

# Foreword

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This is a timely volume of interdisciplinary essays on the ethno-musical history and geography of Istanbul, a modern mega-city of more than twenty million inhabitants that bridges Asia and Europe, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Approaching the history of Istanbul through its musical landscapes, as well as urban geography, is a fascinating way of understanding its rich cultural heritage that continues to this date. The essays are edited and written by a group of Greek and Turkish scholars who engage in different disciplinary analyses. The volume traces Istanbul's ethno-religious diversity, urban transformation, social relations, and resistance to hegemonic state and neoliberal urban projects through the musics of nostalgia (*Rembetika, Âşık, Alevi*) and resistance (*hip-hop*). It covers the 19th century all the way to the Gezi Park protests of 2013.

Musical production, both classical and popular/folk, was an important dimension of urban life in Istanbul. In addition, migrants brought in their own musical traditions from their places of origin, such as the Iberian Peninsula, the Balkans, Anatolia, the Arab lands and North Africa. The fusion of different genres and traditions also took place in Istanbul, where the Palace, *Sufi* lodges, churches, salons of Ottoman princesses, taverns and coffee houses became centers of performance as well as patronage. Musical troupes and performers also included women and members of Istanbul's minorities. The Greeks and Jews played an important role in the entertainment sector of Istanbul, which was centered in Galata. Galata's diverse population included Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Muslims, as well as Italian and Western European trading communities. It was the

most diverse port of the Ottoman Empire (Zarinebaf, 2010: 18–21, 24–28).

In volume one of his ten volumes travelogue called *Seyahatname*, Evliya Çelebi (1611–83), the notable Ottoman traveler, described the ethno-religious make-up of Istanbul's many neighborhoods, the urban character of each and the social habits of the inhabitants. He noted that Galata was the entertainment center of the city as well as its red light district. He described the row of taverns along the harbor that were owned by Greeks, where a variety of local wines were available to both Muslim and non-Muslim clients. He described the pleasure-seeking inhabitants of Galata dominated by sea captains and sailors as 'impertinent lovers.' In the taverns, music was an important part of the entertainment (Dankoff et al, 2011: 19–21).

In his description of the parade of guilds, Evliya also devoted several pages to the guild of musicians, singers, performers, minstrels, dancers, comedians, acrobats, actors, and storytellers who came from a variety of backgrounds, including Roma. Musicians and performers were divided into several guilds, each divided into several branches according to the musical instrument they played and skills they possessed (such as dancing and singing). They entertained the Sultan and his family, as well as the public, in royal weddings, circumcisions, and victory festivals, in formal settings as well as taverns and coffeehouses. They also performed for Istanbul's residents in weddings (female entertainers) and circumcisions (Kahraman et al, 2003: 173–86). The Mevlevi lodge in Galata also offered *Sufi* music set to the poetry of Rumi in Persian, which was an important part of its ritual. Roma who lived in their own neighborhoods by the city walls were an important part of the musical landscape of Istanbul since the Roman times.

While royal festivals were documented in imperial Festival Books (*surname*), the popular performances survived through oral traditions and folk songs in different languages that also expressed the histories and aspirations of Istanbul's rich ethnic communities.

The diverse and multi-faceted music landscape of Istanbul was embedded in its rich urban geography, folk traditions, as well as its ethnic composition. The *Rembetika* expressed the social and spatial marginalization of the Greek community and provided inclusivity and solace to an otherwise invisible minority population. According to Alex Papadopoulos, it is also the music of transition from the Empire to the Republic. It survived in two nation-states, Greece and Turkey, albeit in different forms, as nostalgia in the former and erasure in the latter. Thus the *Rembetika* is the music of nostalgia for a cosmopolitan past that no longer exists.

The *Âşıks* were poet-minstrels who endured since the nomadic past of the Empire in the thirteenth century and were incorporated more recently into other genres like the *arabesk* and *Alevi* musics. It retold epic stories and ones of romance, as well as commented-in-song upon the injustices of rulers, officials, and rich urban dwellers. It was like the Blues music that developed in the black ghettos in America. In that same manner, *hip-hop* is the modern version of the music of marginalized youth in the urban ghettos of Istanbul. *Hip-hop* expressed the resistance of local communities on the verge of extinction by advanced finance capitalism and globalization.

All these musical genres, in one form or other, express the identity construction of marginal groups, their stories of inclusion versus exclusion and erasure in the transition from empire to nation-state, and articulate Istanbul's topography and landscapes in a triangulation of "music-politics-geography." This is a fascinating and timely study that sheds important light on the soundscapes of Istanbul's rich musical past and present. Importantly, it marks the steady erasure of its historically significant cosmopolitan life by the forces of globalization and the resulting resistance to them. The editors have done a great job in assembling a wonderful volume that is theoretically sophisticated, interdisciplinary, and both historical and up to date in its coverage of past and recent events related to urban change in Istanbul.

## WORKS CITED

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