The idea that some musics are pure and others hybrid, that some are culturally legitimate and others illegitimate is a relatively recent phenomenon in Turkey, but one which governs much of the way in which music is understood, practiced and experienced. Questions of purity and hybridity, legitimacy and illegitimacy in relation to certain musical genres throw into sharp focus the issue of transcultural movements, borrowings, migrations, from East to West, and within the Middle East – a fact which is often explicitly and implicitly denied in much nationalist rhetoric in the Middle East. What I am describing is of course true in many Middle Eastern societies which have a shared historical trajectory: post-colonialism and nationalist ideologies have turned the cultural domain into a battle-ground. Intimate details of everyday life in the Middle East have become the site of struggle between imposed concepts of science, order, rationality, purity, legitimacy etc. imposed by reformist bureaucrats, and that which these concepts have sought to supplant. Everything from dress to nuances of everyday language has become an arena of bitter dispute, subtle indexes of the extent to which one agrees with, opposes, or maintains a nonchalant distance from symbols of ‘progress’, reform, westernization etc. Music, and particularly popular musics, have, of course, been thoroughly implicated in these processes, as both a focus for cultural control on the part of state bureaucracies and simultaneously as a focus for resistance to that control. Few cultural activities are as public and yet so intensely private: the powerful possibilities for social control that music offers for the dirigiste mind set of many reforming and westernizing bureaucracies in the Middle East have seldom been ignored. Institutes of national folk music, radio and television stations, exemplary orchestras and performers have been marshalled in the service of the state around invariable notions of national cultural legitimacy. The focus at which arbitrary forms of state power encounters everyday life is invariably a point of resistance, and we should not be surprised by the fact that counter-cultural and oppositional voices have often been explicitly articulated and mobilised in musical performance. The explosive populari-zy. The Musical Construction of Places (Berg 1994) that of Cheb Khaled and Algerian Rai throughout the Middle East, and amongst migrant and diaspora Middle Eastern populations in Europe and elsewhere, is a case in point.

The case that I wish to mention today, that of Turkish Arabesk is, in this respect, interesting and instructive. It is impossible not to see in Turkish Arabesk the musical, poetic and filmic representation of values that are highly inimical to the westernising aspirations of the Kemalist bureaucracy. It is also undeniably the case that Arabesk has not become the focus for explicitly oppositional politics, as in the case of, say, the politicised folk song movement of Ewan McColl or Woody Guthrie in Europe and the States, or in the case of rock in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This can be explained by the explicit moves on the part of Turkish governments in the 1980s to accept a cultural movement that could, indeed, have become explicitly oppositional. Seen at the most general level, this co-

option reflects the fact that in an age of global industrial and communications structures, the old rhetoric of the nation-state makes little sense. A gap has emerged between the nation-state and the current global political structures, and this in turn has produced a gap between nationally «invented traditions» and forms of popular culture readily accessible by audio cassettes, personal computers, satellite TV, etc. The former look increasingly unpersuasive, not to say absurd. Old national-bureaucratist elites have been forced to adopt different strategies to maintain power, and one of these has been to minimise this gap, to diminish the production of national imagery, and to deal more positively with the proliferation of hybrid popular cultural forms. The problem in Turkey is that many of these «hybrid» forms have matters of immense political sensitivity: most, along with various forms of Islam, have been dismissed by nationalist ideologues from the 1920s-50s as backward and unacceptably Eastern. The other component of these hybrid popular cultural forms has been equally unacceptable to the managers of Turkey's national culture: broadly speaking it is the product of youth-oriented Western music and film industries, with a cultural baggage of decadence and rebellion, specifically associated by some commentators with the problems of young Turks in Germany. Nonetheless, improbable though it might seem, forms which are the result of a synthesis of precisely these Western and Eastern elements have now become politically respectable.

This has, of course, happened elsewhere. Until recently, the Algerian government had also attempted to control music which they hitherto excluded as degenerate, hybrid and culturally illegitimate. Algerian Rai was, as it were, decriminalised, with the first officially promoted Rai festival of Oran of 1985. This immediately made Rai with its celebration of sex, drink and drugs, even less acceptable to the FIS opposition. Only a few weeks ago, another Rai singer, Cheb Hassi, was shot dead by gunmen – in all probability supporters of FIS (who are known to have kidnapped a number of singers). For broadly parallel reasons in Turkey, the civilian governments which succeeded the military in 1983 have adopted a compromising attitude towards popular culture and popular music. They have claimed a Kemalist line, but in fact they have been highly accommodating to things which Kemalism ex-

licitly rejected – notably the public expression of Islam, but also many things that had come to be seen as unacceptable remnants of Turkey's «Eastern face».

The political line of the ANAP government of Turgut Özal, which dominated Turkish politics in the 1980s, was one of the promotion of political liberalization and laissez-faire economies. Behind this was, without doubt, a more cynical attitude to the question of law and order, following civil unrest in the late 1970s, the mounting foreign debt situation, and the concerns of Turkey's debtors that the situation had gone out of hand. The cooptation of popular culture by Özal was a direct move to counter arguments (which had their origin, quite separately, in liberal and Marxist debates in Turkey about the state) that excessive bureaucratic control of the reform process had caused the institutions of civil society to wither; that the two had been oppositional, and had not been working to support one another. Arabesk became an explicit focus for Özal's populist politics, and the object of a remarkable and somewhat ironic compromise between the popular cultural domain and the state. The thing which most angers Kemalist intellectuals about Arabesk is its high current of masochistic emotion, its «acar», «pain». In 1987, the Turkish minister of culture and tourism, Mustafa Tınaz Titiz, convened a conference in Istanbul to discuss the «Arabesk» problem, and to advocate an Arabesk which would be removed of its «acar». The result was an officially promoted «painless Arabesk» – «Acsat Arabesk».

Hakki Bulut and Ýsin Engin's model piece of painless Arabesk, «Seventeen Kaskani», enjoyed a brief period of success in 1987 for entirely ironic reasons, and then disappeared without trace. However, the Anawatian government had, I believe, succeeded in persuading many people that they were removing the whole range of liberal causes. The absurdity of «painless Arabesk» was not entirely without consequence, alienating what one might call hard-core fans, who, for a number of stars who remained remarkably unassimilated by the Ozal government, such as Mürdüm Gürses, intensified. This was a result, I believe, of the refusal of stars such as Murat Gürses to participate in ANAP political rallies along with many big Arabesk names, Ibrahim Tatlises and Emrah, or to join the entourage of Özal and his wife Semra, as did singers.
such as Orhan Gencebay and Bulent Enroy, Ar- 
besk therefore has not been entirely assimilated: 
as Meral Ozbek points out in her study of Orhan Gencebay, citing Raymond Williams and Stuart 
Hall, the popular cultural domain of Arapesh is 
today one of simultaneous coercion and resistance 
(hom direkten hem de bir beyan etme olmayan) 
viewpoint which conforms neatly to her Gram-
scian approach to popular culture.

Ozbek’s study of Orhan Gencebay reflects a 
central dilemma on the political left with the success of the right in coopting pop-
ular culture. Her argument is that the left has 
not sufficient cultural articulates, in a haledly coded, metaphor-
cal, and symbolic regime for political system which is 
based on a “sharing” as opposed to capitalist rationality (payaslanmis rasionalites). It is clear 
her interviews with the singer Orhan Gence-
bay that he had difficulty agreeing with his poli-
tical interpretation of his music. However it 
is clear that both left and right in Turkey are 
engaged in a highly significant intellectual en-
terprise—significant, that is to say, when viewed in relation to earlier and entirely negative attitudes

These attitudes can be summed up as follows: 
in the opinion of its critics, Arapesh is a hybrid 
cultural form which has no legitimacy in Turkey 
today. For observers of Arapesh on the right of 
the political spectrum, whose nationalism looks 
back to and celebrates the Ottoman period, Ar-
apesh is the inevitable result of seventy years of bureauocratic domination. This reformism explic-
itly rejected the notion of an Islamic internatio-
nal culture, over which the Ottoman Turks had 
not only presided, but to which they had made their 
own distinct contribution. The classical music of urban, Ottoman Turkey was cultivated 
not only at court, but also amongst the popular 
religious confinements, and leisure spaces of the 
capital dominated by a non-Muslim minority 
bourgeoisie towards the end of the 19th century. 
Since the reformist bureaucratic elite of the ear-
ly republic were in opposition to all of these, Ot-
toman art music became a particularly powerful 
symbol of everything that the new republic re-
jected. The closing of the Ottoman art music con-
servatories in 1926-9, and its continued censure 
was considered by its supporters both undemo-
cratic and, ironically, un-nationalistic. Lacking 
a solid cultural lead, the people, it is argued, tur-
ned to Egyptian popular musics in the 1930s and 
40s, since they offered at least one kind of con-
tinuity, musically speaking, with the past. A great 
deal of scholarly speculation continues in relat-
i on to what Mustafa Kemal Atatürk actually said, 
and what he had in mind when he was saying it. 
Supporters of the art music genre, notably Hus-
yen Sadettin Axel, and more recently, Yilmaz 
Öztuna, have conducted their critique on this ba-
sis—of deference to Mustafa Kemal, but are 
highly critical of heavy-handed bureaucratic re-
formism.

Critics of Arapesh on the left such as Ertan 
Eğribel and Nazife Gengör also deplor the hy-
brid origins of Arapesh, along with its sentimen-
talism and its lack of originality, and similarly find the same 
doctrine of its popularity in misdirected bureaucratic reformation. Here, however, they argue that 
turning away from the Ottoman legacy was in itself 
thing, but the reformist elites did so in a manner 
that was insensitive to the traditional 
cultural needs of the people. This critique is 
based on the idea that the new republic was bet-
ter at tearing the old order down than at repla-
cing it with a viable alternative. It is precisely 
this culture of ‘lack-of-alternatives’ (alternatif-
izik) identified by the sociologist Ertan Eğribel 
that generated Arapesh, along with a number of 
other ‘social problems’. In particular, transport 
infrastructure problems in Istanbul have become 
dacute over the last two decades. This in turn re-
lates to the continued development of squatter-
towns around the peripheries of all large indu-
stral cities in the shadow of large-scale industrial 
the wake of laissez-faire economics and a lack of political 
commitment to sort the problem out. The link 
between the squatter-towns, the transport infra-
structure and Arapesh has been so strong that 
Arapesh continues to be associated with the dol-
muş—a kind of privately run shared taxi or mi-
nibus which connects the squatter town to the 
big city. Arapesh has been jokingly known as 
dolmuş music—a perfect symbol of a kind of 
meandering vitality, of a rapid but disorienting 
mobility which summarised, for critics, the poli-
tics of the Ozal years.

Arapesh study, which is explicitly situated in 
kind of new intellectual project, corre-

sponds to a new generation in the response to 
Arapesh by Turkey’s intellectuals and the state. 
Her conclusion, that a musical form can and 
should be seen as a simultaneous moment of 
resistance and cooption, leaves me in some doubt. 
I sympathise, broadly with her Gramscian poli-
tics, and the fact that we must not dismiss popular 
culture from elitist standpoints. But there are 
some specific problems with the analysis, and one 
of these relates to the notion of hybridity and 
syncretism. Özbeck’s discussions of Arapesh with 
Gencebay lead to many conclusions similar to 
my own discussions with practicing musicians: 
today there is very little one can point to in it 
that is demonstrably and purely Arab in origin, 
and very little that musicians see as being ‘Arab’ in 
any simple sense. Even if one is to investigate 
the idea that the borrowing from film music 
simply echoed Arab tunes and musical ideas from 
an Arab to a Turkish musical culture, one may 
argue against the fact that a huge number of Turks 
were employed in the Arab film industry, as 
musicians as well as other things. This is not to 
deny ‘Arab influence altogether, nor to say that that Arab 
influence itself is hybrid, or, to use a less value-
laden term, syncretic, including many Turkish 
and of course Western European elements.

Secondly, other forms of musical contact are 
more important to Arapesh musicians than con-
tacts with the Arab world. For Orhan Gencebay, 
according to Özbeck, it was Bach and Elvis, for 
Mustafa Keser (a lesser known arab singer with 
whom I worked), it was Frank Sinatra and 
Nat King Cole who provided inspiration. Ara-
apesh instrumentalists inhabit a world of sitars and 
tablas, bongos, congas, electric guitars, synthe-
sizers and the latest recording technology. 
The one sound which is held by many musicians to 
be a real borrowing from the Arab popular 
domain is the chorus of violins, cellos and double-
basses. This is somewhat ironic, since the legiti-
mity of all Arab circles of western violins were 
being debated furiously in the 1932 at the Con-
gress of Arab Music in Cairo.

Music travels easily and lightly, requiring 
only a memory, and small and generally easily 
transportable technology. The means of produc-
tion are dispersed and not concentrated solely in 
the hands of elite groups. Those musicians who 
are predisposed towards eclecticism thus do not 
have difficulty in locating new ideas—all that is 
required, for example, is a radio set, and a vast 
pamphlet of music from both eastern and western 
Europe, and the main Arab musical centers 
are immediately available. The reverse is true of 
more material forms of culture, or rather, cultural forms which require a greater capital investment in 
their basic material culture. The syncretic 
components of Arabesh music are seldom comment 
upon by the writers I have mentioned, 
except for passing comments that Arab music is 
not the only element in the mix. This reflects 
a certain reluctance to discuss the details of the 
music, or the specificities of musical expression, 
or the lives and cultural positions of musicians 
in Turkey. It is indeed true that much recent cri-
tical discussions of popular culture tend to igno-
re the particularities of musical practice: what is 
going on in and through music is not necessarily 
identical to that going on elsewhere (for exam-
ple in the visual arts, literature, architecture, or 
indeed the formal representations of official po-
litics). A more musically sensitive approach 
is certainly required. I am not yet able to elabo-
rate this, but I will conclude with two brief points 
concerning the nature of cross-cultural experi-
ences through music.

Firstly, musicians in Turkey have for many 
centuries been ambiguous figures. Music is at 
least an ambiguous activity for Muslims, and in 
Tur-
key as elsewhere in the Middle East, it has as 
a consequence been associated with non-Muslim 
minorities (much has been written about this). 
Minority populations in Istanbul, especially fol-
lowing the gradual expansion of European trade 
networks into Istanbul during the 19th 

century, have always been culturally inclined 
both in and outside of Istanbul. For example, 
their music is often tinged with a melancholy, 
tragic, or even nostalgic, qualities which are 
not always found in Ottoman music.

Their influence has been profound, particularly in introducing, slowly and haphazardly, western 
musical concepts into Turkish musical practice. 
Around 1650 a Polish palace servant, Ali Ufke 
Bobowski compiled a collection of songs he heard 
around him in western musical notation. Later in 
the 18th century, the Roman prince, De-
malmontus Canemius created an orchestra of 
body of instrumental music, and became a sig-
nificant authority on theory and composer in the
art music tradition. From the late 16th century a series of travellers, merchants and diplomats noted the music they heard, and spent time mastering its theory: Charles Fonton's *Éssai sur la Musique Oriental* of 1751 is a notable example. My first point is that the moral ambiguity of music, as far as the religious and political majority were concerned, and the consequent involvement of non-Muslim minorities meant that music was a field dominated by a marginalised but significant group with multiple cultural ties both across the Ottoman Empire and to Europe. This situation persisted before the creation of a mass market for music publishing and later sound recording.

My second point relates to the contemporary period: the mass music market is dominated by two contradictory forces. One is for modernist exoticia - a demand which has periodically been satisfied by rock and roll, swing, tango, chan son, flamenco, progressive rock, punk, rap and hip hop - all forms which have been appropriated in one way or another by Turkish popular musicians, within and outside of Arabesque. Many young Turkish people have direct experience of this music through labour migration in Europe, travel (for the privileged), and experience of Western tourism, or simply watching satellite TV and listening to the radio. The other is an abiding, if continually mutating, demand for traditional music, in particular Anatolian folk genres and the Arab music popularised by Unum Kültümler and Farid al-Atrash. To any musicians possessing a cassette recorder and a radio, the musical resources for catering for this mass audience lie immediately at hand. In recent years, lingering official disapproval of music which is not considered properly Turkish music has been continually undermined by the ready availability of non-Turkish music. The creative eclecticism of Turkish musicians has always moved a little ahead and outside of state control, whose attempts to construct a national yet modern music have absorbed huge resources. Popular music has always been a problem and a profound threat in Turkey for the ease with which it is able to construct its own East-West trajectories. Whilst the Turkish state has enjoyed limited success in appropriating a once threatening form, Arabesque, it seems likely to me (as a romantic) that in different, even unexpected ways, popular music and its audiences will keep one step ahead.

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**Selected bibliography:**

Fonton, C. *Éssai sur la musique orientale comparée à la musique européenne* (1751).


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1. L'islam suffisante de la guerre et de la disparition de la Bosnie de toutes les cartes: le projet récifiquement élaboré de la Grande Serbie (et, pour la suite, de la Grande Croatie) est envoyé aux oublies. Les leaders d'opinion mondiaux se mettent à profit l'image générale et déjà exister de l'Islam dans les médias occidentaux, reposant sur le terrorisme, le fanatisme et le retard historique: le problème de la démocratie et du totalitarisme est devenu, en douceur, le problème de l'inconciliable des civilisations. Dans cette perspective, l'Islam cesse d'être une composante culturelle de la Bosnie; la Bosnie devient, à son tour, une composante politique en puissance du monde islamique: ne pouvant avoir, en tant que telle, sa place en Europe. C'est pourquoi dans la genèse du conflit bosniaque, l'Usurage qui l'a fait de l'Islam est nettement plus important que ne l'a été son vrai rôle, les œuvres de référence soulignent que les Musulmans bosniaques sont la population slave.