

# Sublime yet ridiculous: Turkishness and the cinematic image of Zeki Müren

Umut Tümay Arslan

## Abstract

This paper scrutinizes anxieties of national identity in Turkey through the image of Zeki Müren in three films, *Beklenen Şarkı*, *Kırık Plak*, and *Son Beste*. In these films the image of Zeki Müren is articulated as the ridiculous sublime. His image always tells two stories simultaneously: construction and collapse of national identity. Through an analysis of Müren's early films, the paper shows, how anxieties about the formation of Turkish citizenship and about modernity are substantiated in his image. This analysis is carried out in the following steps: I, first, explain how the films chosen here construct the feeling of *we-ness* and national imaginary by virtue of Classical Turkish music and the voice of Zeki Müren. I show that the image of Zeki Müren in these films tells the story of the national subject being interpellated or hailed by Turkishness and argue that Zeki Müren's image exposes the "speculary" structure of Turkishness. Examining the construction, completeness, and integrity of Turkish national identity the paper continues to explore its collapse, incompleteness, and disintegration—that is, the dimension of "beyond interpellation." Put differently, I analyze how the feeling of *we-ness* collapses and explore the pleasure and torment produced through the relationship between social power and the subject. With the help of these two axes of exploration, I show how the torment as well as the pleasure of subjection, the desire to be recognized as well as the fear of not being recognized is the text of Zeki Müren's image in these films.

---

Umut Tümay Arslan, Ankara University, Faculty of Communication, The Department of Radio, Television and Cinema, 06590 Cebeci Ankara, Turkey, tumay.arslan@media.ankara.edu.tr.

*Author's Note:* This paper is a revised version of Chapter 1 of my book *Mazi Kabrinin Hortlakları* [Specters of the Graveyard Called the Past] (Istanbul: Metis, 2010). I would like to thank Tim Drayton for his help in translation and for his excellent comments.

*New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 45 (2011): 185-213.

Keywords: Zeki Müren, Turkish cinema, Turkishness, social power, queerness

One holds every phrase, every scene to the light as one reads—for Nature seems, very oddly, to have provided us with an inner light by which to judge of the novelist's integrity or disintegrity.

—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

The institutional and symbolic practices that have constituted the Turkish nation as an imagined community have been widely studied.<sup>1</sup> This has aided us in making sense of the processes that summon us to Turkishness and of the means to construct the mythical and imaginary foundations of modern, national values. However, these studies have mostly perceived the social power of Turkishness as constituting a purely external voice promising unity, entirety and meaning. As such, they have failed to see that this external voice of power is usually not internalized as is, but that it is transmuted while it is internalized.

Literary criticism in Turkey has to a considerable extent succeeded in acknowledging how the external voice of power is transmuted as it is internalized by subjects. This has been achieved by virtue of inserting into the analysis of ideology, the analysis of what goes beyond interpellation. This, on the other hand, has enabled us to see how the failure inherent in interpellation, the failure of power to fix the subject completely, is concealed by fantasy—in other words, by what goes beyond interpellation. Therefore, literary criticism has managed to see that Turkishness has appeared at the very point where summoning to Turkishness has failed. This means that the nation as an imagined community has constructed itself through its discontents. Jale Parla, for example, demonstrates how Westernization has generated a sense of fatherlessness. She analyzes the masculine-authoritarian and, of course, national voice originating in the *Tanzimat*<sup>2</sup> literature, as an effort, under the gaze of the West, to compensate for the absence of a father, for the sense of be-

1 See Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds., *Türkiye'de Modernleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998); Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernizm ve Ulusun İnşası: Erken Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si'nde Mimari Kültür* (İstanbul: Metis, 2002); Murat Belge, "Batılılaşma: Türkiye ve Rusya," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Volume 3: Modernleşme ve Batılılık*, ed. Uygur Kocabaşoğlu (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002); Tanıl Bora, "Milliyetçi-Muhafazakâr ve İslamcı Düşünüşte Negatif Batı İmgesi," in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Volume 3: Modernleşme ve Batılılık*, ed. Uygur Kocabaşoğlu (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002).

2 *Tanzimat* refers to the mid-nineteenth-century state-sponsored political reforms in the Ottoman Empire.

ing deprived of tradition, and therefore for being made into an orphan.<sup>3</sup> Another critic, Orhan Koçak, has discussed Westernization as accepting to be a late-comer, being short of the grand model or ideal. Arguing that the national sense of self was born at the same time as its wounds, he has called into question the dichotomies of form/content, material/soul, thought/emotion, and social/subject.<sup>4</sup> The very gap separating the foreign ideals that portrayed the local as vulgar and deficient from a local-ness that turned the foreign into something snobbish and fake was nothing other than the national sense of self *per se*. While others who long to read about a genuine national self tend to perceive the gap as an obstacle in the way of attaining a national sense of self, Orhan Koçak simply lays bare this misrecognition.

Nurdan Gürbilek, another influential cultural critic, has explored the sexual anxieties accompanying Ottoman-Turkish literary modernization—the anxiety of effeminization and castration, the anxiety of losing virility, and the anxiety of forever being frozen in childhood. Seeking in literature the traces of the division of the national sense of self, the emotions aroused by the narcissistic wound, along with the quest for pure local-ness and a genuine sense of self in the attempt to heal this wound, she has fleshed out the connection between the dichotomies that permeate literature (genuine/fake, original/dandy, local/foreign, soul/body, self/other) and the asymmetrical relationship between East and West. The fear of becoming impotent, effeminate, or child-like in the eyes of the West fused with existential anxieties, and an attempt was made to dispel national anxiety through a masculinizing struggle, along the orbit of this Oedipal conflict.<sup>5</sup> Gürbilek has spoken of the mutual invocation of national anxiety and sexual anxiety, and of the engendering of an extreme and acute stress placed on masculinity, born of the fear of a loss of masculinity and a debilitating dependency, together with a concurrent phobia of foppishness flavored with excessive Westernization, an addiction to mirror and mother, effeminateness, and a fear of homosexuality.

The important point in these explorations of the emotional geography laid bare by the unique conditions of Ottoman-Turkish modernization is that they point to the effort to preserve within the split of the national sense of self the internal-external dichotomy that was

3 Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1990).

4 Orhan Koçak, "Kaptrırlmış İdeal: Mai ve Siyah Üzerine Psikanalitik Bir Deneme," *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 70 (1996): 95.

5 Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark* (İstanbul: Metis, 2004). Also see Nurdan Gürbilek, "Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2-3 (2003).

ever present in the perception of the East-West question. In narratives through which the national sense of self speaks, the internal is portrayed as a place that has long been captured by the external. Yet, these narratives also give voice to the desire for an interior that is unaffected by the exterior.<sup>6</sup>

Literary criticism has thus shown the national sense of self and subjectivity to be not only a space of unity, but also a space of division. The representations, figures, and images of the East and West, which arose from the asymmetrical relationship with the West, interacted with society's own internal divisions (ethnic, class, sexual); from the moment in which they moved in unison with these divisions, they acquired strength and emotional influence. The internalization of the historical East/West dichotomy also caused society's own internal power mechanisms to function, and this dichotomy came into play in the splits and blind spots of the social and subjective whole. The basic structure of the fetishism—which stops time, resists knowledge and is obsessively attached to a frozen past—may be witnessed in its full glory in the desire to be modern *but* national (“Let us be Western, but...”; “Let us preserve tradition, however, ...”). This shifting stage, which Meltem Ahıska has proposed to explain with the concept of “occidental fantasy,”<sup>7</sup> and which hosts confused and conflicting performances of the West and the East, attempts to draw the boundary between that which is national and that which is foreign, women and men, the elite and the people, and, finally, West and East. This delineation of the boundaries of the social is capable of creating a fantasy, to the extent that it can synchronize itself with divisions within the subject. Simply put, the East/West dichotomy or synthesis works as a social fantasy in Turkish society.<sup>8</sup>

6 The question is obvious, as Nurdan Gürbilek asks: “Can it be that we haven’t noticed that this national self established its very ‘originality’ by hiding its own Westernized aspirations, constantly projecting snobism to the excessive other, the dandyish *Tanzimat* self?” Gürbilek, “Dandies and Originals,” 615.

7 Meltem Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı: Garbiyatçılık ve Politik Öznellik* (İstanbul: Metis, 2005).

8 In Lacanian theory, the fullness of identity that the subject is seeking is impossible both at the imaginary and the symbolic level. Therefore, lack is obviously central in the Lacanian conception of the subject. It is this lack that is both making room for the constitution of identity and making identification, by constitution, alienating. Furthermore, lack is marking not only the Lacanian subject, as Žižek simply puts: “The most radical dimension of Lacanian theory lies not in recognizing [‘that the Lacanian subject is divided, crossed-out, identical to a lack in a signifying chain’] but in realizing that the big Other, the symbolic order itself, is also *barre*, crossed-out, by a fundamental impossibility, structured around an impossible/traumatic kernel, around a central lack.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 122. Here, what fantasy carries out is an attempt to make bearable the lack in the Other. Actually, it conceals the fundamental impossibility of the big Other. More importantly, the scenario of a social fantasy obscuring the lack in the Other is always the promise of filling the lack in the subject. For further discussion see also Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 70, 223–224.

The preceding discussion has familiarized us with the psychic evolution and emotional topography of Turkish modernization, which emerges where social power's external voice, that of the interpellation, trips up and meets with failure. This highly unsettled psychic climate involves a whirlwind of emotions; it is like a spiral of opposing emotional paths that can rapidly turn into one another. The internal conflict with the West, costumed as an agent of alienation, leads to dissatisfaction with Turkishness, or anxiety about the originality of Turkishness, which in turn opens the way to a desire *to be another*.

With the help of the framework presented above, I will examine in this essay the fusing and synchronization of national fears with the tyranny of the most basic anxieties about our bodies and identities, as reflected in Zeki Müren's image in the early period of popular Turkish cinema, also known as *Yeşilçam* Cinema. Zeki Müren was a prominent singer and composer in Turkey between the 1950s and the mid-1990s. Over his long professional career, he was celebrated as the "sun" of classical Turkish music. Although he never openly accepted his gay identity, Müren dressed effeminately and wore large, ornate rings and heavy make-up, especially in the later years of his life. His death at the age of 65 in 1996 caused great public grief, and thousands attended his funeral.<sup>9</sup> In his latest book, Martin Stokes has explored the posthumous Zeki Müren image as the "model citizen." This image of Zeki Müren, Stokes has argued, rests on popular foundations:

First, Müren drew on the regional and Egypt-dominated circulation of sentimental films and musical styles identified with revolutionary politics. (...) Second, arguments about Müren's queerness—or denials of it—constituted a way of talking about other kinds of identities and the relationship between identities and citizenship in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, the image of "Zeki Müren as the model citizen" can be found in Müren's early films, too; however, a number of excesses concerning Turkish citizenship always escort this image. In what follows, I will show, through an analysis of Müren's early films, how anxieties about the formation of Turkish citizenship and about modernity are substantiated in his image. This analysis will be carried out in the fol-

9 For further details, see Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

10 Martin Stokes, "Zeki Müren: Sun of Art, Ideal Citizen," in *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 69-70.

lowing steps: I will, first, explain how the films chosen here construct the feeling of *we-ness* and national imaginary by virtue of Classical Turkish music and the voice of Zeki Müren. I will show that the image of Zeki Müren in these films tells the story of the national subject being interpellated or hailed by Turkishness and argue that Zeki Müren's image exposes the "speculary"<sup>11</sup> structure of Turkishness. Examining the construction, completeness, and integrity of Turkish national identity in this first step, I will then explore its collapse, incompleteness and disintegration—that is, the dimension of "beyond interpellation." To put it differently, I will analyze how the feeling of *we-ness* collapses and explore the pleasure and torment produced by the relationship between social power and the subject. With the help of these two axes of exploration, I will show how the torment as well as the pleasure of subjection, the desire to be recognized as well as the fear of not being recognized is the text of Zeki Müren's image in these films.

### The double life of Zeki Müren's image: Wearing *garb*<sup>12</sup>

Generations in Turkey grew up with Zeki Müren's marvelous voice. Not only a Classical Turkish music performer, he was Turkey's "sun of art." His high reputation rested on both his voice and his diction. His Turkish, which was called "İstanbul Turkish," was enthusiastically acclaimed; in fact, it had a kind of mythical status with its superior and elegant quality. This is the sublime part of Zeki Müren's image. He is *the voice*, he is *the language* itself. As Martin Stokes puts it,

"good Turkish" connotes class, status, and prestige, despite the fact that nobody would imitate the way Zeki Müren spoke in everyday life; but more importantly, "good Turkish" connotes empathy with the goals of Atatürk's revolution. In Turkey, as elsewhere, language was the master signifier of the modernist revolution, evoking clarity, functional communicative efficiency, democracy, and, of course, ethnic homogeneity. Zeki Müren's "good Turkish" was a, if not *the*, crucial component of his high prestige.<sup>13</sup>

However, in the case of Zeki Müren's image, this is not the entire story. The image of Zeki Müren is always a kind of a ridiculous sublime. While

11 Speculary is an Althusserian concept to define the imaginary structure of ideology.

12 In Ottoman Turkish, *garb* means the West.

13 Martin Stokes, "The Tearful Public Sphere: 'Turkey's Sun of Art,' Zeki Müren," in *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean*, ed. Tullia Magrini (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 314-315.

his voice and language work as a symbolic register of completeness, his image turns into a text of incompleteness, collapse, and disintegration.<sup>14</sup>

The three films that I have chosen for examination here, *The Broken Record* (*Kırık Plak*, Osman F. Seden, 1958), *The Last Composition* (*Son Beste*, Arşavir Alyanak, 1955), and *The Awaited Song* (*Beklenen Şarkı*, Orhan Murat Arıburnu, Sami Ayanoğlu, 1953), belong to a period in which modern/national pedagogy and mass culture intermeshed with and permeated each another, to a time when the maelstrom without which modernity in Turkey could not spread to the masses erupted and when the chasm opened to make space for the affective mobilization process whereby the social power known as “Turkishness” came to be internalized. These films are thus imbued with a social harmony that strikes one at first glance: Turkish Classical music, cinema, radio and Zeki Müren’s voice created an imaginary space for the nation and the aspiration towards *we-ness*. In this landscape of national-popular imagination, with the aid of modern technologies of recording, surveillance, and power, modern/national bodies join forces to meet with a happy and national end. Yet, as one approaches the precipices within this happy landscape, one begins to hear the voice of truth to which Zeki Müren’s body gives the power of speech. His body speaks of indebtedness, the feeling of guilt, corporeal torment created by addiction to power, narcissistic wounds, and of being simultaneously exalted and comical, genuine and parody, dandy and original, woman and man. In brief, “the self’s radical ex-centricity to itself with which human is confronted”<sup>15</sup> is projected onto his body. In these films, Zeki Müren’s image is always an alienated one, and his subjectivity has an irreducible split.

In one of the memorable scenes of *The Broken Record*, Zeki enters a glittering stage to a burst of applause. He approaches the microphone. The auditorium waits in silence, expecting to be enraptured by his beautiful voice. But he has lost his voice. He has been foiled by the foppish Nermin (Ayfer Feray) who has turned Zeki into a celebrity, but, at the same time, keeps him under her thumb. There is then a scene in *The Broken Record*, which is set in a provincial music hall and represents the collapse of Zeki’s modern stage resonating with applause. In this scene

14 Interestingly, the “duplicity” of his image sometimes changes the film form itself. As in the case of *The Broken Record* (*Kırık Plak*), the film made within the film refers through its *mise-en-scène* to the real film. The spectator sees the film equipment, the star (Zeki Müren) getting ready for the take, his image projected onto the screen and spectators watching him in the movie theater. Here, *mise-en-abyme* works as a process of deconstruction. The image of Zeki Müren not only represses, but also reveals the synthetic, fictive, and performative structure of identity or identification.

15 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1977), 171.

of degradation, contempt, and humiliation, Zeki, in the garb of *İbiş*,<sup>16</sup> performs a parody of Zeki Müren in a provincial theater company that takes pride in hosting “unrivalled artistes of the East.” As if this were not enough, Zeki is confronted with coarseness, contempt, and belittlement in a variety of guises—ridicule, swearing, vilification, raucous laughter, and physical violence. The thing that makes these two scenes so memorable, so moving, must surely be the sheer visceral quality with which they conjure up basic fears concerning the body, through rupturing the unity of body and emotion and invading the very intimacy that makes that unity possible.

Zeki is the body that suffers the pain of somehow being unable to escape dependence. This dependence operates in conjunction with the most basic fears concerning subjectivity, like the inability to be in full possession of one’s own voice, dependence on the will of another person, making somebody else the captain of one’s fate, being subject to ridicule and contempt, or appearing deficient and inadequate in the eyes of others and the shame that this engenders. This is a divided sense of self. On the one hand, it belongs to a pure, holistic and mythical era in which the national-modern dream was realized, in which the national voice, the national body, and the national language have been made sublime. Yet, on the other hand, it portrays a lack of identity and failure of interpellation as (national) subject. We encounter “foppishness” in Zeki, with his predilection for ostentatious costumes and dress, with shots of him applying make-up with a mirror in his hand, and with his portrayal of a character who is unable to assert himself *vis-à-vis* women in scenes of confused sexuality. The fear of wearing “borrowed attire” and acquiring “borrowed sexuality” are portrayed through his image.<sup>17</sup> He is shown in *The Last Composition* putting on a borrowed tuxedo jacket before a mirror. He is to perform the composition in music-lover Princess Ruh-sar’s seaside residence. He enters the sumptuous building, the Pera Palace, with its wealthy, select guests. At that moment, two men standing behind him are shown laughing at him; in a close-up, we see the label attached to the back of his tuxedo jacket, indicating that it is rented. In

16 *İbiş* is the name of the foolish servant in the *orta oyunu* and shadow theater. *Orta oyunu* is one of the fundamental genres of traditional Ottoman theater. Similar to the other forms of traveling theater, such as *Karagöz* or shadow theater which uses puppets and the coffeehouse stories told by a single narrator, *orta oyunu* is staged with live players and performed as improvisation. In the process of Westernization that followed the *Tanzimat* in 1839, however, the texts of these plays were written down. The performance of such texts on stage gave rise to the *tuluât* tradition of popular, improvisational theater in Turkey. “Traditional Theatre, Ortaoyunu,” Turkish Cultural Foundation, [www.turkishculture.org/performing-arts/theatre/traditional-theatre/traditional-theatre-ortaoyunu-288.htm](http://www.turkishculture.org/performing-arts/theatre/traditional-theatre/traditional-theatre-ortaoyunu-288.htm).

17 Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe* (İstanbul: Metis, 2004), 56.





Zeki Müren on the cover of one of his records in 1973. Courtesy of Emre Grafson Müzik A.Ş.

the same scene, while Zeki is playing the piano, a rich woman suddenly guffaws. Zeki, his self-respect and pride injured, shuts the piano lid and stalks off.

Zeki's body, for this reason, serves as a fantasmatic screen onto which not only masculine concerns about becoming dandy/effeminate, but also the shame felt at being deficient and inadequate, and the fear of being demeaned are projected.<sup>18</sup> The viewer shares his torment on the one hand, and derives pleasure from the way in which he is ridiculed, parodied, and submitted to a commanding woman, on the other. The spectacle is, in both cases, Zeki's body. The wounded pride caused by guffaws, ridicule, dependence, indebtedness, surveillance, and being a spectacle in the eyes of others finds representation in Zeki's image alone. In these

18 For the dandy figure in literature, see also Nurdan Gürbilek, "Orijinal Türk Ruhu," in *Kötü Çocuk Türk* (Istanbul: Metis, 2001); Nurdan Gürbilek, "Erkek Yazar Kadın Okur: Etkilenen Okur Etkilenmeyen Yazar," in *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe* (Istanbul: Metis, 2004); Nurdan Gürbilek, "Kadınsılaştırma Endişesi: Efemine Erkekler, Hadım Oğullar, Kadın-Adamlar," in *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe* (Istanbul: Metis, 2004).

films, basic fears with reference to our body, caused by dependence on power, are represented in a manner that will tickle the spectator's desire to domineer. The sense of absolute power and dominance captivates the spectator.

Why is it this body, the image of Zeki Müren that is made to purge itself of guilt and accusation and to prove its innocence in the face of power? I think that the gay identity of Zeki Müren, which does not extend into public discourse, also bears an influence on the body that we encounter by way of his cinematic image. He was Turkey's "sun of art" with his camp costumes; he was an extraordinary singer who dared to sing with a man's body in women's clothes and make-up in 1950s Turkey. However, he was never openly referred to as "gay." This censored text is constantly at work in Zeki Müren's image. While on the one hand, enabling fears of effeminacy, loss of masculinity, or fixation in childhood to be played out in his relations to domineering characters, this secrecy on the other hand, turns homosexuality into a libidinous investment that is not publicly acceptable:

Although the direct prohibition of homosexuality is not to be enforced, its very existence as virtual threat compelling gays to remain in the closet affects their actual social status. In other words, what this solution amounted to was an explicit elevation of hypocrisy into a social principle.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of Zeki Müren's image, hypocrisy functions as a social principle, too. The obvious question here is: if the attempt of constructing a national identity is made by stressing an extreme and violent male identity locked in the struggle for masculinity and against becoming effeminate or losing virility, why should one not conjecture that this male bond that forms Turkishness exists in a volatile manner alongside homosexual libidinous economics?<sup>20</sup> If the formative role of guilt and conscience in

19 Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 23.

20 Both Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek have stated that homosexual libidinal economy is at the root of the fear of homosexuality and that this libidinal economy appears to us in its most marked form in the example of the army. According to Butler, disavowal and prohibition are extremely productive activities that simultaneously produce and contain homosexuality by suppressing it. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford University Press, 1997), 80-82. Similarly, Žižek points out this libidinal economy: "The very libidinal structure of army life is latently homosexual—that is to say, the 'spirit of (military) community' turns on a disavowed homosexuality, a homosexuality thwarted, hindered from attaining its goal [zielgehemmt]. For that reason, the open, public acknowledgment of homosexuality would undermine the perverted 'sublimation' which forms the very basis of the 'spirit of (military) community'." Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Casuality* (London: Verso, 2005), 82. See also Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 23-25.

the cinematic image of Zeki Müren is to make sublime the attachment to the national ideal, then it can be said that the male bonding of the national subjects are made of denied homosexuality. In other words, "the spirit of our male community" is supported by the censored homosexual economy. This must surely be how homosexuality breaks free from this cycle of denial, of escaping the status of obscene surplus operating at a subterranean level and coming into public view, and of the destructive threat that it poses at the level of masculine-national identity.

### Specters of the past, embodied desires

In *The Last Composition*, *The Awaited Song* and *The Broken Record*, there is an absence that strikes one at first glance. Contrary to other films of early *Yeşilçam* Cinema, we encounter Zeki Müren with all of his foppishness as the hero of the film.<sup>21</sup> In this universe dominated by maternal desire, Turkish Classical music is a sublime object that fills the gap left by loss, that ties us to the frozen memory of loss and stops time. We more or less find ourselves dreaming the dream of being modern *but* national. The dream is one of unity, with the sound of Turkish Classical Music broadcast on the radio creating an imaginary community, uniting the nation and, with the assistance of modern sound and surveillance techniques, joining forces with national pedagogy; the past and the present, memory and desire rest their heads on one another's shoulders. One could well regard this universe as being a memory shrouding a loss that the spirit cannot accept and denies. In this emotional geography that is created by a corporeal loss and the absence of the past, memory is brought back to an object that represents the loss. The strange thing in any case is the revival of memory. In other words, the past is constructed through a narrative, which is selective with regard to what will be remembered and what the memento is. This means that the memory of the thing lost is more important than the thing itself.

In *The Broken Record*, Zeki, upon hearing his own voice in the inn, remembers his life in İstanbul and begins to weep. The memory is of his lover, İstanbul, and his love affairs. In *The Awaited Song*, the mansion, more than simply connecting the past with the present, is a shrine to the love of Turkish Classical music, to the lovers who became attached

21 While discussing the split between original and dandy in Turkish literature and criticism, Nurdan Gürbilek explains what *züppe* means in Turkish culture: "The *züppe*, who is both a snob, the slave of the fashionable, and a dandy who pays exaggerated attention to physical appearance 'just like a woman' represented the opposite of warlike manly values and those of the street and community... Hence *züppe* designates both the imitating snob and the effeminate dandy." Nurdan Gürbilek, "Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2-3 (2003): 609.

to one another by this love, and to the memory left by a lost love. However, of these films, it is in *The Last Composition* that one finds the most striking scene involving loss. Shown in the title sequence of the film is a picture of Ottoman İstanbul (views of the Bosphorus, rowboats and excursion vehicles). When the film starts, the camera moves to reveal an old man holding this picture in his hand. The man, mopping himself with a handkerchief, starts walking. He holds a samovar in his other hand. As he prepares to cross an empty street, the Sultanahmet Mosque fills the frame from behind the trees. The old man is heading towards a shop selling antiquities. Its interior is full of objects from the lost past: caftans, lutes, water pipes, and pictures of Ottoman İstanbul. The proprietor of the shop chides another elderly customer, who is there to sell a candlestick, while the former is expressing dissatisfaction with the price: "If it is that precious, why are you selling it?" The old man says, with a mournful sigh, "that is something that only I and God know." The hero of the film, Zeki, will also come to the shop to sell his lute.

The very sound of the film alludes to wholeness and genuineness: Turkish Classical music. Classical Turkish music is an object of both division (*alaturka/alafranga*) and unity (the East-West synthesis), fabricated by social power and control mechanisms. The desire to be modern but national is the modern parent of the body. This is why pedagogy is the core concept behind the quest for a national self identical to the West, but different from it, both pro- and anti-West. Pedagogy with respect to the corporeality indicated by music—emotion, pleasure, and rhythm—is fed by concerns which the *alaturka*, itself a Western appellation, fills with enjoyment.<sup>22</sup> The perception of *alaturka*—which the East-West division has made into excrement, a leftover—undergoes a shift so that it becomes an object of condescension, so much so that listening to *alaturka* music on the radio during the 1930s was a source of embarrassment for the elite. Calling its roots into question, this music invited rejection as an Arabic and Byzantine hybrid. There was something inauspicious about *alaturka* music, infused with suppressed, rejected, abandoned, and denied things. It was associated with sexuality, addiction, (Eastern) disease, and irrationality. It was the sound of "cheap thrills," "bowing to fate," "sexual desires," and "alcoholism."<sup>23</sup>

However, the suppressed *alaturka* returns in the form of Classical Turkish music. In fact, the contradictory nature of the social whole known as the nation makes itself felt here. The national fantasy must,

22 Meltem Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı: Garbiyatçılık ve Politik Öznellik* (İstanbul: Metis, 2005), 122-123.

23 Meral Özbek, *Popüler Kültür ve Orhan Gencebay Arabeski* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1991), 151; Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı*, 123.

simultaneously, make reference both to a situation in which traditional, organic ties have been broken and to a pre-modern residue within modernity.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps this should be put as follows: it is through suppressing history that the conception of the nation and its subjects connect with the frozen memory of loss. Classical Turkish music is a shrouding memory. It both fills the void left by the past and by loss, and it also shrouds the past and the experience of loss.

The 1940s was a decade during which Turkish classical music and, as it later came to be known, “Turkish Art music” or “Classical Turkish music” became part of the national heritage and was subjected to rules. Having been subjected to the discipline and training of Ankara Radio, which formulated the sound of the nation and cast itself in the role of authority, of a national-pedagogic parent, *alaturka* music acquired the title of “classical,” “real,” “original,”—in short, Turkish music. This sound made its return through the suppression of Arab radio stations, Egyptian musical films, and “free” interpretations along with the pleasures, emotions, and rhythms invoked by different ethnic sounds.<sup>25</sup>

Turkish music, with all of its violations, is one of the peculiar components of the national-popular fantasy created by Turkish cinema. The films featuring Zeki Müren create a universe in which radio, cinema, and night club intersect and collide. In Zeki Müren’s voice and image, East and West, past and future, modern and national, high and low along with radio and cinema are brought together. Unlike the national culture of the Single Party Era, which did not lend itself to popularization, the formative role played by the cinema after 1950 in creating a national-popular fantasy and in producing an “us” with which people would identify must be considered from this point of view.

*The Awaited Song* opens with an interior shot of a sumptuous, old building. The camera, moving towards the sound that evidently origi-

24 Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2002), 20. According to Žižek, the nation is not a commonplace, ordinary or normal way of living together, but a modern “deviation.” In this sense, the thing known as the nation is always the “postponed,” “delayed” nation. The distance/space that separates a certain nation from its ideal nation is immanent within the notion of the nation itself; this distance is the nation’s corporeal and internal gap and barrier. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI, 2001), 10, 24. Žižek extends the same theme to national identification. Nobody can be entirely Turkish, English or French. Turkishness, English-ness or French-ness is an internal boundary; this boundary is at an unattainable level that prevents the empirical Turk, English or French person from fully identifying with herself. This corporeal barrier also functions in the dream of the past. The struggle for “national awakening” or the desire to compensate for rootlessness with fantastic people (national myths) when these are simply experienced as being lost or endangered, the thing that may be true is essentially the defense of the national thing. Žižek, *Enjoyment* 110, 213.

25 See Ahıska, *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı*, 120-123.

nates from upstairs, enters the door to the concert hall. With the sound that is imbued with power, and mystery and exaltation, the subject who ventures into the sound's sphere of influence sets out to become acquainted with something, to learn an unknown story, and to discover a "truth." The sound that is sought out at the beginning of the film is the choir's rendering of a work by Dede Efendi.<sup>26</sup> The same camera movement follows a sound heard by choir member Türkan (Jeyan Mahfi Ayral) as she sits before the mirror in her room combing her hair. The camera follows the sound of a piano from another room in the mansion, and the door opens to show Seniha (Cahide Sonku) playing the "Awaited Song" on the piano. This is a half-finished composition, the relic of a love that ended in separation. With the aid of this fragmented relic from the past, the past will turn into a mythical narrative. Through Seniha's voice, the past is told and imagined, and becomes enriched with imagery. This story of the past, which is told retrospectively, is the story of the loss of a love that represents wholeness and happiness. A fragment, an unfinished composition, is a remnant of the lost past/love.

There is a flashback to the same mansion, its furniture, and the pictures on the walls now being different. The place of Seniha's piano is taken up by a *kanun* (a zither-like musical instrument with 72 strings), and the room is decorated with a mirror, reflecting the wholeness expressed by love. The mediator for the love between Seniha and the music teacher is music itself. It is Seniha's father who will be responsible for this love ending in separation. But the historical insertion in this fiction set in the past is as important as the wounded pride. No sooner has the music teacher been put down by the father than he embarks for Anatolia and the national resistance. On a stormy day, Seniha's lover, whom she sees for the last time as he departs on horseback from the world of love and music in the mansion, leaves his half-finished composition behind with Seniha. Thus, the half-finished composition, a fragmented remnant of the past, meshes with a half-finished love, sorrow about the loss of the whole world of love and music in the mansion, into the corpus of the nation's past. This imaginary artifact, this phantom needed by the nation to attain wholeness, plays out a fantasy of the past.

26 The full name of the composer is Hammamizade Ismail Dede Efendi. He composed over a thousand classical songs and contributed greatly to Ottoman music in the eighteenth century. He created masterpieces in all forms and modes of Ottoman music. He has also developed the composite musical modes of *sultanî yegâh*, *nev-eser*, *saba-buselik*, *hicaz-buselik*, and *araban kürdî*. His greatest works are the seven Mevlevi pieces for the *sema* ceremony. More than two hundred of his compositions are known today. "Top 10 Greatest Ottoman Artists of All Time," in *Ottoman Art Blog: The Weblog of an Empire* (2010), <http://ottomanblog.wordpress.com/2010/10/02/top-10-greatest-ottoman-artists-of-all-time/>.

This sorrowful story also contains an enigma. What has become of the lover who set out for war? Is there another part to the composition? These are enigmas that will be solved through the intervention of Zeki Müren's voice and image. A follow-up to the flashback scene in which Türkan learns some of the truth about her mother takes us to the poor but music-filled home of Zeki and his mother (Bedia Muvahhit). The scene opens with a top-down shot of a woman's hands playing the *kanun*. Zeki accompanies his mother on the piano. They play the continuation of the half-finished composition. Zeki's mother does not have the earlier part of the composition, of which Seniha does not have the latter part. The composition is in two incomplete parts and in two different places.

The psychic mechanism of an enchanting, mysterious sound emanating from behind a closed door is also employed at the moment when the composition is made whole. Seniha comes to the home of Zeki and his mother on the outskirts of the city. Lighting a cigarette while waiting, Seniha is surprised when she catches sight of her lost lover's picture on the wall. She approaches the piano placed immediately beneath the picture and begins to play the half-finished composition. After Seniha has finished the first half of the composition, the remainder of the composition is heard on the *kanun* from behind the door opening into the living room. Inside the room, Zeki's mother, puffing on a cigarette, is playing the *kanun*. Seniha follows the sound. She wants to open the door but cannot summon the courage and tearfully collapses. For both Seniha and Zeki's mother, the miraculous appearance of the missing part of the composition has been staged to resemble an unexpected encounter with a specter from the past. Zeki's mother rushes out in a burst of enthusiasm; she first sees the cigarette burning away on the piano and then, turning around, Seniha: "You have brought back for me a cherished memory from the past. You have solved for me an enigma that until today I have been unable to solve."

In this way, sound turns into a sublime object. Turkish Art music is present in the "void" of the past. The emotional effect that this manner of exalting the sound has on the viewer must have to do with the sense that the other side of the door is not empty. It has to do with the belief in the existence of a real, genuine sound there, which alludes to wholeness. Sound is virtually turned into the subject's secret treasure trove. The cherished memory of the past is resurrected, and the enigma is solved. The past is resurrected as "being remembered in the past; a memory worthy of respect." In the scene in which the half-finished composition is completed, the work that starts on the piano is completed in an unexpected encounter with the mysterious sound of a *kanun*. The combining

of the *kanun* with the piano, the *alaturka* with the *alafranga*, the East with the West is tantamount to reunion with one's own pure sound, the internal sound.

With Turkish Art music elevated to the status of pure pleasure and high culture and positioning itself in the lost, metaphysical center of the past, it creates a disciplined, tamed universe of national emotion. In this universe, in which the *kanun* is united with the piano through the mediation of a memory lingering in the past, Zeki's voice reconciles the future with the past and the national with the modern. However, in order for values such as pure pleasure and elegance to differentiate themselves, they need fun, seduction, and vulgarity.<sup>27</sup> In *The Awaited Song*, and also in *The Last Composition* and *The Broken Record*, one immediately becomes aware of this distinction. If Turkish Art music stands for exaltation of the spirit, schooling, nobility, elegance, and the cherished memory of the past, it stands in opposition to the "excesses" of modernity and capitalism, the "excesses" of the *alaturka* which Turkish Art music contains and excludes, denies and accepts.

This notion of the place that does not befit Turkish Art music is populated with the superfluities with which the symbolic construction of the nation was unable to dispense. This imaginary space, which shelters within it superfluities of all kinds, offers the spectacle of unity in contradiction. The inauspicious features of *alaturka* are combined with the disintegrating, depletive, and discarding aspects of the capitalist market. Here, the past now has in its full sense become a way of thinking about the antagonisms of today. The water pipe, the prayer beads, the fez, the beard, the crowds, coarseness and rootlessness, sexuality, alcohol and violence, the commonplace, coarse, commercial and merciless consumption—with all of these being rejected within the same (occidental)ist fantasy scene, Turkish Art music is presented as an exalted object of art, lofty of spirit and pure, as a spiritual pleasure which alludes to a space of wholeness without alienation.

An even sharper distinction between the coarse entertainment style of the masses and national culture is drawn in *The Broken Record*. Zeki Müren, who has lost his voice and is accused of murder, is believed to have died in a car crash. Zeki, in order to hide, dresses in a pauper's

27 Similar to Turkish society, Greek society is a "belatedly modernized" one. Gregory Jusdanis has discussed belated modernity through the invention or construction of "autonomous art," the Greek literary canon. "Autonomous art," which comes into being through establishing a distinction between aesthetic consumption and ordinary consumption, sets itself apart in terms of being a utopian space and refuge which is unpolluted by capitalism and market instincts and where there is peace and transcendence. For further discussion, see Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991).



clothing and boards a freight train. On the train, he begins to sob. Suddenly, from among the straw, poor, rural men appear one by one. The men talk as they bite off and chew huge chunks from loaves of bread clasped in their rough hands. One of them sings a Zeki Müren song, and another silences him, shouting: "Do you suppose he sang this number as he was burning in the car?" When the train stops, Zeki jumps down with the others. He looks around him on the dusty unpaved road. He sees a town in the distance. On the first night that he spends in the tent of the provincial theater company, he deliriously speaks in his sleep. The theater owner, hearing his delirious ranting, coerces him into impersonating Zeki Müren on the stage. The *alaturka*, the East and the local take center stage in these scenes, which draw a distinction between the high culture of Turkish Art music and the coarse entertainment of the masses. The all-male, poor and rural crowd is first portrayed in a top-down shot. There is a belly dancer on the stage. The men—swilling booze, emitting loud guffaws, and cursing—are portrayed in these scenes as a merry crowd. The impression created here is not of a crowd of individuals, but of an amorphous mass. In the scenes in which Zeki appears on stage in the garb of *İbiş* and impersonates himself with his hoarse voice, the merriment assumes a demeaning character. In these scenes—in which the audience is captured in broad, close-up and top-down shots—Zeki is booed. The audience's guffaws, and body motions (standing, throwing things onto the stage, catcalling, slow handclapping, and so on) are portrayed at length.

The place of Turkish Art music, which has been set apart from the coarse entertainment of the masses, is the radio, the conservatory, and the concert hall. Zeki Müren's voice combines and unites society into a single voice and leaves all ears and eyes glued to the sound of the radio. In *The Awaited Song*, on the first evening when Zeki performs Turkish Classical music on the radio, the camera moves from the studio to the close-up shot of a radio. Then Seniha is shown. The portrayal of the radio in close-up and from a subjective point of view attaches a degree of subjectivity to the object. In *The Broken Record*, Zeki Müren's voice and the national wholeness portrayed through the mediation of the radio become even more pronounced. Zeki enters the stage of the night club in a shiny suit and bow tie. As he sings, the effect created by the song is seamlessly transported from the night club to the radio inside the home. Continuity between different homes, different radios, and different places is provided by the radio and Zeki Müren's voice. Women with covered or uncovered heads, drinking tea or Turkish coffee or smoking in modest homes; men in village caps with cigarettes in mouthpieces drinking *rakı* at the tavern;

entire families of young and old, male and female; women in two-piece and men in three-piece suits; rich women dressed to the nines in strapless gowns; prisoners in jail—all of them listen, in front of radios, some lace-doily-covered and some not, to Zeki Müren. Zeki's voice on the radio constructs the national-popular fantasy through devotion to a single voice in hospitals, taxis, private cars, prisons, taverns, and the homes of poor and rich alike. In the concert scenes at the end of all three films, which speak of the resolution of conflict and a state of wholeness that has been achieved at great pains, the audience and performers are dressed, in contrast to the clothing style shown at the coarse entertainment of the masses, in suits, tuxedo jackets, and evening dresses. In these scenes, in which close-up shots are used sparingly and preference is given to a unified portrayal of the performer with both Western and Eastern instruments, Zeki's lover accompanies him on the piano. Disciplined bodies meet with disciplined sound. In the national-modern concert scenes in which the composition is made whole, the piano comes together with the *kanun*, as do women and men. The rift in the national sense of self is finally filled with a national object that appears at the right time and possesses the right identity. Turkish Art music has attained a mythical and exalted status that binds the nation's individuals together, and the nation's stage has been cleared of inauspicious, dirty, malign superfluities. This is surely encapsulated in the unforgettable words uttered by Seniha to Zeki in the finale of *The Awaited Song*: "We are joined by a tie that is as unadulterated and intangible as musical melodies."

### **The acoustic mirror: The fullness of identity, the completeness of self**

At the intersection of the past and the future, the national and the modern, a national wholeness makes itself felt. It is composed of bodies connected to a common sound/ideal and tamed through national pedagogy. A further important component of this social wholeness is made visible by radio technology. The national fantasy created by the radio broadcast of Zeki Müren's voice to the nation entails, at the same time, combining national heritage with modern technology in the radio studio. Abundant use is made in such scenes of various shots of sound recording rooms, sound recording staff and equipment, close-up shots of lights and microphones in the studio, and general shots of the technology surrounding the radio.<sup>28</sup>

28 Martin Stokes has noted that the microphone has played an important role in the image of Müren: "For some contemporaries, Müren was the first to use the microphone as an expressive device, holding it at varying distance to capture different vocal nuances, and using it as a stage prop. Iconic images—for instance, pictures seen on postcards on sale at the Zeki Müren Museum, as well as the

What I essentially wish to dwell on here is the niche established in these films for modern power and surveillance mechanisms, along with radio technology. Confessing to crimes, proving innocence, maintaining public order, and the acquisition of cultural authority by bodies and voices is almost always accompanied by modern technology, such as “surveillance/listening,” microphones, and recording. In this fantasy universe, it is not only Turkish Art music that is made sublime. Alongside this spiritual link—which assumes the form of a pure, unalienated, imaginary space of (national-) wholeness in contrast to the merry entertainment of the masses—modern power mechanisms are also made sublime with the aid of new technology. The fear of appearing guilty in the eyes of the law and, at the same time, the wish to be under surveillance by the law, along with subjection to modern power and surveillance techniques, is like a subtext that accompanies the making sublime of Turkish Art music. Taken together, these two sublime objects will provide an opportunity to become more closely acquainted with the mutual relationship between social power and subjection.

These films incorporate close-up shots of sound recording equipment, microphones, and tape recorders and place a heavy burden on sound recording in proving innocence or guilt. They express the fears of modern society about surveillance and bugging, through which transparency loses validity and innocence may be proven by judicial means. Such films, in exalting technology for imposing order on sound and image, invoke subjection to social power and, in a sense, respect for the supremacy of the law. Sound is, on the one hand, a truth to be followed, the trace of a lost memory, and the remnant of a state of wholeness experienced in the past. Just as it expresses deficiency, a shattered, lonely state of devotion, fragility and mortality, it is also the expression of fullness, exaltation and disavowal of loss—in short, the desire for a possibility of wholeness and the desire to possess a metaphysical center. In tandem with these emotions that belong to the world of introspection, sound is at the same time the social record of obscenity and shame, guilt and confession. The wholeness and deficiency that find expression in the dialectic generated by the presence and absence of sound creates a universe where sound has power and where power is embodied in sound.

---

statue outside—invariably show him posing with a microphone. Such images tell an interesting story to the technologically minded. The earliest show the singer standing before not one but several microphones; later they show him as a classic crooner, his face almost permanently attached to the some version of the RCA 44A or Shure Unidyne; yet later they show him striding about the stage with one of the lightweight, portable condenser microphones of the 1960s and 1970s in hand.” Stokes, “Zeki Müren,” 61.

In *The Awaited Song*, the secret helping hand extended by Seniha to Zeki draws on modern techniques of power. The merciless boss of the night club where Zeki works has made him sign a blank sheet of paper. Seniha, deciding to promote Zeki's career, offers money for Zeki's contract to be terminated; however, the boss tries to extort more money based on the signed blank sheet of paper in his possession. Against this man, Seniha's authority is a microphone placed in a vase of flowers. When the man sees the microphone and learns that his attempts at extortion are being (secretly) intercepted by the officers waiting outside, he swallows the paper in one gulp.

In *The Broken Record*, Zeki has, because of the bag he clutches in his hands while leaving the country, unwittingly become a partner in the smuggling activities of Nermin, who has played a major role in his rise to fame. His fear of the police, his apparent guilt, and his inability to prove his innocence are powerful elements in the film. At the beginning of the film, there is a phone call as Zeki is getting ready for a concert. The caller says that they are the police. Zeki grips the phone in fear. There is a lengthy silence at the other end. Finally, it becomes apparent that this is a joke played by Nermin. Zeki, in his feeling of guilt, falls victim to Nermin's blackmail and acquiesces to her demands. During the period when he has been forced to appear on stage as an impersonator of Zeki Müren, the person who introduced himself to him as "tuluât player Ali"<sup>29</sup> (Nubar Terziyan) was in fact a policeman. It turns out that he has been under police surveillance all this time. He discovers that his fear was groundless and that he is already known to be innocent.

The scene in which the police listen in and record sounds is mostly to establish Zeki's innocence. The necessary condition for becoming a subject is to act out one's innocence before the eyes of the law and to clear one's name by means of this performance. As Judith Butler has stated with reference to subjection and the formation of conscience, Zeki—before the law, by means of the rules of law, and through becoming a partner in crime with the law—"clears his own conscience," proves his innocence, and "becomes a subject" through subjection; and he (re-) acquires his social status.<sup>30</sup> According to Butler, Althusser's theory of interpellation based on subjectivity's subjugation to the law seems to imply the subject's turn towards the law and thus a doctrine of conscience that

29 *Tuluât* is the name of traditional popular improvisational theater in Turkey.

30 As Butler puts it, "there is no formation of subjectivity without subordination, the passionate attachment to those by whom she or he (the subject in question) is subordinated." Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 7.

presupposes acceptance of guilt, but is not elaborated in the theory. A kind of reflexivity, the conscience expressing a turning back onto itself, is the condition that enables the subject to be constituted.<sup>31</sup> It is possible to conceive of *The Broken Record* as a scene of “interpellation,” having components such as sound and surveillance techniques, the formation of conscience (self-accusation and punishment), clearing one’s name in the eyes of the law, turning towards the voice of the law, and partnership in crime with the law, along with all associated linguistic and performative aspects. This social stage, which is both punitive and reduced, portrays the turning towards the voice of the law with a feeling of guilt and the possibility of being a subject with the recognition and identity that this constitutive subjection promises.

Zeki’s status as murderer in the eyes of the law collides with the supposition that he is dead. What collides is not merely the presumption of guilt with the loss of social existence; exclusion from society at the same time collides with the loss of voice, with imprisonment in the countryside, with being the object of *alaturka* pleasures, and with turning into a despised, ridiculed parody. What forms the wish to turn towards the law is this conflict between innocence and the subject’s loss of social status. The narrative appears to have been premised on the guarantee that the turn towards the law will lead to the constitution of the subject as it embraces the law and acquires subjectivity.

Zeki, who loses his sense of self in his relationship with Nermin and embodies a dependent and subservient spirit that is open to abuse, also has his voice destroyed by Nermin. The loss of voice is an allegory for the chain of guilt and virtual death, essentially for the loss of identity. It begins with a distancing from the law and the loss of voice and then continues with the loss of name and social existence. All of this is tantamount to subjectivity shifting stage. The modern stage of the concert hall is replaced by a comical, merry rural stage. Delay or suspension of the turn towards the law virtually serves to depict fears with reference to subjectivity. Such fears are brought into being by a dependence that somehow cannot be broken and by an unpaid debt, both of which rapidly turn into a sense of shame in the gaze of the other/society, perception of guilt, humiliation, ridicule, and contempt.

This preceding discussion should facilitate a better understanding of the moving nature of the concert scene in which Zeki’s voice somehow will not come out. For someone’s voice not to come out on stage before a large audience conjures up the fear of being castrated, the fear of losing

31 Ibid., 104-105.

the wholeness of identity and body, and the shame engendered by all of these (as experienced under the gaze of the other). This “defect” relating to the body and subjectivity then continues with the appearance of being a murderer in the eyes of others, a car crash (a metaphor for the fear of loss of power and lack of control), and the death of “identity.” In the next part of the film, the viewer encounters another Zeki who looks from a distance at the wholeness expressed by his lost voice and image. He is no longer Zeki Müren. He is in a rural setting and in the clothes of a poor man. He looks at a poster for the film *The Composition of Torment*, in which he appears, and then goes into the cinema. He sees his own image on the screen and hears his own voice from the record, and he weeps. While he is drinking *rakı* in the tavern under his own picture on the wall alongside the poster of the popular soccer team Fenerbahçe and reproductions of Ottoman miniatures, he hears his own voice on the record and weeps. It is worth noting that, at the time when the loss of identity and the associated corporeal alienation are played out, the location is rural. The rural setting serves to localize the sense of inadequacy created by the subject’s inability to be its own master, the lack of identity and poverty. In this scene, fears with reference to subjectivity and the national sense of self are interconnected and conjure up one another. It is the fear of remaining a parody, of being pushed to the very bottom, the very pits of society, of being turned into a laughing stock and degraded, of appearing in the role of *İbiş* on the social stage. It is the fear of being the object of vulgar, coarse, wild, and masculine pleasures, of being part of the excrement of the *alaturka*. It is the feeling of being trapped inside the stage of the past and the inability to escape from there. All these fears culminate in an enduring wound to pride: the torment of Turkishness. In terms of location, the rural setting is the glue which binds the sense of inadequacy, deprivation and restrictedness on the subjective level to the shame and fear of humiliation engendered, in terms of the national sense of self, by falling into the backwoods of the modern world, missing the boat, appearing late on stage, and appearing to be *alaturka* in the gaze of the West.

Zeki’s voice is restored with an operation. When he appears on stage, he first continues with the impersonation. In the midst of howling laughter and merriment, somebody stands up and throws a tomato in Zeki’s face. Zeki, unable to endure any more, begins to sing the song in his regained voice. The auditorium is gripped by a deep silence. The camera pans back through the audience to reveal two policemen watching Zeki and remains on them. Following this moment, when the regaining of voice collides with subjection to the law, the conflict will be resolved and

Zeki's innocence, in the gaze of the law and to the satisfaction of his conscience, will be proven. With Zeki turning towards "himself" along with his voice, he also turns towards the law. This relationship with the law that is the condition for the constitution of the subject—that is, the return of the conscience—is the thing that also paralyzes the law's critical questioning. In this sense, the narrative connects the fear of loss of self and all other related fears, through the mediation of guilt, to the law. The promise of identity, for which the presence of voice is the metaphor, may be realized through turning towards the law and taking one's place within society as a subject who has now cleared his name of crime and accusation and become a "good" citizen and beloved performer again.

For all that time while he was on the run, Zeki actually was under the surveillance of the law in the guise of the character Ali. This is not a figure of authority who commands allegiance through coercion, order or force. Rather than discipline, he brings (self-)punishment and surveillance. This self-restraining and self-punishing voice is the voice of Zeki's own desire for subordination. Zeki turns to this voice. By means of subjection to this voice, Zeki regains his social existence.<sup>32</sup> At the end of the film, when "Zeki Müren" returns and the national-modern stage is reconstructed, Nermin's inauspicious gaze will be replaced by the gaze of the conscience in tears, by Ali. It is a splendid acoustic mirror.

### Constitutive excesses of Turkishness: Dandy and rural

One must also realize that this acoustic mirror is not a cure-all. Is the mirror a structure not only of wholeness, but also of a boundary within time, a boundary that we cannot penetrate, however hard we try? The imaginary level of human subjectivity, known as the ego, constructs a split subject between two statements: "This is me" and "I am *another*." This is why the ego is always an alter ego. This constitutive alienation is not only the source of narcissism, but also the source of masochism and sadism in human relations. When speaking of Classical Turkish music, of the power of Zeki Müren's voice to connect with the common ideal and the dream of the nation, intangible spiritual ties, nobility and civility,

32 The turn towards the voice of the law creates a kind of (mis-)recognition that the subject cannot acquire an identity in any other way. In this sense, the appeal of the misrecognition caused by the subordination that is the price of subjectivity or of the wish to turn towards the law is in that this is the only way in which the subject can guarantee its existence. The social existence that is gained in the embracing always-already by the guilty subject of the law appears to imply an incorrect and transient wholeness. The subject that subjects to the law and that desires subordination in order to guarantee its existence binds itself to the law with this narcissistic desire. In fact, this scene of misrecognition is "the sign of a certain desire to see the face of authority and come under its surveillance," an "acoustic mirror." *Ibid.*, 112.

and an exalted, spiritual Turkishness, there will be those who balk at the introduction of bad/perverted pleasures such as masochism or sadism. There will also be those who say that such pleasures are banished from the acoustic mirror of national subjectivity. There is some truth to the claim that the acoustic mirror portrays spiritual purity, spotlessness, and wholeness. However, it would conversely be facile to assume that the rejected, suppressed and excluded have left the stage entirely.

Perhaps Seniha, who serves as protector and promoter in *The Awaited Song*, and Nermin, who forcibly commands allegiance in *The Broken Record*, are not such diametrically opposed characters after all. Does the same not apply to the heartless, rough, and common rural domineering character who forces Zeki to appear on stage as *İbiş* and to the voice of conscience, *tuluât* player Ali? Do not the fear of extreme Westernization embodied in Nermin and the fear of being powerless, inadequate, and imitative portrayed in the rural setting serve as an invisible, secret support, a subterranean breeding ground of pleasure, for the squeaky clean spiritual bonds that tie modern/national bodies together?

One of the sources of disharmony in *The Broken Record* is the rural, rough, coarse, masculine crowd. The other is the malevolent woman, Nermin who, in opposition to the loving and compassionate Leyla (Belgin Doruk), is rich, foppish, out to get all she wants, and openly expressive of her sexual desires. Following the departure of Nermin who has demeaned him, brought his virility into question and hurt his pride, her husband breaks a glass in his hand, causing his hand to bleed. What is striking in this scene is the blurring of gender boundaries and the fudging of the categories of “woman” and “man” in this woman’s relationship with Zeki. Nermin— who in the film embodies dark and malevolent pleasure, who has been conceived of as a “masculine” woman, who with her proclivities towards drink and cigarettes, night life, parties and sex deceives her husband and then taunts him to drive home his powerlessness—has short hair and tends to command and control Zeki.

The threat posed by the coarse and merry masculine masses in the countryside with their *alaturka* pleasures finds representation in the character of Nermin as a womanly threat. But both threats are inseparably intertwined with a fear of the unconscious. Andreas Huyssen speaks of just this: the fear of the masses is always also a fear of woman, a fear of nature out of control, a fear of the unconscious, of sexuality, of the loss of identity and the stable ego boundaries in the mass.<sup>33</sup> Nermin, saying

33 Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approach to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 189–190.



"You have become part of me, Zeki, nobody will be able to take you away from me," is a dark, corrupting, and stifling force who also creates guilt. She orders, controls, and procures sex on command; this position of domination that blurs the boundaries of the sense of self and invites subjugation is represented in a close-up of her long fingers stretching out towards the bedside lamp after she has persuaded Zeki to acquiesce. This besieging, encircling force which subordinates and drags into darkness is like the embodiment of the fear of the unconscious, the fear of losing the boundaries of one's identity, the fear of sexuality, and the fear of the masses with her inability to know what she wants (Zeki: "What do you want from me? I have paid my debt a million times over with my good name, life, and honor. Enough! If what you want is love, there can be no love with blackmail"). This intertwining is also expressed in one moment in the film. In Zeki's words, the masses and Nermin imply one another: "I hit it off with the public even on our first encounter. I became the fan, the captive of the masses before me. But this has been crushing for me. In return for all that I have gained, I have lost my sense of self; I have become Nermin's slave." Nermin, who gets everything she wants, has entangled Zeki in a net from which there is no escape and thereby is the leading embodiment of extreme sexuality and extreme Westernization. She is the representation of a woman-like mass fantasy that is irrational, corrupted through consumption, and out of control, but at the same time the cause of concern engendered by the fudging and volatility of social sexuality; torment engendered by subjugation and dependence; concern about losing the wholeness of sense of self and body; being castrated; and the feeling of ultimate guilt.<sup>34</sup> To the extent that Seniha is exalted and noble in *The Awaited Song*, Nermin is similarly obscure and malevolent in *The Broken Record*. While Seniha, with her addiction to the enigma of the past, is the voice of national-modern pedagogy and the mother-universe's authenticating gaze, Nermin is the inauspicious gaze that gives rise to the feeling of inadequacy and powerlessness.

Let me then return to an earlier question: what possible need can the squeaky clean bonds that tie the nation together, the power of Turkishness, have for these dandy or rural domineering characters? What kind of relationship connects high-minded emotions like love, conscience, compassion, pride, and virtue with malevolent pleasures like sadism, masochism, voyeurism, and narcissism?

34 In *The Final Composition*, Semra is a similar character. She is both rich and powerful. This character who openly expresses her sexual desires and gives voice to haughty and demeaning words is, with her short hair and in the scenes in which they ride horses, "masculine" in appearance and attire, a seductive and dominant force.

The first possible answer is that subjugation to the law can be brought about by means of suppressing or eliminating the obscene masters that represent unconscious fear or perverted pleasures. Apart from this, these masters appear in the dimension in which interpellation fails, over and beyond interpellation—in other words, in the place where social power is lacking. At the end of the narrative, the obscene masters will create the desire for subjection (to symbolic authority). As well as being the antithesis of symbolic authority, they are the source of the emotional investment that safeguards the functioning of symbolic authority. The relationship between the discourse of power and the obscene master is not merely one of exclusion or suppression, but also of dependence. The component to be negated is itself unwittingly protected by the act of negating; suppression is supported by the libido whose suppression is being attempted.<sup>35</sup>

The component that upsets the image of a modern nation, formulated through radio, Turkish Art music, and Zeki Müren's voice, is Nermin. The interests of subjection to social power and production of subjectivity demand that the desire embodied in this component be suppressed. In order for it to be suppressed, it is clear that this desire must first be played out. Do the scenes dominated by Nermin—by negating through encompassing such fears as confused social sexuality, loss of virility, loss of control and the destabilization of the borders of the sense of self—not testify to the domineering nature of snobbish desires? This depiction of the subject held captive by foppish desires comes straight out of the world of forbidden desires. Do the same circumstances not apply to the rural domineering character? In the depiction of the obscene master's deprivation, poverty, roughness and coarseness, does the quality of being local/*alaturka*, prohibited and denied within the formulation of national unity, not receive protection and become reconstituted?

The fears created by the very thing that we call social power (loss of voice, loss of sense of self, indebtedness, dependence, being turned into a parody, being ridiculed) return in the guise of the dandy or rural domineering character. It is essentially these masters who create the unconscious desire with reference to social power and who embrace Turkishness. One can say that the obscene masters split the discourse of power itself from the inside. The discourse of power only functions by means of excluding these masters that are its own libidinal foundation.<sup>36</sup> As such,

35 According to Butler, repression and desire cannot be separated, because repression is also a libidinal activity. The body sustains the moral interdictions in order to continue desiring. She also claims that the agent of moral law is indeed its most serious transgressor. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 55-56, 79.

36 This is conceptualized by Slavoj Žižek as inherent transgression: "The power edifice itself is split from

we must add that the key ingredient of the bond that ties the members of the nation together is the censored quality of being dandy or rural. The dandy domineering character—who depicts the subordination that is the price of the subject's coming into existence, the primitive defenselessness in the face of power, and the openness of power to abuse—as well as the rural domineering character—who is reduced to a figure of ridicule, mockery, scorn and abasement and appears in those ungainly scenes in which the subject is made into a parody—are like corporeal excesses which form the basis for power itself. It must be for this reason that the sadistic pleasures, which infuse both characters, turn into masochism when one embraces social power. The heartless rural domineering character's twin is the self-restraining and self-punishing voice of conscience. The shadow twin of Nermin, who dominates and procures allegiance through guilt, is Seniha, who protects and safeguards. We see that this dependence is made very clear in the script. Nermin, who threatens to take Zeki's life, is at the same time the force that has rescued him from the reality of privation and given him a new life. Zeki rises to fame with the aid of Seniha in *The Awaited Song*, and with the aid of Nermin in *The Broken Record*. The same rage born of dependence is also directed towards Seniha. But Zeki will launch his diatribe against her with tears in his eyes, crying like a child: "What right did you have? Who gave you the audacity to play with my dignity? Did you think that I was incapable of pulling myself up by my own bootstraps? If only you had left me and I had opened the doors of this hall by myself. This bought voice is not mine!"

It is as though the obscene excesses of power give succor to the belief that, by turning towards power's interpellation, one will be able to discard the feeling of corporeal insecurity or even immaturity that itself derives from dependence on power. Social power's castrating force changes location though the mediation of the obscene domineering characters that compensate for the castrated nature of social power itself. What enables a subjectivity that consents to self-punishing, culturally sanctioned

---

within: In order to reproduce itself and contain its Other, it has to rely on an inherent excess which grounds it—to put it in the Hegelian terms of speculative identity, Power is always-already its own transgression, if it is to function, it has to rely on a kind of obscene supplement. It is therefore not enough to assert, in a Foucauldian way, that power is inextricably linked to counter-power, generating it and being itself conditioned by it: In a self-reflective way, the split is always-already mirrored back into the power edifice itself, splitting it from within, so that the gesture of self-censorship consubstantial with the exercise of power. Furthermore, it is not enough to say that the 'repression' of some libidinal content retroactively eroticizes the very gesture of 'repression'—this 'eroticization' of power is not a secondary effect of its exertion on its object but its very disavowed foundation, its 'constitutive crime', its founding gesture which has to remain invisible if power is to function normally." Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, 26-27.

torment to be produced is the release of secret, subterranean pleasures through the mediation of sound and image. Consequently, the basic, but at the same time rejected, ever invisible and denied formative sin that gives succor to Turkishness is being dandy/rural. This formative desire/sin that divides Turkishness—for as long as it is not openly accepted, remains invisible, and is inhibited—perpetuates power.

Subterranean pleasures come once more into play in the relationship that the viewer enters with the film. Zeki Müren's image in these films is heavily laden with a sense of foppishness, which in Turkey has been denigrated and denied in literary and cultural life. The reflection in Zeki Müren's body of the narcissistic wound in the national sense of self, the torment created by ex-centricity, and the turning of this body into a spectacle tickles our desire to be the master of our own body and sense of self. This depiction of subordination as the price of existence is a way of placing us within the national-heterosexual framework, because this national fantasy, even while making constant tacit insinuations as to Zeki Müren's homosexuality, in appearing to purge him of accusation and culpability creates the heterosexual norm. Simultaneously, the formative sin of being dandy, the desire to be another, the sin of transvestitism, for as long as it remains invisible, is rejected and denied. It will continue to beguile us through denial as a secret, subterranean source of pleasure and obscene surplus. If Classical Turkish music is the shrouding memory of the past, Zeki Müren's image is also the image that both represses and discloses this denied base of Turkishness. If Classical Turkish music is the voice of suppression of the past, Zeki Müren is the voice of suppression of being dandy. The national-heterosexual sense of self is only able to hear its own voice with the suppression and denial of homosexuality that is turned into a sadomasochistic emotional economy by means of dandy and rural masters. In other words, the suppressed dark desires inevitably eroticize the oppressive power, Turkish exaltedness itself.

This must be the reason why eroticism based on obedience and the domination of Turkishness can only be represented in the image of Zeki Müren. His image has found its place in that tormenting void of Turkishness in which the comic clashes with the exalted, the obscene with pure spiritual bonds, and sadomasochism with narcissism.

## References

- Ahıska, Meltem. *Radyonun Sihirli Kapısı: Garbiyatçılık ve Politik Öznellik*. İstanbul: Metis, 2005.
- Arslan, Tümay. *Mazi Kabrinin Hortlakları* [Specters of the Graveyard Called the Past]. İstanbul: Metis, 2010.
- Belge, Murat. "Batılılaşma: Türkiye ve Rusya." In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Volume 3: Modernleşme ve Batılılık*, edited by Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, 43-55. İstanbul: İletişim, 2002.

- Bora, Tanıl. "Milliyetçi-Muhafazakâr ve İslamcı Düşünüşte Negatif Batı İmgesi." In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce Volume 3: Modernleşme ve Batılılık*, edited by Uygur Kocabaşoğlu, 251-268. İstanbul: İletişim, 2002.
- Bozdoğan, Sibel. *Modernizm ve Ulusun İnşası: Erken Cumhuriyet Türkiyesi'nde Mimari Kültür*. İstanbul: Metis, 2002.
- Bozdoğan, Sibel, and Reşat Kasaba, eds. *Türkiye'de Modernleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Gürbilek, Nurdan. "Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2-3 (2003): 599-628.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Erkek Yazar Kadın Okur: Etkilenen Okur Etkilenmeyen Yazar." In *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe*, 17-50 İstanbul: Metis, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Kadinsılaşıma Endişesi: Efemine Erkekler, Hadım Oğullar, Kadın-Adamlar." In *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark: Edebiyat ve Endişe*, 51-74 İstanbul: Metis, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark*. İstanbul: Metis, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Orijinal Türk Ruhü." In *Kötü Çocuk Türk*, 94-134 İstanbul: Metis, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2-3 (2003): 599-628.
- Huysen, Andreas. "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other." In *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approach to Mass Culture*, edited by Tania Modleski. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Jusdanis, Gregory. *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*. University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Koçak, Orhan. "Kaptırılmış İdeal: Mai ve Siyah Üzerine Psikanalitik Bir Deneme." *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 70 (1996): 94-153.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits: A Selection*. London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1977.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso, 2005.
- Parla, Jale. *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1990.
- Özbek, Meral. *Popüler Kültür ve Orhan Gencebay Arabeski*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1991.
- Stokes, Martin. *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Tearful Public Sphere: 'Turkey's Sun of Art,' Zeki Müren." In *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean*, edited by Tullia Magrini, 307-328. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Zeki Müren: Sun of Art, Ideal Citizen." In *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- "Top 10 Greatest Ottoman Artists of All Time." In *Ottoman Art Blog: The Weblog of an Empire*, 2010, <http://ottomanblog.wordpress.com/2010/10/02/top-10-greatest-ottoman-artists-of-all-time/>.
- "Traditional Theatre, Ortaoyunu." Turkish Cultural Foundation, [www.turkishculture.org/performing-arts/theatre/traditional-theatre/traditional-theatre-ortaoyunu-288.htm](http://www.turkishculture.org/performing-arts/theatre/traditional-theatre/traditional-theatre-ortaoyunu-288.htm).
- Žižek, Slavoj. *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. London: Verso, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Frigate of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory*. London: BFI, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Casuality*. London: Verso, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.