues between the three actors. The performers are between 23 and 28 years of age, and although not exclusive, the target audience is 13 to 50 years of age.

In the subsequent sections, I elaborate on why I chose hip-hop as the primary structural pillar for *Bacha Posh*. The decision was influenced by hip-hop's intrinsic ability to efficiently relay intricate narratives, its adaptability across languages and cultures, its unique use of sampling, which permits creative musical diversity, and its significant cultural resonance with the target audience in Turkey. The genre also aligns with the modern visual style and choreographic elements relevant to the contemporary theatre scene while allowing for a unique fusion of hip-hop, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian fashion in costume design. Focusing on conciseness, language, sampling, target audience, visual style, choreography, and costume design, I next explore how hip-hop culture forms the backbone of this theatrical work.

3.4.2 Reasons for Choosing Hip-Hop Culture as the Load-bearing Column for *Bacha Posh*

3.4.2.1 Conciseness

A straightforward theatrical approach to a story that covers many years and involves multiple breaking points requires significant use of explanatory text. Accordingly, hip-hop theatre's cultural and performative relationship to orality gives broad access to musical storytelling, as hip-hop's cultural context mirrors certain aspects of the sociological function of epic poetry and tragedy (Banks 2010).

Research verifies that audiences prefer shorter-length, more ‘danceable’,⁴¹ high-volume songs, and popular music is, in response, becoming much shorter. Repost Network’s⁴² creator Jeff Ponchick stated that artists who put out content regularly and produce shorter-length content perform well with them (Hassan and Kopf 2018). According to research by the Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA) at Stanford University, during the post-Spotify era,⁴³ top tracks’ song lengths were short and tempos were slow, while the decibels were high. The ‘energy’ of top tracks decreased as time progressed, but the ‘danceability’ increased. The values of ‘liveness’ and ‘acousticness’ were low across all tracks (Georgieva and Kaneshiro 2018).

Broadway producer and two-time Tony winner Ken Davenport states that shorter shows have become more prevalent in the past ten years: ‘Our target demographic is the ADD generation. Additionally, they can only remain idle briefly if they engage in amusement. Therefore, it is absurd to think that an audience in 20 years will watch a three-hour play’ (Davenport n.d.).

⁴¹ Within the context of mainstream music, ‘danceability’ refers to the characteristic of a song that makes it easy and appealing for listeners to dance to. This typically involves a steady, unvarying beat that dictates a consistent rhythm, prompting continuous motion among dancers. The harmonic structure is straightforward, avoiding complex progressions that might disrupt the dance flow. The song usually adheres to a familiar musical form – often verse/chorus – prevalent in popular music. This structure provides a predictable and satisfying pattern that aligns with the listening habits and expectations of a general popular music audience, often featuring repetitive hooks and a build-up to a climactic chorus that invites movement.

⁴² Repost Network is a music distributor with SoundCloud that allows creators to monetise their online audiences. They provide artists and podcasters on the network with money through advertising, content protection, and expanded profile features.

⁴³ Spotify was launched in October 2008. Therefore, the term ‘post-Spotify’ can be used to refer to the years following its launch, particularly when discussing changes in the music industry, consumer habits, and the digital streaming landscape that have occurred since Spotify became a significant entity.

Some negative feedback regarding the 85- to 90-minute-long *Constantina Pole* was that the play could have been shorter; thus, I wanted to keep the show at around 60 minutes for *Bacha Posh*. A high level of verbal precision and agility was imperative to effectively convey a multifaceted narrative with numerous developments in just one hour, especially during dialogues and monologues. This intricate tale required a musical accompaniment to retain its intended musical nature. Recognising the need to capture public interest and exert influence among the youth, I sought a genre with substantial popularity. This choice also catered to seasoned theatre aficionados, balancing commercial appeal and artistic merit.

Collaboration with CerModern, a renowned arts and culture institution in Ankara, presented a distinct set of challenges and opportunities. Their primary objective is to combine artistic excellence with commercial viability. This dual focus resonates with broader tendencies in the Turkish entertainment sector, where a balance between innovation and popular resonance is often deemed essential. Such trends underscore the importance of integrating familiar elements within artistic ventures to create broader appeal.

CerModern occupies a strategic location in Ankara, serving as a nexus for cultural, governmental, and artistic confluences. Situated amid the National Symphony Hall, the National Opera House, and the district of ministries, its presence symbolises a blend of statecraft and artistry. The daily interactions at CerModern often witness parliamentarians conversing with its director, highlighting the institution's pivotal role in bridging governmental and artistic domains. While CerModern nurtures ties with government officials, it provides engagement with the youth, up-

and-coming artists, and the broader art-loving community. CerModern is one of Ankara's leading artistic and touristic attractions, curating internationally acclaimed works that elevate Ankara's cultural status.

To ensure the success of our production, both artistically and commercially, I needed to be meticulous in every aspect of planning, leaving nothing to chance or untested experimentation. As the producer, my other essential consideration was securing performers who were adept in simultaneous singing, dancing, and acting. Given the developing state of professional musical theatre in Turkey, many National Theatre actors typically excel in only one or two of these disciplines; this compounded the intricacy of forming a semi-professional independent ensemble proficient in all areas. Consequently, there was a hesitancy to rely solely on actors' vocal capabilities, desiring to maintain a professional standard even if the selected actors did not possess wide vocal ranges. Only after fully convening with the crew following the second audition did I discern who I would collaborate with. To my pleasant surprise, Ayşenur Kilinc emerged as a notably talented vocalist – a skill neither she nor I were previously aware of. This newfound knowledge inspired me to compose further tailored pieces for them.

3.4.2.2 Language

Music transcends mere sound, often becoming a powerful linguistic tool for communicating cultural, political, and social narratives. The use of an 'orientalist' approach in musical composition for a Middle Eastern narrative risks perceived superficiality and the evocation of Hollywood's clichéd representations of 'the East', oversimplified and constructed for widespread

appeal (Konzett 2004). Rock music, with its origins entrenched in Western culture, often serves as a vehicle for expressing Western individualism and countercultural ethos. However, this emblem of cultural rebellion and autonomy perhaps aligns differently with the diverse ethos and narratives that pervade the global cultural landscape. For example, situating an Afghan youth love story within a rock musical context could unintentionally imbue the narrative with a 'Western' or white American cultural overtone, which some Turkish audiences may perceive as out of place. As Gudmundsson (1999: 45) posits: 'The US is a melting pot where music from all over the world can be absorbed like exotic spices, yet the foundation of rock as music and culture stays American.'

In contrast, hip-hop, originating from the Black street communities of New York, offers a more universal medium of expression. Its evolution has seen diverse cultural interpretations facilitated by techniques such as sampling that integrate local sounds, making it both familiar and revolutionary to varied audiences, including those in the Middle East.

In *Bacha Posh*, beyond the diegetic and non-diegetic sounds and speeches, the musical landscape is carefully crafted through sampled instruments and sounds employing diverse sonorities to evoke emotional responses and underscore the narrative. Listed below is a summary of the sampled elements within the first song of the musical.

Song 1:

- The *qanoon*, a traditional Middle Eastern zither, establishes the song's cultural setting.
- At the 10-second mark, the sampled sound of my son, Kaplan's, crying imbues the piece with a visceral sense of grief.

- Mucahit's speech about the war, sampled at 19 seconds, contextualises the conflict central to the narrative.
- Incorporated at 5 seconds, the raw emotion of girls crying and praying in a town raided by ISIS, obtained from actual footage, intensifies the track's emotional impact.
- The plaintive sound of a piano, entering at 21 seconds, provides a melodic foundation that carries the weight of the unfolding drama.

Another accessible aspect of hip-hop, the essence of rapping – a raw, rapid vocal articulation – can be harnessed without formal musical training, making it accessible across linguistic boundaries. This freshness, with its origins in marginalised communities and its challenge to white cultural supremacy, positions hip-hop as a compelling artistic medium for the Middle East.

A clear sense of sections, including the introduction, verse, and hook, and a specific oratory style and rhythm are essential for fluidity in rap songs. A word with a double-meaning is more effective in the 'metaphor/simile' step, opening up additional possibilities and dimensions for the 'punchline'. Slang has excellent potential for creating rich metaphors that work on multiple levels; for the 'punchline', homophones, and double entendres add depth. The utilisation of similar vowel and consonant sounds, double meanings, similes, metaphors, alliteration, puns, oronyms, and homophones helps to create the aesthetic landscape of hip-hop song writing. These qualities are intrinsically available to a songwriter in any language, making hip-hop expression appealing across cultures.

My approach to writing rap lyrics differed significantly from approaches taken in other Turkish rap songs. Because I had a very lengthy integral story, the structure was similar to that of long

poems or epic folkloric stories (Turkic *dastans*),⁴⁴ written with differentiating rhyme metres. I did not utilise the paronomasia⁴⁵ technique, which rappers overly rely on to create far-out semantic connections that help the flow and deepen the meanings, as I lacked the time or space to create subconscious drifts away from my story arc. Within the songs and the rap flow, the characters theatrically think, plan, remember, react, and interact, following an intrinsic storyline, thus making the overall design more complicated than a regular 3-minute rap song with a single theme.

The performers I worked with, particularly Berke and Kaan, who were more experienced in Turkish hip-hop traditions, were surprised by the constantly changing long flows, moving from inner thoughts to dialogues without loss of focus on the arc. They wanted to insert and change certain words and flows, add more puns and clever wordplay, break the goal-oriented narrative, and enhance the aesthetic aspects of the flow semantically and rhythmically. However, every time we discussed the new flow, we found, surprisingly, that for a clear and concise narrative of a long, complex story, an extensive use of wordplay, homophones, and homonyms could create systematic problems and detract from the ideal sequence. Consequently, an epic storytelling style of narrative was found to be more suitable.

⁴⁴ '*Dastan*' is an elaborate oral history tradition from Central Asia, Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. A *dastan* is typically focused on a single protagonist who defends his/her tribe or love from an outside invader or enemy. This narrative becomes a teaching tool, as the primary character serves to exemplify how one should conduct oneself.

⁴⁵ 'Paronomasia', meaning a 'pun' or 'wordplay', is a rhetorical device that exploits multiple meanings or similar-sounding words to create humour, emphasise a point, or add layers of meaning to a text. In hip-hop, artists often use paronomasia to showcase their linguistic prowess, create memorable lines, and engage the listener on a deeper level.

3.4.2.3 Sampling

The other key to hip-hop's success in cultural interchangeability is realised through its use of sampling. Sampling refers to appropriating 'sounds' from a previous sound recording and mixing them into a new musical work (Cox 2015). In the 1960s and 1970s, Jamaican disc jockeys (DJs) used turntables to blend the sounds of previously made sound recordings to create a variety of original rhythms and arrangements, known as the early beginnings of the art of sampling. When Jamaican citizen DJ Kool Herc⁴⁶ relocated to the South Bronx in New York and brought his new musical 'remixes' with him, the US became aware of this sampling method. After sampling became known, in order to create a seamless dance music mix, DJs from the Bronx and Harlem devised techniques for manually scratching vinyl records (Blow 1997; George 1998; Rose 1994). Hip-hop started to sample from a broader range of musical genres in the middle and late 1980s as digital sampling technology became more widely available. These genres could include anything, from country through to heavy metal (Demers 2003).

As an integral part of hip-hop music, sampling aims to anchor a song within older and revered traditions. It is a vital tool that adapts this art form to various contexts. While the repertoires, recordings, and practices vary across societies, paying homage to the iconic sounds and recordings of specific cultural backgrounds garners universal resonance. In other words, the global admiration for and effect of hip-hop and sampling transcend geographical and cultural

⁴⁶ The Jamaican American DJ Clive Campbell, known by his stage name DJ Kool Herc, was born on 16 April 1955, and is credited with helping to shape hip-hop music in the 1970s in the Bronx, New York City.

boundaries, uniting audiences around the world in their appreciation of these creative expressions.

Created by the second generation of Turkish migrants in Germany, since the early 1990s, Turkish hip-hop has consistently sought an alternative musical expression through sampling old Turkish recordings. As a response to the exclusionist and segregationist regimes of the Federal Republic of Germany (Kaya 2001) and its mainstream population's frequently depicting Turkish youth as destructive, Islamic, fundamentalist, and problematic (Klussman and Pieper 1997; Focus 1997; Heitmeyer 1997), hip-hop has served as an inspiring example of cultural fusion and diasporic consciousness while creating a new identity.

In choosing hip-hop as the genre for my project, I aimed to capitalise on its powerful and unique ability to challenge sociocultural norms and provoke critical thought. Hip-hop's inherent qualities, such as its directness, authentic language, and deep connection with marginalised communities, allow it to delve into complex themes and reach a wide range of audiences. The use of sampling was also essential, as it enabled me to incorporate various sounds and elements from different sources, adding richness and diversity to the music. By strategically using hip-hop, I was able to explore intersectional issues and engage with my target audience in a more relatable and impactful way than other genres might offer. This approach helped me to push boundaries and achieve a deeper level of understanding and appreciation for the subject matter.

Turkish Hip-Hop culture evolved in Germany's ethnic enclaves rather than the streets of Istanbul due to the living conditions of Turkish youngsters there. Unsurprisingly, the early Turkish Hip-Hop tracks used folk sounds, an arabesque

aesthetic, and lyrics outlining Turkish immigrants' difficulties in Germany. (Yaman n.d.)

Arabesque music is a genre in Turkey that synthesises traditional Turkish folk music and Turkish classical music with classical Arab music. Known for its emotional melodies and often melancholic themes, it first appeared in the 1960s. Arabesque music draws influences from Arabic *maqams* and Turkish folk tunes and typically employs instruments such as the *oud*, *qanoon*, *ney*, and violin. The genre is characterised by passionate vocals that frequently explore themes of love, longing, and despair.⁴⁷ Arabesque music's pessimistic undertones serve as a cathartic outlet for listeners, providing a sense of shared experience and solace in acknowledging life's difficulties. This poignant expression of life's darker aspects has secured Arabesque music's place in the hearts of many Turkish people, making it one of the country's most enduring and popular genres. Over time, it has evolved to incorporate elements of pop and rock, thereby establishing itself as a popular and versatile genre within Turkish popular culture before transitioning into hip-hop.

Working-class Turkish hip-hop youth culture in Berlin can usefully convey how the diasporic youth develop cultural bricolage in collision, negotiation, and dialogue with the parental, 'host', and global cultures. The idea of cultural bricolage thus overcomes problematic terms such as 'deculturated', 'in-between', and 'degenerate', which have been attributed to German-Turkish youth (Kaya 2001).

⁴⁷ For an example of the Arabesque genre, see Müslüm Gürses' 'Unutamadım', which provides a clear embodiment of the style's thematic and musical elements. English subtitles accompany the song to facilitate a better understanding of the genre for non-Turkish speakers. Gürses, M. 'Unutamadım' [with English translation/subtitles] (Channel: Turkish Samurai). YouTube Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of4PQFJkGAg&ab_channel=TurkishSamurai (accessed 29 January 2024).

In Turkish hip-hop, the pessimism of Arabesque, Turkish pop's romance, and rap's 'coolness' blend. As a composer, I found that Arabesque has a powerful personality that can merge with other styles without losing its essence. It can be joyful or mournful but is always mysterious, ecstatic, and elusive. This combination incorporates two of Turkey's most popular genres, creating a solid foundation for Turkish hip-hop. Besides through lyrics, connections to these earlier genres are made through sampling.

For *Bacha Posh*, I aimed to construct a would-be 'oriental' ambience while delivering a multicultural message. To create a Middle Eastern soundscape, I used sampled local instruments such as the *qanoon*, *oud*, and Eastern string sections – signature elements of Arabesque music. Within the universal hip-hop language, defined by a beat of around 90 bpm made with sampled drums and bass, the pre-recorded aspects of Eastern music found their place in a spacious texture. To avoid copyright issues, I used samples from sound banks such as Sonokinetic, Native Instruments, and Logic. I played saxophone, guitar, and keyboards before transforming them into samples (information about the sound banks is included as Appendix 1).

Apart from the music, diegetic sounds, and the speech of non-visible characters (the father, the police, the judge, and the militants) were also sampled for easier manipulation of the pitch and rhythm while being applied over the beat; like Wu-Tang and Kanye West's approach to vocal sampling, I assigned the vocal recordings to Logic's Sampler (see Appendix 1) and altered the recordings through the keyboard (information about rap artists is included as Appendix 2). I

voiced over the male characters and pitched down between 4 and 6 semitones to reach the desired effect of creating a tyrannical voice symbolising male oppression. The voice of the translator and the doctor was kept intact to protect her sensitivity and passion.

3.4.2.4 Target Audience

In Turkey, as of January 2023, half of the Spotify Top 10 were Turkish hip-hop and its derivatives. With 11,409,900 streams, Lvbcl C5's 'Dacia', a reggaeton rap song, was, at that time, number one in Turkey in Spotify streams ('Spotify Daily Chart' n.d.). In 2020 and 2021, Ezhel, another rapper, was Turkey's most streamed musician. In 2022, UZI was number one in the streams, another rap artist. In 2018, theatre ticket sales were 7,899,547, yet in 2017 (TUIK 2020), total concert sales in Turkey were around thirty million (CNN Turk 2017) (see Appendix 2 for information about the artists).

While this number includes all age groups and all musical genres, among Turkish youth, watching theatre plays is just not as popular as going to concerts; according to Nedim Saban,⁴⁸ a theatre veteran in Turkey, 'youth hates going to the theatre' (Tulgar 2002). People from the working class and the ghettos find classical theatre expensive, pretentious, Western, and distant from their culture (Çalışkan 2019). Most of the Turkish population see classical plays as an elitist playground, far from the struggles of daily life. Turkish people who do not embrace the elitist ideology of secular 'White Turks',⁴⁹ a general term from the AKP era, feel a more profound sense of belonging

⁴⁸ Born in 1967, Istanbulite Nedim Saban is a Jewish Turkish actor, TV personality, and theatre director.

⁴⁹ The name 'White Turks' describes urban inhabitants in Turkey, frequently characterised as espousing values relating to Republicanism, positivism, the Western enlightenment, and secularism. The conservative, Islamic, and

to their burgeoning community consciousness as a counterpoint to Western values (Birkiye 2009). Because of classist political ideologies and propagandist columnists, the separation between different social layers has increased.

People who cannot tie a proper necktie, who cannot dance, who will not take their wives to restaurants, who cannot speak foreign languages, who have no knowledge of the arts, who have never heard Brahms in their lives, and who have never been to a theatre are now in positions of power alongside Anatolian businesspeople and politicians who look like them. (Altan 2008: 11)

I aimed to create musicals that would resonate with a wider audience than just the regular theatregoers, elite Turkish society, or 'White Turks'. I wanted to impact the youth, guest workers abroad, and marginalised groups such as LGBTQ+; therefore, the delivery method was as crucial as was the choice of topics that would be relatable for alienated audiences. Hip-hop served to attract people who may not typically view theatre as 'their' form of expression. Early in my composing career, I was hired by various theatre companies for specific music styles in their productions, but hip-hop was never requested.

3.4.2.5 Visual Style of *Bacha Posh* Drawn from Hip-Hop

Hip-hop art elements such as rap music, graffiti, dancing, and attire can provide a fresh approach to traditional theatre. In Ankara, graffiti is popular among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, serving to challenge state control and lay claim to public spaces. Despite its illegality without a permit, graffiti covers many streets and buildings.

often less privileged 'Black Turks', also known as the original rural Anatolian population, are contrasted with 'White Turks'.

Graffiti has also been appropriated for commercial use, ironically as part of gentrification campaigns. Commonly, most popular coffee shops, bars, and nightclubs have graffiti-covered walls. It is possible to trace the tags⁵⁰ by many graffiti artists, and youths commonly know the artists behind them, following their work throughout the cities. 'The realm of graffiti is the kids' other world because adults do not read them, and it is also a place where minority youth may express themselves in their language without being constrained or questioned' (Kaya 2001: 166).

As a theatre professional, I have yet to see plays involving real graffiti and artists in Turkey. However, staging a rap musical without graffiti would have resulted in an incomplete representation of hip-hop culture. As illustrated in Figure 4, our endeavour was to root the musical composition in the ethos of hip-hop culture, and to authentically represent this culture and appeal to young audiences. As dedicated hip-hop enthusiasts, we collaborated with Stak, a renowned hip-hop graffiti artist based in Ankara, for the stage design of our performance. The resulting visual impact, conveyed in Figure 4, further reinforces and embodies the thematic elements of hip-hop in our work.

⁵⁰ Tagging refers to the graffiti artist's writing their signature (or their alias or emblem) on a visible surface.



Figure 4: Collaborative stage design with Stak

When we came together for *Bacha Posh*, I shared our hidden strategy for the stage design with Stak. The stage featured three metal cages, each representing a different location, but we wanted this distinction to be felt subconsciously by the audience.

- The left-hand cage represented a prison in Kabul, Afghanistan.
- The middle-positioned cage symbolised a rehabilitation centre in Berlin.
- The right-hand cage stood for the Guantánamo Bay detention camp in Cuba.

Behind the cages, seven wooden panels hung from the truss. I asked Stak to spray paint the panels with colours respectively symbolising these cities:

- Kabul: dust, sand, and concrete
- Berlin: cold and shiny blue, green, and grey
- Guantánamo: concrete, orange, and black.

Additionally, Stak suggested incorporating original graffiti work from these three cities as a homage to the artists from those places. After researching, he found and integrated pieces he wanted to honour into our stage design.

3.4.2.6 Choreography

Besides the music, dancing and movement may be the most critical aspects of a musical theatre production, and if this musical involves hip-hop, then dance becomes inseparable from the music. As hip-hop dancers became an essential component of popular music videos, the demand for them grew massively in the entertainment industry, forcing dance studios to provide more lessons in that domain. TikTok⁵¹ has also created a force that has embedded dance into our lives more than before. Choreographer Tiana Canterbury⁵² claims that TikTok has increased the number of children enrolling in dance classes. An Australian dancer and past Red Bull ‘Dance Your Style’ champion named Koh told Red Bull last year that ‘TikTok significantly influenced the dance world’. ‘I believe it is fantastic that the platform has brought dance to so many people and allowed them to experience dance in a way that does not make them feel like dancing is something only “dancers” can do’ (Cunningham 2022).

According to app analytics company Apptopia, TikTok topped the charts with 850 million downloads in 2020, and was the most prominent global app with \$540 million in profits (Lehman 2021). The most well-known aspect of this phenomenon is undoubtedly dancing, with viral dance trends being a peculiarly TikTok occurrence. TikTok choreographies have already infiltrated other social media, such as YouTube and Instagram, which have been widening their reach unstoppably. The woman actor in *Bacha Posh*, Ayşenur Kilinc, also known as ‘Fels’, a 23-year-old

⁵¹ A well-known social media platform, TikTok enables users to make, watch, and share 15-second films using mobile devices or webcams.

⁵² Tiana Canterbury is a TV personality, professional dancer, choreographer, and teacher of dance from South Wales.

professional hip-hop dancer, is an upcoming TikTok phenomenon, with solo dance videos watched over 100,000 times. The proportion of TikTok users who are aged 16–24 is 41 per cent (Kobel 2022). This age group constituted my primary target audience; therefore, if I wanted their attention on my musical theatre, I knew I had to present something similar to what they sought on social media.

Onur Dilek, a professional hip-hop dancer and instructor in Ankara, was the choreographer for *Bacha Posh*. He helped in the selection of suitable candidates during auditions, focusing on physical aspects, while the writer/director considered vocal and musical efficiency. The cast included Ayşenur Kilinc, a professional dancer, Berke Can Kuyucular, an MC, and Kaan Karsiyakali, a producer, who could sing, rap, and move.

As the writer/director communicated their expectations for each scene, Onur Dilek translated them into motion with Ayşenur’s assistance. The choreography was then simplified for Berke Can and Kaan. The cast needed to learn hip-hop terminology and specific dance moves, such as the two-step, locking, popping, krumping, and many others. The four-month rehearsal process involved adapting the choreography to suit each performer’s body and gradually honing the movements.

3.4.2.7 Costume Design

Hip-hop fashion currently dominates the tastes of youth from age 12 and upwards, who are aware of the brand names and styles and what they signify more widely. For *Bacha Posh*, I wanted the costumes to have one foot in the hip-hop world and the other foot rooted in an authentic

Middle Eastern and Central Asian dress code, without knowing how to accomplish that. Our costume designer is my partner both in marriage and in the C1-69 Sanat theatre company, Aslihan Karahanli Yuce, and she incorporated the idea of combining local clothes with iconic hip-hop shoes and garments: Aaina had a red Afghani hijab, a nose ring, and a brick-red kameez⁵³ when she was a boy; when she was a girl, she wore a black top and black shalwar, with black leather boots. Fettah, who had long dreadlocks, wore an orange Guantánamo-style jumpsuit, a pair of handcuffs on his wrist, and white Nike Air Force 1 trainers. Niaz had a green shawl, cream kameez, grey shalwar, and Adidas Hoops 3.0 Mid trainers. The baggy clothes were appropriate as the performance involved a lot of dance and action, and all the costumes were made in Ankara by two separate tailors. The combination of hip-hop with the East made the work more marketable to the youth and to theatre lovers as an eclectic and exotic blend (more information on hip-hop attire is provided in Appendix 4).

3.5 Production Process and Challenges

3.5.1 Casting

The summer of 2022 brought several challenges:

- a) For economic reasons, CerModern⁵⁴ set a September deadline for completion and staging of the musical.

⁵³ In South and Central Asia, the shalwar kameez is a traditional combination outfit worn by women and, in some locations, by males.

⁵⁴ CerModern is a contemporary art space located in Ankara, Turkey. It was established in 2010 as part of the European Capital of Culture activities. The venue is housed in a restored industrial building built in the 1930s to maintain and repair trains. This space now includes exhibition halls, artist studios, a theatre, and a café. CerModern hosts a variety of cultural and artistic activities, including exhibitions, performances, workshops, film screenings, and other events. It promotes contemporary arts and fosters cultural exchange nationally and internationally. The institution supports emerging artists, promotes creative dialogue, and brings art and community together. <https://www.cermodern.org/home.html>

- b) Finding three young talented individuals skilled in rapping, singing, dancing, and acting proved difficult.
- c) Only two songs had been finalised by the time onstage rehearsals began, leaving nine more to be written.

CerModern's management urged an early completion, but only two songs out of eleven had been completed by May, and auditions for performers needed to be finalised for the composer to continue. In Ankara, finding suitable talents was a challenge: actors were unable to rap or dance, and dancers could not sing. Working with hip-hop artists raised concerns about discipline, memorising lyrics, and their ability to sing, dance, and act.

Audition experiences with rappers were mainly negative, as they lacked discipline and insisted on creating their own lyrics; however, during the final audition on 4 June 2022, three young hip-hop artists were found: Ayşenur, a dancer and singer; Berke Can, a rapper; and Kaan, a producer and beatmaker. They all quickly took on their roles, forming the team for Turkey's first hip-hop musical with authentic hip-hop artists as actors and performers.

Though lacking formal training, these performers shared a background as avid RPG (role-playing game) players, contributing to their acting skills. Their ease in taking and executing directions facilitated a smooth exchange of ideas and creativity.

Ayşenur's journey was particularly intriguing, as she came from a religious family and had transitioned to atheism and hip-hop dancing. Embracing the story of *Bacha Posh*, she became

the perfect candidate to bring Aaina alive with her background and extraordinary abilities in rapping, singing, dancing, and acting. This fortunate discovery signalled the project's success.

3.5.2 Choreography and Rehearsal Discipline

Integrating hip-hop dance with local Afghani, Pakistani, and Iraqi dance figures was essential to capturing cultural nuances; thus, we relied on online dance videos to gather the necessary moves. The choreographer then adapted these moves into a fluid hip-hop routine, often simplifying them for better understanding.

While Ayşenur, the only dancer among the actors, quickly learned the Central Asian dance moves, the other actors struggled. Aged between 23 and 28 and coming from different disciplines, the actors sometimes needed to take a more professional attitude towards post-rehearsal independent practice, adding tension to the already challenging four-month schedule.

Rehearsals took place four days a week, from 12:30 to 17:00, beginning with flexibility, cardio, and strength exercises led by Onur Dilek. We then worked on show pieces, followed by self-critiques and cooling down. We recorded daily progress and shared it on a WhatsApp group. Fridays included brunch, table rehearsal, and an onstage rehearsal. Balancing the eclectic choreography and ensuring rehearsal discipline were significant challenges and lessons in the project.

3.5.3 Feedback

The theatrical production of *Bacha Posh*, initially conceptualised as a musical, was added to CerModern's 2022 programming schedule. A significant challenge presented itself in expanding the audience for *Bacha Posh* to encompass the regular hip-hop audience, a demographic not commonly aligned with CerModern's typical attendees. During the rehearsal period, however, a noticeable shift in audience composition was evident. This change was mainly due to the varied social circles of the actors, encompassing rappers, DJs, beatmakers, licensed firearm manufacturers, videographers, and hip-hop dancers, among others. The hip-hop entourage stated that they enjoyed what they saw and heard during rehearsals. The cast, who were not professionally trained actors, leveraged their networks for feedback and support. Recognising the advertising potential of their social media presence, they utilised their friends' significant followings, gained through content creation, to promote the musical. This strategy was essential to me, bridging a gap between my understanding and the vibrant street hip-hop culture and providing authentic insights from those immersed in the contemporary Turkish hip-hop scene.

From a technical standpoint, the play drew on the expertise of Levent Ünal (sound) and Gökhan Demirkan (lighting) from the Ankara State Theatre. In addition, Aykut Öz of the Ankara Stage Opera played a significant role as the stage designer. The visual and kinetic aspects of the performance were augmented by graffiti artists, graphic designers, and choreographer Onur Dilek.

Bacha Posh was performed twice in the closing months of 2022. While the initial staging received a favourable response in ticket sales, the succeeding presentation saw a marked decline, with

ticket sales tallying a mere twenty. This drop in audience interest led to the play's premature conclusion at CerModern. Despite my absence from these live shows, I was furnished with recordings, which proved invaluable in collecting feedback and guiding discussions with the production team. The following section delineates the individual feedback sourced during rehearsals and post-performance phases.

Aykut Öz's initial stance towards incorporating rap music in the performance was marked by scepticism. Being an ardent bassist with a preference for rock music, he struggled to resonate with the artistic dimensions of hip-hop. However, he appreciated the backing tracks, commonly called beats. The graffiti elements of the project further piqued his interest. He enjoyed coordinating the graphic design for the play's brochure and overseeing the graffiti artwork on stage. Additionally, Öz played a pivotal role in facilitating the production's audio quality. He assisted in identifying a professional music studio, which proved instrumental in navigating the intricate processes of mixing and mastering. Despite his reservations during the rehearsal phase, the premiere significantly altered his perspective. He expressed admiration and was deeply impressed with the comprehensive vision manifested on stage. He discerned Ayşenur's exceptional talent and was captivated by Berke Can's commanding stage presence, but found Kaan's performance to be unexciting.

Levent Ünal, distinguished as the principal sound technician at the National Theatre and known for his skills as a rock drummer, initially expressed reservations regarding the inclusion of hip-hop in the play. His musical preferences did not align with rap, and while he appreciated the backing tracks, the spoken word elements of rap did not resonate with him. Nevertheless, he

admired the narrative and the staging of *Bacha Posh*. Faced with the challenge of CerModern's dated and problematic sound system, Ünal's expertise was pivotal. He adeptly navigated and resolved the sound issues, ensuring an optimal auditory experience for the audience.

Gökhan Demirkan, a renowned lighting artist from the National Theatre, displayed a favourable disposition towards hip-hop. He expressed appreciation for the stage art, particularly the graffiti elements. Entrusted by me with the autonomy to incorporate his signature light filters, Demirkan seized this opportunity to craft a distinct and personalised lighting ambience, a liberty he relished. However, in assessing the ensemble, he perceived the actors to be relative novices. Furthermore, he noted their obstinacy in not adhering to his specific lighting markings and feedback.

The critical reception for *Bacha Posh* was not as extensive as expected, mainly due to its limited run. *Constantina Pole* had a successful stretch from August 2020 to the autumn of 2022, allowing for a substantial accumulation of audience and critical feedback over many performances. In contrast, *Bacha Posh* was staged only twice and because I was in the UK during its performance run, I was unable to attend the shows in person. Consequently, my understanding of the audience's reception and the critical response to *Bacha Posh* is based solely on second-hand reports from friends and colleagues involved in the production. This limited perspective inherently restricts my ability to provide a detailed analysis of the show's reception.

3.6 Conclusion and Future Outlook

Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical represents a pivotal exploration in Turkish theatrical storytelling, employing a novel approach that intersects autoethnographic research with the dynamism of hip-hop. As Turkey's pioneering hip-hop musical, it wove together diverse artistic practices, threading elements of enduring Middle Eastern heritage with the immediacy of Western cultural motifs. The production spotlighted critical themes such as gender identity, the perpetuation of violence, and the underpinnings of cultural oppression, engaging its audience through a compelling synthesis of hip-hop, choreography, and narrative.

The incorporation of local Middle Eastern dance moves alongside hip-hop choreography added a layer of authenticity to the musical, while the diverse backgrounds of the performers enriched the overall performance. Creating the choreography and maintaining rehearsal discipline proved challenging but ultimately rewarding. The team synthesised traditional and modern elements to create a visually captivating and thought-provoking performance.

The use of hip-hop in this piece of musical theatre was instrumental in attracting youth from all layers of society. The genre's widespread appeal and relatability enabled the musical to resonate with young people, regardless of their backgrounds or socio-economic status; thus, our impact was not limited to the regular theatre aficionados but had a much wider reach. However, its brief performance run curtailed the musical's potential to influence Turkish theatre, halting the momentum that would have been required to fully gauge its impact.

Despite its fleeting presence on the stage, *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* cast a significant ripple through the currents of Turkish theatre. During its brief tenure, it influenced important producers, who sought to emulate its pioneering hip-hop theatre model, sparking a new trend in theatrical productions. Following a coffee chat about my PhD and current hip-hop musical project with a colleague from *Woyzeck Masalı*, the acclaimed actor Erdal Beşikçioğlu expressed his desire to collaborate on a similar venture with his company. I informed him that I was committed to my studies in the UK and was therefore not available. Nevertheless, by the following summer, Beşikçioğlu had developed his own hip-hop musical, positioning it as Turkey's first, despite my prior engagement in the genre.⁵⁵ My musical not only blazed a trail as the first of its kind in a nation of 80 million but also became a launching pad for the careers of the three amateur actors, who have since been recognised for their talents.⁵⁶ Its echoes were felt across the media, with numerous news outlets and newspapers featuring its radical approach.⁵⁷ As the creative force behind this vanguard production, I take immense pride in having laid the foundation for what I

⁵⁵ Beşikçioğlu, E. & Şaniser. (2023). 'Turkey's First Rap Musical: A Clockwork Orange! Told by Erdal Beşikçioğlu and Şaniser'. YouTube Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSIZoRrVtrc&ab_channel=Cumhuriyet (accessed 29 January 2024).

⁵⁶ Following the musical's success, the artists have continued to engage with the public and showcase their talents. One such instance is a ticketing link for an event featuring Berke Can Kuyucular with Kaan Karşıyakalı, highlighting their ongoing artistic endeavours: 'Gece Mülakatı - Berke Can Kuyucular ile Fabrikadaşın.' Tickets are available at Biletino. (Online). <https://biletino.com/tr/e-luo/gece-mulakati-berke-can-kuyucular-ile-fabrikadasin/> (accessed 29 January 2024). Additionally, the influence of the musical has extended to popular social media platforms, where cast members continue to resonate with a broad audience. For example, a performance by Ayşenur Kılınc, an artist from the musical, has gained significant attention on TikTok. (Online). <https://www.tiktok.com/@iamfels/video/7134839141006724353> (accessed 29 January 2024).

⁵⁷ 'Ankara - A Hip-Hop Musical'. *Hürriyet Local News*. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/ankara/bir-hip-hop-muzikali-42100195> (accessed 29 January 2024).

'Ankara - A Way of Being: Bacha Posh'. *Hürriyet Local News*. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/ankara/bir-var-olma-bicimi-bacha-posh-42142514> (accessed 29 January 2024). Links are also presented in Appendix 5.

hope will be a long-standing legacy in Turkish theatre, establishing a new genre that resonates with contemporary audiences and reflects our culture's vibrant, dynamic spirit.

Chapter 4. Going Beyond the Limits: Pushing for Groundbreaking Impact on Musical Theatre with *Constantina Pole* and *Bacha Posh*

This conclusion delves into the significant influence of the pioneering musicals *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* on musical theatre in Turkey and beyond. Created over thirty-four months between October 2019 and August 2022, these musicals boldly addressed significant themes and issues, stepped beyond societal expectations, and reached a diverse audience.

The innovative musicals *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical* have navigated beyond the boundaries of traditional theatre in Turkey's elite and urban society by addressing themes such as gender fluidity, cross-dressing, femininity, misogyny, and social oppression in the Greater Middle East. Their unique storytelling methods and pioneering styles have impacted the musical theatre landscape and initiated essential discussions.

By examining the history of the Anatolian peninsula and connecting it with the present day through these musicals, I aim to raise awareness of the urgent need for gender equality and protection for both women and LGBTQ+ communities in the Middle East. This study contributes to ongoing efforts towards a more accessible and secure global future.

The creative journey of my thesis evolved significantly from its initial conception. While the original intent was to develop a musical at Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL),

potentially involving students and perhaps engaging with the Turkish diaspora in the UK, the actual direction of my work took a different path.

The two musicals that emerged, *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*, were firmly rooted in Turkey, performed in Turkish, and intended primarily for Turkish audiences. This focus reflects a deep engagement with Turkey's cultural, social, and political landscapes rather than addressing the experiences and issues of the Turkish diaspora. Drawing from my theatrical ventures in *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* and *Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical*, I probe into the heart of Turkish sociocultural fabric, challenging entrenched norms and igniting discourse on sensitive issues such as gender fluidity and the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals. This approach mirrors that of Pieter Verstraete, whose engagements with Turkish and Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe illuminate hidden narratives, carving out space for marginalised voices within the broader societal narrative. As Verstraete articulates, the work aims 'to redefine theatre as an institution from within its complicit history with that of an autocratic state' (Verstraete 2019: 302), suggesting a shared ambition to employ the arts as a reflective and transformative force capable of questioning established power dynamics and nurturing an inclusive understanding of identity within a global context.

The success of *Constantina Pole* and *Bacha Posh* in challenging societal norms and expectations has resonated with a diverse audience, breaking away from traditional theatre aficionados and societal elites. These musicals have created opportunities for talented performers from various

disciplines to showcase their skills, and have contributed to the evolution of musical theatre in Turkey and beyond.

The success of *Constantina Pole* and *Bacha Posh* at the box office, with sold-out shows and widespread excitement and interest in both wider society and the theatre world, further demonstrates their impact. People dared each other to attend *Constantina Pole*, adding to the show's fame, mainly because of the improvised section in which the actor humorously interacted with the audience.

Below, I share some audience comments and reactions that we received after a recent performance of *Constantina Pole*, as these highlight various aspects of the show:

- 1) 'I was terrified she would tease us.'
- 2) 'She was fixated on me during the show, constantly hitting on me, saying bald people are good in bed.'
- 3) 'Did the actress's real mother die?'
- 4) 'She cried in the middle of the play; we couldn't tell if she lost her mother.'
- 5) 'I didn't understand the first half, but she crushed everyone in the second half.'
- 6) 'We were bored in the first part; it got better once it started to engage us.'
- 7) 'The actress makes too many jokes using sexuality; it made us uncomfortable.'
- 8) 'We thought this was a woman; she's become a woman, hasn't she?'
- 9) 'Did the actress get breast implants? Is she a real transvestite?'
- 10) 'We're tired of the transvestite propaganda.'
- 11) 'If we continue with this perversion, no men will be left in the country.'
- 12) 'I couldn't watch half of the play because I had to hide behind the seat to avoid her teasing me.'
- 13) 'At the end, does she die? What happens?'

14) 'Why do men dress like this? Is theatre supposed to be like this?'

15) 'I haven't laughed like this in a long time; some moments were like the Huysuz show.'

This notoriety even led to a call from the presidential office, requesting seats for their guests from the government. The call came from the president's private secretary, who contacted the Tatbikat stage manager to request free tickets. The manager nervously called me, explaining that he had received a call from the presidential office and that we should be cautious about providing tickets. He even suggested that we consider changing the actor's outfit. However, I insisted that we would be kind, offer them the best seats, as many as they wanted, and be very respectful, but not change anything about the show. At first, the whole team thought it could be a form of control, but on the night of the show, the private secretary and her friend genuinely enjoyed it. Our actor, Çağıl, was particularly professional that night and made her laugh with intelligent jokes. At the end, he improvised a monologue about femicides and the importance of accepting people as they are, and she gave a standing ovation. She later called me personally to thank me, and I invited her to *Bacha Posh*, which she accepted but did not attend.

Following the journey of my hip-hop theatre work *Bacha Posh*, Erdal Beşikçioğlu,⁵⁸ a renowned artist and a friend, drew inspiration to forge a new path within the same vein. Conversations we shared in the summer of 2021 about my methodologies in writing and composition, along with a sneak peek into the music and synopsis of *Bacha Posh*, ignited a creative spark. Leveraging his prominence in the industry and securing substantial sponsorships, he ambitiously orchestrated a larger-scale hip-hop musical staged at Zorlu Performing Arts Center. His production, a rap-infused

⁵⁸ Erdal Beşikçioğlu (born 5 January 1970, in Ankara) is a Turkish actor and theatre director.

interpretation of *A Clockwork Orange*, throws the spotlight onto themes of women's rights and the scourge of rape, echoing the socially charged narratives that I explored in my work.

Guided by the principles detailed in Rebecca Applin Warner's *The Musical Theatre Composer As Dramatist: A Handbook for Collaboration*, my stylistic choices were anchored in the musicals' conceptual essence alongside the directors' vision. I discovered the art of musical composition-making in real-time, on stage.

Efficient and pragmatic, I respected the director's vision, a lesson ingrained during my Berklee days. My comprehensive role in writing the play, libretto, and music culminated in a signature sound that distinguished me from my contemporaries. This holistic approach has proven economically advantageous for theatre companies by circumventing the additional costs and legal complexities associated with copyrights and contracts.

The productions for my PhD, achieved with minimal budgets and funded by personal savings, reflect my resilience and adaptability. I have worked with professionals and amateurs, ensuring success under any and all circumstances, even amid the global shutdown due to Covid-19. Despite producing two musicals on a shoestring budget with amateur actors and navigating unfamiliar musical styles, I remained open to judgement based on these constrained financial conditions.

Furthermore, if sufficient resources had been available for live orchestration, this would have resulted in an incomparable live experience. However, due to a lack of funding, the performance had to rely on backing tracks, which could not capture the richness of the live music I had

envisioned. Despite these constraints, the work challenged social and cultural norms, particularly those that excluded the LGBTQ+ community, and received recognition from high-level officials, including the presidential office, indicating the project's effectiveness and success.

For aspiring musical theatre composers, my advice is multifaceted:

- **Diversify Your Musical Expertise:** Master one musical style and be proficient in at least five others, embracing a broad spectrum of musical influences.
- **Deepen Your Literary Engagement:** Actively engage with literature to enhance narrative and thematic depth in your compositions.
- **Invest in Your Art:** Commit financially to your creative dreams, and understand the potential need to rebuild from the ground up.
- **Follow Your Inner Drive:** Let your internal motivation and passion guide your creative decisions and workflow.
- **Develop Early Education in Arrangement:** Work on your skills in arranging and orchestration early in your career to strengthen your compositional abilities.
- **Cultivate Lyric Writing:** Develop the craft of writing lyrics, as they are the narrative backbone of musical storytelling.
- **Consider Scene Construction:** Adopt David Lynch's methodical approach to scene construction to structure narrative progression effectively.
- **Focus on Directorial Collaboration:** Work closely with directors, valuing their input on style, technique, and leitmotifs to enrich your score.
- **Improve Your Stagecraft Skills:** Gain knowledge in stage lighting and set design, as these skills complement musical composition and performance.
- **Document and Promote:** Record rehearsals and use social media platforms for promotion to widen audience reach.
- **Embrace Team Dynamics:** Trust your instincts in team collaborations, and view disputes as natural elements of the creative process, not as obstacles.

- **Focus on Long-Term Goals:** Look beyond immediate financial gains, focusing on long-term artistic success and relationships.
- **Be Open to Interaction:** Remain open to interactions outside formal rehearsals, understanding the importance of informal networking and relationship-building within the industry.

Appendix 1: Sound Banks

Sonokinetic: Sonokinetic are famous for creating highly creative, excellent quality sample libraries and digital musical instruments, ranging from authentic vocal and instrumental multi-samples and performances, to advanced symphonic phrase-based tools, and to more traditional instruments.

Native Instruments: Established in Berlin in 1996, Native Instruments offer a range of products, including synthesisers, drum machines, samplers, and other instruments for creating electronic music. The company also provide digital audio workstations (DAWs), virtual instrument libraries, and other music production tools.

Logic Pro: Originally produced by German software company C-Lab (later Emagic) as Notator Logic or Logic, Logic Pro became an Apple product when the company acquired Emagic in 2002. Designed for the iOS platform, Logic Pro is a sophisticated audio editing and MIDI sequencing tool that enables music producers to modify dynamic audio compositions using step-sequencing, multi-device editing, and live-looping capabilities.

Sampler: Available in Logic Pro 10.5, Sampler is a powerful software sampler that allows users to quickly create multi-sample instruments using drag-and-drop processes. Samples added to the Navigation Bar are examined and automatically assigned to keyboard shortcuts.

Appendix 2: Hip-Hop Artists and Rock Bands

André 3000 (born 1975), real name André Lauren Benjamin, is an American rapper, singer, songwriter, record producer, and actor. He is best known for being a member of the hip-hop duo OutKast, alongside Big Boi. André 3000 is known for his eclectic style and unique approach to hip-hop, incorporating elements of jazz, funk, and psychedelic music into his work.

Big Boi (born 1975), real name Antwan André Patton, is an American rapper, songwriter, actor, and record producer. He is best known as a member of the hip-hop duo OutKast, alongside André 3000. Big Boi's work often features a mix of Southern hip-hop, funk, and pop influences.

Ceza (Bilgin Özçalkan), born on 31 December 1977 in Istanbul, Turkey; Ceza is a highly influential Turkish rapper known for his rapid-fire delivery and intricate wordplay. He gained widespread acclaim with his solo debut album, *Med Cezir*, released in 2002.

Sagopa Kajmer (Yunus Özyavuz), born on 17 June 1978 in Samsun, Turkey; Sagopa Kajmer is a prominent Turkish rapper, producer, and songwriter. He gained fame with his debut album, *Bir Pesimistin Gözyaşları*, released in 2001, and is known for his poetic lyrics and introspective themes.

Fuat Ergin, born on 6 July 1972 in Berlin, Germany, is a Turkish-German rapper and producer who has been a significant figure in the Turkish rap scene since the 1990s. He released his debut

album, *Illegal*, in 1999 and is known for his socially conscious lyrics and for blending traditional Turkish music elements with hip-hop.

Wu-Tang Clan, a prominent American hip-hop collective, were founded in Staten Island, New York City, in 1992. Wu-Tang Clan were instrumental in developing and popularising hardcore and East Coast hip-hop subcultures.

Ye (Kanye Omari West) is an American rapper, singer, songwriter, record producer, and fashion designer born on 8 June 1977. He is renowned for his signature high-pitched, speeded-up sampling style.

Lvbel C5, or Suleyman Burak Bodur, born in 2000, is a Turkish rapper from Sakarya, signed to EMI.

Ezhel, whose real name is Sercan Ipekcioglu, was born in 1991. He is a Turkish rap artist known for blending reggae, trap, and hip-hop in his music.

UZI, a Turkish rap artist born as Utku Cihan Yalcinkaya in 1998, became the first Turkish musician to have his track 'Krvn' chart on the Billboard Global Excl. US chart.

Queen are a British rock band formed in London in 1970. They are famous for their distinctive sound, blending rock with other genres, and flamboyant stage performances. The band's classic

lineup included Freddie Mercury (lead vocals, piano), Brian May (guitar, vocals), Roger Taylor (drums, vocals), and John Deacon (bass guitar).

Genesis are a British band formed in 1967, known for their progressive rock, pop, and art rock music. The band's most prominent lineup consisted of Phil Collins (drums, lead vocals), Mike Rutherford (bass, guitar), and Tony Banks (keyboards). Genesis evolved from producing long, complex instrumental passages to creating more accessible pop hits in the 1980s.

Yes were an influential progressive rock band formed in London in 1968. Known for their symphonic style, extended compositions, and complex instrumentation, Yes significantly impacted the genre. The band's classic lineup included Jon Anderson (vocals), Chris Squire (bass), Steve Howe (guitar), Rick Wakeman (keyboards), and Bill Bruford (drums).

King Crimson are an English progressive rock band formed in London in 1968 and are known for their instrumental virtuosity and complex, eclectic sound. The band, led by guitarist Robert Fripp, have undergone numerous lineup changes. King Crimson's debut album, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, is widely regarded as a foundational work in the progressive rock genre.

Appendix 3: Guantánamo Bay Prison

In its twentieth year of existence, the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay became synonymous with torture, extrajudicial executions, and indefinite detention without charge or conviction; it was created by the Bush government in 2002 to hold detainees in a location where neither US nor foreign law applied. Seven hundred and seventy-nine Muslim men and boys have been detained at Guantánamo since 2002 (Shamsi 2022), almost all of them without being charged or facing a hearing, most of them being detained in and around Afghanistan without proper evidence. The Guantánamo Bay detention camp has faced widespread opposition from global organisations such as Amnesty (Amnesty International UK 2020) and Human Rights Watch (Pitter 2018), alongside media publications and movies – *The Report*⁵⁹ and *The Mauritanian*⁶⁰ – concerning human rights violations. The mistreatment that took place on the war field from 1999 onwards in Afghanistan (Council on Foreign Relations n.d.), in its surroundings, and in Guantánamo greatly informs my musical *Bacha Posh*, for the existence and the interference of the United States – and of the Northern Alliance – in Afghanistan and the rest of the Greater Middle East has been a crucial part of the region’s sociopolitical actuality.

Before WW II, how a government treated its citizens was no other governments’ business. The Third Reich and the Holocaust altered that perception. The United Nations was founded in 1945 because of the conflict, and its charter vowed to preserve ‘the dignity and worth of the human person’. (Steyn 2008: 5)

⁵⁹ *The Report* is an American historical and political drama film, written and directed by Scott Z. Burns in 2019.

⁶⁰ Based on a script by M.B. Traven, Rory Haines, and Sohrab Noshirvani and an adaptation of Slahi’s 2015 memoir *Guantánamo Diary*, the movie was directed by Kevin Macdonald, and released in 2021.

The human rights movement and the rights revolution were born out of the Second World War. Another chapter in the human rights movement will begin through the rightful and resilient examination of Middle Eastern stigmatisation and its consequences.

Appendix 4: Hip-Hop Attire

A significant aspect of hip-hop expression, attire is another vital topic relevant to the creation and promotion of any product within the realm of hip-hop. In the 1970s, 'Old School' hip-hop had signature clothes – the streetwear that Bronx youngsters already owned, such as bomber jackets, tracksuits, and sneakers with extra-long shoelaces. Puma, Chuck Taylor, and Pro-Keds were dominant brands in the footwear world (Shackelford 2022). Even though hip-hop attire has become more widespread over the past fifty years, it has remained mostly the same: sports shoes and casual activewear continue to dominate, with oversized t-shirts, baggy trousers, and signature sneakers, namely Nike Air Force 1, Air Jordan 1, Adidas Hoops 3.0 Mid, alongside boots like those worn by Biggie Smalls⁶¹ and Puff Diddy.⁶²

⁶¹ Christopher George Latore Wallace, often known as the Notorious B.I.G., Biggie Smalls, or just Biggie (21 May 1972–9 March 1997), was an American East Coast rapper.

⁶² Sean Love Combs, well-known by his stage names Puff Daddy, P. Diddy, or Diddy, was born Sean John Combs on 4 November 1969. He is an American rapper, actor, record producer, and record executive.

Appendix 5: News and Interview Links

- 1) *Constantina Pole* in the 1980s
<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/ankara/kimizi-lambada-80li-yillar-41593268>
- 2) *Constantina Pole* Premieres
<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/ankara/kirmizi-lamba-promiyer-yapti-41596467>
- 3) What Should I Do This Week?
<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/ankara/bu-hafta-ne-yapsam-42119875>
- 4) Seyfi Dursunoğlu's Bedside *Constantina Pole* on Theatre Stage
<https://www.diken.com.tr/seyfi-Dursunoğlunun-basucundaki-kirmizi-lamba-tiyatro-sahnesinde/>
- 5) 34 I am Your Mother, My Child 34
<https://kaosgl.org/gokkusagi-forumu-kose-yazisi/34-ben-senin-annenim-yavrum-34>
- 6) A Drag Queen Musical: *Constantina Pole* at Farabi Stage
<https://www.maxfm.com.tr/haber/bir-dragqueen-muzikali-kirmizi-lamba-farabi-sahnesinde>
- 7) *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* Reunites with the Audience on 20 January
<https://eventnews.online/2022/01/12/kirmizi-lamba-bir-drag-queen-muzikali-20-ocakta-izleyiciyle-yeniden-bulusuyor/>
- 8) Musical Theatre Inspired by Huysuz Virjin's Life: *Constantina Pole* Meets the Audience
<https://t24.com.tr/haber/huysuz-virjin-in-hayatindan-esinlenen-muzikal-tiyatro-kirmizi-lamba-seyircisiyle-bulusacak,893466>
- 9) Glamorous Beyoğlu
<https://www.milliyet.com.tr/kultur-sanat/isilti-beyoglu-6703724>
- 10) Seyfi Dursunoğlu's Bedside *Constantina Pole* on Theatre Stage
<https://www.mimesis-dergi.org/2022/09/seyfi-Dursunoğlunun-basucundaki-kirmizi-lamba-tiyatro-sahnesinde/>
- 11) *Constantina Pole* Inspired by Seyfi Dursunoğlu to Premiere
<https://mizahgastesi.com/seyfi-Dursunoğlundan-esinlenen-kirmizi-lamba-promiyerini-yapacak/>

12) A Hip-Hop Musical

<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/ankara/bir-hip-hop-muzikali-42100195>

13) Turkey's First Hip-Hop Musical to Meet the Audience

<https://www.sanathaber.net/turkiyenin-ilk-hip-hop-muzikali-izleyiciyle-bulusacak/>

14) New Musical by RHUL PhD Student Onur Yuce

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/research-and-teaching/departments-and-schools/music/news/new-musical-by-rhul-phd-student-onur-yuce/>

Appendix 6: Musical Tracks and Corresponding Online Links

Please note that only the songs listed in the table are available as individual singles on Spotify; however, the remaining pieces, although not found on Spotify, are integral to this work and can be accessed within the videos in the Portfolio of Works section.

No.	Video Title	Rehearsal Version URL (Vocal tracks recorded by Onur Yuçe)	Final Version URL (Recorded by actors on 22 September 2022)
1	Ruhum Çalındı	https://youtu.be/doOLFTmLKY	https://open.spotify.com/album/4iznrobBzdrlz3jovtmAz?si=6jAq5j07Q3GJY0nurW8_wQ
2	Aşk Beni Buraya Attı	https://youtu.be/tYKtENwsfpg	
3	Lekeli	https://youtu.be/legTDuli9dM	https://open.spotify.com/album/4z2ME1CRlg9J9PS50v5d53?si=SvM7jsO1TrSX95mP7ahibg
4	Aşk Böyle Boğdu Beni	https://youtu.be/6YUboDodrPg	
5	Gerçek Aşk Asla Gizli Kalmaz	https://youtu.be/2CWppOMOzqU	https://open.spotify.com/album/2G9oKtm2mNS4fTPFFHqaL?si=AgjfFOXvT0mzu7eLO4byRA

No.	Video Title	Rehearsal Version URL (Vocal tracks recorded by Onur Yuçe)	Final Version URL (Recorded by actors on 22 September 2022)
6	Duyduklarım Gerçek mi?	https://youtu.be/jmoPwdQPkBg	https://open.spotify.com/album/0vPhfc3fWa3zf2ilyaRxa?si=rYVn-LXXTjutOcGZa6uE1w
7	Fuğuş, Zina, Ahlaksızlık	https://youtu.be/p_Tmb_nPjKkM	https://open.spotify.com/album/1s2pJIBsEaJum5tD0b4Vyc?si=WyTMhQD-RDug050A9YN3QA
8	Tetięi Çekecek Göt Var mı?	https://youtu.be/f15RPm1Ycrk	https://open.spotify.com/album/3ihdXzXRJVGZkTern0vxts?si=tRM523L9SvqKFZ_yb1HI6Q
9	Sona Hoş Geldin	https://youtu.be/vC3FhSvBx-g	
10	Kan İçinde İçim	https://youtu.be/gq_-74F21k4	-
11	Ruhum Çalındı II	https://youtu.be/rc2rM9EeFu0	-

Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical, Music & Lyrics (translated from Turkish) by Onur Yuce

Act 1

I was waking up night after night in my bed, my face stuck on the sheets, fantasising I was alone in a dark, sooty, senseless, and filthy place, sheltered in a booth with a single window with frosted glass, from which I could see the dim daylight. I'm dumped, naked, frightened but happy.

My happiness ignites my fear even more. I quietly head to the bathroom to splash water on my face. My steps on the creaky wooden floors awaken mom. She cracks the door and asks:

"What happened? Are you ok?"

"I'm fine, mommy; I just couldn't sleep."

Then my father growls.

"What is wrong with him again?"

I'm harbourless.

I turn on the faucet and wash my face with cold water, hoping it will turn everything in order. But it doesn't work. I return to my room, and while I put my wet face on the pillow, my damp hair falls on my forehead. I sleep, feeling the thrill of wetness, shivers, fear, solitude, and bliss.

Girrl, I can feel, tonight I'll look fabulous. Sure, you will, but your fabulousness is why you're always out of luck. I'm never out of luck. Yass, you are darling. Your fate suffers severe calamity. You won't rain on my parade tonight. You've been running your loudmouth from the back of my head for a zillion year! Every time my head got quiet and peaceful for an evanescent, you start shoutin' "I'm here, don't you forget me!" I damn sure know you are there bitch, and there's only one way to shut you the fuck up!

Song 1

You ain't talking anymore. You do like what you see, innit? I've told you we are going to turn the party tonight. But you've never trusted me, have you? You've always discredited and clocked me. I could never make you happy, never satisfy you. If it were your call, you would have taken all and left nothing to me. Sorry, then we'd both lose.

When was it that I heard your voice for the first time?
I must be four or five, and I've had a horrible fever.
I was so ill; I couldn't even tell if it was day or night,
Between being awake and sleeping.
This was unhappiness, darkness,
And the world disappeared slowly.
You were sitting there, singing by yourself in my darkness.
That's where I met you, and the first thing you said
was, "I'm sorry!"
Guess it was my fault!
It was your voice I was hearing.
It was your song.
I followed your song to make you happy.
Because we were born intertwined,
I followed your song to make you happy.
Because we were born intertwined,
Like the roots of a Mandrake.
Like the roots of a Mandrake.
Like the roots of a Mandrake.
Like the roots of a Mandrake.

After I recovered, my mom started telling me the story of Mandrake.
Mandragora: a fairy-tale about mankind and tarnation.

According to my mom, the disease has altered me.

Forget about it! Finding you within was not a coincidence!

END OF SONG 1

You know, I can't say that I understand when they talk about a happy childhood. We had a mansion with a view and all, but there was a constant fear. We were not allowed to go out and play on the street. There was this boy, Rahman, a childhood friend! Just a childhood friend, dear. He used to come around our house and call me to play football. Once, I was able to go out. But once, Rahman blasted the ball with so much anger; he hit it in my face and split my lip wide open. My whole face was covered in blood. I ran home to seek consolation from my daddy. But he said, "What were you doing outside anyways? Stay home, study and be a decent man. That's what you get when you play with boys and balls!" What did you reckon I was supposed to do?

Song 2

As I grew up, I got fed up with being at home. I'd beg my sister to lend me her bathrobe simply because hers was much more colourful. If she'd let me, I'd wear it and go by the seaside while everybody was asleep. The sea was always beautiful, and I was young. It was the companion of the earth, and I was the earth. Who would be jealous of the love between the companion of the land and the youth?

Is this the summer night heat,

Under my thin quilt?

Touch me and feel it,

And see what's going on.

Within my sparkling soul.

You are seducing me when you whisper into my ear with your wind.

Beauty in the morning,

A beast in the night,
Hiding between two trees.
The sound of the sea draws me in.

As I offer my flesh, my skin.
Love in the dark is a sin and a blessing.
When my soul is a prisoner,
I'm splendour and evil.

Love in the dark is a sin and a blessing.
When my soul is a prisoner,
I'm splendour and evil.
I know it's me that you crave:
Human, dirt, and magnificence.
I create envy within all with my allure.
But you are my kindred,
Blue in the day and dark at night.

Bright in the morning
And vile in the twilight.

I'd rush out of the sea, wear my gown, and run back home.
I'd float in on the balls of my feet without waking up anyone.
Like everybody else, my sister would be sleeping.
Then I'd hang my sister's robe on the hook and slip into my bed.
While I pulled the cover up my face, the blanket would brush my salty skin like a stranger's hand,
And I'd fall asleep shivering.

END OF SONG 2

Then my father put me down for a pension. I still cannot imagine why my mother agreed, but in the end, I was sent. Once I took the coach to the school, I could never forget.

It was packed like sardines. I saw two boys watching me from their seats. One of them kinda shouted so I could hear. "Look at him; he's like a fabulous blend of Adonis and Aphrodite."

You bet I was "beat", and of course, that made me ecstatic, but I stood still and pretended I didn't hear it. The voice within continually reminded me of what I lacked in my life. I felt like I was obliged to do something about the existence of that child within, and if she was singing, I had to sing too. There was a foreign piano instructor at our school. A gifted pianist he was, and a gorgeous man. He'd play as I stood beside him and listened. He reigned over those keys with ease. As if the music came from his body to his waist, moving up his spine towards his shoulders, arms, and hands. From his fingers, it finally reached the keys. I would sit and watch in awe. He eventually spotted my enthusiasm, and he started giving me free lessons. I would get chills just sitting beside him. After checking my assignments, he would give me a glimpse and ask, "Shall we play together?" He would play a passage with one hand, and I'd use both sides in return. And sometimes, I'd position my hands deliberately wrong just so he'd touch my hands to fix them. It was during those days I understood what art stands for me.

It was summer, so I had to head back home. The piano teacher's house was on the European side of the Bosphorus, and we lived on the other side. I was sneaking out of the house in the mornings to take the ferry, and I had to return before it became dark. One day I missed the boat, and everything changed. My dad was waiting for me at home when I entered with sheet music in my hands. He jumped and started shouting: "Never an artist shall be among us!" Then, he grabbed the sheet music from my hand and ripped them apart. I was forced to go to religious classes the very next day. I cried a lot but hid it from everybody to avoid whipping.

Song 3

One night, my mother came to my room. "Ma" I said, "please tell me the story of Yazata and Ahriman." She caressed my head and asked, "Again?" "Yes, again," I replied. She gulped and started:

At first, there were no days, no skies,
no nights: there was only the light.

The light named Yazata was the first child of God, the only thing in the universe.

Alone in a lit universe, he doubted and blinked for once.

His brother was born, and the darkness called Ahriman became his archenemy.

A war began between the light and the dark.

Which one is stronger, the good or the evil?

The answer was given on earth, their playground.

God sent angels to bring them peace.

“Make peace!”

“What is that you want from me?”

“Make peace!”

“Everywhere was mine before. I blinked, and the war began.”

“Every time Yazata blinks, another Ahriman will be born. There will be thousands of Ahriman,
thousand times of darkness.”

The angels found both right and went up to God to set the record straight.

Then the Almighty created the earth as a playground, so his sons shall learn to share.

Let this world be yours.

Play in harmony.

When you play Yazata, let’s call it a day.

And for Ahriman, the night.

There was peace on earth during the day, war, and darkness at night.

God created man as a toy for the light and the darkness.

He threw him on toy earth in the middle of the day and the night.

Thus, the man became prey for Ahriman.

His sharp teeth pierced through the flesh into the soul.

The twilight left a mark within where evil blossomed like a flower.

Two drops of blood fell on the sand,

And rested for forty years.
In the forty-first year,
A strange weed grew in the blood stain.
The angels came down from the skies.
They called the weed a Mandrake, whose roots resemble two intertwined humans.
One bulb was the man, and the other was the woman.
The separated bulbs would shriek in pain, cursing whoever heard its cry nearby.
The screams would reach the skies, raining down as death and damnation.
The separated bulbs, man, and woman, departed, crying their eyes out.
All of this started because of a blink of light, because of doubt.
So, if you ever find a Mandrake, don't ever dig it up.
Don't you split the roots, don't let us hear its damned screams, don't bring the scourge upon us.
All right, mama. Even if I find a Mandrake, no one will hear its screams.
Even if I find one, no one will hear its screams.
No one will hear its screams.
I promise, mama.
I promise, mama.
No one will hear its screams.
END OF SONG 3

The story of Mandrake. Where did my mama learn this story from, I wonder? How did a myth about creating the universe end up as my life story and a take-home message? Does my sister or brother know about this myth? And my father? Nah! I don't think so. My father is a busy man! He wouldn't have time for tales, nor he care for them. Let's go, girls! We ain't gonna babysit, are we?

Song 4

My father was convinced that I was consorting with artists and all. So, he started searching for a school to make a man out of me. That's when my sister and brother came up with the idea of

sending me to a military school, where they fixed people like me. My father immediately liked the picture, forcing me to take the exam. I was crying and whining, and my mother advised me to do what he said but to fail it on purpose. I was terrified of my father, so I took the exam and answered all the questions wrong. But some strings were pulled, I guess, and I got in from the back door. Oh my, look who is here?

I got in the wheels of the corps of cadets,
Need permission from a to izzard,
How on earth I ended up here?

One month, two months, three months
went by,
But the time stood still.
I need to start a riot right now.
There are a bunch of bans and restrictions.
On a snow-white uniform,
A single stain can ruin the show.
One month, two months, and three months
went by,
And I cannot take a leave.
I need to flee from here right now.

Once, my mother astounded me. It was a summer day, and she was doing the laundry in the backyard, And I had this shirt with a terrible stain. Ma, wash this one too; here's the spot." She looked right into my eyes. "These stains are easy to clean, son. Just don't soil your hands." "How on earth can I soil my hands, Ma?" She didn't say more. To this day, I cannot forget that instant, and I still don't know why she said that. If I understood only one thing, the cure for everything is daintiness and chasteness. I try to stay pure as the driven snow. I'm blameless.

Before the ship sails away,
It's now or never to disobey.
Forgive me, mother, for I'm a mess.
Show me the door or set me free.
Forgive me, mother, for I'm a mess.
Show me the door or set me free.
Show me the door or set me free.

I've flunked all my courses, and I was kicked out. Being out was a breath of fresh air. You got me a gift? A record, but why did you do that, you idiot? To cheer me up? I ain't sad that I left the boarding school. I'm happy. But you may be sad to see me going.

Cannot be without thee,
And take this word as an oath.

Of course, I know the words: Thy place in my soul is immense and profound. You are embarrassing me. Why the hell would I throw myself into the water? No, I didn't know that the expelled students suicide out of their sorrow. Well, tough luck, but I'm not discharged; I forced them to release me. And I'm in no mood for drowning. We got many things to savour.

END OF SONG 4

We will live, and happiness won't be just a dream. We won't accept living a secret, mute, dull and miserable life. No! Our story will be different, Yours and mine, with just a glimpse of courage, hope, and light!

Song 5

The light imagined,
Dreamed a dream and contemplated.
Thus, nature was flawed and broken.

Hence, I was born.
I heard a voice within.
The voice was resentful that I heard it.
“I wish,” it declared,
That you’d never discovered me so I could become a song!”
Then I was beaten, torn, but the voice didn’t stop.
Everyone had something to say, only I kept low.
There was a war, and I surrendered.
No angels interceded.
On a holy day of a sacred month, I grew into a weed.
I have promised you, mother.
I am screaming because something is prying me up.
The roots are shouting and screaming.
The roots are shouting and screaming.
Cover your ears! Don’t you hear me!
Though if you have already heard, then forgive me!
Cover your ears! Don’t you hear me!
Though if you have already heard, then forgive me!
Cover your ears! Don’t you hear me!
Though if you have already heard, then forgive me!
Cover your ears! Don’t you hear me!
Though if you have already heard, then forgive me!
END OF SONG 5

Oh damn, I just cannot believe it! My wig looks like a snakepit, all tangled and shit.
All of this is caused by jealousy, crab mentality. For all my life, I experienced jealousy towards my sheer beauty and my youth. People get wiser as they get older, isn’t it? Witnessing each day passing and checking the body and soul’s casualty list, one sadly sees there’s not much to do other than stand aside and accept. Let some truths surpass all sorts of imagination.

Let people demonise what they cannot comprehend. You do not hear that song, do you?
Good that you don't. But maybe once, when you were alone by the sea, the wind sent shivers
down your spine. That wind sounds just like that voice. The false and the facts are concentric.

Song 6

I saw him the other day, hand-to-hand with a girl. He passed by, totally ignoring me, as if we did
not share a mutual sin.

Wanker!

What would you know about the girls?

It's clear that you just can't tell,

The bitch beside you is as ugly as hell.

You wouldn't know that cos' you are a wanker!

All torn up, the hidden memories of our passion and love between those trees.

I was hurt after locking eyes with you for so long and deep.

Was it something to be embarrassed about what we shared?

So, you were ashamed of me, and that is why you spread all your lies.

I'm wounded, should love always to be acceptable?

I'm wounded, should love always to be acceptable?

I said, "all right." But always remember,

The way you glanced away.

Then, while sitting in my room alone, staring at the walls, I had a revelation. What if born together
on the holy day of the sacred month of Mihr, Misha and Mishane, get uprooted from the soil but
never separated?

END OF SONG 6

Hello? Hiya sis. Yeah, I'm fine. I'm fine. I'll get on the stage in a bit. Nope! I didn't change my
mind. I ain't coming to that funeral, yes, I mulled over it. I mulled it over just fine. And yeah, it is

my definitive statement. Goodbye. I had this promise to my mother. That I would keep the roots buried deep in the soil. But she passed away. My heart is aching, yet I can't go there. I don't have to keep my word anymore. The roots can finally get uprooted.

Act 2

Stop! Welcome to our night, welcome! Did y'all miss me? Well, if you miss me, come to my place.

Song 7

One night, I undressed and got your end away.
I released my little bird, and off it flew.
Don't ask me more. It just happened that way!
Early in the morning, my lover ran off running!
You, Romeo, you libertine,
Did it hurt so bad?
It hurts and burns and pains but turns my red lamp on!
You, Romeo, you libertine,
Did it hurt so bad?
It hurts and burns and pains but turns my red lamp on!

You, priest-faced hunk!
Did you miss me too?
What part of mine did you miss exactly?
Such an animal; he says he misses every inch of my body!
Be careful, don't come out a loser!
My Romeo is calling me every night,
Saying, "Darling, I need your love tonight."
You can't find the same love in no one else.
But wanting it every night makes you an addict.

You, Romeo, you libertine,
Did it hurt so bad?
It hurts and burns and pains but turns my red lamp on!
You, Romeo, you libertine,
Did it hurt so bad?
It hurts and burns and pains but turns my red lamp on!

You know what? I'm tired of being a vampire. I wanna become the woman of the house. Action every night is exhausting. I'll find an old sugar daddy, who won't get me tired in bed. Once or twice a month, a quick pampam and a pimpim, and good to go!

Romeo has not been caring for me lately.
Saying, "Darling, I need you!"
But doesn't really come to me!
I don't really care whether you come or not,
It's your call, baby; I got a bunch of chasers, cos I'm always on the make.

You, Romeo, you libertine,
Did it hurt so bad?
It hurts and burns and pains but turns my red lamp on!
You, Romeo, you libertine,
Did it hurt so bad?
It hurts and burns and pains but turns my red lamp on!
Let's go; put your hands in the air!
END OF SONG 7

Welcome to the last performance of this year. I've been on stage eight nights a week for the past eight years. Days have a different flavour, and nights are pure ecstasy. Don't let my face beat for the gods, this gorgeous body, and my dress of utter eleganza deceive you. I was a clerk until

recently. I would never compromise my extravaganza, so my colleagues would watch me with shocked faces in the office. They called me the beauty in the closet. What can I do about it? I know I got something else going on. I got the banter, the chit-chat. Indeed, my style caught my manager's attention. So, first, I was the under manager, and then I was transferred to bookkeeping. Then they sent me to the counter, later to inventory, so the exile went on. Down the wire, I worked in labour relations and offered job services. Let me say that again: Labour relations and offered job services. You, sir, hi there! Have you ever heard of offered job services before? Does it evoke anything in your mind? Oh, he got all quiet. Are you a bit shy or what? He must be a tourist or something. Kinda cute, though. Whatever!

Wallahi, my salary wasn't enough, and I didn't have the dosh to be posh. Asking me why? My monthly pay was hardly sufficient for a pair of trousers and lingerie. Custom made. My panties are silk, yet I live in Tarlabası. So, I went to my manager and asked for a raise. He was like, "Darling, no way." That's when I started looking for an extra for the night shift. I got a beautiful voice and a hot body, and I'm fun. But the thing is, you can't work somewhere else when you work for the state. Above all, if anyone sees that I get on the stage in the night, a massive scandal! So, I came up with cross-dressing as a camouflage. I wore a gown, put on a wig, and turned into a drop-dead gorgeous queen. 'Cos my stock is high quality! Look at my height; look at my opulence! Come and look at my legs too! It must be the first time you see such a fit lady; you gonna devour me with your eyes, you wolf! Where was your mind, you stud, when you chose that brown bagger over a fit bitch like me? Such a shame!

Song 8

I have this epic bedside lamp, and the light should turn red for me to get in bed. If the room is scarlet, you should understand that... You, sir. You seemed interested in seeing my red lamp. I can tell you my address if you want. But I don't want to be called a slag, so please use the back door if you shall come.

If you see a darkened house,

With a scarlet light at the window.
Don't come banging on the front door.
The back door is wide open.
I dimmed the lights while waiting for you.
Only left my red lamp on.
Don't come in any other way,
I'm waiting from the back.
If they see, they say something.
That's how it goes,

They don't dig us here.
Come in, but do everything in secrecy,
Don't let anyone see you.
They don't dig us here.

They are all gossip!
They are all gossip!
Gossip!

I dimmed the lights while waiting for you.
Only left my red lamp on.
Don't come in any other way,
I'm waiting from the back.
If you see a darkened house,
With a scarlet light at the window.
Don't come banging on the front door.
The back door is wide open.

If they see, they say something.

That's how it goes,
They don't dig us here.
Come in, but do everything in secrecy,
Don't let anyone see you.
They don't dig us here.
I'm coming, baby; I know you got the address.

They are all gossip!
They are all gossip!
Gossip!
END OF SONG 8

Look, speaking of gossip, you know what I remember?

My military duty. I was in the military with the flashers' squad. Have you ever heard of the "flashers squad?" Does it remind you of anything? Whatever! After completing the rookie training, I was chosen to be in the flashers' squad. Aren't they right on point, for God's sake? By then, I was still determining what the flashers' squad did in the army and how they served our fatherland; I needed to gain experience. They gathered us and made us stand at attention. From the first glimpse, one thing was sure: They were all suitable to be flashers. Fantastic job on their behalf! Then, an officer came: "Flashers", he screamed, "your duty is well important!" I was shocked when I heard they were publicly speaking of it. No shit, it's vital to be a flasher! It's challenging work, too; not everybody can do it right! Only some people's cut for the job. But talking about the details of the job so freely got me all... How may I put it? Intrigued? The officer kept speaking: "Well, you flashers, your duty is..." I couldn't contain myself, so I yelled: "I'm ready!" They all looked daggers at me. I didn't get why. "You gonna be a part of the Anti-Aircraft Command, commonly called the Searchlight Regiment. You spot the airborne warplanes during nighttime, and we hit them from the ground." Such a fucking bore! All my dreams about flashing down the gutter. From my experience, flashers ain't something like that!

Song 9

Lady sitting there with a glistening complexion like flashers flashed on you.

Watch out, honey, don't get shot in confusion.

You couldn't handle it!

Don't you try so hard to be so upscale,

You think you can be like me but are not cut from the same cloth.

I may be a princess,

But you are an old chavette.

Do your shenanigans in the pursuit of opulence,

But you look more like my ass after all the effort.

You found a man that looks like a seabed, gurl.

Was it the last man on earth?

Who else would take you with that botox face, innit?

Toff tart!

Naff hoe!

You crazy little slag!

You know what, you dicksucker?

Eat your heart out!

Did I hurt your feelings, sweetheart?

Oh, dear!

That's a drag!

All this pain

Will turn your red lamp on.

Don't you try so hard to be so upscale,
You think you can be like me but are not cut from the same cloth.
I may be a princess,
But you are an old chavette.
Do your shenanigans in the pursuit of opulence,
But you look more like my ass after all the effort.

Wallahi, you turned up just like a Christmas tree, dammit!
But look, I'd suggest you learn some nobility by copying me, yet certain things are innate.

Toff tart!
Naff hoe!
You crazy little slag!
You know what, you dicksucker?
Eat your heart out!
Did I hurt your feelings, sweetheart?
Oh, dear!
That's a drag!
All this pain
Will turn your red lamp on.
END OF SONG 9

Wallahi, don't get envious, honey; no competition here; it is way too evident who is more gorgeous between you and me. Yeah, jealousy, girl, it's hard to handle, frankly. And when you are as beat as me, jealousy is inevitable! Let me put it this way: Let me put it this way: I know Zeki gets his panties from the same tailor in Galata as I do. But he claims he buys 'em from Paris. Bullshit! Are you curious about the fabric of my panties or what? Look at his eyes, all over me. Gentlemen don't behave like that. Follow the trends a bit, please! First, get me an SUV. Then

open a coffee shop on the Bebek shore, make it over to me, the deed I mean, then I show you, my panties.

In the entertainment business, you either make it or break it. I'm not sure if it applies to every walk of life, but I'll speak for the entertainment world and say it bluntly: Everybody is onto outshining each other! They'd do anything to stop, block, and beat you, so your name never gets heard. There are so many methods to do that in nightclubs and casinos... Let me give you an example: The audience is there, and the band is on the stage, but the star performer awaits backstage, doesn't come up. Why? They feel more like stars when you keep waiting for them. Am I like them? I'd get up on stage and wait for you! Yeah, I would do it. You have gotta clap here. Sometimes, they appear on stage but don't leave on time; they take forever. Some fill the front tables with their guests and friends, and once their show is over, they ask their buddies to leave after singing their songs, so, the next talent finds an empty hall. Some pay the waiters to sabotage the stage, break the neon with your name on it, or remove the bulbs; and damage you one way or another to fuck you up big time. Yep, they would do it in a heartbeat. And there are many other tricks: One evening, I was chillin' at home just before a show, and the phone rang.

A guy I don't know was sayin':

"Leave Istanbul!"

Who da fuck are you, sir?

"It doesn't matter who I am. Don't ask stupid questions, quit your job at the casino, and leave the town!"

Leave town, he was sayin', how come I didn't understand.

I was terrified to deal with some mafia-related bullshit, ya know?

So, I called the casino, and the manager went:

"The orders are coming from high, babe. This is a serious situation. Don't come soon!"

Holy shit! What the heck did I do? I'm calling everywhere, tryin' to understand what's goin' on, but nobody says nothin'!

Hours went by, and I was stressed as hell!

Then my manager called me, laughing his ass off.

I said, "Why the the fuck are you laughin'?! Didn't you hear what just happened?"

He went, "Yeah, I know, I know! His highness pranked you, 'na a mean!"

It's a fuckin' horseplay, innit! And you know what? It's all to get me down! Jealous biatch!

Song 10

They call me jealous, but that's a lie!

What I fancy is to see you in the flesh, believe me.

Throw rose petals in my whiskey, and I'm ready for a knees-up.

And what time my limo arrives? I can't wait for too long!

Is it jealousy?

Is it sauciness?

Or is it the applause that makes me who I am?

Take a good look at me,

and see how I roll!

I'm complete with cheers!

Take a good look at me,

and see how I roll!

I'm complete with cheers!

They call me jealous, but that's a lie!

What I fancy is to see you in the flesh, believe me.

Throw rose petals in my whiskey, and I'm ready for a knees-up.

And what time my limo arrives? I can't wait for too long!

Is it jealousy?

Is it sauciness?

Or is it the applause that makes me who I am?

Take a good look at me,

and see how I roll!

I'm complete with cheers!

Take a good look at me,

and see how I roll!

I'm complete with cheers!

END OF SONG 10

If you decide to play it, play the one with a larger neck. Let's talk about current pop songs, shall we? What's the deal with the lyrics lately? I've just heard a couple and really blushed with shame! There's one song called "Deeper to the Bottom." This is going off the rails! Another song says, "I've just attacked fifteen people; I've hit and spanked but didn't feel!" Such a shame those types never find me! There's one more, a petite blondie; she asks, "How are you in love? Come and penetrate my world." So randy, I imagine. You wouldn't ask such questions back then, in our Alaturka, you know, it wasn't like this before. Such a shame. You wouldn't have songs on these vulgar topics. Innit?

The spring is over.

The autumn is over.

The songbird doesn't sing anymore.

You are laughing a lot, sir, it seems like the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Come and visit me tonight; thus, your songbird commences humming afresh.

Look, the songbird, the rose, the snake... All euphemisms! The songbird, the rose, the snake, the apple! Suggestions to conquer what we fear to confess, word games! They serve us when we omit some terms to preserve the sanctified. The songbird, the rose, the snake... Let me tell you about somethin' else. You know about the Greek myths, right? They often sound absurd to us, as everything has a God; people interact with Gods like humans, and Gods meddle with people's actions. There are a couple of stories that I like, though. One of 'em is about a guy...

They all start the same: A guy glues the feathers with wax to construct wings. Anyone knows the story? Correct, Icarus. The tale of Icarus. Now, this dude builds those wings for himself. And he goes, now that I got these, let me fly. He takes off and flies up in the skies, getting higher and higher. But he gets too close to the sun, so the wax melts and the feathers scatter here and there; thus, the guy falls to his death. You'd typically say bollocks when you hear that. But amongst the myths, Medusa's story is outstanding, with its sadness.

Song 11

Medusa was a young woman of unimaginable beauty and grace. Everyone fancied her. The God of the sea, Poseidon, had his eyes on her too. One day, at his temple, Poseidon caught and raped Medusa. After the intercourse, Medusa got pregnant. Athens, The Goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, and law, has been jealous of Medusa's youth and beauty forever. Let me repeat that, the Goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, and law, decided that only Medusa deserves a punishment after the rape.

The so-called reason, wisdom, and intellect,
Turned my beautiful hair into a snake pit.
And when you look at my face,
I became the ghastly monster who turns people into stone.
I'm exiled and left everything I had,
To live the life of a beast.
The reason and wisdom were too tight to grasp my existence.
I expected justice but was never serviced!
The world is fixated on me!
That can only be called hate.
A sword in one hand and a shield in another.
It's no different than war.
Anybody sees me turns into stone.
Show me my reflection in your mirrored shield.

Come, turn me into stone!
Come, cut my head off!
Let my blood spill on earth,
Turn the soil red.
From two drops, let me bear two children.
Mother is a beast; mother is dead!
Father is a rapist but still alive!
Long live vendetta!
Long live death!
Long live vendetta! Long live death!
Mother is a beast; mother is dead!
Father is a rapist but still alive!
Long live vendetta!
Long live death!
Long live vendetta!
Long live death!

Look at all the misery, this tortures this poor woman went through! Why all the agony? Dehumanised, dressed up with snakes, exiled, beheaded... What is her sin? Getting raped? Who is paying for it? The woman. As The God of reason, wisdom, and intellect, why don't you serve justice? Nope, the culprit is always the woman. Now, try to say "bollocks" again? Or say, "it's Greek nonsense!" These are the stories of this geography! How many years have passed since Medusa? What really changed around here? Reason, wisdom, intellect, and justice are governed by whom? One shouldn't be weak. One shouldn't be a victim. The legislation is wild. If you step out of the boundaries, if you are a bit less, a bit more naked, a bit lonelier than the next, your head gets cut off. You cut a woman's head. You muted her tongue. Now call her a devil, a snake; she can't oppose. Say, "I killed her because she was beautiful," "because she was bad," or "because she was a woman!" Whoever looks at Medusa gets turned into stone, not because of

her hideousness but because of remorse. I was here, alive, and will be present forever. You can't extinguish the essence of humanity. Is your pen brave enough to write this down?

Oh, the one who created it all,

Let me slip into a quiet rest at last!

Deep and warm,

Just like before your presence.

You weren't by my side when I needed you the most, but heaven only knows why.

Your love is the only reason for the existence of my last hope.

Please, allow me to sleep in your serene and blissful solitude.

God save me!

Amen!

END OF SONG 11

All this mad talk about songbirds, roses, and other crazy shit! Where did it bring us? You gonna think that I'm such a barmy bitch, innit! Did I tell you how I was kicked out of home? I learned all of it afterwards, so you know. My father commanded my mother to find me a girl to marry me off. "Go and get a proper girl to him", he ordered. My mother, with her special mission, went directly to the baths around the town. She found a proper candidate that she liked. Then she came to me. She said, "just go out and talk. That's all I ask; go for a coffee, you know, no harm." I went along with it uncheerfully. I met her on the pier. Good gracious. The moment I laid my eyes on her, I realised I took after my mother, cos she absolutely has no taste in women. I also knew she had a bad taste in men from my father. I took this after her, I suppose.

She didn't need to go around the baths to find such a minger. Listen, it's as if someone pressed from her head and feet, so her body just poured out from the sides. Now that we were out together, I had to keep the conversation going. We took the ferry, but the girl was talking non-stop. Before I said what's up, she was like... Rambled on and on, and I lost my patience. Everything changed when she said, "I want to meet your mates. As they say, show me your friends, and I will tell you what you are." Is that so? We are a bit pompous, aren't we? I accepted the challenge. I said, "all right, I will ask them if they wanna join us, so you can meet them." I had a group of

Judies, all marvellous performers, like me. We rocked Istanbul day and night, if you know what I mean! And when I say everywhere, I mean everywhere, we caused a scene. I invited them to our little date. We were sitting, eating our cakes, and sipping our teas when they entered and turned the cafe into a runaway show. Redshirts, purple scarves, sissyin' that walk, so flamboyant and chic! Sending kisses to all the tables around! She was staring at the floor, thinking, "who the fuck are those?" Completely unaware of what's going on. My friends approached our table, saying, "What's up, Gagarini?" So, I said, "Here, these are my friends!" She was gagging on all the eleganza. After a bit of banter, my Judies got bored, so they said, "let's go to a tavern and get wasted." To my surprise, like an old drunkard, she was only too pleased with that offer. She jumped, "Yass! What a fuckin' relief!" Look at that saucy little minx: she was also tired of me. We went to a tavern by the Bosphorus. A terrific place, right on the shore, with a sea-scented breeze coming and music being played, but my friends were all shading the girl. Like, "girl, look, you are only missing a beard and a stache." They destroyed her by throwing all kinds of shade, you know. Her face was like a cat's arse. One of the guys was a bit fairer; he said, "We are taking the mickey, ya know." She freaked out, thinking that we were going to Mickey Finn her, you know, slip her a mickey.

Mam, hi there. Mickey Finn... Any idea what it is? Let's focus on the first word; that'll remind you of something. You couldn't have focused for many years; I can see it from here.

Yes? No, not that one, darling. Mickey Finn is a drink doctored with a drug. Let me help you understand it. I can't control what comes to your mind. That is your fantasy world.

As she drank, she got totally shitfaced. She got pissed and started shouting like a bum: "You poofs! Y'all jealous of me, ain't ya!" Everybody's looking at us, such a disgrace!

Song 12

Tonight, that's how we roll,
1 boner kill and 4 faux queens,
That's the way it is,

We are on a roll.
We'll ditch her and go to a party.
All we need to find is a place for a kai-kai.
We got her in our car to take her home.
She was shouting out the window like nuts.
Such fuss!

Toff tart!
Naff hoe!
Drunk bitch!
Get outta the car!
You know what, manky vamp?
Eat your heart out!
Did I hurt your feelings, sweetheart?
Oh, dear!
That's a drag!
All this pain will turn your red lamp on.

Tonight, that's how we roll,
1 boner kill and 4 faux queens,
That's the way it is,
We are on a roll.
We'll ditch her and go to a party.
All we need to find is a place for a kai-kai.

So, I told my friends,
"My family is away for a while, so our place is a love dungeon. Let's go to my crib, so we can keep hitting the sauce."
We keep the juicing in the tavern, car, and home!

If there are no breeders, then we kai-kai.

Tops to the bottom and bottoms up!

We started having fun at home!

Dressing up, playing games...

I was dancing in the middle of the living room, wearing a white dress,

And suddenly the door opened.

There was my whole family watching me in total shock.

END OF SONG 12

They were supposed to come back that very night, apparently. When my father saw me in that dress, he was furious. My brother, who took a leaf from him, flew off the handle. They handed me my suitcase and my bird in the cage. My poor mother couldn't even tell 'em to stop; they kicked me out. I spent the night with one of my mates; the next day, I moved to my current address.

Now, I only have the stage in my life. Lights, colours, and laughter... When I have you in my life, I don't really need anything else. Thank you all for coming out to see me. I am proud that you picked my show over other venues or artists. Artists and lovers want to be remembered forever. Tonight, was a special night... I wish there was a fun story behind each phone call. But not this time... Just before coming up on the stage, I got the news that my mother had passed. My mother wasn't young; maybe, one wouldn't call her passing an early one, but that doesn't change anything. I'm thinking about the time passed apart from my mother, and my family... Was it necessary? That's why being close to the ones you love is so important. Kids should treasure their families, and the families should also appreciate their children. Because love and understanding are divine. Love me when you still see me and love me when the day comes, and you won't. Stay with love.

Hello, hi. Yeah, I'm ok. Listen to me before saying anything. I'll be frank with you. I ain't telling you everything. There will be some secrets kept within me. No, it ain't madness; listen, don't

interrupt. You loved me the way you've seen me. Keep loving me that way, will ya? Tomorrow will be a better day. I'll be able to say that I'm happy, like anyone else. There won't be a fear left that devours me from the inside. The rings of the chain will break, don't try to stop it in vain. I'm dreaming of a soundless stillness for the daybreak. Call the press, call friends. Well, then. So long.

People are strange. They all have dreams, hopes and expectations. Up to a point, they are all right, but the moment you step out of their boundaries, the thorns come out. This is not fiction. This is not a role play. This is not a fantasy, although many would think so. This is a dream. A longing.

Song 13

My childhood, my memories,
My innocence and my colourful life,
Who touched you?
Who silenced you?
Why the fearful glances?
Burn, whatever will be left of me,
My wigs and my dreams,
Scatter the ashes of my youth.
Tomorrow shall be a new day.
And no one must know what happened and what will follow.
Child, I'm not afraid of dreams.

Child, please hold my hands.
Child, my laughter lasts longer than my life.
And I'll be reborn with springs that will come.
Child, I'm not afraid of dreams.
Child, please hold my hands.
Child, my laughter lasts longer than my life.

And I'll be reborn with springs that will come.

My childhood, my memories,

My innocence and my colourful life,

Who touched you?

Who silenced you?

Why the fearful glances?

END OF SONG 13

Look! Look at those trees that have turned into children. They are beaming a golden light right from their hearts like an arrow shot to your heart. I'm scared! The children are running in laughter towards that fog. I'm lonely, I'm scared. Watch the sky. What do you see? This is a deep dream. You are fine; everything is fine. Take a deep breath and feel your heartbeat. You're alive. Everything I do is for you to feel better. You wanted to have this. You are fine; everything is fine. Look at your feet. Watch the flowers bloom.

I'm alone; I'm terrified! But you are fine; everything is fine.

THE END

***Bacha Posh: A Hip-Hop Musical, Music & Lyrics* (translated from Turkish) by Onur Yuce**

Act 1

Scene 1 – Hospital/Rehab Centre – Aaina’s Room

(An asymmetrical cage at the centre of the stage is dimly lit with white light. Aaina, tied to the hospital bed, trembles, and tries to break free while having a mental episode. She wears a white hospital jumpsuit with bare feet. In her hallucination, she hears girls’ voices crying in fear. The graffiti-painted panels at the back, hanging from the truss, are lit with soft blue-green light. The stage is dark everywhere else. The sound of Qanoon is sampled over a sad piano accompaniment and finger snaps.

As the voices disappear, she comes to her senses slowly; sitting on her bed, she starts rapping to an imaginary doctor visible only to her. The beat is emotional grime and hip-hop.)

AAINA

I didn’t know that such great pain existed until now.
Didn’t know I could see nightmares without fallin’ asleep.
No one asked me what Aaina would desire.
Won’t ever happen; I have seen the end; my life’s expired.

Honest to God, I’m thankful that you saved my life.
Thousands of victims; maybe I’m the lucky one.
Thousands of miles away, in this hospital,
A newfound life should make me happy, but I feel done.

(She kneels on the stretcher.)

Everything done to me is carved in my memory.
A part of me is hateful; the rest just doesn't feel.
If I felt at all, maybe I would cry ceaselessly.
Did you ever believe that I could be rehabilitated?

(Aaina gets up and walks towards the doctor.)

If I told you everything, would I feel lighter, doc?
I see no goodness; for me, is there any hope?
In the devil's eyes, I saw the massacre, a genocide.
In their hands, I lost my love, future, and past.

(She falls on the ground.)

That might have all passed if I had seen my mother for once.
If I had hugged her last time, I'd have bawled and passed out.
If I had shed one tear, I'd have felt much better.
Lately, my sight has been blocked by a wall of horror.

(Slowly gets up, as her horror arises.)

I'm blinded; the world has disappeared.
Then I wake up, tied up, on a stretcher.
Though this nightmare will never end, I'll tell you everything:

(The hallucinations start again: the sounds of machine guns used in an ambush are heard.)

(Aaina sings melodically, standing on her stretcher. The asymmetrically shaped cages on both sides of the stage get lit with a red light. There are two men in their twenties in the cells. On the

left, there's Niaz, the lover of Aaina, serving time in the prison of love in Kabul. And on the right is Fettah, in an orange jumpsuit, imprisoned in Guantanamo.)

CHOIR (sings emotionally over rock guitar accompaniment)

In two hours, my fate changed.

I saw the devil's eyes; it was our first exchange.

Then everybody, one by one...

(Aaina raps and sings while holding the cell bars.)

The dead were lucky; the rest were slaves.

Three years I spent in the devil's bed.

My body was like a puppet in the hands of the master.

It was no longer me; my soul had been stolen.

In two hours, my fate changed.

No memories left from the old me.

(Aaina collapses on her bed. The red lights over the cages of the men die away, leaving only Aaina's bed light on. She starts having rhythmic seizures as her light also dims to darkness. Only graffiti panels are visible.)

A pulsating rhythm is heard in the darkness. Aaina leaves the stage from the right side once there is a blackout.

Scene 2 – Men speak from their cells in Kabul and Guantanamo

(The left cell, symbolising a jail cell in Kabul's love crimes prison, is lit with orange light. Sitting on a chair, Niaz is writing a letter on a small table, fixated on the cage. The graffiti panels above the

cell, now lit with Islamic green light, indirectly depict Middle Eastern territory with specific colours and images. Niaz wears a shalwar kameez and green shawl with Adidas Hoops 3.0 Mid Classics shoes.)

NIAZ

(Writes in the air nervously while raps)

6 years.

I have been here for 6 years and got no friends left,
Cos, I fell in love, and here, passion is punished.
There's no justice for the believers of love,
But tell me, in which book does it says love is chastised?

I'd tear down the walls if I had strength,
The rules of this place can't change my ways,
The vengeance I buried has time to wait,
Cos, I took a pledge.

(Niaz gets up, leaves the cage, and approaches the mid-stage with lights following him in changing colours. Only left of the stage is lit.)

We became friends on our way to school,
There's a first time for everything; it was my first meeting with a Bacha Posh.
These words are the reminiscence of those days,
I remember your father made you dress as a chap.
He wanted his eldest to support the fam.
Some days you went to school, and some days you worked.
Thanks to how you dress, we had the liberty to be deserted.
Looking just like a boy was your key to freedom.
And when we were alone together, I saw your eyes sparkle.

A wave arose from my heart and hit my brain hard,
I told you I love you, and you gave me a nervous smile.

(Niaz reaches for an imaginary memory of Aaina and sings melodically. A white spot falls on him.)

It was the most beautiful smile in the world,
I can never ever forget it.

(Spotlight disappears, and Niaz keeps on rapping.)

That look changed our lives forever.
We were mistaken, not careful enough.
That guy amongst us, I thought he was a friend,
But he turned and stabbed us in our back.

(Niaz disappears in the dark. Fettah, wearing an orange Gitmo jumpsuit, awaits in his cell on the right side of the stage. His cell gets lit with a reddish-orange spotlight.)

FETTAH

2 years.

I have been here for 2 years and got no friends left,
Cos, I fell in love, and passion is a shame for us.
There's no justice for the believers of love,
But tell me, in which book does it says love is chastised?

I'd tear down the walls if I had strength,
The rules of this place can't change my ways,
I carry the vengeance I took once upon a time,
Cos, I have a heart filled with your love.

(Fettah kneels in front of his cell door as the prison guards arrive to make a cell search. The guards are invisible, and all the action is presented through solo dance motives by Fettah. A white spotlight falls on Fettah as the panels' light turns reddish orange.)

(The choreography action is as follows:

Fettah is pushed down to the floor and rolls over.

Gets pepper sprayed.

Gets prone positioned.

Repositioned against the cell wall, pushed by the throat.

Throws his cell furniture outside.

Throws himself in the scatter and writhes.

Gets up on his feet and throws himself back into the cell.

Lies down on the floor, face down, and speaks.)

Fettah:

How would you describe the disappearance of hope?

Falling from the top of an ivory tower?

Sometimes I rest in a grave as striking as the hanging gardens of Babylonia, and sometimes I hide in a black box, sleeping in a buried bed.

(He slowly gets up and turns to the audience as a white spotlight falls on him.)

Have you ever listened to what ants got to say?

Did you see how each one has a different shade?

My ears are as sharp as the ears of the dead.

But where I lie is not a grave, only deeper than that.

(Fettah goes back to his cell away from the spotlight. His cell gets lit with orange light while Niaz follows the beat by stomping his feet on the floor and hitting the table with his hand.)

Love has thrown me into this!

Love has thrown me into this!

With only one intention, this prison is made,
The whole design is constructed to drive you mad.
The walls, the bars, the floor spread on the sky,
the concrete poured down, and each step resonating in the aisles,
It is made with the same plan: It's a mad dance!

(Fettah picks up an ant from the floor and dances on his cell bed, talking to the ant.)

This barbed wire I see from my cell window,
Is my only companion in misfortune other than you!
It has been two years on this bare concrete,
And what is this sentence for? I only did what I had to do.

(Fettah leaves his cell and hits the mid-stage.)

A man lives for a name worth remembering, and I told her that.
I only went in there to get her out.
To quench the thirst, I collected in my heart,
My sole wish was a life filled with her presence and delight.

But what I heard was,
But what I heard was,
But what I heard was,
Too heavy for even the toughest.
The iron under fire's behest,
It would become a knife to be whetted.

It is no small thing to be easily forgiven,
So, death was her fair punishment.

I may be far from you, yet I have never betrayed!
It started like worship and ended with a slaying.
In the end, a funeral would be a fitting gift.
Truly and naively, still running after broken dreams.

I confess I'm not happy, and all could have ended otherwise.
My ambition overwhelmed me, as my feelings were profound.
I must have been asleep, overseeing the fiction of our love.
I was in an ambush, hearing your hazy howling heart.

(Fettah gets in his cell.)

Maybe she was confused,
Perhaps she was confused,
It was an unrequited love,
No tomorrow, stolen; the remnant was solitude.
Maybe she was confused,
Perhaps she was confused!

(He sits on his bed and freezes while looking at the ant in his hand.)

Love has thrown me into this!
Love has thrown me into this!

Scene 3 – Tainted

(Niaz and Fettah are in their cells frozen. Aaina arrives from the right side of the backstage, walks towards the mid-stage in a Shayla type of Muslim veil and starts undressing slowly.)

It was my father's wish.

Anyways, everything should have been the way he wished,
Apart from his seven daughters.

We had a diwan right by the window.

(She drops her veil to her shoulders and turns her back, walking towards her cell as an imaginary living room from her childhood.)

He would sit there, leaning on the wall and order around us when he didn't work.

(She takes off her shirt and drops it on the floor. Then bends down slowly, picks it up, and walks towards the back of the cell.)

One time, he sat there for hours.

He said nothing and asked for nothing.

Sulky, he smoked in silence.

(She leaves her clothes under the hospital bed and comes towards the mid-stage, rapidly passing from the cell.)

That was usually when he came up with the worst stuff.

Then he got up in a hurry.

Called me over.

I was ten.

(In front of her cell, she bows before her out-of-sight father. Father's voice is heard through PA.)

FATHER

We gotta stop the rumours, Aaina!

AAINA

What rumours, father?

FATHER

The neighbours, Aaina! Haven't you heard what the neighbours say?

(Aaina starts rapping.)

AAINA

The things that the neighbours say!

It was the maw when the man gave an ear to the ghoul,

Slowly turning evil and start thinking alike.

Throw mud at them and pull 'em down.

CHOIR:

Tainted!

Tainted!

AAINA:

They all got their opinions, and they are always right.

The scorpion turns towards you and stings you in your heart.

They play kissy-face and say, "hi, how are you doing?"

Then talk behind your back and burn you with gossip.

CHOIR:

Tainted!

Tainted!

(Aaina returns to bowing before her father in front of her cell.)

FATHER

Go sell some water, collect bottles, or do brickwork.

Make some money and learn how to earn.

Women can't go out; these are all men's duties.

The day, the time, and the right moment may come,

You may even go to school; who knows?

AAINA

Disgrace, misery, punishment, hell!

My father kept saying each day,

"Oh god, what was my sin?

What did I do to deserve all these girls?"

Daddy wants me to be a *Bacha Posh*; I can't believe it.

I don't want to be a girl dressed in boy's clothing.

Not the society's, not my father's fault,

I'm the one who's suffering,

I'm the one to blame, and that's what they suppose.

FATHER

What else can they say? The father of girls.

Tainted!

Tainted!

AINA

My mother cut my hair; I couldn't believe it.

I accepted my hate, and my grudge branded my guts.

I was no longer Aaina; now, I was called Afzal.

Better, superior, lustrous, and prominent.

DOCTOR

I know that it is hard for you. Try to tell me about your feelings. What did little Aaina hide inside during those times?

(Niaz, in his cell, is frozen, washing his face from a bucket filled with water, and Fettah is frozen, standing up, watching outside his cell window.)

I hated every minute of it.

I was embarrassed by each step I took.

Desperately, I hid that I was a girl.

But the looks that judged me never disappeared.

I cried; on the street, I was bullied.

I heard whispers from my back,

As if everyone knew it.

Then I learned how to walk like men:

Stable hips, elbows out, move the shoulders, tighten the neck!

It was so different to walk freely.

What was banned for Aaina was ok for Afzal.

Out on the street, I walked and got far.

A new era had begun, and now I was free.

(Aaina starts dancing around the stage.)

I started to roam the streets aimlessly.
I was Afzal, not Aaina if anyone asked me.
Discovered the town when I was out from work,
I created a new world on my own.

A couple of years passed, and I was in school.
There, I had many girls confessing to me their love.
I'd go, "Don't be foolish; I'm just a girl like you."
But I created a new world that sets me free.

(Niaz and Fettah leave their cages and start playing football with an imaginary ball at the back of the stage.)

A new world for me
A new world for me
I created a new life on my own.

There was a boy in our street called Niaz.
I fell in love with him at first sight.
We were playing football; we were on the same team.
Our eyes crossed and locked,
While mandem hollered, "goal!"

(Niaz interacts with Aaina, and Fettah scores a goal. Niaz slowly approaches Aaina.)

AAINA:

He took a couple of steps forward and got closer.
I held my breath and almost had a cardiac arrest.

NIAZ:

That's football; you might win or lose.

But don't worry about it, tell me what your name is.

FATHER

What else can they say? The father of girls.

AAINA

(Looks around and whispers to herself.)

Look at me; you got to smile,

And say your name is Afzal!

Never, for a second, consider telling the truth,

It is dangerous, and it may end badly for you.

There are people all around,

You should take care and be wise,

Because when you are a *Bacha Posh*,

Each person might be a threat.

A threat!

NIAZ

(Wakes her up from a dream)

Aren't you going to say something? I asked you your name.

AAINA

(Stutters)

My...my name is Afzal.

NIAZ

(Reaches out and takes her hand.)

Your name can't indeed be Afzal.

AAINA

How come?

NIAZ

I can see that you are not telling me the truth. I want to know your real name, not the *Bacha Posh* one.

AAINA

(Takes her hand back rapidly.)

My name is... Aaina!

NIAZ

Good to meet you, Aaina! I'm Niaz.

AAINA

I know! I mean... Nice to meet you too!

AAINA

We left there together in silence.

NIAZ

As if the world was a thousand years away from us.

AAINA

I felt complete for the very first time.

NIAZ

This shit hole belonged to you and me.

AINA

I was now a *Bacha Posh* for my love.

I was now a *Bacha Posh* for my love.

Now for my love,

Now for love,

Now, love!

A new world for me

A new world for me

I created a new life on my own.

(Niaz and Aaina climb down the stairs and get apart, turning to their cages.)

That's a dream, a memory,

We are swamped in the ashes of the past.

Ask the dust; why it feels so sad when the wind blows.

TUTTI:

Tainted!

Tainted!

Scene 4 – Love, Hate, and Ants

(Flashback to the beginning of the love affair: Niaz gets up, walking down the street towards Aaina's home to pick her up. On the way, he meets Fettah, who observes him in suspicion. Fettah passes by Niaz without making a remark and starts watching his moves from afar.)

FETTAH

When I saw you amongst the other boys, your face shone a different light.

Your looks were soft and blacker than most.

A dark spider climbed up my chest and crawled in.

FETTAH

What is your name?

AAINA

It's Afzal!

TUTTI

That's how I was drowned in love.

In a pitch-black well,

A single pebble fell,

And its noise blew up the well,

As soon as I saw them,

I knew that my heart would sink,

Like a giant vessel.

Drowned in love.

In a pitch-black well,

A single pebble fell,

And its noise blew up the well,

As soon as I saw them,

I knew that my heart would sink,

A giant vessel,

Like a vessel, I will sink.

Same city, same street, same place, same play,
But I know that your name ain't Afzal!
Akin dreams, everything's the same, similar colours, but you got something else.

If you got a living spider in your heart,
It's worth giving it a shot!

NIAZ

Why are you following us?

FETTAH

Aren't we all hanging out together?

NIAZ

Well, you insisted, innit?

FETTAH

Don't hold back and shame me,
It's so weird that I chased you like a tail,
I'm choked up, moved to tears,
I can't go back, don't have a choice,
My love fires my poise.

TUTTI

That's how I was drowned in love.
In a pitch-black well,
A single pebble fell,
And its noise blew up the well,

As soon as I saw them,
I knew that my heart would sink,
Like a giant vessel.

Drowned in love.
In a pitch-black well,
A single pebble fell,
And its noise blew up the well,
As soon as I saw them,
I knew that my heart would sink,
A giant vessel,
Like a vessel, I will sink.

AINA

Niaz, Fettah knows that I'm a *Bacha Posh*.
Think about it! He's always on our tail.

NIAZ

Nah! I don't think he knows much about you.

AINA

Just tell me then; how did you find it out, huh?

NIAZ

Found out what?

AINA

Niaz, what on earth are we talking about? Me being a *Bacha Posh*.

NIAZ

Well, that was easy.

AAINA

That's what I'm saying. Fettah isn't a dumbass, either.

NIAZ

Forget it! No one will get it, trust me!

AAINA

If we don't watch our back, we'll find ourselves in deep shit. If Fettah ever snitches on us, you know it's gonna get messed up.

NIAZ

Hush now! He might hear us talking.

FETTAH

Oh, so you are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

You are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

Oh, so you are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

How come you didn't tell me before I asked you?

I'm gonna be honest with you now,

Don't think I went nuts, 'cos I feel like you got something going on.

Got a doubt in my mind if I ask you, think I'll be alright,

Tell me, do you have a secret thing with my mate, Niaz?

Hold on and think before you say it!

'Cos there are some scenes I've witnessed, quite suspicious,

If you're a girl, is Niaz aware of it?
And if he is, does he expect any service?

AINA

You got such disgusting thoughts!
Who in the right mind would come up with those?
How wrong for you to ask these speculations!
Indeed, these are all lies and rumours.

These are all lies and rumours.
These are all lies and rumours.

FETTAH

So, you sayin'; it ain't true, right?

AINA

Right!

FETTAH

You sure?

AINA

Positive!

FETTAH

What's your real name?

AINA

Aaina.

FETTAH

Aaina... Your name is as cute as your face.

TUTTI

That's how I was drowned in love.

In a pitch-black well,

A single pebble fell,

And its noise blew up the well,

As soon as I saw them,

I knew that my heart would sink,

Like a giant vessel.

Drowned in love.

In a pitch-black well,

A single pebble fell,

And its noise blew up the well,

As soon as I saw them,

I knew that my heart would sink,

A giant vessel,

Like a vessel, I will sink.

FETTAH

So, Aaina...Why don't we be together? I mean like lovers.

AAINA

That's not even remotely possible! They'd kill us.

FETTAH

They won't notice it, will they? You'll keep being a *Bacha Posh*. I got this genius plan, got it all figured out. Everything will be kept a secret, and you'll keep hiding your identity.

AINA

That'd be so foolish! You gotta be mad.

FETTAH

Right, I'm mad, 'cos I'm desperate, you feel me?

AINA

No, I don't, and I don't wanna! Do you know why? 'Cos I wanna live.

FETTAH

We gonna live! We'll be free in secrecy.

AINA

Free in secrecy! We are friends, Fettah. We are neighbours.

FETTAH

Isn't it even better?

AINA

We can't do this here. You know that!

FETTAH

Let me put it this way: Do you feel anything for me?

AINA

As a matter of fact, ...

FETTAH

Tell me.

AINA

No, Fettah, I don't see you like that!

FETTAH

You are brave for a girl with such a huge secret.

AINA

I told you the truth. You are my friend.

FETTAH

Alright! Say no more!

That's how I was drowned in love.

A pitch-black well, look,

The well blew up in pieces now.

That's how I was drowned in love.

A pitch-black well, look,

The well blew up in pieces now.

That's how I was drowned in love.

A pitch-black well, look,

The well blew up in pieces now.

That's love!

NIAZ

What did he say?

AAINA

You heard it all, Niaz.

NIAZ

Yeah, I did. We got rid of him.

AAINA

I'm scared, Niaz. I got a bad feeling.

NIAZ

Don't you feel bad? He tried his luck; too bad it didn't work.

FETTAH

Talk about me, my century: My fight for my love is worth it!

I hold on to it hopelessly, finding it in the horizon's infinity,

Clouds at the end of this abyss,

It may be the sunrise or the sun's death; I wouldn't know!

These passions are to blame,

Whenever I see that sparkle on your lip,

The birds drown down that cliff,

They are hung in the mist; I wouldn't see them!

The seas are small rivalled to my wings,

And I'm a dead bird,

That can fly and pass the mist,

If I only knew which way I should flutter.

I may cut the clouds,

I may ride the clouds,
If I keep riding with all these deep cuts,
How long could I go on before I bleed to death?

Your scent is a toxic fruit,
That grows in a deepening season.
It may take me to the heavens,
If I would only know how it tastes.

I climbed up the peak of a purple limpet,
I'm hollow inside, sandstorm, dust, concrete, and thunderbolt,
All the mirrors are broken, and the shattered glass sinks into my skin.
I'm coming already to die.

FETTAH

Hi, little ant!

THE ANT

Seryalokvua!

FETTAH

You are telling me to die, too, huh?

THE ANT

Sanma bele şikitla!

FETTAH

Right...Why should I die?

THE ANT

Selvet vi istisnat sabap!

FETTAH

Should I do that? Really?

FETTAH

Do you think she deserves that?

FETTAH

Alright then! She's gonna face the consequence of what she has started!

NIAZ

Do you want to go to my place for a change?

AAINA

What do you mean? Where are your parents?

NIAZ

They won't be here for a couple of days.

AAINA

If anyone sees us getting in that place, the game is over. We'd lose all our freedom.

NIAZ

It ain't gonna happen!

AAINA

Niaz, how can you be so sure?

NIAZ

I prepared everything. I cooked and set the table. It's a feast for the gods. If anyone sees us, as you say or even worse, if anyone knocks on the door, we can easily say we are having lunch.

AINA

Is that your plan, seriously?

NIAZ

That's right!

AINA

Is it worth losing everything we have?

NIAZ

Being close to you is worth everything to me.

AINA

Ok! But we won't be there for long.

NIAZ

Alright! We'll be quick.

FETTAH

Oh, so you are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

You are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

Oh, so you are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

How come you chose a knucklehead over me?

Oh, so you are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

You are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

Oh, so you are a *Bacha Posh*, huh? Ok!

How come you chose a knucklehead over me?

AINA & NIAZ

Love!

FETTAH

This ain't love!

AINA & NIAZ

Love!

FETTAH

This can't be love!

It's a felony to fall in love,

And the sentence starts from 6 years.

If the dirty act is proven, then you get a fifteen.

If you hadn't lied, maybe I wouldn't have done it.

But lowballing me was a complete misstep if I'm being honest.

Hey Mr Policeman!

POLICE

What have you got to say, son?

FETTAH

On my life, sir, I'm a witness to adultery.

POLICE

Who?

I gotta tell you where they are now urgently.

POLICE

Tell me!

With their actions, they are menacing the community,
I saw 'em with my own eyes; that's adultery.

POLICE

Hmmm!

I gotta tell you where they are now urgently.

POLICE

Tell me!

With their actions, they are menacing the community.
On my life, sir, I'm a witness to adultery.

POLICE

Hmmm!

I'm a witness, sir,
That's adultery!

POLICE

Sit down! Speak up!

FETTAH

As a matter of fact, I ain't no snitch,
But some issues are damn too critical to skip.
Some of us must have burnt the bridges,
And some will be roasted alive, here I'm spittin':

These are the youth from my neighbourhood; I know them well.
One of them is a boy, the other one, I ain't so sure!
They are alone together in a house in the hood,
Supposedly they are eating, but I just know it's a fraud!

POLICE

Good job! We need more youth like you.
Police! Open the door. Open it, or we gonna burst it in!

AAINA

Don't you dare open it!

NIAZ

Do we stand a chance?

AAINA

It'll be too late for everything if you go and open that door. Niaz, don't!

POLICE

IDs! Now! You too! Niaz and Aaina... What were two up to here?

NIAZ

We cooked and ate.

POLICE

Take them to the station now. We'll see if you cooked or are cooked.

TUTTI

That's how I was drowned in love.

In a pitch-black well,

A single pebble fell,

And its noise blew up the well,

As soon as I saw them,

I knew that my heart would sink,

Like a giant vessel.

Drowned in love.

In a pitch-black well,

A single pebble fell,

And its noise blew up the well,

As soon as I saw them,

I knew that my heart would sink,

A giant vessel,

Like a vessel, I will sink.

Scene 5

AAINA & NIAZ

Everything was different now; the devil was nearby,

I feel like I have already died!

If you had heard my cry,

If you had listened when I spoke my mind,

It could have been all different.

Anyhow...

You ain't the one to blame,
You can't hide when it's real love, as they say.
With you, we had a secret but happy,
Happy yet quiet paradise in hell.

NIAZ

Aaina, you were entirely correct; I'll give you that.
We wouldn't have ended up in shit if I had listened to you.
While walking this long road with cuffed hands behind my back,
I gathered my words; I don't fear; I'm ready to retaliate.

When the judge asks, I'll say, "I love this girl."
Whatever my sentence will be, I'll wait for you.
I'm gonna be sealed up 'til the state sets me free.
But I'm gonna find you the moment I'm out again.

The chain of my sentence is wrapped around my neck.
My mistakes are heavy, but any hopes were banned.
If love is a crime, lovers are convicts.
There might be a day our sentence is forgiven.

We are sealed up 'til the state sets us free.
For all the lover's sake!
We are sealed up 'til the state sets us free.
For all the lover's sake!

AAINA & NIAZ

Everything was different now; the devil was nearby,
I feel like I have already died!
If you had heard my cry,
If you had listened when I spoke my mind,
It could have been all different.

AAINA

A life without a battle, a wedding without a quarrel,
A white wedding gown, was it too much for me to inquire?
But no, it didn't happen. Instead, it should be handcuffs,
That I must deserve, finally I'm under arrest.

Always a step behind, pure in my own mind,
But tainted in real life, my name is now mud.
I'm not allowed to wear white; I can only wear green.
Before the gown, cuffs cut both my wrists.

Everything changes with a single word.
And evil is always far closer than you think.
There is no going back.
Tradition says, "we sure want her dead."

In mere two hours, my destiny has altered.
I have only memories left of you.
If you had heard my cry,
If you had listened when I spoke my mind,
It could have been all different.

Anyhow...

AINA & NIAZ

Everything was different now; the devil was nearby,
I feel like I have already died!
If you had heard my cry,
If you had listened when I spoke my mind,
It could have been all different.

Anyhow...

You ain't the one to blame,
You can't hide when it's real love, as they say.
With you, we had a secret but happy,
Happy yet quiet paradise in hell.

JUDGE

Aaina, daughter of Adib, and son of Abbas, Niaz. You were caught red-handed in residence. The police officers who made the raid saw the girl walking from the bedroom. This proof is enough to convict you of the crime. You brought shame to your families; thus, your sentence should set an example and warn others. Our moral law and legislation are clear about adultery. I sentence you both to fifteen years in the prison of love.

PRISON OFFICER

This way! Your hearing will be in this room.

NIAZ

Your honour?

AAÏNA

Please, don't talk about love!

NIAZ

No, I got another plan, trust me. Your honour, may I speak?

JUDGE

Speak up!

NIAZ

We love each other, your honour. We wanna get married!

JUDGE

So, you say you want to get married, huh? A slut dressed up as a boy and you, huh? Aaina, the daughter of Adib, is that right? Do you want to get married to this man?

AAÏNA

(Whispers) Where the hell that came from? Yes, your honour, I do.

JUDGE

It is considered by the court. The moral law prohibits the youth from getting married on their own. Yet, according to the legislation, the couple that agrees to marriage cannot be sentenced to fifteen years. As a result, I will reduce your sentence to two years in prison. After your release, you must proceed with your marriage. That being said, I do not know how your families and kin will react to this disgrace. The court is adjourned.

Scene 6

NIAZ

If I can convince her family, which I will, that sentence means we will have a wedding in two years.

AAÏNA

Two, six or fifteen years, it doesn't matter. This is not the duration of my sentence; it is the rest of my lifetime.

FETTAH

When injustice becomes customary, a right-minded man must revolt. That's when he might entertain eccentric thoughts.

Is what I heard for real?

The judge killed my dreams.

What kinda shit did he pull?

Lost all my trust in this scheme!

Judge, you piece of shit!

How can chastity be so cheap?

That's clearly adultery, doom and gloom!

How can two years be just for them doing so wrong?

This world is out of joint.

Justice is on all fours, and morals are all spent.

It should be taken care of,

What I'm against is the yute chasing the thirst!

If you want something done, do it yourself.

Assure justice and leave them in ruins.

Or she repents, turns back to me and cries for mercy,

Then my better nature may forgive, but...

If you want something done, do it yourself.
Assure the justice and or it won't get done.
If you want something done, do it yourself.
Assure the justice and or it won't get done.

Is what I heard for real?
The judge killed my dreams.
What kinda shit did he pull?
Lost all my trust in this scheme!

AAINA

Is what I heard for real?
This sentence is not what it is,
The real punishment still,
Awaits me once I'm free.

A barrel pointed up my temple,
Bruises around my throat,
My neck maybe broken,
Or perhaps I'm buried under the rocks.

The judge knows what the score is.
We are the real killers.
With a family like mine, who needs a prison,
My last stop may be the home of my people.

My father lives for his pride,
Would die for his pride, would kill for his pride.
The neighbours will spit on his face,

For a tainted daughter, if she is good for prison then she's good for a grave.

I'm sure they already know where my grave shall be.

It sure will be hidden where the shame is buried.

It will be a damned and out-of-sight corner of the cemetery.

This is the wedding I deserve and will get.

I don't need a bridal gown; I'll need a cerement.

As soon as I'm out of here,

I will find peace after I push up the daisies of disgrace.

NIAZ

Is what I heard for real?

Is what I heard for real?

Love gotta be the greatest of all,

Fifteen years of sentence,

Got reduced to two; who could have believed?

Your hair, your neck, and everywhere else,

The little heart of yours within your chest belongs to me.

Don't be afraid to love, you see,

Even the government is a witness to our feelings.

It may be a crime to fall in love,

But to get married solves the issue after all,

As a matter of fact, people are free according to my law,

But the moral law says woman ain't free, that's all!

We are on everyone's lips,

Our names are renowned, Aaina and Niaz,
I indeed called your father,
I wanted to say sorry, but he did not answer.

While doing time in jail, I'm writing many letters.
I recently started counting the days.
I'm going to be here till the state lets me out.
As I end my letter, my sentences are filled with hope.
Is what I heard for real?
Is what I heard for real?

NIAZ

In two years, a wedding.

AAINA

A murder.

FETTAH

Revenge!

Scene 7

Whore, adulterer, indecent,
You're so sleazy, so despicable!
Don't call my move unscrupulous,
I'm gonna explode; the sands are running out!

Who knows what happened in that house,
The police detained you, but the judge will let you go,

I gotta retaliate, and now's the time,
I'm gonna explode; the sands are running out!

I ain't a gangster per se,
I was a good man with a decent family and really loved you.
We could have such a fairy tale wedding,
If you have chosen me.

I would have never treated you wrong if you had chosen me.
But now, I want my retribution; it falls upon me.
Whore, adulterer, indecent,
You're so sleazy, so despicable!
Don't call my move unscrupulous,
I'm gonna explode; the sands are running out!

It's all over; you are so tainted.
You ain't sinless; you went and chose him.
The time has come for avenging.
I'm gonna explode; the sands are running out!

Everybody knows, everybody talks,
The talk of the town is the love of Aaina and Niaz.
To hell with you two!

Do you like it better now?
I really did love you.
Now you can both go to hell.
To hell with you two!
Whore, adulterer, indecent,

You're so sleazy, so despicable!
Don't call my move unscrupulous,
I'm gonna explode; the sands are running out!

Who knows what happened in that house,
The police detained you, but the judge will let you go,
I gotta retaliate, and now's the time,
I'm gonna explode; the sands are running out!

TERRORIST

Who the heck are you?

FETTAH

I'm Fettah. I gotta see the Commander.

TERRORIST

Why are you here?

FETTAH

An angelic voice told me about my mission, and I had a revelation.

TERRORIST

Yeah? And what is that mission of yours?

FETTAH

If you only heard it...Hush!

TERRORIST

Good, do proceed.

FETTAH

Dear Commander, I'm grateful that you accepted me into your presence.
If you'd allow me to speak up, I got something to say.
I'm lachrymose due to an unsettled account.
I feel like screechin', so I got to speak my mind.
The justice served by the state is wack.
The whole jurisdiction has become a joke.

Tricksters, liars and thieves,
They ain't afraid of nothin' 'cos the price they pay is low.

Allow me to tell you somethin',
You got power; take advantage of it.
Leng, guts, faith, and penance,
We gotta fix what is wicked.

COMMANDER

What was your name again?

FETTAH

Fettah!

COMMANDER

Bring it home, Fettah! What on earth are you on about?

FETTAH

Whore, adulterer, indecent,
You're so sleazy, so despicable!
Don't call my move unscrupulous,
I'm gonna explode; the sands are running out!

Allow me to retort, Commander:

The prisons are filled with scumbags 'cos the people are nowadays free.

But what happens when everybody does as they please?

The so-called society collapses and lies in ruins.

The Love Prison, women's ward!

If those were decent ladies, they wouldn't be in the nick, would they?

And each day, this ridiculous justice system sets many of them free.

They soon gonna spread everywhere and demolish what is left of our wounded society.

Their families, fathers, and brothers will find those women.

They gonna find 'em even they flee to America.

And they'll slay 'em on sight,

Like snapping the neck of a dove!

They gonna be a murderer for nothing!

And in jails, the state will keep feeding the murderers and whores as long as they keep killing and whoring.

We must say stop this nonsense!

A single brutal hit at a stroke...

A single blow must destroy the sinners and keep everyone else in check.

A raid to the Love Prison, women's ward!

Whoever dies, dies,

And the rest, the survivors, the sinners that we capture, will be the spoil of war,

Who will become slaves to aid us on our holy quest, our jihad!

Whore, adulterer, indecent,

You're so sleazy, so despicable!

Whore, adulterer, indecent,

You're so sleazy, so despicable!

Scene 8

Pick-ups painted green came down the street.
They halted right by the prison gate.
Hundreds of armed men jumped out of the cargo beds.
Firing into the air and shouting God's 99 names.
One of 'em climbed up the fence in one blow.
Pointed the bazooka right to our window.
He squeezed the trigger, and we all heard the whistle.
A white smoke cut through the air, and the missile...
Run now!

The rocket hit the building and detonated,
Destroyed the wall and killed dozens in an instant.
The ones who didn't die jumped over the bodies and ran to the exit.
In a dust cloud, no one knows which way to go... Run, run, run, run!

All the inmates, we took shelter in a room full of debris.
Packed like sardines, most women unbeknownst to me.
Behind high walls and steel doors,
Under the stairs and tables, trapped on the top floor,

Women and kids are crying with dread.
Now facing a terror worse than the terror of death.
They will come and find us; there's no way around it.
We are left to die or run, run, run, run!

NIAZ

Run; no hope is left, don't think about the dread.
The problem is surviving; this is maybe worse than death.
Now you have a single choice: find somewhere and hide in the dark.
The dogs are coming; save yourself before you get caught.

AAINA

Mama, have no fear; no guns could ever kill me.
Bullets may be fired, but they could never really hurt me.
There are worse things in life than the fact of being dead,
I wouldn't be sorry if it's time to meet my end.

TUTTI

Killer, shooter, bullet,
Perv, slave, infant,
Never do get captured,
Don't despise the bells,
You little slave, that's what you deserve!

Hide until all is better,
Maybe one day or another,
Die, never do get captured!

FETTAH

Hide like you have no friends left on the face of the planet.
Find a hole, close your eyes, and say your last prayer.
Born into this, the war runs in my veins,
Blood will be shed when I shoot you on your forehead, BAP!

In death I trust,

That's what a little girl is worth.
Guess what a girl like you
Really deserves.

I don't need no help.
If you need it done right, just do it yourself.
I am not a pessimist; that's a matter of fact.
For you got my love disgraced.

TUTTI

Killer, shooter, bullet,
Perv, slave, infant,
Never do get captured,
Don't despise the bell,
You little slave, that's what you deserve!

Hide until all is better,
Maybe one day or another,
Die, never do get captured!

TERRORISTS

How is she?
She's a ting, easy money.
How's she?
Clapped!

How is she?
She's young, easy money.
How's she?

Ancient!

How is she?

She's a ten, easy money.

How's she?

Ugly!

How is she?

She's a child, easy money.

How's she?

Forget about it!

-How is that one?

-Young, hot, may be worth a rack.

-Why does she look like a boy tho?

-Maybe she's one of 'em pervs.

-Let's stone her, then.

(Fettah jumps out from the terrorist group and comes right before kneeling Aaina.)

FETTAH

Leave that bitch to me!

An old neighbour from the street.

Her crime was adultery,

She's a *Bacha Posh*, not a pervert.

I'll bring her to book,

I promised her poor father,

When she put us to shame,

All our friends thought we were all cuckolds!

Now that I caught a break,
I inserted the mag, elevated a piece,
The round is ready, awaits in silence,
I chambered it, and the barrel is staring at your temple.

Make another mistake; I dare you!
What's your body count, you slut, you whore?
That's the tip of the barrel; taste it now!
You are used to it; take it in your mouth!

AAINA

My executioner can't be my God!
My God can't be my executioner!
It can't be so evil; it can't be a killer,
It shall never visit the soul of a wasteman.

You lying bastard, what bullshit you fuckin' spread?
How many people have you killed with your hatred?
The soil drowned in the blood of women.
The country turned into a tomb for women.

Tell the truth, and then shoot me down!
Your jealous soul is filled with scum.
All shall hear, you were in love,
You simped and failed, and now you're acting like a bum!

You kill a mother; you kill her child.
I'm pregnant, you idiot. Can you fathom?

Pointed your gun at me, you coward,
Do you have the balls to pull the trigger?

(Fettah dithers but can't pull the trigger. He starts talking while pointing the gun at Aaina.)

FETTAH

You pregnant? From that dossier? I can't end your suffering like this, then, innit? If the baby in your womb is a girl... She shall suffer like you as well. You gotta live, Aaina!

TUTTI

Killer, shooter, bullet,
Perv, slave, infant,
Never do get captured,
Don't despise the bells,
You little slave, that's what you deserve!

Hide until all is better,
Maybe one day or another,
Die, never do get captured!

Scene 9

COMMANDER

Did that new scumbag, Fettah, stage all this bullshit to take his revenge from Aaina, or whatever her name is?

TERRORIST

Yes, that sounds about right.

COMMANDER

Look at that motherfucker! It's all for the best. We got at least 150 birds worth 3 C-notes each. And we gonna palm Fettah off to the Americans in the terrorist market. We should keep 'em happy and fed so they don't turn back and bite.

TERRORIST

That girl, Aaina, they said she's up the duff.

COMMANDER

So what? It's extra merchandise for all I care! Pack 'em all up, get 'em ready, and sell 'em. Don't waste no time!

NIAZ

I heard all about you after you were long gone,
I heard that you bore a girl,
She was my daughter, they said,
And I couldn't sleep a wink ever since.

I told you all about me,
Every time I lay my hand on a blank paper.
It wasn't that easy here, I can assure you.
Hundreds of pages I wrote it all came from the heart.

I don't blink my eyes when the night falls; I'm terrified!
If I blink once by mistake, I keep seeing the same nightmare.
Locked in a cold and dark chamber,
A baby is left crying on the bare concrete.

My hands are tied.
In a place where I don't even know its name,

There lies my daughter, deserted!
How were you strong enough, Aaina?
They forced her off of you,
But how can a baby survive without her mom?
It has been three long years in captivity,
Each moment was burning in flames,
I wonder who you got by your side?
To each hand that is touching you forcefully,
I should strike on them from above like a sword!
It feels like it is all my fault,
But Aaina, if you still got any strength left, exonerate me too!

AMERICAN SOLDIER

Shoot him with a fuckin' rocket!

FETTAH

Me ending up here is actually a trade,
Just like slaves, warriors are also for sale.
In the market, there are dignitaries and death lists,
The price varies with body counts and rapes.
You get beaten with a bat for two weeks straight,
No questions asked,
Altogether, it's the culture of nemesis.
Your body is left naked,
Your shame tenfolds.
They deign to allow you a glass of water,
Heavier than jet fuel.
They smash your head to the walls while interrogating you,
Until your brain shuts down and you pass out.

Next, you open your eyes in a cell all by yourself,
And you feel in your bones,
You are the loneliest man on earth!

I knew that from the go,
This is the very end of the world.
This is where the abyss begins,
The last station to death.

They said, "welcome to the end."
While my hands and feet were tied up.

Love has thrown me into this!
Love has thrown me into this!

AINA

I'm leaving you a motherless child.
My baby shall not be hungry, not stay in the cold.
If she makes a mistake, they shall not beat her, not lay a hand on her.
Let them cuddle and caress her in their arms as of their own.
If only I was close, I would carry her in my arms.
Yet I couldn't succeed. You shall help my daughter, my God!

GENERAL

Aaina! I hear your ratty little voice again! Shut up and come by my side!

Scene 10

GENERAL

You talk too much, Aaina!

Don't you ever forget what you are here for,
Come now.

AINA

I made you tea.

You like it around these hours.

GENERAL

Hmm! After three years, at last, you accept your fate. It was about time. Give me the cup.

GENERAL

What the fuck, Aaina? I saved your life, bitch. Is that how you thank me?

AINA

The skies left my world.

I dove into a cloud of dust,

Where no path is left.

I walked for three days,

With no ground and directions,

I reached death and asked my fate:

You had so many chances,

You really got no bullets left for me?

I killed the devil,

Is Azrael scared of me?

I'm worn out,

Take my life already!

Can living like me,

Be called really called a life?

I walked alone, passed great mountains,
I said, "maybe the death spots me easier,"
But it didn't happen; I'm a deadlock,
I'm neither dead nor alive,
My soul is hanging on middle-earth.

Hundreds of rapes, I'm not gonna lie,
Were more sinister than hell, but what was even worse,
They snatched my baby from my arms,
It has been three years, but I still walk in deep sorrow.

Tell me: what is left for me other than death now?
If I ever want to go back home, my father will be the first to shoot me.
My mother is still mourning, yet it wouldn't stop my father.
Because a lament won't prevent a murder.

I was a slave at 18 and free at 21.
For three years, I've been breaking bread with evil.
Maybe I deserved it all by breaking the rules.
I killed the devil; now it's my turn to die.

Hundreds of rapes, I'm not gonna lie,
Were more sinister than hell, but what was even worse,
They snatched my baby from my arms,
It has been three years, but I still walk in deep sorrow.

Tell me: what is left for me other than death now?
If I ever want to go back home, my father will be the first to shoot me.

My mother is still mourning, yet it wouldn't stop my father.
Because a lament won't prevent a murder.

NIAZ

Everything was different now; the devil was nearby,
I feel like I have already died!

NIAZ and AAINA

If you had heard my cry,
If you had listened when I spoke my mind,
It could have been all different.

Anyhow...

You ain't the one to blame,
You can't hide when it's real love, as they say.
With you, we had a secret but happy,
Happy yet quiet paradise in hell.

TRANSLATOR

They are asking if you are ok, don't be scared.

AAINA

Who are you guys?

TRANSLATOR

Calm down; we won't hurt you!

AAINA

Don't come near me! You can't hurt me, anyways. No one can hurt me. I just die.

TRANSLATOR

We are a team that helps war survivors. We can see that you need help.

AAINA

That's right! But please don't shout. I don't want to hear any human voice anymore, know what I mean? Just go! Allow it!

TRANSLATOR

If you agree, we can take you to our camp.

AAINA

What camp? They will find me wherever I go.

TRANSLATOR

Come with us! Our camp is based in a safe zone; rest assured. Then we will help you leave the country. We will take you away from here.

AAINA

Leave the country? You gotta be taking a piss. To where?

TRANSLATOR

Germany. Over there, you'll be cared for in a hospital. You'll have a new life. If you wish, we can get in touch with your family. We can inform them all of where you are.

AAINA

No, no, no, no! Don't say anything to my family. I got a baby; can you find her?

TRANSLATOR

Let's get you out first. Then we look for her.

AAINA

Promise me!

TRANSLATOR

I promise. But we gotta be quick!

Scene 11

DOCTOR

Do you see any dreams? I want you to write them down. Look, take this clean page and write on it. What colour do you want your paper to be? If we were to write a song together, what would it tell your family and beloved ones? Do you want to write a song together? You had these experiences. These things have happened to you and your loved ones, correct! Turn the story of your past into one that will shape your future. Now! So, you picked red! I want you to write your goals, close your eyes, think, and begin!

Everything done to me is carved in my memory.

A part of me is hateful; the rest just doesn't feel.

If I felt at all, maybe I would cry ceaselessly.

Did you ever believe that I could be rehabilitated?

If I told you everything, would I feel lighter, doc?

I see no goodness; for me, is there any hope?

In the devil's eyes, I saw the massacre, a genocide.

In their hands, I lost my love, future, and past.

That might have all passed if I had seen you for once.

If I had hugged her last time, I'd have bawled and passed out.
If I had shed one tear, I'd have felt much better.
Lately, my sight has been blocked by a wall of horror.

I'm blinded; the world has disappeared.
Then I wake up, tied up, on a stretcher.
Though this nightmare will never end, I'll tell you everything:

CHOIR

In two hours, my fate changed.
I saw the devil's eyes; it was our first exchange.
Then everybody, one by one...

The dead were lucky; the rest were slaves.
Three years I spent in the devil's bed.
My body was like a puppet in the hands of the master.
It was no longer me; my soul had been stolen.

In two hours, my fate changed.
No memories left from the old me.
It all began with love; you might find that funny.
While chasin' a far-flung dream in captivity,
The land that I walked through was up in flames,
You'd call it hell if you had seen it, but what you have seen was my life.

THE END

Production Photographs



Figure A1, A2: Photos from *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*, August 17, 2022



Figure A2



Figure A3: A photo of Fettah (played by Berke Can Kuyucular), the villain, from the rehearsals of *Bacha Posh: Hip-Hop Musical*



Figure A4: A table rehearsal of *Bacha Posh* in summer 2022



Figure A5: Aykut Oz’s original handmade model for the stage design of *Bacha Posh*

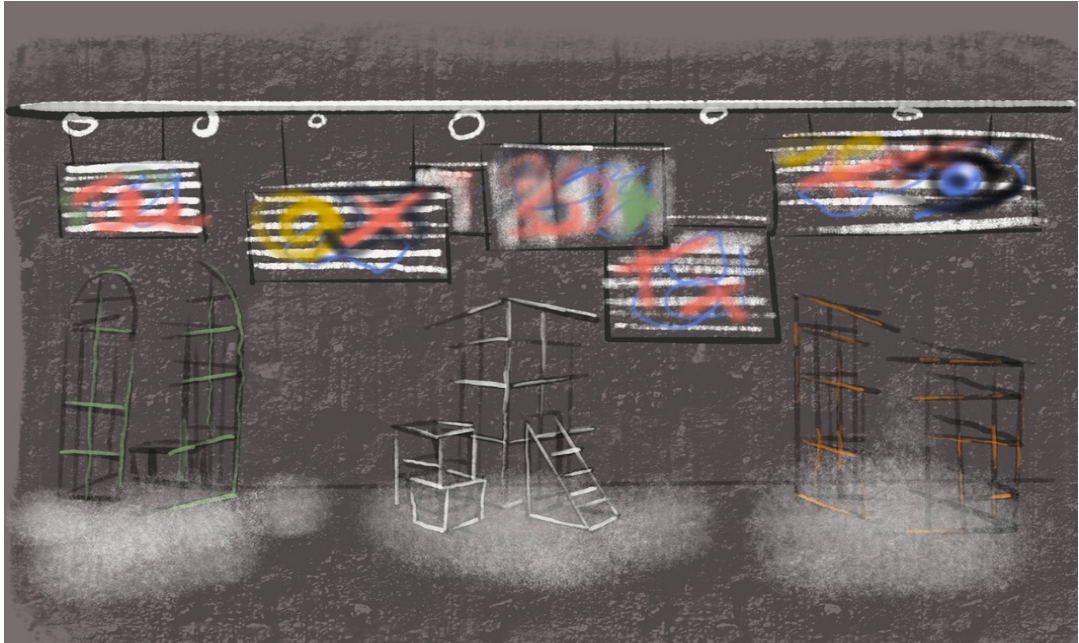


Figure A6: Aykut Oz’s sketch for graffiti work placement



Figure A7, A8: Metal work for the cages used in *Bacha Posh*



Figure A8



Figure A9: Wooden panels for graffiti work



Figure A10: CerModern stage in Ankara where we rehearsed and premiered *Bacha Posh*



Figure A11, A12: *Bacha Posh* performers during rehearsals



Figure A12



Figure A13: *Bacha Posh* final poster designed by Ekin Kılıç Ezer



Figure A14: Stak making graffiti in the car park of CerModern



Figure A15: I hold the ladder for the light artist Gokhan, while he hangs the spotlights



Figure A16, A17, A18: Rehearsals of *Bacha Posh*



Figure A17



Figure A18



Figure A19: The premiere of *Bacha Posh: Hip-Hop Musical* at CerModern, September 22, 2022

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