



**THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE
CLASSIFICATIONS ON POPULAR MUSIC IN TURKEY
AND THE WEST: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE
HIERARCHIES OF TASTE***

**BATIDA VE TÜRKİYE'DE POPÜLER MÜZİKLE İLGİLİ
SINIFLANDIRMALARIN SOSYO-TARİHSEL ARKAPLANI:
BEĞENİ HİYERARŞİLERİ ARASINDA BİR
KARŞILAŞTIRMA**

Onur Güneş AYAS**

ABSTRACT

The theoretical framework built in the West to classify popular music reflects the socio-historical characteristics of the Western societies. This paper argues that this framework is not suitable to understand the music debates in Turkey. Art/popular music (or high/low music) distinction in Western music discourses have reflected a class-based hierarchy of taste. Ottoman-Turkish example differs from this model in many respects. Due to lack of a Western-type aristocracy, land owner ruling class and clergy, Ottoman classical music has developed as a kind of urban music open to all classes of society, exceeding the limits of class-based musical genres and styles. With the start of the Westernization era, however, the East-West distinction reflected in the famous alaturka-alafranga debate has become the yardstick to determine the place of a certain piece of music in the hierarchy of taste built by the Westernizing elites. As a reaction, traditional art

* This article is the revised version of the paper submitted to III. International Music and Cultural Studies Conference (May 13-14, 2016, Istanbul) organized by DAKAM (Eastern Mediterranean Academic Research Center).

** Assoc. Prof. Dr., Yıldız Technical University, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, gunesayas@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5317-271X>.

* Makale Geliş Tarihi: 14.10.2017
Makale Kabul Tarihi: 03.11.2017

music has been popularized by the urban people and oriental melodies have come to express their opposition against the cultural policies of the Westernizing elites. Popular music and arabesk debates are in one way a revised and transformed version of the early republican music debates based on the East-West dichotomy. As a result, Western-type classifications such as art/popular, highbrow/lowbrow music have not worked in the same way when classifying Turkish music. The complex story of popular music in Turkey results from the cultural distinctions shaped by the Westernization process and the distinctive class structure of Turkey that has given rise to a distinctive music tradition during the Ottoman period as well.

Keywords: Sociology of Music, Popular Music, Arabesk, Ottoman-Turkish Music, Hierarchies of Taste.

ÖZ

Batıda popüler müziği sınıflandırmak için inşa edilen teorik çerçeve, Batı toplumlarının sosyo-tarihsel özelliklerini yansıtır. Bu makale, bu teorik çerçevenin Türkiye'deki müzik tartışmalarını açıklamaya müsait olmadığını iddia etmektedir. Sanat müziği/popüler müzik veya yüksek müzik/popüler müzik ayrımları Batıdaki sınıf temelli beğeni hiyerarşilerini yansıtmaktadır. Osmanlı-Türk müziği birçok açıdan bu modelden farklıdır. Batı tipi bir aristokrasi ve toprak sahibi sınıfa ve örgütlü bir ruhban teşkilatına sahip olmayan Osmanlı toplumunda klasik müzik toplumun bütün sınıflarına açık bir şehir müziği biçimini almış, sınıf temelli tür ve üslup sınırlarını aşmıştır. Ne var ki, Batılılaşma dönemiyle birlikte, alaturka-alafrağa çekişmesinde ifadesini bulan Doğu-Batı müziği ayrımı Batıcı elitlerin inşa ettiği yeni beğeni hiyerarşilerinin temel sınıflandırma ölçütü haline gelmiştir. Buna bir tepki olarak geleneksel sanat müziği popülerleşmiş ve Doğulu ezgiler toplumun Batıcı kültür politikalarına tepkisinin bir ifadesi haline gelmiştir. Sonraki popüler müzik ve arabesk tartışmaları Erken Cumhuriyet dönemindeki bu tartışmanın yeni bir versiyonudur. Sonuç olarak Batı kaynaklı sanat müziği-yüksek müzik/popüler müzik ayrımları Türk müziğini sınıflandırırken Batıdaki şekliyle kullanılmamıştır. Türkiye'de popüler müziğin karmaşık hikayesi hem Batılılaşma sürecinin yarattığı kültürel

ayrımların hem de Osmanlı müzik geleneğine kendine özgü karakterini veren özel sınıf yapısının bir sonucudur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Müzik Sosyolojisi, Popüler Müzik, Arabesk, Osmanlı-Türk Müziği, Beğeni Hiyerarşileri.

INTRODUCTION

Popular music has been one of the most favorite fields of study among the sociologists of music since the earliest years of the discipline. For those outside the field, the first concept that comes to mind about sociology of music is popular music, for it is impossible to speak of it without referring to a sociological context. Popular music, as is evident from its name, is a sociological category rather than an aesthetical one. If we are to be consistent with the lexical meaning of the term, we should classify a cultural product as “popular” simply when it is widely consumed or liked by many people. In this sense, it is inevitable to adopt a quantitative approach in defining the “popular” if we want to avoid any kind of ideological prejudices. However, until recently, especially in the Western literature, distinction between popular music and the so-called high (or serious or art) music has been defined in terms of class-based ideological premises rather than quantitative analytical researches. As a result, a simple aria from a Verdi opera listened by big crowds or topping the album charts has been considered as a part of the “high” music category while complex examples of certain popular music genres or non-Western ethnical music performances preferred by a smaller minority have been classified in the less prestigious musical categories. This is also applicable to the music debates of Turkey, but in a very different context.

The notion of popular culture had risen in the West as a term which refers to the inferior-other of the so-called high culture of aristocracy and upper classes. This was a result of the class-based legitimizing strategies of the upper classes. Indeed, the music debates in Turkey are also ideologically motivated. However, in the modern ages, it is not the class positions but rather the political and cultural choices about the Westernization project that have determined the hierarchies of taste in music debates of Turkey until recently. In this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate the different social backgrounds of the music debates in the West and in Turkey in order to correct the misconceptions caused by the ideas imported from the Western social context.

First, I will outline the social origins of the popular music debates and hierarchies of taste in the Western societies and compare them with the social context of the Ottoman-Turkish music tradition, showing that they do not share

the same class structures and class-based cultural choices. Then I will add a new element to the discussion which is lacking in the Western social reality while forming the basis of the great dichotomy in the Late Ottoman and Early Republican music discourses– that is Westernization as the foundation of the *alaturka-alafranga* (Turkish versions of the terms *a la Turca* and *a la Franca*) distinction in music. And finally I will make some observations about the transference of this great dichotomy between the Western and Eastern musical genres into the realm of popular music itself with special reference to the Arabesk debate, in an attempt to draw some conclusions about the different social contexts of the popular music debates in the West and in Turkey.

1. SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE POPULAR MUSIC DEBATES AND THE HIERARCHIES OF TASTE IN THE WEST

Throughout history, it is not so difficult for anyone to notice popular elements in different traditions of music all over the world. For example, even the composers like Mozart and Beethoven have composed some popular pieces to attract a large audience, although those figures are classified as some kind of semi-gods of the high music culture. However, before industrial period, there was not such a concept as popular music in the center of music discourses. Because, in the Western world, this new concept -popular music or popular culture- has risen as a reaction to the alleged threat posed by the rising working class culture to the cultural establishment of the upper classes. Indeed, there are various ways to define popular music and each of them has been criticized from different point of views up to present time. However, one fact still remains; it is very difficult to speak of popular culture (or music) without a dichotomous other in modern Western musical discourse. Therefore, easiest way to define popular culture is in the first place to define what the high culture is. After defining the high culture, we can describe the popular culture as its other. For example, in Western societies, the most prestigious genre of music is the so-called Western classical music which is interestingly synonymous with the categories of music such as high music, serious music, art music etc. But who defines which kind of music is high, serious and worthy of being called as art music? The obvious answer to this question is the dominant classes or groups. Powerful groups in society not only have the material and political power but also the power to define what is valuable and what is not in aesthetical terms (Martin, 1995: 21).

Thus, it is not so surprising to see that the earliest studies on popular culture and popular music in the West have a conservative tendency to protect the aesthetical distinctions against the challenges of the new and powerful culture of the working class in the cities. If that is the case, what are the social origins of this class reflex in the cultural field? First of all we should note that the class structure of the Western society is marked by the property relations of

feudalism which benefit the land owners to the detriment of the landless peasants. These aristocratic land owners and the Church which is itself the greatest landowner of Europe held all the economical, political and social power at their hands. There were strict class distinctions between the three estates in feudal society. It was believed that one's place in the social order had been destined by God and could not be changed. In the modern period, this class structure was abolished by social revolutions but only to be replaced by the domination of the emergent powerful bourgeoisie. The development of the Western music reflects this socio-historical background. For instance, before the social, economic and political transformations and revolutions of the modern age, in the highly hierarchical societies of the middle ages people used to live in compartmentalized realms disconnected from each other. Each social stratum had its own kind of music and entertainment. There were strict distinctions between the religious and secular music or the music performed in courts and the music performed by popular musicians. (Wicke, 2006: 8-9). Transformations caused by social events such as French and Industrial revolutions changed this class structure. Land owner aristocracy and the Church were replaced by bourgeoisie as the dominant class who took over the legacy of aristocratical music tradition and employed it as an upper class marker.

Patronage of the musicians was crucial to maintain these distinctions. To some extent, the power of patronage results from the peculiar characteristics of the Western art music. Some forms of Western art music such as concerto, symphony and opera requires great amount of funding to finance the orchestra, artists, performance places and physical equipment as well. This is one of the main characteristics that distinguish Western music from its Ottoman counterpart which mostly does not go beyond the limits of a chamber music in nature, thus requiring much less funding. Western art music used to depend on the two main patrons, namely the church and aristocratical courts, before the rise of bourgeoisie. However, the decline of the old aristocracy and the Church did not end the dependency of the musicians. And this patronage was also one of the main sources of the distinction between the so-called high and low culture, in other words between serious and popular music. The patrons of the music not only financed it but also set the standards to determine the place of this music in the hierarchy of taste through media, education and cultural institutions. For example, DiMaggio (1986: 196) has shown that the category of high music and the distinction between the art music and popular music have been institutionalized in the United States by the enterprises of cultural capitalists who "invested some of their profits in the foundation and maintenance of" this distinction. The effect of these activities "was not simply to exclude the masses below but to render such exclusion legitimate by establishing the validity of hierarchy of cultural forms".

As Bourdieu argues, the social function of the distinction between the so-called high culture and popular culture and any kind of established hierarchy of taste is to legitimize the social differences. “Nothing more clearly affirms one’s class... than tastes in music” says Bourdieu in his masterpiece (1984: 18). So, it is not surprising that the study of popular culture and music has begun with the works of conservative thinker Matthew Arnold (1960) who identifies the culture itself with the “high” culture of upper classes and the popular culture with anarchy. The underlying argument of this approach was that “the raw and uncultivated masses” were disrupting the cultural legacy created by the upper classes. It can be said that the popular culture studies have begun as a warning about the threats resulting from the “supposedly disruptive nature of working-class lived culture” (Storey, 2008: 19). In other words, these studies have not actually defined popular culture but considered it as the inferior-other of high culture.

Since the distinction itself has risen from the class-based strategies rather than pure aesthetical concerns, the critiques of the conservative elitist approaches have also adopted class-based explanations in one way or another. We can observe this class-based approach in both the analysis of Frankfurt and Birmingham schools in spite of their conflicting opinions. For example Adorno has seen popular culture as an ideological instrument of culture industry, serving the purpose of integrating the working class to the capitalist order and making them obey, while Birmingham school has attempted to find elements in popular culture that express the opposition of lower classes against the capitalist system. Although the approaches imported from the West have brought some fresh light to the problems of Turkish music, I argue that, since they reflect the peculiar characteristics of Western socio-historical experience which is very different from the Turkish case, they should be used carefully in understanding the musical discourses and distinctions in Turkey. Then, we should first outline the socio-historical background that distinguishes the musical life and discourses of Turkey from the West.

2. SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE OTTOMAN-TURKISH MUSIC TRADITION: A COMPARISON

To begin with, we should note that Ottoman-Turkish society had no Western type aristocracy or clergy. Since the land belonged to the State rather than being under private ownership, there was not a Western type land owner class either. The main class distinction within the Ottoman society was between the rulers and the ruled as a whole, and unlike Western society the ruling elite did not exclusively come from the ranks of the upper classes or aristocracy. Since a Western type aristocracy did not exist, there were no rival courts as patrons of the musicians. But this does not mean that the Sultan was the only patron of the

high music as usually happened in the Eastern courts. For instance, the so-called classic music of Iran was limited to palace and its immediate entourage (Nettl, 1978: 148). However, the historical records clearly show that the Ottoman music tradition differs not only from the Western music tradition but also from the other Eastern music traditions in being able to maintain itself independent from the patronage of the Sultan. As Behar (2006: 396) notes, there are many historical evidences that prove this point:

“When two successive sultans, Osman III (r. 1754–7) and Mustafa III (r. 1757–74), both strongly disliked music and chose to disband the Topkapı Palace Meşkhane, thus ending all musical activity in the royal palace, this rash decision had no disruptive effect on the practice of music in the city. Twenty years later, Selim III (r. 1789–1807), himself a patron of the arts and a great composer, had no difficulty whatsoever in quickly reconstituting in the palace a retinue of masterly musicians and composers.”

Behar explains this fact by pointing to the fact that the Ottoman musical tradition was “already sufficiently diffused and ingrained in the urban social tissue and resilient enough to survive” independent of the patronage of the ruling groups. The organization of instruments and performance have been also instrumental in maintaining this independence. Ottoman music was mainly a “chamber music” (Behar, 2006: 402) except the military music called *Mehter*. Two or three instruments and a singer were usually enough to perform the most complex examples of this music and becoming a performer or even a composer did not require a very long musical education as in the West. For example, the music of Mawlawi rite that we can consider as the equivalent of the most complex forms of Western music such as symphony or concerto required no more than five or six musicians in its traditional form. There was not an opera tradition either. So financing even the most complex musical activities was not expensive as happened in the Western classical music world. As we have noted, the palace was not the only place that Ottoman music was performed. Ottoman music was trained and performed in “private homes, mosques, dervish lodges and even coffee-houses” (Behar, 2006: 396). So, as many researchers and experts noted, Ottoman music was mainly an urban music performed in various places in a widespread manner that was open to the participation of all classes.

The range of the large social basis of this music can be seen from its prominent composers. For instance, when we look into the famous biographical collection of Şeyhülislam Esat Efendi (*Atrab ül-âsâr fi tezkire-ti urefâ' il edvâr*) written in 18th century (see Behar, 2010), we clearly see that there were many musicians from humbler origins along with some high-ranking officials and dignitaries. This is apparent from the names of the composers of the Ottoman music tradition recorded in this biographical collection. For example

Tavukçuzade was the son of a chicken seller. Taşçızade was the son of a stone-cutter. Sütçüzade and Suyolcuzade were respectively sons of a milkman and a builder of water conduits. Even the most famous composer Dede Efendi, who also performed in the palace and being favoured by two powerful sultans of the period was the son of an owner of a public bath and Mawlawi dervish. Before being idealized into a nostalgic aristocrat due to some nostalgic yearning for an imaginary aristocratic musical past, he had been usually called Hamamcıoğlu İsmail or Dervish İsmail in his time, pointing to the humble origins of the composer. It is interesting to see four workers, a servant and even a slave in a biographical collection including 97 composers of the so-called high music tradition of Ottomans. A similar social composition of classical music composers is certainly unimaginable in the Western context.

It should be noted that dervish lodges, especially those of Mawlawis, were also very important in making the religious and secular repertoire of the Ottoman classical music tradition accessible to all classes of society. These lodges were the civil centers of musical training and transmission, open to everyone except only those rejecting to obey the special rules of these places. For example, we read in an announcement of Mawlawi House in Edirne, which was the second capital city of the empire and one of the most important centers of the classical music tradition, that there would be music lessons in the lodge including the teaching of *makam*, *usul* and the most complex forms of Ottoman music. It is interesting to see that these lessons were open to all classes of society regardless of one's social origin and even his religion, the only thing that was expected from the participants was regular attendance to the lessons and not being drunk (Şimşek, 2008: 386-7).

Another important feature of the Ottoman music tradition was that the boundaries between various genres were very flexible. In other words, high music, folk music and popular music were not polarized through the social distinction strategies but merged together in a unifying musical culture. It does not mean that a folk song and the highest forms of classical Ottoman music had the same value, but it is certain that they were not polarized. For example, Ali Ufki who compiled the Ottoman musical repertoire in two manuscript anthologies which are still one of the two written sources about the music of the period, has classified the folk songs and the complex forms of music performed in the palace in the same pages (see Elçin, 1976). We know that folk songs were performed in the palace and sometimes folk singers were invited to sing for the Sultan. Toker (2015) stated that there were even official ensembles in the service of court called *Şâirân-ı Hâssa* (Courtier Minstrels) that exclusively perform folk music. Moreover, when we look into the works of the classical composers, we see many "light" or popular music pieces along with the so-called "art music"

samples. For example even court musicians like Itri and Dede Efendi have composed popular songs along with the classical suits. Tanburi Mustafa Çavuş, today greeted as one of the most prominent composers of the classical tradition, had in fact composed only popular songs but he had been also honoured and favoured by the palace. Even the Mehter music which was performed by the musicians who were also some kind civil servants and directly financed by the royal palace, used to play for the people in the urban activities, important days and civil ceremonies open to all classes of society. The polarized distinction between the musical genres and the ideologically based strict hierarchies of taste, can be said, to a large extent, to have begun with Westernization. Now it is time to turn our eyes to the East-West dichotomy in musical discourse that affected the musical life of Turkey to this day.

3. EAST-WEST DICHOTOMY IN THE LATE OTTOMAN AND THE EARLY REPUBLICAN MUSIC DISCOURSE

Nedim Karakayalı (2001: 115) interestingly notes that the most striking characteristic of the pre-twentieth century texts on music in Turkey is their “cosmological and universalistic attitude” and “the universalistic conception of the history of music” as well. Although there were some politically oriented discussions underlining the East-West distinction regarding the music in the nineteenth century, it is only after twentieth century that the East-West dichotomy completely dominated the musical discourse. In any case, it is possible to argue that there was not a dichotomic distinction in the Ottoman-Turkish music discourse before the westernization period, for there was not a strong challenge against the cultural legitimacy patterns that in turn required an ideological response. As a matter of fact, Westernization itself was a response to the challenge coming from the West. Paradoxically, the Ottoman elites attempted to resist against the military challenge of the European powers by adopting Westernizing reforms expected to make the Ottoman Empire a part of the Western political system.

The adoption and the transformation of the *alaturka-alafranga* distinction is a very good example for this complex and twofold effort (see O’Connell, 2005 and Ayas, 2015: 104). When first coined in Europe, the word *alla Turca* referred to the Turkish influence on the Western music. Then the word entered into Ottoman Turkey together with the Western musicians invited by the Sultan himself to reform the musical world of the capital in Western lines. But this time its meaning went through a semantic shift and came to mean Turkish music itself. It was the first step that bifurcated the musical discourse of Turkey along the East-West distinction. As a result, the musical practices and genres came to be distinguished from each other according to their relation with the Western music. The new reformers had brought Western musicians to the royal palace in

order to put the Western musical genres to the showcase of the newly Westernized official institutions including the court itself. As a result, not only the Western genres but also the Ottoman musical practices came to be classified according to the East-West distinction. For example, the assembles performing traditional Ottoman music in the service of the Sultan were divided into two categories named *Fasl-ı Atik* (the old Fasil) and *Fasl-ı Cedid* (new Fasil), the latter was distinguished from the former by the Western instruments and methods employed by its members. In the third phase this seemingly neutral classification transformed into an ideological one. Eastern taste came to show one's disability to adapt to contemporary developments or his political position against the Westernizing policy of the new ruling group of political reformers. Alaturka was identified with the outmoded oriental past, while alafanga came to be associated with a far-sighted, open-minded, progressive and scientific frame of mind. In the Republican period, during the most heated phase of the debates, the alafanga camp would even blame the advocates of alaturka by comparing their resistance to adopt Western music with the resistance against all modern innovations such as cars, railways etc. In other words, the distinction between alaturka and alafanga which is cultural in nature transformed over time into a temporal one where alaturka represented the backward and alafanga represented the advanced. Because of this temporal distinction between alaturka and alafanga tastes in music, music lovers of the early republican period would have to run the risk of being labeled as reactionary before declaring their sympathy towards alaturka.

It should be noted that there is an important difference between the Ottoman and Republican Westernization processes in terms of their stance on the values and tastes of the ordinary people and the scope and depth of Westernization as well. For the Ottoman reformers, Westernization in music was only a showcase that will show the European powers that the Ottoman Empire is part of Europe politically. They had not any concern about changing the tastes or cultural identity of ordinary people or fighting directly against alaturka. However, republican reformers started a war against alaturka, dismissed it from the official and educational institutions, conducted insulting media campaigns against it and even prohibited alaturka broadcast on radio.

The scope of this paper does not allow talking lengthier on the so-called Music Revolution of Turkey, about which I wrote a voluminous book (Ayas, 2014). However it is important to note that the classifications established by the republican elites have survived until recently and left its mark on almost all of the music debates in Turkey. These classifications were based on Gökalp's famous formulation which is also the theoretical source of all the subsequent classifications in music debates. The early republican elites aimed to form a new national identity supporting Westernization and the consciousness of secular

Turkishness while excluding the Ottoman-Islamic legacy as much as possible. The Gökalpian formula provided the legitimizing theoretical framework for this twofold project. According to Gökalpian distinction between culture and civilization (in his words *hars* and *medeniyet*), civilization represented the technical achievements of humanity which is transnational in nature, and culture represented the national character. Gökalp argued that it was inevitable to adopt the Western civilization, but insisted the Turkish culture should be preserved. However, according to Gökalp, the oriental elements of this Turkish culture, especially those related to Ottoman civilization, were non-Turk and had to be abandoned completely to give way to Western civilization. When it comes to music, as Tekelioğlu (1996: 202) accurately put it, Gökalp's formulation was defining the problem and solution as follows: "The enemy is Eastern music, the source is folk music, the model is Western music and its harmony and the purpose is to achieve national music."

This was also the formula for determining whether a cultural element is legitimate or not in terms of the official policy. With cultural legitimacy, I mean the set of criteria that determines the place of a cultural product in the hierarchy of taste both culturally and politically. In this respect, O'Connell is very right to observe that "a sociological and class-based interpretation of Turkish culture during the early Republican era is problematic." (2000: 122) In other words, the source of the hierarchy of taste was not one's class position and musical habitus but his/her political/ideological position in the East-West dichotomy. (For example, even Atatürk who had inspired the so-called Music Revolution preferred the traditional Ottoman-Turkish music in his personal life.) Since the Gökalpian formula was the main official criteria that determined the place of a certain piece of music in the hierarchy of taste, it was the East-West rather than high/low or art/popular music distinction that shaped the classifications in music. For the very reason, a popular music genre like tango was at the higher level of hierarchy than the most complex suits of Dede Efendi that were once performed in the Ottoman Court. Thus, the European type art music/popular music distinction based on class a tradition certainly does not account for the musical classifications of the early republican period. The subsequent music debates were based in many ways on the revised and transformed version of these classifications. This point needs further evaluation.

4. TRANSFER OF GREAT DICHOTOMY INTO THE REALM OF POPULAR MUSIC: PROBLEMS OF CLASSIFICATION

In his standard handbook on music widely read by popular reader and music lovers in Turkey, Ahmet Say, who is the father of the famous Turkish pianist and composer Fazıl Say, classifies all kinds of music in three categories: Art music, traditional music and popular music. This is also the standard

musical classification in the West, though it has been challenged by some critics recently. According to this classification, art music or the so-called high or serious music is the music which is composed and performed for artistic purposes and associated with the upper classes of society. Traditional music is national or local in character and is the natural expression of the emotions of a certain people in a certain region. Popular music is the music for entertainment, mainly listened and performed in cities by large crowds and produced by culture industry in the modern capitalist world. Whether this classification is right or wrong is another question. What is important for us is that even Say acknowledges the fact that this classification does not fit into Turkey. He does not, however, abandon this classification and suggests a slight adjustment. When we replace the art music of Turkey in the traditional music category, Say argues, there will be no problem at all (Say 2008: 27-9). But, in fact, it is not a real solution. Since there is not a strict distinction between the art and popular music of Turkey, as happened in the West, it seems like there is no problem in putting them together into the traditional music category. However, the question still remains that if Turkish music tradition does not include such a thing as art music, why should we adopt a Western type classification that includes this category at all? If there is an art music tradition of Turkey, why don't we put it in its proper place in this classification?

The second problem stems from the Gökalpian formula adopted by the republican elites which classifies the so-called Ottoman art music legacy as non-Turk and excludes it from the field of legitimacy and the national culture as well. In this respect, the official classification assumes a strict distinction and even a stark contrast between the folk and art music of Turkey.

The third problem is directly linked to the specific focus of this paper. If this classification is true, then where is the popular music of Turkey? If we take into account the period till 1950's or 1960's, paradoxically, it is clearly the so-called Turkish art music which is the unrivaled popular music of Turkey, though it is in fact a popularized version of the classical style. Interestingly, this genre, though it has been classified as art music, has dominated almost all the fields of popular culture and the entertainment sector. In the public houses, movie theaters, public concerts large crowds were listening to this kind of music those days. The record industry was depending on this music. The cover of a popular music magazine with the largest circulation in 1950's presents a striking example about the popularity of the so-called Turkish art music. In the 1950's, *Ses* magazine, had on its cover the photos of Zeki Müren and Alaeddin Yavaşca and asked its readers: "Who is the greatest?" (Aksoy, 2008: 270 and 276) It is interesting that Alaeddin Yavaşca is recognized today as the greatest living figure of the Ottoman-Turkish classical music tradition. He has given special concerts in European capitals, singing the classical pieces of the composer Sultans and

court musicians. To make it clear for people who are not so familiar with Turkish culture, we can compare him as an art music composer to Schubert rather than Elvis Presley. Imagine that Schubert was nominated for the MTV music awards in the best popular music singer category. In the Western context, the question in the cover of *Ses* magazine is as strange as this imagined situation.

Today, the popularized versions of the Turkish art music are still among the most favored popular music genres of Turkey. According to a research conducted in 2014 by Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) which is a state agency for monitoring radio and television broadcasts (cited in Güven, 2016: 458), most favored music genres among radio listeners in Turkey are as follows: Turkish Folk Music (43.5 percent), Turkish Pop Music (42.2 percent), Turkish Art Music (32.7 percent), Arabesk (24.3 percent), Protest Music (21.7 percent), Religious Music (21.4 percent) and Turkish Rock Music (16.2 percent). According to the same research, Turkey ranks third among the European countries in terms of radio listening duration, and 70.1 percent of respondents states that they mainly listen to music through radio rather than music player or television. Thus, it can be argued that this research represents the general leanings of the music listeners in Turkey.

This fact results from two main reasons, one of which is socio-historical, the other is rather political. We had attempted to explain the socio-historical reason above when outlining the general features of the Ottoman music tradition. Since this music tradition depends on a large social basis open to all classes rather than being a class-based or aristocratical courtly music, it has not experienced big difficulties in transforming itself to a kind of popular music in the republican period. Moreover the Turkish classical music tradition managed to survive against the attacks of the Westernizing elites by technically and socially popularizing itself. The second reason is directly related to this. Since the majority of the people in Turkey had some doubts and criticism about the radical Westernizing policies of the early Republican period, they found the way to express their reaction against it in embracing the Ottoman legacy which is excluded by the Westernizing elites. Therefore even the cultural elements that can be compared to the aristocratical high culture of the Western societies were interestingly embraced mostly in ideological forms by conservative masses. For example, it is very interesting to find many immigrants from the countryside who were among the most passionate advocates of the old Ottoman elite culture of Istanbul in ideological forms. In other words, Turkish conservatism in cultural politics was not the reaction of the old aristocracy and upper classes against the popular culture of the masses as happened in Western context but a result of the reaction of the large crowds against the elitist Westernism.

However it should be noted that the so-called Turkish art music was not the genuine art music of classical tradition but its transformed and popularized version. The classical version of this music tradition was in some way put into the museum or museumized as called in the ethnomusicology literature (e.g. see Shiloah, 2000: 89; Nettl, 1985: 150-4). Thus, it can be said that its place in the hierarchy of taste did not change, though it achieved to survive by popularizing itself.

After 1950's and especially 1960's, we can speak of a different context in the music debates. In the early republican period, the aim of the Westernizing elites was to build a Westernized national music integrated into the art music tradition of the West. After the efforts in creating this Westernized art music failed, they changed their strategy and directed their efforts to create a Western popular music. Indeed, there were many other global and social factors that shaped this development. But Western music, which had failed to penetrate into the musical life of the Turkish people in the early republican period, managed to do it after 1950's through American and European popular music songs. Paradoxically, the pro-American conservative Democrat Party governments of the 1950's who gave some legitimacy to the traditional culture in certain public institutions with its new ideological discourse against the Westernizing elites, at the same time helped Americanization-Westernization of Turkish popular culture.

As a result, the East-West dichotomy of the early republican period was transferred in one way or another into the field of popular culture. Many popular genres were placed into higher positions in the hierarchy of musical taste simply due to their Western origin. This was among one of the important factors that made the Turkish experience different from its Western counterpart. For example, tango music which is in fact the music of poor people in Argentine, was supported by State radios beginning with the early republican period and as a result adopted by Westernized elites and transformed into an elite music in Turkey. Similarly, even the various genres of folk music in America including very simple ballads came to be appreciated by Westernized elites and transformed into a Western symbol that distinguishes the taste of a group of people from those having "inferior" oriental tastes. It is interesting that popular music itself as a category was identified with Western genres. The name given to popular music was "light Western music". On the contrary, the so-called Turkish art music which was more popular among Turkish people until 1950's than this "light Western music" was not classified as a popular music but seen as a nostalgic and sometimes unwanted remnant of the past. The legitimate popular music had to be composed and arranged by Western techniques, bringing in some way the Western sound to ears.

Initially even singing in Turkish language was a shame for some elites, but fortunately this attitude changed over time. First, some musicians began to translate the lyrics of Western popular songs and sing them in Turkish. These popular songs were called *aranje* or *aranjman*, which means “arranged” music. In one way, we can draw a parallel between *aranje* music and the import-substitution policies in the economical field supported by pro-Western, pro-American foreign policy. By the way, some musicians did not confine themselves by writing Turkish words for Western songs but composed new popular Turkish songs in Western lines. Some musicians attempted to integrate national elements to these popular genres. But it was important that the music should not have seemed oriental, since the legitimate formula required it to be both national and Western. In other words, these efforts were in some way an adaptation of the early republican official musical efforts into the field of popular culture in a more liberalistic way. The words of the famous music group *Modern Folk Üçlüsü* (Modern Folk Trio) prove this point very clearly. In the 1970’s the group members had declared that they would apply the orders of Atatürk based on the Gökaltın formula to the field of popular music, taking national elements from folk music and processing them with Western musical techniques (Meriç, 2006: 253). The main aim was still to build a polyphonically Westernized Turkish music. Therefore, it can be said that the patterns of cultural legitimacy and tastes of hierarchy did not change much until recent times, since the Western music did not cease to be the catalyst of the musical classifications. However, this “new pattern of constructing a Western model of modern music” in the field of popular culture does not seem to have “appealed to people in great numbers” (Yarar, 2014: 52) though being more successful than the early republican efforts.

The rise of arabesk music can help us understand the point more clearly. Arabesk music emerged at the end of 1960’s as “a new hybrid genre mixing Turkish classical and folk elements with those of the West and the Egypt” (Özbek, 1997: 211). In the beginning it was ignored by the Westernized elite and even banned by the state television and radio channels, but in a very short period of time it “achieved the status of being the first popular music of Turkey” according to some observers (Yarar, 2014: 53). For example by 1988, it was estimated that “150 out of the 200 million cassettes produced each year by the Turkish recording industry” was “of the arabesk genre”. 90 percent of Turks were listening arabesk music (Özgür, 2006: 175). Even the name of the genre indicates that the East-West dichotomy still determines the classifications in music. It should be noted that the word arabesk was not adopted by the musicians of this genre, in fact most of them insistently rejected this label. Because the term arabesk which is “too loaded with value judgements to be used as an objective definition” was “coined to humiliate a definite music style and its fans” (Karakayalı, 2001: 119). At the first glance, it can be seen that its emphasis

is on the Arabic-Oriental character of the music. As it can be remembered, in the early republican music debates, alaturka as the “inferior-other” of alafanga has been identified with the undesirable Oriental elements of Turkish culture.

After the rise of Arabesk, the discourses once used against alaturka in early republican period came to be directed against Arabesk, by both the leftist-Kemalist intellectuals and conservative Turkish music circles. For example, according to the Marxist scholar Oskay who was perhaps the most prominent pioneer of the critical popular culture studies in Turkey, arabesk music was the “expression of despair resulting from the Oriental despotism and an undesired remnant of the darkness of the Middle Ages” (2004: 24). Opinion leaders of the Turkish art music circles similarly labelled arabesk as a degenerated genre representing the Oriental-Arabic backwardness. As a matter of fact, in the early republican period, alafanga camp had called the Turkish art music itself as *Şark musikisi* or “the “oriental music” in order to humiliate it, while the members of this genre had rejected the term and called it *Türk musikisi* or “Turkish music”. They also segregated themselves insistently from the other Oriental music traditions. Accordingly, they emphasized the non-oriental content and styles in the genre and otherized the oriental elements. As a result of this discursive background, in the 1980’s and afterwards, the term arabesk was also used by the members of the Turkish art music circles in order to segregate themselves from this oriental other. This is a perfect example of self-orientalism, but unfortunately the scope of this article does not allow us to analyze it.

Arabesk music, though it was ignored and humiliatated by the established order in the cultural field, rapidly popularized and even some of the Westernized elites came to listen this genre in a short period of time. As a result pop music itself was influenced by it, giving rise to a new genre called pop-Arabesk which dominated the musical scene in the 1990’s and afterwards. Sezen Aksu and Kayahan were the key figures of this event. But it is interesting that the musicians who integrated arabesk elements into pop music had to defend themselves against the ideological accusations. For example Kayahan who was blamed to give rise to pop-arabesk had claimed in the 1990’s that he in fact “exterminated arabesk and made everybody listen pop music” (Meriç, 2006: 96). It is still discussed whether the pop music or the arabesk assimilated each other. In any case it is important to note that the East-West dichotomy does not allow a genre that has oriental connotations to be accepted as a proper popular music genre by Westernized elites. The narrative of Meriç on the history of popular music in Turkey sheds light on the power of this discourse. Meriç, in his comprehensive book, consistently emphasizes the distinction between the “genuine” pop music and arabesk and sometimes implicitly blames the pop musicians who integrate arabesk elements into their music. Interestingly, in the

arabesk debates, the opposite of arabesk as a popular music genre was not a “high” music form (for example some kind of art music) as happened in the Western societies, but Western type popular music genres. It was really difficult to understand why the simplest examples of American folk, blues or rock or even the Turkish pop music, made up of two or three simple chords should be classified in a higher position than a Gencebay song which was much more sophisticated artistically. Therefore, it is not true to think that the harsh reactions against the Arabesk only resulted from concerns of the elitist art music circles. If so, they would be expected to show the same reaction to the other so-called low-brow popular music genres as Adorno did when expressing contempt towards American popular Jazz pieces. However these genres were more preferable for Turkish Westernists simply because they had more Western elements than arabesk.

Indeed, it cannot be said that today arabesk or pop-arabesk is excluded by political elites. On the contrary, beginning from Özal in the late 1980’s, arabesk has rapidly climbed the steps of the hierarchy of taste and gained cultural legitimacy. Now, arabesk musicians are awarded by official institutions including the Turkish presidency. However, in one way, this striking transformation is a result of the changing attitude of elites towards West and the Ottoman legacy rather than a some kind of class revolution. Especially after the end of the cold war, the political elites of Turkey came to lose confidence in their Western alliances. Moreover, a political movement that criticized the Westernist-elitist policies of the old elites came to power. The new elites were more willing to embrace the oriental elements of Turkish culture not only because they have different social and cultural backgrounds but also they had to legitimize their newly attained power against the old established elites. Therefore the taste of arabesk music is not a class indicator in Marxist terms, but an expression of the new elites’ reaction against the exclusive Westernist policies of the old elites and their legitimation strategies. There is not any reason today to identify it with the lower classes. On the contrary there are sociologists like Ali Akay (2002) who calls the new elites of the last decades who adopted the arabesk culture as “arabesk bourgeoisie”, emphasizing the importance of culture that distinguishes them from the other segments of bourgeoisie.

5. CONCLUSION

This complex story of popular music in Turkey results from the cultural distinctions shaped by the Westernization process and the distinctive class structure of Turkey that has given rise to a distinctive music tradition during the Ottoman period as well. There are of course a lot of things to say about the transformation of arabesk and the changing hierarchy of tastes in Turkey, for example by drawing attention to the “unclassifiable status of arabesk in reference

to the old classifications” as Karakaya did (2001: 121). But the scope of this paper only allows to outline the main differences between the historical and social backgrounds of the Turkish and Western musical discourses and classifications. I think that it would be useful to keep in mind these differences when talking about popular music in Turkey. This paper does not suggest a new analytical classification, but should be read as a preliminary draft inviting new discussions in the field.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akay, Ali (2002), *Kapitalizm ve Pop Kültür* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları).
- Aksoy, Bülent (2008), *Geçmişin Müsiki Mirasına Bakışlar* (İstanbul: Pan Kitap).
- Arnold, Matthew (1960), *Culture and Anarchy* (London: Cambridge University Press).
- Ayas, Güneş (2014), *Musiki İnkılabı'nın Sosyolojisi: Klasik Türk Müziği Geleneğinde Süreklilik ve Değişim* (İstanbul: Doğu Kitabevi).
- Ayas, Güneş (2015), *Müzik Sosyolojisi: Sorunlar-Yaklaşımlar-Tartışmalar* (İstanbul: Doğu Kitabevi).
- Behar, Cem (2006), “Ottoman Musical Tradition”, S. Faroqi (Ed.), *Cambridge History of Modern Turkey, Vol III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 393-407.
- Behar, Cem (2010), *Şeyhülislam'ın Müziği 18. Yüzyılda Osmanlı-Türk Müsikisi ve Şeyhülislam Esad Efendi'nin Atrab'ül Asar'ı* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları).
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- Dimaggio, Paul (1986), “Cultural entrepreneurship in 19th Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America”, R. Collins, J. Curran, N. Garnham, P. Scannell and C. Sparks (Eds.), *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader* (London: Sage): 33-50.
- Elçin, Şükrü (Ed.) (1976), *Ali Ufkî Mecmûa-i Sâz ü Söz* (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı).
- Güven, Uğur Z. (2016), “Türkiye’de Toplumsal Tabakalaşma ve Müzik”, L. Sunar (Ed.), *Türkiye’de Toplumsal Tabakalaşma ve Eşitsizlik* (İstanbul: Matbu Kitap): 443-464.

Karakayalı, Nedim (2001), “An Introduction to the History of Music Debates in Turkey”, Hammarlund, Olson ve Ozdalga (Ed.), *Sufism, Music and Society in Turkey and the Middle East* (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute): 114-124.

Martin, Peter J. (1995), *Sounds and Society: Themes in the Sociology of Music* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press).

Meriç, Murat (2006), *Pop Dedik: Türkçe Sözlü Hafif Batı Müziği* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları).

Nettl, Bruno (1978), “Persian Classical Music in Tahran Process of Change”, *Eight Urban Musical Cultures: Tradition and Change* (ed. Nettl) (London: University of Illinois Press).

Nettl, Bruno (1985), *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaptation and Survival* (New York: Shirmer Books).

O’Connell, John M. (2000), “Fine Art, Fine Music: Controlling Turkish Taste at the Fine Arts Academy in 1926”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 33: 117-142.

O’Connell, John M. (2005), “In the Time of Alaturka: Identifying Difference in Musical Discourse”, *Ethnomusicology*, 49 (2): 177-205.

Oskay, Ünal (2004), *Yıkanmak İstemeyen Çocuklar Olalım* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları).

Özbek, Meral (1997), “Arabesk Culture: A Case of Modernization and Popular Identity”, S. Bozdoğan ve R. Kasaba (Ed.), *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Washington: University of Washington Press): 211-232.

Özgür, İren (2006), “Arabesk Music in Turkey in the 1990’s and Changes in National Demography, Politics and Identity”, *Turkish Studies*, 7 (2): 175-190.

Say, Ahmet (2008), *Müzik Nedir, Nasıl Bir Sanattır?* (İstanbul: Evrensel Yayınları).

Shiloah, Amnon (2000), “Modern Kentin Büyüsüne Kapılan Geleneksel Sanatçı”, (trans. Dilhun Hacıkulaoğlu), *Musikişinas*, 4: 88-98.

Storey, John. (2008), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge)

Şimşek, Selami (2008), *Osmanlı’nın İkinci Başkenti Edirne’de Tasavvuf Kültürü* (İstanbul: Buhara Yayınları).

Tekeliođlu, Orhan (1996), “The Rise of a Spontaneous Synthesis: The Historical Background of Turkish Popular Music”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 32 (2): 194-215.

Toker, Hikmet (2015), “Courtier Minstrels”, *Rast Musicology Journal*, 3 (1): 80-100.

Wicke, Peter (2006), *Mozart’tan Madonna’ya Popüler Müziđin Bir Kültür Tarihi* (Turkish trans. S. Dalaman) (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları).

Yarar, Betül (2014), “Politics of/and Popular Music: An Analysis of the History of Arabesk Music from the 1960s to the 1990s in Turkey”, *Cultural Studies*, 32 (1): 35-79.