

National Musics Across Borders: Theorizing Music-Power

Histories of many nation-states have traces of changes paralleling one another in the political and cultural domains. Establishment of a new regime is usually reflected in establishment of an understanding of a new “national music”. Music in this sense can be regarded as an ideological state apparatus in Althusserian terms, considering the way the state empowers itself through music. The First National Congress of Music was assembled in Mexico in 1926, in an effort to determine the music that fits the national identity which is proper for the post-revolutionary state. Likewise, the classical music of the Ottoman court was excluded from conservatory curricula in Turkey in 1920s so as to ensure that the new state gets rid of the remnants of the fallen empire in every domain of social life. On the other hand, the power relationship between music and the state is not merely one of a hierarchy. The state can well be disempowered by music and find the only way out by despising musicians, as in the case of Shostakovich in Stalin’s Soviet Russia. Those interplays of music-power might result in emergence of new genres which, rather unsuccessfully in the eyes of the state, manage to spread beyond borders and become transnational. Chalga of Bulgaria and Arabesk of Turkey, in a similar way, emerged as a reaction against the imposed folk musics by the state and found routes to become popular in different countries in Europe. This paper aims at finding a theoretical common ground for the relationship between music and the state concerning national and transnational outcomes of political processes. Wittgenstein’s understanding of meaning, Althusser’s understanding of the state and Bourdieu’s understanding of field will be benefitted from in explaining the parallelism between interplays of music-power in different countries in the 20th century.

Nevin Şahin is a research assistant at Yildirim Beyazıt University, Turkey. She holds an MS degree in Social Anthropology and is a PhD candidate in Sociology. Her fields of interest are ethnography of music, anthropology of religion, migration and transnationality, and qualitative research methods.

Serkan Özçifci is a research assistant at Hacettepe University, Turkey. He holds an MS degree in musicology and is a PhD candidate in Music Theories. His fields of interest are music theory and early music.