

BOOK REVIEW OF

KIRSTEN SEIDLITZ. 2020. MUSIK & POLITISCHER KONFLIKT AUS DER TÜRKEI – KURDISCHE, ALEVITISCHE UND LINKE MUSIK IN DEUTSCHLAND [MUSIC AND POLITICAL CONFLICT FROM TURKEY – KURDISH, ALEVI, AND LEFTIST MUSIC IN GERMANY]. BIELEFELD: TRANSCRIPT.

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Abstract

This short review essay refers to the book of Kirsten Seidlitz ‘Musik & Politischer Konflikt aus der Türkei – Kurdische, alevitische und linke Musik in Deutschland [Music and Political Conflict from Turkey – Kurdish, Alevi, and Leftist Music in Germany], which was published in 2020 by the German Transcript Verlag in Bielefeld. It is written in German and addresses many important questions regarding political conflicts and their impact on music among various different Turkish people living in Germany. Migration and political participation are heatedly debated in recent times and also a part of cultural exchange.

Keywords

Book review, Migration, Musicians, Political conflicts



This book “Music and Political Conflict from Turkey”, written by a young German scholar working in Berlin, is written in German language. This is the mother tongue of at least 100 Million people in the world and the second language of many people living and/or studying in Germany. Being proud of the possibility to review an article in my own mother tongue in this journal, I want to emphasize that I try to be as critical as necessary since the entire problem is dedicated to a burning issue, not only in the context of Berlin or Germany.

The author focuses on live concerts and political expressions within this frame work that is measured by its transparency in terms of a musical conflict determination among Kurdish people, Alevi, and leftists in Germany.

This is seemingly very ambitious and difficult as the author has to agree to many limitations in access to territorial practice. The chosen personal examples are, therefore, rather the few that were available or supporting the claims of the author. Insofar, the point of departure is pretty narrow compared to the promises made in the introduction. The book is in itself quite obviously a development from an academic thesis that tried to focus on specific issues rather than serving the claim of comprehensiveness. Even the subtitle of the book “Kurdish, Alevi, and Leftist Music in Germany” seems too big for being discussed within a single writing. Nevertheless, the author tries to put many basic steps into perspective right from the beginning in the introduction, not without some contradictions.

The author names three research questions, yet does not differentiate much between them as they are all dedicated to political engagement and musical realization brought up through events in Turkey, in Germany, or as projected future impact on musical protest in Turkey.

The book is structured into four inner chapters after this and concludes with a wide-ranging bibliography that is worth the reading. The inner chapters are dedicated to the protest through music, the Kurdish, and the Alevi, which are then in a fourth step all together discussed in the last inner chapter under the title “Fazit” [Result].

The Fazit-chapter is then constructed in a way that it goes back to the initially mentioned research questions such as “Music as a political comment”, Recognition of musical diversity among musicians from Turkey within the German environment”, and also the “Hopes for music in a transnational context”. The author bases his statements on ten interviews made under different circumstances, yet following a strict scheme of generating statements. One very important criterium for interviews was the strict loyalty to self-indicated identities. It was not the author’s idea to create a system of ethnic or religious or political boxes. The interviewees themselves did name their own self-observation. This is one of the many practical solutions to the dilemma of diversity definitions in an evolving cross-regional context with cross-social boundary constructions. In contrast to this, the author defines answers rather based on language use or at least, puts language use in one row with musical elements or symbolic actions. The political aspect of commenting is seemingly reduced to the primary content of song texts, which is less supportive in terms of musical independency in creative expressions. Regarding musical creativity, the use of terminology is rather reduced to known common schemes. To give an example, she writes “Zwar verwenden sie viel traditionelles bzw. von traditionellen Kompositionsschemata inspiriertes Repertoire, doch arrangieren sie dieses häufig mit einem westlichen Touch. Sakîna bspw. tritt in zwei ihrer drei Musikkollektive mit klassisch-westlichen Instrumenten auf: Sowohl das Trio Mara als auch das Anadolu Quartet beinhalten keine spezifisch kurdischen Instrumente.” (on page 177) [Although they use a lot of traditional repertoire or repertoire inspired by traditional composition schemes, they often arrange this with a Western touch. Sakîna, for example, appears in two of her three music collectives with classical western instruments: neither the Trio Mara nor the Anadolu Quartet contain any specifically Kurdish instruments.] The author may have no space nor any intention to describe what traditional repertoire means in this context, what a so-called “Western touch” may imply, or what specifically Kurdish might be in any musical instrument. This is a hurting shortcoming which can only be compensated through further detailed studies.

In this core chapter, the author also follows a very disciplined approach in finding clear statements made in the earlier described interviews. One important moment is the expressed hope in most of the interviewees, that their musical engagement has an impact on the creative

community in Turkey and that living abroad may extend one's view on political issues. The author is fluent in naming some well-known musicians and influential organisers of musical events, so that can be concluded that this book has been thought to be mainly relevant to musicians from Turkey living in Germany. In order to dive deeper into the given facts and generated statements, one has to be familiar with the cultural environment of the interviewees and the life among their primary communities abroad. Looking at it from this perspective opens another view on the felt urge to permanently justify exile and the relationship between the social circumstances in the culture of departure and destination. This is, as I can see, a very important point of departure in studying diaspora and their work beyond the musical appearance.

This seems also be the reason why this book is a necessary addition to literature about music and political conflict.