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Turkish Music and Its Relationship with Emotions within the Turkish Migrants in Germany

In this presentation, I am going to discuss the role of Turkish music within the lives of Turkish immigrants in Germany. As a part of my dissertation writing process, I conducted an ethnographic research on the Turkish musical fields in Hamburg during my Erasmus stay between October 2009 and February 2010. My research questions in my dissertation are:

1. What is the role of Turkish music for the migrants? If it offers therapy for the migrants as commonly articulated, how can therapy be defined from a cultural sociology perspective?
2. Within the Turkish musical fields, can constructivism offer satisfactorily define the Turkish diasporic culture (s) in Germany? Or do social scientists need better definitions?
3. Are the participants in the Turkish musical fields content? Are there group dynamics?
4. Do specific genres of Turkish music or Turkish musical fields in Germany function to provide the Turkish participants a sense of distinction within the diaspora?

In this presentation, I will focus on the question no. 1, namely the concept of therapy.

First of all, why did I choose music, what is it to do with Turkish identity? Music was, as Maria Wurm suggests and actually widely known “the central element of Turkish cultural and modernization policies” since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. It was also instrumental in building “nation-state identity” (Wurm cited in Al-Hamarneh and Thielmann 2008: 371). The impact of Ziya Gökalp in cultural policy of the Turkish state in the 1920s was undeniably strong. He wrote in *The Principles of Turkism*:

Today, we are confronted with three kinds of music: Eastern, Western, and folk. I wonder which of them is our real national music? We have already noted that Eastern music is both sick and non-national, whereas neither folk nor Western music is foreign to us since the first music is the music of our culture and the second that of our new civilization. I submit, therefore, that our national music will be born of a marriage between folk and Western music. Our folk music has given us many melodies. If we collect these and harmonize them in the Western manner, we shall have both a national and a European music. (Gökalp cited in Al-Hamarneh and Thielmann 2008: 372).

The aim of the reforms imposed from above actually aimed at elimination of all Ottoman institutions following secularization and the abandonment of the Caliphate in 1924. The Orient, as Martin Greve maintains, was deemed “backward” and “detested” in the ideology of the new state (Greve cited in Al-Hamarneh and Thielmann 2008: 372). New Composers were schooled in Western Classical Music. The state introduced radio ban on the former Turkish / Ottoman music for 20 months. Ultimately, they all led the

rejection of the Western Music by the masses, as Tekelioglu reminds us (Tekelioğlu cited in Al-Hamarneh and Thielmann 2008: 372).

At first sight, the idea of observing Hamburg's Turkish diasporic musical fields was appealing for an ethnographer since I had not come across a comprehensive study on this issue. The majority of the field research took place in two folk and two classical Turkish music choruses. The reason why I chose these fields is that the Turkish diasporic mainstream club culture in Hamburg, for instance is difficult to be systematically observed; the ethnographer/sociologist is occasionally confused with the secret police and making open interviews with people with an explicit sociologist identity is almost impossible. Having comprehended the difficulties in these fields, I went on seeking other possible musical fields by meeting Turkish university students at the campus of University of Hamburg. I chose the Asia-Africa Institute, and mainly the *Cafe Kanela* as his pivotal information-gathering zone from which I could acquire wider knowledge about the Turkish musical fields in the city.

The choruses were easy to have access, the rehearsals took place once a week and participation was mandatory for the members. They were comprised of mixed male and female numbers from different generations. Most of the members though were of middle-aged and of skilled factory and service sector jobs with some exceptions of teachers, translators, university students. Ethnic, religious and political identities were not (mostly not allowed) to be on the foreground. Except for a German Turkish instrument student, all of the participants were "Turkish". Both Turkish Folk and the Art chorus were

based on “monophonic vocal repertory” (Stokes 2010: 15) modelled on their counterparts in Turkey.

Establishing rapport between the participants and me as an ethnographer was sometimes problematic, because the interviewees expected that I would be of the same opinion with them and suspected that I was funded by institutions, such as Soros Foundations. I conducted all the interviews within the last one and half month of the whole Erasmus stay, having attempted to act as “natural” and as an insider as possible as a participant by joining the choruses and singing with the group. None of the choruses seemed to include those associated with crime or “stigmatized” Turkish groups by the majority in Germany. During the interviews, none of the participants from the Turkish folk and classical Turkish Music choruses affirmed that they enjoyed low-brow music scene, such as the *Florya Club* in the city. On the other hand, most of the participants from both type of the choirs complained that they were subjected to social exclusion by the German population.

Emotions” and its relation to music in terms of meaning-making process is perhaps one of the conspicuous domains about which sociology of culture cannot much speculate. However, Maria Wurms text, seemingly from the cultural sociology perspective, pays attention to the concepts such as “home”, and “family life” that are reminiscent of “emotional warmth” for the young Turkish music audience, who associates them as the constituents of the “Turkish context”. It highlights the fact that “German or English context” is associated with “school” and “job”, therefore with the feelings of refusal and estrangement (Wurm cited in Al-Hamarneh and Jörn Thielmann

2008: 383). The author does not intend to make essentialist claims by distinguishing Germanness or Turkishness, rather she attempts to interpret these feelings through how participants' statements. The author describes music as an instrumental "leitmotif", through which Turkish youth in Germany feel "affiliated" to certain groups and develop a sense of "safety". At the same time, she draws from Johannes Moser who dismisses the idea that today people still belong the classical "class" formations. In stead, she relates Moser's proposition that "contexts, necessities and needs" determine the "network" that people should join in parallel with the "individualization of life situations" (Ibid: 388-389).

I received answers during my ethnographic work in Hamburg such as, singing in the choruses of Turkish classical or folk music provides the chorus members the effect of a "therapy", despite the fact that the participants were of different cultural backgrounds. The participants, however could not or did not want to express the meaning of the word "therapy". My interpretation is that, thanks to choruses, the participants are able to establish collectivity and thus, in parallel to Wurm's suggestion, they feel secure in their chorus. On a rather general level in my research in Hamburg, I have usually witnessed that the music in the diaspora functions as a portable tool for the Turkish migrants who whistle tunes from their Turkish homeland as a frequent daily activity. This verifies Tia DeNora's observation of music as a "'a material that actors use to elaborate, to fill out and fill in, to themselves and to others, modes of aesthetic agency and, with it, subjective stances and identities . . . a resource for producing and recalling emotional states" (DeNora 2000: 74, 107).

It is evident that construction of Turkish identity is always related to German identity. One of my participants who was a nurse in her mid-thirtys in Turkish Folk Music Chorus stated: „Can a German come here and understand the emotions of the Turkish Folk Music...Could she/he understand the lyrics of the folk music, I don't think so.” The same person lamented: “I would like to establish friendships with Germans, but friendship does not emerge with the Germans. After a while, you are only remaining at a nice dialogue with them. I don't know why but they treat Turks distantly.” Another participant from Turkish Art Music of 30 years with dreaded-hair, who likes contemporary German novels as well as rock music, confessed that her friend-circle was comprised of non-German but international/mostly Latin and Balkan origin. She added that Germans including the politically left-wing, were too disinterested towards Turks and they placed all the Turks into a single category.

The only German student who was attending Turkish folk instrument courses in one of the choruses related that “I think Turkish and German or European music are very different, sometimes the musicians do not open up for the other music because the theoretical systems are very different, for Germans it sounds a little bit strange. Sometimes they say Mozart, Bach, European Classical Music is the best, but it is not because of Turkish music is not so good but it is difficult for their ears. Sometimes German musicians look down to, or they don't even say that in Eastern culture there is a classic music.”

While the resentments of Euro-centricism were quite strongly articulated, the need to introduce the Turkish culture was equally pronounced by an instrumentalist of one of the folk choruses: “Of course, as the association, our goal is that we spread our

culture, to introduce and promote Turkey, not all of it, unfortunately...Some of Turkish Folk Music , folklore, instruments, etc., When we give a concert in a month. Our main goal is to introduce it. We're playing zeybek, we wear dresses, the Germans come and ask where these dresses come from. This is also a kind of policy, to introduce ourselves better, to increase the friendship between us them. People are fearful of people who are not familiar with them”.

The chorus leaders often warned the chorus to sing the songs by “feeling” them during the rehearsals. This is, on one hand, related with the sheer performance dimension of the activity as Jeffrey Alexander suggests, “Successful performance depends on the ability to convince others that one’s performance is true” (Alexander et al 2006:32) and also with the fact that the lyrics often relate to desire for the homeland.

During one of the rehearsals, Turkish Art Music conductor stated, “All dresses should be black and white in this year’s concert. We were criticized a lot after last year’s concert due to the clothes. OK, we’re not doing here a fashion show but we’d like to be pleasing to the eye.” Here, the discussion over women’s dress code, whether to wear trousers or mini skirt is reminiscent of a concealed discussion of religiosity versus secularism in Turkey.

Resembling the high society and thus feeling confident was important to the group. At the same time the art music with its musical and visual representation had a claim of classicism that meant a sense of distinction for the group. On the other hand, a desire for remembering or imagining their identities as urban – mostly Istanbulite was conspicuous. Dismissing *arabesk* as a corrupt genre also connoted with the elitism prevailing in Turkey. As Martin Stokes reminds us, this genre is associated with a “cliché

had it that arabesk was fatalistic and masochistic, encouraging a passivity that had no place in a modernizing republic” (Stokes 2010: 100).

Conclusions:

1. Music functions as a therapy against exclusion. The therapeutic impact of performing music in the chorus can be understood by the participants’ feeling better than so-called “low-brow” *Arabesk* listeners. It provides the members feeling of confidence, unity, safety, pride and less risk of being othered and marginalized. Choruses unite people of different status, worldviews, whereas the audience of clubs tends to be more homogeneous.

2. Participants would like to express “coolness” through Turkish music and its representation, by classicism and dress code.

3. The way the participants construct themselves is usually related to Germans.

While the participants of the choruses were able to make clear-cut distinctions about the Durkheimian “sacred” and “profane” within the Turkish diasporic space, the dichotomy between Turks and Germans resemble rather a sacred vs. “differently sacred” non-Durkheimian binary, exemplified in the statement a “nice dialogue”. The liminal state of the participants in the chorus can be taken as “fuzzi-mindedness” from Eviatar Zerubavel’s perspective, which suggests in quotation “general modern aversion to conventional social divisions”. (Zerubavel 1999: 61).

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