

# Turkey's Cultural Cold War: Turkish-American Relations and the Emergence of Anatolian Rock

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## Abstract

This paper mainly examines Turkey's cultural history during the Cold War. Despite a significant number of studies regarding the political and military history of the Cold War, cultural reflections on Turkey derived from bilateral relations with the United States have usually been neglected. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to fill in some gaps in the Cold War literature. In this manner, the paper mainly aims to provide a new interpretation of the development of Anatolian Rock. The essential argument is that during the first twenty years of the Cold War period, the trend of Turkish-American relations directly affected the emergence and structure of Anatolian Rock music. In the 1950s, with closer ties to the USA, young artists were highly influenced by American music, especially Rock'N Roll. But during turbulent times of the 1960s in Turkish politics, such as the military coup and the Cyprus problem, Bayar's idea of "a tiny America" was contested.

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## Introduction

On April 5, 1946, the USS Missouri, an American battleship, arrived in Turkey to bring the corpse of one of the most critical Turkish diplomats, Münir Ertegün. The Turkish government and the public welcomed this gesture from the US. On the same day, in one of the most prominent newspapers, *Cumhuriyet*, Nadir Nadi published an article with the following headline: "Welcoming the sailors of friendly America".<sup>1</sup> Only five days after the arrival of the USS Missouri, another journalist of the *Cumhuriyet*, Abidin Daver, demonstrated this gesture as a manifestation of Turkish-American friendship.<sup>2</sup> Both Nadi and Daver were journalists and politicians. While Nadi was a Member of the Parliament (MP) from the Democrat Party, Daver served as an MP during the single-party period. As they revealed, starting from April 1946, Turkey and the United States began to have much closer relations on the eve of the Cold War. Particularly during the 1950s, the Democrat Party gov-

<sup>1</sup> See more in Nadir, Nadi (1946): Dost Amerika'nın denizcilerini karşılarken. *Cumhuriyet*, 5 April.

<sup>2</sup> See more in Abidin, Daver (1946): Eski Dostluğun Yeni ve Parlak Bir Tezahürü. *Cumhuriyet*, 10 April.

ernment in Turkey implemented highly pro-American attitudes. Even President Bayar, the former Prime Minister of Atatürk, wishfully called Turkey “a tiny America”.<sup>3</sup>

From sending troops to Korea to becoming a member of NATO, Turkish decision-makers sought closer ties to the West, especially to the US, hoping for the country’s economic growth and the rise of its military power (Lippe 2000, 92 – 102). Accordingly, the general tendency among historians has usually been to focus on military and political dimensions. In other words, much of the current literature concentrates on developments that emphasize mostly high politics (Üngör – Örnek 2013, 2). However, beyond military and economic objectives, closer ties with the United States caused momentous transformations in the public’s cultural and intellectual life, which have usually been neglected. Besides a limited number of studies, these mainly concentrate on developing Turkish literature, architecture, and ideological conflicts within society.

Even fewer studies concern Turkish music progress despite the importance of Ertegün and his sons, Ahmet and Nasuhi Ertegün, in transforming both American and Turkish music industries. While Münir Ertegün was organizing receptions in the Turkish embassy for African American jazz musicians during his mission, his sons were the founders of Atlantic Records.

In this manner, this paper mainly aims to provide a new interpretation of the development of Anatolian Rock. The fundamental question is how a generation of young musicians who had studied in various western schools of the country, such as Robert College, Üsküdar American Academy, and German School of İstanbul<sup>4</sup> was influenced by the Cold War dynamics and played a role in transforming Turkish Anatolian music. The essential argument is that during the first twenty years of the Cold War period, the trend of Turkish-American relations directly affected the structure of Anatolian Rock. In the 1950s, with closer ties to the US, young artists were highly influenced by American music, especially Rock’N Roll. But during the turbulent times of the 1960s in Turkish politics, such as the military coup and the Cyprus problem, Bayar’s idea of *küçük bir Amerika*<sup>5</sup> (a tiny America) was contested. The 1960s was a decade of transformation for Turkey, and with the changes in domestic politics and foreign policy, the image of the USA had shifted (Alkan 2017, 933 – 987). This deterioration of diplomatic relations and the rise of Kemalism contributed to the transformation of Anatolian Rock. Instead of performing a complete “American” style, their music evolved into a more hybrid style with traditional structures at the forefront. It also turned into a protest against mainstream American music and the development of an “authentic” music genre called Anadolu Pop-Rock (Camgöz 2020).

3 See more in Celal, Bayar (1957): 30 Yıl Sonra Küçük bir Amerika Olacağız Dedi. Cumhuriyet, 21 October.

4 Further examples: Turkish İstanbul Alman Lisesi and German Deutsche Schule İstanbul.

5 Küçük bir Amerika Olacağız Dedi, 1957.

## The 1950s: American sailors and the outbreak of Rock'N Roll

In the 1950s, Rock'N Roll swept across the United States. From "Rock the Joint" by Jimmy Preston to "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley & The Comets<sup>6</sup>, the music spread in all countries by crossing the borders of the United Kingdom and the United States. And Turkey, as a country building a solid relationship with Western countries, especially with the US, had already begun to be affected by this "outbreak".

After the arrival of the Missouri Battleship, Turkish-American relations started to blossom. The Agreement on Aid to Turkey within the framework of the Truman Doctrine was signed on 12 July 1947, which would soon become a foundation for most of future bilateral agreements (Bilgiç 2015). However, the Doctrine was not the only significant development for Turkey. During the 1950s, this gesture and economic aid immediately continued with the visits of many American musicians, who performed in Turkey (Erkal 2014, 43). Dizzy Gillespie and Quincy Jones were two of the most influential musicians, who gave concerts in Turkey.

As for the most notable aspect of these visits, the collaboration of Turkish-American navies led to almost all those performances by American musicians. Many American naval officers organized various receptions and parties in the Sports and Exhibition Hall located in Harbiye (Erkal 2014, 51). In other words, the first Turkish encounters with Rock'N Roll musicians occurred through the gates of *nizamiye*. The critical audience was first both the professional military personnel and a young generation serving their compulsory military duties.

A famous jazz artist İsmet Sıral was one of these people influenced by American musicians during his military service. He tried carrying the music he observed to the stages and formed the "Big Band" orchestra in 1951 (Erkal 2014, 45). However, because his music was not widely accepted in the early 1950s, Sıral could not be as popular as later in the 1960s. Despite the short-term failure of Sıral, naval officers continued to carry out the music genre they had embarked on. In 1957, for instance, another vital attempt was made in *Bahriye*. "Somer Soyata ve Arkadaşları" was emerged within the Naval Academy (Meriç 2017). Although five young students of the Academy came together to form the first Rock'N Roll band, it was not welcomed by their commanders, and once again, the band could not continue to perform their music (Erkal 2014, 60).

Despite all the failed attempts, these first encounters introduced a new type of music to the public. The outbreak of Rock music eventually spread beyond the military circles in the late 1950s. Taking into account the popularity of many American artists, such as Elvis Presley or Chuck Berry in the US, it would be difficult to prevent its influence outside the military and its Turkish intellectual environment.

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<sup>6</sup> Although it is difficult to determine which was the first Rock'N Roll song, the consensus is that it was the "Rock Around the Clock" released in 1954. See more in Erkal, Güven Erkin (2014): *Türkiye Rock Tarihi*. [The History of Turkish Rock]. Esen Kitap.

## The spread of the “Devil’s Music” in Turkey

*“Dut ağacından teknesi, kiri<sup>10</sup>ten bağlı perdesi.  
Behey insanın Teresi, şeytan bunun neresinde?”*  
(Aşık Dertli)

The Ottoman folk poem above, entitled “<sup>a</sup>eytan Bunun Neresinde” (“Where is the devil on it?”) and written by Aşık Dertli, responded to those who claimed that playing *bağlama/saz* was against Islam and should be restricted in the Ottoman Empire. Dertli however argued that the Turkish traditional musical instrument, *saz*, does not belong to the “devil”, so there is nothing to be afraid of. Although it is a poem from the Ottoman period, when authorities did not always welcome (such cultural) changes, it can also be adapted to modern Turkey’s developments in the mid-twentieth century.

In 1956, Rock’N Roll music increased its influence in the public sphere. In 1956, the records of Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and Jerry Lewis were introduced to Turkey, and the first Rock’N Roll book, *Dünya Sarsılıyor*, was published (Erkal 2014). While these developments were taking place, people thought this music was harmful to Turkey’s ethical values, and that it was unsuitable for social morality. It was even officially requested that this type of music should be banned from the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> However, neither magnitude of these criticisms nor negative attitudes towards the music were enough to discourage a generation of young musicians. This generation was educated in modern Turkish high schools with western values.<sup>8</sup> During the late 1950s, students of these current institutions were impressed by the records of American artists, mostly Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry, and started to spread their songs in various student organizations, proms, and parties. Erkin Koray, one of the most influential figures in the history of Turkish music, was one of them.

Although jazz, rumba, and salsa were more popular on the radio compared to Rock’N Roll, Koray had an opportunity to listen to one of Elvis Presley’s songs. He immediately formed a band with his friends from the German School of İstanbul (Özkarabekir 2010). Koray thus represented the classic western rock stars by leaving home early, entering the commune life, and growing his hair (Solmaz 2017, 1007). The band (“Erkin Koray ve Ritimcileri”) became very popular in a short period with two concerts they gave at Galatasaray High School and Üsküdar American Academy.<sup>9</sup> Inspired by Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley, Koray became one of the idols of young people and contributed to the spread of Rock’N Roll (Erkal 2014). One of these young people who eventually became the essential representative of Anadolu Pop-Rock was influenced by this outbreak. His name was Cem Karaca. After he graduated from an American institution, Robert College, Karaca’s music career started under the influence of the trend, and he spent most of his time cov-

<sup>7</sup> See more in Striptease ve Rock’N Roll’un yasak edilmesi istendi. Milliyet, January 8, 1957.

<sup>8</sup> Robert College, Üsküdar American Academy, and the German School of İstanbul could be the best examples.

<sup>9</sup> Another vital figure of Turkish Anatolian Rock music, Barış Manço, was in the audience at Galatasaray High School, another vital institution adopting the French school of education.

ering Rock'N Roll songs. Even his father, initially protesting against American-style music: booed him while singing Elvis's songs on stage (Güler 2018, 27).

Consequently, this outbreak, which entered the country through American naval officers, seemed striking to the young musicians at the time. One of the prominent musicians, Şanar Yurdatapan once stated: "This excitement led us to find a group called "The Comets" in 1958. Rock'N Roll was fashionable that year, and everybody aimed to imitate what they heard well..." (Yurdatapan 2006). They played and sang the current songs on the radio and read in the newly established music magazines. If the Platters were singing "Only You", or "The Great Pretenders", Turkish musicians were singing them too; in other words, they never stayed behind (Büyükburç 2006). Thus, in the 1950s, the American musical influence on a generation of Turkish musicians was overwhelming.

Finally, the American soldiers not only started but also brought an end to this trend, and therefore, they caused a massive transformation in Turkish-American relations for the next decade.

## The return to Kemalism and its influence on Anatolian Rock

Unlike the 1950s, the American image of the 1960s was replaced by an idea full of insults (Alkan 2017). While the dynamics of world politics influenced Turkey, it was also trying to reveal its characteristics (Alkan 2017). Added to Turkey's internal turmoil, foreign policy and actions of the USA had been equally effective in damaging the US-Turkey relations and, consequently, the Turkish perception of the US. The Vietnam War had already damaged the prestige of the US. Along with the Vietnam War, the US attitude towards the Cyprus problem also contributed to the shift of the US image in Turkey.

The standoff between these two countries turned into hatred among the public and intellectuals. And ultimately, Turkish music was highly influenced by these new attitudes. All those musicians of the 1950s who became the representatives of American Rock'N Roll music in Turkey took a different approach in the next decade. Despite their western-educated background, they turned into a more traditional musical style with a strong protest against American music. It is also worth noting that the rise of Kemalist ideas after the coup was an essential trigger for this transformation.

On 3 February 1958, the Turkish Prime Minister, Adnan Menderes, was put on the cover of *TIME* magazine with the title: "Turkey's Premier Menderes". According to the report, Menderes had become more autocratic and more sensitive to criticism every year in the office, and Menderes ultimately shaped Turkish policies. *Yenigün* was the only newspaper criticizing the magazine's article claiming that Menderes is the greatest Turk since Atatürk. Ultimately on 27 May 1960, only two years after the cover story of *TIME*, the first military coup appeared in Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Under the rule of Cemal Gürsel, The National Unity Committee dissolved the Turkish Parliament and started to work on a new constitution classified as more democratic

<sup>10</sup> The leadership of Cemal Gürsel conducted it. He was a Commander of the Turkish Army.

and libertarian.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it also enhanced Kemalist ideas within society.

The US reaction to the reflections on Turkey's new constitution was pronounced regarding the ideological transformation of Turkey, which was based on more nationalist and Kemalist senses. In 1963, the official report from the İstanbul US Consulate to Washington D.C. demonstrated Turkish social and spiritual conditions. The report addressed that 27 May was commonly called a restatement of the ideals of Atatürk, and in this respect, the makers of 27 May brought a few new social ideas to the fore (Bali 2010). In other words, the military coup was an attempt to return to *Atatürkism* or *Kemalism*, which was considered an acceptable source of ideology (Bali 2010).

Another report from the Embassy in Ankara to the Department of State expressed Turkey's ideological nature in the 1960s. Robert S. Dillion, Deputy Chief of the Mission, defined the ideological atmosphere in bureaucracy and society as *neo-Atatürkism* (Bali 2010). After İsmet İnönü became the Prime Minister of Turkey, Kemalist ideas played a prior role in shaping Turkish politics and public opinion. In this respect, Dillion demonstrated that Turkey was narrowly nationalistic and aimed to enhance national strength and prestige (Bali 2010). Unlike the rule of the Democrat Party, an essential part of the reform included the avoidance of foreign cultures and the rediscovery of Turkish heritage. Therefore, İsmet İnönü's description of the Turkish ideological transformation is necessary to understand its reflections on the development of Turkish music that transformed into (a) more traditional (protest).

## From Rock'N Roll to Anadolu Pop-Rock

*Bakin şu deyyusun kaç tarlası var  
Aman da kızlar ne zor imiş burçak yolması  
Burçak tarlasında yâr yâr, gelin olması  
Eğdirme fesini yavrum, kalkar giderim  
Evini başına yâr yâr, yıkar da giderim.<sup>12</sup>*

Ziya Gökalp is an intellectual who pioneered the modernization movement in the field of music, which was tried to be actualized using official applications of the state since the first years of the Turkish Republic. In his famous book *Türkçülüğün Esasları*, he states "there are three types of music: oriental, western, and folk music. Which of these types of music is national for us?" (Gökalp 1923, 143). Further, he mentioned that since folk music characterized the Turkish identity and western music belongs to the new civilization, Turkish national music should be derived from both types. By the ideas of Gökalp, Mustafa Kemal also supported that Turkish national music should use western or modern musical techniques. Hence, a mixture of both local and contemporary elements is necessary.<sup>13</sup>

11 See more in Meclis feshedildi, yeni Anayasa ve demokratik müesseselerin kurulma hazırlığına başlandı. Cumhuriyet, 28 May 1960.

12 Tülay German: "Burçak Tarlası", 62 – 67p. Kalan Müzik Yapım, 2001.

13 Sami N. Özerdim. Atatürk ve Müzik. Düşünce Alanı, 18 January 1972.

After Kemalism started to dominate both the public and intellectuals, almost all Turkish artists under the influence of Rock'N Roll during the 1950s changed their musical style in line with Kemalist discourse. While some artists like Erol Büyükburç, Erkin Koray, or Cem Karaca were examples of this change, some musicians such as Tülay German and bands like Moğollar or Mavi Işıklar also appeared in this period.

The turning point in the transformation of Turkish Rock music dates to 1962. One particular alumnus of the Üsküdar American Academy, Tülay German, a former jazz artist, started to become famous in İstanbul. With the change in people's attitude towards music, she was convinced by her friend Erdem Buri to use Turkish poems as the lyrics of original American songs. Buri said to German: "You are not an American. Let them sing Jazz. You are a Turk. Why don't you sing your music in your language?" (German 2019, 92). Putting lines of Turkish poems in lyrics, he proposed using Western instruments with traditional melodies. Thus, Anadolu Pop started to spread among musicians in the 1950s.

Although with the increase in the number of artists performing Anatolian Rock, this "authentic" style was not widely accepted by the public at first. In 1962, after German enacted the new genre on the stage, criticisms started to appear. Once German gave a response to a group of audience who said that they came to listen to English songs: "As a person who graduated from an American school, I want to sing your folk songs, but you as a group of people from Adana, want me to sing English songs..." (German 2019).

Two years later, on 1-2 September, the 10th Balkan Melodies Festival took place in Belgrade. In order to represent Turkey at that festival, "The National Orchestra" was formed, including Tanju Okan, Erol Büyükburç, and Tülay German. The artists of "Milli Orkestra" performed Turkish songs in line with Western musical harmony. German's "Burçak Tarlası" (Eng. "The Vetch Field") became a hit not only in Belgrade but also in Turkey. With this performance, German was chosen as the favorite singer of the music critics, and she was on the cover of the magazine of *Arena* in Yugoslavia (German 2019: 112). Even she started to be called *Anadolka Tülay*, which means Tülay of Anatolia (German 2019). Therefore, this success of the National Orchestra contributed to the spread of Anadolu Pop in Turkey by the second half of the 1960s.

## The deterioration of Turkish-American relations and the rise of Anatolian Rock in the second half of the 1960s

*We used to put Elvis Presley's songs on the record. With an ear aptitude that comes with being a Robert College student, we would pull the lyrics from the record and sing whatever Elvis Presley said. Now, I don't care what those guys are doing. An American fascination with the vast opportunities provided by the American College at that time...*

(Cem Karaca)

Apart from the ideological changes in Turkey, another vital contribution to the development of Anatolian Rock was the change of perception in American image because of the attitude of the US regarding the Cyprus problem. More nationalistic/Kemalist ideas had already shaped Turkey. Anti-American attitudes in this context were not entirely separate from feelings toward the Greeks because of the long-standing US friendship with Greece. This shift was reflected in politics and was seen in Turkish intellectual and cultural life, especially in the development of rock music in Turkey. From the mid-1960s, most musicians – pioneered by Tülay German – started to evolve their essences. Especially German's record of "Yarının arkısı" was used as a propaganda song for TİP (Workers Party of Turkey), and Anadolu-Pop turned into a protest genre (Güler 2018). The Turkish government, especially the Justice Party, also promoted the development of Anatolian Rock.

The most significant attempt to promote the spread of this original music genre was the Golden Microphone Music Contest. It was organized by *Hürriyet*, one of the most popular newspapers. At this contest, musicians had to perform a song that synthesized both Turkish and Western musical elements. In 1965, forty-one different musicians performed with eighty jury members in this competition. The top three musicians, respectively Yıldırım Gürses, Mavi Işıklar, and Siluetter, became the first representatives of this organization which lasted only three more years (Erkal 2013). "Helvacı Helva", the song of Mavi Işıklar, is considered one of the most successful examples of this synthesis genre with its local lyrics and Rock'N Roll instruments.<sup>14</sup> The following year, Mavi Işıklar won second place again. Still, the band's song, "Çayır Çimen Geze Geze", was another vital illustration of Anatolian Rock because it was a modern version of an old Turkish folk song.

Among these four contests from 1965 to 1968, the most important was the one in 1967. One of Anatolian Rock's most influential and long-standing representatives became popular in this contest, whose name was Cem Karaca. Until 1967, Karaca had been influenced by American Rock'N Roll, primarily by Elvis Presley. But during his military service, the whole of his musical philosophy changed. He stated: "I missed my home and İstanbul. Behind our regiment in Antakya, there were mountains. I would look there, and I would have homesickness. And I said: No more Elvis Presley!" (Güler 2018). After too much exposure to the sound of *bağlama* and meeting with a famous Alevi Turkish folk poet, Aşık Mahsuni <sup>a</sup>erif, in Antakya, he decided to adapt his music to the new trend of the time by harmonizing Anatolian soul and the western instruments (Güler 2018). Thus, after returning to İstanbul,

14 Mavi Işıklar (2002): "Helvacı. Türk Pop Tarihi", Ada Müzik.

he started working with a band called Apaşlar. As he intended, Karaca and his band covered numerous pieces by folk poets such as Karacaoğlan, Dadaloğlu, and Pir Sultan Abdal. In 1967, they participated in Golden Microphone Contest, a song written by the nineteenth-century Turkish folk poet Erzurumlu Emrah.<sup>15</sup> Even though they won second place – Altın Çocuklar/The Golden Boys were the winner – they released two different songs.<sup>16</sup> Both were the rearrangement of two local poems, “Karacaoğlan” and “Emrah”.<sup>17</sup> These records can be considered a combination of Anadolu-Pop and the Beat. After Karaca left the band in the 1970s, his music turned into protest music using leftist discourse with his new band, Moğollar.

Since the 1967 Golden Microphone, the influence of Anatolian Rock music has continued to spread. In the 1950s, there was a continual shift from American music to Anatolian Rock. Erkut Taçkın and Erkin Koray started to write songs with Turkish lyrics and used traditional and local discourse in their music.<sup>18</sup> In addition to these changes, many new musicians and bands have emerged, such as Kaygısızlar, Haramiler, and Selçuk Alagöz. Thus, from the mid-1960s, Anadolu Pop as an “authentic” and unique genre could have been seen in newspaper headlines or billboards with its gradual development and success.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The Cold War substantially altered the ideological positions of the official circles and various social groups in Turkey during the second half of the twentieth century (Üngör and Örnek 2013, 2). The musical interaction between Turkey and the United States started when Turkey's Ambassador of Washington D.C., Münir Ertegün, hosted jazz musicians from all races, colors, and identities even during the segregated years in the United States. In 1946, the corps of Ertegün was brought to Turkey, which was finally seen as the manifestation of Turkish-American friendship on the eve of the Cold War.

Both the political and cultural trends highly influenced Turkish musicians in these two countries. In other words, during the first two decades of the Cold War, the music of politics dominated the cultural environment of Turkey. During the 1950s, American Rock'N Roll music came to Turkey through the interaction between Turkish-US naval forces and spread among young musicians studying at Western, primarily American institutions. After the military coup, however, those musicians transformed their music by returning to Kemalism. They adopted a music style that synthesized Western and Turkish traditional elements. The so-called Anadolu Pop was the result of this. However, their popularity in the 1960s could not last long. Again, it took a different path in terms of relations with the dynamics of Turkish

15 See more in Cem, Karaca – Apaşlar (2019): Emrah. Yavuz Burç Plak.

16 See more in Altın Mikrofonu Bu Yıl Altın Çocuklar Grubu Kazandı. Yeni Gazete (İstanbul), 7 April 1967.

17 See more in Cem Karaca – Apaşlar (2019): Karacaoğlan. Yavuz Burç Plak.

18 See more in Erkin, Koray. (1962). Bir Eylül Akşamı/Its So Long. Melodi Plak.

19 See more in Yeni Bir Beat Topluluğu – Moğollar, 4 December 1967. Yener Süsoy: Avrupa'yı Etkisi Altına Alan Bir Akım: Soul Müzik. 12 December 1967.

politics and was characterized as more political/left-oriented in the early 1970s.

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