

# Performing Trauma in Privileged Spaces: Empowering Turkish Women's Voices of the Past

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**Abstract:** *'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar', ('They Put Red Henna on My Hands')* is a well-known twentieth century Turkish folk song, portraying the voice of a young girl forced to be married against her will. It is mainly performed at a women's henna night ritual that occurs at the home of a bride's parents before the wedding ceremony. This rite of passage is symbolic of the transition into womanhood, with the loss of virginity and the song acts as a warning to the trials and tribulations of marital woes that reside in the collective memory of Turkish women. As a Turkish female composer, choosing to perform this piece outside of the Turkish community, I bring the role of women as important tradition bearers to the forefront and also contribute to raising awareness of the global issue of child marriage. By performing this piece in the privileged spaces of academia, I give voice to underprivileged traditional folk singers of the past who were also survivors of childhood trauma. This chapter reflects upon my leadership role as a female performer/researcher, engaging with this challenging subject in an intercultural context. I discuss my position as leader of the collaborative and exploratory creative process with North American instrumentalists whereby the emotional and musical elements of the piece are intertwined, mirroring its sadness using the Hüseyini mode with descending glissandos and tremolos. I analyze the function of the piece within this new performance space from historical, musicological, and social perspectives. Finally, I also examine different participatory roles of women past and present as the creators of the music, based on multi-cultural contexts of the university and communities in Calgary (Alberta, Canada).

**Keywords:** *child marriage, Turkish folk song, intercultural, music-making, improvisation.*

'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' ('They Put Red Henna on My Hands') is a well-known twentieth century Turkish folk song, portraying the voice of a young girl forced to be married against her will. The piece carries a message that plays a significant role within traditional Turkish culture. It tells the story of the little girl's disappointment with her own family and her helpless condition:

They put red henna on my hands,  
My fate is doomed, they sold me to a place far from here

I was only twelve when they made me a bride  
I cry, and I cry, and I wipe my tears away...

This piece was introduced to me by an instructor in Turkish Folk Music at Ege University in Izmir, Türkiye.<sup>1</sup> The melody of this song was skillfully structured: the changes in expressions and melodic contour reflect the narrator's desperation in a simple yet intriguing way.

The content of 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' deals with the issue of child marriage. In this chapter I analyze the piece from musical and cultural aspects, using it to demonstrate intergenerational impacts of trauma through musical engagement – empowering women's voices of the past by connecting to them in the present in an intercultural medium.

## Representations of Female Trauma in Early Marriages

I grew up with my grandmother, Zarife, who lived from 1933 until 2004. She told my brother and I many stories about what she witnessed during the Dersim massacre<sup>2</sup> and WWII, which brought hunger, poverty, and cruelty to her village. She was forcibly married around the age of twelve to a much older man. Zarife's strength was clear from her narrative:

I was playing outside with my friends, then he took me away, I did not want him. He was old and he hurt me. Even after I had a baby, I did not realize that I was a mother and a wife. I never loved him. I would just try to sneak out and play with other kids while holding my own baby. Eventually, I escaped from him to another village. I refused to cry because of my abusive husband, but I did cry for the child who I left behind, and never saw again.

There are many similar stories within the Turkish media addressing the issue of domestic violence, trauma, and femicide caused by early marriages. In 2014, the independent online publication T24 (Yur 2014) interviewed five survivors of child marriage. During the interview, one woman said, "I slept with my mother-in-law for three to four years, because I was given to a much older man when I was only eleven".

Most of these stories share a similar background: a violent, unloving father, an uneducated and powerless mother, followed by shame, blame and further violence by the in-laws and spouse. However, there are many instances where child marriage survivors helped their daughters break the cycle of violence. Likewise, Zarife, as a survivor of child marriage, faced and overcame many difficulties in her life. Despite her humble beginnings, she became a midwife, a naturopath, and a mother again. Finally, she became a

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- 1 I use the name Türkiye instead of Turkey because this is the Turkish name of the country and its official name, also approved by NATO. Turkey is its name in English, often confused with the fowl.
  - 2 My grandmother told us about the horrors she witnessed at the Dersim massacre (1937–1938). She vividly remembered bombings and attacks to her village. For more on the Dersim Massacre please see Çelik 2019: 65–75.

role model for me – because she never gave up and strived to do her best, even in the worst circumstances.

The global humanitarian organization Plan International Canada (2019) stated on its website that “Child marriage is a global issue, and no country, religion or culture is immune”.<sup>3</sup> Factually, nearly every two seconds, a girl under eighteen is getting married somewhere in the world. Research by Nawal Nour (2009) shows that 50% of married girls in Kenya are more likely to contract HIV than unmarried ones. This number is even higher in Zambia and Uganda. Furthermore, girls between the ages of ten and fourteen are five to seven times more likely to die during childbirth than those fifteen to nineteen. As data from UNICEF show, this issue occurs in every country, regardless of the GDP.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the rising average age of marriage, child marriage<sup>5</sup> remains an ongoing challenge in Türkiye. Children between sixteen and seventeen are allowed to legally get married under the supervision of a legal guardian's consent until the age of fifteen.<sup>6</sup> A common issue is the falsification of official birth certificates to legalize underage marriages. Statistically, women from less educated and low-income families are victimized through early marriages, arranged by their own families and are generally at increased risk of femicide. The Turkish National Police Academy Journal published a detailed report comparing Turkish and world femicide rates between 2016 and 2018. Their data revealed that in total, 928 femicides occurred between 2016 and 2018; furthermore, of these, 8.6% of them were under 17 years of age.<sup>7</sup>

Although the issue of child marriage is well-known in Türkiye, there is minimal engagement with this subject in visual arts and music. An important song on this subject was released by one of the Turkish most popular musician and singer, Sezen Aksu, in 1986. The song ‘Ünzile’<sup>8</sup> (A Turkish name for a woman) was written by Aysel Gürel and composed by Onno Tunç. It tells the story of a little girl being forcibly married and facing domestic violence. Sezen Aksu explains the story of how this song was written by Aysel Gürel in one of her concerts:

In 1962, Aysel Gürel was touring Anatolia with Münir Özkul. They visited all villages and cities. At some point, they came across a father and his eleven-year-old daughter in

3 For more information please visit, Plan International Canada, <https://plancanada.ca/child-marriage> (accessed 17 February 2022).

4 <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/fight-continues-end-child-marriage-us/38893> (accessed 27 February 2022).

5 Another term we could use instead of child marriage is juvenile marriage. Aktepe and Atay (2017: 410–411) suggest using the term juvenile marriage to avoid the confusion with the term child bride. However, in reality the girls should not be seen as brides, as they are victims of this tradition. Throughout this chapter, I will use mostly the term child marriage since there are more publications and information related to this term.

6 See <http://www.eskisehirbarosu.org.tr/haber/basina-ve-kamuoyuna-28052021> (accessed 2 March 2022).

7 Taştan and Küçüker (2019). More information regarding recent femicides can be found on “We Will Stop Femicides Platform”: <http://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net/veriler/3008/we-will-stop-femicides-platform-january-2022-report> (accessed 2 March 2022).

8 Sezen Aksu, ‘Sezen Aksu – Ünzile’ (Official Audio), published on *YouTube*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXpgWAZHVI> (accessed 21 May 2022).

one of the villages of Denizli. When recounting the story of this song to me, Aysel portrayed this little girl as a character in a poem with the words, “She was like a blonde tear drop with corn braided hair, standing next to her father like a weak leaf (*saz*)”. Then she went on to recall the words of the girl’s father who said, “We will marry her off in a week”. Deeply saddened after hearing these words, Aysel Gürel asked the father “But why, she is just a child?” The father answered happily, saying “we are marrying her, that’s how”. The name of the song is Ünzile because that was the girl’s name.<sup>9</sup>

Both these songs are about child marriage and originated in the Denizli/Acıpayam region in Türkiye.<sup>10</sup> ‘Ünzile’ became so successful that other male and female musicians interpreted their own versions of this piece. The music video of this song was planned as a social awareness project and staged to portray the desperate condition of little girls who are victims of this tradition.

There is too little discussion of child marriage in the literature of musicology, likely because the subject is seen as too emotionally nuanced for the musical medium. Engagement with this topic is necessary, however, and one must approach the conversation from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. Most recently, researcher Ecem Köklükaya (2019) and Savaş Yavuz (2019) discussed the topic of child marriage and bride exchange in Türkiye, using the perspective of visual arts. Both researchers aimed to give social messages through documentary cinema and animated graphics. There were overlapping aspects in these three projects, as well as disparities in our respective approaches. Köklükaya undertook this discussion through individual creation, whereas Yavuz analyzed a documentary<sup>11</sup> about child marriage, largely using concepts of mass media. My method combined multiple musical approaches to create intercultural collaborative works, which did not solely rely on single composer/creator. During this study, I aimed to connect both privileged and underprivileged communities of all ages to raise awareness on the issue of child marriage. In addition to public concerts and conference presentations, our performances are available on online platforms with the goals of wider dissemination and audience engagement.<sup>12</sup>

9 Televizyon Arşivi, “Sezen Aksu Ünzile Şarkısının Hikayesini Anlatıyor (Aysel Gürel İçerir)” published on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZMl3jrfSzw>, I translated this story from Turkish to English the following YouTube video of Sezen Aksu’s account (accessed 20 May 2022).

10 I recently contacted musicians from the Denizli/Acıpayam region via social media to confirm my findings. They informed me that the piece is old-fashioned and used to be performed more frequently during henna nights. It is still being performed; however, today most brides prefer popular henna songs.

11 Savaş Yavuz (2019) analyzes a documentary by Muhammed Beyazdağ called *Zarok*.

12 Please see Gjuka 2019 for Sofra Ensemble music performances.

## Exploring Trauma through Music

The term trauma<sup>13</sup> refers to physical and psychological responses to traumatic events such as sexual assault, natural disasters, violence, serious accidents, injuries, and illnesses. Child marriage is a traumatic experience causing personal, but also cultural and intergenerational inherited problems. Journalist and researcher Tori DeAngelis (2019) stresses that most trauma survivors and their children suffer from anxiety, depression, and PTSD. 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar', thus becomes a collectively shared cultural memory. As portrayed in the song, the impact of this traumatic event was memorialized by Turkish women throughout several generations. Furthermore, this cultural memory became amplified when performed in an intercultural setting and is experienced second-hand by musicians and the audience. My role as a Turkish woman, researcher and musician in this study led me to connect to women of the past.

Understanding my unconscious choice of 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' for this research project was an immense relief on a personal and intellectual level as it helped begin the process of personal/familial healing from intergenerational trauma. In addition to its specific musical features (which was the rationale for choosing this piece) I also imagined the narrator as a young version of my grandmother. My work is unique as it sensitively engages with the topic of child marriage, and uses analytical and musical research methods. The platform I created explores collaborative music-making process within its difficult content. Written songs focusing on the issue of child marriage do exist within Turkish culture.<sup>14</sup> One can also find analyses of representations of women in Turkish folk songs.<sup>15</sup> However, research on child marriage in Turkish music, its intergenerational impact, and psychosocial implications is still a young topic.<sup>16</sup>

Most folk songs carry real-life stories and memories, which could help future generations learn about their history and prevent traumatic events from repeating and healing from generational traumas. They can also exist as acts of rebellion against authority. Anthropologist Tok Thompson claims: "Our cultural and collective memory is shaped through folk stories like mythology and legends".<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, anthropologist David Berliner (2005: 200) mentions that the concept of memory mostly presents the "social remembering of precise historical and sometimes traumatic events and experiences". In terms of social and collective memory, 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar', acts as a warning. It is performed at Turkish schools, concerts,

13 For more about the term and concept of intergenerational trauma please see Greenwalt 2005, and Weathers and Keane 2007. Although there is research focusing on intergenerational impacts of cultural traumas, or children of PTSD patients, I was not able to pinpoint a study focusing on the possible inherited effects of child marriage.

14 Genç (2006) classifies the song 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' as one of the folk songs that reflects on violence towards women, but she does not analyze the piece.

15 Please see Çaycı 2014 and Çelik 2020 for more on representations of women in Turkish folk songs.

16 Most recent research on the issue of child marriage in Türkiye and its psychosocial implications were written by Ekici 2018 and Mandacı 2002.

17 Quoted in: Meredith McGroarty and Susan Bell. "Why Is It Important to Remember What Came Before?" University of Southern California Dornsife, <https://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/3360/remember-what-came-before/> (accessed 3 April 2022).

and special events, such as bridal showers and henna nights. The song's message raises awareness on the issue of early and forced marriages, while a young girl's voice (from the past) echoes to the present through folk songs and traditional rituals.

While singing and listening to this song, both the audience and performer experience the desperate conditions of a twelve-year-old girl's unwilling marriage, albeit second hand. They can predict and visualize the consequences of this marriage, such as possible domestic violence and vicious cycles of psychological and physical events. Therefore, the piece presents complex emotional content, possibly leading to the recent decline in its popularity.

### 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' within Turkish Musical and Cultural Contexts

Turkish music researcher Nida Tüfekçi recorded and transcribed 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar', which was first performed by the local musician Süleyman Uğur in 1968,<sup>18</sup> from the Denizli/Acıpayam region in Türkiye. The text is in the unique dialect of Acıpayam region and contains traditional symbols. Below is the original text containing words specific to the Acıpayam region and its literal translation:

*Ağ elime mor kınalar yaktılar*  
 They put red henna on my hands  
*Gaderim yok gurbet ele sattılar*  
 My fate is doomed, they sold me to a place far from here  
*On iki yaşımdı gelin ettiler.*  
 I was only twelve when they made me a bride  
*Ağlar ağlar gözyaşımı silerim of of*  
 I cry, and I cry, I wipe my tears away  
*Merdimenden endim endim yıkıldım*  
 I went down the stairs and collapsed  
*Her çiçekten aldım aldım takındım*  
 I tried on all the flowers  
 Gırmızı gül sendi galdı tamahdım of of  
 I couldn't wear the red rose because you had it  
 Yüce dağ başında asmalı pınar  
 There is a spring and hanging branches at the top of a high mountain  
 Asması yıkılmış suları harlar  
 A branch is broken, as the water flares up  
 Galındı gal gal süpürgü çaldığım evler  
 I left the house I swept  
*Başım alıp gurbet ele giderim of of*  
 I will leave and go abroad

18 As shown in (Figure 2), the first recorded version of 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar', was from the TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) Folk Music archive, number 7.

Turkish wedding traditions vary based on the region. However, the henna night and wedding night are almost always celebrated consecutively. Henna application is a traditional ritual during *kına gecesi* (known as henna night), an intimate event, particularly for the bride-to-be, where only women attend before the actual wedding ceremony (Demir 2017). Although this is a festive celebratory event, during the henna ritual, the women sing laments about girls leaving their family home, and about being separated from their families, or starting a new life. Such laments are known as *gelin ağlatma*, meaning bride's lament. They apply the henna to the bride's hands and their own. Brides are traditionally expected to show some sadness, and it is considered "well-mannered" for the bride to cry when leaving the family home. If the bride cries, it is interpreted as showing innocence, respect, and love for her family.

To understand and analyze this piece clearly, it is essential to introduce *makam*<sup>19</sup> as a Turkish term that refers to modal theory and practice. Theoretically, *makam* conveys sequences of rules and musical components: pitches, intervals, specific scales, progression, and structure. It is a unique shared music system, created and utilized by diverse cultures over several centuries. In Turkish *makam* music, theory and practice are inseparable – and mastery of these concepts encourages the musicians' artistry.

From the musical perspective, most traditional henna songs<sup>20</sup> utilize the *Hüseyni makam*, which is one of the most used *makams* (it is also called as tune/air in Turkish folk music), forming the base of "Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar". They also use 9/8 (3+2+2+2) or 4/4, 2/4 metric structure, mainly because henna rituals convey dance-like movements. During the performance, women walk/dance in a circle (without joining hands) around the bride and follow the rhythm. I chose this piece since it is written in *makam Hüseyni*, 9/8 meter (which is a pervasive Turkish rhythm) and allows space for personal interpretation. Unlike most cheerful *Hüseyni* pieces with a 9/8-time signature, dance-like compositions, this piece is unique in its sorrowful content. The melodic movement of the piece demonstrates a descending character consistent with the content and overall context. The first verse starts around the tonic (A) and dominant (E) as one of the most significant features of this *makam*. It utilizes longer legato notes and is performed with certain glissandos, trills, and vibratos. Figure 1 presents the notation of this piece, as well as information regarding the publisher, the year it was collected, the source and the transcriber:

19 The origin of the word *makam* is Arabic, meaning "division", "location", "position" and a "melody type", see Ederer 2011: xxx.

20 Acar (2014: 37–41) also briefly analyzes 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' as a henna song.



information regarding the culture. As a performer/instructor, I demonstrated and clarified information regarding Turkish *makam* music, folk music and different performance styles. The collaborating musicians were never expected to perform like Turkish musicians. One of the goals was to create a platform nurtured by listening to and observing new music, while exploring and creating within this new system. They became more comfortable creating while using this platform. I fostered communication between the performers and focused on providing a positive and encouraging space. That meant, I focused on maintaining a neutral standpoint. Various ideas and suggestions were performed without judgment and were never imposed.

'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar', was the first piece the Sofra Ensemble arranged, composed, and interpreted. Several weeks after the music rehearsals began, I shared my connection to this piece with the musicians. They were surprised, saddened, and deeply touched by my grandmother's story, which went on to affect their performance. Their personal and cultural connection to this music was important, not just from a theoretical/socio-historical point of view, but also during the creative process.

To start, we related the piece to the lifetime of a child from the song. The clarinetist began the song with a soothing lullaby-like melody accompanied by the percussionist emphasizing heartbeat-like figures.<sup>23</sup> Our composition was followed by a new cheerful melody composed by the violinist, imagining a toddler's happy antics. Then with the *klasik kemençe*, I connected these happy tunes to chaotic sounds, representing the child's confusion upon learning that she will be married at a young age. The heartbeat-like rhythms provided by the percussionist prepared the ensemble to perform the song as it exists in its original version, from the young narrator's perspective – preserving the young girl narrator's voice. We did not have a composer in this project, but the narrator's voice and story were at the center of everything we created. In the vocal performance section, I interpreted the song using ornaments and vibrato; however, I mainly performed it as it was transcribed by Nida Tüfekçi. After the first verse, the cellist started improvising somber sounds, reflecting a dark, hopeless situation. He used various Western contemporary performing techniques: artificial sounds, un-metered rhythms, extended technique, harmonics, and overtones. The ending of the piece was kept true to the original, to amplify the narrator's voice.

As vocalist and voice of the narrator, I empathized with this child throughout the performance. The narrator became a parent at an age when she was supposed to be nurtured by her parents. I imagined my grandmother's stories and thought of her crying while singing this piece. I felt weak, desperate, and torn. However, I also gained the strength from finding my connection and sharing this experience as a researcher. I started researching this issue from global, national, psychological, and musical perspectives. In this way, I gave voice to the women who had been silenced. Raising awareness on child marriage became one of this project's most important social aspects.

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23 Please see minute (00.00-00.20) from the performance of 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' from the Sofra Ensemble on YouTube (Gjuka 2019).

## Performing 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' in an Intercultural Context

The implications of this research project reached beyond what I initially predicted. As a Turkish female musician, I found it challenging to express myself using Western terminology, especially while attempting to position myself with the Western notions of composer, performer and researcher. I suggested to collaborating musicians we avoid defining ourselves and our work as “composer” and “composition”, even though much of our musical creation was fixed in conventional notation. Since our group’s creative process was collaborative and involved musicians and musical techniques from different music cultures, it would be misleading to describe it using ideological concepts from one cultural perspective. This research project intertwines musical features from multiple cultural viewpoints.

When we began the study, each participant had a unique “musical library”.<sup>24</sup> I prefer this term to background or memory, considering how people store and use all musical information they have come in contact within their minds. These libraries are personal and distinct, almost like human fingerprints. Yet, they carry some similarities and usually overlap with the libraries of other musicians, especially among those with the same cultural background. For example, a song could have an emotional impact related to personal childhood memories, although one may not remember the context of where/when they heard it for the first time. Meanwhile, the same song could be a dry, uninteresting analytical subject for someone else.

The musicians’ progress with the piece and comfort level with each other gradually increased. At the beginning of the process, for example, the cellist mentioned collaborative musical creation being a new concept to him. He had lots of ideas to share but did not want to dominate the discourse.<sup>25</sup> His concerns regarding finding his voice and expressing his ideas were shared by others. However, over time we were able to communicate more effectively and create a supportive environment. After several rehearsals, the clarinetist shared her insights regarding building trust in the process and musicians in order to create a distinctive group sound:

... The “Ayrılık”<sup>26</sup> creation was productive, and we produced a pretty good composition in a short amount of time. I think that is the biggest challenge composing with a group. You must be diplomatic however, in being that time gets wasted. I think we could spend hours and hours together creating some amazing things; however, time is not what any of us have. When the pressure is on, we get it done. I have some licks to iron out and write out – overall it works well... the compositions that the cellist and violinist created are beautiful. The Bach fugue-like piece the cellist

24 Our musical libraries were shaped by our surroundings, education, and comprehension of all the music that we heard up to that point in time.

25 Musicians entered their insights regarding the study on a confidential forum at the University of Calgary’s online teaching platform.

26 The Sofra Ensemble interpreted and rearranged an Azerbaijani folk song called ‘Ayrılık’ while exploring *makam Nihavend*, see Gjuka 2019.

arranged is wonderful to play... The violinist's piece was also quite good, somewhat challenging putting it all together, but we will get it.<sup>27</sup>

All the volunteer musicians were creators and performers; thus, we avoided creating a hierarchy. Though I was the lead researcher facilitating this project, I aimed not to influence the creative process as a performer. Each participant's musical background added something unique to the collaboration and design process. Everyone was irreplaceable and constituted the backbone of this version of musical creation.

My method for the study required the combination of new musical information with knowledge that the participants already held. To enable the process of creative music-making along with research methods, I used the research-creation approach,<sup>28</sup> literature reviews, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic observations. Ethnographic observations were necessary to document details and challenges during rehearsals. After each rehearsal, musicians were required to write down their observations about their experience, musical engagement, and general ideas. They were free to share these opinions with the other collaborating musicians in the study. These observations helped them make creative choices on what elements to use and which to discard. Semi-structured interviews, qualitative and quantitative questions provided statistical information regarding musicians' musical motivations, musical background, expectations, and progress. These verified research tools generated practical results. Overall, I framed my study using the above multi-disciplinary approaches to collect and analyze my findings.

To enable the data collection process during our music rehearsals, I utilized an advanced music recording studio at the University of Calgary. Each week, I set up the equipment and prepared questions to ask musicians throughout the rehearsals. The Sofra ensemble interpreted, rearranged, and composed pieces related to three makam scales and rhythmic patterns. Each piece presented a different creative process and character.

The musicians used my method for faster and more fluent engagement with specific *makams*. Part of the reason for choosing the first song, 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar', was its *makam* features and simple melodic style, which provided many possibilities to rearrange the piece within the creative method. During rehearsals, I demonstrated *makam Hüseyini* on my instrument (*klasik kemençe*) and explained *taksim* as a traditional structured music-making tool.

Usually in the *meşk yöntemi* (master-apprentice learning technique), a student learns repertoire and performance techniques from their teacher. Turkish masters use this pedagogical method to teach their students the ways of musical creation. This method encourages the repetition of ornamentation, melodic patterns, modulations, and rhythmic cycles (*usuller*). Mind-body musical knowledge is transmitted along with the teacher's performing style. I used aspects of the same system to provide performers with a clear understanding of the rules and the ability to navigate within them. During my *taksim* performances, I quoted and emphasized motives and features of 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar

27 The clarinetist entered her observations about week 9 on the University of Calgary's d2L platform on 10 April 2019.

28 Fundamentally, "research-creation" offers a perspective that combines diverse range of epistemologies regarding the study of music and its performative aspects. See Stévanec and Lacasse (2019) for more information regarding this approach.

Yaktılar’, along with the *Hüseyni makam* characteristics such as tonic, dominant, ascending/descending character, accidentals, etc. After that, I performed the piece as written and mentioned additional performance techniques common to this *makam* and the Ege (Aegean) region of Türkiye.

To familiarize the musicians with the music and initiate improvisation, I suggested that musicians play along with me several times. Then I asked them to repeat a specific phrase that rhythmically and melodically embodied the main features of the song:

Figure 2: Transcription by Bahar Gjuka of a motive from ‘Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar’.



Performing these two measures repetitively as a loop allowed the musicians to experiment with different ideas, improvisational space, and improving their *taksim* skills. At the start, members of the ensemble listened to and memorized the piece. They first read through the score while observing the *makam* rules. After that, they listened to and watched similar pieces that used the same *Hüseyni makam*, analyzing different versions of the same song and looking for theoretical and performative characteristics. I recorded the rehearsals continuously. At the end of each rehearsal, I shared the raw recorded data via e-mail with the collaborators. This was so they could revisit the ideas, performing techniques, and source material outside of group rehearsals.

The recordings also enabled the musicians to track their progress and generate new ideas during individual practice sessions. Rather than executing the music created by a composer, they took the initiative using their musical ideas in combination with the piece they had been given. They shared their compositions and arrangements with the group, then executed a selective process where some ideas stayed, and some were discarded. This methodology fostered spontaneous “causal interaction”<sup>29</sup> between the research method I chose and creative ideas, significantly impacting our creative process and outcomes.

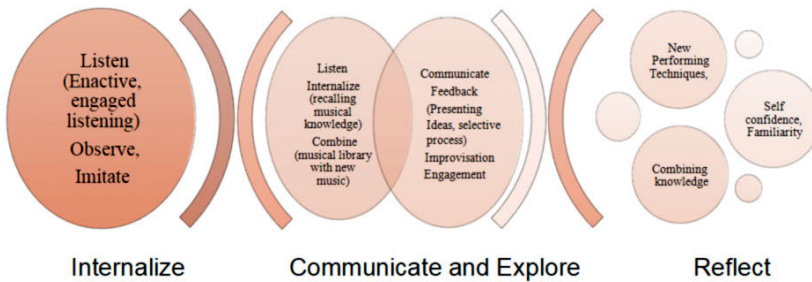
## Challenges and Benefits

Our creative process involved a sequence of musical events that could be divided into three stages (see Figure 4): each performer listened, engaged, created, and arranged ideas during group rehearsals and individual explorations. The final product was always a written-out composition in which each part was fixed, as well as the beginning and end of the piece. However, the completed score always left room for improvisation in

29 The term “causal interaction” is used by Stévanca and Lacasse (2019), as part of the research-creation approach, referring to research and creation having a direct influence on the other.

certain sections. It also kept the original song in the middle section in its unchanged form. The musicians' creative process began with engaged listening, watching, reading, and imitating, through which they internalized new knowledge. Then, they integrated this knowledge with their own musical library and explored ways of creating new music through improvisation, communication, listening and researching new ideas. In the end, this process allowed them to produce and present the newly created music at concerts and events.

Figure 3: The three phases of the creative process.



After twelve weeks, our fully arranged, partially composed version of 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' was ready to perform.<sup>30</sup> Our version of this piece was almost ten minutes long. The problematic content of the piece led us to reflect on our thoughts through our music. We emphasized the narrator and kept her voice as it was written in the score. She was the lead voice and carried the central part through this musical piece.

In addition to my role as a researcher and performer, the socially sensitive content of this piece helped me to get involved in the role of activist. I experienced intergenerational trauma inherited from my grandmother.<sup>31</sup> When she bravely spoke about what happened to her, I witnessed her frustration, and sadness every time she remembered parts of what happened to her. Even as a child, I felt it was my responsibility to tell more people that child marriage had far-reaching catastrophic effects on individuals, families and as we see from folk songs, even on communities. Throughout my doctoral research study, I did extensive reading on the issue of child marriage and its cultural and intergenerational impact. I explored this issue also by interviewing my family members and making music related to this subject. In my case, trauma manifested itself via my subconscious choice of this specific folk song. While working on this piece, I wanted to give all child marriage victims a chance to be heard and seen throughout the musical creation. The Sofra Ensemble musicians learned and read stories about child marriage as part of the project. By combining this knowledge with our sadness, the group members and I internalized this issue and reflected on our feelings through our music.

30 Please see Gjuka 2019 for the performance of 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar'.

31 I experienced sadness and injustice when my grandmother shared her story.

## Cultural Implications and Outcome

Traditionally 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' is performed by women at intimate henna nights and special gatherings. In our intercultural context, we performed this piece with a mix of male and female musicians in an academic context – a concert venue and a performing space in an institution of higher education. Our ensemble focused on shared universal experiences regardless of race and gender: happiness, fear, sadness, and trauma. In a large-scale view of the work, we presented a lifelong musical story built up to the narrator's authentic version of this piece. Enacting music about childhood was a good starting point; all the musicians had that experience. Our compositional design also created a story shaped by our musical libraries. Melodic sounds are commonly used to portray happier and more balanced life events, such as in childhood years. The performance is built up to highlight the original song in the middle. Certain motives were emphasized, while other parts were secondary. Our version of this piece consisted of a combination of minor (compositions) musical segments.

Although everyone composed their parts, each musician was accompanied by the other musicians. There were both elements of authenticities and, at times, deliberate contemporary elements. As a Turkish female musician, I brought and shared my expertise and knowledge with the North American musicians. The platform I created allowed me to explore Turkish *makam* music from a broader perspective. My combination of traditional and unconventional performing techniques became a starting point for other musicians to combine their musical libraries with the new information they received.

Here, it is critical to note that at various conferences, I received questions regarding cultural appropriation due to performing Turkish music with North American musicians – negating my Turkish musical background. The concept of cultural appropriation does not apply to my research, because as a Turkish musician I led the project based on certain aspects of *makam* methods, which I extensively studied in Türkiye. Furthermore, victims of rape or trauma cannot be pigeonholed into any specific culture. In fact, these issues transcend cultural boundaries in the same way my project uses music to provide a shared human experience. Discussions of these issues are not solely the survivor's responsibility. All people must discuss child marriage, speak up and educate our community about the risks.

Furthermore, this subject should not be targeted at or spoken only by females. All her children and grandchildren, including my brother and I, inherited my grandmother's trauma. By telling us her stories, in a way – it seems that our grandmother was urging us to share the subject with others. This became obvious; for instance, when I started working on this piece with the Sofra Ensemble, my brother told me he had started writing a book.<sup>32</sup> He was also inspired by my grandmother's story and severely affected by this intergenerational trauma – only this time, it was manifested in book form.

I believe limiting the subject of child marriage to a specific culture, gender or age group could be harmful. This issue is global and has intergenerational and cultural impacts. The fact that it is rarely explored in artistic contexts is food for thought. One of

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32 His book *Hasret* (Longing) will be published in 2023.

the most chaotic, dark, and artistically challenging parts of our musical design was expressed by the cellist's (a male musician) highly skilled improvisational interpretations. He was not attempting to become the narrator's voice or appropriate her situation to any cultural events, simply creating the setting for her story. He volunteered for the project and wanted to help raise awareness about this subject. He used his advanced musical skills in a compassionate way to perform chaos, sadness, and desperation in his music. Our work on the issue of child marriage aimed to provide a platform for voices silenced by traditional and patriarchal social structures. Previously, anonymous songs circulated in Turkish culture were the only form of expression for these individuals. By integrating these songs into my project, I wanted these victims to be heard in a much broader context.

In terms of musical outcomes, the musicians deferred to my expertise in Turkish *makam* music. At this point, I would like to again oppose considerations of this study using Western ideals of "composer-performer-researcher" or attempting to define the musical outcome with any cultural form. Traditional Turkish folk and *makam* music encourage composers to become highly skilled performers and researchers. Tanburi Cemil Bey, Ali Ufki, Kantemiroğlu, Neşet Ertaş, Aşık Veysel were masters of their craft. However, within the Western classical music tradition, the roles of composers, performers, and researchers remain separate. The method I designed combined *meşk yöntemi* with the musical libraries that each performer brought to the ensemble. Rather than simply imitating the teacher, musicians created their own music in an interactive environment. By opening the practice of the ensemble to a diverse range of stylistic content, we transcended boundaries between traditional Turkish music and Western art music. Thus, we presented a framework for female leadership connected to women's voices of the past in an intercultural context.

Our creative process ended with two public concerts in 2019 at the University of Calgary Women's Resource Center. Performing our music to make a positive change for our community and to create equality for young girls became the priority aim of the concerts. Our performance focused on empowering the voice of young woman as a narrator in the song. This work had far-reaching impacts, using online streaming platforms to engage with a broader audience. Thus, it was an enriching experience for the musicians involved, and, to this day, I receive comments and emails from the public and academicians.

Healing from intergenerational trauma is a process. I believe my research was an essential first step. From a cultural and social point of view, performing this song in a privileged space was eye-opening for many who had not engaged with this subject/or experienced trauma on that scale. 'Ağ Elime Mor Kınalar Yaktılar' thus helped the musicians and the audience connect to women's voices in the past and brought diverse communities together.

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