

Musical Life and Westernization in the Republic of Turkey. Schismogenesis and Cultural Revisioning in Contemporary Music

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Biographical Note

Born in Heidelberg in 1976, studied Composition and Music Theory in Saarbrücken, Basel, Lyon, Karlsruhe, and Istanbul. Since 1999, he has become more and more active as an intercultural expert of Middle-Eastern musics. Supplementary oriental and ethno-musicological studies were complemented by numerous sojourns in the Middle-East. In 2007, he enrolled as a PhD student at the Turkish-American research center MÍAM of the İstanbul Technical University, an institute linked to the State Conservatory of Turkish Music, where he is currently completing a dissertation on the tuning theory of the internationally acclaimed qānūn virtuoso Julien Jalâl Eddine Weiss. In 2008 he equally worked at the Ankara State Conservatory in the rare position of a “foreign expert”. While pursuing his artistic career as a composer, Pohlit has been working on a novel critique of intercultural attempts in con-temporary art music, influenced by recent tendencies in anthropoloy and folklore-studies.

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Abstract

Musical life in Turkey has been restructured by Western influences since the late Ottoman era. The early Republican government introduced polyphonic music aimed at creating a new cultural expression for a modern, democratic society, while officially marginalizing the classical Ottoman tradition. However, many Turkish composers of Western music today have shown growing interest in the concepts of Ottoman music. The disruption of musical life in this country exemplifies how poorly enforced Westernization and radical top-down transformation could serve the development of a genuinely modern awareness. Contents and meanings of Western art-music have merged into objectified statements rather than truly helping this society to evolve upon the proposals of modernism. Contemporary Western art music with its present increase in cross-cultural interaction is hereby faced with the neglected side-effects of its own radical postulations.

Introduction: Intercultural Aspirations in Contemporary Western Art Music

Musical tradition acts as an extension of the sensory body of a people, both organ of perception and facial expression of it. As a tool of expression, it can hardly be separated from its environment. Ethnomusicologists have suggested that music frequently tends to reinforce boundaries as much as it expresses community. It reflects the self-perception of a society (Baily 1994:48) and offers the stage for the organization of social hierarchies (Stokes 1997:4). The interaction between cultures usually takes place under the premises of the dominant civilization (Barth 1998:31), and the stylistic diacritica that reflect cultural difference equally serve their disaffirmation, “Style always has hegemonic thrust, both as it works out the implements of form and in terms of inclusion and exclusion principles” (Keil 1994:208).

The few consciously elaborated symbols of cultural aesthetic systems, such as the visual assets of performers on the stage serve the creative orchestration of ethnic identity (Peterson 1997:218). In return, many cultural symbols remain disguised under the surface of such operations: “Most symbols do not have visual or physical expression but are, rather, ideas” (Cohen 2000: 18). They equally transport and control a society’s view of and response to the culturally “other”: “The augmented second denoting ‘the Orient’ in the old Turkish delight advertisement has little to do with Turkish musics, but it informs us in the context of our own musical language of an imagined world of violence and repressed sexuality” (Stokes 1997:4).

Tara Browner (2000) showed how native-American Pow-wow song has experienced a cultural revival that often has to relearn itself. Similarly, some African-American styles of the 20th century emerged from political protest movements, in “cultural revisioning” (Keyes 2002: 21) or, as for Hip-Hop culture, in transfiguring concrete urban reality (Rose 1994). The Black Arts Movement of the 1960’s and -70’s (Keyes *ibid.*: 32) developed a specifically black identity in fostering its lost traditions, where “Afrocentric and Black Nationalist themes and

Islamic ideology were all fundamental to the expression of the new black aesthetics” (ibid.: 33). Such communities often construe a new, “invented tradition” out of their own pre-history – whose connotations appear less expired than the closer past – “for quite novel purposes” (Hosbawm 1992: 6). Theorists of Hip-Hop-music have referred to the origins of Rap in the West-African bardic tradition (Keyes ibid.: 18). Adherents of the Ras-Tafari movement of Jamaica have been “keen to protect in speech, dress and general deportment what they call ‘the African personality’, that is, any pattern of behavior or life-style that departs most radically from the Anglo-Europeanized pattern” (Watson 1973: 191-2). On the other hand, “black” life style could be adopted by young white Americans as a fashionable tool for distinction: During the 1940’s, it was in account of the “conscious nonconformity” (Baraka 1980: 186) of the “zoot suite” that looking and speaking like Dizzy Gillespie (ibid.: 190) became fashionable among those who wished to discern themselves from mainstream culture. White “hipness” (Rose 1994: 5), “Bop talk”, and, in more recent times, “Hip talk” (Baraka 1980: 187) evolved from the white American’s freedom to embrace an ethnicity out of individual choice – a freedom that, for the longest time, black communities themselves could not enjoy. A musical idiom is chosen upon certain traits of a culture’s *habitus*, out of *choice* or *affinity* in addition to *belonging* (Slobin 1992: 37).

Musical communities merge into global networks – Arjun Appadurai’s “-scapes” (1996) and often participate in several classifications at a time, under religious, ethnic, or stylistic aspects. Cultural crossroads are prominently apparent in the concept of modern World music since the 1980’s, and they have more and more affected the evolution of contemporary Western art music, first in the works of a few aficionados, then as a global concept (Stokes 1994). Every year, the world new music festivals held by the International Society for Contemporary Music take place in one of its participating countries. However, these activities, despite their increasing decentralization, merely promote the cultural legacy of the West. The

independence of modernist concept and technologies offers an immense aesthetic liberation especially in 2nd and 3rd world countries. On the other hand, extra-European local traditions often fall prey to ideological degradation: Modernism introduces with its tools also its own idiomatic structures rather than motivating the genuine development of the ethnically distinctive. The specific alienation concepts and the critical distance of contemporary music render a real fusion with other traditions comparably difficult. For that reason, contemporary music is often misunderstood as an ultimate destination of musical heritage and swallows every cultural material near its own event-horizon. The growing interest in the reflection of other cultures is more and more promoted by official private and state foundations. As a remarkable trait of this phenomenon, most composers selected for residencies and commission on the basis of intercultural exchange, are visiting the respective foreign countries for the first time and, thus, participate in a large-scale cultural tourism. On the other hand, the radical avant-garde, gradually running out of uncommon ideas and sound effects, welcomes a new supply of unknown material in an approach that does not appear that alien to its basic premises. This process alludes likewise to a return to archaic implements, in the way that André Schaeffner, in 1924, described them in a stage production of Stravinsky's "Renard" as a "new metamorphosis of the antique choir" (1998:192¹) and within the close proximity between the radically new and the primitive.

But contemporary music's new look on ethnic roots also reveals the vernacular sources of Western culture itself. It offers the foundations of a new reconciliation in which the antagonistic nature of modernism resolves. As much as Haydn drew his melodic inspiration from an ethnically definite folk inventory, composers are awake for a process of adaptation that departs from their culturally shared heritage and culminates in most advanced aesthetic concepts. This operation largely resembles a process of adaptation that Robert Cantwell de-

¹ Transl. from: "une nouvelle métamorphose du chœur antique"

scribed in American folklore studies under the term *ethnomimesis* (1993, 2008): While the cultural *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) fills the grey areas of every cultural perspective with allusions to agreed positions and concepts (Bourdieu 1977: 98), its steadily upheld properties are imitated, reflected, and eventually transformed in poetry, music, and the arts. It appears that, suddenly, contemporary music is able to celebrate community where it was hitherto denied. In reconciling its elitist status with the musics of the world, contemporary music proves to act as a learning, self-critical system. As it has grown into a globally received world-language and a motor of Western cultural ideologies, its operations in countries outside the Western world urgently await new concepts of transmission and communication – to be directed by true intercultural experts –, in order to protect the cultural diversity that it allows itself to embrace.

Musical Westernization in Turkey: A Socio-Political Perspective

In most recent times, Westernization has reached extra-European cultures under the pretext of furnishing a reliable tool of modernist progress. In countries like India or in most of the Arab world, Westernization has echoed from the remains of British and French colonialism. Other countries, such as Turkey, Japan, or China, embraced Western habits deliberately in order to retrieve a new, nationally perceived identity. In the Republic of Turkey, the introduction of Western classical music grew from a reform that comprised the very understanding of officially promoted culture, “resulting in conversion almost on a civilizational level” (Göle 1997: 83-84).

The beginnings of this process can be traced back to the decline of the Ottoman Empire when, in the 19th century, new institutions were introduced upon Western exemplars. After the execution of the entire Janissary army in 1826 under Mahmûd II, a European-style military system was conceived. It was accompanied by a military chapel with a Western con-

servatory, the *Mizika-yı Hıymey'n*, to be directed subsequently by the Italians Giuseppe Donizetti and Callisto Guatelli (Jäger 1996: 93 & Lewis 2002: 150). The early Kemalist governments introduced polyphonic idioms, orchestras and opera houses for promoting the new cultural expression of a Western, democratic society and sent out young musicians to Austria and France for the study of Western composition. Nationalism motivated early Republican composers to seek for a specifically Turkish expression (Saygun 1951a) as well as an applied theory (Aydın&Ergur 2006) within the Western idiom. They often legitimated this attempt by resorting to the ideological postulations of the intellectual spokesman of the former Young Turks, Ziya Gökalp (2002:147), who, himself, possessed no knowledge of music. The Ottoman classical tradition, classified as “*ala-turka* music”, was stereotyped as the expression of an alien culture. Composers, such as Ahmet Adnan Saygun, specified their interest in recovering their supposed true heritage in Anatolian folk-life (1934, in Çalgan 1990:21-22), in an approach that, since, has been labeled *sentez* (synthesis) by Turkish academics (Aydın 2003: 69). Besides Western traditional forms, also folkloristic genres were translated into harmonic contexts. Composers often acted likewise as ethnomusicologists, such as Adnan Saygun who, during the 1930's, escorted Béla Bartók during his visits to Turkey and to field research in the Çukurova. After the German annexation of Austria, he assisted in the latter's eventually unsuccessful attempt to immigrate to Turkey (Saygun 1951b).

Yet, this new official culture remained unable to permeate the lower social strata and did not change the society's deeper subconscious: As the new polyphonic music did not grow out of real folk-life and was primarily addressed to the urban upper classes, its ideals were concealed to an intellectual elite and, as much as in 19th century Eastern Europe, to “pious hopes created by nationalism itself” (Dahlhaus 1989: 94). During the 1930's, the government banned Turkish classical music from the radio. The people, however, in particular in rural areas, would simply tune their radios to Radio Egypt with its more familiar programs. The

impact of Arab popular musics would eventually give birth to the most significant Turkish pop genre, *Arabesk* (Stokes 1992: 93). Today, neglecting the underdeveloped provinces in the East has caused a large-scale migration to the big cities and inclined the balance of power in cultural matters in favor of the poor and uneducated. The victory of the Islamist party AKP in 2002 has shown that the intellectual upper class acts from a narrow retreat, now itself a pariah, from which it remains unable to uphold its ideals of Westernized “Turkishness” with broader impact.

By tradition, Turkish conservatories tend to operate as strong bastions of Kemalist opinions. The utopist background of their potential in Turkish culture should, however, not be overlooked: Before WWI, Western music was only professed by a number of composers in the Christian-Armenian minorities of the late Ottoman Empire. There exists no local repertoire of Western music before the foundation of the Republic, and, thus, composers should normally be able to profit from remarkable aesthetic freedom without an overweighed historic past. Unfortunately, this opportunity is diminished by the conservative attitude at State conservatoires and their broad insistence on early-Republican aesthetics. In regard to the remarkable transformation of Turkey’s broader cultural orientations, these establishments act as an anachronistic *arrière-garde*, concerned with a supposedly better past in the early one-party government before the 1950’s. This process is nourished by the coupling of musical identity with ideological implements and superficial, supposedly cultural habits that, analyzed in detail, would not seem so necessary. Certain communities usually labeled as “Kemalists” do nevertheless confess to Islamic religion and would reduce their critical concern, mostly on the political application of religion that they sense in the AKP government. Others, however, regard Islam *per se* as an anti-democratic force. Turkish Western musicians forget that also European history, especially in music, was shaped substantially by a religious and spiritual past and that a “European” ethnicity cannot simply be transported from one locality to an-

other. Radical opposition against political Islam drives them further away from Turkish mainstream culture. As AKP came to office in the course of democratic elections, many of them have started to distrust the democratic state concept of their country – that, paradoxically, the introduction of polyphonic music in the Turkish Republic was initially supposed to express. The persistently re-lived and re-enacted trauma of the war of independence has maintained a general reservation – officially called *devrimcilik* (“reformism-revolutionism”, Kili 1980: 402) – against the policies of foreign countries. The West is not fully accepted as a veritable ally, but local traditions are equally rejected.

The isolation of Turkish Western music instruction is most radically perceived at the State conservatory of Ankara and some provincial institutions, where an exchange with foreign countries does not exist and where textbooks and available scores are often outdated by about fifty years. Many students can only rely on file sharing communities on the internet. However their interaction with the outside world is further limited because most students enter the conservatory around the age of ten and usually lack consistent instruction in foreign languages and general education.

Exchange between the old Westernized upper-class and the Islamic majority of Turkey’s citizens is characterized by sometimes radical polarization. Symmetrical response – comparable to the Kurdish conflict – fosters an increase in reciprocal opposition, in a process that the British anthropologist Gregory Bateson once coined *schismogenesis* and through which communication between the different social strata is rendered more and more difficult (Bateson 2000). A complete study of this process should, therefore focus on the persistence of antagonistic inner-cultural struggles rather than an observation that simply reveals which partaking ideology finally triumphs: Even though each party does apparently only react on the radicalization of the other, they nevertheless participate equally in their schismogenic split. An analysis of their interaction from only within, often fails as much as a purely outsider’s

perspective, because it succumbs to the drawing power of one or the other excluding mindsets within their superior polarity system.

Many Turkish Western-style composers of today, especially in İstanbul, have shown increasing interest in the concepts of Ottoman music. But likewise it should be asked which society they really address. Many of them, as participants in the globalized culturescape of Western new music, enjoy their most effective performances outside their country. They merely live and teach in Turkey where a genuine forum for contemporary music – despite the abundance of institutions and composers – has not yet evolved. While they still approach their indigenous musical traditions as foreigners in their own culture, some of them have studied the original treatises or learned specific instruments in as much depth as intercultural aficionados in the West. Turkish Western conservatories certainly offer introductory course-programs in *maqām*-music and, thus, serve a movement of revisioning towards the Ottoman tradition. But their major concern has always been a thorough conversion into a Western musical consciousness: Instruction concentrates on an overarching amount of solfège classes that, usually based on pre-war textbooks from France, that barely offer opportunities for creative explorations.

To this day, as a positive side-effect of their contribution to nationalist aspirations, Turkish Western composers enjoy a relatively strong support from the government, with many new operas and symphonic concert pieces to be premiered by state institutions. There exists an abundance of significant but yet unexplored topics that classical Western music could address and to which it could comment as a unique complement to this society. However, most acclaimed operas of Turkish composers, such as Saygun's "Özsoy" or Nevit Kodallı's "Gılgamış", are based on mythological subjects; recent concert pieces, such as Hasan Uçarsu's harp concerto "Uninvited Guests", also address the interaction with Ottoman instruments. This orientation remains however remarkably blind in regard to the social reality:

The omnipresence of beggars, child labor, and invalids notably in Istanbul would let an outside spectator ponder on a Turkish “Wozzeck” that would possibly respond more adequately on this reality.

This year, Istanbul was chosen as the European Capital of Culture 2010, however the scarceness of contributions involving Western contemporary music within the official program of activities shows that Western music has apparently little to say about Turkey’s now fostered dialogue with the West. While a withdrawal of state endowment appears foreseeable, more and more private foundations, such as Akbank, Tefken, or Borusan offer more varicolored programs that bring the formerly separate musical currents into closer confrontation. This attempt would, however, gain a more integrative message if the Westernized Turkish elites and, in particular, Western composers and musicians decided to step beyond their traditional circles and reach out for new audiences within a broader Turkish consciousness. Also, many of them have not yet noticed that Western audiences would be more interested in a distinctively Turkish contribution echoing from a genuinely resurrected heritage.

The Ottoman Tradition in the Turkish Republic

While cultural development was officially assigned to the new polyphonic idiom, modernism excluded the Ottoman tradition from its agenda. Until the decline of the Ottoman Empire, this music had grown in its very structure, such as in the conversion from the old to the post-17th century Ottoman *Peşrev* and was growing in refinement within a discreet shift in the relationships between single beat and larger *‘usûl* patterns (Feldman 1996: 330). In Ottoman times, imperial concert activities were confined to the inner sections of the palace and, thus, were more or less inaccessible to public audiences. On the other hand, 17th century Istanbul is reported to have enjoyed an extraordinarily rich musical life in all social strata, such

as, the remarkable tolerance among Islamic scholars and legal officials (Popescu-Judetzu 1999:21 et seqq.), the daily presence of classical tunes in the *mehter* services of the Janissary corps (Jäger 1996: 55 et seqq.), and the popular ceremonies and teachings of the *Mevlevî tekkes* (Feldman 1996: 98 et seqq.). During the 19th century, many court musicians were forced to play in the taverns of Pera and Galata. This transportation of the Ottoman repertoire, although presented mostly in form of the light-hearted *şarki* (the urban popular song), contributed to a new increase in popularity.

The important social upheavals of the early 20th century, on the other hand, left the structural content of this distinctive art remarkably unaware. On its surface, it was respelled in the theoretical attempt of Hüseyin Sadettin Arel, Suphi Ezgi, and Salih Murad Uzdilek (Arel 1993). It has, since then, been written in an applied form of Western staff notation as the official way of transmission at the conservatory of İstanbul. This theory was based on a first proposal, written in French by the late-Ottoman composer Raûf Yektâ Bey and consisted of a revival of the 13th century Pythagorean-Systematist methodology of Sâfiyy al-Dîn al-Urmâwî (Yektâ 1921 & D'Erlanger 2001:24-28). Despite the elegant symmetry of this system, its postulations, in particular concerning the non-Pythagorean main notes of its fundamental scale, took part in the general segregation of the larger Middle-Eastern tradition and have marked Turkey's ultimate rejection of the Arab elements within her transnational heritage. In the 1940's, this tradition was renamed "Turkish music" in prevention against nationalist depletion (Feldman 1990: 101 & Arel 1980). While Arel equally aimed at motivating polyphonic development within his genuine art form, this system poses many problems when applied to the preservation of historic performance practice. In particular those sources that date back before the 19th century were most probably conceived on the basis of a tuning-system that still resembled the intonation customs of present-day Arab and Iranian music (Feldman 1996:204 et seqq.). Furthermore, the theoretical inflexibility of the Arel-Ezgi-Uzdilek approach concerning

the true intonation practice of some principal *maqāmāt* has been criticized by a number of Turkish theorists, most prominently by the composer Yalçın Tura (1988). Others, such as Mustafa Ekrem Karadeniz (1985) or Kemal İlerici (1975), conceived their own, much more complicated approaches that failed to contribute to common practice.

Meanings in Western Contemporary Art Music of Turkey

Although polyphonic music in the Republic of Turkey was originally perceived as the expression of a democratic society, it should be noted that today, the standard concert repertoire – somewhat the usual preference list of Turkish orchestras – focuses on 19th and 20th century Russian works, Italian operas and a few standard pieces from the Viennese-classical period – music that evolved within excluding economic elites. While J. S. Bach is taught in specific counterpoint lessons at conservatories, neither Renaissance vocal polyphony nor German early Romanticism are considered in official instruction and concert life.

In the multi-ethnic Ottoman society, Western and *maqām* music were neatly separated and, to a similar extent as Orthodox church music, concealed to their own micro-ethnicities. In present-day Turkey, Western music is perceived through a certain iconization where it does not grow from a general epistemology but rather affirms typecasting cultural attitudes, comparable to Western dress-codes. The early Republican composers perceived local traditions in the same manner, as a supply of musical characteristics that could serve as an adornment to the Western structural basis of their compositions. Saygun declared that *maqām* signified “only a color” to him (Saygun 1981 in Çalgan 1990). This phenomenon perfectly resonates with Edward Said’s scolding attacks against classical Western Orientalism where he condemned an objectification that reversed the process of tradition to a “thing”: “[...] this object is a ‘fact’, which, if it develops or otherwise transforms itself the way civilizations frequently do, never-

theless is fundamentally, even ontologically, stable. [...] And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it’ [...]” (Said, 1979: 32). An objectified tradition excludes the semantic and grammatical relationships that normally lie at the basis of musical structures. The preference for light formal genres – in which this adaptation often happened – equally mirrors an enforced academism, in suites and variation cycles on given folkloristic themes, “a scholastic rut: symphonies on popular themes, symphonic poem and suite for piano where [...] the same clippings return invariably” (Schaeffner 1998b: 56²). Paradoxically, *maqām* music was used to give the search for identity an original, distinctive stamp, not in speaking to its local communities but in directly facing the West, in a monotonous dialogue in which nothing more was left than an exclusive “us” and “the West”. In being assimilated to Western tuning contexts, the traditional intonation system was applied to Western instruments and distorted in regard to its fundamentally different pitch supply. Turkish-Western “synthesis”, as a mere statement culture, could only say: “I am this ... or that...”, and making this “us” more originally “Turkish” in the West and more “Western” in Turkey.

The first generation of the 20th century’s East-European composers, on the other hand, achieved very original examples of cross-cultural creativity. The so far unexploited modal structures of folk music were discovered from a lively aural perception and built the foundation of new harmonic universes yet to be explored. Exploring the characteristics and connotations of such musical material was like traversing the hidden trails on a map of a collective, subconscious self. In the most serious of these attempts, folk music was not exhibited in concrete references, nor did it disclose itself in immediate disposition, collage or patchwork. Being symbiotically rooted in the composer’s formal plan, it exerted its energetic tensions from within the deep structure of the piece of art and its background structures. Adorno sensed the potential for a specific socio-critical function in this combination (1975: 41). From his West-

² Trans. from: “ [...] une ornière scolastique: symphonies sur des thèmes populaires, poème symphonique et suite pour piano où [...] reviennent invariablement les mêmes coupes.”

ern perspective, these musical resources were qualified to unsettle the more and more clichéd and stereotyped formal principles of Western art music. Thus, an aesthetic shock comparable to that provoked by twelve-tone music could equally operate from the European periphery. For Adorno, it seemed sufficient that this “material” was uncommon to central-European ears. Nationalist schools of the 19th century, on the contrary, had discovered their local folk traditions as a source of distinction from the Viennese-classicist style that was perceived “primarily as German, not as a universal style” (Dahlhaus 1989: 82). The difference between Adorno’s and this nationalist approach lies in the fact that modern East-European composers built their very musical structures out of the unpolished rawness of folkloristic influences whereas nationalism processed and converted them into its ideologically implemented view of history, as superficial surface material. Turkish contemporary music after WWII has not digested this set of problems: The “blood and soil” ideology of early Kemalist composers still resonates in contemporary academic explanations and will continue to recur unless Turkish composers learn to define their own distinctive voice and a critical approach towards an intercultural vision of modern music. In eventually retreating from the ideological postulations of the premature years of their state system, they are challenged with the search of a new home within their own culture rather than in an invented Western society.

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