

Masks Or Souls?: Halide Edib's Politics and Her Pacifism as a Playwright Özlem Ezer

Abstract: In this article, I discuss Halide Edib's play *Masks or Souls?* (*MOS*) as anti-war literature by a Turkish female intellectual and activist who lived between the two World Wars. The article provides a more complete portrayal of Edib, who has often been reduced to a nationalist novelist. I also argue that *MOS* contains autobiographical insights. There is evidence in *MOS*, for example, that Edib became a pacifist on the eve of the Second World War. Another war Edib fought was against the ideas and ideologies within the military and intellectual circles of Turkey. Through the actions and comments of several characters in the play, Edib also criticizes the reforms and westernization processes that took place immediately after the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Finally, I counter the neglect this play has suffered by calling into question some of the nation- and region-based hierarchies prevalent in literary studies.

In 1953, Halide Edib,¹ a famous Turkish novelist, wrote a play in English called *Masks or Souls?* (*MOS* henceforth), based on an earlier, Turkish version of her play.² The play offers an extensive, cynical critique of ideologies of some contemporaneous governments (those of Turkey and Europe in particular) and the affairs that had been taking place in several countries like the founding of the League of Nations (which she supported) and some extreme right-wing movements (which she did not). The Turkish version was originally serialized in *Yedigün Weekly* in 1937 as *Maskeli Ruhlar* (*Souls with Masks*) and published in Turkish in 1945 as *Maske ve Ruh* (*Mask and Soul*). The play still has not

been staged in Turkey or elsewhere, a curious fact, to which Hulya Adak also draws attention (“An Epic for Peace” xvii).³

I consider this play to be Edib’s contribution to anti-war literature as a Turkish female intellectual and activist and see it demonstrating the reshaping of her ideas between the two World Wars. This essay provides a more complete portrayal of Edib who has been categorized as and reduced to a nationalist female novelist. There is no question that she was a fervent nationalist during Turkey’s War of Independence (1919–22), which she considered an anti-imperialist struggle against the Allies. However, her views altered over time and from the various experiences of traveling, leading her to become a pacifist on the eve of the Second World War. There is enough evidence for this change in *MOS*, already clear in its serialized Turkish version in 1937. Another war Edib fought was against the ideas and ideologies within the military and intellectual circles of Turkey. Adak claims that *MOS* “brings forth Edib’s pessimism about the second decade of the Kemalist revolution” (xvii).⁴ This frustration, the consequence of what I refer to as her intellectual war, complicates Edib’s pacifism as reflected in *MOS*. Through the actions and comments of several characters, Bay Timur being the major one, Edib criticizes the top-down structure of the reforms and the westernization processes that took place immediately after the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923. On the basis of Edib’s other works, it is conceivable for her to be a nationalist and pacifist simultaneously with sometimes inevitable ambivalences, as in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, with whom Edib managed to see during her stay in India in 1935.

Moreover, by equating the character of Nasreddin Hoca,⁵ the most durable Turkish folk philosopher and humorist, to Shakespeare, Edib constructs him in the play as a potential peacemaker without overbearing political statements, who at the same time combines the cultures of East and West.⁶ Simultaneously, she introduces his tolerance and use of witty humor, widely known in Turkey, to an English-speaking audience. Hoca serves as a constructive figure to restore hope for peace in the play against the dark atmosphere in Europe at the time as well as in Edib’s personal life, including her experiences with war and exile. In the conclusion, I argue that the rediscovery and reprinting of *MOS* would

improve the studies of Edib's oeuvre both in English and Turkish and connect the play to the other contemporary works of literature in the global scene. A closer consideration should be given to Edib's concerns, because she can help us think through the negative effects of mechanization and totalitarian regimes around the world that are yet to be eradicated. For Edib, mechanization likely refers to the increasing use of machines and capitalism's justifications and rationalizations for such an increase: in Edib's words, the processes in which "figures, machines, and a mind without a soul are at work" (*Turkey Faces West* 246). In the same chapter of her memoir, she uses terms such as "over-mechanized and standardized tendencies of democracy and socialism" (250) with a critical and warning tone yet does not directly provide a definition of mechanization (in other sources either).

The Background of Edib's Ideological and Political Shifts towards Pacifism

From the beginning, Edib rejected a narrow sense of nationalism, that is, one that might have verged on racism. As a child in Istanbul, she was provided with a multicultural education and was in love with her Greek kindergarten teacher, whom she saw as a mother figure (*Memoirs* 23). Edib's studies at the American College for Girls, a missionary school, also strengthened her linguistically and culturally diverse education.

In 1908, when the Young Turks, later consolidated under the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), demanded the restoration of the constitution of 1876, Edib responded with enthusiasm and entered into public life as an activist and journalist. She was twenty-four years old when she began to write for the Unionist paper *Tanin* (*Voice*) on women's issues and nationalism. As underlined by Ayse Durakbasa, Edib was among "the few female intellectuals to participate in the activities of the Young Turks, contributing articles to influential journals" such as *Vakit* (*Time*) and *Aksam* (*Evening*) along with *Tanin*, signing her name Halide Salih (*A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms* 120). Although she worked with the leading proponents of Pan-Turanism (an extremist nationalist project to unite Turks living in different states) such as Ziya Gokalp, she openly acknowledged the

failings of Pan-Turanism in her memoirs. *Türk Ocakları*, Pan-Turanistic organizations founded in 1911, were the first nationalist clubs whose agenda was built on raising Turkish educational standards and anticipating economic progress. Edib proudly wrote that she was honored by them with the title “the Mother of the Turk.” She says that this title was “the greatest recompense” she would have asked for her services to her “people and country” (*Memoirs* 321). Her novel *Yeni Turan* (1913), depicting a utopia in which a liberal Turkey led by the CUP gives political and employment opportunities to Turkish women, explicitly reveals her Turanist ideology. Kaya, the female protagonist of the novel, has characteristics associated with the women of Sparta, who were celebrated in antiquity for being morally and physically virtuous, healthy, and strong. Elsewhere in her writing, Edib contrasts the strength and physical health of Spartan women to disreputable and weak Athenian women (*Conflict of East and West in Turkey* 240). Even in her Turkish utopia, Edib does not restrict herself into the narrow (race- and ethnicity-based) nationalism I mentioned earlier. Her examples are from ancient Greek history and reflect her knowledge of and generous references to Western cultures. It is no wonder that her disagreements with the Unionists took an intense form after she delivered a speech in *Türk Ocakları*, articulating her stance against the violence inflicted upon the Armenians. In 1916, Edib was sent to Syria by Cemal Pasha (appointed with complete power in military and civilian affairs in Syria in 1915 and known among local Arabs as *al-Saffah* or “blood shedder” due to his cruel treatment) to set up orphanages and girls’ schools in the Arab regions of the Empire.⁷

As I analyze in detail elsewhere, Edib displays contradictory attitudes in her depictions of people from the West and the East, which can also be taken as evidence for her conflicting stances with regard to nationalism (Ezer 116–28). Edib returned to Istanbul in 1918 feeling depressed and unable to write due to the occupation of the city and the massive territorial losses for the Ottoman Empire. She was informed of a group of nationalists fleeing to Anatolia (Asia Minor) to initiate a national struggle against the Allies. During this time, Edib’s nationalism was reshaped by her belief in the American mandate, a form of political protection against the invasions of the Allies, as the only solution to prevent

the Ottoman Empire from further decline. The evidence for this can be seen in *MOS* and will be explained later. Her advocacy for the American mandate was later used against her in *Nutuk* (the speech Mustafa Kemal Atatürk delivered in 1927) and deprived her of a “true” nationalist identity in the official history, at least through Atatürk’s eyes. However, before the split from Mustafa Kemal in 1925, both Edib and her husband Adnan Adıvar were part of the nationalist high command’s inner circle, because the couple secretly escaped from Istanbul to Anatolia to join the Nationalist Army which Mustafa Kemal was forming. The government of Istanbul even issued a death warrant for Edib along with the other nationalists in Anatolia, which officially marked her struggle for an independent Turkey. She was soon to establish the Anatolian News Agency and to serve as a translator, public speaker, nurse, and, more significantly, as a soldier. She learned how to ride a horse and to use a rifle, and she conducted inspections in the villages of Anatolia. Later, she was promoted to Sergeant Major in the Nationalist Army. After the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the disagreements between the Adıvar couple and Mustafa Kemal resulted in the couple’s self-imposed exile to England and France in 1925, which continued until 1939. The years abroad as well as some of the reform practices, which the Republic enforced in Turkey, once again reshaped Edib’s concept of nationalism. When asked which party she supported in a 1924 interview, Edib responded that she did not support any political party that did not grant suffrage to women, distancing herself even further from Atatürk and his supporters (Enginun, *Arastirmalar ve Belgeler* 69).⁸

With regard to her views on nationalism, Edib’s memoirs published in English under the titles *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (1926) and *The Turkish Ordeal* (1928) stand as significant testimonies. It is in those two volumes that Edib laments the demise of a multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire and criticizes (though rather indirectly) the political climate of the 1920s, hinting at the dictatorship in Turkey, which she compares to fascist Italy (*Memoirs* 268). Adak, in her introduction to *Memoirs*, argues that “Edib’s Turanism and her longing for a multi-ethnic Empire are not contradictory” because even as a Turanist, she “rejected all violent forms of nationalism such as the violence perpetrated against the Armenians

in 1915” (“An Epic for Peace” xiv). In the same introduction, under the subtitle “The Dialectics of National Struggle and International Peace,” Adak discusses how Edib’s texts are “torn between celebrating the military power of the nationalist army of Turkey and advocating the prevention of war altogether” (xix). Adak hails them as precursors to certain anti-war sentiments expressed by other female authors, such as *Three Guineas* by Virginia Woolf (xix). Not only does Edib distinguish a form of “pacifist and empathetic nationalism from the narrow, negative and destructive nationalism in the world,” but she also draws attention to a “chauvinistic and imperialistic” internationalism, as in the case of Soviet Russia (*Memoirs* 326). Adak argues that Edib’s memoirs aspire “to an inclusive ideal of peace and brotherhood” and do not sound “as desperate about the possibility of peace and a meaningful human existence” as the play *MOS* (“An Epic for Peace” xxiv).

During her years of self-imposed exile, Edib traveled to the United States (1928, 1931) and to India (1935), which paved the way for her developing pacifism as reflected in *MOS*. Edward Mead Earle, in his preface to Edib’s lectures delivered at the Institute of Politics at Williamstown, Massachusetts, says the following of Edib: “Although she was a Turkish Nationalist—embracing nationalism as the only emotional and moral force capable of saving the Turkish people from complete domination by Allied and Greek imperialism—she is of the opinion that ‘political nationalism is as ugly as any other creed which tends to make men exterminate each other’” (xi). Earle also states that Edib’s “account of the Nationalist movement” is “more detached, objective, and reflective” than *The Turkish Ordeal* (xiii).

Edib stayed in India for two months in 1935, giving lectures and helping to establish a progressive and anti-colonialist Muslim university, Jamia Millia. Here too, Edib voiced “her protest against colonialism” and opted for a multi-nationhood, “not for mono-ethnic nationalism” as Adak points out (“An Epic for Peace” xv). Edib’s lectures, published under the title *Conflict of East and West in Turkey* (1935), and her impressions of India, published in the same year as *Inside India*, also include commentaries on her concept of nationalism as it was once again reshaped by her travels and introduction to a new culture.

To provide a succinct account of when and why Edib shifted to the internationalist pacifist stance that *MOS* exemplifies is not easy. As previously discussed, although the conflicting views in *Memoirs* date back to as early as 1909, Edib managed to integrate her support for peace within her understanding of nationalism even during the wars. However, when she came to Columbia University as a visiting professor in 1931, the U.S. was suffering from the Great Depression, and Edib witnessed the global effects of that period in France and Britain, from where she also observed the emergence of the fascism of Mussolini and Hitler. Under these fascist regimes, state power was growing at the expense of individual liberties, a situation that disappointed Edib immensely. In the Soviet Union, Stalin was also consolidating his dictatorship in the context of communism. All of these groups are represented as engaging in heated debates in *MOS* (Act III, Scene 1). In the following years, with her visit to India and meeting with Gandhi, Edib's internationalist pacifist stance as an intellectual was strengthened.

With the global economic crisis and political tensions on the rise, fewer people defended liberal ideals, while extreme nationalism in the 1930s allowed authoritarian rulers in many countries to obtain power, including in the "democratic states" of Europe. The new nation of Turkey was affected by this trend. However, as Edib's visit to and observations of India and its politics reveal, nationalism could also be a positive force, providing a source of hope for colonized people. Gandhi personified these hopes while giving the world a model of peaceful political change. *Voyages in World History* draws a link between Edib and Gandhi that I have not come across elsewhere: "Like Halide Edib, Gandhi saw the fight for national independence as inseparable from the fight for justice"; Gandhi's "peaceful philosophy" was "in sharp contrast to the renewed militarism that would soon lead to another world war" (815).

On January 9, 1935, Gandhi gave an interview to Edib, and he chaired Edib's lecture at Jamia Millia Islamia on January 19, 1935. Edib mentions *MOS* in this interview. One can see that at the time she was quite obsessed with the harmful effects of mechanization, which would result in the loss of many jobs, and asked Gandhi how to fight this "curse." He replies: "It is all implied in my non-violence. . . . The Harijan activity

and the movement for the revival of village industries come naturally to me because of non-violence. It is cruel, it is sinful, to think of mechanization in a country of 350 million human beings” (Desai). Edib follows up by saying that although political freedom would be won, mechanization “might get hold of India.” In that case, “there is no escape from violence.” However, Gandhi insists on his stance of non-violence: “I have shaped all my activities in terms of non-violence.” Edib responds, “But it’s so difficult. The soul has to be preserved. I have written a play called *Masks and Souls*. There are more masks than souls, but if you will prepare a nursery of souls, it would be all to the good,” and adds that she is “not very optimistic, for the opposite side is very strong.” In *MOS*, as referred to earlier in one of Adak’s comments about the play, Edib’s pessimism seems to be entrenched. Fortunately, Gandhi is also determined in his stance, stating, “I have never lost my optimism. In the seemingly darkest hours, hope has burnt bright within me,” and “there is no defeat in me.” Edib’s responds with her final words of the interview: “There will never be, I am sure, there will never be” (Desai).⁹

I would claim that despite her growing pessimism as an anti-war intellectual in the 1930s, Edib defended and sought to believe in Gandhi’s stance and ideas. In this sense, her praise of Gandhi in her last lecture at Jamia Millia is important: “All Hindu Indians should support him and serve him” and “all Moslem Indians should also support him and further his cause” because of his “readiness to co-operate and love” and his respect for “truth and *peace*” among other things (*Conflict of East and West in Turkey* 300; emphasis added). She proposes that “both the Eastern and the Western world should study him seriously” for he is offering salvation not “only [for] the East but also [for] the West.” This enables cooperation with a “*peaceful East*” (300; emphasis added).

Edib’s Ideas and Ideals in *Masks or Souls*?

After introducing Edib as a pacifist intellectual on the eve of and during the Second World War, I find it essential to present the unusual mix of characters in the play. In the beginning of the play, a voice announces all the characters (twenty in total) by name and explains briefly who they are. The first four in order with their historical birth-death dates

are William Shakespeare (1564–1616); Ibn-Khaldun (1332–1406), the Maghrebian scholar, the founder of modern historiography and sociology; Tamerlane (1336–1405), the Mongolian world conqueror; and Nasreddin Hoca (ca. 1300–1400), the Anatolian religious scholar and spiritual teacher whose humorous stories are still widely known and told in Turkey although he left no written records. The various travels undertaken by the characters through time and different places such as Aksehir (Turkey), Hampstead (London), Dolma Bahce Palace (Istanbul), New York, and Heaven are not coincidental. It is likely that Edib wanted the audience to gauge for themselves the effects of mechanization and the different political regimes referenced in the play. While her views on these issues are clear, her play is not directly didactic; instead she leaves the audience to compare varying political ideologies and draw their own conclusions. In the Turkish version of the play, instead of New York, there is the imaginary city called Kalopatya, which provides Edib with the chance to criticize the reforms that were imposed on Turkish society but with no direct reference to skyscrapers or mechanization. Edib's aim in her writings was also to create a compromise between the cultures of the East and the West. In addition, she constantly stresses the importance of the human soul and spiritualism, as opposed to extreme materialism and mechanization as hinted at in her interview with Gandhi.

Additional characters, inspired by historical figures who in the play are residing in Heaven, are Aristide Briand (1862–1932), former French Prime Minister who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926; Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), twenty-eighth President of the U.S.; Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929); and Socrates (c. 469 BC–399 BC). They belong to the League of Human Affairs in Heaven and hold meetings regarding the disputes among the small factions in Heaven, sending spirits down to Earth to sort out some of the problems there. In real life, Edib shared in the hope of the League of Nations, which Wilson proposed in 1919 after the wars in Eurasia.¹⁰

The most extensive information about why Edib chose Nasreddin Hoca as one of the main characters for this play is provided by Edib herself in her preface to *Maske ve Ruh* in 1945. She explains to Turkish readers that the idea of writing such a play first came to her while she was

visiting Akşehir in 1935. During this visit, she visited Nasreddin Hoca's shrine and observed that people in this region still carry the traces of the tolerance and spirit of Nasreddin Hoca. She writes that after the disasters that took place in the "civilized world" (clearly referring to the Second World War) and the frustration she felt in her soul because of the threat of war, she had "the urge to see the world through the eyes of Nasreddin Hoca" (38). The final lines of the preface have an apologetic tone: "I was suffering from not having an intellectual compass, due to the seemingly conflicting values that might be dominating the future, and this is why I wrote this fantasy whose protagonist is Nasreddin Hoca" and "I have to confess that the darkness and the chaos in the years preceding the war blurred even poor Nasreddin Hoca's cool mind so I hope the readers don't mind" (38).¹¹

Regarding the conception of the play, Edib's biographer Ipek Calislar found a letter in the archives at Columbia University Library written in 1937. Addressed to Charles Richard Crane,¹² Edib mentions in her letter a "Nassir-eddin Hoja Play," which she began writing in "a moment of madness," hinted at in the lines from the preface I translated above. The "moment of madness" she refers to signals an intellectual and inner crisis from the wars she had to witness. She adds that "in the circumstances that the world is going through today, even Nassir-eddin Hoja cannot be as funny as he used to be," revealing symptoms of her depression (qtd. in Calislar 394).¹³

Before the process of writing her play, Edib was especially touched by her visit to Nasreddin Hoca's shrine in Akşehir.¹⁴ There is a symbolic giant lock on its door, even though the shrine itself does not have any wire or fences to protect the tombstone, hinting at the attitude of the friendly local people as much as Hoca himself. Edib reflects on this humor, that is, having an oversized lock on a door with no fences or walls, causing a visitor to smile even at a site of death; she writes, "The humor is created by a realistic philosopher of common people and life who can actually manage to keep a distance while observing people's sorrows, leaving his ego behind" (*Maske ve Ruh* 38).¹⁵ Hoca's approach to life also resembles a doctor's who can create an air of peace for his patients (38). There are two other reasons for Edib to create Nasreddin

Hoca as a main character. Edib assigned Hoca the role of the guide in her expression of frustration with the issues which “threaten the civilized world and civilizations” (*Maske ve Ruh* 38). If only she could “perceive the world through the eyes of Nasreddin Hoca,” she muses, she might possibly “figure out some values that seem in opposition to each other” in contemporaneous politics (38). Finally, Hoca as a main character illustrates Edib's embrace of populism in her work, which was unique for her class of women writers, as mentioned in Florence Billing's 1924 introduction to *The Shirt of Flame* (qtd. in Andrea 19). Fahir Iz also affirms that Edib's commitment to “folk literature” and “simple, straightforward Turkish” explains why she is “still one of the most-read writers of her generation” (936).

Setting up a dialogue between the East and the West, Edib makes William Shakespeare Nasreddin Hoca's traveling companion. Edib revered Shakespeare, as we can infer from her translations of *Antonius ve Kleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, *Nasil Hosunuza Giderse (As You Like It)*, and her essays on Shakespeare. In *Memoirs*, Edib writes of him:

There is no Christian feeling in Shakespeare. He is a man, clearly chanting the creative manliness of his barbarian ancestors, toning them down to harmony, indeed bringing into formal beauty the chaotic ideals of their dreams and struggles, and painting them in terms with which every human being in every decade of history may become familiar. (179)

As an intellectual who dedicated most of her life to establishing a dialogue between the East and the West, more specifically between Islam and American/British cultures, having Shakespeare as Nasreddin Hoca's traveling companion must have seemed like a perfect choice to Edib. For her, drawing parallels between cultures and using humor to reveal human failures and shortcomings are the ways to stop wars. Shakespeare and Nasreddin Hoca were capable of achieving this by creating work that appealed both to the elite and to the common people.

In her article “Dialogism Between East and West: Halide Edib's *Masks or Souls?*” Bernadette Andrea also grapples with Edib's choice of Shakespeare and Hoca as soul mates. Andrea argues that Hoca's “sage

humor enabled the synthesis of masks and souls that renders him the forebear of Shakespeare's wise fools" (6). Moreover, toward the end of the play, the transposition of Shakespeare into the name "Shake" is no coincidence since it is a homonym for "Shaykh," meaning a Sufi spiritual teacher. By doing this, Edib dialogically assimilates the English "Bard" into the Turkish Islamic idiom of Nasreddin Hoca (Andrea 6).¹⁶

As for the fourteenth-century conqueror Tamerlane and his later reincarnation, Bay Timur, the connections between the two are even more complicated. In Act III, Tamerlane's spirit reincarnates in the modern world as Bay Timur and thus infuses the fascist dictatorships of Edib's era, represented by Hitler and Mussolini in general (Andrea 8). More specifically, "Bay Timur, the dictator and the Prime Minister of Turkey in the late twentieth century" (8) most probably refers to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Since Tamerlane is known by his cruel punishments, choosing him as a way to criticize the current leadership and the government in Turkey at the time is not only harsh but also dangerous for a writer. In Act III, Scene VII, a dialogue takes place between Timur and Shake (Shakespeare disguised as a journalist) that reveals Edib's criticisms. In reference to the Turkish pre-historic past, which Atatürk carefully separated from the Ottoman/Islamic past, Mahir (Hoca's donkey transformed into an ambitious political figure) says, "We are the people from whom all the civilized nations descended" in order to please the Prime Minister Timur. Yet Timur responds that this version of history is "a harmless tale to tell the children. . . . [W]e squeeze out an anesthetic when we are operating to extract the tumour called the soul!" (84).

The scene reflects the ideological disparities between Edib and Mustafa Kemal which began with Edib's defense of the American mandate to protect Turkey in 1918 and onward. Among other matters of dispute were secularism as a state policy, the status of minorities, and reforms related to the westernization of the Turkish people.¹⁷ Edib's observation about Atatürk is apt because the word "modern" was almost the antonym of religion, in particular of Islam for Atatürk and a certain group of elite and military figures in Turkey at the time. The "history" the state wanted to teach its citizens is also criticized by Edib in her attack on Atatürk's reforms.¹⁸

The shifts in Edib's ideas about Mustafa Kemal in 1920 can be observed in her memoirs, *The Turkish Ordeal*:

I felt that whatever shortcomings this new form [elected government with an assembly] might have, it gave the impression that Mustafa Kemal Pasha was leaving the entire power and responsibility with the people's representatives, and that the prevalent belief that he wanted to be the sultan or the dictator of the new regime was quite groundless. In a strange way, I was beginning to feel that he was to be our George Washington. (141)

By the mid-1930s, she created the character of Tamerlane/Bay Timur instead of George Washington, and in the play, Timur's destruction of the souls would be restored by another American President, Wilson, as the final scene implies.¹⁹ The play clearly demonstrates that Edib kept her trust and ideological affinity with the American leaders but not with Mustafa Kemal.

Portraying Bay Timur as Atatürk could have been a major reason for the play's not making it on stage in Turkey for decades. I would like to point out that the Turkish version does not contain the harsh and the most obvious criticisms against the contemporaneous regime and its leaders. The English version of *MOS* has received no attention or criticism so far in Turkey. In a letter to the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee dated February 20, 1949, Edib mentions seeing Olivier's *Hamlet* in Istanbul and observing that a "strange soul-obsession" took hold of the public in Turkey which she "had thought was soul-proof":

Curiously enough I myself went through this soul obsession many years ago, when it was hardly evident in Europe or in America. The only need the world seemed to have was speed, or a good time. It was this that had made me write "Masks or Souls" in 1935 at a time when my eldest sister was dying. I've re-read the English version these days and am sending you the MS. My agent's idea in 1935 was that it was not the stuff which would attract the English readers. . . . [I]n 1940, after my return to Turkey, a very much modified Turkish version of

it was serialized in *Yedi Gün* (a weekly) and it appeared in book form in 1943. (Enginun, “Halide Edib’in Profesör Toynbee’ye Yazdigi Bir Mektup” 165–66)

From this letter, one can conclude that Edib wrote *MOS* with a British and/or American audience in mind. It is in the same letter that she shares the hope that if Laurence Olivier plays Nasreddin Hoca or Shakespeare, the play would be a “success in England, [and] especially in America” (165). She also writes that she added a few new sentences to the copy that she is sending to Toynbee, in which Hitler’s ghost and the atomic bomb are mentioned (165). However, to our knowledge, Edib’s enthusiasm was not shared by Toynbee. It is also possible that his attempts of establishing connections for Edib failed.

Edib’s Wish to Carry “The Soul-Germ” for World Peace and Europe

Having experienced war firsthand, Edib became a pacifist intellectual in the 1930s, and *MOS* is neglected literary evidence for this attitude. She expressed elsewhere that Mussolini’s Italian fascism in the early 1930s cannot be part of the European tradition of thought (*Daga Cikan Kurt* 173–74; *Turkey Faces West* 257–58), thus separating the totalitarian regimes from her ideal Europe. In *Turkey Faces West*, she argues that “accepting the fact that the European’s traditional attitude of mind opposes dictatorship, we have to then admit that nearly half of Europe is already non-European” (257). She compares Italian dictatorship with “the Turkish dictatorship” and claims that the Italian one is at least “frank,” “denounces parliamentarianism openly,” and “glorifies the organized minority” in the government (*Turkey Faces West* 258). On the other hand, Edib argues that “the Turkish dictatorship” works “behind a constitutional screen” and thus retains “a European façade, although a sham one” (258). Furthermore, the Turkish government calls itself nationalist, but according to Edib, it has “a very anti-nationalist spirit.” “The Turkish dictatorship has made the greatest effort” to cut “its people off from their past,” which is a “decidedly modern” act for Edib (258–59). In this way, she also separates being modern from being European.

Based on these distinctions above, people can be modern in cruel, hypocritical, and non-European ways according to Edib. In *MOS*, she makes fun of certain drinks (82, 85) and other public acts promoted as “modern” and implies that the Turks practicing them are superficial and unquestioning. The beginning of Act III, Scene V describes the preparations for an in-house reception for Prime Minister Timur. The modern image the hosts want to present to Timur is demonstrated in the scene with its “ultra-modern furniture with an American bar in miniature at the side” and “small dishes of various hors-d’oeuvres” (76). The host Mr. Nassir, who aims to get permission from Timur to build an “electric tram to Sultan Mountains,” is talking to his wife:

AHMET NASSIR. Fancy Bay Timur, the greatest Prime Minister, spending a whole evening in my house, and drinking with me . . . (*He comes towards her from behind and embraces her gaily.*)

SABIRE, *pushing him off*. The servant may come back at any moment. I hate the shameless habit of kissing in public.

AHMET NASSIR. All modern people kiss their wives in public.

SABIRE. And their mistresses in private. You do not need to bring alien habits into the family circle to prove yourself modern.

AHMET NASSIR. You talk as if we were nothing but a group of savages apeing [sic] modern people. We are the originators of all civilisations! Fathers of all civilized nations! (76)

This is only one example of the many that Edib presents in *MOS* in order to illustrate her response, on behalf of Turkish people of different social classes, to the Kemalist reforms. Even drinking, an indication of being modern, has its degrees of modernity based on one's choice. Preferring *raki* (anise-flavored Turkish liquor) over whiskey shows that one is not modern enough as the following dialogue reveals:

REMZIE. What will you have, gentlemen? We have whiskey here.

NUZHET NASSIR. That foul stuff! It smells and tastes like hair lotion. May we have coffee?

MAHIR. What did you drink in London?

NUZHET NASSIR. I had raki brought from Istanbul.

REMZIE, *shocked*. Raki is the kind of drink with which all sorts of out-of-date customs are associated. I never allow it at home.

NUZHET NASSIR. I am sorry to offend your taste. (69)²⁰

Similarly, listening to jazz and classical music and attending balls as couples are signs of being modern, whereas “gypsies dancing in public” are forbidden as the dance stands as a form of folkdance (75). Visiting shrines (Nasreddin Hoca’s is the one in the play) is looked down upon by the people approving Kemalist reforms (64–65). The strict regulations on clothes and bans on certain traditions which serve as material for ridicule in the play are meant, according to Edib, for maintaining peace and order in Turkey so that in the long run it becomes “European.” A similar tone is established by Edib in her perception of Heaven and how the peoples’ souls cannot restore peace among themselves, carrying their cultural and racial baggage from the earth. The section below taken from Act III, Scene I is significant in this sense. It shows that Edib is more concerned about the politics in Europe and how the Second World War came into being than the reforms of Atatürk and his followers in power. The scene takes place in Heaven and depicts “an extraordinary session” of the League of Human Affairs (51). People in black (the Blacks) represent European fascism, the ones with red gowns (the Reds) represent Soviet communism while simultaneously “voicing the Kemalist method,” and the Whites stand for American capitalism (Andrea 12).

The argument of the representative of the Black group is as follows: “The interest of mankind on earth is centered on order, and that can be established only by a chosen race, and we represent that chosen race of men” (52). Clemenceau is in favor of what he refers to as “the classic notion of the Roman Law” and “the rights of men as mentioned by Rousseau;” thus, he believes that Heaven is “essentially a French place!”

(52). The representative of the Black group "looks and sounds like Hitler" and responds to Clemenceau, "Nay, it is an essentially German place!" (52). The Blacks' representative summarizes some of the dangerous arguments between the Reds and the Blacks:

We agree with the Reds in their procedure to ensure an all-powerful minority government to rule mankind. But mark this: it must be composed of the chosen race, that is, of Germans who are the only people able to do it by fair or foul means. We do not want a soulless world, but the universal soul must bear the stamp of our Holy German Kultur. (54)

The meeting in Heaven does not resolve any issues; however, it is concluded that one reason for the present state of Earth is that "twenty millions of its [the earth's] best marched up into the Heaven and settled down there, refusing to be reborn" after 1914 (56). This decreased the quality of the humans on earth since only "animal spirits or some medieval celebrities such as Tamerlane, not to mention the would-be-Napoleons," went down to Earth. Thus, Nasreddin Hoca was assigned to go down there as the "first observer" so that he could collect evidence on whether or not "the terrestrials" want to preserve the individual soul. It seems like "the soul-germ refuses to die," but still it is essential to send someone from Heaven to report back accurately (56). That is how Edib accounts for the unresolved political problems among the nations as well as the hypocrisy and submission before the authorities.

Conclusion

This article can be taken as evidence of Edib scholarship in general since it draws attention to a neglected side of Edib's writing, namely, her pacifism. I argued that Edib's reduction to a nationalist feminist intellectual and author reflects an incomplete and sometimes misleading representation. She believed in the possibility of an amalgamation of both perspectives, that is, as an anti-war advocate and an anti-colonialist supporter of colonized countries. Based on her lectures given in India, one can see that Gandhi was an embodiment of this amalgamation for Edib.

I have claimed that Nasreddin Hoca is the strongest reflection of Edib's ideas and empathy in the play. He is portrayed as a peacemaker and has at times a confused yet tolerant religiosity. His inability to adapt to the new and strict regime in Turkey and his choosing Shakespeare as his best friend are reflections of Edib's ideas. He is seeking to balance two cultures in peaceful, non-aggressive ways in his mind and suffers physically from malaria and fever probably due to his mental breakdowns, similar to Edib herself as evinced in *Memoirs* (93, 226, 229, 309, 358) and *The Turkish Ordeal* (136–37, 167, 178–79, 248). Nasreddin Hoca's feelings of not-belonging to either the West or the East, his love for animals and Nuzhet's hallucinations (as reincarnated Nasreddin Hoca) are among other details that make soldier- and dictator-like secondary characters such as Tamerlane and the representative of the Black group in Heaven irritating foils to Edib's protagonist. These war-supporters are completely sure of their ideas and beliefs, unlike Nasreddin Hoca.

It is no coincidence that in the play *Nuzhet* (reincarnated Nasreddin Hoca or Edib herself) is excommunicated by the State according to the newly created laws by Timur (reincarnated Tamerlane). As announced during a press conference in the play, state excommunication is an alternative to killing souls without the death penalty (92). It refers to a form of exile and exclusion that Edib and her husband Adnan Adivar suffered for many years after they had been stigmatized by Ataturk's government.

Edib can be studied as an anti-war writer to provide a more complete picture of her. I have yet to come across a study that depicts her as such. On the contrary, she is known for her novels and memoirs narrating the Independence War with a nationalist tone.²¹ It is time that some of Edib's works—including her essays in newspapers and journals, especially after the mid-1930s, and her work in English—are analyzed as anti-war literature. Edib vividly portrayed her firsthand experiences with war and poverty in *Memoirs* and *Turkish Ordeal* (1926, 1928), both of which were written in English. In the section of *Memoirs* narrating the First World War, she says: "I am against war in general, and so I cannot defend our going into it on any side [Germany or Britain], but if one disentangles the mass of knotted political arguments of the day and tries to see the psychology of the Young Turk leaders who entered the war,

one sees these causes" (313). She explains five causes, one by one, beginning with the "desire for complete independence" (313–14). In another recently published book by Mushirul Hasan entitled *Between Modernity and Nationalism: Halide Edip's Encounter with Gandhi's India*, Edib is described only in passing as a "pacifist and internationalist" (206). However, Hasan actually takes pains to establish several connections between Edib's intellectual life and its intersections with prominent figures of India. While doing that, he mentions how meeting Gandhi and her visit to India might have influenced her. Thus, at times he depicts her as a peacemaker, although this component remains time- and context-bound (150–167, 180–82).

I also call for the complete translation of *Memoirs*, *The Turkish Ordeal*, *Inside India*, and *Masks or Souls?* into Turkish so that they can contribute to studies by Edib scholars in Turkey. As for the layman, this translation project will portray a different image of "nationalist Edib" from the one found in the Turkish and abridged versions of *Memoirs* and *The Turkish Ordeal*. I hope to pass on my enthusiasm for exploring Edib's life from a wider angle to other readers and researchers of Edib, "the woman who does not fit into her biography," as the subtitle of her latest biography, by Calislar, proposes.

One reason for this neglect of *MOS* in Edib's oeuvre may be because of the hierarchies (nation- or region-based) among literary studies. My article aims to challenge this as well. Adak argues in "Exiles at Home" that "global literary analysis must interrogate its imposition of Western genres on other literatures" since "this imposition casts Third World Literatures as 'late bloomers' in a developmental paradigm that assumes some literatures lag others" in the adoption of certain genres such as autobiography (24). Although she does not define the term "Third World," Adak probably uses it to refer to non-Western countries with low income, including Turkey. **Thus, the assumption that Turkish literature is a "late bloomer,"** which was slow to adopt the genre of autobiography, may, in part, explain scholars' unwillingness to acknowledge *MOS* as partly autobiographical.

Though we have seen the end of World War II, we are certainly not living in a world free from global conflict and power struggles. I argue

then that *MOS* remains a contemporary text that deserves our closer attention. Maybe it is time to speculate on what Edib meant by “keeping the soul” and why she obsessively stressed its importance as an intellectual living through the two World Wars. Because *MOS* is almost contradictory to the prevalent image of Edib as a militant nationalist, many critics and scholars have found it easy to ignore this play. It is my hope, however, that studying *MOS* as an example of anti-war literature can help challenge the authorities of global literary analysis who have effectively trapped Edib’s works within discourses of nationalism and women’s literature.

Notes

1 Halide Edib (1884–1964) is also known as an advocate of women’s rights and nationalism. She was born in Istanbul and brought up by her grandmother, who was a member of Mevlevi Sufi order, and by her father. After graduation and her marriage, she had continuous social interaction with prominent male and female reformers of the time and contributed articles to influential journals. She fled to Egypt with her sons in 1909 fearing the counter-revolutionary reprisal. Her efforts to reconcile the philosophies of “the East” and “the West” can be observed not only in *Masks or Souls?* but also in her more famous works such as the novels *Seviyye Talip* (1910) and *Handan* (1912). After her divorce in 1910, she dedicated her life to educational activities. She was also a famous public speaker and her speech at the Sultanahmet Meeting (June 6, 1919) against the occupation of Izmir has served as a powerful icon of the Turkish Independence War. Along with her second husband Adnan Adivar, Edib joined the National Forces led by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk after 1920. Although the couple was initially members of the inner circle of Ataturk, they had to leave the country because of Adnan’s involvement in the establishment of an opposition party. They lived in Western Europe in a quasi-self-imposed exile for fourteen years and did not return to Turkey until after the death of Ataturk. In her lecture tours to the U.S. and India, Edib emphasized historical continuity between Republican and late-Ottoman reforms, unlike the official ideology and history spread by the contemporaneous governments. On her return to Turkey, Edib was appointed professor of English Literature at Istanbul University (1940). She wrote twenty-one novels and several books of political and literary analyses as well as short stories. Edib died in Istanbul in 1964 (Durakbasa, *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms* 120–23).

2 Although there are several references to the text as “translated” such as Adak’s Introduction to *Memoirs*, I find this statement very troubling (xvii). There are too many changes and editing in the English version of the play to call it “trans-

- lation.” Some of the characters’ names are changed, and the end is different and longer in the English version. Similar to Edib’s two autobiographical volumes written originally in English in 1926 and 1928 (*Memoirs* and *Turkish Ordeal*), the differences between the two versions of the play deserve a separate study by themselves. There are articles by Adak, Doltas, and Erdem analyzing the differences between Edib’s Turkish and English memoirs. *Mor Salkimli Ev* (1963) and *Turk’un Atesle Imtihani* (1962) are the Turkish titles chosen by Edib herself for the Turkish version of her memoirs. The play’s English version came out sixteen years after the Turkish one; the opposite is true of Edib’s memoirs whose English versions were published earlier but included much more critical and radical comments. Obviously, Edib was concerned with the language and issue of audience.
- 3 In her preface to Edib’s *Memoirs*, Adak mentions Hilary Blecher’s adaptation in New York during the 1997–98 season. However, the web link <http://www.womensproject.org/past_reading.html> is no longer active and the official website of “women’s projects and productions” does not list *MOS* or anything that may hint it or Edib were included in the production list of the 1997–98 season.
 - 4 Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic in 1923 after leading a War of Independence against the Allies, who occupied the Turkish lands since the Sevres Treaty on August 10, 1920. The political, economic, and social changes he advocated and/or designed to create a modern and secular Turkish state are known as Kemalist reforms. They constitute the major part of Kemalist revolution.
 - 5 The Turkish spelling for Nassir-eddin Hoja is Nasreddin Hoca. It was probably for her concerns of correct pronunciation that Edib chose to spell it the way it is in *MOS*, but I am going to use the Turkish spelling. Hoca is the Turkish honorific for an esteemed teacher, and it can be used instead of the full name in the context of the play. It is no coincidence that the Turkish Prime Minister “Bay Timur” is the given name for the reincarnated Tamerlane. Timur is the Turkish word for Tamerlane, and it is known that Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, expressed his admiration for Tamerlane. Bozkurt’s book *Aksak Demir’in Devlet Politikasi* [Tamerlane the Lame’s Policies of Governing] actually makes an explicit comparison.
 - 6 I am aware of Edib’s vague use of the terms “the East” and “the West” without defining them. Both words have extensive and contentious historical and geographical meanings and uses as the studies by Williams, B. Lewis, Melman, and Bennett et al. demonstrate. Based on the context, “the West” refers to North America and Western European countries, including Britain. The trickier term “the East” refers to the countries of the former Ottoman Empire, Turkey, Middle Eastern countries, India, and to a set of values which Edib attributes to certain areas.
 - 7 Adak speculates that Edib’s educational activities in Syria “may have been a kind of self-imposed exile” due to her growing discontent with the Unionists (“An Epic for Peace” x).

- 8 Suffrage was granted to Turkish women in 1934.
- 9 Desai reports: “Edib came and sat down near Gandhi and said, ‘I have come to learn from you and take what I can for my own people.’” Although the spelling appeared incorrectly in the newspaper (“mosques” instead of “masks”), I spelled it as Edib meant it.
- 10 **Edib was an active member of the League of Nations (1919–46), an intergovernmental organization founded as a result of the Paris Peace Conference that ended the First World War. The League heralded the United Nations and was the first permanent international security organization whose principal mission was to maintain world peace. At its greatest extent from September 1934 to February 1935, it had fifty-eight members. The League’s primary goals included preventing war through collective security, disarmament, and settling international disputes through negotiation and arbitration. Other issues in this and related treaties included labor conditions, just treatment of native inhabitants, trafficking in persons and drugs, and protection of minorities in Europe. The League was originally Woodrow Wilson’s idea, whose famous Fourteen Points Speech (January 8, 1918) ended with a call for the formation of the League.**
- 11 My translation.
- 12 Charles Richard Crane (1858–1939) was a wealthy American businessman. His widespread business interests led him to engage in domestic and international political affairs where he enjoyed access to many influential power brokers at the top levels of government. His support of President Wilson’s election campaign rewarded Crane with an appointment to the 1917 Special Diplomatic Commission to Russia, as a member of the American Section of the Paris Peace Conference, and in the 1919 Inter-Allied Commission on Mandates in Turkey that bears his name (King-Crane Commission).
- 13 Edib suffered from periods of depression in different stages of her life. In *Memoirs*, she mentions “temporary loss of interest in life” (36) and expressions of depression are spread throughout the book (216, 453). Adak rightly claims that the violence and war that Edib experienced with the First World War were “replicated during the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922)” and led Edib “to contemplate seriously the possibility of committing suicide” (xxiii). In her reference to the play *MOS*, Calislar speculates on the reasons why Edib came up with the idea of such a play. Edib began to write it when her sister Mahmure was on her deathbed in Istanbul while Edib was in Paris, as one of her letters to a close British friend/historian, Arnold Toynbee, displays (Calislar 395). Translations from the Turkish sources are mine unless stated otherwise.
- 14 **Nasreddin Hoca was presumably born in Sivrihisar (Turkey) in the 13th century. He spent many years in Konya or Aksehir serving as a religious teacher, preacher, and judge. He died and was buried in Aksehir. His tales have been translated into dozens of languages including English, Russian, German, and French, attesting to his universal appeal. UNESCO declared 1996/7 “International Nasreddin Hoca Year.”**

15 In fact, the lock is still there today. It reminds me of a common joke attributed to Hoca in Turkey:

Hoca's donkey was stolen. His friends whom he hoped would console him in this difficult situation began commenting: -You should have had a lock the door of stable . . . -Didn't you hear even a clinking noise? -You probably didn't tie the donkey well enough . . . Hoca listened to them for minutes, then for hours and finally said: -Enough is enough; you all accused me by justifying that all is my fault. Be fair a little, was the thief guiltless?!

16 This is an extremely thought-provoking argument which may give a deeper insight to Edib scholarship especially when her collections of lectures and essays are considered. Andrea's main argument is that (unlike Adak's argument in her dissertation) Edib's engagement with the West exceeds the boundaries of orientalist and patriarchal discourses. Edib's assimilation of Shake into Nasreddin Hoca in this play suggests Edib's reconsideration of Shakespeare from a canonical and colonizing literary figure to a "fusion" or "reconciliation figure" (Andrea 8).

17 Edib's *Turkey Faces West* is probably the most critical and straightforward evidence for this. In the chapter entitled "The Turkish Republic," Edib seems to be fixated on the words "dictator" and "dictatorship" and argues the absurdity of the changes imposed by the new government under Ataturk, including a long list of reforms such as the hat law, civil law, adopting the Latin alphabet, and establishing the Religion Affairs Unit as a governmental instrument (214–37).

18 Among the reforms, the one that was integrated in the construction of an official Turkish history is the language reform in Turkey. This has been analyzed by several scholars especially after 2000, such as G. Lewis, Savkay, Sadoglu, Aydingun and Aydingun, Colak, Dogancay-Aktuna, Celik, Parla, and Balcik. The official theory of Turkish history was constructed in the book *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatlari* (Central Tenets of Turkish History) in 1930. Edib had been critical of some of the reforms while supporting others, as her essays in *Conflict of East and West in Turkey* and *Turkey Faces West* show in detail.

19 It is because of President Wilson's principles, which are referenced in *MOS* (90), that not only Edib but also Mustafa Kemal considered establishing some alliances with the U.S. government at the time. The twelfth principle was specifically about Turkey: "The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees." In the play, nobody cares about the principles; according to Nasreddin Hoca, "I never heard anyone speak of them. There are so many pointless points discussed down there nowadays" (90).

- 20 Nuzhet represents both reincarnated Nasreddin Hoca (explained in the play) and Edib's own ideas and attitudes (my argument). Since my focus here is foregrounding Edib as a pacifist author, not drawing parallels between the real and fictional characters, I hold back from further speculating that Nuzhet can be read as the spokesperson for Edib.
- 21 The most recent study I came across is an MA thesis defended in July 2012 by Demirhan: "Halide Edib: Turkish Nationalism and the Formation of the Republic." Her review of the previous studies on Edib is thorough and her stress on the fluidity of Edib's political ideas and identity differentiates her study from the others, which only highlight the nationalist side of Edib.

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