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TURKISH POP MUSIC IMAGES.

THE MUSIC AND ITS COMMUNICATION DESIGN:

RECORD COVERS,
PHOTOS & POSTERS & ADS
IN MAGAZINES,
CINEMA POSTERS,
MUSIC PERFORMANCES
IN FILMS & CLIPS

FROM THE 1960s
TO THE EARLY 1980s

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This text gives a preliminary insight into a research project on Turkish pop music images, more precisely on Turkish pop music of the 1960s up to the early 1980s, also called *Anadolu pop* or Anatolian rock, and its visualization.¹

A Trouvaille and *Lisesi* Music Group Culture

We would like to introduce our topic by presenting a trouvaille that we owe to Ercan Demirel from Ironhand Records: A video version of “Fidayda” produced by TRT, the Turkish Radio and Television Company, in 1979.² The visual side is realized through dance in film by a high school band from the Kadıköy Anadolu Lisesi, presenting their version of the Turkish folk song “Fidayda.” This TV video is a multi-faceted hybrid, combining rurality and urbanity, East and West,³ folk and rock, acoustic and electric, tradition and modernity—all this by musically mixing a traditional *türkü* tune, “Fidayda,” with modern Western electric instruments and electronic sound effects like distortion, and by combining an Anatolian dance style and rural costumes with Western modern dance and an element of socialist popular dance. You will not easily find a comparable audiovisual combination in any other country at the time.

The fundament for the TV video is the *lisesi* [high school] music group culture. While Western education was still banning pop music from schools, because more conservatives claimed it will degenerate the youth, Turkey was encouraging pop music in education from scratch, including teen girl bands, children’s bands, and even baby bands. Comprehending pop music in education was supported with very popular, nationwide contests like the Hürriyet Golden Microphone contest (1965–68), aiming also at High School Bands, and the Milliyet Inter-High School Music Contest (1967–2000). An example for the integration of children into adult pop groups gives Beybonlar whose drummer was 12-year-old Sefa Ulaştır (Schnell 2022).

The fact is: Pop music in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s was different from pop music in other countries and enjoying a much better status in certain parts of society than it did in the Western world. Yet, it was also different from other non-Western hybrid pop music because of the strong Turkish

Unless stated otherwise, all online sources in this text were accessed on April 29, 2026.

1 See also <http://turkish-pop-music-images.org>.

2 Fidayda, Kadıköy Anadolu Lisesi, dir.: N.N., Turkey: TRT, 1979.

According to an interview conducted on April 18, 2019 at Istanbul ITU with one of the dancers, Mine Daldal, there have been involved as musicians: Aydın Esin (arrangement), Mithat Kiliç (piano), Önder Şahin (drums), Erhan Asker (bass), Göksel N.N. (guitar), Fatih Okan (guitar); and as dancers: Mine Tali Daldal, Arzu Ayday, Dilek Altun, Sevtap Arslan, Gaye N.N.; choreography by Rana Evcim O'Brien; costume design by Bilun Kefeli. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIbmivNTVI&t=131s>.

3 For a more thorough discussion of the concepts of ‘East’ and ‘West’ in this context, see Lund 2026/2020: 145.

element in it. Joobin Bekhrad states: “[...] on the hard rock, psych, and folk songs of the era, this strong Turkish element and flavour is also prevalent, taking the numbers beyond the simple adaptation and translation of Western music for Eastern audiences” (Bekhrad 2014).

Hence, our basic questions would be: Is there a different visual communication for this kind of music, too? If so, how does it look like and is there something special about it? And how is it related to the music? Can one get a better understanding of the music through its visual communication as part of the pop context?

Going Visual to Reach Out to the Audience

Outside of Western pop music, Turkey had one of the largest and strongest independent music industries with a stable market of its own, with more than 100 Turkish record companies in the 1970s (see Greve 2003: 77; Ergun 2018: 84), and millions of Turkish records sold. This industry also produced several music magazines, starting with *Caz* and *Swing* in the 1940s, continuing with *Caz Ekspres* in the late 1950s, *Melodi* and *Diskotek* in the 1960s, and, most prominently, in the 1970s with *Hey* as the only non-Western weekly pop music magazine.⁴ *Hey* appeared for over two decades, featuring many more Turkish than Western artists, at least in the 1970s.

Many of these artists were male, and male-dominated pop music history writing tends to overlook an essential fact: “It was women who created the sound of the era in terms of quantity and often quality,” as Binicewicz (2017) points out—with outstanding singers like Esin Afşar, Ayla Algan, Melike Demirağ, Nükheth Duru, Esmeray, Hümeýra, Neşe and her sister Gülden Karaböcek, Yasemin Kumral, Ajda and Semiramis Pekkan, Şenay, Tülay Özer, just to name a few (see Binicewicz 2018 and 2023). Hence, our focus will also be on the female side of Turkish pop music images. Moreover, current research into Turkish pop music defines the origins of *Anadolu pop* more and more as female, with *kanto* and its female singers, and especially with the 1964 song “Burçak Tarlası” by female singer Tülay German, the first pop-westernized *türkü*, which created the basic formula for *Anadolu pop* (see Karahasanoğlu/Skoog 2009: 59; Meriç 2018; Baysal 2018: 207).

Over the last few years, and with the help of many friends from Turkey, we have been able to establish a collection of original Turkish records (and their covers), a collection of original *Hey* magazines, and a collection of digital copies of Turkish films and clips.

4 It is important to note that other non-Western music magazines were in circulation at that time; for example, the *Utusan Radio Dan* TV magazine in Malaysia, which was published on a monthly basis.

According to Selçuk Artut (see Spicer 2018: 245), there is no archive culture in Turkey for pop music history. Therefore, the music is not very well known anymore, not even in Turkey. Daniel Spicer recently noted: "Whereas, in the West, rock superstars of that era had been canonized, their musical legacies kept alive by endless hyperbole and mythologizing, Turkish rock pioneers were all but forgotten" (Spicer 2018: 244). Why is that? According to Ergin Bener, the coup in "1980 was a disaster—musically, politically, culturally [...] What happened in 1980 was like cutting down all trees in the forest" (Bener quoted in Spicer 2018: 230f). So, the coup de-historicized Turkey.

Our multimedia archive serves as fundament and starting point for future research, but also for aesthetic transformation: instead of just researching and reproducing the visual and audiovisual material, we want designers and artists to reinterpret it, not with a nostalgic or retromaniac touch, but with a contemporary approach, following, as Binicewicz puts it, constant remixing as "a sort of leitmotif in Turkish culture" (Binicewicz 2016) and bearing in mind present gender and political issues. This reinterpretation will be a central part of the project and define its outcome in publications and exhibitions. First examples of such reinterpretations are the digital collages on the project website and the short cut-up video *Boş Sokak. Female Turkish Music Cinema* (2019) by Aslı Serbest and Mona Mahall, based on snippets from music clips extracted from films or from stand-alone music clips.⁵

What Kind of Music Is *Anadolu Pop*?

Let us go back one step: What kind of music is *Anadolu pop* or Anatolian rock, as it is called as well? Back in 1972, Cahit Berkay (of the Anatolian rock group Moğollar) presented a still useful definition: "Anadolu Pop is a style that combines Turkish folkloric themes, instruments and poems with the electronic capabilities and the systems of pop music" (quoted in Baysal 2018: 216): It is a hybrid and experimental music, everyone in literature agrees—yet at present under reconsideration, as the title of Ozan Baysal's recent text, "Reconsidering 'Anadolu Pop'" (2018), suggests. Under reconsideration not only regarding its female origins and dimensions, but also regarding its hybrid character that can be described from three different perspectives:

⁵ See <http://turkish-pop-music-images.org> and <https://vimeo.com/341231294>. Since this text was first published in 2019, the project has evolved, shifting its focus from artistic and curatorial research to lecture performances and academic writing (see e.g. Lund/Lund/Yanikkaya/Zöllner 2026/2023).

1. *The Westernization of Anatolian music by pop-rock means, resulting in Anadolu pop*

This perspective can be traced back to Ziya Gökalp, the leading thinker of Turkism, who advocated the Westernization of Anatolian folk music in the frame of the central republican project of nation-building in the early 20th century (see Lund 2026/2013).

In 1947, Marshall Plan funds were established for Turkey. In line with these economic and political measures, a cultural development took place: Westernization in an American way, which the historian Erik Zürcher sums up as follows: "The 1950s saw the emergence of a modern, American oriented lifestyle among the urban bourgeoisie. Its members embraced consumerism. The Epicenter of this new lifestyle was the hypermodern Hilton Hotel [...] which opened 1955" (Zürcher 2017: 231–232). But we should not forget: The Hilton Hotel is one thing, but the ploughing peasants that photos from the late 1950s show right in front of it, are part of the same reality. This gives evidence, that a rural-agrarian and an urban society existed side by side, creating a sort of 'rurbanism,' a mixture of rurality and urbanity.

2. *Turkification of Western pop by Anatolian music, resulting in Anadolu pop*

This perspective can also be seen as related to Ziya Gökalp, and it remained relevant until the anti-imperialistic Left-Nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s, which opposed all dependence on foreign countries, namely the U.S., and focused on the culture of Anatolia.

Antoine Remise reversed the perspective of simple Westernization when he wrote:

"In a way, 'Anatolian Rock' was more an easternization of Turkish music trends than the westernization that is usually discussed.

The bands and artists started to copy less and less their Anglo-Saxon models and developed their own genre. The audience's response was huge; their amazing and unique [Anatolian] melodies had a fresh energy that touched the hearts and minds of many who wanted to be a part of the bigger modern world whilst enjoying their Turkish identity" (Remise 2014).

He shows that Anatolian rock can be understood in a more complex way, twisting the hierarchy of adopting entity and entity adopted. Yet, when writing about 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. *The 'in-between perspective' on Anadolu pop*

This perspective is related to many of the musicians and to a central part of their audience: the Turkish middle class college youth. Baysal writes: "Many of them attended Western-oriented [...] high schools and/or universities" (Baysal 2018: 207). But they kept a double distance, "from both the Western world and from traditional Anatolia." He continues: "It was being in such an 'in-between' state [...] that made their innovative experimentations possible" (ibid.; see also Noyan 2008: 19), taking elements from both, East and West, to form something in-between: *Anadolu pop*, which, according to Baysal, was an experimental way of "harmonizing [or at least: trying to harmonize] various fields—including national ideology, local culture, international counterculture, and the modern world" (Baysal 2018: 216).

The three perspectives—Westernization, Easternization and 'in-between'—are, depending on the point of view, very present in the visualization of *Anadolu pop* and lead to a specific 'rurbanism,' which can be observed on record covers and *Hey* magazine photos quite often. Rural outfits are juxtaposed to and mixed with an urban outfit to provide hybrid *Anadolu pop* outfits.⁶ This kind of 'rurbanism' can as well be produced by the combination of a rural landscape and a rural activity with a Western urban outfit, or the rural-urban electrified saz appears as a symbol of 'rurbanism,' as it happens in many cases.

Music and Inner-Turkish Migration: 'Rurbanism' and Identity Building in Music

Banu Çiçek Tülü analyses this situation as follows: Turkey's history is marked by migration. Starting from the 1950s, there has been massive domestic migration from rural areas to big cities, especially Istanbul.

According to the social scientist and urban planner İlhan Tekeli, the Turkish Republic's process of modernization was a "top down" process. The idea of "for the public, despite the public" characterized the authoritarian regime and policy, which aimed at homogenizing the country (Tekeli 2009).

The first problem was that people from rural areas were considered as outsiders in the city where elitism dominated the cultural scene. Consequently, the two hybrid music mixtures, *arabesk* and *Anadolu rock*, became the voice of the 'other.' The people moving to the big cities created their own living spaces, the so-called *gecekondu*, trying to hold on to their former life. While this migration drastically changed the urban topography, it also brought different cultures together. Despite of being all new to the big

6 For a quick first impression please check the pages from *Hey* magazine displayed on the project website: <http://turkish-pop-music-images.org>.

cities, the newcomers came with their heterogeneous cultures—and this made *arabesk* more than a cultural mixture in music. They turned it into a manifestation of their identity as the result of social chance. This 'identity music' tried to urbanize and centralize itself.

Kenan Behzat Sharpe points to other elements involved:

"As the politics of the Turkish left became increasingly militant after 1968, [...] activists began heavily emphasizing the [rural] culture of Anatolia. Selda and others began to move from a psychedelic-folk fusion to unambiguous folk revival. Urban activists from Istanbul and Ankara cut their long hair short, tore through the 'village novels' of socialist realist writers, and attempted to organize the peasantry. With the *bağlama* in one hand and rifle in the other, they struggled for a completely independent Turkey. Nationalism, highly selective reinterpretation of the Turkish independence movement, and investment in the historical continuity of 'the people' shaped the content and form of revolutionary art in the period" (Sharpe 2018: 174).

Daniel Spicer follows this track: Musicians "were beginning to consider themselves as much revolutionaries as artists" (Spicer 2018: 78). He remarks about Barış Manço's album 2023 that the record praises a rural Arcadian brotherhood, a semi-socialist "idealized, rural society" (ibid.: 158). He continues about Selda Bağcan's music: "Her interpretations of folk tunes were perceived as protest songs, using timeless resonances to cast an allusive and critical eye over the socio-political situation in modern Turkey" (ibid.). Here, folk music was used as a legitimized and securing tradition enabling protest. Selda said herself that "the people who said they hated my songs did listen to me, in secret, because I do my own country's folk music, the cultural music, the roots" (quoted in Spicer 2018: 160).

Meral Akkent brings another notion to the table, combining urban gender issues and rurality: "In 1970s [urban] *female* performers discovered self-confident statements of rural women in traditional songs and interpreted these songs in their albums. To what extent these wise recommendations of the older women in these songs are in place" (Akkent 2018) is demonstrated by a number of songs. One example is Neşe Karaböcek's "Demiyyom mu?" In this very old traditional song from Anatolia "an experienced woman clearly tries to encourage a younger one to shape her own life and not to waste time with unreliable men who only consume the vital energy of a woman" (ibid.).

Summarizing the thoughts of Tülü, Sharpe, Spicer, and Akkent, one can come to the conclusion that the rural and the urban are interwoven in a complex, even contradictory way. The outcome is a 'rurbanism' characterized by the following key elements: a rural-to-urban migration, an urban left-winged nationalism focusing on the rural, an Arcadian, anti-imperialistic, revolutionary ruralism plus female empowerment. The pop music images produced just show this complexity: they are mixing the rural with the urban, by tying the urban back to the rural as well as by urbanizing the rural.

The Flexi-Image

Like 'rurbanism,' there is another central feature of Turkish pop music images on the level of their visual structures, which we would like to call the 'flexi-image.'

Nazlı Eda Noyan has researched the Yeşilçam melodrama and its film posters and writes about the flexi-film and flexi-poster: "[...], a film and its poster differ in Turkey from region to region in terms of content and marketing techniques [...]", "the film endings and the posters would [even] differ from district to district in Istanbul [...]" (Noyan 2008: 11). Citing Ağâh Özgüç, she continues: "As Özgüç notes (1985), 'the theatre owners of Anatolian cities warned the producers that they would reject their films unless they had belly dance in them'" (ibid.). Films were also produced with different endings according to a regional male or female audience (ibid.). In music, this corresponds to a sort of flexi-music that Baysal was referring to when he said "that artists/bands would often experiment with different musical aspects in each of their recordings" (Baysal 2018: 209). It also corresponds to flexi-covers. For example, the singer Selma İstanbullu changes her style and appearance with every cover, yet the heavy electronic Anatolian funk style of the songs is not present in any of the different covers.⁷ Sometimes even one and the same song gets different record covers, as one and the same film gets different posters.

A prime example for the flexi-image is Barış Manço's album *2023*: We can discern a socialist textual message (the brotherhood) and a progressive Turko-futurism in sound here (using the latest synthesizers). Then, the record cover features a Western modernist electric guitar hero, Ottoman fashion with a nationalist touch, and a hippie style with long hair, alongside progressive rock graphics.⁸ It is, as Spicer (2018: 137) remarks, highly ambivalent and complex, containing everything: left-wing and right-wing, progressive and backward positions.

Why is that so? Maybe it serves a communication that aims at different, heterogeneous target groups, mixed like the audience in the *gazino*⁹, sending references in every direction to maximize the audience? Or is it to cover musical experiments by visual means, balancing the experiments by pointing to various directions? More research has to be done on this subject. And we would like to invite everyone to support us with material and thoughts—any kind of help is much appreciated.

7 See some of Selma İstanbullu's record covers:

<https://www.discogs.com/artist/4140098-Selma-Istanbullu>.

8 For the record cover and the artwork of Barış Manço's *2023*,

see <https://www.discogs.com/release/1758454-2023/images>.

9 Thanks for this hint to Erbatur Çavuşoğlu from Lefter Records (personal conversation, April 2017).

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