

3. History of Anatolian Folk Music

The Quest for “National Music”: A Historical-Ethnographic Survey of New Approaches to Folk Music Research

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As a folklore historian, I had the opportunity to focus on diverse national cultures over many years. When I was writing my dissertation during the 1990s, “nationalism studies” were at its peak and it was a common tendency for many of us to study the historical structures of the nation-states in which we were born. Reading the works of Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Anthony Smith and Homi Bhabha with great enthusiasm, we were discovering how each of them contributed a new perspective to discussions on nationalism. My own primary focus in these years, was to examine the formation of a national culture from the perspective of the history of folk dances.

In time, I developed more interest on the processes of nation building and its relation to the invention of new cultural forms. There, I observed that the historical dynamics seen in the building up of folk dancing since the early Republican years bore resemblance to other cultural forms as well. As Selim Sirri Tarcan’s search for a “national dance” (*milli raks*) proved to be a quest for a national dance to be performed nationwide, many other fields such as music, theatre and architecture had similar aspirations to be national cultural forms. In recent years, I give more thoughts on the emotional historical processes of how we experience, classify, remember and transmit these national cultural forms. I want to dwell upon two basic contexts here:

1. The historical process: The discovery, invention, and interpretation of folk music in Turkey and its acknowledgement as a national genre;
2. The historical transformation of our perception of folk music, including our institutions of music and the genres and discourses produced in these institutions.

First of all, it should be underlined that the construction of national cultural forms is not a historical phenomenon specific to Turkey. The same quest for national cultural forms also existed in the European context and other neighbouring countries, such as Greece, Bulgaria, Egypt and Iran. In fact, the emergence of ethnology and folklore as new academic disciplines happened in close interaction with nationalism. Besides ancient history and regionalism, folklore has always been seen as one of the most important elements in the invention of a national culture. This approach is also evident in the Young Turks movement. Rıza Tevfik, Ziya Gökalp, Fuat Köprülü, Selim Sirri and Yusuf Akçura wrote articles on folklore and pointed

out that this field was a source of material to take advantage of. Rıza Tevfik stated that folklore may include historical information and with its strong expressive power conveys levels of encounter with it, which historical narratives are unable to provide. In his article on folklore, he chooses the folk song *Zincirli Han* as an example:

Amid these lines which seemingly are not related, are not myriad lines more implicit and more meaningful at the same time? These short five lines almost sing an epos of the events. As soon as we hear the first line, we understand that a roughneck, a young man is subject to a sorrowful accident. Presumably, he was shot and seriously wounded. As he did not die yet, he can even report the merciless: Yakup shot him! Maybe, he is his rival. However, he takes a vow: "If my wound gets healed, upon God's generosity, I shall not let this go!". The person who inferred this meaning from these lines, necessarily recreates the event and describes an image which suits both the protagonist's and Yakup's situation and reputation. One even imagines the ill-tempered grey horse tethered to the caravansarai Zincirli Han, pawing the ground impatiently and willing to see his wounded owner. Then to frame this painting and to elaborate it, he imagines Zincirli Han, the *şadırvan* (fountain) in the middle, the courtyard around it, the good old plane tree, the drinking fountain lacking a tap with its wide basin, a crowd of men in clothes proper to this view, the blacksmith's shop and, many more similar things. He imagines, invents, portrays, and creates a splendid huge picture, even if these may not have actual accuracy. So this mesmerizing effect is what we call "evocation".¹

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, folklore began to be identified as a fruitful source in the service of nationalism, and "collecting" was seen as a national mission, assigning important meaning to fieldwork in the nation building processes. "Collecting" was followed by "archiving" and by using these archived material for the construction of a new national culture. During the transitional period from the late Ottoman to the Republican context, one other attempt for "collecting" came from the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory (*Dârü'l Elhâن*). In 1924, Yusuf Ziya Demircioğlu and Musa Süreyya, directors at the Conservatory,

¹ The original quotation is as follows: "Zahiren pek ilintili görünmeyen şu dizelerin arasında nice cümleler daba saklı ve anlamlı değil midir? Şu beş küçük satır adeta olayların bir destanını söylüyor. Birinci dizeyi dinler dinlemez anlıyoruz ki bir kabadayı, bir yiğit geliyor ve teessüfü gerektiren bir kazaya maruz olmuş, galiba vurulmuş ve teblikeli bir yerinden yaralanmış... Henüz ölmemiş, hem kendisine kıyamı da biliyor. Yakup vurmuş! Belki de rakibidir. Lakin "Besa" veriyor: "Yaram iyi olursa Allah kerimdir. Ben bunu onun yanına komam!" diyor. Şu cümleler aracılığıyla bütün bu anlamları çırakın zihin, bizzarure olayı ilhya ediyor ve "musavvir-i endișe" gerek olay kalbramanının, gerekse Yakup'un durum ve ününde uygun birer çubre resmediyor. Zincirli Han'da bağlı duran kir atın bile, birçün bir sabırsızlıkla yerinde eşindiğini ve yaralı olan Ağası'nı görmek istediğini insan tasavvur ediyor. Sonra bütün bu levhaya bir çerçeveye yapıp onu süslemek için artık Zincirli Han'ı, ortasındaki şadırvanı, etrafındaki meydani, yillardan kalmış çınar ağacını, geniş yalaklı ve müslüksüz çeymesini ve bu çevreye yakışır kıyafette bir sürü adamları, nallıtan dişkânını haslı her şeyi düşünüyor. Gerçekte aslı olmasa da tabayyûl ediyor, icad ediyor, resmediyor, mükemmel bir büyük tablo yapıyor. İşte evocation denilen o bütünlüklü etki budur." The above-mentioned part of the folksong (*türkü*): "Kir atı bağladım Zincirli Han'a/ Kırk yılda bir yiğit gelmez meydana/ Doğuran anaya râmet okuna.../ Vurma Yakup vurma! Yaram derindir/ Yaram savulursa Allah kerimdir!" See Evliyaoğlu & Baykurt 1988:105-112.

sent questionnaires to researchers in Anatolia to report back about folk songs. Other institutions founded in the initial years of the Republic, such as the Turkish Folklore Association (*Halk Bilgisi Derneği*), People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) and Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*) also promoted the collecting and archiving of folk songs in their surrounding. Among these early Republican institutions, one should note the founding of Turkish Folklore Association, established in 1927. The association was the first initiative to make direct research on folklore, with an independent status of governmental organizations.² Halil Bedii Yonetken (1899-1968), one of the influential intellectuals of the early Republican era, recounted the establishment of the association via with his passion for folk music. According to this account, one day around the Süleymaniye Mosque Halil Bedii ran into the Hungarian ethnographer Dr. Mészáros, who had an effective role in founding the Ethnography Museum of Ankara:

On that day, I explained Mészáros, with all my sincerity and excitement, what I understand of Turkish National Music, and my belief in folk music. I saw that he shared my belief. When I told him it was time to gather people who shared the same ideas and to take action to found a "Turkish Folklore Association," to collect Turkish folk music and dances, Mészáros shook my hand and said, in this very moment the foundation of this association was laid down. We planned the first project there that day, and we started to search and admit members to the association. (Yonetken 1960: 2197)³

One of the first publications of the Turkish Folklore Association was *Halk Bilgisi Toplayıcılarına Rehber* (A Guide to Folklore Collectors), prepared during 1927-28 and intended to guide the way in collecting folklore. The guide followed the framework developed by European folklorists such as Arnold Van Gennep, Achille Millien and Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, and aimed to present detailed information on the scope of folklore and its diverse genres, along with its goals and methods. According to Nail Tan, the folklore genres included in the guide, the "folklor kadroları" as he puts it, covered the areas of material and oral culture, beliefs and theatrical forms as well as the domains of storytelling and musical and dance performances. Laying out a wide range of folklore genres, the guide gave a particular focus only to language, music and folk crafts. The additional information on music was prepared by Mahmut Ragıp⁴ (Tan 1988:8).

² Turkish Folklore Association held a very active position in the "collecting" of folklore, until the establishment of the People's Houses in 1932, which required all independent organizations to be abolished.

³ "O gün ben milli Türk Müziği anlayışımı, halk müziğine karşı olan inancımı bütün samimiyet ve heyecanımla Mesaroş'a anlattım. Kendisinin de aynı inançta olduğunu gördüm, o zaman, bu konuda aynı düşünceleri taşıyan insanlarla bir araya gelerek bir "Halk Bilgisi Derneği" kurmak ve Türk halk müziği ve oyunlarını toplamak hususunda harekete geçmek zamanının gelmiş ve geçmekte bulunmuş olduğunu söyleyince Mesaroş bu derneğin temelinin o saat ve o dakikada atılmış olduğunu bildirerek elimi siki. İlk projeyi o gün orada beraberce yaptıktı, sonra derneğe üye aramaya ve kaydetmeye başladık."

⁴ Mahmut Ragıp took the family name Kösemihal as his lastname in 1934, to change it to Gazimihal in the 1940s. See *Diyanet Islam Ansiklopedisi* Vol.13, p. 477.

With the founding of the People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) in 1932, the process of nation building entered into a different phase. The history and culture of Central Asian Turks, a matter which had remained in the focus during the period of the "Turkish Hearths" (*Türk Ocakları*), were now being taken under the structure of the Turkish Language Association (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) and the Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarihi Kurumu*). The duty of the construction and spreading of the new national culture, however, was given to the People's Houses, which were also organized throughout Anatolia. The main distinction of the People's Houses was their particular focus on "Anatolia" as a new cultural space. It is worth noting here that until the Republican era, "Anatolia" was not seen as a historical-geographical site *per se*. Archeologist Aslı Özyar draws attention to the problematic process of defining archaeological findings as "Anatolian civilizations," stating that the term is in fact a "Turkish invention":

By referencing the multi-layered cultural heritage of Turkey to as "Anatolian civilizations," an analogy is made to "Mesopotamian civilization," "Egypt civilization" and even "Western civilizations" on a verbal/intellectual level. In this context, the feature that literally defines "Anatolian civilizations" is that these civilizations lead their physical existence in Anatolia, almost a synonym for Turkey. In other words, while the term "Anatolian civilizations" maintains characteristics of the above-mentioned civilizations, which are unique to Anatolia, it also seemly meets the implicit demands of Turkey to become the inheritor of the cultural success of this early period. (...) Concepts such as Greek and Rome civilizations, Western civilization and Near East Civilization have been settled, accepted and confirmed inventions of the Western historical narrative for a long time. "Anatolian Civilizations", however, is an invention of the Turkish Republic (Özyar 2005:40).

Besides the cultural layers of the ancient eras, the approach of the People's Houses to Anatolian geography, now the only homeland of the Turkish Republic, was also problematic. The first thing that comes to mind is the research areas, which have been developed around the notion of "Anatolian Folklore." Localities of the early Republican era consisted of a population who had a strong experience of displacement through wars and force migrations. These localities had lost their own non-Muslim populations, while migrants coming from Caucasia, the Aegean region and the Balkans were relocated to areas very different than their own local topography.

The basic function of the People's Houses here was to collect samples from local cultures to feed the national culture, and also to present and popularize Western cultural forms within the context of the Republic's desire of Westernization. A department for Fine Arts was founded under the People's Houses in order to draw the public's attention to areas such as Western music, painting, sculpture and architecture, to promote skilled people to specialize and produce in their particular fields. The main idea was, in their own words, to create an "understanding of high art." The initial ordinances of the People's Houses had two articles about this issue, which are rather important. According to these, one of the most important tasks of the Fine Arts Department was "to help all people to learn the modern national an-

thems and songs and to make sure that they would be sung altogether during national holidays." The other one was related to a function of encouraging the collecting of folklore: "The department is charged with determining national dances as well as notations and lyrics of folk songs (*balk türküler*), as sung by the people, especially in village communities." (CHP 1935:11)

A review article on a classical music concert which had taken place in Izmir People's House in 1943, is in fact a good example of the passionate aspiration for Western music:

Abdi Aksunar was first to show up on a pea green stage, illuminated by a beautiful light behind colourful glass. When he began to play a sonata by Händel with his viola, the fingers of Salahattin Göktepe started to flutter on the piano keys like the wings of a bird. We were in a slow, solemn and reassuring rhythm. Both amateurs were in accord with each other. This harmony felt like it was not only between themselves, but also between them and the understanding or the perception of the composer. (İşıldak 1943:32)

Besides the mission to endear Western music to the people, the People's Houses hastened the collection of folk music. They hence promoted music as the representation of the new nation-state, using local – thus folk music – as the main source. However, most of the collections and publications of the People's Houses in the area of folk music were limited to transcribing the lyrics of the *türkü* genre, and only in a few exceptions their notated melodies were also published. The journal *Çoruh* published melodies of Artvin folk dances, for instance, *Fikirler* journal did so for *türkü* collections from Tire and Kozak, and *Uludağ* covered collections from Balıkesir and Bursa.⁵ Besides these collections, People's Houses journals covered topics such as the history of and theoretical approaches to music in Turkey. *Ülkü*, the prominent journal of Ankara People's House, also published review articles about the visit of Béla Bartók and his speeches as well as some proposals regarding how national music could be constructed.⁶ Additionally, *Ülkü* proposed the People's Houses should concentrate on folk and Western music rather than on classical Turkish music as performed on *ud*, *tambur* and *kanun*, associated with Ottoman ways of entertainment.⁷ The articles of Mahmut Ragıp Kösemihal which were published in *Yeni Türk* in Istanbul, offered a comparative perspective to local music traditions in Turkey with those of other countries. Kösemihal regarded the People's Houses as "local conservatories" and emphasized that both music competitions and radio broadcasts would have an important role in the development of music.⁸ The People's Houses journals also covered portraits of musicians. For ex-

⁵ See "Çoruh'un Milli Oyunlarından Sarı Çiçek," and "Deli Horon," *Çoruh*, April 1938, vol. 1, issue 2, 8-9; "Ata Bari," August 1938, vol. 1, issue 4, 37; *Fikirler* 1939, issue 182, 12 and 1942, issue 234, 6; *Uludağ* 1940, issue 27, 35 and issue 28, 25.

⁶ See Tarcan 1935, Salıcı 1938.

⁷ See "Fasıl Musikisi Hakkında Bir Cevap," *Ülkü*, July 1941, issue 101, 468-469.

⁸ See Gazimihal / Kösemihal 1938b. For studies on regional music by the same author see "Artvin ve Kars Havalisi Müzik Folkloru Hakkında," *Yeni Türk*, 1938, issue 67, 253-255

ample, in an article published in *Ün*, Isparta People's House journal, the biography of a local musician named Çopur Ali and its relation to his songs was narrated. *Taşpınar*, Afyon People's House journal, published photographs of the folk music collection committees.⁹

A similar approach to music could be observed in the circles of the Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*). Mahmut Makal, the reputed novelist trained in Village Institutes, wrote in his memoir how dancing and singing folk songs collectively in their morning ritual created a special bond among the students:

Daily life in the Village Institutes used to begin with wake-up drums during red dawn. It was all the same whether it was hot or cold, winter or summer. As people would wake and mingle in the open field, the day would turn into *halay* and *türkü*. The sound of mandolin and accordion would resonate across the mountain and a circle of a thousand people would start to perform a *halay* dance with “hey, hey” utterances, as if they were one foot and one arm. During this process which was the true education of the spirit and the body, from Sivas *ağırlaması* and Tatar *kirması* to *harmandalı* and *bengi*, every dance you can think of would be performed. Eventually, everyone would gather in the vast fields and the departure for their work places or schools would start. (Makal 2009)

Be it within the context of the People's Houses or in the Village Institutes, the Republican regime adopted until the 1970s a strategy of detaching Anatolian geography from its historical demography, to reconstruct an imagined Anatolian culture. Historically speaking, similar music genres sung in different languages existed in Anatolia. These were discarded when national folk music collections were made and archives were compiled through the nation building era. For several generations of the Republican era, people in general believed that *saz* is exclusively a Turkish instrument, and that the minstrel (*aşık*) literature was entirely an element of the Turkish culture. This is why a familiar folk melody sung in a different language, would surprise them. Many would associate themselves with Karacaoğlan, but would have no idea of his contemporary Sayad Nova.

As the People's Houses were closed in 1951, many cultural activities which were performed under their roof were taken up by other institutions founded during the Republican period.

The most basic type of ceremony that the People's Houses had created was the “müsamere” (a ceremonial entertainment), which became the most effective cultural form re-created and presented to the public by national education institutions. A significant shift in the field of music, specifically in that of folk music happened via radio. The latter, which had been a state monopoly since 1926, featured many *türküs* collected during the People's Houses era, in its choir *Yurttan Sesler* (“Voices from the homeland”). The approach of *Yurttan Sesler* is the most obvious example for the re-invention and performance as a “local richness and diversity”, as one form of the new concept of “Anatolian Culture” during the Republican era. The

⁹ See Demirdal, Sait 1943, “Çopur Ali,” *Ün*, issue 106, 1479-1481. See also “Mahalli halk türkülerini toplama komitemiz çalışırken,” (1937).

concept of "richness" was assigned more to different localities than different ethnic communities.

Another manifestation of the Republic's aspiration for Westernization was the interpretation of the Western music with folkloric melodic themes. In Turkey, folk music which represented an important aspect of the quest for "national music", was also seen as an important source in the Republican approach towards classical Western music. The compositions by the Turkish Fives (*Türk Beşleri*) who re-interpreted certain folk songs were pioneering examples of this quest. However, like in the example of "national dance" type of Sırı Tarcan, it is hardly possible to say the Western music with folkloric melodies was accepted as successfully as it was imagined in the early Republican era.

What happened in this historical process that took us to the 1950s and 1960s? What was settled and which cultural patterns and approaches came out? The institutions for national education played here an effective role. The compulsory primary education made a great impact on the homogenization of Turkish language, the internalization of Western musical education, putting flute and mandolin in the classrooms, and thus on the process of getting people used to hear orchestral and chorale folk songs with "reduced dialect." These songs were broadcasted nationwide through the radios. The fact that the Republican regime defined localities not on the basis of their ethnic communities but through the new provincial (*il*) administrative system, allowed also all ethnic associations and their linguistic implications to disappear.¹⁰ This way, there emerged a new sense of regionalization, where singers like İzzet Altınmeşe, Ümit Tekcan, Özay Gönlüm were popularized with the help of the radio, and happened to be identified with particular regions (Eastern Anatolia, Black Sea and the Aegean). The 1970s where the Marxist movement domineered can be seen as a breaking point. This movement promoted folklore and folk culture as a universalist rather than a nationalist perspective, and many cloaked identities such as Alevism, Kurdishness, being an Armenian or a refugee (*muhacir*), found their ways to express themselves in this protest culture. The visibility of the Kurdish issue that was sustained with the domestic migration, re-introduced the identity problem after the 1980s as a discussion area which could not be ignored be anymore. In the 1990s, so to speak, the Pandora's Box was opened. And what had come up from that box, was not only the ethnic or religious identity issues, but also the feminist movement and the lost memories of non-Muslims showed up, which began with nostalgia of old Istanbul (Gürbilek 1992). These years also witnessed an increase on the publication and communication on these issues. Since the late 1990s with the Turkish-Greek rapprochement and in the 2000s with increasing exchange programs like the Erasmus, a new generation of researchers were raised. Among these, there are many young researchers

¹⁰ For example, Tirebolu and Espiye which had completely different identities during the Ottoman period, became parts of the same province during the republican period.

in the field of music: Melissa Bilal, Merih Erol, Seren Akyoldaş, Burcu Yıldız, Altuğ Yılmaz studied the music of the Ottoman period in different cultural aspects.¹¹ We should also not ignore the transformation of the social sciences, caused by studies on nationalism which had begun in the 1980s, and the paradigm shift brought about by these to historical writing.

Within this context, what we call “Ottoman music” today covers a much wider world. As new researchers are working in Asia Minor Center archives in Greece, in the archives of the National Academy of Armenia in Yerevan, or doing ethnographic research on the Kurdish “*dengbêj*” tradition in the South-East, the study of folk music is extending beyond the paradigm of national culture. When one explores the journey of folk music through Republican institutions, it is important to mark the increasing role of Turkish Music Conservatories.

Over the last 20 years, the communication of music has also changed. While during the early Republican years Western music was just an aspiration, over the time, it transformed into a creative platform where folk music could be re-interpreted. When we listen to “*Uzun İnce Bir Yoldayım*” by Pentagram, “*Hey Onbeşli Onbeşli*” by Handan Aydin, “*Demedim mi*” of Pir Sultan Abdal by Hayko Cepkin, it is possible to understand this new platform. Listening to Aytekin Ataş or Toygar Işıkçı, the stars of the soundtracks for Turkish television series, their musical domain carries the traces of the folk and classical Turkish music while at the same time it is “new” and “western”. Similarly “*Mecnunum Leyla’mı Gördüm*” sung by Seren Akyoldaş and her *Cazova* band in a jazz club, now, feels like our music, as well.

To conclude, let us draw attention on how we re-interpret folk music with its different versions in new genres. In the 1970s the singing of an Alevi *deyiş*, the Köroğlu epic, or a leftist political song could happen in the same cultural sphere. Today, we see that the *türkü* genre, touching to Turkish sensibilities, is used in different cultural forms. We can refer to this as the construction of wholly new genres, or as the transition of folk culture into new cultural forms. For some time many television series featured popular singers in the main roles, in order to increase their ratings. In recent times, Beren Saat and Engin Akyürek sang “*Evlerinin Önü Mersin*” in “*Fatmagül’ün Suçu Ne*” (What is the guilt of Fatmagül) and Meryem Uzerli sang lullabies with her own voice in “*Muhteşem Yüzyıl*” (The Magnificent Century). Likewise, in “*Kuzey-Güney*” (“North-South”), Kivanç Tatlıtuğ took his *saz*, playing it and singing at the same time. *Türkü* as a part of prison culture, *türkü* as the sound of unspoken love, *türkü* in a jazz club, *türkü* in the “*Rock & Coke*” festival... These new fields are outgrowing the old paradigms and entail new approaches within the frame of performance theory.

¹¹ Bilal 2004; Erol 2009; Akyoldaş 2010; Yılmaz & Kerovpyan 2011; Yıldız 2012.