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DECOLONIZING
POP
MUSIC
HISTORIOGRAPHY.

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ANATOLIAN
POP
STUDIES
AS
AN EXAMPLE

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“Music history is proof of a power struggle.”

Kornelia Binicewicz/Ladies on Records (2020)

Introduction: Decolonial Perspectives

Ever since I first came across Anatolian pop in 2006, I have wondered how this kind of music could have existed in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s. What were the conditions for the development of this kind of hybrid pop music? The question led me to do some research over the years, involving many collaborations, also with people from Turkey. In this text, I try to push this research one step further using discourse analysis combined with decolonial thinking.¹

Recently, things have changed. Inside and outside Turkey, there has been an ‘English turn’ in Turkish music studies. Over the past few years, and especially since 2018, a new wave of Turkish musicologists has started to publish their research in English (see Gedik/Ergun 2019: passim, 99). They are participating for the first time in a global, English-dominated discourse about music and music history.² Ali C. Gedik even writes about his own seminal book *Made in Turkey* “that such a comprehensive collection [of articles dealing with music from Byzantine times until today] does not even exist in Turkish” (Gedik 2018: XV). Richard C. Jankowsky identifies the same problem regarding the articles in his volume of *Bloomsbury’s Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World Vol. 10: Middle East and North Africa*, which includes various entries on Turkish music styles: “many of the entries are pioneering essays on under-represented musical practices” (Jankowsky 2015: VIII). Still, things are changing in a way that one might call ‘decolonial’ when, for example, “Global Popular Music Studies” project leaders Goffredo Plastino and Franco Fabbri, as series editors, “insisted on the contribution of native scholars for each volume dedicated to popular music of their country or region” (Gedik/Ergun 2019: 99), thus enabling Gedik’s volume, *Made in Turkey*, to be written mostly from Turkish perspectives.

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2 The predominance of the English language and the Anglophone publishing system in academia is, of course, a colonial legacy with a neo-colonial character that must be discussed. However, this would go far beyond the scope of this text.

Scholars from Turkey participating in the global music discourse today allow the discourse itself to take new perspectives on Turkish music history. A lot of information that was previously not well-known outside Turkey is entering the discourse, being debated and developed further, also opening new—decolonial—perspectives on Turkish music history and historiography. Martin Stokes identifies in the “research agendas currently at play in Turkish studies” an “interest in the global and transnational circulations of culture, the critique and historicizing of national culture formation” (Stokes 2012: 102). This includes “attempts to think about Turkish music making outside the boundaries of the modern state” (*ibid.*: 103). He proposes to understand Turkey’s major population centers as “sites of hybridity and translation” (*ibid.*; see also Woodall 2015; Miller/Shahriari 2012: 54–55) and to research the “historical relations between Turkey’s minority and majority cultures” (Stokes 2012: 103). Looking for example at the demographic balance of Istanbul, there was a remarkable stability over the centuries until the establishment of the Republic in 1923, with about half the population being Muslim and half being non-Muslim, and about 40 languages spoken in the second half of the 19th century (Erdoğan 2010: 140). Around the time of the foundation of the Republic, half of the urban population in Turkey came from the Balkans (as did Kemal Atatürk) or the Caucasus (Stone 1999: 39). Without adopting as radical a view as social anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin, who “denied that there was indeed any coherent thing called ‘Turkish culture’ at all” (quoted in: Bates 2019: 149), it makes sense to keep in mind the plurality of ethnic groups having lived on or having been connected to Ottoman or Turkish territories as well as their often “multiethnic identities [sic] configurations” (Bates 2019: 150).

Looking at Turkish historiography in general, “perhaps the most central theme that continues to define revisionist studies of Turkish history is the degree to which the republic’s development is informed by its imperial past” (Gingeras 2014: 4). In conclusion to his overview of Turkish historiography, Ryan Gingeras, while dating the Republic back to the Young Turks revolution of 1908 (*ibid.*: 5), advises to take Ottoman structures and legacies much more into consideration than the assumed republican disruptions, or rather to see the latter as rooted and pre-developed in the Ottoman past (*ibid.*: 5–6). Therefore, within the domain of Turkish historiography, a distinct “Re-Ottomanizing” perspective has emerged in academic discourse, particularly since the 2000s (*ibid.*).

Hybridism as a Form of Resistance against Self-Colonization

In his article about “Music in Turkey,” Stokes categorizes Ottoman and Turkish musical styles whilst also expressing doubts about doing so. His concerns about “somewhat arbitrary categorizations (folk, art, popular)” that are “driven by ideas about what should be rather than what is” (Stokes 2012: 102), can be understood as a critique of the Western model of thinking, of building categories and of separating things, which do not match the Ottoman and later Turkish musical phenomena. Rather than using isolating categories, preference should be given to co-existence, collaboration, combination, and hybridism in the examination of Ottoman and Turkish music.

A decolonial approach should take this into account, and it should also recognize that the music of the Ottoman period was already “an amalgam of Turkish influences and musical influences from minorities and neighboring cultures” (Karahasanoğlu 2018: 200), all of which had musical cultures of their own. Furthermore, a decolonial approach should consider the aspect of a Turkish ‘self-colonization’ by the Republican project of Westernization and Modernization that tried to erase the Ottoman and the Eastern past, and with it ‘*alaturka*’ (music in Turkish/Eastern style). This ‘self-colonization’ has blocked, as Stokes quite rightly observes, other, non-Western-dominated ways of looking at musical phenomena, both inside and outside Turkey. The Republican nationalism, which links Westernization and Modernism and connects them to de-Ottomanization, could be regarded as a top-down self-colonization. Indeed, many characteristics similar to the process of colonization can be observed in the Republican period: the devaluation of Ottoman language and writing, Islamic religion and law, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, as well as the devaluation of Ottoman elements in culture (music, clothing, especially the *fez*, veil, and turban), and schooling etc. A new elite, largely drawn from the military, set new standards and new preferences, enforcing them in public through the power of the state. “The reforms [...] initiated a state of ‘historical amnesia’” (Woodall 2015: 26), as main traditions and musical practices, such as Ottoman classical music and religious music of the dervish lodges, were banned from public performance.

How did that feel for the people in the new Turkish Republic? The people were not as radical as the new elite, who were themselves ambivalent. In private, the Republican leader Kemal Atatürk, for example, preferred to listen to Ottoman-Turkish music (see Ayas 2018: 101)—which his official music politics put out of favor.

Most of the people tried to stick to their old Ottoman habits. Yet, with the new Republican elite in power, this was not an easy task. The state even paid musicians to make songs aimed at influencing the people through music, exposing them to certain new musical forms and contents like Anatolian folk opera (Coban 2019). As early as in the late 1920s, *The Jazz Singer* was shown in

Istanbul in cinemas (Stokes 2000: 220) and Black jazz was broadcast regularly by Radyo Stanboul, both nationally and internationally (Woodall 2014: 273). This was an effect of the Allied occupation period (1918–1923) and the docking of a U.S. Navy fleet in Istanbul in 1919/1920, which led to the development of a relevant jazz culture in Istanbul (see Woodall: 2014). Therefore, many people, musicians and audiences, developed a complex “in-between” position (see Baysal 2018: 209) or just “muddled through” (Stokes 2000: 221), mixing and hybridizing Ottoman and (Western) Republican elements.

This musical hybridism that spreads from the Ottoman into the Republican era is also visible in photographs: Fig. 1 shows female members of the Sultan’s family engaged in palace music. Note the Western style in interior design and fashion as well as the mixture of Ottoman and Western instruments. Dressed in fashionable Western-style attire, the singers in fig. 2 represent *kanto*, one of the hybrid styles developed in the Ottoman era. The photo of the Bergama Caz Band from 1932 (fig. 3) gives a visual impression of the combination of rural and urban styles, modern Westernized and traditional elements, and jazz music and Anatolian folk dance. One could imagine a sort of Anatolian rumba here (see Aytaç 2018: 30). This is the earliest visual depiction of this kind of hybridism I could find so far. It is like a template for so many later Anatolian pop images (see Lund/Lund/Yanikkaya/Zöllner 2026/2023).



Fig. 1: Palace music included female members of the Sultan’s family as musicians and composers, probably early 20th century. Source: Beşiroğlu no date.



Fig. 2: *Kanto* singers, probably late 1920s. Source: Beşiroğlu no date.



Fig. 3: Bergama Caz Band, 1932. Source: Erkal 2014: 30.

Many “in-between” styles had already been developed in the Ottoman period, for example, ‘*alafranga*’ (music in French/Western style), polkas in the Ottoman musical mode *makam* (see Pennanen 2004: 11), and *kanto* (cabaret song). Later in the Republican period, other “in-between” styles followed, such as *fantezi* (cabaret song), *oryantal tango*, *oryantal fokstrot* (Tekelioğlu 2002: 101), and Anatolian rumba (Aytar 2018: 30). In the Democratic period from the 1950s to the 1970s, they were followed by *aranjman* (arrangement of Western pop songs in Turkish language), *Anadolu pop*, *Roman oyun havası* (Belly Dance by Roma people, also called *oriyantal*) (see Stokes 2012: 100), *arabesk*, *Anadolu arabesk rock* (mixing *Anadolu rock* and *arabesk*), *disco fasıl*, *disco kanto*, and *disco folk*.

Even Ottoman musical forms and genres got hybridized during or after the Republican period, such as *şarkı* (urban art song), *fasıl* (urban suite of instrumentals and songs) (Bates 2011: 41f), *gazel* (improvised art song) (see O’Connell 2015: 35–37), as well as *Türk sanat müziği* (Turkish art music). A prominent example is Zeki Müren, who hybridized *Türk sanat müziği* by using Ottoman, Arabic, and Western elements (see Bates 2011: 34, 75–76; Hawkins 2016: 1, 6).

Taking on a decolonial and poly-cultural perspective, one can see for example how “the use of arrangements and traditional motifs from other cultures and languages in Turkish popular songs are examples of the hidden cultural wealth within Turkish music. One need only [to] explore the songs released on 45s in the 1960s and 1970s [...] to witness the cultural diversity of the country” (Yıldız 2018: 137). Antoine Remise comes to another, rather surprising conclusion at first sight: “In a way, ‘Anatolian Rock’ was more an easternization of Turkish music trends than the westernization that is usually discussed” (Remise 2014). He shows that Anatolian pop can be understood in a more complex way, twisting the hierarchy of adopting entity and entity adopted: instead of a Westernization of Turkish music, he sees an Easternization of Western pop music. Yet, when reflecting on Orhan Tekelioğlu’s concepts of “West-East” and “East-West” syntheses, Songül Karahasanoğlu and Gabriel Skoog already observed “a conceptual shift from a model based on Western music incorporating Turkish styles to one based on Turkish styles incorporating Western music” (Karahasanoğlu/Skoog 2009: 53).³

3 It is in reference to these musicological approaches, which try to widen the perspectives on Turkish music history in a decolonial way, that the concepts of ‘Westernization’ and ‘Easternization,’ resp. ‘West’ and ‘East’ are used in this article. This is not to be mistaken as a continuity of the historical opposition of ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident,’ the colonial constructedness of which has already been dismantled by Edward Said in 1978.

From Ottoman to Jazz Times: Processes of Hybridization

The process of hybridization linked to the process of Westernization had already started earlier in the Ottoman era, most significantly with the military music reform and the establishment of *Muzika-i Humâyun* (1828), a musical institution for the military and later the palace, directed by Gaetano Donizetti (Feyzi 2016: 19). In the *Tanzimât* reform period (1839–76) many consciously Westernizing reforms took place in the Ottoman Empire, concerning also music, connected, for example, to the rise and use of terms like ‘Turkish’ music (Karaelma 2016: 1) or ‘alafranga’ as opposed to ‘alaturka’ (Ayas 2018: 100). But most importantly, even in the late Ottoman period, a spirit of mixing and hybridity was a key feature of music, a “policy of synthesis” (Gedik 2018: 22) where “musical fusions were common” (Pennanen 2004: 9), in particular since the second half of the 19th century. This “policy of synthesis” is rooted in both, the old poly-cultural Ottoman Empire itself and the Westernizing reforms it undertook in the *Tanzimât* period during the 19th century (see Bates 2011: 49–50; Ayas 2018: passim). This even affects oppositions, as “studies also remind us of the fact that *Alaturka* and *Alafranga* patterns did not necessarily signify binary opposites, and especially as they were experienced, allowed a lot of fluidity and contingency” (Aytar/Keskin 2007: 147). Regarding Istanbul’s music history, Volkan Aytar and Azer Keskin state: “Seemingly separate and even conflicting music styles and spaces of music continuously scuffle and inter-mingle in Istanbul, learn from and transform each other” (Aytar/Keskin 2007: 154).

A decolonial approach to Turkish music history could start from here, from an ‘Ottomanization’⁴ of the research perspective, which considers all three periods, the Ottoman period (ca. 1299–1918/1923), the Republican period (1923–1945/1950), and the Democratic period (1950–present) up to the respective afterlife of the Ottoman heritage. “Ottoman studies are no longer marginalized in modern Turkey” (Stokes 2012: 103), but maybe they should be extended even further to better understand the many Ottoman and Turkish hybrid musical forms that have been developed especially since the second half of the 19th century.

Historically speaking, the situation reached another level of complexity with the Allied occupation and the early Republican period (1918–late 1920s). “The arrival of General Wrangel’s fleet from Odessa in 1920 dramatically changed the face of Constantinople” (Roueché 2014: 68) in a way that “in the twilight years of the Ottoman Empire, Beyoğlu-Pera was simultaneously the heart of the city and not part of the city at all [...]” (Matthews 2014: 82). The city, especially the Beyoğlu-Pera district, heated up in an intoxicating modern way. The city was drug-addled, flooded with opium, heroin, and cocaine,

4 This broadening of the research perspective should not be confused with Neo-Ottomanism, a political stance strongly supported by the current Turkish government.

and “everyone seem[ed] intoxicated” (Mufti-Zada Kemal Ziya Bey, quoted in: Roueché 2014: 69; see also Gingeras 2014: 65–81; King 2014: 144–145; Woodall 2015). This could only happen because Turkey was economically massively involved in drug traffic, while staying out of any national or international agreement: “No law or government body regulated the production, processing, or export of opiates in Turkey before 1930” (Gingeras 2014: 71). An estimated 40,000 prostitutes, mostly Russian refugees, were on the streets (Woodall 2015: 21), which were already crowded with urban strollers. Parties with “pornographic art” (Roueché 2014: 70) took place. In the 1920s, the public, who was already familiar with the sometimes obscene Turkish shadow play *Karagöz*, was not shocked at all about the fact that there was “no censorship of films except political and military. Some of the films [were] very suggestive and would not [have] been allowed in America or England” (Erdoğan 2010: 135). In 1922, the young Ernest Hemingway stayed in Istanbul as a reporter and summarized much of the feeling of the times: “All of Constantinople was in a feverish sort of wildness.” He painted Constantinople as “doing a sort of dance of death” (Hemingway quoted in Maksudyan 2023: 239–240)—with jazz beginning to be the soundtrack for this dance.

In 1921, the famous nightclub *Maksim Gazinosu* opened at Taksim, run by the Mississippi-born African-American Frederick Thomas, who set a “black American influence on the nightlife of the city” (Maksudyan: 69); a nightlife established around 1900 and otherwise dominated by Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and Russian entertainment (see Erdoğan 2010: 131). Progressive Turkish flappers, with bobbed *alagarson* [styled like a boy] hairstyles and chic dresses, attended the cinemas, appeared in the streets (see Erdoğan 2010: 133; Roueché 2014: 70), and “danced the Charleston on the fringes of social acceptability” (ibid.: 71). At the heart of it all, as the main soundtrack to and symbol of this lifestyle, was jazz (figs. 4–5)—particularly European and Black American jazz, the latter played by soldiers and also diffused to local musicians through teaching and shellack records.



Fig. 4: Istanbul jazz 1920s.
Source: King 2016: 145.



Fig. 5: Dance to a jazz band (to the right) at the Garden Bar in Tepebaşı, 1920s. Source: Roueché 2014: 68.



Fig. 6: Nilüfer with İsmet Sıral Orkestrası (including singer Özdemir Erdoğan on the right bottom side) at İstanbul Hilton, 1961. Step by step Turkish musicians and groups were replacing American musicians at the Hilton. Source: Altun 2015: 54.

Prominent parts of Turkish society had their doubts about this kind of modernity. A harsh critique of decadence and the ruinous influence on Turkish men and women arose, formulated for example by Turkish women in the "Petition of the Ladies of Istanbul" (ibid.: 69). But, with Kemal Atatürk taking power, "the expected clampdown on nightlife did not happen" (ibid.: 70; see Karahasanoğlu/Uyar 2016: 136): "Mustafa Kemal exhorted his people to adopt modern, *alafranga* habits of dancing, drinking and entertaining, yet jazz, as performed by African-Americans, occupied a grey area on a spectrum of East vs West" (Roueché 2014: 70). This was probably due to "jazz's ambiguous relationship to modernity" (ibid.), being of old African heritage as well as being the new popular sound of Western modern life. Roueché infers: "Still, these



Fig. 7: Ajda Pekkan, concert at Istanbul Hilton, 1970s. Source: Permanent exhibition at the Hilton Istanbul Bosphorus Lobby (April 2019).

wild years of gay abandon laid the foundations of a long relationship between Istanbul and jazz, which would return to the city in full force in the 1950s" (ibid.: 71). A return was propelled by Turkey being on the map of U.S. state promoted jazz tours shaping the American image world-wide (Karahasanoğlu/Uyar 2016: 134). But propelled also by a US-American oriented lifestyle emerging in the 1950s (Zürcher 2017: 231f). This lifestyle equally paved the way for rock 'n' roll and pop music in Turkey in the late 1950s, which first appeared in Turkish cinemas through US-American imports; then Turkish musicians quickly adopted these new styles. The new Hilton Hotel in Istanbul (1955) was established as a model for nightlife (Altun 2015; Lund/Lund/Tülü 2026/2019: 83) and, later in 1971, it included Istanbul's first discotheque (Altun 2015: 73) (figs. 6 and 7).

There is still room for development in Turkish jazz studies. Currently, they mainly focus on American jazz in Turkey (see Woodall 2014; Woodall 2015). Or they focus on musicians from other ethnic groups like Armenians or Roma, as well as on European musicians (Karahasanoğlu/Uyar 2016), as Turkish musicians were not playing a key role in the jazz scene before 1938, when they finally entered jazz orchestras (ibid.: 132). Nevertheless, jazz was a vital part of the music scene in Turkey and, in the 1950s, Turkish musicians jumped in enthusiastically.

Yet, perhaps even more underdeveloped are studies on the music scene of Dileklerarası (running between Beyazıt and Fatih), the Muslim counterpart to Christian-dominated Beyoğlu-Pera. “From the turn of the century until the 1930s and the coming of cinema, an emerging Muslim bourgeoisie in Istanbul sought its musical and erotic pleasures” (Stokes 2000: 220) in Dileklerarası, where mostly Armenian, Greek, but even Muslim Turkish women were “performing bawdy music hall routines” and took on the roles of “Greek male dancers called *köçek*” (ibid.). This area rivaled the district of Beyoğlu, and its main style was *kanto*. This popular Ottoman style was named after the classical Italian singing style *canto*. The *kanto* of the second half of the 19th century “illustrates the ‘hybridity’ between alaturka and alafranga forms. [...] *kanto* should be seen as a crossover between the two” (Aytar 2018: 27). It also includes, to a quite significant extent, Roman music and later on jazz elements (Beşiroğlu/Girgin 2018: 49; Seeman 2015: 93). Thus, the jazz frenzy was a sort of underlying common ground, invading and permeating two main entertainment sections of Istanbul in the first half of the 20th century.

A New Framework Is Needed

In conclusion, the research outline for Ottoman/Turkish music studies could be described as follows: the nationalization of music during the Republican period brought Anatolization (Anatolian folk music archiving) and Westernization (opera, jazz), connected to de-Ottomanization and an East–West or ‘alaturka’–‘alafranga’ polarization. Recent research hints, on the one hand, at de-nationalization (Gedik, 2019: 94–97) through the decolonial transnationalization of Ottoman/Turkish music (e.g. Stokes 2012; Gedik 2018). This stands in contrast to a somewhat neo-colonial Westernization on the other hand, as exemplified by the Anglo-Americanization of Turkish pop music history, as presented most prominently by Daniel Spicer in his book *The Turkish Psychedelic Explosion: Anadolu Psych 1965–1980* (2018/1). Spicer even emphasizes the Britishness of Anatolian pop, psychedelizing Anatolian pop (esp. in his radio interview on NTS Radio, 2018/2). Against this backdrop, the Easternization of Anatolian pop was discussed (e.g. Karahasanoğlu/Skoog 2009; Remise 2014; Lund/Lund/Tülü 2026/2019). That a decolonial Ottomanization of research could be useful is the topic of Ayas’ position: “The theoretical framework built in the West to classify popular music reflects the socio-historical characteristics of the Western societies.” He argues that

“this framework is not suitable to understand the music debates in Turkey.

[...] Due to lack of a Western-type aristocracy, land owner ruling class and clergy, Ottoman classical music has developed as a kind of urban music open to all classes of society, exceeding the limits of class-based musical genres and styles” (Ayas, 2018: 91).

A new framework is needed based on a non-polar, hybrid-oriented thinking, respecting the open structures of Ottoman and also of Turkish social and cultural life that resulted in many combinations of styles, forms, and cultural spaces, as well as in many hybrids of the urban and rural, the East and West, 'alaturka' and 'alafranga,' the secular and religious, the traditional and modern as well as art music, folk music, and popular music, and many more (see Ayas 2016: 9–12; Bates 2011: 49–50). Although the politics of the Republican period introduced or enforced these polarities, they have either remained ignored or neglected by many, especially musicians and their audiences, or have led to modifications of existing musical styles and to hybridizations resulting in new musical styles. Musical needs (and pleasures) ruled out polarizing Republican music ideology.

Six Developments: Preparing and Establishing Anatolian Pop

Coming back to the introduction and to Anatolian pop, six developments of high relevance could be identified as influential in preparing and establishing Anatolian pop:

- 1) an Ottoman non-polar 'policy of synthesis,'
- 2) a Republican polar East–West construction that sought to avoid the 'Ottoman East' and to merge urban Westernization and Modernization with rural Anatolian folk, and
- 3) processes of nationalization through Turkification, executed in music by the preservation and unification of Anatolian folk music through the elimination of improvisation, and the introduction of "Western notation and chase away other ethnic influences"

(Gregory 2018: 76).

These three developments led, in an entangled and complex manner, to the predecessors of Anatolian pop such as *kanto/fantezi*, *oryantal fokstrot*, Anatolian rumba, and *aranjman*, as well as to Anatolian pop itself and to the intersections of Anatolian pop with parallel styles such as *arabesk* and *Roman oyun havası*. *Aranjman* can particularly be seen as a primary reference in both directions: Anatolian pop could be regarded as a spin-off of *aranjman*, taking up Western pop, as well as a counter-development to *aranjman*, pitting Anatolian folk against Western pop or imitations of Western pop. The musical culture of *aranjman* itself is regarded as key to understanding Turkish music by several scholars (Markoff 1990: 73; Stokes 2002: 73; Pennanen 2004: 11) because the Western "concepts of 'composition' and 'authority' are problematic" since "improvisation and the way a performance [is] executed [are] more highly esteemed than the original compositions" (Pennanen 2004: 11). This approach to 'version music' easily paves the way to all kinds of hybrids.

The three developments mentioned above are completed by three following main developments of Easternization of Turkish music as a counterpart to the official Republican Westernization:

- 4) The Egyptian Easternization, which began in the first half of the 20th century (Özbek 1997: 14; Stokes 2012: 100) and gained much strength after the state had banned Turkish music ('*alaturka*') on private radio (1934–35), and then took control of the radio (1936) and nationalized it (1937). Stokes summarizes: "Seen with the most dispassionate eye in the world, it is impossible not to conclude that the state's musical policies failed to engage with the musical tastes of urbanites or peasants: by the 1940s the habit of tuning radio sets to Egyptian radio was well entrenched" (Stokes 2000: 221). After the success of Egyptian films in the late 1930s, the state had also banned foreign language films. But "this ban backfired disastrously, since it unintentionally initiated a large [Turkish] industry entirely dedicated to the plundering of Egyptian films and singers" (ibid.: 220). So, in reaction to the state's cultural policies, people (and musicians) turned to Arabic radio stations as well as to Egyptian and even Indian films, along with their Turkish imitations, including 'Easternized' music. Since then, Egyptian songs have been continuously translated and covered in Turkey (ibid.: 221).
- 5) The influence of Roma musicians, who in the 1960s "predominated as the power and influence of other minorities decreased" and who "introduced Balkan, Mediterranean, and, later, north Indian elements to Turkish audiences" (Stokes 2012: 100). As a result, a "cosmopolitanism from below" took shape in *meyhaneler* and *gazinolar* [nightclub music hall restaurants] during the 1960s and 1970s, made by "singers, professional dancers, instrumentalists, and mass media entrepreneurs, [a cosmopolitanism] that embraced [...] 'Eastern' associations" (ibid.).

And last but not least,

- 6) the Easternization which was included in *arabesk* from the late 1960s onward. In brief, *arabesk* is a mix of Turkish folk, art, a wide range of Western popular, as well as Arabic and Egyptian musical elements, put together—mixed or juxtaposed—similar to highly eclectic Pakistani or Indian Bollywood film music. The *arabesk* composer and musician Orhan Gencebay, for example, recorded songs like "Nereden Bileceksin" (1980), making extensive use of the sitar and the tabla.

These three developments of Easternization and Ottomanization regarding the spirit of hybridism, the inherited structures of Ottoman-era craft guilds in studio recording production and workflow (Bates, 2019:159, 161), and the references to Ottoman-era poets and *aşık*lar (minstrels) should be taken into account for further decolonial research on Anatolian pop. They could make this music understandable in a way, that is not Western but Eastern and Ottoman, as Remise advocated. For example, the most prominent figure of Anatolian pop, Barış Manço, liked to dress in Ottoman style

for performances and promotional photos (fig. 8), and he included Egyptian-*arabesk* sounding string sections in his Anatolian pop.



Fig. 8: Promotional photo of Barış Manço and his group. *Hey* magazine (April 3, 1974: 25).

Cem Karaca, another major figure of Anatolian pop and the son of the Armenian İrma Felegyan (artist name: Toto Karaca) and of the Azerbaijani Mehmet İbrahim Karaca, was informed by a transnational musical heritage. He arranged songs by poets and *aşık*lar like Karacaoğlu and Dadaloğlu (Skoog 2012: 51), two rebellious *aşık*lar from the Ottoman period. Many other Anatolian pop singers, such as Selda Bağcan, Zerrin Zeren, Tülay German, or Ersen and Erkin Koray, also drew on these two *aşık*lar for their music deliberately.

Anatolian pop musicians and the Turkish music industry more broadly have been operating in a complex field defined by various developments and processes, as well as the demands of the audiences from around 50 different ethnic groups (see Bates 2019: 149) and experiences of internal migration. The musicians tried to position themselves between these developments and demands, essentially applying Raymond Loewy's famous MAYA principle (Most Advanced Yet Acceptable). They experienced that, for example, songs that were too Westernized did not have the same success as those with a more Eastern sound, "so they probably channeled their tunes into an Eastern style for reaching the crowd" (Kosebalaban 2019). The 'Easternness' of the audience and its feedback into the music should therefore be another key element of further research.

Eliminating National Borders: Transnational Approaches

Yet, there are still more connections to be made, linking Turkish music to other geographic regions. There is, for example, the idea of a Mediterraneanization (Sharpe 2018) or the idea of a Balkanization of Turkish music (Pennanen 2004). Nationalist perspectives have hindered such a view, as Pennanen states for the Balkans: "Although many historical, cultural, aesthetic, and structural factors unite music and dance in the Balkans, nationally oriented authorities, journalists, scholars, composers and choreographers have rather tended to stress the differences, thus creating situations where musical styles declared as national are seen as increasingly separate from each other. Ethnic characteristics have been underlined, even invented [...]" (Pennanen 2004: 1)—as with the designation of the saz or the bouzouki as national instruments.

A rare early historical example of the Balkanization of Anatolian pop is the former Yugoslavian record mini-series *Prva Muzička Balkanijada 1&2* (1964), which includes early Anatolian pop singers Erol Büyükburç and Tanju Okan. The Ottoman Greek café music *smyrneika* (of or pertaining to Smyrna/Izmir) of the first half of the 20th century (Pennanen 2004) could be seen as a basis for later Greek and Armenian adaptations of Turkish Anatolian pop music. These adaptations include, for example, songs by Barış Manço recorded by Αντώνης Λορέντζος (Antonis Lorentzos) on his album *Πω! Πω! Φωτιές* (1980) or Harout Pamboukjian, who covered Barış Manço's "Yaz Dostum" under the title "Kyahripar" (1985) thus broadening Anatolian pop music and turning it into a transnational phenomenon.

From the beginning of Turkish pop music, it was a common practice to release transnational songs. In 1964, Tülay German released the blueprint for Anatolian pop with "Burçak Tarlası," a transnational folk song played in Turkey, Greece, and Macedonia, which was already released in 1960 in a version by the Syrian singer Maha Abdel Wahab, titled "Doktor" in Lebanon.

In 1965, Ayla Dikmen recorded two songs: "Niksarin Fidanları," a version of the popular Turkish-Greek-Arabic song "Şinanay," and "Ay Kız Adın Yamandır," based on an Azerbaijani folk song as indicated on the record label.

The transnational musical practice of circulating (post-)Ottoman music, especially through song networks, has been portrayed for example by Pennanen with his research on the *İzmir Marşı* (2004: 15f) and more recently in some documentaries. Haig Aivazian, for instance, focuses on the legacy of Turkish-Armenian oud master Udi Hrant Kenkulian in his film *Not Every Day Is Spring* (2016). Adela Peeva's *Whose Is the Song* (2003) is a documentary about the famous tune "Üsküdar," its origins, and circulation in post-Ottoman countries. In addition, documentary films like Jumana Manna's *A Magical Substance Flows into Me* (2015) follow the same transnational perspective, in this case focusing on Levantine music from Morocco to Palestine including Kurdish music by Kurdish Jews.

As early as the 1960s and 1970s, the New York-based record label Monitor Records dedicated itself to a transnational approach to Mediterranean, Near Eastern, and Middle Eastern music with its *Music of the World* series reaching out to an audience combining listeners of 'exotic' music, music ethnologists, and a post-Ottoman diaspora in the U.S. and worldwide. Many of the series' records featured musicians and instruments from different post-Ottoman countries, playing transnationally known tunes or developing transnational versions of local tunes. *Belly Dancing for Everyone* (1975) by Chris Kalogerson & The Ensemble Sharqi, for example, incorporates a variety of Greek, Egyptian, Turkish, Roma, and Arab melodies as well as a variety of instruments from India (tabla) to Europe (violin).

Other record labels, such as Prestige's sub-label Near East, early on explicitly addressed Anatolian music as transnational. On their record *Anatolian Feast* (1962), Spero Spyros and his modern Anatolian ensemble claim in the liner notes: Spero Spyros makes music "not from any one particular group or nationality; but from the result of inter-marriage of the old cultures of Asia Minor, which is mainly Armenian, with those of Greece, Turkey, Syria and the outlying Mediterranean sector, a *mélange* of traditions which is Anatolian." Indeed, one can hear exactly this: a very enriched, transnational Anatolian style, oscillating between many musical references of Mediterranean countries, with Anatolia at its center.

The same group's *Anatolian Introduction* (1962) pushes it a bit further when addressing the question of what 'Anatolian' means in the liner notes on the sleeve: "It's a state of mind [...]"—described as a "world taking in, and paying homage to the ethnic cultures that are Lebanese, Arabic, Hellenic, Armenian and Turkish, embracing particularly [...] the Sephardic." The abandonment of a specific geographic concept in favor of a mental concept—"a state of mind"—offers a truly transnational perspective that transcends history, the changing nations, and their borders throughout the late Ottoman and post-Ottoman periods.

The recordings of Spero Spyros and his modern Anatolian ensemble refer to a non-Turkified, non-nationalized Anatolia, an Anatolia that is still pluri-ethnic or transnational, thereby negating the process of Turkification and nationalization of Anatolian music as implemented by the musical ideology of the Turkish Republic, particularly with the construction of a national repertoire of Turkish folk songs called *türkü* (see Ramm 2020: 263). Spero Spyros and his modern Anatolian ensemble reclaim a Levantine musical perspective for Anatolian music—and the result is very convincing on record.

Similarly, artists from a transnational migrant background create transnational music that incorporates Turkish music styles, thereby making it part of a transnational music. One example is Jacques Kodjian, who is of Armenian-Lebanese descent. He left Lebanon for the U.S. due to the civil war but toured worldwide. Kodjian developed a transnational music that seamlessly incorporates European classical music (with references

to Rachmaninoff and Chopin), jazz, Latin music (esp. bossa), as well as Arabic and Turkish music. His *Mélodies Arméniennes* (ca. mid-1970s) offer a representative selection of transnationally rendered Armenian music.

Another example is Ahmad Djamal ve Büyük Arabesk Orkestrası's *Arabesk 3* (1978), released by S&S/the Ezgi Plâkları label in Turkey. The record cover already visually hints to its transnational nature, showing a beach and a caravan in the desert on the front and Egyptian pyramids on the back, thus constructing a sort of imaginary 'Arabia' (fig. 9). The music brings *arabesk* to this 'Arabia,' with Ahmad Djamal playing arabesk melody lines on the guitar, decidedly in the style and sound of famous Egyptian electric guitar player Omar Khorshid. The *arabesk* melody lines pay homage to Orhan Gencebay's idea of *arabesk* as *serbest çalışma* (fantasia or freestyle) (see Tohumcu/Tohumcu/Küçükaksoy 2012: 326), combined with belly dance percussion and space age synthesizer sounds. *Arabesk* is even brought to space here. Especially "Arabî" pushes the transnational lines as far as Germany, delivering Kraftwerk-like proto-electro synthesizer sounds.



Fig. 9: Record cover (front and back) for Ahmad Djamal ve Büyük Arabesk Orkestrası, *Arabesk 3* (1978).

Yet to this day, non-Turkish people in the Mediterranean region continue to adapt Turkish folk songs. Badiâa Bouhrizi recorded her version of “Muhabatt” called داب تركي (“Dub à la Turquie”). It features on the album *KahruMusiqa* (2024), on which the queer-feminist Tunisian singer connects the song to female poets she admires and whose poems she uses as song lyrics, such as Palestinian authors Fadwa Tuqan or Salma Al Jayusi, or the Tunisian poet Nouredine Werghi. Drawing connections like these shows the potential that non-Turkish people in the Mediterranean region can see in and give music from Turkey.

The transnational perspectives, as advocated by Stokes, Gedik, or Pennanen, could be linked to the current decolonial discourse as shaped for example by Achille Mbembe. He advises for an Africa without nations and national borders, and points to nationalism as something which separates people instead of uniting them:

“Identity politics, as we know them today, is a terrible poison.
We have to speak much more about what
we have in common and less about the differences between us.
When catastrophe is taking place,
it will not make distinctions between identities”

(Häntzschel 2020).

Therefore, a transnational perspective on music historiography includes a political dimension in order to gain a better understanding of both politics and music, and their entanglement.

Perhaps it is best to conclude with a striking example of post-Ottoman, transnational music practice. *Tavernada Aşk* is the title of a LP released 1974 in Turkey by Zerrin Zeren, Rışar ve Kupa Dörtlüsü. This LP contains traditional songs from both Greece and Turkey, played by a Greek-Turkish orchestra based in Istanbul in a Balkanized, especially Romanized, style, also informed by greek *laïko* and Anatolian pop. The singer Rışar constantly changes the language in his songs, with parts sung in Turkish and others in Greek. This bilingual, border-crossing approach is extraordinary, considering the complex and problematic history of the Turkish-Greek relationship in the 20th century, with all its political tensions, marked by the 1923 so-called Turkish-Greek ‘population exchange,’ the Istanbul pogrom against Greeks in 1955, and other events in the following decades (see Sharpe 2020: 130). Despite this history, the group catered to both Greek minority and Turkish audiences in Istanbul in the early 1970s. However, by 1974, when the Cyprus crisis occurred, the band had dissolved. Thus, the record is both a document of an ongoing post-Ottoman transnational music practice and a testament to it.

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