

A LA TURKA / A LA FRANKA

Cultural ideology and musical change

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One of the most perplexing problems in the study of Sephardic Jewish music from Turkey is a very audible change : a musical tradition that was primarily Middle Eastern has become transformed into a Western European style of music. This phenomenon is documented by commercially produced sound recordings, as well as by ethnographic field tapes. Striking musical differences are evident between early 20th century (1910s - 1920s) versions of songs and more recent renditions (1970s - 1980s) from the same repertoire. For example, Yehoram Gaon, a popular Israeli singer of Turkish Jewish heritage whose records were produced in the 1970s, employs an *ala franka* or Western-type singing style. His versions of the songs use a distinctly European musical organization, i.e., the song arrangements emphasize diatonic intervals, utilize harmony and feature lush orchestral accompaniment.

In contrast, singers from the early portion of the 20th century, such as the famous Haim Efendi (Haim Yapaci) and the cantor, Izak Algazi, whose 78 rpm discs remain as historical documentation, employ an *ala turka* or Middle Eastern vocal style, using *titrek* (Turkish : tremelo singing), featuring elaborately embellished melodic lines, and utilizing a nasal-centered vocal production. These older recordings of the songs are structured in the *makam* system (micro- and macrotonal in comparison to the diatonic system of Western music), show a lack of harmony (monophony or heterophony is present) and are accompanied by the small urban ensemble of traditional Arab/Turkish instruments : *ud* (lute), *kanun* (a trapezoidal, zither-type, plucked, stringed instrument), *keman* (Middle Eastern-tuned violin). Only the original melodic line and the language of the poetic text (Judeo-Spanish or Hebrew) remain constant between these contrasting renditions.

Accounting for the change from a Middle Eastern musical system to a Western European one has been the prime focus of this researcher's work in Turkish Jewish music. The research expanded from a detailed analysis of commercial sound recordings produced in Turkey of Sephardic Jewish music through current recordings produced in Europe, America, and Israël ; to field work in three Sephardic communities in the United States (1976-1980); and finally, to a period of extended field study in Istanbul, Turkey, and with Turkish Jews in Israël (end December, 1981 - August, 1983), where both young and old singers were interviewed and recorded.

The field research yielded a more complex appraisal of the state of the Sephardic musical art. Differential continuity and change was documented between generations of singers, and between component repertoires (e.g., secular and sacred, *kantigas v. pizmonim*) within the larger body of tradition. In the ethnographic present of the field study (1982/83), both Middle Eastern and European musical systems were found to co-exist. The native model, *alaturka / alafranka*, as a symbolic classification for Eastern versus Western cultural orientations, was adopted from the community by the researcher to serve as an explanatory model for understanding the relationship of musical to social change. As the research progressed, it became clear that the categories *alaturka / alafranka* involved more than musical sound. To the anthropologist, they seemed to be cornerstones of the cultural ideology that characterizes Turkish Sephardic Jewish culture.

Culture ideology

Ideology is a collection or framework of beliefs and values, attitudes and conceptualizations, that organize the world for members of a particular cultural group. The view of culture as ideology has as its focus the importance of human thought, and derives from symbolic¹, semantic², semiotic³, and Marxist⁴ paradigms in social anthropology. As Godelier

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973 et Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge*. New York, Basic Books, 1983.

² Malcolm R. Crick, *Explorations in Language and Meaning : Towards a Semantic Anthropology*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1976 et Malcolm R. Crick, "Anthropology of Knowledge", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. II, pp. 287-313, 1982.

³ Michael Herzfeld and Margot D. Lenhart (eds), "Disemia", *Semiotics 1980*, New York, Plenum Press, 1982, pp. 205-215 et Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More : Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1982.

⁴ Jean R. Barstow, (ed), *Culture and Ideology : Anthropological Perspectives*. Minneapolis, Minnesota Latin American Series, 1982.

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points out, "thought not only interprets reality, but actually organizes every kind of social practice ..." ⁵. Actors, or members of the group, negotiate their social identities in specific interactions based on their perceptions, and rank in importance different aspects of the ideological framework. The ideology itself is not a well integrated, systematic whole that is readily apparent to all members of the culture. Rather, individuals are aware of aspects of the ideology that directly apply to their social status (e.g., age and gender considerations) or particular needs. Ideology may not always be explicit in language, but it may be implicitly expressed and symbolically indexed or referenced in nonverbal communication, such as the arts ⁶.

The categories *alaturka/alafranka* are differentially valued co-domains within the ideology of Turkish Jewish culture. That is, the categories are manipulated by the people in the construction of social identities. Associations with each respective category represent something about who an individual is, and in certain contexts, about group identity. Simply defined, the categories organize the culture into (a) *alaturka* - that which is Ottoman, Anatolian, or Middle Eastern in its origin or orientation; and (b) *alafranka* - that which is European, or Western, again, in its origin or orientation.

These categories were often discussed by Turkish Jews even before the researcher attempted to elicit such material with questions. For example, if asked about their musical preferences, informants would answer with a classification of musical styles :

"I prefer Western music (*Bati müziği* or *alafranka*)."

"Zeki Müren is a great singer. I always listen to *alaturka* (Middle Eastern) music."

Even people who had no formal musical training would list repertoires of music they enjoyed. Within the context of modern Turkish society, this was a typical response, as people in Istanbul are very aware of all types of music, Eastern and Western. In Turkish, specific terms exist for these musics: *Arabesk*, *Halk Müziği*, *Sanat Müziği*, *Caz (Jazz)*, *Aranjman*, *Klasik Bati Müziği*, *Hafif Müziği*, *Pop Müziği*. These repertoires are further

⁵ Maurice Godelier, "Infrastructures, Societies, and History", *Current Anthropology*, 1978, vol. 19, p. 766.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction : A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press 1984; French edition, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1979 et Michael Herzfeld and Margot D. Lenhart (eds), "Disemia", *Semiotics 1980*, New York, Plenum Press, 1982.

grouped into two overarching categories : Western and Eastern. Several terms are used to express this East/West distinction. For the Jews of Istanbul, the most popular terms are *alaturka* and *alafranka*.

These categories are differentially valued, i.e., they have differing social values attached to them in different performance contexts. For example, *alafranka* music, such as Italian popular song, has a high social value attached to it. Jews as a rule rarely listen to Turkish folk music (*Halk Müziği*), and regard European and American popular music and their Turkish counterparts (*Hafif* and *Pop Müziği*) as being more appropriate to modern life. However, in the realm of religion, *alaturka* music is considered appropriate, even if one's personal tastes run contrary. Mr. P., a prominent member of the community council, confided that he far preferred Western Classical Music to Turkish Art Music (*Sanat Müziği*). However, he continued, synagogue song was *alaturka* and it was "our art music". So even if he didn't personally like it, he respected it and acknowledged its appropriateness for the synagogue. Religious and traditional families in the community, who constitute a minority of the remaining 20 000 Jews of Istanbul, prefer *alaturka* music, by which they mean *Klasik Türk Müziği* or *Sanat Müziği*, and its Jewish counterparts (*Maftirim*, *Perukim*, *pizmonim*, *Hizun* repertoire for *Yamim Noravim*). They often refer to historical connections between Jewish religious song and Ottoman palace music, an elite form.

Musical and sociocultural change

Drs. Rodrigue and Kastoryano have already discussed the significant changes that the Turkish Jewish community experienced at the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. Historically, we have seen that the Jews flourished under Ottoman rule, enjoying a limited type of autonomy in the *millet* system and governmental recognition of Jewish law, religion, language and culture. Jews had entered all levels of Ottoman society, including the *saray* where they were physicians, advisors, financiers, and musicians. With the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the shift to a modern republic (in the years following World War I), the size of the Jewish community in Turkey diminished with emigration to Israël and the West (Europe and the Americas). The socioeconomic composition of the community changed as well, as the majority of poor and working-class Jews went to Israël circa 1948, leaving the community today predominantly middle and upper class. While there are a few professionals (doctors and lawyers), most Jewish men (women rarely work outside of the home after they marry) are classic

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economic middlemen, owning small shops, factories, and distributorships, or representing foreign companies. Emigration was also internal ; as the community became smaller, Jews from towns moved into Istanbul, which today is the main center of Turkish Jewry. These town Jews brought with them distinct regional folkways, speech-styles, foodways, and musical styles. Thus, Istanbul has become a composite community composed of numerous regional styles.

What relationship do these and the other changes have for understanding the shift in Turkish Jewish music from an *alaturka* musical system to an *alafranka* one ? Perhaps the most significant change was that in the cultural orientation and ideology of the Turkish Jewish community. A Jewish *millet*, which in the Ottoman context was mixed of a range of social classes and orientations, became top heavy in the 20th century. The middle and upper clans Jews who remained in Turkey, by and large adopted an ideology of elitism. During the fieldwork (1982/83), it was observed that even if a family was really working class - viz., they didn't own their shop nor their home - their cultural style, projected to other members of the community, was that of being middle clans. The middle class orientation was expressed by speaking French, by listening to European music, by moving from Şişli to Göztepe (changing neighborhoods), by vacationing in Marmaris or Bodrum, or at least, by renting a house for part of the summer on the *Adalar* (Prince's Islands, Marmara Sea). *A mujer* (Jewish wife) from the Istanbul community, unlike her working-class Israeli sister or her Muslim neighbor, disdains the traditional *alaturka* jewelry, the heavy gold *kadenas* (chains) and bracelets, preferring instead small European-style diamond earrings.

This elite ethic and style is satirized in the following stanza from a poem by Refail Akkohen, a Jewish folk poet of Istanbul, entitled, "Nosotros el Turkano" (We the Turkano).

*Kon meneadas va kaminando, te saludava kon **Grandeza**
Paresia ke vino al Mundo, de una Madre de **Prenezeza**
Loke estudio es fin tressera klasa i nasio en **Hasköy**
Se olvido ke su Padre gritava "**Eskiler Alayım**" en **Ortaköy**.*

He walks with affectation ; he salutes you with grandeur
It seems that he was born of a royal mother
But he only attended school until the third class and he was born in
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He forgot that his father used to shout, "I buy old things" (that is, his father was a junkman) in Ortaköy.

The protagonist in the poem is occupied with the symbols of his new social status of middle class businessman - card playing on the Islands, tennis matches, a fancy house, a bejeweled wife. He has conveniently forgotten his humble origins in the old Jewish neighborhoods which are no longer fashionable. He puts on airs and acts so upper class, as though his mother was a princess, when, in fact, his father was only a junkman.

Social mobility was strongly symbolized by language change. The French language, promoted by the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools, became associated with elite, upper class status. The adaptation of French as the primary language of many Jewish families has had a profound impact on the transmission of the Judeo-Spanish language (Turkish : *Yahudice*), the Jewish language of Turkey, and its corresponding folk culture, including the Sephardic song tradition. It is difficult to continue singing songs in a language that one no longer speaks, and in a language that is stigmatized as a marker of low class (*basse classe*) culture.

Technological advancements in the 20th century have changed the position of traditional music in Turkey, as in the rest of the world. The entertainment functions served by traditional folk singing have been replaced by radio, television, video and cassette in the urban context. Changes to a more technologically modern and European - oriented life style by upper class people in the Turkish Jewish community have led to a decline in folk religious practices. These ceremonies had been held in the home (outside of the synagogue), but, as part of non-elite traditional *alaturka* culture, they came to be regarded as superstitious and *atrasado* (backward). Songs which accompanied not only these ceremonies, but also daily activities in the home, have all but disappeared in the community as a living tradition. Thus, *romansas*, the Medieval ballad form brought from Muslim Spain for which Sephardic women were famous, and *kantigas*, the popular songs composed about life in the Balkans, have been replaced by Europeanized arrangements of the traditional texts on commercial Israeli, European (especially French and Spanish recordings), and American cassettes and 33rpm discs. The enormous body of paraliturgical songs that accompanied special ceremonies in the home such as *parida* (childbirth), *asuar* (display of dowry items), and *bodas* (weddings) exist only in the memory of a few older informants (70s - 80s age range).

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Yet, religious music continues in the synagogue as a distinctly *alaturka* form. At first glance, this appears to be a paradox or something that doesn't fit into the *alaturka* / *alafranka* explanatory model. However, this situation is not surprising when we remember that religious music is *an elite*, *alaturka* form, and that its transmission is limited to a small group of very traditional practitioners. As we have heard, the style of religious music is dominantly Ottoman ; many of its melodies have been adapted from Turkish Classical music, the music of the Ottoman court, or were composed by Jewish composers who wrote both for the palace and the synagogue: e.g., Izak Varon (1884-1962) ; Avram Mandil (1829-1888) ; Hoca Santo (Şemtov Şikar) (late 19th - early 20th centuries) ; Tanburi Izak Fresko Romano (1745-1814); Haham Nesim Sevilva (20th century) ; Misirli Ibrahim (Abut) (20th century) ; Izak Algazi (20th century) (Republican period).

Jewish religious music is extremely difficult to sing and it is rare that non-specialists can reproduce it, except in a piecemeal fashion. Specialists in the religious music are, for the most part, *hazanim* (cantors) and amateurs (*Maftirim* choir members) who have often had formal instruction in classical Turkish music at the state or municipal conservatory, or who have trained with a master. Religious music is an entirely male domain. Women do not sing this music nor do they have any idea about it, except for the daughters of *hahamim* (rabbis) who may have been involved with their fathers as children in the performance of synagogue song. Men often discuss concepts from Turkish music, such as *makam*, which characterizes the performance of synagogue song.

The close relationship and resemblance of Jewish synagogue song to Turkish classical music is expressed in the following anecdote about Levy the Kanuni (kanun player) and the Sultan :

It was the eve of Tisha B'AV, a fast day, the saddest day in the Jewish year, and Abdul Hamid called Levy and his group to play that night in the palace. Levy was very perplexed and upset. It was a fast day in the Jewish year. and he did not want to profane it with playing secular music. But the Sultan had called him. Not to go before the Sultan would make the ruler angry, and he, Levy, would suffer the consequences. What to do ? Levy thought the whole day, and finally decided to play kinot (Hebrew), that is endechas (Judeo-Spanish : lamentations) which are traditionally sung for Tisha B'AV. Since our religious music is sanat (art) music, there was no problem. The Sultan was very moved by the performance and didn't even realize that the

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singers were singing in Hebrew. Later, he gave Levy a valuable present.

The elite background of the religious music and its "quality" are often mentioned by its practitioners.

Outside of the synagogue, very few informants in Istanbul were able to sing in an *alaturka* fashion. In contrast, during the fieldwork (1983) in Israel among the Turkish Jews of Yehud, where the preoccupation with a high social status is less important, secular song was sung *alaturka*, particularly by working-class women with their families in the car as they went on picnics or *tiulim* (Hebrew : excursions), "kantigas de kaminar" (traveling songs). These women also frequented matinees on Wednesday afternoons in Bat Yam night clubs which feature Turkish food and where Muslim musicians are brought to Israel from Istanbul to sing *Arabesk* and popularized semi-classical Turkish song, two distinctly *non-elite*, *alaturka* forms.

Alaturka / alafranka : some conclusions

The explanatory value of the *alaturka / alafranka* distinction and the Istanbul Jewish ideology of elitism in understanding musical and sociocultural changes is made even clearer when we consider the revival of Sephardic music that is currently taking place in Istanbul. During the field research, there were three groups of young people (20s to 30s age range) actively performing Sephardic music in the community. These three groups had different musical aesthetics and styles, all of which derived from elite, *alafranka* sources which originated outside of the community.

The first of the three groups, the Kula group, wrote a musical play which they performed in a youth club in 1978. The inspiration for this play was Izak Navon's *Boustan Sepharadi*, an Israeli musical about the old Sephardic families in Jerusalem and their songs. Rather than going to their grandmothers to learn the old Jewish songs of Istanbul, members of the Kula group took the Boustan songs, and material from Gloria Levy's Ethnic Folkways album (produced in New York, FW8737, 1959). These songs were adapted into their play which documented the life of their parents in the 1930s in Kuledibi, a picturesque neighborhood in the shadow of the Galata Tower, which at that time was about 95 % Jewish, the *juderiya* of Istanbul.

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Kula members, many of whom became good friends and research assistants, are fairly knowledgeable about Sephardic culture. Yet, they adapted Western musical forms and styles into their play, while their speech styles imitated the Oriental Spanish of their parents in an *alaturka* manner. During the fieldwork, Kula members who remained in Istanbul (others had immigrated to Canada and Israël) tried to regroup and perform a concert of the "Kula 930" (the title of their musical) songs.

This time, perhaps due to interference of the anthropologist, *alaturka* instruments such as the *kanun* were added and an *aranjman* (Turkish : arrangement - a specific East/West combination musical style) sound was achieved, similar to that of the Turkish popular group, the Modern Folk Trio.

The second group, Yeshua's group, is a choir. The leader of the group, Yeshua A., who by profession is a distributor of electrical equipment, was also a student at the Çemberlitas conservatory in 1982/83, where he was studying Classical Western music. Yeshua's aesthetic of Sephardic song is that it should be sung in the style of European madrigals, since the Jews came from Medieval Europe. Yeshua has taken his material from European recordings, but he has also learned songs from older people in the community for which he has written new arrangements.

Finally, the third group is Jak E.'s band. Jak and his friends speak Castillian Spanish which they have learned at the Spanish Consulate in Istanbul. One member of the band, Moreno B., is a professional singer and guitarist who plays *Hafif* music in Turkish resort hotels. This group performs the Sephardic repertoire in the style of modern Spanish popular music, a la Julio Iglesias. Jak's friends have learned their repertoire from the old people in the Istanbul community. However, the older people complain that these young people are playing the music all wrong. At a concert in 1983, held at the *Azilo* (Jewish Home for the Aged), Mme Rosa and Mme Rachelle M. observed that Jak's band sounded like *Hafif* or Turkish pop music. This, these grandmothers maintained, was not the correct *alaturka* sound that people over age 70 prefer ! Jak and friends made a visit to Spain, and later, showed the anthropologist a photograph of themselves next to a statue of Maimonides. Jak's aesthetic is that Sephardic music and culture is "Spanish". Thus, arranging the songs of the old people into modern Spanish, changing both the language and musical style, is appropriate. Moreno B., when confronted with the opinions of Mme Rosa and Mme Rachelle M. answered : "Old people at the *Azilo* don't appreciate good quality music ; they just want *alaturka* all the time."

Hence, the meanings of the categories *alaturka* and *alafranka* differ considerably between generations, as does language use, and are influenced by how respective actors view their culture, viz., their views of the cultural ideology. For the older generation (age range of 70s and above), Sephardic culture is *alaturka*. Although this generation was educated in French, they retain Judeo-Spanish⁷. For people in the 40s to 60s age range, the French language is favored while they also can speak Judeo-Spanish. In many cases, their Turkish is marked by the distinctive Jewish speech-style. The musical tastes of this middle-aged generation are mixed, between *alaturka* and *alafranka* forms. For young people, in their 20s and 30s, knowledge of Judeo-Spanish declines and depends upon what languages were spoken at home. Their musical and cultural preferences are European, as is their view of their own Sephardic heritage, i.e., "We are Spanish or Medieval European in origin".

In conclusion, an ideology of elitism seems to have influenced the retention of certain cultural forms, such as religious music in the *alaturka* mode, as well as the adaptation of new forms, such as the *alafranka* models employed by the young people in their attempts to reconstruct their heritage. The *alaturka* / *alafranka* categories, have some diachronic components. Namely, *alaturka* cultural forms are historic ; they relate back to a time, expressed in Judeo-Spanish as "al tiempo", when the Jewish community of Istanbul was mixed in terms of socio-economic class. However, *alaturka* is not the only category with a historical dimension. The *alafranka* category can also be viewed as being historic, as in the case with both Yeshua's group and the Jak E. band. Within the ideology of these young people, Jewish culture in Istanbul is Spanish, which means in their view, European, rather than designating an Islamic, Arabic, Andalusian origin of their 15th century ancestors. As we have seen in the example of religious music, elitism overrides the categories *alaturka* / *alafranka*. All of the *alafranka* culture found in Istanbul has an elite connotation, while only some of the *alaturka* culture, i.e., the palace component manifest in Jewish religious music, can be considered as such. It is the ideology of elitism that has influenced which types of Sephardic music still exist as a living tradition in Istanbul today.

⁷ In this generation, the women rarely have much background in Turkish, although the men speak it because of the military service. Older women may also speak Greek, learned from their Christian neighbors.