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Pre-History of Street Music in Istanbul: Historicizing the Discourses of Street Music[1]

ABSTRACT
The contemporary meaning of street music in Istanbul, especially after the 1990s, was shaped by a global context that linked it to hegemonic struggles in the urban public space. Until then, the term street music was either not used at all or did not have its contemporary meaning. Consequently, the studies on street music often overlooked music practices occurring on the streets prior to the 1990s or tended to express doubt about their status as street music, arbitrarily including some while excluding the others. To address this problem, this study aims to identify and historicize the discourses of street music by delving into the practices and groups associated with street music before its explosion in the 1990s. The categorical content analysis method is used to analyze the data set obtained from historical texts, films, and secondary sources on the history of street music. Four distinct socio-historical contexts of street music were identified: music in public places such as picnic areas, meadows, and promenades; street vendors who are accompanied by music; outdoor music associated with drinking binges; and neighborhood performances. Immigrant groups, Gypsy and non-Muslim entertainment musicians, and immigrant musicians coming from rural areas who are associated with âşık (minstrel) tradition are notable actors. Three dominant themes of historical discourses to interpret and classify the street music are identified: The street musician as a wandering urban folk artist, the street musician as a member of a low-status group, and the street musician as an outsider. These themes contributed to historicizing the discourses around street music, identifying its socio-historical context prior to its explosion in the 1990s, and illuminating the contemporary meaning of street music shaped thereafter.

KEYWORDS
Music history
Popular music
Street music
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Introduction

After the 1960s, the intersection of street and art emerged as a focal point of hegemonic struggle in both the United States and Europe. This theme was associated with the active use of public spaces to transcend restrictions in cultural, socio-economic, and political realms (Bird, 2016: 135–139; Haedicke, 2012: 1; Kabaş, 2019: 100–102). The hegemonic struggle on the streets included, on the one hand, the takeover of public spaces used for street activities by government and private sector organizations to domesticate and subordinate streets to capitalist interests. On the other hand, a new street culture was born as a resistance to these domination strategies. Throughout the following decades, street music became more and more identified with a culture of resistance, as well as an expression of democratic urban public space.

This global context began to shape the meaning of street music in Turkey, especially after the 1990s. Until then, the term street music was either not used at all or did not have its contemporary meaning, which was associated with hegemonic struggle and resistance in urban public space. Influenced by prominent groups that symbolize this contemporary meaning of street music, such as Siya Siyabend and Kara Güneş, some of the music heard on the streets began to be named under the category of "street music". Depending on this perspective, street music was associated in academic literature with themes such as nomadism and criticism (Malkoç, 2018: 8), oppositional popular culture, activism, and protest (Günlü, 2013: vi, 59–60), nomadism, Gypsy lifestyle, hippie culture, and anti-capitalism (Evin, 2015: 79–80), ethnicity, and resistance (Özden, 2013: 19–20, 30).

The strong character of this new meaning of street music in the 1990s triggered assertions such as the absence of street music before the 1990s (Anar, 2018: 10) or to frame the narrative of street music in Turkey within the period following the 1990s (Evin, 2015: 93; Günlü, 2013: 59; Özden, 2013: 69–107), however, music had always existed in the streets. Indeed, apart from music performed in indoor spaces and at institutional music events, there were always street performances that have been associated with various discourses throughout the late Ottoman and Republican Turkey. However, the tendency to categorize the music performed on the streets by relying on some recently formed street music discourses led to uncertainties about the history of street music.

Hence, as mentioned earlier, in some studies on street music, music performed on the

streets before the 1990s is ignored (Anar, 2018; Özden, 2013). There is also hesitation about whether they should be included in the category of street music in today's sense (Akçura, 2022: 24–25). There are instances of arbitrary inclusion and exclusion, where certain street music activities in the past are included while others are not. For example, Anar, in a later study, includes music performed in festivals, picnic areas, promenades, Ramadan, and *Hıdrellez* celebrations, as well as Gypsy musicians, puppeteers, Janissary bands, *laterna* (barrel-organ) players, and street vendors performing music (Anar, 2021: 17–43). Evin focuses on Apukurya Carnival (Evin, 2015: 58–61). Günlü explores the past of street music by examining the *ozan-baksı* and *âşık* traditions[2], though emphasizing that they cannot be considered street music in the contemporary sense (Günlü, 2013: 57–59).

The problem encountered in categorizing music practices associated with street music today is a bit different. While some music practices performed on the streets are not defined as street music, others classified as street music do not actually take place on the streets. Street performances by musicians who do not identify themselves as street musicians are included in street music analyses—such as Sun Ra's 1990 *İstiklal Caddesi* Concert and Davide Martello's *Gezi Park* performance (Evin, 2015: 31–63). Music groups recognized as street musicians—such as Siya Siyabend or Light in Babylon—often perform in indoor venues or on stages set up for events like "street music festivals" (Alan, 2016; Habertürk, 2014; Özavcı, 2016).

This study aims to identify the discourses in which the music on the streets is embedded or associated with, rather than to offer a normative definition of what street music is or should be. Exploring questions such as how music performed on the streets is defined, evaluated, compared with other practices, and linked to various discourses can help us understand that street music is constantly reinterpreted within a historical chain of discourses rather than carrying an intrinsic meaning. This text seeks to historicize the discourse of street music by delving into the practices and groups associated with street music before its explosion in the 1990s, exploring where it took place, by whom it was performed, and how it was understood and represented through various discourses.

Three key questions need to be answered to achieve this: 1) What kind of music practices

[2] *Âşık* tradition performed by wandering poet-singers (Köprülü, 2004) represents one of the oldest examples of a musical practice similar to bards and minstrels preceded by the *ozan-baksı* tradition.

exist on the streets? 2) Which groups perform these practices? 3) Through which discourses are these practices interpreted and classified? The following sub-research questions can be outlined: 1a) Where are the practices associated with street music performed? 2a) From which segments of society do the groups making this music come, and what is their position and status within society? 3a) What are the extra-musical discourses about musical practices associated with street music, and how are they related to social/historical structures?

Sources and Methodology

The above research questions can be explored through the lens of Hall's perspective on the relationship between representation and discourse. What Hall (1997: 9–10) refers to as “the practices of representation” encompasses concepts, ideas, and emotions expressed in a symbolic form that can be meaningfully interpreted. However, meaning is not fixed; it is constantly negotiated. Due to its lack of transparency and straightforwardness, the meaning undergoes alterations based on context, usage, and historical circumstances.

In connection with this, the representation of knowledge through a group of statements in a specific historical context is referred to as "discourse" in a Foucauldian sense (Hall, 1997: 45). Discourse not only serves as a language for discussing particular topics but also aims to overcome the distinction between language and practice. It regulates both the ways that ideas are put into practice and the meaningful ways of talking about them.

At times, discourse establishes a complex relationship between the object and the way it is discussed, emphasizing an idea-based direction rather than being straightforward (Hall, 1992: 185). An illustrative example is found in the distinction between Japan's geographical location and its culturally coded position. Despite being situated geographically in the East, Japan is portrayed as having a more Western societal form than Latin American countries.

A comparable circumstance arises when defining street music. While music performed on the street may not be defined as street music, music not performed on the street may be presented as such depending on the content of the contemporary discourses on street music. Each narrative reconstructs the history of street music differently, depending on

the discourses that are pursued. In examining the continuity between contemporary and earlier discourses, the concept of articulation formulated by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) will guide the research. This concept, which focuses on how and in what sense discourse groups are interconnected, will be used to identify and group the themes and categories when analyzing the discourses on street music.

Hegemony, discrimination, power, and control emerge as the prominent themes of critical discourse analysis, which focuses on the linguistic, social, and historical analysis of the texts from a critical perspective (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Fairclough (2001: 128) distinguishes "three interconnected analytical concerns: dominance, difference, and resistance" when analyzing discourses. Especially the first two are particularly important for our study, which attempts to reveal the dominant discourse in the period analyzed, as well as the range of difference and diversity in discourses within the same period and across different periods.

Nevertheless, discourse analysis, founded on the principles of Foucault (Willig, 2008) and critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2001), invites analysis through the framework based solely on concepts such as power and ideology without offering a precise and explicit research design. Since our research does not foreground such a framework and aims to use a more open research design, we used the categorical content analysis method (Lieblich et al., 1998) to integrate and analyze the data set obtained from the sources on music practices associated with street music. Some of the sources are firsthand accounts based on recollection or testimony, while others are research articles that retrospectively evaluate street-related music practices from a historical perspective. Rather than collecting factual data or creating a chronological history of street music, these sources were used to identify how musicians categorized under street music-related genres are represented and how these representations relate to contemporary discourse on street music. We utilized firsthand accounts such as historical chronicles and analysis (Ali Rıza Bey, 2011; Ayvazoğlu, 2016; Cemil, 1970; Karabey, 1949g, 1949f, 1949a, 1949b, 1949c, 1949d, 1949e; Kaygılı, 1934, 2021; Koçu, 2017), news reports and serials based on eye-witness accounts (Alus, 1931, 1939, 1942, 1944b, 1944a, 1949; Çapanoğlu, 1953; Es, 1940; Oruçlu, 1949; Rasim, 1940; Yüzüncü, 1938), and fictional works such as novels (Ahmet Mithat, 2019; Kaygılı, 2020, 2022; Ulunay, 2017b, 2017a), and films (Alyanak, 1961; Başaran, 1969; Erakalın, 1965; Erksan, 1964; Özonuk, 1957;

Temizer, 1980), which, despite their fictional nature, are mostly based on the authors' personal testimony and observations. Additionally, we utilized secondary sources consisting of research articles and theses that retrospectively evaluate street music practices (Akçura, 2022; Anar, 2018, 2021; Başar, 2019; Bayazoğlu, 2022; Evin, 2015; Günlü, 2013; Malkoç, 2018; Özden, 2013). Due to the broad historical period covered in our research and the limitations of our scope and article length, we were unable to examine archival documents or legal texts that reflect official perspectives. Our main goal was to trace the discourses on street music. Therefore, we prioritized texts that contribute to the historical foundation of contemporary street music discourse.

While working with different datasets, it is important to acknowledge that these sources are not neutral repositories of data but are themselves integral parts of social and cultural structures. Fictional novels of the period tend to portray street musicians through a lens of authenticity, rediscovering local values from a new perspective. For example, in Kaygılı's novel *Çingeneler*, the curiosity of a young researcher, resembling an ethnomusicologist, is a clear example of this tendency. Similarly, historical chronicles and analyses often include the meanings authors attribute to street musician groups. In Karabey's texts, for instance, he expresses his biases towards these groups, often approaching his analyses with a negative view of their intentions. Period films, on the other hand, tend to create an emotional narrative through themes of poverty and the conflict between good and evil, positioning the street musician as part of the poverty and good side. The richness and diversity in the approaches of these sources provide the exact scope that this research aims to cover. Thus, rather than offering a normative definition of what street music was like before its explosion in the 1990s, this approach allows for an expression of the diversity that street music extends to through various discourses and narratives.

Based on these sources, the research highlights three themes in the discourse section that are common across all periods (the late Ottoman period, the early Republican period, and the period from the 1950s to the 1990s) identified as pre-history of street music. Nevertheless, in the late Ottoman and early Republican periods, a street music culture intertwined with Istanbul's longstanding water culture (Avcı, 2023) and picnic gatherings stands out. On the other hand, films from the 1960s, influenced by internal migration, depict an urban street musician profile specific to the period from the 1950s

onwards. During this period, the element of wandering occurs within urban streets, and poverty is framed through the struggle to establish a foothold in the city, often depicted through slum neighborhoods. While female performers, particularly among street vendors and the Gypsy community, were commonly observed, an in-depth analysis of gender issues falls outside the scope of this paper.

We will analyze all these sources in five steps. First, these sources providing data were examined in accordance with the research question and goals. Second, relevant expressions in the texts were identified and compiled. Third, content categories were established and grouped under larger themes (Girgin-Büyükbayraktar, 2018). Fourth, identified expressions were placed under these categories. Finally, they were examined considering the research questions and goals to reveal the historical discourses framing the representations of the music on the streets. However, we should first identify the kinds of historical musical practices associated with streets and the performers of these practices before moving on to the discourse analysis.

Practices and Places

This section is guided by two key questions: Which practices are associated with street music? Where do these practices take place? By starting with these questions, one can acquire insight into the narrative construction of street music in retrospect, comprehending how and where different practices have shaped it over time.

Historical studies tend to link street music to any type of music-accompanied public space entertainments other than the ones held in entertainment venues or home-like enclosed/private spaces. The main categorization in commercial entertainment music appears as the distinction between the concert hall or *salon* music/artist/singer/performer and the street music/artist/singer/performer (Başaran, 1969; Erakalın, 1965; Erksan, 1964; Karabey, 1949a, 1949b, 1949c, 1949d, 1949e, 1949f, 1949g). If the performer is not given a stage, such as an indoor venue or a concert hall, he/she is positioned as a street musician. These practices can be categorized based on the venue in which they are performed or the event they accompany. Accordingly, we can list four main categories: 1) Entertainment music performed in picnic areas/meadows (*çayır*) and promenades; 2) The music used by street vendors, puppeteers, bear handlers, and monkey trainers; 3) The outdoor music performed on the way to or from drinking

binges; 4) The outdoor music performed in neighborhoods. While some music practices often belong to more than one of these categories at the same time - such as street vendors appearing in both picnic areas/promenades and neighborhoods - music practices in each category seem to have produced their own unique culture.

Transitions between categories should not be overlooked. This applies to the transitions between street and non-street music practices. Just as a musician can be included in more than one of the above categories, similar transitions can happen between music played on the street and in non-street locations. Some street musicians do not perform solely on the street or may shift rapidly from streets to more prestigious venues. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in *incesaz* ensembles[3], where so many interactions and transitions occur between different taste cultures and art worlds. For instance, Vasilaki, a Rum Gypsy who started his career by playing clarinet in taverns, fairs, and village weddings, learned *kemençe* from Fenerli Yorgi, a wandering street musician, then joined the ensemble of lute player Civan and the Andon brothers, finally becoming one of the most distinguished *incesaz* performers at Fevziye Coffeehouse, which was the most prestigious venue for the lovers of Ottoman classical music (Rasim, 1323; as cited in Başar, 2019). Another example is the renowned *zurna*[4] player Yakomi, an entertainment musician of Rum Gypsy origin who usually performs his music at the shabby coffeehouse opposite Fevziye, at meadows, picnic gatherings, and drinking binges, as well as in the mansions of Ottoman high-ranking officials sometimes accompanied by the esteemed musicians of the era (Ulunay, 2017b: 53–57).

Picnic Areas, Meadows, and Promenades

In the entertainment scene of the late Ottoman and early Republican Istanbul, picnic areas and promenades constitute the main open venues where musical entertainment activities are concentrated. Therefore, when the history of street music is retrospectively evaluated, these places are the first ones to be examined.

In the 18th century, the use of picnic areas and promenades for music-related socialization activities became notably visible (Poulos, 2019: 184). Some of the venues

[3] Bands playing a popularized version of Ottoman classical music as part of the popular entertainment scene of Istanbul were called *incesaz* ensembles. The music they performed is also called *incesaz* or *fasıl* music. For a detailed sociological analysis of these ensembles see (Ayas, 2023).
[4] A woodwind instrument made of specific types of wood and metal, commonly used to play folk music.

hosting these activities include Çırpıcı Veliefendi promenade (Ulunay, 2017b: 361), Kağıthane, Göksu, Çırpıcı (Kaygılı, 2022: vii), Heybeliada (Kaygılı, 2020: 94), Boğaziçi and its surroundings, and Kalamış – Fener (Baklacı, 2019: 62). In the relevant literature, the music performed in picnic areas and promenades may sometimes originate from a drunk person or a drinking assembly, occasionally from a few wandering musicians, at times be associated with boat entertainments, or emanate from an entertainment venue. In this sense, picnic areas and promenades serve as transitional spaces where street and non-street music coexist, as mentioned earlier.

Following the introduction of ferry service in 1851, Sarıyer emerged as a popular destination for those seeking entertainment. While *alafranga* (alla franca), the name given to European-style music in late Ottoman Istanbul, is the predominant music in the Büyükdere area (Ali Rıza Bey, 2011: 131), traditional Turkish music (*alaturka*) and *alafranga* instruments coexist in the Büyük Çamlıca entertainment scene during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Ali Rıza Bey, 2011: 120).

Similarly, on the Üsküdar side, it is quite common for people to enjoy the night listening professional *incesaz* ensembles in Kayışdağı, Alemdağı, and Taşdelen promenades (Ali Rıza Bey, 2011: 121). *İncesaz* or *fasıl* music performed by these groups to entertain tipsy (*çakırkeyif*)/drunken individuals is one of the most popular activities in picnic areas and promenades (Ulunay, 2017b: 58) as well as in the entertainments on the riverbank or meadows (Ulunay, 2017a: 7).

Vendors, Puppeteers, Bear Handlers, and Monkey Trainers

While tracing the historical discourses of street music, another notable activity we come across is the street vendors with music accompaniment. While they are also found in picnic areas, a group of vendors offering food or some special entertainment activities move beyond these spaces and roam the streets, neighborhoods, and promenades in search of revenue. They also use music to draw attention to themselves, bringing energy and color to the era's entertainment scene.

In historical texts, there are many references to *macun* (Ottoman paste candy) sellers who use music during selling their products (Kaygılı, 2021; Oruçlu, 1949; Yüzüncü, 1938). These vendors, playing instruments like clarinet, oud, and violin, performing traditional

music and singing *mani* (a kind of rhymed folk music) during sales, stand out as significant figures coloring the streets of the era (Akçura, 2022: 20–21). As an example, we can trace the other activities of a *zurna* player accompanying Ottoman paste candy sellers throughout a historical novel written by Kaygılı (2022: 132). The *zurna* player engages in a kind of traditional Ottoman theater called *ortaoyunu*, village weddings, wrestler competitions, as well as roaming the streets with an Ottoman paste candy seller to make a living. This provides a clue about the other areas where musicians accompanying vendors play. Musicians performing in the streets switch between different activities and music genres that bring in money for them throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Other historical figures highlighted in the texts are the puppeteers (Alus, 1942, 1944b) who roam the meadows with a musician - also participating in the music as a vocalist - and *laterna* players roaming the streets with puppets (Akçura, 2022: 28–29). In the Vidos and Çıfıtburgaz (Bağcılar) areas, there is a form of sales/entertainment where puppeteers play, perform music, and sing simultaneously (Kaygılı, 2022: 32–42).

Bear handlers and monkey trainers are also observed in the Vidos and Çıfıtburgaz areas during the early 20th century, benefiting from music as well (Kaygılı, 2022: 32–42). As bear handlers and monkey trainers play the tambourine to make these animals dance, musicians accompany the show with a clarinet and *çifte nara,* a traditional percussion instrument. The tambourine used by the bear handler is named after its accompaniment in these events, characterized by a thick-rimmed tambourine with small chains instead of bells on the edges (Kaygılı, 2022: 26).

The outdoor Music on the Way to or from Drinking Binges

The music practices in the third category include the music performances on the way to or from entertainment places in which people usually drink alcohol.

One of the accompaniments to summer night recreational events is the entertainment conducted on the water. Connected to Istanbul's longstanding water culture (Avcı, 2023) boat excursions have become an integral part of the entertainment culture. Numerous musical practices performed on boats can be found in the literature (Akçura, 2019; Ali Rıza Bey, 2011; Kaygılı, 2020, 2022; Sevengil, 2014; Ulunay, 2017a). In some cases,

although the goal may seem to be enjoying the boat itself, in many instances, it is part of a sea or river journey to or from the entertainment place.

Entertaining trips to Kağıthane are made by sea and with music (Sertoğlu, 1992). In one example, an entertainment is organized with a small *zurna* called "*kurabiyeci zurnası*" at the front of the boat, accompanied by a large drum (Kaygılı, 1934). Akçura starts his article by examining Istanbul's street musicians retrospectively with examples from the boat excursions, implying the significance of these musical practices within the outdoor music culture of the time (Akçura, 2022: 17).

Various examples can be found in Osman Cemal Kaygılı's novel *Akşamcılar*. One of them focuses on the journey to a moonlight revelry with alcoholic beverages to be held at Çam Limanı in Heybeliada. The travel plan involves boarding a boat from Sandıkburnu and going to the *raki* (traditional alcoholic beverage) table with music and dance (Kaygılı, 2020: 94). In another passage, a drunk character undertakes a journey towards the nightclub on a donkey, accompanied by child musicians (Kaygılı, 2020: 162). An example of a return journey from entertainment place occurs when those who stayed at the wedding house wake up and return to the wharf with an *incesaz* ensemble consisting of eight musicians (Kaygılı, 2020: 129).

Reşad Ekrem Koçu is another figure who mentions boat trips (Koçu, 2017: 43–48). On boats heading towards Hasköy, including ladies and black servants, musicians play instruments such as violin, kanun, and oud, and Hanende Nedim sings improvisational pieces of *alaturka* music called *gazel*s. As the journey progresses, Gypsy and Jewish women dance with *zurna* and *çifte nara*, and clarinet melodies become prominent. *Laterna*, cries, cheers, vendor shouts, and various drums are the sources of other sounds emanating from boat journeys.

Music Performed in Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods in big cities, especially as evidenced in the texts about the Republican period (Alyanak, 1961; Erakalın, 1965; Erksan, 1964; Özonuk, 1957), appear to host music practices predominantly combined with storytelling and epic (*destan*) selling. Pedlar epic-sellers are minstrels (*âşık*) who “print and copy the epic verse they wrote and sell them by singing simple melodies with maqam (Akbulut, 2012). Music culture in the

neighborhoods, which Ulunay (2017b: 58) called as "the true conservatory of singing old songs" for the people from the different walks of life, was quite widespread and constituted a music scene beyond the music culture of street vendors.

At the entrance of Çiçekçi Street, known for its brothel, it is possible to encounter a *laterna* accompanying racy women in the windows (Ulunay, 2017b: 65). This situation also shows how street music was added to the entertainment life in the early Republican period. In addition, in Gypsy neighborhoods, when female fights break out, musical instruments also accompany the incident. Women pouring into the street with drums, tambourines, bells, violins, and empty yogurt containers turn the fighting field into a fairground (Kaygılı, 2022: 143–144).

Religious begging, known as *goygoyculuk*, also takes place in neighborhoods. During the activities that last for ten days in the month of Muharram, a group of beggars collecting materials for Ashura expresses their requests with maqam music (Karabey, 1949g). Despite the misconception that *goygoycular* are Anatolian villagers because they pronounce the phrase '*koy koy* (put into)' as '*goy goy*,' they are actually Istanbulites (Ayvazoğlu, 2016: 307). However, their begging was prohibited in 1909 with the declaration of the Second Constitutional Period (Akçura, 2022: 46).

Groups

This section is guided by two fundamental questions: What kind of groups perform music on the street? What are their status, profession, position in society, and living conditions? This inquiry also includes questions about their position in the hierarchies of taste as musicians, in other words, the artistic value attributed to their music by the intellectual establishment. By pursuing these questions, it becomes possible to observe the continuity and differences in the groups participating in street music from the past to the present. Additionally, it offers a chance to learn more about the symbolic value of street music and the status of street musicians.

The Gypsy community is a prominent figure in the literature on street musicians from late Ottoman to early Republican Istanbul. Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey (2011: 89–193) draws attention to the Gypsy street musicians accompanying dancing women whom he called as *Kıpti* (Coptic). Osman Cemal Kaygılı portrays Gypsy groups playing songs and

dancing in promenades, neighborhoods, and on the roads in his novel *Çingeneler* (Gypsies) (Kaygılı, 2022: vii–viii). Musicians in a large boat during Kağıthane nights (Kaygılı, 2022: 150), the drummers, clarinet, *zurna*, and *tulum* (a kind of bagpipe) performers during the Hıdırellez festival (Kaygılı, 2022: 25, 195), those making music in Okmeydanı during the day, and on the waters of the Golden Horn on boats at night are also Gypsy groups (Pekin, 2010). Ahmet Mithat Efendi (2019) mentions that music in picnic areas and promenades is mostly performed by Gypsy people. They are depicted wandering in promenades, singing songs under every tree. Additionally, they make music by going to the front of the houses they are invited to (Akçura, 2022: 15–16).

Groups coming from the Balkans are occasionally visible in the text of the Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey. During the annual period when animals are taken to the pasture, there are dancing boys called *koçeks* (Avcı, 2017) and Bulgarians playing *gayda* (another kind of bagpipe) and dancing *horon*, a traditional folk dance usually performed by the people from Black Sea (Ali Rıza Bey, 2011: 104, 114–115). Additionally, in Emin Karabey's writings, there are Romanian street musicians playing drum and accordion, Balkan instrumental groups emerging during the carnival season, and Aegean Islands, Albanian, and Bulgarian instrumental groups, contributing to the diversity of the groups performing music on the streets (Karabey, 1949g, 1949f, 1949a).

Sermet Muhtar Alus (1939, 1944a) mentions Greek musicians playing mandolin, guitar, and accordion, wandering door to door (Akçura, 2022: 35). In Emin Karabey's texts, one can also come across Greek accordionists and young Greek boys wandering through neighborhoods, serenading (Karabey, 1949g, 1949f, 1949a).

Individuals identified as Arab, including those of African origin and those who truly come from Arab regions, also engage in street music practices. Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey mentions *kabakçı Arap* musicians known to be of African origin and playing a musical instrument made of gourd (Ali Rıza Bey, 2011: 114–115). Ahmet Rasim notes that *kabakçı Arap*s roam around the villages of the Bosphorus, Haydarpaşa, and Kadıköy, playing music (Rasim, 1940). Introduced by Sermet Muhtar Alus (1949) and Münir Süleyman Çapanoğlu (1953), *kabakçı* Araps are welcomed by those who want them to perform music but are feared by others (perhaps due to their African origin) (Akçura, 2022: 51–53). Furthermore, Akkâms, who originate from Arab countries (Morocco, Maghreb, Syria,

Hejaz, and Yemen), are mentioned by Sermet Muhtar Alus (1931) as singing hymns and gathering money (Akçura, 2022: 45–47).

To understand the place of these groups in the status hierarchy, it is necessary to look at the commonly encountered distinction between commercial music and high-cultural music in Ottoman music (Ayas, 2024: 388-393) in which highly respected musicians usually earn their living from non-musical pursuits. Using music for commercial purposes and making a living from music was often seen as contrary to the norms of the traditional Ottoman music culture (Behar, 2017: 163–170). Involvement in music for money or personal gain leads to a loss of reputation for the respected members of society (Cemil, 1970: 6). In short, entertainment music performed for commercial purposes was often linked with a low-status position in music. For example, music historian Başer (2018: 250–251) notes that making music for commercial purposes was frowned upon by Ottoman Turks and that respected musicians who had to work in the music market in order to make a living are mentioned with sadness and pity in the historical sources. Although the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the commercialization of Ottoman high musical culture through public concerts, private educational institutions, and the recording industry, the entertainment music of the streets and taverns did not share the prestige of these activities performed by elite performers. Prejudices against commercial music persisted among elite groups and directed to the musical activities of non-elite entertainment musicians in such places. Therefore, in the history of street music, the aforementioned musicians appear as low-status groups.

On the other hand, the ethnic and religious division of the Ottoman-Turkish society along the lines of Muslim/non-Muslim and Turk/non-Turk people seems to enforce the devaluation of street musicians in the eyes of the dominant groups since a significant portion of street musicians comes from non-Turkish or non-Muslim groups. For example, Mesut Cemil (1970: 6) attributes the fact that non-Muslim and non-Turkish groups dominate the commercial entertainment music on the streets to the fact that upper and middle-class Turkish-Muslim groups do not consider commercial music activities appropriate for themselves. This situation indicates that sometimes aesthetic and social distinctions between different groups might combine with ethnic and communal distinctions. This is especially true for Gypsy street musicians, who, despite having long

been at the center of Ottoman entertainment culture, are often viewed as belonging to the lowest layers of the aesthetic and social hierarchy (Pekin, 2010; Tamar Seeman, 2019). In conclusion, the fact that historical texts often refer to Armenian, Greek, Gypsy, Jewish, Circassian, Slavic, Arab, and Abyssinian groups in the context of street music seems to associate street music symbolically with the so-called minority groups. However, in historical texts (Kaygılı, 2022; Ulunay, 2017b) and some movies (Başaran, 1969; Özonuk, 1957), there are also many references to individuals and groups performing some musical and cultural forms (like *mani* and *destan*) mostly related to Turkish folk culture as well as minstrels (*âşıklar*) migrated from rural areas, which implies that some historical connections are established between the history of street music and minstrel (*âşık*) tradition.

Discourses

There are two main questions that this section addresses: What discourses are used to label the musical practices on the streets? What other discourses are associated with street music, and how do they connect to socio-historical structures? By taking these inquiries into consideration, it may become clear how different discourses are articulated to provide a socio-historical definition and origin of street music.

After the first two steps of the content analysis mentioned in the methodology section – reviewing the dataset according to the research questions and identifying the expressions about the music on the streets – were completed, categories of street musicians appearing on the historical texts were grouped within three major themes: Street musician as the wandering urban folk artist, street musician as a member of low-status group, and street musician as outsider.

The first theme, "street musician as the wandering urban folk artist", encompasses the connection of street music with the *âşık/ozan* tradition, which is usually associated with troubadours and wandering musicians in a global context, as well as immigrants from rural to urban areas. The second theme, "street musician as a member of low-status group", combines the themes of low economic, social, and professional status with low aesthetic status. Because street musicians are frequently characterized as members of such groups and their music is considered to have low aesthetic value. The third theme, "street musician as outsider," groups together categories that link street musicians to

characteristics that are considered outside the mainstream culture in the society in which they live. These characteristics include being insane (outside of the community of sane people) or vagrant, engaging in rituals and practices associated with sorcery and healing, belonging to marginalized street culture, and typically being an immigrant or member of a non-Turk/non-Muslim community. These themes and categories can occasionally intertwine. For example, outsiders also tend to have lower socio-economic status.

Street Musician as the Wandering Urban Folk Artist

The practices and discourses associated with street music progress historically through the line of the *âşık/ozan* tradition, story selling in epic style (*destan selling*), and street singer/performer. When retrospectively examining street music, the dominant theme emerges as what we refer to as "street musician as the wandering urban folk artist." This theme encompasses the content categories of *âşık/ozan*, troubadour, traveling musician, and the folk artists migrated from rural to urban areas.

Âşık/ozan (minstrel) culture serves as the first and fundamental component of the theme "street musician as the traveling urban folk artist." This culture, with deep roots extending to the Ottoman period and beyond, tends to converge with the discourse of street music (Günlü, 2013: 57–59; Malkoç, 2018: 8). Malkoç (2018) prefers a narrative that considers the *âşık/ozan* tradition in Ottoman society, which dates back to ancient times through traveling musicians, as the history of street music. These musicians, who seek shelter, food, and money while traveling, also stand out for their functions related to oral culture, education, and critical thinking. On the other hand, another researcher, Günlü (2013), examining the origins of street music in Turkey, delves into the *ozan-baksı* and *âşık* traditions through the concepts of travelling, entertainment, and healing. However, he emphasizes that the *ozan-baksı* and *âşık* traditions cannot be considered street music in today's sense, which seems to imply a discontinuity in the historical development of street music in some way.

In Ulunay's novel, we encounter an etymological speculation that associates *âşık* tradition with Troubadours in a global context: "In the West, poets who wandered from village to village and town to town, singing heroic and love poems, were called 'Troubadours'. In our culture, they were once referred to as '*derbede*r' (vagrant), possibly due to a mispronunciation leading to 'Troubadour'." (…) "Anatolia still calls a poet (…) When they

come to a town, the people fill the coffeehouse, where they will play and sing. These individuals not only play music but also tell a tale of adventure." (Ulunay, 2017b: 426) Here Ulunay seeks the equivalent of Troubadour, seen as the historical representatives of street music in Europe, in the Ottoman Empire, and Turkey by establishing a speculative etymological connection. However, it should be made clear that (contrary to Ulunay's speculation) the word troubadour is completely unrelated to *derbeder*. Both words have clear etymologies (from French and Persian, respectively) and have no historical relation to one another. On the one hand, Ulunay's speculative attempt to establish an etymological connection through the word *derbeder* (vagrant) portrays street musicians as outsiders and part of marginalized street culture, a theme which will be explored below. On the other hand, since a troubadour in medieval Europe was not a wandering vagrant or outsider but someone who was highly valued, literate, educated, and skilled in courtly poetry and music, often coming from a noble background, this speculative etymological connection also seems to include some elements of gentrification.

One of the significant elements that characterize the *âşık* tradition is being a traveling musician. They are depicted as figures who travel from one land to another, narrating their stories to those who listen to them (Özonuk, 1957). However, traveling is not exclusive to *âşık* tradition; therefore, it can be examined as another content category. For example, puppeteers appeared in the texts on the history of street music as figures roaming in the meadows (Alus, 1942; as cited in Akçura, 2022: 28) or wandering the streets with *laterna* players accompanying them (Alus, 1944b; as cited in Akçura, 2022: 29).

By the mid-1900s, the *âşık/ozan* culture undergoes a historical transformation due to increasing urbanization and migration from rural areas. Individuals recognized as *âşık/ozan* start wandering in cities, making music, and telling/selling stories in epic style (Akçura, 2022: 54; Çobanoğlu, 2007). In the film "Üç Garipler," which tells the migration story from rural (Urfa) to urban (İstanbul) areas, musicians affiliated with the *âşık* tradition are portrayed as figures playing and selling stories on the streets of Istanbul (Özonuk, 1957). While portraying this period, the term "street singer/street musician" frequently emerges to describe story sellers (Akçura, 2022; Başaran, 1969; Çobanoğlu, 2007; Erakalın, 1965; Özonuk, 1957). This socio-historical transformation associated

with urbanization lays the ground for the continuity in the discourses on *âşık/ozan* tradition, story sellers, and street singers/musicians in today's sense, as well as linking them to the global history of street music represented by troubadours and wandering musicians.

Street Musician as a Low-Status Group

The practices and discourses associated with street music also tend to articulate the theme of being a part of a low-status group. It is still a common characteristic that distinguishes street musicians today from the position of recording artist or concert artist. Three categories are involved in exploring the theme of having low status: low economic and professional status, low social status, and low aesthetic status.

Being a part of low economic and professional status is highlighted, especially in the texts of Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey and Emin Karabey. Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey groups street musicians with street vendors, cart drivers, and beggars (Ali Rıza Bey, 2011: 111, 133). This provides significant information about the other professional groups associated with the street musicians during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Karabey also mentions similar low-status occupational groups related to those making music on the streets. He indicates that Gypsy women singing on the streets also engage in peddling, fortune-telling, and theft. He also describes blind street criers engaging in begging and claims that the blind eye is fake (Karabey, 1949g: 19–22). On the other hand, texts on *Goygoyculuk*, a religious form of begging during the month of Muharram, associate the practice of begging with a kind of wandering musician. Karabey suggests that *Goygoycular*, driven by a commercial mindset, never turn down anything given to them (Karabey, 1949g: 20). The prohibition that came with the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era in 1909 highlights the low status of *Goygoyculuk* once again.

Low social status of street musicians also become evident in cinema films after the 1960s, which represent street musicians in terms of the street music/concert hall music dichotomy. The movies "Şepkemin Altındayım" (Erakalın, 1965), "Senin Olmaya Geldim" (Temizer, 1980), and "Acı ile Karışık" (Başaran, 1969) depict characters playing music and singing on the streets while simultaneously selling stories. These characters identify themselves as street singers and therefore feel themselves worthless. This position,

viewed almost mockingly, is compared to concert hall singing. Those singing on the streets aspire to develop themselves and their careers to the point of singing in the concert hall. The comparison between the high status of the concert hall singer and the street artist often emerges as a dichotomy that devalues street music. In the movie "Üç Garipler" (Özonuk, 1957) musicians coming from the *âşık* (minstrel) tradition regard playing on the street as a humiliating occupation, like begging. Mustafa Kalyoncu, whom we will talk about in another context a few paragraphs later, refers to his move as a musician from weddings and fishermen's taverns to the streets as "falling into the streets" and asks being ashamed of this situation: "Is there anywhere lower than here? (Bayazoğlu, 2022; as cited in Akçura, 2022: 60–61)"

The low aesthetic status of street music often becomes apparent in the language used to describe the music played on the streets. In *Akşamcılar* (Kaygılı, 2020: 49), during a conversation about the divine nature of music, one asks in a derogatory manner if even the music played by the Gypsies on *zurna* and *çifte nara* is supposed to be divine. In another passage of the same text, the music played by street musicians on clarinet and oud is described as gubbins played here and there for anyone. (Kaygılı, 2020: 234). Sermet Muhtar Alus (1948: 14) draws attention to the fact that master musicians like Udi Ekrem Bey get angry when they hear street musicians playing pieces incorrectly, confusing maqams and singing or playing out of tune (Akçura, 2022: 23–24). As previously said, Mesut Cemil, another accomplished musician, recognizes a clear distinction between this kind of entertainment music made for commercial purposes and music made for artistic purposes, placing the former into a lower position in the aesthetic hierarchy.

Understanding low aesthetic status is also possible through the instruments mostly used in street music and their positions in the hierarchy of taste. Considering the division between *incesaz* – catering to sophisticated tastes – and *kabasaz* – appealing to crude tastes – instruments most commonly used in the past on the streets, such as *zurna* and *çifte nara,* fall into the category of *kabasaz*. Occasional inclusion of *incesaz* instruments (such as violin, oud, and kanun) is also visible, but they are part of the commercialized version of the elite *incesaz* culture, which had already lost ground in the taste hierarchy compared to Western and Turkish art music cultures (Ayas, 2023: 647–652).

Street Musician as Outsider

The final theme in the representation of street musicians bring together the characteristics that place them outside the established norms, routines, identity, and structures of the larger society in which they live. The fact that the street is outside can also be semantically connected to this theme. As mentioned above, many writers tend to define street music retrospectively as any musical practice performed outside of the music halls or venues. Then a street musician becomes an outsider when compared to these music practices. Besides, in some writings, street culture itself is associated with marginalized people and activities, which makes it an outsider culture. For example, famous *ney* player and poet Neyzen Tevfik, who occasionally performed his music and even lived on the streets like homeless people, describes his lifestyle as follows: "My friends were thieves, pickpockets, and hashish users (…) They were the ones providing my raki, my food, and my hashish. They played, struggled, and looked at me. What was I doing to them, really... Just a few improvisations, that's all" (Kabacalı, 2003: 28). Neyzen Tevfik always carries his *ney* with him and can't say no to people who want to listen to him playing his *ney* on the ferry or somewhere else. (Kabacalı, 2003: 52). Living occasionally on the streets, playing indiscriminately in any place, and fearlessly expressing himself, Neyzen Tevfik is one of the dominant figures of street culture, connecting the past of street music to contemporary discourses.

We should also note that Neyzen Tevfik used to stay occasionally in the mental hospital. This brings us to another category under this theme, which brings together the representations that associate street musicians with madness (being outside the community and norms of sane people). Akçura's study shows that minstrels *(âşıklar)* such as Âşık Cemal wandering in districts like Fatih, Malta Caddesi, Karagümrük, Silivrikapı (Aksel, 1977: 301) are mostly perceived as mad (Ataman, 1997; both cited in Akçura, 2022: 41). This exemplifies the articulation of two themes in street music discourses: Street musician as a wandering folk artist and street musician as outsider.

Kaygılı also describes someone named Selman as a "half-crazy old fellow" and writes that he roams the streets singing *gazel*, hymns, and songs with a tambourine in one hand. Selman also goes about begging and buys cheap alcohol with the money he gets (Kaygılı, 2020: 288). Here again, different themes in discourses on street music, such as madness,

mendicity, having low socio-economic status, converge in one example. It is interesting to see that another key figure in an article on street musicians (Bayazoğlu, 2022) is Mehmet Kalyoncu who worked as a document registration officer at the customs office, ended his civil service due to what he describes as "mental distress." Subsequently, he starts wandering with a large tape recorder on his back, singing his songs. He records his own tapes, selling and playing them on the streets. Here street appears as a place for people like Mehmet Kalyoncu who has lost his psychological health and his position in society and has fallen.

When seeking the historical origins of street music, writers like Günlü (2013: 57–59) associate some people making music on the streets in the past with practices like offering sacrifices to the deities in the sky, sending the soul of the deceased to the depths of the earth, preventing evils, diseases, and deaths caused by demons, treating illnesses, and sending the spirits of certain deceased individuals to the sky. Since some of these practices are historically and symbolically magic-related, which is sometimes considered weird practices by the larger society, street musicians as magicians or healers can be classified under the category of outsiders. However, in a positive manner, references to these ritualistic healing practices retrospectively can be an attempt to find a historical origin to the assumptions frequently encountered today about the healing aspects of art and music (İKSV Kültür Politikaları Çalışmaları, 2011, 2017, 2018, 2020).

Finally, it may be argued that the predominance of immigrants (Özonuk, 1957), non-Turks, and non-Muslims (Cemil, 1970: 6) among street musicians in the past also placed them in an outsider position vis-à-vis the larger society, especially in Republican Turkey where they were usually defined as minorities. This theme also appears in some of the contemporary representations of street music, not only as an expression of being an outsider but also as a positive manifestation of multiculturalism.

Conclusion

As previously noted, the studies on street music in Istanbul often overlook music practices occurring on the streets prior to the 1990s or tend to express doubt about their status as street music. Additionally, there are instances of arbitrary inclusion and exclusion, where specific street music activities from the past are included while others are not. However, historically oriented scholarship on street music constitutes a

significant part of the global literature on the subject (Bennett & McKay, 2019; Boutin, 2015; Cohen & Greenwood, 1981; Johnson, 2018; Simpson, 2017; Tanenbaum, 2014; Watt, 2018a, 2018b). To address this problem, this text aims to historicize the discourses surrounding street music in Istanbul by examining the practices and groups engaged in street music before its explosion in the 1990s. The investigation explores where these musical practices take place, by whom they are performed, how they are understood and represented through various discourses, and how these discourses intersect with other narratives. This approach allows us to comprehend that street music is constantly reinterpreted within a historical chain of discourses rather than carrying an intrinsic meaning.

Following the research questions, four distinct socio-historical contexts of street music were identified: music in public places such as picnic areas, meadows, and promenades; street vendors offering food or special entertainment activities accompanied by music practices; outdoor music associated with drinking binges; and music performed in neighborhoods. In the historical texts and secondary sources, immigrant groups, Gypsy and non-Muslim entertainment musicians, as well as immigrant musicians coming from rural areas who are associated with *âşık* (minstrel) tradition stand out as the most prominent examples of street musicians. In this study, three main lines of historical discourses serving as dominant themes to interpret and classify the street music before the 1990s were identified: The street musician as a wandering urban folk artist, the street musician as a member of a low-status group, and the street musician as an outsider. The first theme connects street music to the *âşık/ozan* tradition which is usually associated with troubadours and wandering musicians in a global context, portraying street musicians as traveling artists. The second theme highlights the low economic, social, and aesthetic status of street musicians, often depicted in literature and films as marginalized figures. The third theme presents street musicians as outsiders, linking them to mental instability, marginalized street culture, and non-Turkish, non-Muslim identities. These themes helped to historicize the contemporary meaning of street music formed after the 1990s by tracing the historical chain of discourses and the socio-historical context of street music.

It is possible to establish connections between these historical discourses and the contemporary representations of street music. Street music, as portrayed in historical

texts through the lens of the migration theme, is being reexamined in a new dimension today, particularly in the context of the Syrian immigrant musicians (Habash, 2021; Hajj, 2016; Öğüt, 2016, 2021a, 2021b). Street musicians like Siya Siyabend claim to be or represented as the extension of the *âşık/ozan* (minstrel) tradition (Akın, 2005). The current widespread notions regarding the healing qualities of art and music (İKSV Kültür Politikaları Çalışmaları, 2011, 2017, 2018, 2020) seem to be rooted in the historical tradition of musical practices associated with sorcery and healing. Furthermore, there are also emerging themes that are not associated with historical narratives, such as technology and street music (Bennett & Rogers, 2014; Tutalar, 2019). Despite the new dominant agendas, such as attempts to domesticate and subordinate streets into capitalist interests and the resistance of musicians to this domination, earlier discourses on street music still exist in various contexts. Sometimes historical discourses are integrated into these new agendas. The theme outsider, including associations with insanity, low-status groups, and marginalized street culture, remains dominant as observed in the preliminary fieldwork or representations of contemporary street musicians in the texts (Bennett & Rogers, 2014; Habash, 2021; Malkoç, 2018; May, 2017; Öğüt, 2021a, 2021b; Öngen, 2020). This theme not only points out the low-status of street musicians or their positions as outsiders usually in a negative way but also links historical examples to the discourses associating contemporary street musicians with protest culture or resistance in a positive way (Bird, 2016; Evin, 2015; Günlü, 2013; Haedicke, 2012; McKay, 2007; Öngen, 2020; Özden, 2013). The representation of street musicians as modern urban troubadours/minstrels who are the spokesmen of a free urban public space or protest culture usually works as a strategy of gentrification (Gökırmaklı, 2022; Kabaş, 2019; Mason, 1992; Sari & Uslu, 2018). The employment of street musicians by municipalities or the institutionalization of street music practices by public or private organizations serves to domesticate street culture on the one hand and to elevate the historically low social, economic, and professional status endured by street musicians on the other. A closer look at contemporary street music discourses may help us understand the historical continuities and discontinuities in the interpretation of street music today in more detail, but this is beyond the scope of this study.

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