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Transcultural Intimacy in Turkish-Greek Relations

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

Two fishermen sailed out to the sea
One from this shore of the Aegean
The other from the other shore

They cast their rods into the blue waters
A small *orfoz*¹
unwilling to disappoint them
and not knowing which one to choose
tied their lines together
with a sailor's knot.

The short poem cited above, by the well-known Turkish poet and children's writer Yalvaç Ural, was the winner of the 1983 Abdi İpekçi Turkish-Greek Friendship and Peace Prize in poetry. It is also recited, in its Turkish and Greek versions, at the opening of *Ege'nin Türküsü/ To Tragoudi Tou Agaiou* [*The Song of the Aegean*], the 2001 album of the Turkish violin virtuoso Cihat Aşkın. It is an apt testament to the childlike optimism that has permeated the majority of efforts surrounding the rapprochement at the grassroots level. Muammer Ketencioğlu's introduction to Türkan and Sinopoulos's *Letter from Istanbul*, another 2001 production, echoes these sentiments, this time with a certain scepticism towards the nation-state:

I want to believe that art and music are more powerful and permanent than the concepts of nation and state, which, through wars, assimilations and cultural purifications, have become prevalent over the last five centuries and which give the impression of having irrevocably shaped our lives today.

This somewhat naïve hope for true friendship or, at least, for genuine reconciliation between the two nations is discernible in the majority of the recordings examined. At the end of his notes for *Rebetika III*, Ketencioğlu lists some of the thoughts that occurred to him while listening to this compilation:

A unity and richness which cannot be reduced to similarity; 'We too are from Anatolia'; 'Don't forget us!'; in one hand the rage of the victorious, in the other the punishment of the defeated; a cherished bridge made up of notes, a bridge no bomb can destroy.

In a similar vein, the lyrics of the Turkish cover version of the *rembetiko* song *Manolis* [*Manolis*, penned by Cengiz Onural] end with the following stanza (Susam-Sarajeva 2006: 272):

Turkish lyrics	Back translation
Yaşa bre Manolaki, vur sazın teline Sana gölge edenler, çıkmasın önüne Kaybolur biz çalınca hepsi birer birer Dünya ehli olanlar aynı dilden söyler	Good for you Manolaki, start playing your <i>saz</i> / <i>baglama</i> So that those who bother you will give up They will disappear one by one, when we play

¹ Grouper in both Greek and Turkish.

Those who know the ways of the world sing in the same tongue
--

Although in keeping with the general tone of the song, the stanza does not actually correspond to the Greek lyrics, in which the emphasis remains on playing the *bağlama* and smoking hashish to forget or disregard the ways of the world (*pseftiko dounia/ yalan dünya* [the world as a lie/ an illusion]). The allusion in the final line of the Turkish lyrics, however, to those who know and have mastered the ways of the world (*dünya ehli*), to the remnants of the Greek and Turkish communities adhering to traditional Anatolian values, and to their hoped for unity and harmony (singing in the same tongue) is unmistakable.

These relatively optimistic early mediators involved in the rapprochement – lyricists, singers, composers, compilers, bands, virtuosi and translators – were mainly on the periphery of the Turkish musical scene due to their political affiliations, their desire to avoid mainstream music and/or the lack of marketing. Most of them were intellectuals trying their best to keep modern mass entertainment at arm’s length and to offer an alternative route within the rapprochement – perhaps a more cautious and subtle route than the official and mainstream ones observed in the later years of the thaw in relationship between the two countries. Dissidents as they were in varying degrees, they were arguably in a more suitable position to question the political decisions of Turkish and Greek states at the time, to underline the gaps and contradictions in state-endorsed histories and to open up avenues in artistic cooperation with their previously maligned neighbours.

Subsequent joint concerts by the top singers of both countries, on the other hand, and the consequent increase in the visibility and impact of popular music within the rapprochement indicate a definite move from the periphery to the centre. What was started by the ordinary citizens of both countries as a movement against the foreign policies of their respective governments has eventually been co-opted by the two nation-states themselves. Today it would be fair to say that Turkish-Greek friendship has turned into a “publicised motto, commoditised, reappropriated by mainstream political and media discourse” (Karakatsanis 2014: xiii). The strategically timed support that the rapprochement received from the governments and the media of the two countries has contributed substantially to this process. As Livaneli (2008: 297-8, my emphases) observes:

Until [the Paris concerts], all that we achieved had developed within the framework of friendship and artistic independence, quite separate from our respective countries’ official politics. [...] So much so that we had not even underlined the ‘friendship’ aspect too much, preferring to focus on the theme of artistic synergy instead, and without falling into the *ouzo-sirtaki* chitchat, which some circles often poke fun at. *After all, Turkish-Greek friendship was candidate to becoming yet another cliché.* We have been presenting our work mainly as a co-operation between a composer and a singer. And this is the truth. For me, what was important was not that Maria was Greek, but that she was one of the greatest soloists in the world. My international cooperation was not limited to her. The concerts and records I had done with another Maria, Maria Del Mar Bonet from Barcelona, never evoked a Turkish-Spanish friendship discourse. Similarly, my work with Joan Baez never meant a Turkish-American friendship. My songs have been sung by singers of more than twenty different countries, but *none were received as politically as the singers from Greece.*

This politicized reception is mostly due to the perception of the Greek as the quintessential Other, among all the neighbours surrounding the Republic of Turkey and all the other nations

beyond the region. As the journalist Kırbaki (2005: 6) puts it, in relation to the unprecedented success of the Turkish TV series *Foreign Son-in-Law*:

The ‘Other’ is always enticing. The other always tickles one’s curiosity. In these two countries, blessed with the beautiful waters of the Aegean, a Turkish-Greek love is in itself a story to sell successfully. If the son-in-law had been, say, British, instead of Greek, the series wouldn’t have been so popular, not even in Turkey.

Due to this enticement, almost all instances of co-operation between musicians of both shores have eventually come to be reported in a way that would fit into the discourse of the rapprochement. For instance, Turkish singer Mahsun Kırmızıgül’s Harbiye Open-Air Concert in 2006 was announced with the headline: “Mahsun brings the two shores together”, even though the actual news report only briefly mentioned the Greek clarinet player Vassilis Saleas and vocalist Sarandis Saleas appearing on stage.² In another news item it is claimed that Saleas’s joint concerts with the Turkish clarinet player Serkan Çağrı in Istanbul on 15 November 2005 and on 5 May 2013, under the title *İki Yaka Tek Nefes* [*Two Shores and a Single Breath*], “establish a bridge of friendship from Istanbul to Athens. Common melodies played and sung in different languages demonstrate the centuries-old intercultural interaction echoing today”.³ “Turkish-Greek reunion will be lived on stage”, proclaims another headline, advertising a classical music concert of the Greek Ensemble Kelsos, under the auspices of the İzmir municipality and the Greek Consulate in Turkey.⁴ The reporting of the Turkish, and international, megastar Tarkan’s visit to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus focuses on his songs “carrying a message of peace” and duly acknowledges the 2,000 Greek Cypriot audience who were expected to attend the concert in addition to the Turkish Cypriot ones.⁵

Even though the early activist-musicians wished to believe that art and music would ultimately prevail over the aggressive policies of nation-states, the situation between the two countries did not drastically improve until the latter decided to extend its patronage to these artistic and musical endeavours, in an effort to diversify and broaden the peace-building process. The increasing state-support offered to music within the Turkish-Greek rapprochement, as well as the more general ‘recognition’ extended by the Turkish state to its minorities, is reflected in Stokes’s (2010: 136) analysis of Aksu’s album *Işık Doğudan Yükselir* [*The Light Rises from the East*, 1995]. He points out how the album was promoted by the state through an uncharacteristic appearance during a Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) evening news broadcast in the summer of 1995:

If Aksu succeeded in initiating broad and civil debate about the place of minority languages in the national ‘mosaic’, she did so because she chose her battles carefully, could rely on popular support, and now had the endorsement of the state. The underlying challenge constituted by *Işık doğudan yükselir* was, though, a stark one. Aksu implied that the TRT, and by extension the state itself, was no longer meeting its responsibilities as the guardian of national culture, which she claimed now fell to the private citizen and the market. The TRT and other state agencies responded cleverly. It was hard to deny that they were no longer leading the nation musically. Aksu’s project was then to be comprehensively co-opted – both pre-emptively, by making it the subject of a TRT news broadcast, and prospectively, by the TRT giving its blessing in advance to subsequent incarnations of the musical mosaic metaphor.

² *Sabah*, Friday supplement, 21.7.2006, p.6.

³ <https://tr-tr.facebook.com/events/102896359904864/> (last accessed 12.5.2015).

⁴ *Günaydın*, 18.7.2006, p.11.

⁵ *Sabah*, *Günaydın* supplement, 26.5.2006 [n.p].

Drawing on the work of Herzfeld (1997), section 1.4 noted the paradox inherent in anti-state and anti-law actions of the ordinary citizens – that they inevitably reify the existence and authority of the state. The resurgence of the rebellious *rembetiko* or the contributions of *özgün müzik* [original music] in Turkey, as exemplified by bands like Yeni Türkü and musicians like Zülfü Livaneli, could criticize state policies from the margins for only a certain time period. Soon the state would resume its paternalistic role as protector of citizens and use any and every means to promote its own agendas, including that of the *détente*. In this shift from the grassroots to the mainstream/ official, the link between the rapprochement and popular music would not be broken. Attempts at the official sanctioning of music as one of the key dimensions of the rapprochement have been exemplified not only in the visit of the progressive foreign ministers of both countries to the *rebetadhiko* in Athens (see section 3.5) but also in the concerts by the Turkish Sertab Erener and the Greek Sakis Rouvas in 2004 on Sultanahmet Square, Istanbul, and in the Acropolis, Athens, which were held “under the auspices of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis”.⁶ This kind of sanctioning is a far cry from the concerts of Theodorakis, Farantouri and Livaneli in the 1980s and early 1990s, which were not only overlooked by their respective states, but were also threatened by their secret services and civil servants (see sections 1.2 and 1.4). Four days after the Erener-Rouvas concert in Istanbul, on 7 July 2004, Karamanlis, who was also present at the concert, appeared as one of the guests of honour in the wedding of Erdoğan’s daughter⁷ and gave speeches to the Turkish media about the crucial place of the arts and especially music as bridges between the two nations.⁸

On a more positive and less cynical note, however, it is true that a rapprochement without the backing of the states would be particularly difficult to sustain. As Ker-Lindsay (2000: 216) observes:

a process built solely upon a popular outburst, such as that seen at the time of the [earthquakes], would be unlikely to stand the significant tests that are inevitably placed upon peace processes. In reality, the current *détente* is built upon something far more valuable. Namely, a sincere recognition by two governments that in the contemporary international environment a policy of cooperation is far more advantageous than continued confrontation.

In as complicated a process as the thaw in relationships, there is of course no one single factor in achieving the desired outcomes. One could argue that both the backing of the nation-states and the grassroots endeavours, including the ones in art and music, contributed to the thaw in relationships since the 1990s. One fact remains – that the relationships are now perceived rather differently. In an interview given as early as in 2003, the Turkish musician Ketencoğlu comments on these striking changes brought about by the rapprochement:

I believe compared to what it was before, it is easier today to find a more supporting environment to cultivate peace. It was really difficult ten or fifteen years ago. A tiny anecdote: A concert we were to give at the University of Boğaziçi [in Istanbul], in 1983 or 1984, there were supposed to be four songs from Theodorakis; we had to cancel the first concert, took those songs out the programme and only then we were allowed to go on stage. Seventeen years later, in the very same theatre, we gave a concert comprising nothing but songs in Greek. Therefore, I do think that music is a very powerful element; that it is possible to attain lasting outcomes

⁶ <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/277207.asp> (last accessed 12.5.2015).

⁷ www.mpa.gr/article.html?doc_id=466336 (accessed 30.7.04).

⁸ www.yeniasya.com.tr/2004/06/08/kultur/butun.htm (accessed 9.6.2004).

especially through artistic unions and sessions, which bring together the youth and artists from both sides.⁹

Despite the cautionary, even somewhat pessimistic stance of Herzfeld (1997) regarding the acts of ordinary citizens and the might of the nation-states, it is clear, as foregrounded by DeNora (2000: 159), that “at the level of daily life, music has power. It is implicated in every dimension of social agency”. I believe that the book has demonstrated this power illustrated by the efforts of musicians singing in the Other’s language, compiling common melodies and folk songs, and creating cover versions of the popular music of their neighbour, as well as in the translational exchanges of song lyrics amongst fans. In the particular case in hand, music has indeed “serve[d] as a resource for utopian imaginations, for alternate worlds and institutions [and] used strategically to presage new worlds” (*ibid.*). The urge to bring the Greek and Turkish people together into such a new world has been apparent in almost all the recordings examined, informing their titles, illustrations, track descriptions and liner notes including translations, as well as in the circulation of lyrics and their translations on internet forums.

At the level of nation-states and long-lasting political relationships, however, the picture may indeed be more complicated than the ones depicted above through music, and the hopes and struggles of ordinary citizens. Koglin (2008: 6, my emphasis), expressing his doubts about the viability of a lasting or profound Turkish-Greek friendship and citing Dimitris Monos, observes:

apart from political, economic and military interests, it is also national perceptions and common stereotypes that continue to play their part in the persistence of Greek-Turkish disputes. I am doubtful whether music is the panacea to remedy this state of affairs, whether we are entitled to hope that ‘music, purified of political and religious overtones, is perhaps the only vehicle of communication between politically and religiously antagonistic peoples’. Not even musical traditions as profoundly rooted in Aegean culture as rebetiko or Ottoman art music can be regarded as a ‘bridge’ between Greeks and Turks, because *members of each people understand and use these traditions in different ways.*

Some commentators on the peace process inevitably consider the “exchange of mass cultural products like pop songs and soap operas” as reflections of a superficial rapprochement, while “the sources of mutual mistrust remained largely intact” (Karakatsanis 2014: 1). While I agree that the mutual mistrust is still alive and well, I would nevertheless argue that it is these cultural products themselves which infiltrated into the daily lives of the ordinary citizens and reshaped their opinion about the Other – and much more so than any political initiative could have ever dreamt of. Nonetheless, presenting the translations within the context of popular music in the Turkish-Greek rapprochement as ‘bridges’ bringing the two nations closer to each other would have been a simplistic and inaccurate move, and was therefore eschewed in this study as much as possible. In a similar vein, the music itself does not act as an open channel of communication between these nations. Instead, it offers opportunities of contact, of questioning official histories and of imagining alternative futures. Hesmondhalgh (2012: 374) similarly questions the conflating of music’s political power with the question:

“Can music change the world?” There is nothing wrong with this question, as long as it is not assumed to exhaust our understanding of the politics, or social significance, of music. Nothing

⁹ Population Exchange Reconsidered: The Compulsory Exchange of Populations between Greece and Turkey (80th Anniversary), www.lozanmubadilleri.org.tr/proje_yenidenkurulan.htm (last accessed 12.5.2015).

can change anything by itself! However much we want to see the world become a better place, surely none of us would want to see music evaluated solely on the basis of the degree to which it contributes to social change. It has other purposes which might be thought of as indirectly political. What I'm suggesting is that the best way to approach this array of potential functions is in terms of the distinctive abilities of music – distinct from other forms of human endeavour, and from other forms of artistic practice and experience – to contribute to human flourishing, and the ways in which social and political dynamics inhibit or promote these capacities.

In this study, I have aimed at emphasizing these distinctive affordances of popular music and at bringing them to the attention of scholars within translation studies, popular music studies, sociology of music and ethnomusicology. Zooming out, so to speak, of the intricate linguistic details of lyrics, translated or otherwise, and focusing on the immediate socio-political context which gives rise to the songs themselves, and on their regional and international circulation enables translation studies scholars to reach out to their colleagues in these neighbouring disciplines. For those who work within popular music studies, I hope this book has been successful in raising interest in the question of how popular music travels across linguistic and cultural borders, with and without the aid of translation and other forms of rewriting. By presenting a detailed regional case study I have addressed the calls in ethnomusicology for more information regarding the local and specific; and by presenting an alternative account of the rapprochement – not only based on governmental, economic and military decisions, but also on artistic contributions to the thaw in relations – I believe the book has complemented Mediterranean Studies with a more complete picture of a significant development that took place at the turn of the 21st century.

In this book, my objective has been to demonstrate how translation, in its various forms (on paper, in audio and in digital format), has accompanied and intersected with the production, dissemination, promotion and consumption of popular music, which allegedly challenged the authority and permanency of the two nation-states in question. This was a movement not necessarily initiated (considering the initial Davos process) but definitely fostered and sustained by ordinary citizens, as well as artists and musicians. As indicated earlier, the discourse of the rapprochement chose to emphasize the common sense of the common people as well as the 'pure' people of the land and the Aegean. Within this discourse, translation and popular music were nourished by, and at the same time, upheld the transcultural intimacy established around this Aegean identity.

Along the way, I hope to have demonstrated clearly how both translation and popular music are interlinked with the local and regional socio-political dynamics. Translations within the context of popular music bear a relatively non-canonized status even within translation studies, and are rarely examined as part of the other disciplines addressed in this book. This does not mean, however, that they are insignificant. On the contrary, precisely due to their ability to become part of the daily lives of ordinary citizens and to be mobilized by them for particular purposes, these translations have the potential to achieve a much wider impact than translations of other, more canonized texts. It is my hope that this book will catalyse further scholarly debate on the topic and encourage researchers in both translation studies and popular music studies to approach the intersection of translation and popular music from a variety of perspectives, particularly taking the different modalities and socio-political contexts into consideration.