

ROUNDTABLE

An Orient of One's Own: Music and Islamic Modernism in the Late Ottoman Empire

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Abstract

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Muslim intellectuals sought to articulate new forms of Islamic thought and practice that would be suitable for the modern world. Islamic modernist movements drew on concepts of civilization, progress and science that were integral to European imperialism while also constituting a critical response to the latter. In this essay, I examine the views of prominent Ottoman Muslim reformists concerning music, and situate them within a transnational debate about Islam and modernity. While the views of earlier reformers were shaped by Eurocentric notions of musical progress, an oppositional discourse emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. This discourse, associated especially with Rauf Yekta (1871–1935), appropriated the idea of ‘the Orient’ in order to establish a pan-Islamic narrative of music history, which also emphasized the scientific aspects of Islamicate music theory. In the final part of the essay, I discuss how debates about musical reform were related to the political dynamics of the late Ottoman Empire, particularly in terms of religious and ethnic identity. In conclusion, I argue that the discursive categories of the late nineteenth century continue to underly music historiographies both in the West and in other places, precisely as a consequence of the global connections that emerged during this period. In order to write more ‘global’ histories of music, it is therefore necessary to move beyond the analysis of Western colonialist representations by engaging more closely with non-European sources and discourses, which reveal more entangled and ambivalent stories about music, empire and modernity.

Keywords: musical reform; orientalism; scientific progress; civilization; imperialism; global music history

Few concepts have had greater power to inspire European global imaginaries than ‘the Orient’. The Orient is constitutionally vague, referring to anywhere from Tangier to Tahiti, but it has a particularly close association with the Islamic world. This is partly a consequence of proximity between Christian and Muslim-ruled lands: from al-Andalus to the Ottoman Empire, large swathes of Europe were once governed by Muslim states with hinterlands in North Africa and the Middle East. At the same time, the Islamic world is itself a distinctive global space, extending far beyond these regions through shared faith, language, trade and aesthetic practices. In the nineteenth century, European powers sought to colonize or otherwise dominate Muslim-ruled territories both in the geographically adjacent regions of North Africa and the Middle East and in more distant locations across Central, South and South-east Asia. The concept of the Orient thus came to be intertwined with imperialist projects that were enacted not only through military, political and economic domination, but through discursive and representational forms.

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This is as true for music as it is for literature, visual arts or scholarship. Edward Said's incisive critique of the relationship between empire and orientalism precipitated a significant stream of musicological research that has not only examined orientalist representations in Western art music, but has sought more generally to apply postcolonial perspectives to the study of music.¹ As this research has amply demonstrated, the idea of the Orient and its musical representation are predicated on developmentalist notions of cultural alterity in which progress, modernity or rationality are associated exclusively with Europe, and conversely are assumed to be lacking in Muslim (or 'oriental') societies. But while the necessity of critical approaches to orientalism could not be clearer, postcolonialist musicology has for the most part restricted its focus to the familiar expressive forms, languages and social contexts of Western music history. Despite the undeniable value of much of this scholarship, it has therefore maintained aspects of the parochialism and cultural binarism that were integral to earlier music-historical narratives.

It is, in other words, insufficiently 'global', and for this reason cannot adequately represent the plurality, complexity and multidirectionality of contacts between Europe and the Islamic world. Most importantly, it does not consider the ways in which Muslims themselves have engaged with and reflected upon global historical processes, including not just European colonialism but the social and intellectual dimensions of 'modernity at large'.² The technological, economic and political developments of the nineteenth century were as profoundly transformative for Muslim societies as they were for European ones, in both similar and more specific ways. Moreover, these changes could not fail to generate critical public debate, not least due to the spread of new technologies of communication, from the steam press to the steamship. While these debates included a wide range of actors and perspectives, some of the most influential voices were those of reformist intellectuals who advocated, albeit in quite diverse ways, explicitly modern forms of Islamic practice and identity.

Islamic modernism, of which many varieties emerged across the Muslim world during the long nineteenth century, was a means of navigating technological and social transformations, establishing transregional political alliances and reimagining historical narratives.³ It is often associated with governmental and legal issues such as constitutionalism or the relationship between the state and religious institutions. However, Muslim reformists were also concerned with a broad range of cultural

¹Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]). For perspectives on Said's uneven impact on musicology, see 'Round Table: Edward Said and Musicology Today', ed. by Brigid Cohen, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 141 (2016), 203–32. For important studies of orientalism and nineteenth-century music history, see *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s–1940s*, ed. by Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing, 2007); Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Ruth E. Rosenberg, *Music, Travel and Imperial Encounter in 19th-Century France: Musical Apprehensions* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Rachel Beckles Willson, *Orientalism and Musical Mission: Palestine and the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Ralph P. Locke, 'Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East', *19th-Century Music History*, 22 (1998), 20–53; Philip V. Bohlman, 'The European Discovery of Music in the Islamic World and the "Non-Western" in 19th-Century Music History', *The Journal of Musicology*, 5 (1987), 147–63.

²Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Appadurai stresses the novelty of global connectivity in an age of electronic media and mass migration, but many of his conclusions are valid (*mutatis mutandis*) for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For studies of global modernity and the Muslim world during this period, see *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880–1940*, ed. by Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayech and Avner Wishnitzer (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, ed. by James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Nile Green, 'Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West: Industrial Communications in the Making of the "Muslim World"', *The American Historical Review*, 118 (2013), 401–29; Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. by C. A. Bayly and Leila Tarazi Fawaz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

³For a wide range of representative primary texts, see *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Key works of historical analysis include Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017); Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Monica M. Ringer, *Islamic Modernism and the Re-Enchantment of the Sacred in the Age of History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

practices, from education and language to ethics and aesthetics. Discussions in all of these areas, and the emergence of the modern conception of the ‘Muslim world’ itself, were determined by an acute awareness of the political and symbolic power of contemporary Europe, and a discursive framework based on notions of progress, civilization and universality. As I will show, debates about music were also shaped by these ideals and by the unequal geopolitical situation that they represented and validated.

In this essay, I provide an overview of discussions about musical reform in the late Ottoman press, contextualizing them within a larger contemporary debate about Islam and modernity. Islamic modernism was dialectically related to European views of Islam and associated discourses of civilizational progress. At the same time, it was a strategic response to the increasing global dominance of European colonial empires. Facilitated by new modes of connectivity and communication, it contributed to the consolidation of pan-Islamic sentiment, articulated partly through historical revivalist narratives. I therefore begin by discussing the relationship between orientalism, Islamic modernism and pan-Islamism. I then focus on three prominent Ottoman Muslim reformist thinkers of the late nineteenth century (Namık Kemal, Şemseddin Sami Frashëri and Ahmed Midhat), and discuss their views on music, which have rarely if ever been analysed before.⁴ After outlining their understanding of musical reform, I describe a contrasting approach which emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. This is represented by Rauf Yekta, who is considered one of the founders of modern Turkish musicology.

Like most Ottoman intellectuals of the period, all of these men were committed to ideals of ‘progress’ (*terakki*) and ‘civilization’ (*medeniyet*), but they differed in how they related these concepts to music, how they interpreted musical developments historically and how they evaluated the role of European music in contemporary Ottoman society. Another important keyword was ‘science’ (*fenn* or *ilm*), an expansive semantic field that encompassed notions of ‘technology’ and ‘art’ as well as ‘knowledge’ and ‘theory’. Yekta’s revival of the ‘science of music’ (*ilm-i musiki*) as a rationalistic theoretical discipline, as well as his delineation of a shared ‘oriental’ (*şarkî*) musical tradition, marshalled the past glories of Islamic civilization for the ultimate goal of progress. This represented a significant departure from the ideas of musical reform espoused by Yekta’s predecessors, which were based on more Eurocentric understandings of music history.

Whether in debates about music or in other areas, Muslim reformists were compelled to reckon with the geopolitical dominance of Europe and the associated narrative of civilizational progress. But although in many respects they adopted the discursive frameworks of Western colonialism and orientalism, they also contested or subverted them in unpredictable ways. The idea of the Orient – like the idea of civilization, progress or science – was accepted as an unavoidable fact. The question for Muslim reformists, however, was what the nature of the Orient was, and who had the epistemological power to define it. As Namık Kemal wrote in 1872, ‘Europe knows nothing about the Orient’.⁵ By the early twentieth century, this argument had developed in more radical directions, influenced by geopolitical conflicts and shifting transregional alliances, ethnic nationalism and secular materialist paradigms.

In musical discourse, this was linked to the emergence of reformist currents that emphasized rationalist approaches to theory and pedagogy, but also made claims for the superiority of particular cultural groups, often articulated through references to a lost golden age. As I argue in the final section, projects of musical reform among diverse Ottoman communities were based on discursive concepts and identity categories that were integral to processes of intercommunal conflict and imperial dissolution. In conclusion, I suggest that such reformist movements were geographically widespread around the turn of

⁴The writings of Ahmed Midhat on music are discussed in *Ahmet Midhat Efendi ve Müsiki: Batılılaşma Döneminin İlk Metinleri*, ed. by Fazlı Arslan (Istanbul: VakıfBank Kültür Yayınları, 2020). See also Fazlı Arslan, *Müzikte Batılılaşma ve Son Dönem Osmanlı Aydınları* (Istanbul: Beyan Yayınları, 2016).

⁵Namık Kemâl, ‘Avrupa Şark’ı bilmez’, *İbret*, no. 7 (16 Rebi’ü l-âhîr 1289 [23 June 1872]), 3. For a translation, see Namık Kemal, ‘Europe Knows Nothing about the Orient’, in *Europe Knows Nothing about the Orient: A Critical Discourse from the East (1872–1932)*, ed. by Zeynep Çelik (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2021), pp. 59–62. On other global appropriations of orientalist thought, see *After Orientalism: Critical Perspectives on Western Agency and Eastern Re-Appropriations*, ed. by François Pouillon and Jean-Claude Vatin (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

the twentieth century, and as such offer one possibility for thinking globally about music history beyond the binary framework of Western colonialism and non-Western victimhood. Engaging closely with non-European debates about musical reform reveals that they were not just a response to Western hegemony, but were shaped by social and political power dynamics at both local and regional levels, and indeed were often themselves linked to projects of nationalist or imperialist expansion. They therefore enrich but also complicate our understanding of the global geographies of music history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Islamic modernism in the age of empire

On 29 March 1883, the French philologist and orientalist Ernest Renan (1823–92) gave a lecture at the Sorbonne on the subject of ‘Islam and science’.⁶ Renan, whose only experience of the contemporary Muslim world was as a member of an archaeological expedition to Syria in 1860–61, argued that the rational sciences had flourished under the Abbasid caliphate (a period of five centuries that he dismissed as ‘transitory’) solely due to the contributions of Persians, Greeks and Nestorian Christians. Unlike the Semitic Arabs and Jews, all of these groups were said to belong to the Aryan race. In the following centuries, the light of knowledge had been extinguished in the lands dominated by Islam, since Muslims (and non-Aryans in general) were constitutionally incapable of rational thought. As Renan notoriously declared:

Any person with a modicum of instruction in the affairs of our time clearly sees the current inferiority of Muslim countries, the decadence of the states governed by Islam, the intellectual nonentity of the races that derive their culture and education solely from this religion. Anyone who has been to the Orient or Africa is struck by the fatefully narrow-minded character of the true believer, by this sort of iron band that encircles his head, rendering it completely impervious to science, incapable of learning anything or opening itself up to any new idea.⁷

In accordance with the common sense of his time and place, as well as being unabashedly racist, Renan’s speech – made two years after the French invasion of Tunisia and shortly before the scramble for Africa was formalized by the Berlin Conference – was a clarion call for aggressive European imperialism in the name of progress:

If Omar or Genghis Khan had come up against some good artillery, they would not have crossed the borders of their desert. [...] What was not said, originally, against firearms? They nevertheless contributed substantially to the victory of civilization. For my part, I am convinced that science is a good thing, that only science furnishes weapons against the evil that can be done with it, that ultimately it will only serve progress, I mean true progress, the kind that is inseparable from respect for man and for liberty.⁸

Renan’s views on Islam are, of course, an exemplary instance of orientalist discourse. As Said argued, his approach to the philology of Semitic languages laid the groundwork for a racialised understanding of comparative history, which produced ‘the apparent ontological inequality of Occident and Orient.’⁹ But while Said focused exclusively on the discursive construction of the Orient by European scholars, contemporary Muslim intellectuals were not unaware of the ideas about Islam that were being

⁶Ernest Renan, *L’Islamisme et la science: conférence faite à la Sorbonne le 29 mars 1883* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883). For a translation, see Ernest Renan, ‘Islam and Science (*L’Islamisme et la science*, 1883)’, in *What is a Nation? And Other Political Writings*, ed. and trans. by M. F. N. Giglioli (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), pp. 264–80.

⁷Renan, ‘Islam and Science’, p. 265.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 276–77.

⁹Said, *Orientalism*, p. 150.

propagated in Paris, London and Berlin.¹⁰ A few weeks after the text of Renan's lecture appeared in *Journal des débats*, the editors published a letter by the Iranian political activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–97).¹¹ Al-Afghani's tone was scrupulously polite, and he largely endorsed Renan's views about the contemporary decline of the Muslim world and the stifling effects of religious dogmatism on scientific progress. However, he disputed the claim that Muslims and Arabs were fundamentally hostile to rational thought, arguing that history provided ample evidence of their 'natural love for sciences'. Indeed, while the early Islamic empires may have adopted the sciences of the ancient Greeks and Persians, these were subsequently 'developed, extended, clarified, perfected, completed and coordinated with a perfect taste and a rare precision and exactitude.'¹²

Al-Afghani's letter was the first of many such responses to Renan by intellectuals across the Muslim world.¹³ Unlike al-Afghani's cautious rejoinder, published in French and aimed squarely at a European readership, those written for local audiences were less willing to pull their punches. Namık Kemal (1840–88) was a playwright and novelist as well as political theorist and a leading member of the Young Ottoman constitutionalist movement, who had spent a period of exile in Paris and London in 1867–70. In 1910, a privately circulated manuscript he had written in the 1880s was published posthumously in Istanbul as *Rönan Müdafaaamesi* (Refutation of Renan).¹⁴ Namık Kemal was incredulous that such uninformed and blatantly prejudiced opinions, which disregarded the principles of evidence-based argument, could be taken seriously in the supposedly civilized world. Ridiculing Renan's claim that the early Muslim philosophers were 'not intellectually Arab', he invoked the ostensible universality of the discourse of civilization by asking: 'Is it even conceivable for people to possess an intellect exclusively their own, besides the one they share with everyone else?'¹⁵

Yet what seems to have really piqued Kemal was not just the claim that the Islamic world was intellectually inferior to Christian Europe, but the implication that Muslims were less civilized than other peoples in more distant lands:

[Renan] thinks he can justify his opinion simply by casting a superficial glance at every issue he comes across as though – lest we suggest a comparison! – he was dealing with the Zulu sect [...] Concerning intelligence and learning, Monsieur Renan, who sees no need to provide evidence for his views, can then perceive Muslims as the least among the human species, worse than those who worship fire in China or animals in India, those cannibals in uncharted territories or ocean archipelagos.¹⁶

Thus, while Kemal chastised Renan and other European scholars for their bias against Muslims, he was content to accept the general premise that cultures could be ranked hierarchically according to their stage of civilizational progress. This view was commonplace amongst Muslim intellectuals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, Ottoman Turkish elites in Istanbul regarded themselves as superior to other Muslims on the peripheries of the empire, particularly the Arab

¹⁰Said attempted to rectify this imbalance to some extent in his later work. For a brief mention of al-Afghani's response to Renan, see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 337.

¹¹For a translation, see Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī, 'Answer of Jamāl ad-Dīn to Renan, *Journal des Débats*, May 18, 1883', in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī"*, ed. and trans. by Nikkie R. Keddie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 181–87.

¹²Al-Afghānī, 'Answer of Jamāl ad-Dīn', pp. 184–85.

¹³Monica M. Ringer and A. Holly Shissler, 'The al-Afghani-Renan Debate, Reconsidered', *Iran Nameh*, 30 (2015), xxviii–xlv; York A. Norman, 'Disputing the "Iron Circle": Renan, Afghani, and Kemal on Islam, Science, and Modernity', *Journal of World History*, 22 (2011), 693–714; Dücane Cündioğlu, 'Ernest Renan ve "Reddiyeler" Bağlamında İslam-Bilim Tartışmalarına Bibliyografik bir Katkı', *Divan*, 2 (1996), 1–94.

¹⁴Namık Kemāl, *Rönan müdāfa 'a-nāmesi* (Istanbul: Maḥmūd Beğ Maṭba'ası, 1326 [1910]). For an abridged translation, see Namık Kemal, 'Refutation of Renan', in Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing*, pp. 73–93.

¹⁵Kemal, 'Refutation of Renan', p. 89.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 76, 78.

provinces, and believed that they had a duty to civilize their compatriots in order to drag them into the modern age.¹⁷

Islamic modernists such as al-Afghani and Kemal promoted educational, legal and political changes which they believed would enable Muslim societies to regain their past confidence and to compete with – or at least resist domination by – the currently more advanced societies of western Europe. They maintained that Islam was fully compatible with modern scientific and political institutions, and that by adopting the intellectual tools of contemporary Europe for the sake of progress, Muslims were in fact reviving the original character of the religion that had prevailed during its earlier periods of florescence. This historical perspective was combined with efforts to foster unity amongst geographically disparate Muslim communities, through the mobility of political activists and the use of print technology, in order to more effectively resist the encroachments of European imperialism.

As such, Islamic modernism was in many ways synonymous with the ideology of pan-Islamism. In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was the largest independent Islamic state, headed by a sultan with a widely recognized claim to the caliphate, and with diverse and extensive territorial dominions of its own. Despite its increasingly precarious military and economic position, the empire was still a serious player on the global stage, with the capacity to engage with European powers on something like equal terms. Accordingly, reformists in cities such as Lahore, Tashkent and Baku looked to the Ottoman Empire as the political and moral leader of the Muslim world, and saw Istanbul as a modern metropolis in touch with the latest developments Europe, as well as a meeting place for activists and intellectuals.

There were, to be sure, many competing and often discordant voices within the movements that are retrospectively grouped under the rubric of Islamic modernism. While a belief in the benefits of science, progress and civilization was broadly shared, there were profound disagreements about how these ideals related to the Islamic past, how they should be implemented in contemporary Muslim societies and to what extent European practices should be taken as a model to be emulated. These debates spilled into all domains of public and private life, including politics and law but also culinary practices, sartorial habits and gender roles, which were the subject of polemical debates as well as fictionalized portrayals in literature and theatre. Although it has been largely absent from scholarly discussions of Islamic modernism, another arena of debate was music. From the 1870s onwards, music was discussed in the Ottoman Turkish press within the same general framework that defined other areas of public debate. In particular, the adaptation of European musical forms and concepts to local contexts and sensibilities, the effects of this process on existing aesthetic practices and the necessity and methods of musical reform, were understood and contested within a master narrative of civilizational progress.

European music and civilization

The question of musical reform in the Ottoman Empire was linked to the set of military, economic, legal and bureaucratic reforms known as the Tanzimat (lit. ‘re-orderings’).¹⁸ The process of state-led musical reform was inaugurated, as it was in so many other places, with the establishment of a European-style

¹⁷Ussama Makdisi, ‘Ottoman Orientalism’, *The American Historical Review*, **107** (2002), 768–96; Selim Deringil, ‘“They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery”: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate’, *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, **45** (2003), 311–42.

¹⁸For concise overviews of European music in nineteenth-century Istanbul, see Özgecan Karadağlı, ‘Western Performing Arts in the Late Ottoman Empire: Accommodation and Formation’, *Context*, **46** (2020), 17–33; Adam Mestyan, ‘From Private Entertainment to Public Education? Opera in the Late Ottoman Empire (1805–1914) – An Introduction’, in *Die Oper im Wandel der Gesellschaft: Kulturtransfers und Netzwerke des Musiktheaters in Europa*, ed. by Sven Oliver Müller, Philipp Ther, Jutta Toelle and Gesa zur Nieden (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010), pp. 263–76. For more detailed discussions, see e.g. Selçuk Alimdar, *Osmanlı’da Batı Müziği* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2016); Emre Aracı, *Donizetti Paşa: Osmanlı Sarayının İtalyan Maestrosu* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006); Emre Aracı, *Naum Tiyatrosu: 19. Yüzyıl İstanbulu’nun İtalyan Operası* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010); *Giuseppe Donizetti Paschià: Traiettorie musicali e storiche tra Italia e Turchia*, ed. by Federico Spinetti (Bergamo: Fondazione Donizetti, 2010).

military band in 1828, the way having been cleared by the violent abolition of the Janissary corps two years earlier. The training of the band was entrusted to Giuseppe Donizetti (1788–1856), brother of the opera composer, who also headed the new Imperial Music School. The palace built private theatres that hosted performers including Franz Liszt, and patronized the first public opera house in Istanbul, the Naum (originally Bosco) Theatre, in 1839.

Alongside these elite spaces, which catered to the higher bureaucratic and diplomatic communities, smaller venues hosting European-style music and theatre proliferated in Istanbul from the 1860s onwards, particularly in the district of Beyoğlu (also known as Pera). The genres on offer included translations of light operas by composers such as Offenbach and Lecocq, and original works with Turkish librettos featuring local themes and characters. Further still down the socio-economic ladder were song forms such as *kanto*, composed from a blend of European and Ottoman elements and performed by women of lower-class background, whose lyrics celebrated the illicit pleasures of Istanbul's nightlife. Diplomatic balls and Italian operas in the embassies and theatres of Beyoğlu existed alongside a thriving shadow economy of alcohol consumption, gambling and prostitution, in venues where European-style entertainments featured centrally.¹⁹ Thus, while the idea of European music offered the promise of civilization and modernity, it also harboured the threat of corruption and immorality.

In the cultural sphere, Namık Kemal was concerned primarily with theatre and literature rather than music, although his famous patriotic play *Vatan yahud Silistre* (about the Ottoman defence of Silistria during the Crimean War) was based on an Italian opera by Giacomo Panizza (1803–60), first performed at the Naum Theatre in 1855.²⁰ Nonetheless, his writings on theatre occasionally refer to music and are revealing of his general attitude towards the performing arts. In accordance with the aims of Tanzimat literature, Kemal believed that theatre was a conduit of civilization that should provide moral edification and promote a sense of patriotism.²¹ As a commonly used phrase put it, the theatre was a 'school for civility' (*mekteb-i edeb*).

Kemal was therefore censorious of lighter theatrical and musical forms, which he deemed morally unsuitable for Ottoman audiences. The polka, which encouraged close contact between unrelated men and women, was in Kemal's view incompatible with the morals of Ottoman society.²² He was, of course, not alone in such views, which were frequently expressed in Europe itself and in other places where new musical forms, couples dances and theatrical genres transformed public modes of social interaction.²³ Likewise, Kemal condemned the levity and lasciviousness of genres such as operetta and vaudeville, and advocated that new artistic works should be written by and for the Ottomans rather than simply translated from French and other Western languages.²⁴ Yet he did not question the underlying assumption that modern European cultural forms such as the novel, the scripted play and the opera were universal expressions of civilization, even if he believed that their linguistic and thematic content should accord more closely with the values of Ottoman society. A loose parallel might be drawn with Kemal's brand of constitutional liberalism, ultimately derived from French Enlightenment thought but

¹⁹On the wider cultural and social context, see Malte Fuhrmann, *Port Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean: Urban Culture in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) and Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 271–327.

²⁰Aracı, *Naum Tiyatrosu*, pp. 227–32.

²¹For discussion of Kemal's involvement in theatre and theatre criticism, see Refik Ahmet Sevengil, *Türk Tiyatrosu Tarihi*, 5 vols. (Istanbul: Millî Eğitim Basımevi, 1959–68), ii: *Tanzimat Tiyatrosu* (1961), pp. 161–239.

²²[Nâmîk Kemâl], 'Tiyatro maddesi', *Diyojen*, no. 164 (15 Teşrin-i şâni 1288 [27 November 1872]), 1–2. The grounds for attributing this and other articles to Kemal are provided in Namidar Günay, 'Nâmîk Kemâl'in *Tasvîr-i Efkâr ve Diyojen* Gazetelerindeki Makaleleri' (unpublished master's thesis, Selçuk Üniversitesi, 1990), vi–vii. For a transliteration of the article, see *ibid.*, pp. 360–63.

²³Derek B. Scott, *Sounds of the Metropolis: The Nineteenth-Century Popular Music Revolution in London, New York, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Avra Xepapadakou, 'Idolatry and Sacrilege: Offenbach's Operetta in Nineteenth-Century Athens', *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 8 (2014), 129–41.

²⁴[Nâmîk Kemâl], 'Tiyatro', *Diyojen*, no. 44 (14 Ağustos 1287 [26 August 1871]), 1–2. Transliterated in Günay, 'Nâmîk Kemâl', pp. 237–40.

with the all-important caveat that political reforms must conform with Islamic law and the morals and customs of Muslim societies.²⁵

Similar views were held by other Muslim reformist thinkers. Şemseddin Sami Frashëri (1850–1904) was an Ottoman Albanian scholar and journalist who wrote the first modern Turkish dictionary as well as several plays and novels. In an article published in the periodical *Hafta* in 1881, he asserted that the love of music, and especially opera, was the hallmark of a civilized society.²⁶ However, he acknowledged that there were differences in taste and sensibility between different nations, and that musical and civilizational stages of progress were not always aligned:

Whether in order to show a people's scientific and civilizational progress, their emotional sensitivity and degree of refinement, or their condition and their natural and national morals, there is no better measure than music. Without people's sensibilities attaining refinement, without understanding anything about refined and delicate musical instruments or beautiful modes, a rudimentary instrument and a monotonous (that is, consisting of the repetition of a single note) music is enough to make them enjoy themselves. If an Italian or a German were to listen for one hour to the goblet drum and shawm that the people of Sudan listen to for weeks on end and which makes them dance and brings them to ecstasy, he would go mad; and if a Sudanese were to listen for months to the music of a famous Italian maestro, it would sound to him like the buzzing of a fly, and he wouldn't feel any effect at all. [...] For this reason, if music reveals the degree of sensibility of a people, this does not always go together with civilization and education, it generally cannot be separated from the fine arts with which it is related and it differs according to the morals and natural condition of every people. For example, while Italy is in the second or perhaps third rank of civilized countries in Europe, in music it is more advanced than anywhere else. As for Switzerland and Scotland, although they are far advanced in civilization, to this day they preserve their ancient, rudimentary musics.²⁷

Despite its gestures towards cultural relativism, Sami's understanding of music is firmly in the mould of Spencerian evolutionism.²⁸ It assumes, like Kemal's derogatory comments about 'the Zulu sect' or 'cannibals in uncharted territories', that there is a single path of historical development upon which all cultures are temporally and hierarchically arranged. Sami suggests that musical progress is not necessarily commensurate with progress in other areas of society. However, his belief that music had reached its most highly developed form in 'Germany, France and other civilized countries' makes clear that he perceives the vanguard of both musical and civilizational progress to be in the West.²⁹

In other contexts, both Kemal and Sami highlighted the historical achievements of Muslims and sought to justify modernizing reforms by reference to Islamic precedents. It is therefore noteworthy that neither of them put forward an analogous argument in relation to music, but instead accepted the premise that only European music offered a pathway to progress and modernity. There is no attempt to demonstrate that Ottoman music, as part of the broader tradition of elite musics that had long been cultivated in the urban centres of the Islamic world, might provide a basis for reform or be compatible with modern ideals of civilization. To some extent, this may be attributable to a personal lack of familiarity with Ottoman music, as opposed to other areas of Islamic culture in which Kemal and Sami had received extensive education, such as law, linguistics or poetry. Yet it also reflects the paradoxical

²⁵Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000 [1962]), pp. 283–336.

²⁶[Şemseddin Sâmî], 'Mûsikî', *Hafta*, no. 11 (3 Zî'l-âhicce 1298 [27 October 1881]), 170–74. The attribution to Sami is based on *Osmanlı Mûsikîsi Literatürü Tarihi*, ed. by Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, Ramazam Şeşen, Gülcan Gündüz and M. Serdar Bekar (Istanbul: İslâm Tarih, Sanat ve Kültür Araştırma Merkezi, 2003), p. 176.

²⁷[Sâmî], 'Mûsikî', 173. This and all following translations are mine.

²⁸On the global impact of Spencer's thought, see *Global Spencerism: The Communication and Appropriation of a British Evolutionist*, ed. by Bernard V. Lightman (Boston: Brill, 2016).

²⁹[Sâmî], 'Mûsikî', 173–74.

Eurocentricity of Islamic modernism. Although Islamic reformists rejected the idea that Muslims were essentially incapable of modernization or rationality, since they had historically demonstrated their capacity for scientific progress, they were nonetheless convinced that civilization had attained its most advanced stage in contemporary Europe. Especially before the 1890s, Islamic reformists believed that civilization was universal and singular, and that the surest path to progress was through the implementation of modern European technologies, ideas and cultural forms, albeit with adaptations that would make them more compatible with local environments and historical precedents.

Another influential Ottoman Muslim thinker of the period was Ahmed Midhat (1844–1912). Like Kemal and Sami, Ahmed Midhat was active in various literary spheres, including as a journalist, novelist, translator and popularizing scholar. In 1884, he published a serialized essay entitled ‘History of Music’.³⁰ The essay begins by discussing the origins of music and its relationship with language, followed by the invention of instruments and the music of ancient civilizations including Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, Greek and Jewish cultures. These are assessed according to their ‘service to musical progress’ (*terakkiyat-i musikiyeye hizmet*), which is understood to be a universal and cumulative historical process. Likewise, knowledge of acoustic principles is interpreted as evidence of ‘human progress and civilization’ (*terakkiyat-i beşeriye ve medeniyet*).³¹ Midhat makes a distinction between ‘old’ (*eski*) and ‘new’ (*yeni*) music, which corresponds to the binary between ‘Turkish’ (*alaturka*) and ‘European’ (*alafranga*) musical styles: ‘In the old music, there was no such thing as ‘harmonie’, that is, harmony [...] Which is to say, the difference between the old and new music is like the difference that we have described between what are now referred to as *alaturka* and *alafranga* [musics].’³²

In a section on ‘Islam’s service to music’, he counters the argument (apparently advanced by a French scholar) that Islam is hostile to music by emphasizing the importance of Qur’anic recitation, and mentions the contributions of the philosopher al-Farabi (*d.* 950) to the development of music theory. In this respect, he takes a step further the intention stated (but not realized) by Sami to discuss ‘music in the time of Islamic civilization, and especially music’s degree of progress [...] under the Arabs’.³³ In the end, however, Midhat concedes that music is currently more developed in Europe:

Nevertheless, we are not claiming superiority to Europe in the matter of music. After the Middle Ages, Europe’s service to the new [i.e. polyphonic] music was such that while today the science of music has reached almost the highest point in Europe, amongst us it is still at the stage of infancy. From now on, it is necessary for the experts to make serious efforts in order for [oriental music] to reach the maturity it deserves.³⁴

The final part of the essay is devoted to the history of Western notation and the ‘new music’ (especially opera and ‘*musique instrumentale*’) as the latest and highest stage of musical progress. Midhat concludes with a hopeful assessment of the current situation in the Ottoman Empire, which he attributes to the wider reforms associated with the Tanzimat:

The Auspicious Reforms have opened for us an era of progress and renewal. Since that time, the Exalted Ottoman State has also had an imperial music school worthy of being considered a ‘conservatoire’ – that is, an institution of musical education. This has been an excellent gateway for the importation into our country of the new music which has been brought to the level of perfection by Europe. In particular, it is our right to expect the support of this institution to open a

³⁰ Ahmed Midhat, ‘Tarih-i musiki’, *Tercümân-ı Haşikât*, no. 1731 (12 Cemâzi’l-evvel 1301 [10 March 1884]), 3; no. 1732 (13 Cemâzi’l-evvel 1301 [11 March 1884]), 3; no. 1733 (14 Cemâzi’l-evvel 1301 [12 March 1884]), 3. The essay was republished in *Müntehabât-i Tercümân-ı Haşikât* the following year. A simplified transcription of the latter is provided in Arslan, *Ahmet Midhat Efendi*, pp. 39–55.

³¹ Midhat, ‘Tarih-i musiki’, 10 March 1884.

³² Midhat, ‘Tarih-i musiki’, 11 March 1884.

³³ [Sami], ‘Musiki’, 174.

³⁴ Midhat, ‘Tarih-i musiki’, 11 March 1884.

period of renewal for our ancient music in accordance with the latest developments in the art of music.³⁵

In his later writings, Midhat came to adopt a more critical view of European music and its centrality in universal histories of music. There is a suggestion in the quote above that Ottoman music itself might become a vehicle for progress. However, in this essay at least, Midhat did not develop this idea further, and the thrust of his narrative makes clear that European music is a normative and universal measure of progress. As with Kemal and Sami, this may be partly due to the fact that Midhat was a generalist with no special expertise in Ottoman music. However, the later shift in his writings towards a more complex critique of European music and a concomitant defence of ‘oriental’ music points towards a wider transformation in Islamic modernist thought towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Pan-Islam and the science of music

This new approach to the question of musical reform is most evident in the work of a younger generation of intellectuals, of whom the most prolific and influential was Rauf Yekta (1871–1935). In contrast to the figures discussed above, Yekta was highly trained in the theory and practice of Ottoman music, although he was officially employed as a palace bureaucrat. Together with his teachers and collaborators, most of whom were senior members of the Mevlevi Sufi order, Yekta devoted many years to collecting and studying treatises in Arabic and Persian associated with the Systematist school. This tradition of mathematical theory had flourished between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries but had long been obsolete in Ottoman and other Middle Eastern musics. Through his research and publications, Yekta revived Systematist concepts in order to establish a scientific theory of the Ottoman modal system, which continues to form the basis of Turkish music theory.³⁶

This was, to be sure, a reformist and modernist project, and Yekta agreed with his predecessors that Ottoman music was currently less developed than European music, which he attributed to the neglect of the scientific aspects of theory. However, unlike the older generation of reformists, Yekta did not believe that there was a single, universal music, or that the best way to achieve progress was through the adoption of European forms and practices. Instead, he maintained that there were two universal traditions of music – Eastern and Western – that were based on fundamentally different principles. Although oriental music now appeared inferior to European music, it had historically constituted a great tradition that was superior in many respects, particularly in terms of modal and rhythmic complexity. Furthermore, it had a scientific tradition of music theory that was associated with the golden age of Islamic civilization and demonstrated the shared historical and cultural roots of the various musics of the Islamic world.

Yekta put forward these arguments in dozens of articles in the most widely circulated Ottoman periodicals of the time.³⁷ A brief example will suffice to illustrate his polemical style. In 1898, an article was published in the daily newspaper *Sabah* by Mehmed Zati (1863/6–1961), a teacher at the Imperial Music School who published books on Western music theory and composed new polyphonic works.³⁸ Zati argued that there was no such thing as ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ music, but only a single universal music whose laws were fully explained by current European music theory. The following week, Yekta responded in another newspaper, *İkdâm*, by suggesting that although Zati may have been known as

³⁵Midhat, ‘Tarih-i müsiki’, 12 March 1884.

³⁶Murad Bardakçı, ‘Rauf Yekta Bey’in Hayatı ve Eserleri’, in Rauf Yekta Bey, *Türk musikisi*, trans. by Orhan Nasuhioğlu (Istanbul: Pan Yayıncılık, 1986), pp. 8–16; Okan Murat Öztürk, ‘Türk Müziğinde Yekta, Ezgi ve Arel Teorilerinin Pozitivist İnşası: Kısa Fakat Eleştirel bir Tarihçe’, *Eurasian Journal of Music and Dance*, 16 (2020), 171–215.

³⁷For transliterations of many of Yekta’s articles, see Hüseyin Özdemir, ‘Rauf Yektâ Bey’in, *Resimli Gazete, Yeni Ses ve Vakit* Gazetelerinde Müsiki ile ilgili Makalelerinin İncelenmesi’, (unpublished master’s thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2010); Muhammet Ali Çergel, ‘Raûf Yektâ Bey’in *İkdâm* Gazetesi’nde Neşredilen Türk Müsikisi Konulu Makâleleri’, (unpublished master’s thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2007).

³⁸Mehmed Zâti, ‘Müsiki’, *Şabâh*, no. 3247 (22 Teşrin-i şâni 1314 / 5 December 1898), 1.

an expert in European music, he was evidently unfamiliar with the history and theory of ‘our national music’ (*milli musikimiz*), which was part of the common heritage of Islamic civilization:

As is well known to those who are familiar with the history of our music, we Ottomans took the art of music – like many other arts and sciences – from the Arabs and Iranians. In any case, the oriental *makams*, which result from very small musical intervals that are employed by oriental peoples, were taken as a basis to create the delicate melodies that are particular to the imperial [Ottoman] lands. But leaving aside, of course, the different singing styles of each people, the fact that even today no great difference is observed between Turkish, Arabic and Persian musics is one of the indications that these three musics possess the same theoretical laws. Hence, while many *makams* such as *uşşak*, *hüseyni*, *segah*, *saba*, *evc* and so on exist in the songs of the aforementioned peoples, in other words in oriental music, such *makams* are still unknown in Europe. This too constitutes a further proof that Eastern and Western musics are each independent arts which are born from different foundations.³⁹

Contrary to Zati’s assumption that non-European musics lacked a rational foundation, Yekta argued that Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (*d.* 1037) had developed robust theories on the basis of scientific and mathematical principles, in particular the harmonic series. The neglect of this intellectual tradition by Ottoman musicians was the reason for the recent popularity of European music, which was perceived to be more ordered and therefore easier to learn. According to Zati, Ottoman *makams* could be easily explained with reference to the system of major and minor keys; *hicaz*, for example, was equivalent to D minor.⁴⁰ Apart from the ignorance of the characteristics of particular *makams* that this argument betrayed, Yekta pointed out that a sophisticated modal theory had existed in the Islamic world long before the concepts of ‘major’ and ‘minor’ emerged in Europe, and that the treatises documenting this theory were still extant:

Apparently it did not occur to him that 650 years ago, when masters of music such as Safiyüddin Abdülmü’min [*d.* 1294] performed the *makam hicaz* at the court of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, a science of music did not even exist in Europe, let alone D minor! Nonetheless, we take pride in the fact that the *Şerefiyye* treatise, which was composed by the aforementioned master on the basis of extremely precise mathematical principles of description, adorns our hands today. Has Mr Zati [...] perchance benefited from consulting this fact-assembling treatise? It is understood from his noble comments not only that he has not read it, but that he has not even heard of it. Because if he had heard of it, at the very least he would have conceded that there exists an excellent theory that is particular to oriental music, and he would have understood that apart from *hicaz* not being D minor, the musical intervals employed in that *makam* do not even exist in European music.⁴¹

Yekta’s arguments reflect broader currents in Islamic modernist thought at the turn of the twentieth century. Earlier reformists had interpreted the discourse of civilization to mean that Muslims were capable of emulating the progress of the West. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the increasing hegemony of European powers – including events such as the occupations of Tunisia and Egypt and the loss of other Ottoman territories in the Caucasus and Balkans – had made clear to many Muslims and other non-European intellectuals that there was little prospect of achieving geopolitical parity with the West, at least on the terms set by the latter. Despite the rhetoric of universalism, the harsh realities of colonialism, economic exploitation and scientific racism demonstrated that the European powers in fact conceived of civilization as exclusive and unattainable by other cultures.

³⁹Ra’uf Yektâ, ‘Meḥmed Zâti Bey Efendi’ye’, *İkdam*, no. 1590 (30 Teşrin-i şâni 1314 / 12 December 1898): 3. Transliterated in Çergel, ‘Ra’uf Yektâ Bey’, 385–94.

⁴⁰Zâti, ‘Mûsikî’.

⁴¹Yektâ, ‘Meḥmed Zâti Bey Efendi’ye’.

This led to the emergence of more oppositional, anti-Western strains of reformist thought, which did not renounce a belief in progress and civilization, but attempted to ground them more firmly in local and regional histories and institutions.⁴² Yekta's insistence on the theoretical and aesthetic autonomy of 'Eastern' music thus suggests an alternative historical narrative in which civilization is not singular but plural. The achievements of Islamic civilization demonstrate that other cultures also have unique and valuable traditions that are shared across immense geographical and linguistic areas, and which are equally as universal as European practices, if not more so. Furthermore, traditions such as Islamicate music theory were based in scientific principles that preceded and eclipsed modern European achievements.

The resonance between Yekta's arguments and the ideology of pan-Islamism is further demonstrated by his emphasis on the shared foundations of different musical traditions of the Islamic world. While there had been extensive entanglements between Turkish, Arabic and Persian cultures long before the nineteenth century, the identification of a collective 'Eastern' or Islamic music in opposition to 'Western' music was a novel development. This reflected both the increasing contacts across the Islamic world facilitated by new communication technologies, and the way in which these connections were strategically mobilized to build transnational alliances that could more effectively withstand the pressures of European hegemony. Alongside anti-colonial political activism, discourses of culture and civilization played a key role in the formation of these real or imagined solidarities.

The notion of a monolithic Orient was, of course, European in origin and axiomatic to orientalist discourse. However, it was appropriated and redeployed by Muslim and other non-European intellectuals for their own purposes. The idea of a morally and aesthetically superior East that was diametrically opposed to the decadent, materialist West was capacious enough to accommodate multiple ideologies, including not just pan-Islamism but other transregional doctrines such as pan-Turkism and pan-Asianism. These latter ideologies also informed musical discourse during the early twentieth century, for example in Yekta's unfinished *Şark Musikisi Tarihi* ('History of Oriental Music', 1925), which constructed a counter-narrative of musical history centred on Asia rather than Europe.⁴³ However, nestled within such transregional visions were a variety of competing local nationalisms, which eventually proved a more potent vehicle for discourses of musical identity.

Finally, what differentiated Yekta's approach to the question of musical reform from that of his predecessors perhaps most of all was his understanding of 'science'. Although figures such as Kemal, Sami and Midhat took pride in the intellectual achievements of early Islamic civilization, they were largely ignorant of the place of music theory within this tradition, and thus conceded that only European music had a rational, scientific foundation. The central aim of Yekta's published output was vigorously and meticulously to refute this claim, not just in Ottoman intellectual circles, but also through his publications in French and correspondence with sympathetic European scholars in the 'international' community.⁴⁴ Again, there were important convergences with wider intellectual currents in the Ottoman Empire, particularly the engagement with Comtean positivism and materialist philosophy by figures such as Abdullah Cevdet (1869–1932), who was one of the founding ideologues of the Young Turk movement. Like other late Ottoman intellectuals, Yekta looked to Islamic history as a source of renewal and pride, but he did so with a modernist faith in science as the fundamental driver of human progress.⁴⁵

⁴²Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Penguin, 2013).

⁴³Ra'uf Yektâ, *Şark Müsikişisi Târîhi* (Istanbul: Maḥmûd Beğ Maḥba'ası, 1343/1925).

⁴⁴See e.g. Raouf Yekta Bey, 'La musique turque', *Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du conservatoire. Première partie: Histoire de la musique*, vol. 5, ed. by Albert Lavignac and Lionel de la Laurencie (Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1922), 2845–3064.

⁴⁵M. Alper Yalçınkaya, *Learned Patriots: Debating Science, State, and Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Şükrü Hanioglu, 'Blueprints for a Future Society: Late Ottoman Materialists on Science, Religion, and Art' in, *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. by Elisabeth Özdalga (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 28–116; Öztürk, 'Türk Müziğinde Yekta, Ezgi ve Arel'.

While most reformists believed that Islam was fully compatible with modern science, a more radical materialist current accompanied the rise of the Committee of Union and Progress (İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti), which was founded in 1889 and came to power with the Young Turk revolution in 1909. A fervent belief in the ideals of progress and secularism was also what galvanized the military officers and intellectuals who led the Turkish War of Independence, which reversed the seemingly inevitable colonization of the former Ottoman territories in Anatolia after World War I, and led to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. In the polarized environment of the early Republic, the contested relationship of science and progress with the heritage of Islamic civilization was at the heart of the battles fought between those who advocated the adoption of European music and those who wished to reform Ottoman musical traditions according to modernist ideas and practices, as indeed it continues to be in many ways today.⁴⁶

In a much broader sense, the transition from empire to nation-state involved a recalibration of social and political relations not just among different factions within the Turkish-speaking Muslim community, but within and between many other ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. It is therefore necessary, in closing, to briefly consider how debates about musical reform and the larger discourse of civilizational progress played out in the field of intercommunal relations. As I will argue, although the complexity and diversity of late Ottoman society precludes any simple conclusions about correlations between particular identity categories and political dominance, discursive concepts such as ‘civilization’ or ‘the Orient’ were instrumentalized by different groups in ways that had profoundly significant political consequences.

Ottoman identities at the end of empire

In contrast the idea of a monolithic Orient, there was a wide range of opinions among Muslim intellectuals regarding questions of musical reform during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even if these were often polemically expressed through the essentialist categories of the time. However, it is important to acknowledge that the protagonists were located within specific social and political hierarchies. Muslim reformists may have occupied (or felt themselves to occupy) a subordinate position in relation to Europe, but in their local and regional contexts typically identified with a dominant social group, whether in terms of political authority, ethnicity, religion or gender. This dominance is reflected in the constitution of the historical archive, as the sources – and discourses – that are most readily accessible (within the context of the Ottoman Empire, and across the Islamic world more generally) were for the most part produced by literate, urban, male, Sunni Muslim elites.

Yet even within the highly circumscribed group of writers discussed here, there was considerable diversity that belies the assumption that such identities can be directly correlated with power or privilege. Namık Kemal, for example, was an anti-government activist who was exiled for his political opinions; Şemseddin Sami Frashëri was a central figure in the Albanian nationalist movement; Ahmed Midhat was a self-made journalist who published some of the earliest feminist writings in Turkish; and Rauf Yekta belonged to religious and musical communities which, by the time he died in 1935, had been systematically suppressed by the secular republican state.

Furthermore, if we expand our perspective to include the larger population of the empire, we might also consider contemporary debates about musical reform among, say, Greek, Armenian, Jewish or Arab communities, or any of the other linguistic, ethnic and confessional groups that lived within the Ottoman sphere.⁴⁷ In many cases, intellectuals from these communities advanced similar arguments about

⁴⁶For studies of music and politics in the republican period, see Orhan Tekelioğlu, ‘Modernizing Reforms and Turkish Music in the 1930s’, *Turkish Studies*, 2 (2001), 93–108; John Morgan O’Connell, ‘In the Time of Alaturka: Identifying Difference in Musical Discourse’, *Ethnomusicology*, 49 (2005), 177–205; Güneş Ayas, *Müziği Boğan Gürültü: İdeolojinin Kaskacındaki ‘Musiki’* (Istanbul: İthaki, 2018).

⁴⁷Merih Erol, *Greek Orthodox Music in Ottoman Istanbul: Nation and Community in the Era of Reform* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Maureen Jackson, *Mixing Musics: Turkish Jewry and the Urban Landscape of a Sacred Song* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), pp. 52–55; Jacob Olley, ‘Remembering Armenian Music in Bolis: Komitas Vardapet

musical reform, revolving around questions of historical decline and revival, the systematization of musical transmission or scientific theoretical models. Furthermore, they typically identified their cultural and musical practices with – or against – ‘the Orient’, even if this identification took on particular inflections within different cultural-linguistic spaces and in different historical moments.

Again, although language, faith and ethnicity played a central role in intercommunal relations in the Ottoman Empire, these identity categories overlapped and diverged in complex ways and did not align straightforwardly with political power. In one sense, for example, the subordination of non-Muslims was enacted through legal and fiscal institutions, as well as cultural and social practices. During the nineteenth century, however, non-Muslim communities gained new visibility and agency due partly to the support of European states for separatist movements. These movements were celebrated by many (perhaps with good reason) as liberatory revolutions, but could also be detrimental to the interests of other constituencies, including both Muslims and non-Muslims who identified more strongly with the empire than with the emergent nation-states. Furthermore, debates about issues such as musical reform were shaped by hierarchies and power struggles within these communities, such as between religious authorities and secular professionals, or Ottoman loyalists and nationalist revolutionaries.

If there was to some extent a shared imperial identity in the late nineteenth century, including in musical practices and narratives, by the 1920s this had broken down almost entirely. As nationalist movements gained momentum, the stakes and significance of imagining oneself to belong to ‘the East’ or ‘the West’ shifted rapidly, and with real-world consequences. These labels (or others such as ‘Muslim’, ‘Christian’, ‘Turkish’, or ‘Armenian’) were indexed to volatile claims for territory and political rights that were dependent on competing discourses about history, progress and civilization. In the chaos of imperial breakdown, strategic identifications that may once have been a matter of intellectual opinion or social prestige became existentially consequential. These were not just trivial quarrels about ‘culture’, but instrumental to small and large acts of collective violence, including forced population exchanges, civil wars and genocide.⁴⁸

A century after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, such discourses and identities continue to define music-historical narratives in Turkey and other post-Ottoman states, often in ways that contribute to the ongoing marginalization of particular ethnic, religious or linguistic groups.⁴⁹ Yet they may also be used to assert communal autonomy or to shore up narratives of cultural and historical achievement, particularly in the face of the continued geopolitical and ideological dominance of the West. In short, the discursive frameworks that shaped musical debates in the late Ottoman Empire, and which continue in many ways to be relevant today, may be utilized in diverse ways within and between different groups, and are seldom morally unambiguous.

Conclusion

Despite Renan’s assertion that Muslims are incapable of understanding science or achieving progress, the debates about music outlined above demonstrate that modern ideals of rationality and civilization were

in Transcultural Perspective’, *Memory Studies*, 12 (2019), 547–64; Salah Eddin Maraqa, ‘Vom “Fremdling” zum “Maßstab”: Zum Einzug der westlichen Musiktheorie in die arabische Welt bis ins frühe 20. Jahrhundert’, *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie*, 15 (2018), 79–127.

⁴⁸For a recent analysis of the relationship between revolutionary idealism and interethnic violence, see Bedros Der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014). On the continued importance of late Ottoman and early republican history in contemporary Turkish politics, see Fatma Müge Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).

⁴⁹On music and minoritized communities in contemporary Türkiye and other post-Ottoman states, see Jackson, *Mixing Musics*; Burcu Yıldız, *Experiencing Armenian Music in Turkey: An Ethnography of Musicultural Memory* (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2016); *Ottoman Intimacies, Balkan Musical Realities*, ed. by Risto Pekka Pennanen, Panagiotis C. Poulos and Aspasia Theodosiou (Helsinki: Foundation of the Finnish Institute at Athens, 2013); Sonia Tamar Seeman, *Sounding Roman: Representation and Performing Identity in Western Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

an integral part of the self-understanding of Ottoman Muslims and other communities during the age of European imperialism. The idea that Muslims or any other group are inherently irrational or a threat to Western civilization is not, unfortunately, dead and buried as it should be. Indeed, Renan's insouciance in making such claims during an lecture at the Sorbonne in 1883 is readily comparable to Islamophobic rhetoric employed by politicians, media commentators and public intellectuals today. Furthermore, as the tumultuous events of the last few years have made abundantly clear, musicology has a long and painful road to travel before it exorcises the living ghosts of its colonial past.

Of course, much valuable work has been done on the complicity between orientalism, coloniality and Western music history. But while it is essential to continue to reflect critically on these issues, the assumption of a straightforward moral divide between Western colonial oppression and indigenous virtue, in which non-Europeans are always either voiceless victims or anti-imperialist revolutionaries, is in some sense simply an inversion of the colonial worldview articulated by Renan. While it should certainly not be thought of as a catch-all solution (and indeed brings its own potential pitfalls), engaging more closely with non-European sources, histories and musics may offer pathways out of such discursive cul-de-sacs. As I have attempted to demonstrate, doing this not only contributes to a more diverse field of voices and perspectives, but also points towards more complex and ambivalent stories about modernity, empire or globalization.

My decision to concentrate on the views of one specific group within the Ottoman Empire is partly a pragmatic one, but it is also reflective of some of the epistemological issues that are central to the geopolitics of the late nineteenth century, and which, I would suggest, continue to shape the discipline of musicology. The Ottoman Empire was an Islamic state, within which Muslims were the dominant social group. To this extent, the views of Ottoman Muslim intellectuals can be taken as somehow representative of the empire, or, in the light of the latter's symbolic importance for Muslims around the globe, of 'the Islamic world'. Yet although this can be a convenient and indeed productive approach, it inevitably obscures important distinctions within this group as well as the diversity and complexity of the wider environment in which it was situated. Most problematically, it may reinforce essentialist categories that are as integral to ethnic nationalism or religious fundamentalism as they are to colonialist ideology.

As I have argued, the concept of the Orient was not only a key aspect of European imperialist thought in the nineteenth century, but was also appropriated by Muslims and other non-European intellectuals for their own purposes. Similarly, the discourse of civilization, with its attendant notions of clearly bounded and homogenous cultural identities, was enthusiastically propagated by reformists across the globe.⁵⁰ For this reason, while such ideas continue to underly musicology in the West, they are also central to music-historical narratives in other places. The important question here is how such notions might play into the current disciplinary turn towards 'global' music history, and what we can do (if anything) to avoid reiterating the discursive shibboleths of the late nineteenth century.⁵¹ At the same time, we need to consider how these historical discourses and identity categories continue to shape relations not just in the Western imagination, but within and between different communities in global, regional and local contexts.

In conclusion, debates about musical reform articulated by Ottoman intellectuals in the decades around 1900 were to a large extent defined by discursive categories that were intertwined with the geopolitics of Western imperialism. However, it is crucial to situate them not only in relation to Europe, but also within their immediate social and political environment. The desire to imagine an Islamic, oriental, or Asian musical geography – whether from the standpoint of intellectuals in Istanbul, Tokyo or Delhi – was related as much to competing local and regional interests as it was to the hegemony of the West. Indeed, global connections are discernible between musical reformist projects across the non-Western world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were similarly led by elite

⁵⁰Pouillon and Vatin, *After Orientalism*; Prasenjit Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism', *Journal of World History*, 12 (2001), 99–130; Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁵¹For an overview of the literature on global music history, see my introduction to this round table.

social groups and linked to strategies of national, imperial or transregional dominance. While the manifold differences between these projects should not be ignored, it is nonetheless possible to identify important shared features, such as the rhetorical revival of a golden age, a belief in the essential unity and pre-eminence of a particular cultural group, or a positivistic concern with scientific theoretical and pedagogical models.⁵²

Thinking seriously about such connections (and divergences) is one possible way among many to imagine a global history of music that is not focused solely on the West and its colonial fantasies, but takes full account of the agency of others and their diverse responses to the conditions of modernity. However, in line with the global trends of the early twentieth century, these reformist projects were also implicated – again, in complex and varied ways – in political developments that had devastating and lasting human costs. While such discourses may have emerged partly in response to the pressures of European colonialism, the assertion of an essential cultural homogeneity or superiority, especially if it is felt to have been lost, has the potential (though this is by no means inevitable) to mobilize sentiments that are instrumental to imperialist, ethnic-nationalist or religious-fundamentalist ideologies, whether in the West or elsewhere. If we are to write more ‘global’ histories of music, it is therefore necessary not just to acknowledge the agency of others, but to recognize that this agency may have its own complicated relations to power.

⁵²See e.g. Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ann E. Lucas, ‘The Creation of Iranian Music in the Age of Steam and Print, circa 1880–1914’, in *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print*, ed. by James L. Gelvin and Nile Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 143–57; Takenaka Toru, ‘Isawa Shuji’s “National Music”: National Sentiment and Cultural Westernization in Meiji Japan’, *Itinerario*, 34 (2010), 5–19; Bob van der Linden, ‘Non-Western National Music and Empire in Global History: Interactions, Uniformities, and Comparisons’, *Journal of Global History*, 10 (2015), 431–56; Pamela Moro, ‘Constructions of Nation and the Classicisation of Music: Comparative Perspectives from Southeast and South Asia’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 35 (2004), 187–211. However, despite offering useful insights and relevant case studies, much of this research is oriented towards rather static and teleological concepts of ‘nationalism’, ‘classicization’, ‘tradition’ and ‘modernization’ that are integral to the historiographical framework of twentieth-century ethnomusicology. For a more sophisticated analysis of the interaction between modernity and music-historical discourses in East Asia, see Yamauchi Fumitaka, ‘Contemplating East Asian Music History in Regional and Global Contexts: On Modernity, Nationalism, and Colonialism’, in *Decentering Musical Modernity: Perspectives on East Asian and European Music History*, ed. by Tobias Janz and Yang Chien-Chang (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019), pp. 313–43. For an important historiographical critique of the narrative of ‘classicization’, see Katherine Butler Schofield, ‘Reviving the Golden Age Again: “Classicization,” Hindustani Music, and the Mughals’, *Ethnomusicology*, 54 (2010), 484–517.