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## **TURKISH HISTORY THESIS AS A LEGITIMIZING INSTRUMENT IN MUSIC DEBATES OF EARLY REPUBLICAN TURKEY\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The goal of the early republican elite was to form a new national identity supporting westernization and the consciousness of secular Turkishness while excluding the Ottoman-Islamic legacy as much as possible. Turkish History Thesis was, above all, an ideological instrument for supporting and legitimizing these objectives. The influence of the Turkish History Thesis on music debates of the early republican period is reflected by the arguments on the Central Asian and archaic Anatolian origins of Turkish music, the alleged impact of this archaic Turkish music on the other great music traditions of the world such as Western music and the famous pentatonism thesis. In these debates, the Turkish History Thesis has been employed as an ideological instrument rather than a scientific explanation. The ideological background underlying the Turkish History Thesis and its various extensions in the field of music has dominated not only the official view but also the oppositional discourse, despite its weak scientific basis. This fact points to the extent of ideological hegemony exercised by the dominant cultural discourse on the oppositional one and also presents a good case of how the survival strategies of the oppositional culture against the attacks of an official discourse pave the way for the internalization of this dominant discourse by it.

**Keywords:** Turkish music reform, Ottoman music, Turkish folk music, pentatonism, sociology of music, Turkish History Thesis, Turkish modernization, Turkish national identity

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## ERKEN CUMHURİYET DÖNEMİ MÜZİK TARTIŞMALARINDA MEŞRULAŞTIRICI BİR ENSTRÜMAN OLARAK TÜRK TARİH TEZİ

### ÖZET

Cumhuriyet elitlerinin amacı Batılılaşmayı ve seküler Türklük bilincini destekleyen ve Osmanlı-İslam mirasını mümkün olduğunca dışlayan bir milli kimlik yaratmaktır. Türk Tarih Tezi büyük ölçüde bu amaçları destekleyen ve meşrulaştıran bir ideolojik enstrümandır. Türk müziğinin Orta Asya ve kadim Anadolu'daki kökenleri ve dünyanın diğer büyük müzik geleneklerine etkisi hakkındaki argümanlar ve pentatonizm tezi Türk Tarih Tezi'nin müzik tartışmaları üzerindeki etkisini yansıtmaktadır. Türk Tarih Tezi bu tartışmalarda bir bilimsel açıklama olarak değil de ideolojik bir enstrüman olarak kullanılmıştır. Bilimsel temelinin zayıf olduğu yaygın bir şekilde kabul edilmesine karşın, Türk Tarih Tezi'nin ideolojik arka planı ve müzik tartışmalarındaki uzantıları resmi söylemi olduğu kadar muhalif söylemleri de etkisi altına almıştır. Bu durum hâkim kültür söyleminin muhalif söylem üzerindeki ideolojik hegemonyasına işaret etmekte ve muhalif kültürün ayakta kalma stratejilerinin nasıl hâkim söylemin içselleştirilmesine yol açabileceğinin iyi bir örneğini sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Musiki İnkılabı, Osmanlı müziği, Türk halk müziği, pentatonizm, müzik sosyolojisi, Türk Tarih Tezi, Türk modernleşmesi, milli kimlik

### INTRODUCTION

Turkish History Thesis, the official historical doctrine of the early republican regime in 1930s, has been studied from various aspects until now. In most of these studies, it has been emphasized that the thesis is a part of the official efforts to provide the new republican generations with a new national identity rather than being simply a product of pure intellectual interests. The goal of the republican political elite was to form a new national identity supporting westernization and the consciousness of secular Turkishness while excluding the Ottoman-Islamic legacy as much as possible. Turkish History Thesis was, to a large extent, an instrument for supporting and legitimizing these ideological objectives. In this respect, there is a close similarity between the Turkish History Thesis and the debates on the Turkish music reform or the so-called Music Revolution (*Mûsiki İnkılâbı*). The main point in the debates on the Turkish Music Reform was not about the aesthetic choices or the specific problems of music. The official spokesmen of Turkish music reform aimed to legitimize the Westernizing-Turkist stance and exclude oriental elements in traditional culture from the field of legitimacy just as did the official spokesmen of Turkish History Thesis. In other words, it was not the music or the history but the national identity which was at issue. Therefore, it is important to note that these two debates are closely related with each other although they appear to be unrelated at first glance. For the very reason, during the heated debates on the Turkish Music Reform (which is popularly called alaturka-alafranga debate) both camps have referred to Turkish History Thesis in order to legitimize their arguments. In this article, I shall examine how some arguments of the Turkish History Thesis are reflected in the dominant and oppositional discourses employed in the music debates of the early republican period.

## Republican Westernization and the Turkish History Thesis

Turkish History Thesis was formulated to a great extent as a response to the seemingly conflicting needs of the new Turkish Republic. In order to get rid of the Ottoman-Islamic legacy which prevents the new regime from making peace with the West, Kemalist elite had to bring the Central Asiatic origins to forefront. On the other hand, they had to find Anatolian ancestors in order to have a response to the Western-supported Greek and Armenian claims on Anatolia (Copeaux, 1998, 32). Moreover, they needed a new historical narrative that would be able to legitimize both the nationalist and Westernizing policies at once. The difficulty of this intellectual task stemmed from the complicated nature of the Kemalist regime. The young republican elites were deriving their legitimacy from the victorious national independence struggle led by them against the Western powers, though they themselves were mostly feverish proponents of Westernizing policies in Turkey. Adopting a nationalist ideology was an inevitable choice for the new regime whose legitimacy depended on the national struggle. Most probable others of this nationalist ideology were supposed to be the Western enemies against whom the nationalist leaders had fought during the national struggle. However, rather than the West, the new regime “otherized” the Ottoman-Islamic legacy for political and ideological reasons and took its recent enemies as a model for the new Turkey. In other words, the West which had been the historical “exterior other” of Turkish national identity became the very model to be followed, while the Ottoman-Islamic legacy which had been the deepest source of the national identity became the “interior other” itself.

The main source of the new national identity was supposed to be the so-called “Turkishness”. But this Turkishness had to be isolated from the Ottoman-Islamic legacy and transformed into something that is adaptable to the westernizing policies. It was the sociological concepts of Gökalp that provided the theoretical framework for such a westernized Turkishness. Through the culture-civilization distinction, the theoretical framework of Gökalp was not only legitimizing the westernization project but also dismissing the Ottoman-Islamic legacy from the formative sources of national identity. In order to push the Ottoman-Islamic legacy into the background, Gökalp gave prominence to the Central Asiatic origins of the national identity. The theoretical framework built by him in his masterpiece *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (The Principles of Turkism) shaped all of the patterns of thought in the official historical discourses. However, the advocates of the Turkish History Thesis were more daring than Gökalp was.

For the creators of the Turkish History Thesis, who argued that all the civilizations in the world, including the Western civilization, took their source from the Central Asiatic-Turkic pre-history, it was the Ottomans who were responsible for having broken the Turks’ connections with the West. Ottoman-Islamic parenthesis in Turkish history, they argued, had suspended Turks’ march towards the West and their guidance in the march of civilizations. Now it was time for Turks to close this parenthesis by cleaning up the remnants of the Ottoman and oriental elements in the contemporary Turkish culture and turning it back to its “genuine” source. In this sense, westernization was nothing but returning to the “genuine” source of Turkishness. As Deren (2007, 383) put it, “contrary to the fact that all the nations striving for westernization had to look to the future, it was sufficient for Turks to look their past” (but very distant past). Hence, the Ottoman-Islamic recent past was to be otherized while a new past

which is compatible with the West was to be invented in the depths of history.<sup>1</sup> It was in this context that the Turkish History Thesis took its shape.

Although there is a vast literature on the Turkish History Thesis<sup>2</sup>, the summary presented by Reşit Galip, one of the prominent formulators and vigorous advocates of it, is sufficient for our present purposes. Reşit Galip (1933, 167-8) has outlined the Turkish History Thesis in the journal *Ülkü*, one of the prominent media organs of the new regime, as follows:

(1) Central Asia was the cradle of not only the Turks but also the entire humanity. (2) The first civilization in history was founded by the Turks who were also the indigenous population and the first inhabitants of Central Asia (3) “Turkish race belongs to Brachycephalic-Alpine type.” (4) “Throughout history, the great migrations have taken place from east to west, not the opposite.” (5) “As an outcome of the drought in Central Asia, Turks have spread across all over the world and founded the ancient civilizations there.” (6) “Anatolian highland has been the densest area of passage and concentration for these great migrations.” (7) “The oldest history of Turks” can be traced back not only to the Central Asia but also to Anatolia, “in racial terms one of the areas representing the Turkishness in its purest form without hybridism”. And lastly (8) “It is the accidental causes and factors that have brought about the present situation in which Turks have not been able to fulfill their mission of guidance in the progress of civilization for the last few centuries. However, since the republican Turkey has “a reliable racial fabric” and also has overcome the accidental problems leading to decline, through the modernizing reforms, there is nothing now to prevent Turkish nation from undertaking its historical mission of civilization once again.

The origins of this historical view emphasizing the secular Central Asiatic origins of Turks and finding them Anatolian ancestors as well while putting the archaic Turkishness to the very source of all civilizations, can be traced long before 1930s. For instance, in a book named *Pontus Meselesi* (Pontus Question) which was published even before the republican period, the writer claimed that Sumerians and Hittites were Turkic in origin. In the very early years of the republican period, Yusuf Ziya Özer, one of the prominent professors at the faculty of law, asserted that Hammurabi and even Greeks were also Turkic in origin (Berktaş, 1983, 50-1). By the way, that Hittite studies gained momentum in the beginning of the twentieth century was almost a blessing for Kemalists who was striving hard those days to prove the Turkic origins of Anatolia against the claims of various nations (Copeaux, 1998, 31-2).

It was only in 1930s that the Turkish History Thesis attained a state of programmatical integrity. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (The Outlines of Turkish History), which was first

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<sup>1</sup> As it is well known, peoples in Middle East conquered by the Arabs, Greeks and Romans, in order not be assimilated by them, have attempted to attribute the origins of the civilization of the conquerors to their own history, inventing certain cultural myths for this purpose. For those kinds of cultural myths see McCants, 2012. The difference of the Turkish History Thesis lies in the fact that it has invented an imagined national history located in a very distant past largely unknown, while otherizing the recent past which is still a living part of the collective memory. Moreover, the new Turkish state had been founded after a victorious independence war against the invaders, rather than conquered by them as it happened in the Middle Eastern cultural myth inventing processes. Şerif Mardin (1997, 180) compares the Turkish experience with the experience of most of the developed countries and particularly those in the Third World which have done their best to benefit from the legacy and social institutions of their recent history. In this sense, having attempted to exclude the brightest era of its past from the collective memory, Turkey presents an anomalous case of nation-building process.

<sup>2</sup> For comprehensive information on the literature see Behar, 1992.

started to be written by Afet İnan with Atatürk's order in 1929 and finalized by an official commission and printed 100 copies in 1930, was the manifesto of the Turkish History Thesis. The expanded introduction of this book (*Methal*) was printed thirty thousand copies and distributed among the teachers and students of public schools, though it was not introduced into the market owing to the fact that it was being criticized in terms of its insufficient documents, sources and methodology. However, the four-volume textbook of History (*Tarih I, II, III, IV*), which was written according to the main ideas in this outline, was approved as the official textbook and read by the students until 1939. The Turkish History Thesis also left its mark on the first two congresses of the Turkish Historical Society, one of the most important cultural institutions of the early republican Turkey. Therefore, despite the fact that it remained in force for a relatively short period of time, it can be said that the thesis has been the official historical view of the early republican period rather than being simply an eccentric experiment.

It is important to note that the Turkish History Thesis hardly gives a place to Ottomans and Arabs in its historical narrative, though it argues that the archaic Turkishness is the origin of all the civilizations in the world. As a matter of fact, since every nation in the world, in one way or another, originated from Turks according to this historical narrative, it could have led to a very humanistic worldview which has no "other". However, the Turkish History Thesis has created an "interior other" rather than an "exterior one". In this historical narrative even Romans were somehow an important part of the "Turkish" history, but Ottoman-Islamic past was almost completely left outside of it.

In terms of scientific knowledge, it can be said that the new historical view of the Kemalist regime, to a large extent, has freed Turkish historiography from being confined within the limits of the Ottoman-Islamic history and directed it to the new areas of Turkish and World history. However, it has certainly gone beyond the proper limits. For instance, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (The Outlines of Turkish History), includes 622 pages and not more than fifty pages of it have been devoted to the Ottomans who ruled for over six hundred years. Even in the expanded introduction of this book (*Methal*), there is no mention of Ottomans either. In general, advocates of the thesis have attributed the great successes of the Ottoman history to an imagined and ambiguous Turkishness and all the failures including the decline of the empire to those Ottomans defined by them as the anti-thesis of Turkishness (Behar, 1992, 106-7). The greatest sin of the Ottomans was that they had blocked the historical march of Turks towards the West and destroyed the bridge between the Turks and "the civilization" (in other words the West).<sup>3</sup>

### **Turkish History Thesis and the Official Music Policy**

Throughout its historical development, traditional (or so-called classical) Turkish music has been identified with the Ottoman culture. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Ottoman musical legacy has become one of the main targets against which the cultural-historical policy makers have directed their attacks. In early republican Turkey, the most essential pillar of the official position towards music was to exclude and otherize the Ottoman

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<sup>3</sup> This claim, which was insistently emphasized by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in his speeches made against the Ottoman legacy (for example see *Söylev ve Demeçler* III, 65), would later form a basis for the historical narrative of Bernard Lewis (1968) on the origins modern Turkey. For a helpful summary of this approach of Lewis see Kasaba, 1997: 20-1.

musical legacy. This official position had been inspired by the “national music” formula expressed by Gökalp in his book *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (The principles of Turkism). As Tekelioğlu (1996, 202) compactly 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.” In this conjunction, republican elites claimed that the Ottoman music tradition in the cities and the folk music in the Anatolian villages were completely dissimilar in terms of their historical origin and the musicological and cultural features. On the other hand, they strived to discover some common traits between the Western and the Turkish folk music at every opportunity. In Gökalp’s formula, Ottoman music was not only “backwards”, “sick”, “somniferous” and “cosmopolitan” but also a “foreign” music taken from Byzantines. Gökalp argued that Ottoman music, which was “the remnant of the obsolete Byzantine culture”, had nothing to do with Turkishness. The pure and genuine music of the Turks could only be found among the Anatolian folk songs which had no connection with this “foreign” Ottoman music. Since the genuine Turkish culture (*hars*) and the new civilization (*medeniyet*) of Turks were represented respectively by the Anatolian folk songs and the Western music according to Gökalp’s model, these two were supposed to be compatible.<sup>4</sup> The first thing to do for Turks to merge the music of this new civilization and the Turkish folk music representing the genuine pure Turkish culture into a modern-national synthesis was to get rid of the music of their old civilization. In this sense, adopting the Western musical system was a part of a broader civilization change project.

Inspired by the Turkish History Thesis, Ali Rif’at Çağatay (1934), one of the prominent spokesmen of the so-called Turkish Music Revolution, has argued that it is not even necessary to speak of a civilization change regarding the Westernization of Turkish music. For Çağatay, the archaic Turkish music has provided a basis for the polyphonic Western music; in just the same way as the archaic Turkishness defined by the Turkish History Thesis has provided a basis for the world civilizations. According to this line of thought, the westernization of Turkish music is in fact returning to the genuine source of Turkishness rather than a civilization change. As a result of this logic, even some official practices, like the banning of the Ottoman-Turkish music and the enforcing of the Western music in official institutions, paradoxically have been legitimized through a nationalist discourse. Moreover, they are the very musicians trained within the Ottoman musical tradition that have undertaken this legitimizing mission in the most sophisticated manner.

One of the most striking examples of legitimizing the Westernization policies in music through the Turkish History Thesis can be found in a newspaper article by Çağatay (1934) published just after the banning of Ottoman-Turkish music in the Radio. Before dealing with this more closely, we should first remember the political atmosphere of these days. As it is well known, the unfavorable stance of the new regime towards the Ottoman-Turkish music was not limited to the intellectual field. Policies to exclude the Ottoman music legacy were also put into practice. For example, as early as 1926 Ottoman-Turkish music education had been banned in official institutions. Turkish youth was learning and practicing only Western

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<sup>4</sup> For the famous Gökalpian formula of national music see Gökalp, 1923a, 342 and Gökalp 1923b, 130-1. For detailed information and analysis on the origins, impacts and implementation of Gökalp’s formula see Ayas, 2014, 71-145 and Ayas, 2015a.

music in schools. By the late 1934, Turkish music broadcast on the radio was also forbidden. For about two years, radio listeners had to listen to mere Western music. In the official commissions responsible for the Turkish Music Reform, some proposals were discussed for banning the Ottoman-Turkish music not only in the official institutions but also in the public realm as well, including the entertainment and record industry. Thankfully these proposals were rejected after long discussions, but for a very long period of time, insulting attacks towards the Ottoman music tradition and its members proceeded without an interruption through the statements of the official spokesmen and a kind of witch-hunt undertaken by newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that Ali Rif'at Çağatay attempted to legitimize all these practices on the grounds of the Turkish History Thesis. Originally trained in the Ottoman-Turkish musical tradition, Ali Rif'at Çağatay was a famous composer of this genre but also an advocate of the Westernizing approaches in music. The Turkish national anthem composed by him in makam Acemaşiran had remained in use until 1930. However, the official circles who found it inadequate on being Western decided to replace it with the composition of Zeki Üngör, conductor of the Presidential Symphony Orchestra. What is more closely related to my article is that Çağatay is also the writer of the chapters on music in *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (The Outlines of Turkish History), the main text of the Turkish History Thesis.<sup>6</sup> What is all Çağatay does in this passages is to inform the reader about the general outlines of the musical traditions of various archaic peoples and, since he thinks that Turkish History Thesis already “proved” that almost all civilizations including Hittites and Sumerians were Turkic in origin, this assumption automatically makes all these musical traditions early examples of the Turkish music. For example, when Çağatay speaks of the music of the Hittites, he also speaks of the music of “Hittite Turks”. So automatically all the musical traditions become part of the general Turkish music tradition overnight. Not surprisingly, this is not applicable to the Ottoman music. There is not any reference to Ottoman music in *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (The Outlines of Turkish History). It is really hard to understand why a Turkish writer of an official handbook on Turkish history has considered the Hittite, Sumerian and even Greek music to be a part of the Turkish music tradition, but has been unable to find it necessary to mention the contributions of Ottomans even in a sentence.<sup>7</sup>

In 1934, just a few days after the banning of Ottoman-Turkish music on radio, this time Çağatay (1934, 6) made reference to the Turkish History Thesis with a more ideological emphasis in order to legitimize the banning decision and the Turkish Music Reform in general. Çağatay had discovered “twelve chromatic pitches in the double flutes played by the human figures in the cartouches available at the Hittite museums”. This fact, according to him, proved that “the octave which underlay the Western music had already existed in the music of Hittites

<sup>5</sup> For detailed information on these practices and reactions against them see Ayas, 2014, Balkılıç, 2009. For an illuminative overview on the modernization efforts and music reforms in Turkey written in English see Komsuoğlu and Turan, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> For the offprint of Çağatay's manuscripts which had been used in a much more concise form in the music-related passages of *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* see Çağatay, 1933.

<sup>7</sup> In the music-related passages of *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, Çağatay (1930, 247) includes many poorly-grounded “details” into his narrative such as the claim that Greeks borrowed not only their musical instruments but also their whole music theory from “HittiteTurks”. However he doesn't mention even once from the Ottoman music in the chapters devoted to the Ottomans who are claimed to be only soldiers having made no contributions to cultural and artistic fields.

who had emigrated Anatolia from Central Asia". This also meant that "the origins of the contemporary European music could be found in Central Asia and Anatolia". Since the "grass root of the Western music was the archaic Turkic music", it was fair enough to adopt it. The reason why the Turks to this day had not realized the need to adopt the Western music was that they were used to live in backward social conditions that "encaging the Turkish women" and "forcing the musicians to play music on bended knees in presence of their oppressive sultans". When the Ottoman music which conformed to neither "the genuine Turkish history" nor the requirements of the contemporary world, was replaced by the Western music, the Turkish music would return to its source and keep up with the modern world at the same time. In short, Çağatay makes effective use of the Turkish History Thesis to legitimize Westernization of Turkish music in a nationalist discourse.

The Turkish History Thesis also left its mark on the first Turkish opera (Özsoy) ever performed in the republican Turkey. Not surprisingly, in practical terms, the most important goal of the Turkish Music Reform was to establish a Turkish opera (Üstel, 1993, 43). The fact that the subject of the first Turkish opera ever performed in the republican period being the Turkish History Thesis itself is very important in terms of the main point of this article. It really shows what a central place the Turkish History Thesis occupies in the music debates of the early republican period.

The first national opera performed in Turkey, Özsoy was composed by Ahmet Adnan Saygun at the behest of Atatürk. The libretto of the opera written by Münir Hayri Egeli and inspired by the ideas of Atatürk, clearly reflects the Turkish History Thesis:

"History tells us: The river of "civilization"

found its very source in the brachycephalic race.

This race originated from Asia and spread all over the world.

This history was considered the beginning of the rise.

In Europe, Anatolia, Iran and the Middle West

Copper entered into the civilization with the great race."

(Refiğ, 2012: 61)

The subject and content of this opera was directly dictated by Atatürk and written by Münir Hayri Egeli (Refiğ, 2012: 24). So it was a direct expression of the official view. The relation between the Turkish History Thesis and the dominant music discourse and practice went beyond the rhetorical level. The Turkish History Thesis also played a key role in the classification and the evaluation of the musical genres and even in the shaping of the new official music of the republic. For example, pentatonism thesis proposed by Ahmet Adnan Saygun and Mahmut Ragıp Gazimihal was to a large extent inspired by the Turkish History Thesis. In his memoirs, Saygun (1982: 46-9) clearly states that just like the Özsoy opera, pentatonism thesis did too originate from the historical view of Atatürk. According to Saygun, Atatürk has emancipated Turks from being obliged to adopt the narrative that equates the Turkish history to the "Ottomans originating from four hundred tents". Owing to the new historical view of Atatürk, the Turks have realized that "the contemporary inhabitants of

Anatolia which has been the cradle of civilization throughout history are not only the inheritors of the creators of these civilizations but also their descendants, sharing a common Turkic origin with the Turkic tribes coming from Central Asia.”

The pentatonism thesis is a result of his attempts to adapt this historical view to music. Saygun asserts that there exists “a common pentatonical structure in the folk musics of Anatolian, Hungarian, Finnish and the Turkic people living beyond the Ural Mountains” and attempts to find out the dispersal routes of this structure all over the world. As Aksoy (2015) put it, “pentatonism was a racial element” according to Saygun (1936, 6) who argued that “wherever one encounters pentatonic elements, the stamp of Turkishness in music, he should conclude that the inhabitants of this place are Turkic in origin.”<sup>8</sup> In his memoirs Saygun states that Atatürk, briefed by him about the thesis during the course of four and a half hours, has paid close attention to the pentatonism thesis and adopted it enthusiastically. Having seen the genuine national character of the pentatonic music and its noncompliance with the Ottoman music system, Saygun claims, Atatürk has concluded that Ottoman music is completely foreign to Turkish nation and just after a week made his famous speech in the parliament that has paved the way for the banning of the Ottoman-Turkish music.

As a matter of fact, the pentatonism thesis is a more sophisticated and technical variation of the Gökalpian formula that emphasized the contrast between the Ottoman and folk music. The aim of Gökalp was to show that, from the nationalist point of view, there was nothing wrong in Westernization since the Ottoman civilization had been just as foreign as the Western one. Pentatonism thesis not only created a contrast between the folk and Ottoman art music but also attempted to invent a shared history between the Turkish folk music and Western music. For example, Saygun (1936) claims that the genuine Turkish folk music which has Central Asiatic origins is pentatonic in character and the pentatonical elements observed in the world music have been spread all over the globe from Central Asia. In his book, there are also maps showing the dispersal routes of the pentatonism, reminiscent of the migration maps in the textbooks of Turkish History Thesis.

There is another key figure that encouraged the advocates of the pentatonism thesis by claiming Central Asiatic origins for the Hungarian folk songs: Bela Bartok (Balkılıç, 2009, 133). In just the same way as the European scholars embraced and acclaimed in the the history congresses like Eugene Pittard whose ideas were compatible with the Turkish History Thesis, the ideas of Bela Bartok were attached great importance by official circles probably since he was seen as a prominent Western musician and scholar who testified the Central Asiatic origins of the Western music. However, Bartok, though he himself was a Hungarian nationalist, was too serious a musician to manipulate music for political ends and had nothing to do with the Turkish History Thesis.

The argument that the pentatonic music as the genuine music of the Turks was spread throughout the world including Anatolia from Central Asia has been advocated not only by Saygun and Gazimihal but also other important figures such as Reşit Tanrıkut and İzzettin Tuğrul Nişbay (Balkılıç, 2009, 135). We can also see the impacts of the thesis on Muzaffer

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that, however, Saygun changed his mind afterwards. In 1986, he wrote that, since he was influenced by the Turkish History Thesis, he had thought in 1930's that the origin of pentatonism was Central Asia due to his imperfect knowledge and lack of experience but now realized that he was mistaken. For his auto-critic and revised analysis on pentatonism see Saygun, 1986, cited in Aksoy, 2015.

Sarısözen, the architect of the folk music policies of the state, who asserts that “the Turkish pentatonic folk music is the elementary form of the polyphonic Western music” and therefore “Turks have an important share in the beginning of the polyphonic music of Europe” (cited in Balkılıç, 2009, 143). However, there is not a necessary relationship between the pentatonism thesis and employing the Turkish History Thesis in music discourses. For example, Ali Rif’at Çağatay has criticized the pentatonism thesis severely, despite the fact that he has embraced the Turkish History Thesis. According to Çağatay, it is intolerable to consider a kind of music such as pentatonism, which is in fact one of the musical features of “primitive and savage tribes”, as the distinguishing feature of Turkish music.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, as we have seen above, he too, though in a different way, claims Turkish music to be the origin of the Western music. Another example of employing the Turkish History Thesis in music discourse without referring to pentatonism is Mesut Cemil, son of the legendary tanbur player Tanburi Cemil Bey and also the director of the official Istanbul Radio, who claims, in order to legitimize Westernization, that “most of the instruments played by Western musicians in Europe and United States are Central Asiatic in origin.”<sup>10</sup>

The main goal of the pentatonism thesis was to find out a common origin between the Western and Turkish music. Until that time, in both foreign and Turkish music circles, it was widely agreed that Ottoman-Turkish makam music and the polyphonic Western music were two different music systems, one is modal and the other tonal, therefore contrasting each other in technical and structural terms. Ottoman-Turkish music, perhaps the most refined and sophisticated member of the Oriental makam music, has distinctive and rich micro-tonal pitches that almost inevitably should be eliminated when being transformed into a polyphonic structure. It is therefore very difficult to create a synthesis between these two music systems without destroying the distinctive features of the makam music. The pentatonism thesis is a response to this challenge. Since the problem rises from the Ottoman makam music, the advocates of the thesis argued that the Ottoman makam music should be abandoned and another native source that can be made adaptable to the Western music system should be found. This source has been found among the pentatonic melodies in the Anatolian folk songs.

However, there are very few examples in these melodies that can be considered pentatonic. The advocates of the thesis explained this problem again by putting it on Ottomans’ shoulders. According to this explanation, the genuine Turkish music was pentatonic but it had transformed into its present state because of the disruptive effects of the Ottoman culture. It was argued that the masters of Ottoman music had scorned the folk melodies, not finding them worthy of analyzing in theoretical terms. Due to this scorn and neglect of the Ottomans, the genuine Turkish folk music had disappeared from the cities and nearby villages (Gazimihal, 1936, 12 cited in Balkılıç, 2009, 137). As a consequence, the folk music performed in most of the cities and nearby villages was a deformed and degenerated form of the genuine folk music. It was therefore necessary to go to the furthest villages in Anatolia to discover the so-called “untainted” music of the Turks. For example, Gazimihal (1936, 37) argues that, it is not even enough to go far from İstanbul to find this music. Because, “if we go for instance to Konya”, he writes, “we see that the folk songs of the villages of Konya have already lost their

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<sup>9</sup> Ali Rifat Çağatay, *İlk Müsveddeye Karşı Yapılan Tenkitlere Cevap*, “Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları” eserinin müsveddeleri, seri II, no. 6 / A, Akşam Matbaası, İstanbul, no date [193?], s. 4-7, cited in Aksoy, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> See Mesut Cemil, 1936 and Mesut Cemil, “Folklorumuzun Hudutları”, *Radyo*, II (17) cited in Balkılıç, 2009, 135.

untaintedness and pureness because of their long relationship with the classical alaturka and Mevlevi music in the city". It is just the same problem that the members of the official research teams encountered when they first attempted to collect the so-called "pure" Anatolian Turkish folk songs. The reports in the *Halk Şarkularımız Defteri* (Notebook of Folk Songs) prepared by the collector-researchers and published by Darülelhan shows that the folk songs are very similar to the makam music in cities in structural and technical terms. While citing the observations recorded by Sabri Bey in the introduction of the second notebook, Gazimihal notes that the Anatolian villagers has come to prefer to play and listen makam music instruments such as violin (keman), lute (ud), zither (kanun) and tanbur, now more popular than bağlama in some places. According to him, some sophisticated forms of makam music have recently become widespread in Anatolia. The reason of this, Gazimihal (1928 cited in Ayas, 2014, 143) notes, is the effects of the Ottoman city culture which has penetrated into the countryside via the dervish lodges (*tekke*), military organizations and the modern media such as gramophone or radio.

Vahit Lütfi Salcı<sup>11</sup>, an expert on Alevi-Bektashi music, through a somewhat conspiracist speculation and with a very little evidence, has come to the same conclusion. He claims that there are two different branches in Turkish-Anatolian folk music: A secret-esoterical folk music and a manifest folk music. The secret branch which belongs to the Turkish Alevi tribes reflects the genuine culture of Turks and contains polyphonic elements. They are such secret in nature that the folk songs collected by Bartok and even the Bektashi hymns (*nefes*) collected by the conservatoire are very far from this genuine Turkish music. That is why the Turkish folk music and the Ottoman makam music, misleadingly, appears to have a lot of things in common. However, in the secret and genuine Turkish folk music, there are in fact many elements that point out to polyphony. So this "secret branch" in folk music, Salcı (1940, 24-25; 39-49) claims, "exonerates Turkish music from the accusation of monophony". There is neither "feminine and somniferous elements" nor "something belongs to the Arab nation or religion" in this branch. All of its products are expressions of "the lively and pure Turkish spirit". They are not only "completely Turkish" but also "in accordance with the contemporary universal Western technique".

In short, according to these improved and enriched variations of the Gökalpian formula, the "untainted" and "pure" samples of the Turkish folk music are the raw materials that are to be processed by the Western musical techniques. The only thing to do, then, is to get rid of the Ottoman-Oriental elements in Turkish music. In other words, the Ottoman makam music is the main enemy of the Turkish music reform and all the approaches attempting to legitimize it including those based on the Turkish History Thesis. However, it is interesting that some advocates of the Ottoman makam music have also made use of the same thesis in order to legitimize their case against the attacks of the Turkish Music Reform. Now it is time to see how.

### **The Impact of the Turkish History Thesis on the Oppositional Discourse**

Above, we had seen how Ali Rif at Çağatay applied the Turkish History Thesis to the music debates in order to legitimize the Westernizing policies of the Kemalist government and the exclusion of the Ottoman makam music as well. On the contrary, a group of musicians

<sup>11</sup> For comprehensive information on Vahit Lütfi Salcı and a selection from his writings see Arslan, 2015.

representing the Ottoman-Turkish makam music have made use of the Turkish History Thesis in order to expand the legitimacy of it. Sadettin Arel and his follower Laika Karabey (1963, 8-9; 10-7), one of the most striking representatives of this approach, have not only attributed the origin of the Ottoman-Turkish makam music to Central Asia and even the Sumerians and the proto-Turks allegedly lived in Hatay thousands of years ago, but also discovered in Turkish music some elements supposedly more suitable for polyphonic music than the elements in Western music itself.<sup>12</sup> These representatives of the Ottoman-Turkish makam music who themselves were the targets of the official attacks based on Gökalp and the Turkish History Thesis created an alternative and revised version of these two approaches in order to defend the music they represented. As Bülent Aksoy (2008, 150) wrote, “Arel applied the cultural ethnicism to Turkish music and responded Gökalp with Gökalp”.

It is true that, in general terms, Arel has remained loyal to the Gökalian framework although he has criticized his dismissive arguments against the Ottoman makam music. He is the first musicologist who has used the term “Turkish music” with an ideological emphasis. In his revised version, not only the Turkish folk music, as in Gökalian formula, but also the makam music has come from Central Asia. Therefore, the Ottoman-Turkish makam music is ethnically as pure as Turkish folk music. In other words, there is again a “pure”, ethnically defined Turkish music but this time including the Ottoman makam music. Moreover, since this music has influenced the Oriental nations without being influenced by them, it cannot be classified as a branch of Oriental music anymore. Because the so-called Oriental music is itself a result of the Turkish influence on the region.

Arel (1949a, 3) argues that all of the key elements of the Western musical technique potentially exist in Ottoman-Turkish makam music whose material is even richer than Western music itself. “The Turkish music,” in his words, “contains ten times as many technical possibilities as the Western music does.” The only thing to do is to find out these riches and process them through the Western musical techniques. The formula is simple enough: “Western science in the service of Turkish Art”. This formula, which looks very familiar, is almost identical with the Gökalian formula with the only difference that in Arel’s formula the Ottoman makam music replaces the Turkish folk music in the original one. Arel explains this (seemingly slight but, fundamentally very great) difference on the basis of the general assumptions of the Turkish History Thesis. Regarding his sympathy towards the Ottoman music and his critical views against the official music policies, Arel’s approach can be classified among the oppositional discourses. However, this oppositional discourse paradoxically has internalized almost all the general assumptions of the official discourse including the Gökalian approach. Now let’s examine it more closely.

In fact, Arel, even though without referring to the word *Orient*, acknowledges the fact that there has been a common music culture among the Oriental nations throughout history.

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<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, in a different context I had discussed Arel’s views in a more detailed way elsewhere (Ayas, 2014, 221-33 and Ayas, 2015, 329-44). However, in this article I had to repeat some of my findings since I thought it necessary to draw attention to the power of the ideology underlying the Turkish History Thesis by showing its influence on the oppositional discourses. It should be noted that Arel is not a marginal figure in the Turkish makam music circles. He is the creator of the contemporary Turkish makam music notation, director of the municipal conservatory of Turkish music, composer and teacher of many official and non-official prominent figures performing or representing makam music. So I think that he provides a typical example, particularly in the field of the history of Turkish music, although he has some marginal ideas not approved by the alaturka camp.

After all, this fact has already been acknowledged by the opposing *alaturka* and the *alafranga* camps both having associated the Turkish makam music with Oriental music though for different reasons. However, Arel draws a very different conclusion from this consensus. All the music traditions in the former Ottoman territories, Arel argues, have come into being as a result of the spreading of the Central Asiatic Turkic music in the region. In his words: “It is the Turkish conquests that have united three nations like Arabs, Persians and Byzantines, who have little in common in terms of geography, language, culture, nationality and race, in a single music journey” (Arel, 1990, 34-5).

In his masterpiece, *Türk Musikisi Kimindir?* (To Whom Does the Turkish Music Belong?) Arel (1990) has mobilized all the available materials in support of this “Turkish conquest thesis” without closely examining their coherence. For example, in the first chapter of his book, he attempts to show that the Persians have taken their music from Turks. Though this argument has not been supported by any strong evidence, he fails to follow up on further questioning and in the second chapter, on the basis of the Orientalist literature claiming that the Arabic music has been taken from Persians, Arel concludes that, since there is not such a thing as Persian music, Turkish music is also the source of the Arabic music. It is a similar reasoning that he employs when attempting to show that the Byzantine and even Greek music is also Turkic in origin.

Arel’s strategy in this book consists of two stages. In the first stage, he begins with the claim that all the Oriental nations from Middle East to Africa have had no music of their own and in the second stage he explains the wide currency of the common makam music tradition in this vast geography by attributing them to the Turkish migrations and conquests. Accordingly, while he rages against the Western orientalists who argue that “Turks have no music of their own”, he praises the argument of the same people when they claim that there is no such thing as Arabic music. Moreover, he uses these Orientalist arguments denying the existence of Oriental music traditions in one way or another, in order to prove the Turkic origins of Arabic music. After all these discussions, Arel concludes that “Turks, Arabs, Persians, Armenians and Jews have a common musical tradition... first owners of which are Turks who have distributed it to the inhabitants of the countries which they pass over.” Then, it means that there is not such a thing as Oriental music. According to this way of thinking, the music supposed to be Oriental, is in fact the very Turkish music that has influenced most of the music traditions in the world. (Arel, 1990, 98-100).

It is interesting to note that, according to Arel, Turks have succeeded to influence all these music traditions without being influenced by any of them. This is just the very miracle that is attempted to be proven by the Turkish History Thesis. “The fact that Turks have not taken their music from any nation but brought together from Central Asia”, writes Arel (1990, 235), “glitters like a sun over all the claims, deductions, discussions and comparisons.” A slightly revised version of Gökalpian explanation isn’t enough for Arel to prove this miraculous fact. He needs another instrument of legitimization, finding it in the Turkish History Thesis. Arel (1990, 234) writes: “For example, what would you say if I proved that the ancient Greeks didn’t give us their music but rather did take it directly from us?... Let me explain. We can trace back the origins of the civilizations of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hebrews and Phoenicians to the Sumerian civilization, the origin of the Western civilization, from which the ancient Greeks have taken a good number of their cultural

elements and institutions.” On the ground that Sumerians are proto-Turks according to the Turkish History Thesis, Arel takes it for granted that this is enough to prove the Turkic origins of many musical traditions all over the world. He has written about this subject, which first appeared in a lecture given by him in 1941, in four successive articles published in the famous *Musiki Mecmuası* (Music Journal) in 1949. According to Arel (1949b, 4), there is no doubt that Sumerians are Turks migrated from Central Asia. Sumerian civilization, the origin of all the great civilizations in the world, has naturally influenced the Western civilization. Not only the Turkish music itself but also the Western musical forms and techniques as the notation and the opera, Arel claims, have come from Sumerians<sup>13</sup>. Although he acknowledges the fact that we have unreliable and insufficient information about the long centuries between us and the Sumerians, according to him, it will not be difficult to find out these evidences once our scientists proceed to excavate in Central Asia and the former Sumerian geography, finding new sources and evidences about the history of Turkish music (Arel, 1948b, 4).

As it can be remembered, the Turkish History Thesis has not only emphasized the Central Asiatic origins of the civilizations but also the Turkishness of the archaic Anatolian peoples. Accordingly, Arel (1948c, 3-4) has adopted the eccentric discourse of some official historians considering Hatay as a “millennial Turkish land”, claiming that the Western notation and the collective performance as an elementary form of Western choruses are both rooted in the musical practices of the “Hatay Turks” (Karabey, 1963, 8-9; 17-8).

According to Arel and some of his followers, Turkish music was not only the primordial source of the Western music but also could provide a fresh solution to its current problems. As it is well known, during early twentieth century, many composers, critics and intellectuals have pointed out the constraints and deadlocks of tonal music. They even discussed the possibility of exploiting the micro-tonal elements in order to bring a fresh blood to the Western music which was in a very serious crisis. Some of the Turkish intellectuals were following these discussions with great interest and very happy that the Ottoman makam music, which is humiliated in Turkey in those days, now could play a universal role as a potential rescuer of Western music. Fatih-Harbiye, the famous novel of Peyami Safa, which refers to these discussions on music in the dialogues of his heroes, presents a good example of this atmosphere. For example, one of the characters, in order to criticize the dismissive attitude of the official circles towards the Ottoman-Turkish makam music, quotes from a Western man of music (Eugene Borel) writing on the crisis of music in Europe. He writes that “The Western art music should take inspirations from Oriental art music traditions, most convenient of which is Turkish music in terms of proximity and perfectness” (Safa, 2000, 120). Hence, the theme of “Turkish music as a rescuer of Western music” developed later by Arel and followers is in fact not that much novel.

To see how this theme has been used for legitimizing purposes by the “alaturka” camp, we should turn our eyes to Osman Şevket Uludağ, who is both a follower of Arel and one of the leading spokesmen of the “alaturka” camp. In 1940, during the famous debates in the Turkish parliament regarding the music policies of the state, Uludağ defends the Ottoman makam music by giving its enemies a dose of their own medicine, reversing the Gökalpian formula. According to Uludağ, “European music has been trying to free itself from the cage

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<sup>13</sup> For the claim that the Western notation was rooted in Sumerians see Arel, 1949d, 3. For the claim that the opera is rooted in Sumerians see Arel, 1949c, 5.

of the major and minor tones.” This provides a very good opportunity for Turkish music to play a universal role. The Western music is in need of micro-tonal materials to overcome its crisis, while the Turkish music needs the Western musical techniques to modernize itself. Merging of the micro-tonal materials of the Ottoman-Turkish makam music and the modern Western musical techniques might be a good solution to the problems of both music traditions.<sup>14</sup>

It is noteworthy that in both the Gökalpian formula and this revised version of it, though the latter is more challenging and inclusive in a sense, the Turkish music is somewhat a raw material to be processed by the Western musical techniques. According to Gökalpian formula this raw material should include only folk songs. However, Arel argues that a musical modernization that confines itself to the folk songs is bound to fail since the makam music as a raw material contains elements much more convenient for this purpose in terms of richness and complexity. In his words: “The efforts of building a new music from the folk songs, while ignoring the rich material of makam music, resembles building a new modern architecture from the adobe huts, while scorning the architectural style of Süleymaniye Mosque for being a copy of Byzantine style” (1964, 20).

In short, Arel and his followers, through the instrumentality of the Turkish History Thesis, portrayed the Ottoman-Turkish makam music as a pure Turkish music which was rooted in Central Asia and not influenced by any musical traditions of the Orient. Thus they replaced the folk music in the Gökalp’s formula by its Ottoman counterpart. However, just as in the way that Gökalp did in the case of folk music, they saw the Ottoman musical legacy as a raw material only to gain its real value when processed by the Western musical technique. So the same group of people, who were the target of the official attack based on the Gökalpian thoughts, formed an alternative and revised version of this Gökalpism in order to defend themselves.

## CONCLUSION

Now it is time to draw some conclusions from these discussions. First of all, it should be emphasized once again that the Turkish History Thesis has been employed as an ideological instrument rather than a scientific explanation in the music debates of the early republican period. For example, as Bülent Aksoy has noted (2015), the paradigm of the folk music studies in Turkey including the pentatonism debate has derived from the political and ideological views of the thinkers outside the field of music rather than being a result of “the curiosity and initiative of the music circles”. In this respect, “the motivations underlying the folk music studies in the early republican period and the studies of Bartok in Hungary are different from each other.” The main aim of the former is to provide cultural legitimacy for the musical practices, making them compatible with the political requirements of the new regime. This legitimizing role is twofold. A revised and more challenging version of the Gökalpian formula, the Turkish History Thesis, has both legitimized the Turkist policies and Westernization at the same time by claiming that all the great civilizations including the Western one is rooted in archaic Turkishness. More precisely, it has provided a Turkist legitimacy for Westernization. Hence, pentatonism thesis is a translation of the Turkish History Thesis and Kemalist ideology into a musical context.

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<sup>14</sup> *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre IV, c. 11, İçtima 1, 13 May 1940, p. 97.

Secondly, it is important to note that the ideological background underlying the Turkish History Thesis and its various extensions in the music debates have dominated not only the official view but also the oppositional discourses, despite its weak scientific basis. This fact points to the extent of ideological hegemony exercised by the dominant cultural discourse on the oppositional one. For example, Arel's arguments on the origins and influence of Turkish makam music influenced by the official historical view have been widely welcomed among the Ottoman-Turkish makam music circles. The followers of Arel, including important figures such as Laika Karabey and Yılmaz Öztuna have adopted his historical narrative on Turkish music.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that even a resolute defender and spokesman of the alaturka camp such as Rauf Yekta, who has played a very important role in transmitting the Ottoman-Islamic culture to the republican generations, has had to refer to the Shamanic origins of the Mevlevi rites though he himself was a high-ranking Mevlevi (Rauf Yekta, 1934 cited in Salcı, 1941, 8-11). However, it is not that much surprising when we take account of the political atmosphere of the 1930s. What is surprising is that, today, standard textbooks on the history or theory of the Turkish makam music still refer to Arel's general narrative when they argue for the Turkishness of the Ottoman makam music.<sup>16</sup> So it can be said that the core of the dominant ideology in the official music discourse of the early republican period is still very influential although its practical aspects, particularly the strict measures against the makam music, are being widely criticized and rejected by nearly all parties involved in music debates. Another important fact that points to the extent of this ideological hegemony is that it has succeeded to unite very different and conflicting approaches in a general ideological framework. Ali Rif'at Çağatay is a harsh critic of pentatonism and a supporter of the Westernization policies. Gazimihal and Saygun are the advocates of pentatonism and use it to dismiss the Ottoman makam music and Arel is one of the prominent spokesmen and defenders of it. However, they all share the same ideological background reflected in the main points of the Turkish History Thesis.

Thirdly, the music debates related with Turkish History Thesis are significant in terms of the relationship between invented and living traditions. Inventing traditions, as Hobsbawm (1983) put it, is an inseparable part of nearly all nation-building processes. However, it should be remembered that each invented tradition is somehow rooted in a tangible cultural element already existed in the history of that society. Some of these elements keep on living and it is these very elements that shape the living traditions. However, as Eliassen (2014, 774) put it, "invented traditions," more often than not, "oppose and distort customary behaviors that are living traditions." The success of the nation-building or tradition-inventing process depends largely to the distance between the invented and living traditions. In the case of pentatonism, field studies have shown that pentatonic elements in Turkish folk music consist of a relatively very small part of its corpus in terms of living tradition and historical precedents as well. As a result of this wide gap between the invented and the living traditions, pentatonism thesis has failed to establish pentatonic elements in music as the key feature of national Turkish music culture as expected by Saygun, Gazimihal etc. As a result, after the strict ideological atmosphere of the 1930s has come to an end, it has been put on the shelf. Hence, it is not

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<sup>15</sup> Even his most ardent critics such as Cinuçen Tanrıkorur have referred to these arguments when arguing against the Westernist discourse claiming the Ottoman music to be non-Turkic in origin.

<sup>16</sup> For one of the most widely circulated examples of this approach in educational music institutions see Özkan, 2003, 26-30

surprising that the pentatonism debate has almost been forgotten for a long time though the soft ideology underlying it is still in effect in one way or another. But this can be a subject of another article.

I wish the music studies influenced by the Turkish History Thesis could serve to draw attention to the cultural diversity and richness of the Turkish musical culture rather than attempting to find a monolithic source for national identity defined in strict ideological terms. Finally, what is left from these debates is not only a striking example of an ideological instrumentalization of the musical field but also a motivation to reconsider the place of Turkish music in universal music traditions. Even if the early republican attempts failed in terms of the latter, they can still inspire us to find a much more nuanced way to achieve this task today.

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