

# The Impact of Political History on Music Making: Issues of Ethnicity on Jazz in Turkey Between 1923-1955

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*Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History Conference Proceedings*

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**The Impact of Political History on Music Making:  
Issues of Ethnicity on Jazz in Turkey Between 1923-1955**

In the early days of the Turkish Republic, jazz music used to be a symbolic genre of the music scenes of Istanbul, framed as a ‘Western style’ of entertainment. On the contrary of its mainland United States, in Turkey jazz never became a music culture expressing racial or political issues, moreover, it was in the center of entertainment culture until 1950s. In addition to the performance of early jazz and swing repertoire, in the early years of the Republic, the term jazz (*caz*) used to denote all Western forms of dance music, including tango, waltz, foxtrot or tunes from Tin Pan Alley repertoire.

When I started my research in 2011, literature on the history of jazz in Turkey was limited<sup>1</sup> and these studies mostly relied on archival research, with two<sup>2</sup> exceptions using in-depth interviews to collect historical data. I had started my own research by searching both a series of printed and musical primary sources, such as the music magazines and private collections on the subject. But reaching out these written sources and earlier musical recordings required personal contacts, and with each personal contact came a narrative of the era, which very soon made oral history my main approach in the survey of jazz music in Turkey.

As a work in progress, my research consists, as of today, of 22 interviews, which I conducted with Turkish jazz musicians in Turkey, between the years of 2011 and 2014. 10 of these in depth interviews belonged to musicians who were in their sixties or up, born between 1920-50. Although my focus was on music and jazz in particular, I collected their life stories as a whole. Put altogether and cross examined with the written and musical sources, these narratives provided me with the main structure of the historical development of jazz music in Turkey, but also with information about its reception and perception.

What is more relevant here, the narratives also revealed many memories on how the musicians of Armenian and Jewish origin were instrumental in that history. It is during these interviews that the issue of non-Muslim musicians, the so-called minorities of the Turkish Republic, came forward as the agents of promoting, producing and disseminating the jazz culture in Turkey. As the interviews deepened with jazz musicians, their narratives also revealed important traumatic moments they experienced as minorities of an increasingly Turkified nation-state, as members of a rather marginal sector of a larger domain of popular music.

The narratives revealed that the political history had a significant impact on music making, particularly on the cultural politics of ethnic identity. To comment on the history of jazz in Turkey, we need a brief survey of how Turkish nationalism influenced minority politics of the Republic between 1923-1955, until the events of the so called “6-7 September Events” of 1955, when an organized public riot against non-Muslim business owners in Istanbul, resulted in mass migration of non-Muslim citizens from Turkey to abroad. In pursuing this historical research, my informants were all Turkish musicians, but their

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<sup>1</sup> See Mimaroglu (1958), Davran (1995), Meriç (1999), Tunçağ (2010), Kahyaoğlu (2010).

<sup>2</sup> While Wodall (2010) focused on the entertainment culture in Turkey throughout the 1920’s, Tekelioğlu (2011) drew an outline of the jazz venues since 1940.

narratives had a clear focus on their encounter with Armenian and Jewish musicians in the field of jazz music in Turkey. This encounter, I observed, had references to different emotions, including admiration and envy at the same time. It had also painful aspects, bringing at times religious and ethnic origins face to face in the shadows of rising nationalism. The narratives I collected revealed therefore a 'Turkish' point of view from prominent figures of the 'Turkish jazz', who experienced the early years of jazz music on the rise, along with the stories of non-Muslim social actors of that era. The interviews laid out an important array of historical data on the events, people and institutions, but they also included paradoxical contradictions, which made it crucial for me to cross-examine with an archival research on the newspapers and art magazines in order to confirm the dates and the names mentioned in the narratives.

### **Turkish Nationalism and Its Reflection on the Music Politics of the Republic**

In 1923, Turkish Republic was established on the remains of a multi-ethnic and multi religious Ottoman Empire. After the collapse of the Empire after WWI, defining the Republic's national culture under a single 'Turkish' identity had been a means of salvation, gathering people under a 'single flag' ideology.

On the construction of the 'Turkish' identity, the national leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk defined the cultural agenda mainly as a combination of the values of Europe and Anatolian culture. Ziya Gökalp was among the chief intellectuals of the era, influencing Atatürk's views, by defining the West as the model of this new 'civilization'. Music, was in the upfront of the Republican reforms, as a promising new national genre which could reflect the identity of this 'civilized' Turkish nation. Ziya Gökalp himself wrote on which particular musical culture should represent 'Turkish' identity, by classifying musical traditions under three headings (1923):

- (1) 'Western', to define the European polyphonic music,
- (2) 'Eastern' to denote Ottoman / Turkish modal makam music (rooted in Byzantine heritage) and,
- (3) 'Original', to indicate the traditional folk music of Anatolia.

The new regime defined the fusion of 'West' and 'Origin' music cultures as the music of the Turkish nation, while refusing the makam music of Ottoman heritage. Classical Ottoman music was even banned it from the national radio during 1934-35 for 20 months. As a means of achieving that musical ideal, Turkish composers were sent abroad for training on European classical music. They were expected however to include folk melodies in their works as a reflection of the nationalist culture to be invented. In the context of Republican policies on fostering European classical music, attention on jazz music came as a surprise. Dance music such as tango, waltz or foxtrot was quite popular among the cultural elite due to the 'State Balls' or other social dance events. Soon, all Western derived popular music began to be called 'jazz' by the mainstream music producers and consumers. An anonymous writer wrote in one of the leading culture and arts magazines of the 1930s, *Music and Art Movements* a disapproving commentary about the rise of jazz music:

This jazz craze didn't influence the countries with a proper taste in music. However to us, it was like a germ eating us, since we are the head of the nations who doesn't have a music culture.

"Jazz and Cocaine", 1934.

## Minority Politics of Turkish Republic and the Events of 6-7 September 1955

After the defeat of Ottoman Empire in World War I, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923, officially ended the war and between Turkey and the Allies countries. The treaty not only recognized Turkish sovereignty within its new borders, but also pledged the status of non-Muslim citizens in Turkey, the so-called “minorities”, to preserve their national, religious, economic and cultural status. This, however, did not change the new regime’s approach to unite its citizens under ‘one single’ nation, a Turkish one, resulting in a variety of discriminatory policies against non-Muslim, and in some cases, non-Turkish populations. Established on a rather displaced population through years of exile, war and migration, since the early years of the single-party regime of the Republican People's Party (RPP), Turkey went through a series of challenging experience. The first of these was perhaps ‘*Mübadele*’, the population exchange between Greece and Turkey mainly in Aegean and Thracian communities in 1924. Early Republican years also witnessed the migration of Armenians from the rural areas of Asia Minor into urban centers. To foster the Turkification of the economy, many non-Muslim employees in foreign firms were replaced with Turkish ones, between the years of 1929 and 1934. In 1942, the Wealth Tax application approved by the National Assembly directly targeted to control the pioneering role that Armenians, Greek Orthodox and Jews had in the economy (Güven 2011). The Wealth Tax, aimed to decrease the efficiency of the non-Muslim industrialists and tradesmen in the economy, thus empowering the Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie’s position in the Republic’s economy.

Transition to democracy occurred with the establishment of ‘Democratic Party’ in 1946 and their success in 1950s elections marks the transition to multi-party system in Turkish Republic. As Gül Pınar Gülboy suggests, the change of ruling party was the key to the change of the ruling elite, and the change of the economic system from a state controlled capitalism to liberal one (2010). After the elections in 1950, it was expected that Democratic Party would follow a more favorable approach about minority groups in Turkey. However, this proved to be wrong. On 6-7 September 1955, an organized public riot took place against non-Muslim business owners in Istanbul. The government was later accused of having provoked the events. The memory of this trauma was documented with an oral history project collected in a book.<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarship reveals today that the events resulted in plunder and destruction of 4214 homes, 1004 work place, 73 churches, one synagogue, two monastery and 26 non-Muslim schools (Aktar, 2010), triggering fear among non-Muslim ethnic and religious groups besides the financial loss.<sup>4</sup> Although the number of deaths is uncertain, the press of the time reported more than 10 deaths (Güven 2011). The events resulted in a great wave of migration from İstanbul, reaching 5000 Greeks leaving İstanbul between the years of 1955 and 1956, followed 70.000 Christians between the years of 1955-1962<sup>5</sup> (Dilek 2005).

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<sup>3</sup> See Bali (2010).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the origins and conspiracy about the riots, see (Güven 2011), (Aktar, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Numbers quoted in a broadcasted interview with Prof. Dilek Güven, at NTV on 5 September 2005. For transcriptions see <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/340288.asp> (28.04.2014).

## Narratives of Early Performance of Jazz Music in Turkey: The Role of Non-Muslim Musicians

It is this political framework of Turkey that jazz music was performed. Although my interviewees were Turkish, they all revealed a cultural domain in Istanbul which was directly affected by minority politics of the government. The oldest of my interviewees was born in 1925, making possible to date the earliest memory of jazz to the end of 1930s. Nevertheless, given his age, a critical assessment of the secondary sources was necessary to write about this rarely documented early period of jazz in Turkey.

İlhan Mimaroglu who has been the pioneer in writing on jazz music in Turkey, published in 1958 a book called *Caz Sanatı* (The Art of Jazz), where he also shares with his readers his own journey of pursuing jazz music in Turkey. He was a jazz enthusiast, writing critics and playing harmonica, before moving to New York for composition education in Columbia University. There he became one of the leading electroacoustic music composers. His book also portrays earlier jazz musicians in Turkey. He mentions, for instance, an Armenian violin player Leon Avigdor, who apparently is the person who brought jazz to Turkey. Apparently, after hearing jazz during a visit to Paris, Avigdor decides to learn alto saxophone (1958: 122). According to Mimaroglu, Avigdor formed a band with the “Ronald’s” consisting of alto saxophone, banjo, and drums, and on piano, Belarusian pianist Kolya Yakovyef, who escaped to Istanbul after WWI. On 1925-26, they used to perform popular pieces of ragtime, early jazz and Tin Pan Alley repertoire such as ‘Alexander’s Ragtime Band’ and ‘Dardanella’. Mimaroglu also states that this was a dance orchestra, they also used to play tango and while they played tango, Leon Avigdor grabbed his first instrument violin (1958, p. 122).

Mimaroglu does not tell us how the story of Leon Avigdor came up. During my in-depth interviews with the jazz musicians, nobody remembered Avigdor himself. When I asked however how Mimaroglu found out about him, my oldest interviewee Cüneyt Sermet stated: “He probably heard it from the elders”. Since I couldn’t come up with Avigdor name on archival research, it is high possibility that Mimaroglu obtained this information through personal conversations, which once again showed that origins of jazz music in Turkey had been traced down through oral history even before my research. What is also crucial here, Mimaroglu’s narrative was the starting point of some other succeeding narratives, which repeated the same story on the origin of the history of jazz music in Turkey.<sup>6</sup>

Two other sources also state an earlier account of jazz music in Turkey. According to Alexandrov (2013) and Adil (1990), African-American jazz impresario, Frederick Bruce Thomas was the one who introduced jazz to Istanbul. In Thomas’s biography, Alexandrov states he was born in Mississippi in 1872 then moved to Russia 1899, then escaped to Istanbul after Bolshevik Revolution (2013). On January 20, 1920, he opened “The Royal Dancing Club” at 40 rue de Brousse in Pera in which together with jazz, European style dances such as foxtrot and tango used to be performed by the orchestra (Alexandrov, 2013, pg. 246). Thomas was also founder of Istanbul’s Maksim, the most popular dance hall of the 1920s in which he introduced the first jazz band performed in Turkey in 1924. In his memoirs on the entertainment life of Istanbul in 1920s, Adil states:

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<sup>6</sup> See Davran (1995), Meriç (1999), Tunçağ (2010), Kahyaoğlu (2010), Tekelioğlu (2011).

Istanbul heard the first real jazz band in Maksim. This orchestra was called ‘7 Palm Beach’ and consisted of seven Negroes who all were virtuosos.[...] Palm Beach jazz band, not only taught Istanbul what jazz means, but every musician learned the tempo of jazz from them.<sup>7</sup>

Fikret Adil, 1990, p. 21

According to Adil’s story, Thomas gave their resident orchestra the duty of listening to 7 Palm Beach every night to learn to repertoire and the arrangements they used to play. However, listening was never enough for them to learn that ‘sophisticated’ music, so that each night after the performance, the scores were locked up by the management to the safe box. But Thomas led his resident musicians to copy those scores without the permission of the members of 7 Palm Beach. After the band left, Maksim’s resident orchestra directed by Yonko started to play their arrangements (1990, p. 22). This resulted in Turkey’s primary acquaintance with jazz music as performed by local musicians.

Alexandrov compiled the biography of Thomas through a detailed research on the archives and libraries, and by conducting an oral history interview with Thomas’s grandson. Adil includes the statements on jazz in his book consisting of his own memoirs of Istanbul entertainment life. On the process of archival research on the era’s newspapers, I came up with advertisements of 7 Palm Beach and Thomas’s clubs.

Mimaroglu states that in the 1920s, ‘jazz’ word is used to define all western derived popular music dance styles such as tango, samba, waltz besides jazz and jazz band is used for orchestras playing entire Western dance music styles (1958, p. 12). All of the orchestras playing dance music were called jazz band and all ‘foreign’ styles were defined as jazz music, so that jazz word used to denote the ultimate other in a way. One of the earliest dateable account of jazz band traces back to 1926 that has found in in the “Whimsical Newspaper” which used to be published in Ottoman:

In our day, a perfect *cazband*<sup>8</sup> would be preferred to classical music orchestras all over the world. It started in a ship for the first time with the influence of the primitive negro music of Americans. Since there was a lack of various instruments so that they found sleazy instruments. *Cazband* also proved that people need another kind of music. Piano, violin, violoncello, drums, saxophone, banjo and oboe are the main instruments of the *cazband*. Especially saxophones and various cymbals give even the simplest melody a sweetness that can’t be described. However, *cazband* killed the real and classical Western orchestra. However in the east and among us, *cazband* satisfies the European music pleasure. Our ears, which are numb to classical orchestra, understand *cazband* easily. It can be said that *cazband* serves for the acquirement of music taste among us<sup>9</sup>.

“Modern Addictions: Dancings, dances and jazzbands”,  
Meraklı Gazete, 16 September 1926, 2

The narratives of the jazz musicians and the accounts of two interviewees born in 1925 both referred to the Armenian bandleader Gregor Kelekyan. Hülya Tunçağ wrote: “In 1936, Gregor Kelekyan, an Istanbul Armenian started his band Gregor Jazz Band and gave concerts in Europe and United States” (Tunçağ, 2010, p. 14). Actually Tunçağ’s article on ‘Jazz in Turkey’ is one of the most reliable sources as I concluded through oral history interviews and

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<sup>7</sup> Translation of the quotations from secondary sources and oral history interviews made by the writer.

<sup>8</sup> Turkish word for jazz band, in some sources it is written as *cazband* while in the others it is written *cazbant*.

<sup>9</sup> Translation from Ottoman to Turkish by Özlem Bilge, from Turkish to English by the writer.

archival research. Furthermore, she was among the Cüneyt Sermet's pupils in Turkish National Radio and her article on the subject is the outcome of her conversations with Cüneyt Sermet. Another crucial name mentioned by four interviewees is Jewish musician Gido Kornfielt. Tunçağ suggests that he was a trombone player and had a band consisted of 10 musicians, which is started in 1938 and disbanded during World War II (2000). However Hasan Kocamaz claims that Gido Kornfielt was his trumpet teacher.

Throughout the narratives of the jazz musicians, there were several common concepts that have observed during the conversations. One of them is 'authenticity' and the debate of what 'real' jazz is. Cüneyt Sermet stated that Kelekyan's Orchestra used to play jazz in the end of 1930's in Sarıyer region and he added "But what is called jazz back than were all the dance music's of the era, it's not real jazz". For instance, Cüneyt Sermet claims that the first jazz band in the 'real' manner used to perform in the 1940's, at the venue called Tea Room in Beyoğlu region and consisted of Armenian brothers Arto Haçaturyan (trombone), Dikran Haçaturyan (trumpet), the Jewish musician Victor Kohenka (drums) and Halis Akıncı (tenor saxophone). According to him, before than that, all jazz attempts can be classified under the heading of dance music. Hasan Kocamaz also used the 'real' word during our conversations. When I asked him what real jazz bands perform in their repertoire, he listed the standards made popular by swing bandleaders such as Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw and compositions by Duke Ellington.

Another common theme is declaring the pioneers. In addition to the 'firsts' in the story up to now, İlham Gencer claims that Gregor Kelekyan's eight piece band, which started in 1944, was the first jazz band in Turkey. This first band included himself on the piano, Kemal Sural with the nickname 'Badi' Kemal on trumpet, Mehmet Akter on clarinet, Türkan Pasiner as the singer. They used to perform at Miami Restaurant located in Baltalimanı.

The narratives of jazz musicians who experienced the 1940s and 1950s often implied that Armenian and Jewish musicians had a musical superiority and a 'higher' understanding of music. For instance İlham Gencer emphasizes the contribution of non-Muslim minorities as follows:

Among the Armenians, that music is far beyond. After being exposed to the minorities, something happened to me, I developed a sense of inferiority. This is the reason I always wanted to become a leader and supported young musicians.

İlham Gencer, 2012

However, as also can be observed in Gencer's statement, the feeling of 'otherness' and a struggle of acceptance to a scene dominated by Armenian and Jewish musicians were among the concerns. Hülya Tunçağ states that the first 'Turkish' origin jazz musician who was accepted to an orchestra consisting of non-Muslim musicians was the drummer Şadan Çaylıgil. Çaylıgil was a member of Gido Kornfielt's orchestra consisting of 10 musicians, which was initiated in 1938 (2000, p. 14). Actually, while non-Muslim citizens accepted as 'others' of the society, Turkish musicians' acceptance to the local jazz scenes shows a reverse concept of 'otherness'.

I performed with non-Muslim musicians a lot, as a matter of fact, they accepted me and few other Turkish musicians among them. Once I remember playing a wrong note, one of them got really furious at me! They were quite serious musicians, not like today's children.

Hasan Kocamaz, 2011

Considering the fact that both Ottoman makam music and Anatolian folk music are monophonic and heterophonic in essence, the definition of ‘civilized’ music made by the opinion leaders of Republican era embraces polyphony. Another significant jazz personality in Turkey, Emin Fındıkoğlu explains Armenian musicians’ proximity with jazz:

They are familiar with polyphony. If you go to an Armenian church, there are choirs consisting of 3 or 4 parts. This doesn’t exist in our Mosque music. Everything is monophonic. We went to Onno Tunç<sup>10</sup>’s father’s funeral at an Armenian church and there was choir singing fabulous. Onno said that he was a member of that choir as a child. That’s the reason. They grew up on it.

Emin Fındıkoğlu, 2012

On 1949, İlham Gencer formed an orchestra with the aim of performing live at Turkish National Radio. He said the repertoire included tunes like ‘Caravan’, a standard made popular by Duke Ellington and a Duke composition ‘In a Sentimental Mood’. The orchestra included guitarist Turhan Taner, armonica player Hasan Kocamaz, and trumpeter Willy with his taken Turkish name Veli Laik (Hungarian), kontrbassist Çarli Rahçi (Armenian). Veli became a Turkish citizen and performed in popular jazz venues throughout the 1950’s. About the trumpeter Willie’s story of taking the name of Veli:

In 1937, there was a popular restaurant called ‘Canlı Balık’ next to Sarıyer pier. Atatürk used to visit that place with his yacht. To that venue, a lot of musicians from Europe came, especially Hungarian musicians. Willie used to perform in one of those bands, sometimes on trumpet, sometime on violin. I think he was Hungarian Jewish. There was a story between him and Atatürk, which is told like a legend. Atatürk asked for a specific piece from Willie. But the orchestra didn’t know the piece, so they played something similar instead. Then Atatürk said, “I didn’t buy it Veli”. After that story, people started to call him Veli, instead of Willie.

Cüneyt Sermet, 2013.

An emphasis on ‘Turkification’ can be observed in the case of Willie taking the Turkish name of Veli, which is a story brought by four interviews. When I asked about the early performances of jazz:

Now we can say that, without fear, Armenians and Jewish community became the pioneers of many art movements in Turkey, as in theatre and also in jazz. We can say that without fear. But are they primary reason that these movements exist? I don’t know.

Cüneyt Sermet, 2013

The sensitive nature of ethnic issues in Turkey can be observed in Sermet’s statement by repeating the same phrase twice: ‘without fear’. Sermet’s declaration on the importance of non-Muslim musicians on the jazz scene marks the strongest theme of the conversations, which is a confusion of nationalist discourse and declarations of nostalgia.

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<sup>10</sup> Armenian music producer and jazz bassist. His arrangements of Turkish pop diva Sezen Aksu’s albums are quite influential on the creation of Turkish pop sound.



I have huge respect and love to Armenians. There was a record store in Beyoğlu region, 'His Masters Voice' company owned by Armenian Vahram Gesaryan. They used to bring amazing jazz records to Turkey and they knew I was a jazz lover. Again in Beyoğlu region, there was a record shop owned by a Jewish father and his daughter. When the new jazz records came, they used to send me the news. I used to go there and have conversations with the owner such as "Does Lester Young plays better in this record or the other?" Once, I never forget that story, a wealthy *Hacı Ağa*<sup>11</sup> entered the store. That father and daughter were playing the new records for me and we were having conversations about the music. Then *Hacı Ağa* said, "Give me 100 sonorous LPs from there". And the Jewish owner said, "Don't you see, we are doing something important here, we are listening to music. Wait for your turn". I had the money for just one record and *Hacı Ağa* was about to buy 100 records. But that reply that Jewish owner gave, there used to live such precious people in Turkey.

Cüneyt Sermet, 2013

As mentioned earlier, the Wealth Tax implementation on Armenian, Greek and Jewish citizens, with the aim of the 'nationalization' of the capital, had a deep impact on the decrease of economical power of ethnic and religious minorities. 'His Masters Voice' record company owned by Vahram Gesaryan used to be located in the İstiklal Street in Beyoğlu sold to Sümerbank as an indirect result of the 'Turkification' of the economy. Sümerbank is still located in the same building. As quoted by Ayhan Aktar, that incident took place in Cumhuriyet newspaper as:

The building owned by His Master's Voice Company bought by Sümerbank and we gladly wrote that it is allocated as a part of Local Good Market of Beyoğlu. In that manner, another beautiful building has nationalized.

(2000, p. 205)

The events of 6-7 September 1955, marks a milestone in the political history of Turkey by resulting in huge numbers of immigrations of non-Muslim citizens. An interviewee who doesn't want to reveal his name stated that many wealthy Armenian and Jewish citizens immigrated to Europe or United States after that incident. İlham Gencer stated that Gregor Kelekyan was an Armenian from Istanbul, but he immigrated to USA later on.

Among those who dominate the local jazz scene after 1955, only one individual referred by all other musicians with valuable contributions to the development of jazz music in Turkey with 'other' ethnic or religious origin is Hrant Lusigyan. A 1919 born alto saxophonist, who passed away in 1993, was among the victims of the events of 6-7 September 1955. Altan İrtel states that Hrant had a petit point shop with his sister in Beyoğlu, but he lost of all of his assets when the attackers plundered his shop during the events of 6-7 September 1955. In the interview conducted by Cezmi Ersöz with Lusigyan, he recalls the morning of 7 September:

I woke up and went to my shop. There was just the skeleton left. I was looking around without knowing what to do. I found fifty liras on the floor. It must have fallen on the floor when the attackers took what was inside of the safe. I was so happy about finding that money, you cannot imagine.

Hrant Lusigyan (quoted in Ersöz, 1994)

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<sup>11</sup> It means landowner Muslim pilgrim and a derogatory term used to denote the rich villagers immigrated to Istanbul from Anatolia.

As his narrative transmitted by interviewees, Lusigyan used to perform in jazz clubs as a side activity before than that incident. However after he lost all of his assets, he had to make a living by playing in music clubs. How he spent the last years of his life in the nursing home of Surp Pirgiç Armenian Hospital in loneliness, as a result of the damage of 6-7 September events narrated by two interviewees. The story of Lusigyan therefore represents a direct influence of those attacks on the local jazz scene. Yet, another memory of the events 6-7 September:

We followed the attackers on Istiklal Street in Beyoğlu. The first store, which took the sledgehammer, was a beautiful store selling records and music instruments. The shop window explodes like a bomb. The records of Nat King Cole and Münir Nurettin Selçuk were flying on the air. The violins, guitars, records, scores are all collapsed and lost their music lives.

Tevfik Yener (quoted in Bali, 2010, pg.50)

The tragedy caused by the attacks to non-Muslim business owners not only influenced the jazz scene directly, but also resulted in the transition of the economical power in the music business as many record stores owned by Armenian or Jewish citizens.

İlham Gencer as a veteran Turkish nationalist, who took the name of Bozkurt<sup>12</sup> with a court case, displays a nationalist approach on his memory of the events of 6-7 September:

I used to perform at İzmir Fair, a club called Mo Gambo when the events of September 6-7 occurred. After that night, that club had closed down. The attackers destroyed and burned down whole İzmir. The club that I worked was the only place survived, because I saved there by making a psychological move. The attackers thought all fair was full of Greeks and they assumed that they targeted the non-Muslims. However, the attacks were not just targeted to Greeks, they were demolishing everywhere. One of the attackers came with a rod and tried to take the microphone from my hand. I punched him and started to sing '10<sup>th</sup> Year March'<sup>13</sup>. After that move, the attackers joined me singing the march and left the club. That night the music not just saved me, but everybody in that venue.

İlham Gencer, 2012

Besides a heroic declaration of 'Turkishness', this statement might be regarded as an indication of how entertainment venues are conceived as non-Muslim spheres of the performance of Western music.

As a result of my oral history interviews with the aim of revealing the historical periods, the jazz musicians who were quite influential between 1955 and 1970 can be listed as Erol Pekcan (drums), Emin Fındıkoğlu (piano), Selçuk Sun (double bass), İsmet Sıral (tenor saxophone), Altan İrtel (piano), Hasan Kocamaz (harmonica), İlham Gencer (piano), Ayten Alpman (vocals), Sevinç Tevs (vocals), Müfit Kipek (trumpet), Hrant Lusigyan (alto saxophone), Günnur Perin (trombone), Süheyl Denizci (vibraphone), Melih Gürel (french horn), Maffy Falay (trumpet), Tülay German (vocals). Among those who dominate the local jazz scene after 1955, only one individual with 'other' ethnic or religious origin is Hrant Lusigyan. On the influence of the events of 6-7 September on jazz scene of Turkey, Orhan

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<sup>12</sup> Bozkurt means greywolf and signifies Nationalist Movement Party.

<sup>13</sup> A nationalist march dedicated to Atatürk, including the lines of "We are Turkish and our chest is bronze shield of Republic".

Tekelioğlu quotes one of his interviewees: “We figured out how jazz scene dried after ten years” (2011). As can be observed from the prominent figures of the scene, musicians of Turkish origin started to gain dominance in the scene after 1955.

To conclude, one can state that the narratives of the jazz musicians in the early Republican era in Turkey reflect the pioneering role of the non-Muslim musicians in this field. Governmental policies on ethnicity and economics, had a direct impact on the way music was produced. Following the events of 6-7 September 1955 and the discriminatory policies thereafter, the sector of jazz performance had been ‘nationalized’ through the changing hands of the record shops and performance venues. Given this framework, 1950s emerge as a rather paradoxical era regarding ethnicity and empowerment. Government policies had a negative effect upon non-Muslim jazz musicians for sure, by pointing to their ‘otherness’ as ‘minorities’ of the Republican regime. But the situation was just the reverse, in the field of jazz music, where they had powerful positions which made many musicians of Muslim origins feeling as ‘minorities’. Narratives of Turkish jazz musicians reveal mixed feelings regarding the important place of non-Muslim pioneers of jazz in Turkey. On the one hand, there is a widely accepted feeling of disapproval on the political events like the 6-7 September riots and the unfair treatment and discrimination towards non-Muslim communities in general. On the other, however, there is also a remembrance of strongly felt barriers to be included in this new form of Western music, which gave them feel a ‘minority’ status in the early decades of jazz music in Turkey. Based on these emotional perceptions and experiences resulting from early governmental policies, it is perhaps not so hard to see how jazz music has evolved from its popular stance towards a more elite status. This musical form which was adopted as the new social music of the modernizing Republican era among the non-Muslim communities, turned out to be framed more as a genre of ‘high culture’ among its Muslim performers.

**Oral History Interviews:**

Altan Irtel (jazz pianist), interview conducted in February 2013 in İzmir.

Cüneyt Sermet (jazz critic, radio programmer and double bassist), interview conducted in August 2013, in Izmir.

Emin Fındıkoğlu (jazz pianist, educator), interviews conducted in April 2011, November 2012 in Istanbul.

Eray Turgay (jazz double bassist), interview conducted in November 2012 in Istanbul.

Ergüven Başaran (tenor saxophonist), interview conducted in May 2013, in Istanbul.

Hasan Kocamaz (harmonica player, jazz club owner), interview conducted in June 2011 in Kilyos.

Ilham Gencer (jazz pianist), interview conducted in February 2012, in Istanbul.

Maffy Falay (jazz trumpeter), interview conducted in December 2012, in Istanbul.

Neşet Ruacan (jazz guitarist, educator), interviews conducted in February 2012 and May 2013, in İstanbul.

Selçuk Sun (jazz double bassist), interviews conducted in January and March 2013, in Istanbul.

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