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Joking Aside

European Music and the Dislocation of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Satire

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Abstract In this article, I examine humorous portrayals of European music in satirical journals published in Istanbul during the 1870s. Drawing on theories of humor as a means of expressing ambiguity, I analyze a description of a private salon concert as well as polemical debates about the public performance and reception of Turkish-language operetta. Through the strategic use of irony and mistranslation, Ottoman satirists exposed the incongruities of being modern while playfully undermining perceptions of distance and proximity between "Istanbul" and "Europe." Modernity produced a sense of dislocation, a being out of place, that was heightened by listening to unfamiliar sonic practices as part of a broader assemblage of civilized behaviors. Yet by making light of such disconcerting experiences, Ottoman satirists produced a form of cultural intimacy that relocated modernity itself within a more familiar and accessible space – as long as their readers got the joke.

Introduction

> Amen!!! Say amen too. Mercy, don't let the evil eye touch us, because there are plenty who can't stand us since we attained this level of perfection. But what has happened to us? What kind of perfection have we reached? … My dear, we have arrived at the level of perfection in civilization. Praise God, what are we lacking? Is our level of civilization below that of any other nation? Give thanks, for what don't we have? (Diyojen 1872a)

Thus begins a short essay titled "Allah Nazardan Saklasın" ("May God Protect Us from the Evil Eye") published in the periodical *Diyojen* on 25 May 1872.[1] The editor of the periodical, who may also have been the author of this article, was the Ottoman Greek journalist Teodor Kasap (Theodōros Kasapēs, 1835–1897). Kasap, who had been educated in Paris and reportedly worked

as a secretary to Alexandre Dumas père, published several periodicals in Ottoman Turkish (as well as French, Greek, and Armenian) that were modeled on satirical journals such as *Le Charivari* in France and *Punch* in England (Şahin & Elfenbein 2022, Elmas 2013). Like a number of similar publications that flourished in Istanbul during the 1870s, *Diyojen* offered readers a humorous take on international affairs and domestic politics, as well as commenting on current social and cultural developments. Indeed, it was often the latter that occupied the most column inches, with entertaining yet also critical and informative discussions of contemporary urban life, including issues such as public transport, sartorial trends, and theatrical or musical events.

In this article, I draw on these satirical publications in order to shed light on perceptions and experiences of European music in late Ottoman society, with particular reference to debates about modernity. For nineteenth-century Ottoman commentators, "modernity" was not a commonly used term, although perceptions of the "new" and the "old" were important points of reference. Rather, as Kasap's essay demonstrates, the dominant concept was "civilization". This French word had been translated in the 1830s as the existing term "medeniyet" (similarly related to "city"), which in the process acquired new associations with modern European culture and political discourse (Wigen 2015, Reinhart 2007, Baykara 1992). Thus, for Ottoman discussants, "civilization" was to a large extent synonymous with what we would now call "modernity." Notwithstanding the essential slipperiness of both concepts, what they share is a belief in an developmental trajectory towards an improved future, enabled through the implementation of novel technologies, institutions, and social practices. This trajectory was indicated by related words such as "progress" (terakki) and "advancement" (ikdam). Moreover, the foremost representative of civilization, and the standard by which progress could be measured, was "Europe" (Avrupa).

As a number of scholars have argued, the conceptual overlap between modernity, civilization, and Europe has underlain diverse political projects, not least those of colonial domination (Murray-Miller 2018, Bowden 2009). The history of European (or "Western") music in the Ottoman domains is one aspect of these broader socio-political associations. The adoption of European music has often been understood as an unmistakable marker of progress towards modernity, culminating in the secular, nationalist utopia

(or dystopia) of the Republic of Turkey.[2] However, while discussions of "modernization" or "Westernization" in the Ottoman Empire have typically focused on top-down political reforms or ideological debates, I am interested here in how these official and discursive domains interact with informal, embodied experiences of daily life. In this, I follow recent work in Ottoman social history that has examined the everyday worlds of imperial subjects as they negotiated the transformations of the nineteenth century (Hafez 2022, Wishnitzer 2015), as well as research on the affective dimensions of modernity in global context (Pernau et al. 2015).[3] Such research demonstrates that modernity – or civilization – was not simply thrust, fully formed, upon Ottoman or other non-Western (or indeed Western) subjects, by whom it was either gratefully accepted or stubbornly rejected. Rather, individuals and communities sought to articulate, through continuous and often fractious debate and social action, their own varied answers to what it meant to be (or not be) modern or civilized.

These articulations were at once discursive and embodied, as the realms of public discourse and institutional organization intersected with people's everyday lives, their personal relationships, their emotional experiences, and their aesthetic choices. Music, as a relational and embodied aesthetic practice that was also a subject of ideological debate, is thus an important site for understanding both what it *means* and how it *feels* to be civilized. Indeed, as I will argue below, music – or rather, a particular kind of music – was seen by some Ottoman commentators not as a pleasant yet dispensable addition to the panoply of civilization, but as its crowning achievement. To enjoy and understand European music was, in fact, to be fully civilized. Conversely, for an individual to lack an appreciation of this music – or for society to lack the material and human resources that would enable it to be cultivated – was to be lacking in civilization.

We are, perhaps, all too familiar with the idea that Western music became a cipher for civilization in the nineteenth century, and that this association had profound and lasting effects on the cultural lives of non-European peoples, especially under conditions of coloniality (Wangpaiboonkit 2022, Walton 2019, Agawu 2016). However, I am interested in another dimension of this experience, which may allow us to prize open illuminating gaps in the seemingly solid edifice of Eurocentric modernity: humor. Discussions of music and humor have mostly focused on specific genres or musical practices

(such as operetta or parody) that use humor as a structural or aesthetic technique. These are often closely related to nineteenth-century print culture, satirical journalism, and music criticism (Belina & Scott 2020, Rowden 2020, Suárez García 2017). The introduction of Western-style music theater in the Ottoman Empire, among which comical genres like operetta and vaudeville were especially popular, was likewise part of a broader shift in public culture in which print journalism played a central role. However, I focus here not on comical musical forms themselves, but on the uses of humor in relation to perceptions of "European music" more generally, and especially as a means of thinking about Ottoman experiences of modernity.

I begin with a discussion of humor both in the context of the late Ottoman press and in terms of its wider theoretical implications. In particular, I emphasize the ability of humor to articulate feelings of ambiguity and ambivalence. As a signifier of Ottoman attitudes toward modern civilization, humor can reveal a range of simultaneous sentiments whose very incongruity may provoke laughter. I then analyze in more detail Kasap's article in *Diyojen*, which goes on to describe a salon concert in the Istanbul district of Beyoğlu and illustrates how European music was embedded in a broader assemblage of civilized behaviors and material technologies. In the following sections, I discuss the translation and performance of European operettas in Istanbul and their reception in the contemporary press. The first of these sections focuses on mistranslation and wordplay as satirical techniques, highlighting the ways in which linguistic and musical practices were related to other modes of bodily comportment and social interaction. In the second, I discuss the adaptation of operetta to local musical tastes and satirical fantasies about imagined European listeners. These encounters are mediated both through the traditional genre of the shadow theater and via the modern communication technology of the telegraph. As such, they articulate a sense of dislocation in Ottoman experiences of modernity, while also intentionally disorienting perceptions of distance and proximity between Istanbul and Europe.

Ottoman print culture, humor, and dislocation

As a number of historians have demonstrated, the satirical press of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provides rich material for analyzing the complexities and contestations of modernity in the Ottoman Empire (Büke Okyar 2023, Brummett 2000, Özdiş 2019, Georgeon 1995). Güneş Ayas has also shown that ideological positions in the musical debates of the early Republican period were articulated through the cartoons of the time (Ayas 2020:265–71), while Yael Navaro has discussed how jokes expressed the hopes and fears of different social factions in more recent moments of political tension in Turkey (Navaro-Yashin 2002:22–9). In the present article, I focus on depictions of European music in the Ottoman satirical press of the 1870s, which offers an important documentation of the ways in which readers and listeners in Istanbul engaged critically with European cultural forms and their social ramifications.[4] As I will argue, thinking humorously yet seriously about the assumed linkages between European music and civilization, which are both asserted and critiqued in such publications, reveals some of the constitutive ambiguity of modernity.

Following early ventures by Armenian publishers in the mid-nineteenth century, satirical periodicals in Turkish flourished in Istanbul from around 1870 until 1877, when they were banned until the reinstatement of the constitution in 1908 (Özdiş 2019, Elmas 2013, Strauss 2001, Şeni & Georgeon 1992).[5] The views expressed in *Diyojen* and other satirical journals are broadly representative of the urban middle classes: state functionaries, doctors, lawyers, journalists, teachers, bankers, businessmen, and so on. Needless to say, there was a great deal of diversity – in terms of socio-economic status, ethnic or religious identity, or political orientation – within what we might loosely call the "Ottoman bourgeoisie" (Eldem 2014). Nonetheless, while many of the editors, contributors, and readers of these journals were, like Kasap himself, members of non-Muslim communities, they tended to express a shared bourgeois mentality rather than a particular ethnic or nationalist orientation.

Kasap's liberal use of the first person plural (biz) in "Allah Nazardan Saklasın" suggests a confidence both that his readers will get the gist of his article, and that they will identify themselves as a collectivity. In one sense,

this speaks to a historical moment in which Ottoman intellectuals advocated a common imperial identity that might counter the centrifugal tendencies of ethnic nationalism or religious particularism, and the related economic and geopolitical pressures that threatened the integrity and sovereignty of the empire.[6] This aspiration was, in principle, not limited to a particular socio-economic class. The colloquial linguistic register employed in publications such as *Diyojen* reflects an intentional shift towards wider accessibility in public discourse as well as a porosity between literate and oral modes of "reading." These journals were not fundamentally elitist, but aspired to include a wide swath of the population, and thus to create an educated general public. Even so, those who were actively involved in Ottoman print culture were conscious of their leading role in society, as the balance of power shifted away from the palace and religious institutions and towards the expanding middle classes. Moreover, although affordable, Ottoman journals were still limited in their circulation, in terms of both their small print runs and their accessibility beyond the predominantly male, bourgeois readerships of the imperial capital.[7]

Thus, *Diyojen* and its ilk can provide useful insights into the mentality of urban, educated Ottomans during the late nineteenth century. As Heidi Hakkarainen (2019) has recently argued, the satirical press in late nineteenth-century Vienna was an important medium of bourgeois identity formation, especially in relation to the modernizing urban environment. While the same general argument can be made for Istanbul, the situation was additionally determined by the peripheral position of the Ottoman Empire in relation to Europe. Ottoman satire did not just articulate an emergent bourgeois sensibility or reflect critically upon modern urban life, but was fundamentally concerned with the place of the empire in the wider world – or, more accurately, in the global capitalist system dominated by western European colonial powers. Diverse forms of humor were therefore deployed in the construction of distinctions and affinities between different groups within Ottoman society, but also between the empire and Europe.

Theories of humor, as Michael Billig (2005) suggests, may be broadly categorized into those that emphasize social superiority, cognitive incongruity, or physiological relief.[8] These categories are not mutually exclusive: a joke may juxtapose seemingly incompatible things, while also expressing a judgment about their relative social value, which precipitates a release of collec-

tive emotion. Furthermore, there are many kinds of humor, which may relate to particular social contexts. Slapstick or obscene humor, for instance, may be more readily associated with popular culture than intellectual or literary modes such as wit or irony. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the popular and the elite, or of associated categories such as the traditional and modern, is itself a key technique in Ottoman satire.

These discursive strategies can be usefully analyzed through metaphors of spatiality. Ottoman humorists playfully reoriented perceptions of distance and proximity between the familiar environment of Istanbul and the foreign, far-off land of civilization known as "Europe." The perception of distance or discrepancy between these two sites, at once real and imagined, was a central condition of nineteenth-century Ottoman life. If the collective "we" referred mainly to the Ottoman bourgeoisie, the latter were no less invested in the welfare of the empire than were traditional elites. Crucially, however, the standards by which this could be judged were now determined in places far from Istanbul – that is, in the cities of western Europe, which had risen over the preceding century to become the principal centers of global power. In the minds of many local commentators as well as outside observers, Istanbul was no longer the splendid, self-possessed center of a world-conquering empire it had been in earlier times, but a second- or even third-rate city on the periphery of Europe that was desperately struggling to modernize in order to compete with London, Paris, or Vienna (Eldem 1999). The geopolitical structures of Eurocentric modernity thus produced, for Ottoman and other non-European subjects, a sense of dislocation, of being out of place in the world.

At the same time, Europe – or civilization/modernity – was not just a distant ideal, but was increasingly present in the urban infrastructure of Istanbul, in its public spaces, and in domestic life. Particular institutions and districts, as well as material products and aesthetic practices, came to stand in for Europe, while others were designated as Oriental or "alaturka." The geopolitical fact of European hegemony thus reordered local social structures and regimes of value. This, too, produced dislocations. The social geography of the city was remapped, with hitherto marginal groups such as Ottoman Christians (particularly those attached to European embassies or businesses) and Levantines (people of western European descent who had settled in the empire), the districts they lived in (especially Beyoğlu, also

known as Pera), and the languages they spoke and read (especially French) achieving unprecedented prominence in the public sphere. "Alafranga" habits of eating, dressing, and socializing introduced new options for quotidian life, and new forms of writing and media to explain and comment on them. Such changes may have provoked feelings of excitement, enthusiasm, and pleasure, but perhaps also alienation, confusion, and resentment.

These conditions were fertile grounds for satire, and were exploited accordingly by Ottoman humorists. Incongruity was emphasized by intentionally juxtaposing Ottoman and European practices or values that appeared to be separated by an unbridgeable cultural divide. Often, this was done somewhat self-deprecatingly, with the implication that the Ottomans were not (yet) sufficiently competent in the ways of modernity. In this sense, it evokes the sense of "rueful self-recognition" that Michael Herzfeld has identified as key to the fostering of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 2016:8, cf. Stokes 2010). At the same time, however, satirical depictions of "civilized" practices can be read as a critique or disavowal of the unthinking imitation of Europe. Hence, Ottoman satire is not reducible either to a mode of self-exoticization that endorses the supposed superiority of Europe, or to an act of indigenous resistance against the modern West. Instead, it thrives on the ambiguity and co-constitutive nature of such oppositions. In broader historical context, ambiguity has been understood as an important feature of Ottoman poetic expression (Andrews & Kalpaklı 2005:38–9 and passim) and of Islamicate culture more generally (Bauer 2021). In this sense, Ottoman experiences of modernity were mediated through existing cultural practices that encouraged playful yet critical uses of indeterminacy.

Ambiguity, like incongruity, is a key element of many forms of humor, including satire, parody, irony, and mimicry. It is in the doubleness or multiplicity of meanings, the potential for mistaking one thing for another and thereby revealing both sameness and difference, that humor is often located. Particularly in the context of colonialism or other forms of domination, such modes of humor are at once amusing and deadly serious (Dunphy & Emig 2010, Reichl & Stein 2005, Bhabha 1984). "Joking aside," then, might be taken in a conventional sense to mean that, once the laughter has died down, humor can reveal more sober truths. But the phrase harbors other potential meanings. Humor is a kind of theatrical aside or a stage whisper: an oblique comment on the state of things, expressing that which cannot be

said directly. This obliqueness also relates to the position of the Ottoman subject in relation to Europe, the imagined locus of civilization. The Ottoman satirist views modernity from an angle. Civilization, when it is relocated to Istanbul (which is, in fact, still an imperial center despite its relegation to the periphery of the global capitalist system), is revealed to be almost the same but not quite as it is imagined to be in Europe.

Performing civilization in Beyoğlu, 1872

The opening passage of "Allah Nazardan Saklasın" illustrates that for authors such as Teodor Kasap, "civilization" was not an inherent and unchanging quality of a given society (as it was in earlier periods), but a developmental stage at which it "arrives" (vasıl olmak) or which it "attains" (erişmek). Beyond the stark measures of territorial control or economic prosperity, the status of any society was to be judged by its degree of civilization. Thus, civilization was inherently comparative, something that could be measured against the "level" of civilization attained elsewhere, and whose attainment might provoke resentment (or the "evil eye" [nazar]) among other peoples. As noted above, comparisons of "civilization" (medeniyet) were articulated through the related concepts of "progress" (terakkî) and "advancement" (ikdam). Tellingly, all three of these terms were adopted as titles of Ottoman periodicals. The notion of civilization was thus closely bound up with technologies, social practices, and ideologies associated with print culture, which was dependent on and constitutive of the increasingly rapid and far-reaching circulation of information. The sense of collective self was therefore necessarily shaped by an awareness of positionality in relation to other places, preeminent among which was Europe.

Despite a common belief in the inevitability of civilizational development, such a vision also implies the possibility of stagnation, underdevelopment, or regression. The question of civilization, which pertained to the status of individuals and groups within a society, and to the position – or the very viability – of that society within the wider world, was thus a very serious one. Yet while it was discussed with great earnestness in the Ottoman and international press, and indeed in much academic scholarship since the nineteenth century, the perceived (and actual) gravity of the issue has tended to outweigh and thus to obscure its more prosaic and comical aspects. How-

ever, contemporary commentators were not oblivious to the absurdities and incongruities that "civilization" engendered. Indeed, these were inherent to the experience of becoming modern, as was the act of reflexively calling attention to them.

"Allah Nazardan Saklasın" is an example of this critical, self-conscious, and ambivalent attitude, which seems at one level to embrace the ideal of civilization, but at the same time points out its risible shortcomings and contradictions, at least as these were perceived within certain sectors of Ottoman society. The premise of the article is encapsulated in its titular invocation of prayer and superstition to safeguard the Ottomans' attainment of civilization, which should have made such archaic beliefs and practices obsolete. This highlighting of temporal, spatial, and cultural incongruities operates at various levels throughout the essay, which insistently juxtaposes the old and the new, the local and the global, the Ottoman and the European.

The article proceeds to invoke a litany of technologies and social practices that make up the assemblage of nineteenth-century modernity:

> Don't we have an urban postal service? Don't we have trains and telegraphs? Don't we have trams and every kind of business? Don't we have banks raining down like the April showers these days? Don't we have women, young ladies, and old ladies in striped crinoline dresses with "puffed" sleeves? Don't we have authors writing plays for the theater? Don't we have newspapers that are fun and boring, illustrated and unillustrated, published and forthcoming, closed down and due to be closed down?
>
> Don't we have every method of managing transportation between the capital city and its suburbs? Stone. Iron. Trees. Don't we have bridges? Don't we have a museum full of ancient pieces of stone? The theater. The café-chantant. The ball. Don't we have places to enjoy ourselves like associations and satirical journals like this one? Even if we don't have the Fifth and the Seventh, don't we have the Sixth District? (Diyojen 1872a)

These developments were unevenly distributed across the Ottoman Empire and between different areas of Istanbul. Beyoğlu was considered the most modern neighborhood of the city, since the local municipal council (known as the Sixth District and dominated by wealthy, non-Muslim businessmen) had invested in and implemented new infrastructure more rapidly than in other areas.[9] According to the author, most other areas of Istanbul had not even been incorporated into the modern municipal mapping of numbered administrative districts. The modernization of Istanbul is thus depicted as incomplete and inadequate, consisting of piecemeal, superficial changes dri-

ven by fads or external pressures, rather than a lasting and well-integrated transformation.

The introduction of new technologies and infrastructure depended on investment by foreign capital and associated changes in economic organization. Banks, most of them European-owned, proliferated (or "rained down like April showers") as the empire was incorporated into global capitalist markets, underpinned by unfavorable trade agreements and driven by spiraling public debt (Kılınçoğlu 2015, Elden 1999:196–206). This entailed the introduction of mass-produced European products and materials, such as the crinoline dresses that were increasingly fashionable amongst Ottoman women, and were – for better or for worse – considered a sign of being civilized (Şeni 1992). The notion of civilization was not limited to economic, technological, or material progress, but also encompassed social, intellectual, and aesthetic practices. Middle-class Istanbulites might perform their civility in institutional forms such as associations, societies, or charitable organizations, or in urban spaces such as public parks, shopping thoroughfares, cafes, bars, theaters, museums, and ballrooms. Moreover, the experience of modernity was mediated through the press as a forum for debate and entertainment, in spite of the constant pressures of censorship and competition (Boyar 2006, Yosmaoğlu 2003).

Yet although he believed that the Ottomans had acquired all the material trappings of civilization, the author of "Allah Nazardan Saklasın" felt that they were still missing something essential. This something had, according to certain newspapers, recently been discovered in Beyoğlu:

> What don't we have, what don't we have … Isn't it easier to count the things we don't have? But no, no, what should we count, I thought, we must be lacking something. Yet apparently there is something we were missing, but I was not yet informed what it was. God bless our newspapers who discovered what it was the other day. The thing that I thought we were missing was a "maestro." Apparently he was in the razed ground (yangın tarlası) of Beyoğlu.[10] We have our very own maestro, Pisani. But let me inform you what a maestro is. Look, maestro means head of the musicians. But one does not call them monsieur. Because one says maestro. They direct the operas according to the rules of notation. (Diyojen 1872a)

The pinnacle of modern civilization, it turns out, is music – or more specifically, the kind of music that is conducted by a maestro. Even if Istanbul regularly hosted European opera troupes, the Ottomans apparently did not have their own maestro, and the discovery of a certain Pisani therefore signaled

that they had finally reached the promised land of civilization. But who was Pisani, and why was he described as "our very own" (kendi malımız)?

Bartolomeo Pisani (1811–1893) was born in Istanbul and studied at the conservatoire in Naples (Kutlay Baydar 2010:10–11). The Pisanis were of Italian origin, and had moved to Istanbul from Crete after the Ottoman capture of the island from Venice in 1669. Successive generations of the family worked as dragomans (translators), mediating between the Ottoman state and European embassies (Castiglione 2016). From the 1850s, Bartolomeo Pisani worked at the Ottoman Imperial Music School, first as a teacher, and later as its director. He also offered private lessons in piano, singing, and composition at his home in Beyoğlu. Pisani composed in a variety of genres, and regularly put on concerts of operatic repertoire as well as sacred choral works. He was evidently a highly competent musician, and was a major figure in the European music scene in Istanbul during the latter half of the nineteenth century. His performances and compositions received enthusiastic acclaim in the local French-language press (Kutlay Baydar 2010:10–28).

Yet Pisani was neither a recent arrival, nor a visitor who was merely passing through. He was a Levantine (or Frank), a local Christian of European origin whose family had lived and worked in the Ottoman Empire for generations (Schmitt 2005). In the nineteenth century, as the Ottoman state attempted to adapt to the new international order, it became increasingly reliant on people with expertise in European languages, cultural practices, and technical and intellectual systems. Although some of these experts were recent immigrants from Europe, many others were drawn from the local non-Muslim population. The presence of Levantine families in Istanbul attested to long-standing economic, diplomatic, and religious connections between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. But whereas in earlier periods the Levantines were marginal to Ottoman society, during the nineteenth century both they and other local non-Muslims began to play a more central role in public life. Hence, a musician like Pisani could suddenly be "discovered" in Beyoğlu.

Although the status and visibility of the Levantines were transformed by the conditions of the nineteenth century, they nevertheless continued to occupy a liminal space, being both Ottoman and European – or perhaps neither. This ambivalence is symptomatic of the deeply entangled historical relations between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, which were modulated

by practices of translation. Translation was central to earlier histories of exchange as well as to the more intensive interactions of the 1800s. The Ottoman lexicon included numerous loanwords from European languages, especially Italian and Greek, resulting from historical connections across the Mediterranean. In the nineteenth century, French became the dominant foreign language in the empire, essential for most types of engagement with the wider world, from diplomacy to daily news (Strauss 2011, 1999). The language of publications such as *Diyojen* reflects this situation. Most of the items listed in "Allah Nazardan Saklasın" as evidence of civilization are of French or Italian origin, and are written phonetically in the Arabic script. These include "posta" (postal service), "şömendöfer" (railway), "telgraf" (telegraph), "tramvay" (tram), "banka" (bank), "malakof" (crinoline skirt), "tiyatro" (theater), "gazete" (newspaper), "müze" (museum), "kafe şantan" (café-chantant), and "balo" (ball).

That the majority of these words did not require any explanation for readers of *Diyojen* indicates that they were well integrated into the daily life of bourgeois Istanbulites. Some, however, are explicitly marked as foreign or novel, such as "pouf" (referring to a fashionable style of women's dress), which is set off in parentheses as *(puf)*. The term "maestro" is also designated in this way upon its first appearance, as *(mayestro)*. Although some readers may have been unfamiliar with the word, the explanation that follows is probably meant to be comical rather than informative. The title "maestro," according to the author, must be carefully distinguished from the common term of address for European men, "monsieur" (mösyö). It is therefore not an ordinary title, but a sign of mastery, expertise, and authority. More specifically, the maestro is an expert in a particular kind of music, referred to as "opera" (opera), which he directs according to the rules of "notation" (nota).

These latter terms also belonged to the assemblage of civilized products and practices designated by foreign words. When translated into the Ottoman context, however, they no longer signified quite the same thing as they did in Europe. In the late nineteenth century, "opera" was used as a generic term for Western-style music, which might include anything from operetta and vaudeville to a salon recital. One of the defining characteristics of "opera" was that it was performed according to "the rules of notation" (nota usulü). This contrasted with alaturka music, which was usually played and taught orally, and was therefore criticized by proponents of Western

music as lacking rules.[11] In the description of Pisani's evening concert or "soirée" (suare), the specifics of the repertoire are irrelevant; what is important is that it was a performance of "opera," a signifier for the most civilized form of music. The concert (konser), in which the maestro directs the musicians according to the rules of notation, is thus a performance of civility, a form of embodied practice and social organization that is enacted through sound, voice, and movement.

Maestro Pisani was joined in performance by his student, who may also have belonged to the Levantine community:

> Now, apparently we have a maestro by the name of Pisani, and he is not alone: there is also a student of his called Madamoiselle Çamhaçerveto [چامحاچروه تو], who is full of talent from her stripes to her boots. Apparently she sings such beautiful songs and her voice is so sweet that those who listen to her are amazed and stunned, and when she walks, even the rustling of her skirts is such that it cannot be distinguished from the voice of a nightingale. The other day, at a soirée that took place in one of the most "refined" residences in Beyoğlu, she and her teacher played, sang, and danced, and our newspapers greatly approved.
>
> Even I applaud such a talented young lady. She is reportedly young in appearance. The date of her discovery is apparently not the same as that of America, but the eighth of May in the year 1288 [= 20 May 1872]. (Diyojen 1872a)

In this somewhat misogynistic (or at least patronizing) description, the singer exemplifies the fashionable young women who paraded the streets of Beyoğlu in their sumptuous crinoline dresses. However, this signifier of European modernity is again comically juxtaposed with an image rooted in Ottoman poetic and aesthetic traditions: the nightingale. These contrasting symbols are incongruously linked through their sensory and auditory qualities, as the rustling of an industrially produced material is compared to the pure, spontaneous melodies of the natural world. In this way, musical performance is shown to be a matter of habitus, which requires specific modes of bodily comportment and standards of aesthetic judgment. The humor in the passage turns on the collision between the elevated sentiments that are attributed to civilized cultural practices and the mundane, material realities of people performing European music or related aesthetic forms in an intimate domestic space.

The discrepancy between the ideal and the real is further highlighted by a mocking comparison of this modest salon performance with the "discovery" of America. This reference makes more explicit the ironic narrative of

the adoption of European music as a momentous historical event which is tantamount to the attainment of civilization itself. The implication is that, contrary to the opinion of its patrons and certain newspaper editors, a fashionable salon concert in Beyoğlu is not of great historical significance, but is merely a local, petty affair. By ridiculing the pretensions of those who imitated European culture, the writer seems to confirm that the Ottomans could not possibly hope to be fully civilized, and thus to consign them to the margins of modernity.

At the same time, however, the satirical tone of the article allows for alternative readings. If "civilization" consists merely of Maestro Pisani and his student singing and dancing in a salon in Beyoğlu, could it really be so difficult to attain? And in any case, who decided whether the Ottomans were civilized or not? The conclusion of "Allah Nazardan Saklasın" seems to reiterate this ambivalence towards civilization as defined by modern Europe:

> So, do you see? Finally, do the Europeans have any right to say "you are behind in civilization"? Finally, are we not considered excellent now that we have such a girl with her maestro and teacher as our own? May God immediately protect us from the evil eye. Amen. (Diyojen 1872a)

Thus, the judgment of who is "ahead" or "behind" in civilization is shown explicitly to be determined by "the Europeans" (Frenkler). It is not an objective or substantial measure of development, but a matter of opinion, based on appearances. The self-conscious performance of supposedly universal forms of civilized behavior for the benefit of distant critics is contrasted once again with traditional understandings of social prestige, approbation, and envy, signified by the evil eye. On one level, then, the article seems to be an internalization of Europe's condescending gaze towards the perpetually belated Ottomans. Yet it simultaneously highlights the author's ability, as well as that of his readers, to judge what is and is not civilized, and thus establishes a sense of cultural intimacy between those who are in on the joke. In this way, it speaks for an imagined community that distinguishes itself from supposedly less civilized elements within Ottoman society, but also promotes a sophisticated, discerning attitude towards the products of European modernity, rather than slavish devotion or blind imitation.

Hence, while "Allah Nazardan Saklasın" focuses on a seemingly inconsequential private concert of European music, this is indexed to a much larger set of processes concerning historical relations between Istanbul and

Europe. In its references to Western perceptions of the belatedness of the Ottomans, and in its denigration of those who were deemed incapable of attaining civilization, the article evokes the Orientalist discourses that defined the internal and external politics of the empire in its final decades (Deringil 2003, Makdisi 2002). Simultaneously, its ambivalent portrayal of an imaginary West exemplifies what Meltem Ahıska (2003) has referred to as "Occidentalism": the inseparable dialogical counterpart to Orientalism that emerges through the articulation of spatiotemporal difference as a constitutive feature of modernity. These discursive dynamics are fundamentally constituted by modes of translation, projection, and introjection, as actors navigate relationships between more or less familiar or foreign social practices and cultural products. With the circulation of Western musical genres beyond the palace and private residences and into the sphere of commercial entertainment, the idea of European music as a form of civilized behavior became a matter of concern for ever larger numbers of readers and listeners, while aural and embodied experiences in theaters, cafes, and ballrooms were continually mediated and critiqued through the press. This offered new opportunities to reflect critically on musical experiences through purposeful acts of (mis)translation, by which "civilization" could be spatially identified as at once exotically remote and intimately familiar. An important locus for such practices was the performance and reception of Turkish-language operetta.

Mistranslating European music

A couple of years after the publication of "Allah Nazardan Saklasın," the Istanbul press was preoccupied with the Turkish-language premiere of Jacques Offenbach's operetta *La Belle Hélène*, which was to be performed that winter season at the Ottoman Theater in Gedikpaşa, directed by the Armenian impresario Güllü Agop (Hakob Vardovean, 1840–1902). Meanwhile, Agop's main rival Dikran Çuhacıyan (Tigran Ch'ukhachean, 1837–1898), an Armenian musician who had trained at the conservatoire in Milan, was enjoying success with his recently composed Turkish-language operettas.[12] Journals such as *Hayal* (also edited by Teodor Kasap) praised Çuhacıyan for his composition of original operatic works in Turkish. By contrast, Agop was condemned for translating European plays and operettas that were deemed

morally unsuitable for Ottoman audiences. Despite Agop's protestations, he was ridiculed as being in search of a quick profit and having no real appreciation for the supposedly edifying effects of theater and music. The fundamental question underlying these debates was whether "civilization" – epitomized by European music theater – had a place in the Ottoman Empire.

The relocation of civilization to Istanbul, whether it involved the adaptation of European operettas or the composition of new works in Turkish, was both literally and figuratively a process of translation. Yet if translation was a key aspect of the shifting relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, it was also a good source of jokes – indeed, humor was an effective way of addressing the complexities and ambiguities produced by encounters between different languages and the cultures they represented. An important forum for such satire was the traditional shadow theater, Karagöz, which both commented on and was itself transformed by the technologies and practices of modern civilization (Elmas 2013, And 1979). With the growth of Ottoman print culture, the main characters from this originally oral form of popular entertainment, Karagöz and Hacivat, became interlocutors in published dialogues about contemporary urban life.

Wordplay, mistranslation, and mishearing were central techniques of the Karagöz genre, as both shadow theater and as printed dialogue. Thus, in a dialogue in *Hayal* (which itself means "Shadow Theater"), Hacivat mentions that he had seen a poster for Güllü Agop's production of *La belle Hélène* (*La bel elen*), but could not understand what it meant, since he did not know Arabic (although some people had told him it was French). Karagöz therefore explains:

> The letter "la" which is in the active verb of the phrase "la bel elen" is a negative particle ["lā" in Arabic]. As for "bel" ["waist"; "loins"; "sperm"], perhaps it explains its own meaning. And the first "e" of "elen" is superfluous, so "len" is also a negative particle ["lan" in Arabic]. Do you understand? (Hayal 1874b; translit. in Yaman 1994:254)

In a later issue, after Karagöz has been to see the Turkish translation of *La belle Hélène*, Hacivat asks him about the songs that were performed. Karagöz replies: "They must have been French songs about civilization or something; I didn't understand a word." (Hayal 1874a:3, translit. in Yaman 1994:259). Similarly, in an article published in the journal *Letaif-i asar*, the author explained that, before the establishment of Agop's Turkish-language theater, Ottoman

listeners who attended operas Italian sat there "staring like geese" (kaz gibi bakmak) – that is, without understanding anything (Letaif-i asar 1875:57). Even when operettas or songs were performed in Turkish, the pronunciation of the performers (most of whom were Armenian) made it difficult for listeners to follow.[13] As *Diyojen* stated when describing an evening at Agop's theater: "You will certainly like the song 'Aşkım Bir Yâr İsterim Sadık' ['My love, I desire a faithful companion'], which was sung by Mademoiselle Karakaşyan. If I had understood anything of the lyrics, or what mademoiselle was saying, I reckon I might have enjoyed it too." (Diyojen 1872b:3; translit. in Oğuz 1998:634).[14] Just as the French language was unintelligible, especially when pronounced incorrectly, Turkish seemed to become incomprehensible when sung on the operatic stage, where it was distorted by the foreign structures of the source text as well as the unfamiliar style and context of the performance. As Karagöz responds when Hacivat asks him about the Turkish translation of *La belle Hélène*: "It didn't sound like Turkish; it was probably the revenge (intikam) of the French language [i.e. for being habitually mispronounced]." (Hayal 1874a:3, translit. in Yaman 1994:260).

The borrowing of French or other European words was meant on the one hand to evoke something elevated, luxurious, sophisticated. This included honorifics such as "maestro," "monsieur," "mademoiselle" (madmuvazel) or "signor" (sinyor). At the same time, however, such titles could have mocking or derogatory connotations that challenged the perceived haughtiness of those who used or were assigned them. Likewise, to the ears of nineteenth-century Turkish speakers, European personal names might sound glamorous and alluring, but also strange and comical. This ambivalence was exploited by Ottoman satirists, as in the nonsensical etymology of *La belle Hélène* quoted above. The humor of such a strategy lies in the simultaneous difference and sameness of borrowed European words that bear a sonic resemblance to existing Turkish words. Later in the same dialogue, for example, when Karagöz is explaining the plot of Offenbach's operetta, he mentions the character Agamemnon. Hacivat conflates this with the phrase "ağa memnun" ("the gentleman is happy"), and asks "who was the gentleman happy with?" (Hayal 1874a:3, translit. in Yaman 1994:260). Through a kind of sonic mimicry, such strategies assign a local significance to foreign words and the things they represent, revealing a doubleness of meaning in which the absurdity of the "local" interpretation undermines the seriousness and pre-

tensions to universality of European theater. Put differently, it performs an act of domestication which puts the mocked object in its place, thus articulating a sly critique of the language of civilization.

The difficulty of navigating between Ottoman and European languages was a common signifier of larger cultural disparities in Ottoman novels, often in conjunction with musical tastes. The "Europeanized dandy" (alafranga züppe) is a stock figure of nineteenth-century Ottoman literature who is in thrall to European culture yet has not fully mastered its codes (Mardin 1974). Characters such as Rupenig Ağa in Vartan Paşa's *Akabi Hikyayesi* (1851), Felatun Bey in Ahmed Midhat's *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* (1875), or Bihruz Bey in Recaizade Ekrem's *Araba Sevdası* (1896) are ostentatious devotees of all things European, from champagne and frock coats to opera and theatre.[15] As Şerif Mardin has pointed out, Bihruz Bey likes to intersperse his speech with French, but not always correctly or appropriately (Mardin 1974:408). Similarly, in Hüseyin Rahmi's *Şıpsevdi* (1911), Meftun Bey's habits include "[using] French proverbs in a conversation, whether or not related to the subject" and "[whistling] pieces from opera during a conversation when he becomes bored" (in Boyar and Fleet 2010:305). As with Teodor Kasap's ridiculing of the salon concert in Beyoğlu, pointing out someone's inability to fully embody "civilized" habits simultaneously implies their mastery by the observer.

For most Ottoman subjects, speaking French or another European language – pronouncing a foreign word, feeling its strange shape on the tongue and lips, or perceiving unfamiliar sounds through the ears – was an intimate, physical, and potentially uncomfortable experience, like wearing close-fitting trousers or eating with a knife and fork. Relatedly, listening to or performing European music was a bodily practice that was embedded within social relationships. Such habits had to be learned, which could be embarrassing or even humiliating, but for the same reason offered opportunities for humorous and reflexive critique. Another such arena was the ball, which became a regular part of Ottoman social life from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. As well as the mixing between different genders and the financial costs that were often criticized by commentators, the ball engendered new modes of physical comportment that could appear ridiculous. As *Latife* sarcastically explained: "It has now been discovered that the jerky way of walking of chic men (şıklar) occurs because of their excessive

contortion and inclination when doing the polka and other dances at balls." (Latife 1875, translit. in Köken 2019:405).

Being part of the modern, civilized world required the adoption of disciplined forms of behavior, not least in relation to music. European music could only be properly performed and appreciated if practitioners adhered to appropriate aesthetic, material, and social formats. Yet Ottoman musicians and audiences did not always subscribe to these codes. At the performance of *La belle Hélène* in Gedikpaşa Theater, for example, Karagöz reports that the evening was marred when "a bunch of silly fellows who were out on the town came in, and by belting out songs with her [the prima donna, Yeranuhi Karakaşyan] turned the theater into a ladies' bathhouse." (Hayal 1874a:3; translit. in Yaman 1994:259). In any event, local Armenian performers were often seen to fall short of the ideal standards expected in Europe. As a writer to *İbret* complained after an evening at the same theater: "I couldn't find anything that might be called opera or ballet. Because isn't the aim dance and music? But apparently these ones can't do dance and music like the Italian girls. They do it like Armenian girls – ah, enough said." (İbret 1872, translit. in Demir 2015:227).

The process of translating European music thus involved not only language but also forms of behavior on the part of both performers and listeners. Furthermore, the performance of civility had different ramifications in a public theater than it did in a private salon, as Western musical forms were adapted to the contexts and tastes of wider audiences, in large part due to the demands of commercialization. While the adaptation of operetta and related cultural forms reflected in the first instance an increasing entanglement with Europe, it was also shaped by a variety of other social relations within the empire. Gender, economic class, ethnicity, language, and religious identity were all implicated in this process, as diverse social groups engaged in different ways with European music and the idea of civilization it represented. As satirists grappled with the question of how Western music should be performed and listened to, they playfully undermined notions of remoteness and proximity between Europe and Istanbul. In doing so, they highlighted the distant allure of modern civilization, but also its potential deficiencies when seen and heard up close.

The location of civilization

Debates about European music in late nineteenth-century Istanbul related on the one hand to the changing status of existing genres of music and theater, and on the other to the mediation of performance through new technologies including the press and the telegraph. Transformations in social and cultural practices therefore also involved changes in the forms through which such practices were communicated and understood. An awareness of the simultaneity of these changes, and of the subsequent potential for confusion and incongruence, was central to Ottoman satire, as exemplified by the adaptation of Karagöz in the satirical press. The apparently unrelated domains of traditional shadow theater and modern communications technology were brought together in a regular feature of *Hayal* titled "Karagöz Telegraph Company" (Karagöz Telgraf Şirketi), which had counterparts in other periodicals. This provided a pretext to comment on real or imagined happenings in Europe and in the Ottoman Empire, revealing the distances and differences that separated these cultural and geographical spaces, but also the connections between them.

The performance of operettas in Istanbul was a common subject for satirical telegraphy, which often critiqued such productions by ventriloquizing contemporary European composers. Güllü Agop's Turkish-language production of Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène* was mercilessly mocked in this manner from the moment rehearsals were announced. According to a report in *Hayal*, supposedly based on communications received from Paris via the Karagöz Telegraph Company, Offenbach had suffered an apoplectic stroke upon hearing that his operetta was going to be performed by Agop's company in Istanbul (Hayal 1874d, translit. in Yaman 1994:230). A few days later, however, another telegraph announced that the composer had recovered after learning that "the best parts of his opera were going to be cut for no apparent reason." Meanwhile, it was reported from Paris that "fifteen lords from London have arrived here in order to travel to Istanbul via Marseille. It is said that the purpose of their journey is to see, even if only once, the opera *Belle Hélène* staged at Gedikpaşa Theater after the end of Ramadan." (Hayal 1874c, translit. in Yaman 1994:231).

The next communication, supposedly received from Genoa, underlined *Hayal*'s partisan support of Çuhacıyan as a serious composer whose operettas were judged superior to Agop's translated adaptations:

> Signor Verdi, the most skilled musician of our century, hearing that opera is in fashion in Istanbul while knowing that it is going out of fashion here [in Italy], and hoping to do more business there [in Istanbul], has embarked on a journey by six-oared caique with the ambition of staging his newly composed opera at Dikran Çuhacıyan Efendi's theater after the end of Ramadan. (Hayal 1874c, translit. in Yaman 1994:231)

The reactions of imagined European listeners play a central role in these telegraphs as a measure of whether a musical performance is sufficiently civilized. The very fact of staging a recent French operetta in Turkish translation is portrayed as inherently comical when heard from a distant European location. But the sense of the ridiculous was compounded further when Western musical forms were adapted to local instruments and performance styles. Agop's production of *La Belle Hélène* turned out to be hugely popular, and was performed in a wide variety of contexts, sometimes accompanied by local instruments. Around two years after the premiere, *Çaylak* published the following telegraph, supposedly from Offenbach:

> Although I regretted to hear that the libretto of my famous opera *Belle Hélène* (which I composed and published in Paris some time ago) was ruined when it was performed in translation at the Gedikpaşa Theatre, because I am a supporter of the Turks' progress in every matter, I tolerated it in the hope that it would improve with repetition. However, far from showing progress, last night at the aforementioned theater, the music was performed by a band from the taverns of Kumkapı and was in complete disarray. Please would *Çaylak* communicate to the concession-holder Güllü Agop and his patrons İsmail and Hacı İzzet Efendi my wish and request that the aforementioned opera is henceforth not performed with a gypsy shawm (*çingene zurnasıyla*). (Çaylak 1876, translit. in Yaman 1994:430)

Similarly, another critique of Agop's theater reported the attendance of the Italian ambassador with a mixture of rueful shame and outraged mockery:

> Just imagine making a person born in Italy and whose ears are full of the music of famous Italian music masters such as Verdi, Bellini and Donizetti listen to the opera *Télémaque* (*Telemak*) with melodies (makamlar) that derive from the taste of Benlioğlu from Hasköy! Agop Efendi's efforts reached that far. Indeed, he made him [the Italian ambassador] listen. But is the listener obliged to be uncomfortable (bi-huzur)? (Diyojen 1872b:3, translit. in Oğuz 1998:634)

The humor of these extracts stems partly from the contrast between the universal renown of European locations (Paris, London, Genoa, Marseille) and the particularity of Istanbul's neighborhoods (Gedikpaşa, Kumkapı, Hasköy). Moreover, unlike the imperial palace or European embassies, these neighborhoods were particularly associated with popular entertainment and lower-class sociality. Likewise, a comical discrepancy is conjured up between the names of famous European composers (Offenbach, Verdi, Bellini, Donizetti) and those of local impresarios, patrons, and musicians involved in commercial entertainment (Güllü Agop, İsmail, Hacı İzzet, Benlioğlu). This type of satire thus seems to point to a lack of civilization in Istanbul, which is revealed through the rude sounds of a tavern band or a gypsy shawm performing in a context that demands a conductor, score, and orchestra. The displacement of the civilized by the barbaric, or of the universal by the local, is experienced by the ideal European listener as a form of physical discomfort, which mirrors the uneasiness of the Ottoman subject who is not accustomed to dancing the polka, speaking French, or hearing "opera" conducted by a maestro.

On one level, then, the mockery of Agop's production of *La Belle Hélène* or the performance of alaturka music in the theater was predicated on the improbability of Istanbul becoming a center of operatic or theatrical life equivalent to cities such as Paris or London, where great composers and "lords" were at home. The portrayal of Istanbul as a provincial backwater, out of step with the pace of modern life, is underlined by the apparent mismatch between the European season of balls, plays, and operas, and the Muslim festive month of Ramadan. However, these different temporal and social orders co-existed in nineteenth-century Istanbul, and were perhaps not as opposed as might be assumed. Despite its religious significance, Ramadan was traditionally a time of nocturnal enjoyment and public sociability, and the theaters and entertainment venues of the city were especially busy during this month (Georgeon 1997).

Likewise, other aspects of the Karagöz telegraphs suggest that the distance between Europe and Istanbul may have been in some way illusory. The telegraph as an imagined medium of communication emphasizes spatial distance, but also the collapsing of that distance through the instantaneous transmission of information, as contemporary events in London or Paris are relayed in real time to readers in Istanbul. The Mediterranean ports of Mar-

seille and Genoa were even closer, as nodes on an increasingly congested maritime network that also included cities such as Alexandria, Izmir, and Thessaloniki (Fuhrmann & Kechriotis 2009). The image of Verdi embarking on a caique – rather than a steamship – seems again to locate Istanbul in a pre-modern temporal space, where picturesque wooden rowboats ply the timeless waters of the Bosphorus. Yet the ironic tenor of the story subverts such associations: the caique, after all, is supposedly departing from a western European port, and commercial steamers, as readers of *Hayal* would have experienced daily, had been in regular operation in Istanbul since the early 1850s (Çelik 1986:82–7).

Indeed, the integration of the Ottoman Empire into global trade and communication networks facilitated the tours of European theater and opera troupes, who frequently performed in Istanbul and other cities around the eastern Mediterranean (Fuhrmann 2020:122–72, Papageorgiou 2008, And 1971). If the fictional Verdi spied a commercial opportunity in the 1870s, he was several decades behind the many other European musicians who had already set out to try their luck in Ottoman lands, of whom Giuseppe Donizetti (1788–1856) is only the most well documented (Spinetti 2010, Aracı 2006). More recently, of course, Verdi's *Aida* had been premiered at the khedivial opera house in Cairo, which, aided by European capital and diplomatic support, had emerged as a serious threat to the power and prestige of Istanbul (Mestyan 2017:84–119, Locke 2005, Said 1994:140–68). It was not, then, too far-fetched to suggest that a famous European composer might consider staging a new opera in the Ottoman capital, even if Çuhacıyan's theater was not quite as grand as La Scala. However, this hopeful possibility was undermined by the charge of venality: Verdi's motivation for embarking on such an arduous journey is not the altruistic mission of bringing the edifying effects of opera to Ottoman audiences, but, more prosaically and self-interestedly, the opportunity to tap into a new market for one of the most alluring products of civilization.

Ottoman commentators were fully aware of these contradictions. While opera, like other European cultural and material products, might have seemed desirable and even necessary in order to be civilized, Western music in general was associated with deleterious social practices. Rather than the grandeur of the opera house, alafranga music was more typically heard in cafes, ballrooms, cabaret halls, taverns, and casinos, where it was often

performed by impoverished women who had immigrated to the Ottoman Empire from central and eastern Europe. Beyoğlu was the main center for such venues, the less salubrious of which also offered other kinds of leisure activity, including gambling, alcohol, and prostitution.[16] Satirical journals commented frequently on these spaces, which seemed to expose the dark underbelly of civilization. Moreover, like other alafranga fashions, they were driven above all by commercial interests, as evidenced by the tax income accumulated by the municipal administration. As *Diyojen* sarcastically reported in March 1870:

> This year, the Sixth District has reportedly earned three hundred thousand *kuruş* in revenues from the balls and casinos and the associations of Beyoğlu. I'm not making this up – it's in their account books. May God ease their work! Thus the harvesting of the first fruits of civilization has begun. (Diyojen 1870, translit. in Oğuz 1998:149)

Ottoman perceptions of European music were shaped by the intimate relationship between the ideals of civilizational progress and the morally dubious, materialistic trends of modern urban life. The sonic presence of European music in Istanbul, together with banks, theaters, telegraph offices, publishing houses, and crinoline dresses, seemed to offer proof that it was a civilized city. Yet Western cultural practices and material products were also associated with capitalist rapacity, the superficial vagaries of fashion, and the disorienting upheaval of social relations. Thus, if satire revealed a sense of dislocation that was felt by Istanbulites as they adopted the technologies and aesthetic forms of modern civilization, it also hinted at the possibility that this feeling was produced not by a lack on the part of Ottoman subjects, but by the contradictions inherent in modern civilization itself.

Conclusion

The satirical articulation of Ottoman attitudes towards European music as a marker of modern civilization can be interpreted in multiple ways, which may be contradictory though not necessarily mutually exclusive. In his description of the Italian ambassador in Gedikpaşa Theater, the satirist seems to align himself (and his readers) with the civilized listener rather than the unsophisticated local performers. In "Allah Nazardan Saklasın," or in literary depictions of fashionable fops, the targets of criticism are those who pretentiously assume European airs and graces. Although this might suggest

an affinity for an opposing ideal of an authentic, traditional Ottoman culture, it seems rather to reinforce the notion of the universality of civilization, by suggesting that even those Ottoman subjects who are devoted to European ways are not – due to their distance from centers of the *truly* civilized world – sufficiently modern. And yet, while the satirist may have positioned himself, through his caustic criticism of contemporary Ottoman society, as the arbiter of what was truly modern or civilized, the self-conscious irony of his critique produces a sense of ambiguity that threatens to collapse the separation between Europe and Istanbul.

It is not just the apparent distance between Paris and Gedikpaşa, or between Monsieur Offenbach and Agop Efendi, that makes these vignettes both amusing and instructive, but the surprising ways in which they are brought into proximity. The bringing together of incongruous elements is partly imaginary, as the great composer Verdi is fantasized as arriving in Istanbul on a caique, or Offenbach as responding via telegraph to the performance of a tavern band from Kumkapı. But such imagined encounters are also a reflection of real connections between Europe and the Ottoman Empire that were brought about by the technological, economic, and political transformations of the nineteenth century, and the resulting integration of new material, cultural, and social forms into everyday life. Through practices of translation and adaptation, European music, languages, or clothes were no longer entirely distant and foreign, but increasingly familiar and local. The modern or the civilized became not just a far-off ideal, but something that could be intimately seen, heard, and felt.

The domestication of civilization had complex implications. The sense of dislocation that was produced by the peripheralization of the Ottoman Empire in economic, political, and cultural terms was countered by relocating civilization to Istanbul. This could occur practically, through the adaptation of European cultural forms and modern technologies to local sensibilities, and also imaginatively and discursively, by producing a self-defining narrative – even a satirical or ambivalent one – of the Ottomans as perfectly civilized. Yet such strategies also involved a closer scrutiny of the ideals and actualities of modern civilization. Perhaps more than the apparent distance between Europe and Istanbul, it was the discomfiting discrepancies between the promises of civilization and its lived realities that were revealed through satirical critique. European music may have functioned in the nineteenth

century as an instrument of Western hegemony that evoked, for those on the peripheries of global power, a sense of being out of place. But by making light of such feelings, Ottoman satirists articulated an experience of modernity that was closer to home than the grand illusions of civilization.

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Notes

1. The article is transliterated in Oğuz 1998:895–6. All translations are my own unless noted otherwise. The title *Diyojen* is a reference to the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes, whom Kasap regarded as a “perfect madman” (meczub-ı kâmil) and thus as an exemplar of the kind of social critique to which his journal aspired (Şahin and Elfenbein 2022:12, Strauss 2001:132).

2. Notable examples of scholarship on European music in the Ottoman Empire include Karadağlı 2020, Alimdar 2016, Eğecioğlu 2012, Aracı 2010, Kutlay Baydar 2010, Mestyan 2010, and Spinetti 2010.

3. For a classic study of the historical development of civilized attitudes and behavior in Europe, see Elias 1994 [1939].

4. While I concentrate in the present article on the 1870s, debates about music and civilization continued throughout the following decades and into the Republican era, adapting to the political, intellectual, and social dynamics of these later periods, as discussed in other contributions to this themed issue. For recent studies of popular theatrical and musical life in Istanbul around the turn of the twentieth century, see Ayas 2023, Nagata & Egawa 2021, Blackthorne-O’Barr 2021. On musical debates as they were mediated through the press in the early Republican period, see Ayas 2020 and Paçacı 1999. As I will argue, thinking humorously yet seriously about the assumed linkages between European music and civilization, which are both asserted and critiqued

in such publications, reveals some of the constitutive ambiguity of modernity.

5. Although cartoons and other illustrations appeared in the early Ottoman satirical press, before the twentieth century they were relatively sparse and seldom related to music. I therefore focus in the present article on textual discourse. For examples of satirical cartoons from the 1870s, see the reproductions in Özdiş 2019, Kasap 2022, and Erimez 1941. For broader studies of Ottoman cartoons and their political contexts, see Büke Okyar 2023, Brummett 2000, and Heinzelmann 1999.

6. For recent and contrasting approaches to the concept of Ottomanism in historical and contemporary contexts, see the contributions in Taglia 2016 and Chovanec & Heilo 2021.

7. Although there were a number of women's journals published in the 1890s and the early twentieth century (Yıldız 2018; Brown Frierson 2000), in previous decades the Ottoman press was dominated by male writers and editors (though this is not to say that earlier periodicals were not also read by women). Before the end of the nineteenth century, most Ottoman periodicals had print runs in the hundreds rather than thousands (see e.g. Baykal 2019:26–7), though these apparently low numbers were partly offset by the circulation of single copies among many readers and the fact that they were also read aloud (Yalman 1964:6), as well as their affordability and the proliferation of different titles in multiple languages and scripts (Strauss 2001). By 1908, the print run of the satirical journal *Kalem* was around 13,000, while the most popular newspapers could reach between 40,000 and 60,000 copies (Heinzelmann 1999:17–18).

8. For historical discussions of humor, see Brewer 1997; Cheauré and Nohejl 2014, and Berger 2014. On satirical journalism in global historical context, see Harder and Mittler 2013.

9. On the material and social transformations of Istanbul in the nineteenth century, see Fuhrmann 2020, Boyar & Fleet 2010 (chapter 8), and Çelik 1986.

10. This presumably refers to the destruction caused by the great fire of Beyoğlu in 1870, which led to extensive redevelopment of the area (Keyvanoğlu 2013).

11. See, for example, Hacı Emin 1302/1884 (translit. in Erol 2003). For further discussion of notation and oral transmission in the late Ottoman period, see Olley 2017, Behar 2006, Jäger 1996.

12. On Güllü Agop and his theater company (including his interactions with Çuhacıyan), see Güllü 2008, And 1999 [1976], and Sevengil 1961:53–111. On Çuhacıyan's operettas, see Tahmizian 2001 and Sevinçli 2016. Detailed information about both figures is also provided in St'epanyan 1969.

13. This complaint was a ubiquitous aspect of discussions about Turkish-language theater and operetta (see e.g. And 1999 [1976]:67–8, Şahin & Elfenbein 2022:13), and was also leveled at non-Muslim performers of Ottoman-style (*alaturka*) music (Ayas 2023:660).

14. Yeranuhi Karakaşyan (Eranuhi Garagashean, 1850–1924) enjoyed a highly successful career as a performer with Güllü Agop's troupe. For biographical details, see Musavver Medeniyet 1874, St'epanyan 1969:101–106, and Şarasan 2008:89–92. On Armenian women in Ottoman theater, see Khalapyan 2013.

15. For a modern edition of *Akabi Hikyayesi*, see Vartan Paşa 1991 [1851]. See also Sagaster 2011 for a discussion of the cultural dynamics in this story. Ahmed Midhat's *Felatun Bey ile Rakım Efendi* has been translated as Ahmed Midhat Efendi 2016 [1875]. On Western music in nineteenth-century Ottoman literature, see Üner 2006. For a recent discussion of the figure of the Ottoman dandy, see Hafez 2022, chapter 3.

16. On European music and popular social spaces in Istanbul, see Alimdar 2016:237–74 and Çilli 2023:163–74. On the intersections between prostitution and commercial entertainment, see Boyar 2019 and Fuhrmann 2009.

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