

**Zeki Müren, A Prince from Outer Space:
Reading Turkey's Gender-Bending Pop Legend as a Transmedia Star**

by

Beyza Boyacıoğlu

M.F.A. Computer Art, School of Visual Arts, 2012
B.A. Visual Arts and Visual Communication Design, Sabanci University, 2009

Submitted to the Program in Comparative Media Studies/Writing in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

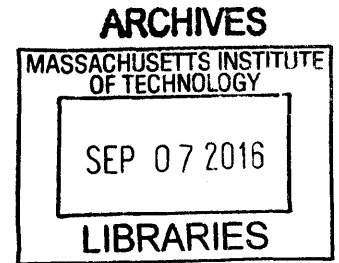
Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies

at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

September 2016

© 2016 Beyza Boyacıoğlu. All rights reserved.



The author hereby grants to MIT permission to reproduce and to distribute publicly paper and electronic
copies of this thesis document in whole or in part in any medium now known or hereafter created.

Signature redacted

Signature Author.....

Handwritten signature

Department of Comparative Media Studies/Writing
August 12, 2016

Signature redacted

Certified by.....

Handwritten signature
Signature redacted

Certified by.....

William Uricchio
Professor, Comparative Media Studies
Thesis Supervisor

Signature redacted

Certified by.....

Vivek Bald
Professor, Comparative Media Studies
Thesis Supervisor

Signature redacted

Accepted by.....

Sasha Costanza-Chock
Professor, Comparative Media Studies
Thesis Supervisor

Heather Hendershot
Director of Graduate Studies, Comparative Media Studies

**A Prince from Outer Space, Zeki Müren:
Reading Turkey's Gender-Bending Pop Legend as a Transmedia Star**

by

Beyza Boyacıoğlu

Submitted to the Department of Comparative Media Studies/Writing
on August 12, 2016 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies

ABSTRACT

Zeki Müren is Turkey's beloved queer pop star whose career spans a period between his first radio emission in 1951 and his death during a live television program in 1996. He is a pioneer of 'Turkish Art Music', a trailblazer in utilizing novel mass communication tools, a proud nationalist who donated half of his estate to Military Veterans Organization, and an LGBTQ solidarity symbol whose gender-bending image has been an inspiration to queer individuals in Turkey. Müren's artistic production and his star image contain multiplicity of meanings that have rendered him accessible to publics from various backgrounds, subcultures, and generations. This thesis examines Zeki Müren as a media text that is scattered across music (radio and records), cinema, *gazino* nightclub performances, and television, during his lifetime, and deconstructed and appropriated by fans, artists, musicians, and media makers after his death. Based on their ideological and representational affordances, these media together create a polysemy — multiple meanings that Müren's star image signifies — whose elements are often in tension with each other, while providing different entry points for different audiences. With the guidance of Richard Dyer's work on *intertextuality* and *structured polysemy* of star images, and Henry Jenkin's theory of *transmedia storytelling*, this research follows the traces of Müren's transformation from his radio days, to cinema, *gazino*, and television performances, while situating these textual analyses within Turkey's political, media, and LGBTQ histories. In addition, two media components in-production — a feature-length film 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren,' and a participatory and interactive documentary 'Zeki Müren Hotline' are interwoven into this intertextual and cross-generational conversation, emphasizing the generative polysemy of Müren's star image.

Thesis Supervisors

William Uricchio, Professor, Comparative Media Studies

Vivek Bald, Professor, Comparative Media Studies

Sasha Costanza-Chock, Professor, Comparative Media Studies

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Images.....	6
INTRODUCTION: The Many-Faced Turkish Pop Legend.....	7
CHAPTER 1: The Radio Star and Recording Artist.....	15
CHAPTER 2: The Talented, Naive and Amorous Musician of Melodramas.....	30
CHAPTER 3: The Flamboyant <i>Gazino</i> Nightclub Star.....	44
CHAPTER 4: The State Artist, Aging Parrot, and Queer Symbol on Television.....	57
CHAPTER 5: Posthumous Zeki Müren: The Model Citizen, The Resistance Icon.....	64
CONCLUSION: Reading Turkey's Gender-Bending Pop Legend as a Transmedia Star Through a Transmedia Project.....	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	94

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support of my mentors, family, and friends. I feel incredibly lucky to be surrounded by such a wonderful community.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with my wonderful advisors, William Uricchio and Vivek Bald, whose guidance and support were truly invaluable.

I would like to thank the brilliant members of Open Documentary Lab (ODL) who challenged my definition of non-fiction storytelling again and again every week, and encouraged me to undertake a transmedia project. I want to especially thank Sasha Costanza-Chock for helping me set up Zeki Müren Hotline and believing in this project from its very inception. I am incredibly grateful to have met Jeff Soyk at ODL; it was a true pleasure to co-create the Zeki Müren Hotline interactive documentary with him.

I want to thank my fellow classmates for all their support during the past two years; they have inspired me deeply. Thank you to Deniz Tortum for all his feedback and priceless camaraderie. Thank you to Lilia Kilburn for her relentless enthusiasm for this project. Thank you to Defne Kırmızı for being my greatest champion.

The best part of making a documentary is meeting people whose generosity never fails to surprise me. I want to thank my interviewees Derya Bengi, Demet Demir, Cem Başeskioğlu, Pınar Selek, Göksenin Çakmak, Güsel Bilal, Aysun Akıncı Yüksel, Ethnique Punch, Gaye Su Akyol, Nesren Jake, Yücel Ziyilan, Nermin Erol, Cem Temel and Hasan Bülent Kahraman, for their insight and time. I am indebted to all the anonymous participants of Zeki Müren Hotline. I am also grateful for the support of Lorans Tanatar Baruh and Merve Elveren at SALT Research in Istanbul.

I cannot thank my parents and my sister enough for always believing in me, encouraging me to dream, and their love. My grandmother was the inspiration behind this project. I want to thank her for being my childhood best friend and introducing me to Zeki Müren.

I want to thank Selin and Defne for *a/ways* being there, with love and patience.

Lastly, thank you Hayrettin for your unconditional love. Thank you for making me happy every day. Thank you for being my partner.

Images

<i>Figure 1: Zeki Müren record advertisement from 1952.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Figure 2: Zeki Müren record advertisement from 1955.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Figure 3: Zeki Müren record advertisement 1955.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Figure 4: Popular culture magazines featuring Zeki Müren.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Figure 5: Zeki Müren in Siemens radio advertisement.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Figure 6: Zeki Müren in a state reception.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Figure 7: Zeki Müren in Osman Paşa outfit in Tepebaşı Bahçesi 1960.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Figure 8: Zeki Müren in 'A Prince from Outer Space' outfit 1974.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Figure 9: Zeki Müren in Maksim Gazino 1960.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Figure 10: Zeki Müren in a women's matinee in Gençlik Parkı Yazar Aile Bahçesi.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Figure 11: Façade of Manolya Bahçesi in Izmir International Fair 1974.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Figure 12: Stencil of Zeki Müren's image and slogan.....</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Figure 13: Zeki Müren's image in a voting ballot 2014.....</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Figure 14: Sign that says "I asked Zeki Müren, he told me to #resist" Istanbul Pride 2013.....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Figure 15: Man holding a sign that says "We are Zeki Müren's soldiers!".....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Figure 16: Man holding a sign that says "We don't recognize another Paşa".....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Figure 17: Zeki Müren's stencil image on a wall.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Figure 18: Election poster with Zeki Müren.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Figure 19: Portrait of a Pasha.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Figure 20: "HOPE Join the army of Nesren Jake - (Zeki Muren)".....</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Figure 21: Illustrated story featuring Zeki Müren 'Libertango' by Sadi Güran.....</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Figure 22: Illustration from Gzone Magazine.....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Figure 23: Zeki Müren illustration by Melike Koçak.....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Figure 24: Turkish Art Music concert in TRT's Harbiye Studios.....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Figure 25: Wax sculpture of Zeki Müren in Sapphire Shopping Mall.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Figure 26: Drawing from İşte Benim Zeki Müren exhibition's guest book.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Figure 27: Police intervention at 2015 Pride Parade, Istanbul.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Figure 28: 2015 Pride Parade celebrations, Istanbul.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Figure 29: Zeki Müren Hotline flyer in a dolmuş minibüs, Istanbul.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Figure 30: Example of a morphing image from 'Zeki Müren Hotline' i-doc.....</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Figure 31: Still from 'Zeki Müren Hotline' i-doc.....</i>	<i>91</i>

INTRODUCTION

The Many-Faced Turkish Pop Legend

“Zeki Müren, you are the best thing that ever happened to us.”
— Anonymous message from Zeki Müren Hotline

One of my fondest childhood memories is of my grandmother accompanying me in my room for an afternoon tea party. During our lengthy conversations, I asked her to tell me the same stories over and over — the first time she had met my grandfather and how much she had been taken by the beautiful curls of his hair; marrying him at the age of 16 and having to move in with her in-laws; that time when she had chased my mother with a rolling pin for staying out too late; the incident of my uncle’s elopement which had caused a sensation between two families... Amongst the amusing, nostalgic, and sometimes bittersweet family histories stood out one occurrence that connected my grandmother to a larger narrative of her contemporaries: the first time she had come across Zeki Müren’s voice, which had later become a national legend uniting fans from various walks of lives. This encounter was added to the mix of other family memories, and my grandmother retold this incident over and over, as a major story from her youth.

Like my grandmother, Zeki Müren was also from Bursa — once an Ottoman capital, today a large industrial city with a fairly conservative population, and hometown to many classical musicians — and he was born a year after her, in 1931. During his childhood and early teenage years, Müren used to perform Turkish Art Music songs to an intimate crowd in his neighborhood. As a young girl, my grandmother had witnessed one of these happenings and had been struck by the velvet-like voice of Zeki Müren, without knowing who he was, or who he was to become. It was only years later, when she went to a live *gazino* show to see the famous Zeki Müren, she connected the dots: She had never forgotten his voice, so she had been a fan all along! Today, she still continues to be one.

Growing up with my grandmother, I had been exposed to the music and the image of the legendary pop star Zeki Müren since my childhood. I remember spending many evenings watching a Zeki Müren concert or his music videos on the state-owned television channel TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) of the late 1980s and early 1990s. In these performances, Zeki Müren always appeared in an incredibly flamboyant outfit, wore rings on multiple fingers of his manicured hands, had an intact golden hairdo brushed perfectly backwards, and had just the right amount of makeup that would have been considered modest on a woman's face. It was strange that my grandmother, a conservative woman who prayed five times a day, fasted during the whole month of Ramadan since she was a teenager, and who did not leave home without her headscarf, was a fan of a cross-dressing and rumored-to-be gay singer. I cannot say this was out of politeness or tolerance, knowing her as the sweet yet blunt and nosey grandmother, who had never held her opinion back for political correctness. For instance, during our teenage years, when my sister and I were going through a serious Tarkan¹ phase, our grandmother unapologetically stated her dislike of Tarkan because of his overtly feminine dance performances. She found it highly inappropriate when the popular comedian Seyfi Dursunoğlu crossdressed as his stage persona 'Huysuz Virjin' (Cranky Virgin), a foul-mouthed and flirtatious cabaret dancer. Yet, when it came to Zeki Müren, my grandmother simply ignored the aspects of the pop star that did not comply with her vision of the world, and just kept on admiring him for the rest of his qualities such as his elegance in style, his perfect vocals, his impeccable articulation of the Turkish language. And she was not the only one. 19 years after his death, Zeki Müren is still considered Turkey's national hero who earned the honor to be a state-sponsored artist, and the informal titles of 'Turkey's sun of art' and 'paşa' (high ranking Ottoman military general), whose legendary voice and contribution to Turkish Art Music and popular culture remain uncontested.

•

¹ Tarkan is a famous Turkish pop singer of 1990s and 2000s.

In *Stars*, Richard Dyer inquires why, how, and what stars signify. He says that “the set of ideas and representations in which people collectively make sense of the world and the society in which they live” namely ideology, is always at play in these investigations.

From the perspective of ideology, analyses of stars — as images existing in films and other media texts — stress their structured polysemy, that is, the finite multiplicity of meanings and affects they embody and the attempt so to structure them that some meanings and affects are foregrounded and others are masked and displaced. The concern of such textual analysis is then not to determine the correct meaning and affect, but rather to determine what meanings and affects can legitimately be read in them.²

Zeki Müren's star image contains multiple meanings that can accommodate various ideologies all at once. This polysemy is significant in Müren's success, because the way people of Turkey collectively make sense of their society is rather fragmented, and its parts are often in contradiction with each other. Starting in the late 19th century with Young Turks³ of the Ottoman Empire and accelerated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's⁴ revolution in 1923, Turkey had undergone an elite-led modernization process, whose principles have failed to permeate through all layers of the society, leaving the project undone, and entangled with what was supposed to be left behind. When Zeki Müren emerged as the face of Turkish Art Music and the first major pop star who truly moved and mobilized the public in 1951, his target audience was practically everyone. His public persona had to provide multiple entry points for audiences that are traditional and modern, eastern and western, national and cosmopolitan, religious and secular, and later in his career, straight and queer. Based on the reception of specific audiences, some of these values were blurred while others were foregrounded.

² Richard Dyer and Paul McDonald. *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 2-3.

³ Young Turks were a progressive 20th century movement in Ottoman Empire, who promoted a constitutional state and western ideals of Enlightenment, in lieu of the Empire's monarchy and religious law.

⁴ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is the architect of modern Turkish Republic. He rose as the leader of Turkish National Movement following the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I; mobilized the people of Anatolia to fight against the occupation of Allied powers and achieved independence; established Turkish Republic as a secular and democratic nation-state, breaking political and cultural ties with the Ottoman Empire by undertaking 'Atatürkian' reforms that were modeled after western ideals of Enlightenment. Atatürk served as the president of the country until his death in 1938.

When I interviewed my grandmother recently, multiple layers within Zeki Müren's star image and their selective perception were crystallized in one interesting example. I asked my grandmother if we can examine together the catalogue of a recent exhibition named 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' (It's Me Zeki Müren).⁵ The exhibition excavated Müren's monumental archives — stage costumes, letters, furnitures, diaries, notebooks, but most importantly hundreds and hundreds of photographs — that had been sitting in some chests in the storage room of Turkish Education Fund (TEV), a non-profit organization to whom Müren donated one half of his estate.⁶ When my grandmother was flipping through the pages of the catalogue, I asked her to comment freely on each image, while I occasionally gave her prompts to frame the conversation. Her initial comments were the usual suspects: Nobility and gentleness of Zeki Müren's character, the elegance of his unique outfits, how awe-inspiring his soft, yet meticulous voice was... When I asked her if she thought Zeki Müren's costumes were "perhaps a bit too feminine for a man", especially in a society that was considered traditional for the most part, she said no and added, "He was always very elegant." When I brought up the fact that he had even worn a miniskirt and high-heeled shoes, my grandmother said she does not remember such thing. She kept flipping through the pages until she eventually came across Zeki Müren in his 'A Prince from Outer Space' costume. She said that she did not recall those outfits.

This thesis initially examines Zeki Müren as a text that is scattered across various media and follows the trajectory of Müren's transformation from his radio days, to cinema, gazino, and television performances, while situating his public persona and artistic practice within Turkey's political, media, and LGBTQ histories. Secondly, interviews with fans, musicians, artists, and LGBTQ activists are added to this intertextual and cross-generational conversation, emphasizing the generative polysemy of Müren's star image. These testimonies were collected as a part

⁵ 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' was curated by Derya Bengi and sponsored by Yapi Kredi Private Banking and Yapi Kredi Kültür ve Sanat Yayıncılık. The exhibition traveled six cities in Turkey between 2014 and 2016, showcasing Müren's archives from his beneficiaries, Türk Eğitim Vakfı (Turkish Education Fund) and Mehmetçik Vakfı.

⁶ Güsel Bilal, interview by author, Bodrum, Turkey, August 18, 2015.

of a feature-length documentary named 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren'. In the film, archival materials and interviews unpack Muren's mystique, while scenes from contemporary Turkey chase the star's mythology into the present. In addition to the documentary, I set up a participatory telephone line named 'Zeki Müren Hotline' in order to gather stories and memories of everyday people about the pop star. Zeki Müren Hotline evolved into an interactive web experience created in collaboration with media artist Jeff Soyk, which will be discussed in detail in conclusion. The audio testimonies from Zeki Müren Hotline and other commonly recited rumor-stories are interwoven into this thesis; factual or not, they constitute a significant part of Müren's legend.

Based on their ideological and representational affordances, music (radio and records), cinema, *gazino* and television create multiple-layers of meanings that Müren's star image signifies, whose elements are often in tension with each other. At the same time, this polysemy provides different entry points for different audiences. As a result, Müren's story is told through a variety of channels, and each of these channels contribute uniquely to the unfolding of his grand mythology. Similar to Müren's star image, this research is also scattered across various media and methodologies; historical and archival research, textual analysis, a documentary in production, a participatory hotline and its accompanying interactive web experience (interactive documentary or 'i-doc') all come together to portray Müren as a *transmedia* star.

With the framework from Richard Dyer's 'Stars', this thesis explores Zeki Müren as a phenomenon of both production and consumption, and offers an ideological analysis of his work and star image. From the production perspective, Zeki Müren's emergence as a popular culture icon is closely linked to the Turkish Republic's modernization aspirations, the role of state-owned media institutions within this project, and the resulting economy that shaped Turkey's culture industry. While such complex sociopolitical and economic factors set up the behind-the-scenes framework of Müren's success, the public narrative of the star relied on his magic and talent, slowly but surely building his legend as a popular culture icon. On the consumption level,

Müren's skills in accommodating various publics' expectations rendered him a 'model citizen' — as his biographer Emine Aşan calls him in the last chapter of her book⁷ — as his public persona negotiated competing terms such as traditional and modern, eastern and western, national and cosmopolitan, intimate and famed, and so on. As a result, his star image offered Turkish society an ideal to aspire to, and his shapeshifting quality appealed to the inner wants of various publics. Finally, Dyer's exploration of the star as a constructed public character and the ideological implications of this phenomenon are interlaced throughout this analysis. Dyer's discussion of stars as preserver of the status quo and reinforcer of values under threat is especially interesting in relation to the case of Zeki Müren because dominant and threatened values in Turkey are often in flux, and swap places every other decade; Müren's talent lies in his ability to maneuver in this fragmented ideological system without alienating any section of the society.

Secondly, the expansion of Zeki Müren's star image over various media platforms is analyzed within the framework of Henry Jenkins's *transmedia* theory. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins writes:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best — so that a story might be introduced in film, expanded through television, novels, comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Reading across media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption... A good transmedia franchise works to attract multiple constituencies by pitching the content somewhat differently in different media.

While Jenkins describes transmedia terminology as a method of storytelling that usually seeks to conquer various audiences in multiple markets, in this thesis, same theory is applied to Zeki Müren's star persona. Müren is described as a 'transmedia star' whose story unfolds in music, cinema, *gazino* performances, and television, as well as in posthumous appropriations and at-

⁷ Emine Aşan. *Rakipsiz Sanatkar Zeki Müren*. (Istanbul: Boyut, 2003), 118.

tributions. As a result, his image and work reach multiplicity of publics from various social and political backgrounds, subcultures, and generations.⁸

Given the fact that the evolution of media in Turkey provided considerable momentum for Zeki Müren's career, it is suitable to survey Müren's work chronologically up until his death, and begin (in Chapter 1) by tracing out the circumstances around Müren's rise as a radio star. This investigation examines Müren's personal and professional background, and his talent and discipline that would lead to his national success and mythological status. At the same time, the chapter expands upon issues such as radio as the primary mass communication tool, the symbol of westernization, and a major patron of music production in the 1950s' Turkey, 'music reform' undertaken by the state, and the rupture in education, transmission, and structure of Ottoman-Turkish traditional music in accord with the state's westernization efforts. Overall, this chapter teases out the conditions that prepared Zeki Müren's birth as Turkey's first true popular culture icon.

Chapter 2 takes a close look at Zeki Müren's image in cinema, focusing on two films: his debut on silver screen 'Beklenen Şarkı' (The Awaited Song) from 1953, and 'Hep O Şarkı' (Always That Song) from 1965. In both films, Müren plays a gifted young musician — also named Zeki Müren — who tries to do the right thing despite all the bad luck, misfortune, and corruption surrounding him. The similarity between fictitious and real Zeki Mürens — as well as their shared name! — blurs the line between the star and the film character, contributing to Müren's larger mythology. His characters, through their gender performance and iconic singing voice, embody the Republican ideals of modernity, gender equality, and reconciliation of East and West.

Chapter 3 explores *gazino* nightclubs which are synonymous with Zeki Müren's name today. *Gazinos* are extinct today, but they are the symbol of the vivid cultural life in Istanbul between 1950s and 1970s. In 1955, Zeki Müren transitions from the strict realm of TRT radio to a

⁸ Henry Jenkins. *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. (New York and London: NYU Press, 2006), 97-98.

more flexible and market-driven world of *gazino*. During his *gazino* years, he takes advantage of his privilege as the most sought after nightclub star, and dials up the flamboyancy in his outfits. This chapter analyzes the politics and aesthetics of *gazino*, and explores how Müren achieved a two-way intimacy within this public space that provided him immunity as a cross-dressing man.

Chapter 4 explores Zeki Müren's television appearances during TRT's monopoly years. While the 1984 New Year's Eve program shows him as an artist of the establishment (he would be awarded the title 'state artist' in 1991), his music video of 'Ah Bu Şarkıların Gözü Kör Olsun' reveals his changed performance aesthetics during his years of decline. This chapter also foreshadows developments today. Müren's unique image on television dominated the subconscious of a generation who came of age in 1980s, as well as LGBTQ individuals who lacked a networked community or a social movement at the time. Today, these people are playing a crucial role in deconstructing and recontextualizing Müren's star image.

Chapter 6 shifts the timeline to post-1996, and investigates what Zeki Müren's image has signified for various publics after his death, especially in the recent years. This last section aims to reveal the tension between different readings of Müren's memory: his guardian institutions' conservative approach, and independent media makers' and LGBTQ community's appropriations.

Conclusion chapter reasserts the reading of Zeki Müren as a transmedia star who unravels various narratives in multiple media platforms, and therefore appealing to various publics and ideologies all at once. In accord with Müren's 'transmedia star' quality, this research also employs a transmedia methodology. The last chapter elaborates on the production process of the feature-length documentary 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren' and participatory hotline and interactive web experience 'Zeki Müren Hotline'. While these additional media components offer a multi-layered exploration of Müren's persona, they also make this thesis a generative transmedia project that will hopefully produce further meanings and discussions in time.

CHAPTER I

The Radio Star and Recording Artist

“Your voice is like morphine. It feels so good. Your lyrics are another story.”
— Anonymous message from Zeki Müren Hotline

Zeki Müren’s first public appearance was on the state radio in 1951. The story of this incident has been recited so many times in written accounts as well as in informal conversations that his performance in his first radio program has achieved a legendary status. From this very early incident, Müren presented his exceptional musical talent and masterfully negotiated the demands and competing desires of the official institution and the public, and quickly became the young Turkish Republic’s golden boy. Launch of his career is a balance act between the production of his star image under the influence of official state ideology, and market demand, and its consumption by different publics with varying tastes. His exceptional talent clearly produced one half of his success. But the undeniable other half comprised his skills in mediating between values in flux during a period of societal and political transformation in Turkey.

The Roots

The story of Zeki Müren’s audition for Istanbul Radio in 1950 holds multiple layers of information on the conditions of Müren’s forthcoming success. The nineteen-year-old recent high school graduate stood in front of the selection committee with enthusiasm and pride, and told them he had not prepared *only* one song. When he was asked how many songs he had in his repertoire, he said three thousand. Except for Şerif İcli who had been his private tutor, none of the jurors believed this presumptuous claim; so they asked young Zeki Müren to perform pieces from various *makams*⁹, even challenging him to start from random points in the song, for about

⁹In Turkish music, makam refers to the rules that describe melodic progression patterns (*seyir*) within musical scales, which are in turn founded on particular orders of intervals.

two hours. Years later, Müren looked back at this incident and said: “Entering the exam, I was excited but I had to win. I did not have tolerance for failure. Because radio was the medium to introduce me to the country”.¹⁰ Amongst 186 entrants, he was the only vocalist to be hired by Istanbul Radio. This anecdote not only provides an apt origin story for Müren, but it also hints at the cultural and political dimensions of music and mediascape in the 1950s’ Turkey. State radio was indeed the ideal medium to kickstart Müren’s career, as his background and personal skills aligned well with the official ideology — the state’s ‘music reform’ was looking for ways to consolidate local/Turkish and modern/western traditions and was in search for a pop star who could mobilize masses under this agenda — giving way to the birth of modern Turkey’s first pop star.

•

Zeki Müren was born in Bursa; a large, industrial city, facing Istanbul from across Marmara Sea. Bursa’s cultural significance comes from being the first official capital of Ottoman Empire in the 14th century, and also from its proximity to Istanbul. By the 16th century, Bursa rose as one of the major musical centers of the Empire alongside Edirne and Istanbul, superseding the well-established cities of Muslim geography such as Herat, Tebriz, Damascus, and Bagdad¹¹. From the Ottoman times to the Republican era, the city has always been an important resource for music production, supporting the music scene and the commercial industry in Istanbul.¹²

Within this deep-rooted musical culture, Zeki Müren was born into a family with a hybrid taste in music, encapsulating both western and eastern traditions. His grandfather Mehmet Efendi was a renowned *hafız* — a person who had memorized the Quran — and he occasional-

¹⁰Ayhan Erol. "Bir Dönemin Popüler İkonu Olarak Zeki Müren." *Biyografya* 3 (2002): 54.

¹¹Cem Behar. *Osmanlı - Türk Musikisinin Kısa Tarihi*. (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2015), 14.

¹² Erol, 44.

ly performed *mevlit*¹³ at religious gatherings, or conducted call to prayers at the local mosque¹⁴. Müren's grandmother was an immigrant from Peloponnese in Greece, who owned a record collection including Turkish music, as well as western genres such as waltz, rhumba, and tango. On one hand, he was exposed to religious music, where the congregation was reminded of humility and submission before the eternal life by his grandfather's beautiful vocals while reciting *mevlit*. On the other hand, he was mesmerized by the exuberant tunes he found in his grandmother's His Master's Voice gramophone.

A childhood story paints a playful picture of Müren's fascination with the music recording technology, his attraction to western tunes, and his general enthusiasm for musical performance: A young Zeki comes home from school, tears the cover of his notebook, cuts it into the shape of a record, and glues a bright red construction paper on top of it. On this 'record', he writes: "Singing: ZEKI Müren", places it on the gramophone, and starts singing:

You'll be a saloon bride
Put your hand on my heart
I liked your sweet tongue
A staple on the heart
Rhumba rhumba rhumba¹⁵

(Ol bir salon gelini / Koy kalbime elini / Sevdim tatlı dilini / Kalplere vur bir zımba / Rumba da rumba rumba)

Despite his exposure to all types of musical stimulation at home, young Zeki's heart was set on Turkish art music that he devotedly listened to on the radio¹⁶. The genre of Turkish Art Music had its roots in a decade-long contestation about what 'Turkish national music' should sound like and the signs of this debate can be traced back to the westernizing reforms of Ottoman Empire.

¹³ *Mevlit* is a poem by Süleyman Çelebi, a 15th century poet from Bursa. Written in Ottoman Turkish, *Mevlit* tells the story of Prophet Muhammad's birth, life, death, miracles, and journey to heaven. In Turkey, it's popular practice to perform the poem as a song during religious rituals, specifically on the 40th day of funerals.

¹⁴ Erol, 45 - 63.

¹⁵ Nalan Seçkin. Zeki Müren. (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1998), 20.

¹⁶ Seçkin, 21.

In the first half of 19th century, Sultan Mahmud II undertook various administrative, military, and education reforms, including the abolishment of military band *mehter*, in lieu of which a western-style chorus band named 'Muzika-i Hümayun' (Military Band of the Sultan) was created¹⁷ — this band underwent several transformations during the Republican era, and today it is based in Ankara as 'Republic Symphony Orchestra.'¹⁸ As the westernization process within various institutions of the Ottoman Empire continued during the reign of Mahmud II.'s successors, European music further penetrated into Ottoman - Turkish musical tradition. On his way to *hajj* (Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca), where he passed away, the famous virtuoso and Mevlevi dervish Dede Efendi was rumored to had said, "Bu oyunun artık tadı kalmadı" (This game is no fun anymore), pointing at his disillusionment in the music scene in a westernizing Ottoman Empire¹⁹. However, the evolution of Ottoman - Turkish traditional music reached its peak only after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, when the country turned its face fully towards the West, and undertook a music reform as a part of its national culture policy.

Since its birth under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkish Republic's official ideology had been to break away from the Ottoman past and to realize itself as a modern and secular democracy modeled after European civilizations. Kemalist ideology manifested itself both in governmental reforms, such as creating a secular and constitutional democracy, abolishing the Muslim caliphate, supporting women's suffrage; as well as cultural and symbolic changes, such as imposing a western dress code and the 'hat reform,' opting for the Latin alphabet over the Arabic script, and promoting western art over Ottoman cultural heritage. The government's special interest in music was evident in Atatürk's speech: "You should be able to transform the great ideal [modernization project] that we are fighting for, from an idea into an emotion in the hearts of the people."²⁰ Today, at Turkish Radio and Television's (TRT) Istanbul

¹⁷Nazli Usta. "Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye'de Müziğin Dönüşümü." *Erciyes İletişim Dergisi* 1, No. 4 (2010): 109.

¹⁸Mustafa Şahin and Ruşen Duman. "Cumhuriyetin Yapılanma Sürecinde Müzik Eğitimi." (2008): 263.

¹⁹ Behar, 158

²⁰ Meltem Ahiska. *Occidentalism in Turkey: Questions of Modernity and National Identity in Turkish Radio Broadcasting*. (IB Tauris, 2010), 78.

Studio, one can still see Atatürk's words inscribed on the wall: "Bir ulusun yeni değişikliğinde ölçü, musikide değişikliği alabilmesi, kavrayabilmesidir" ("The ability to accept and grasp change in music is the measure of a nation's progress").²¹

Music reform had addressed the question of what Turkish national music should sound like, and how this music could rapidly progress to catch up with the western standards. This effort was, to some extent destructive, because consolidating the oral, heterophonic²², and improvisational nature of Ottoman - Turkish traditional music²³, with western equal temperament²⁴ and standardized notation meant losing the core characteristics of the genre. However, since the 19th century Ottoman era, westernization efforts led to the superimposing of these forms onto Ottoman-Turkish traditional music. By the 1950s, a great number of *makams* — mostly the ones that had been considered 'too Eastern' for the westernization program, or too complicated for fast and easy consumption — were lost, and the ones that remained complied with western musical structures and capitalist market demand²⁵. These *makams* lacked the genre's original complexity, but at the same time they were perfect for a newly burgeoning pop culture of the young capitalist society of Turkey. In the second half of the 20th century, a simplified and west-

²¹ Martin Stokes. *The Republic of Love: Cultural intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*. (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 16.

²² Heterophony, in music, is texture resulting from simultaneous performances of melodic variants of the same tune, typical of Middle Eastern practices as well as of a vast array of folk music.

²³ In his interview in 'Ottoman History Podcast' Cem Behar explains that the naming of Turkish music became a problem after the 20th century, due to the official culture policy and the ideological clashes that resulted from it. He uses 'Ottoman - Turkish traditional music' for the music genre that precedes mid 20th century Turkish Art music because this title encapsulates the multicultural nature of the music, encompassing Turkish and non-Turkish identities; and it refers to the musical tradition that was disrupted by the Republic's cultural ideology. I follow Behar and use his terminology when I refer to the genre that precedes the Republican era.

²⁴ Equal temperament, in music, is a tuning system in which the octave is divided into 12 semitones of equal size.

²⁵ Ali Ergur. "Türkiye'nin Kapitalistleşme Sürecinde Türk Musikisinde Tampere Sistem ve Zeki Müren." *Biyografya* 3 (2002): 122-132.

ernized version of Ottoman-Turkish traditional music was born with the new name 'Turkish Art Music' and found its place in the state-sponsored radio²⁶.

With Atatürk's order, radio was nationalized in 1936 and put to work in the state's modernization efforts. In *Occidentalism in Turkey: Questions of Modernity and National Identity in Turkish Radio Broadcasting*, Ahıska elaborates on the mission bestowed upon the national radio as follows:

Radio was at the intersection point of (1) culture and civilization: Radio represented Western modernity and progress in its very technological form, but it was also a means of communicating cultural messages that uniquely belonged to the nation; (2) education and entertainment: It was seen as a vehicle for mass education, but had to be entertaining if it was going to have any impact on the audience; (3) the elite and the people: In the definition of broadcasting it was implied that radio talked to the masses, namely the people: yet, the elite were keen to disseminate their own values and criteria as markers of modernity; (4) private and public: Radio was perceived as an apparatus for reorganizing the public domain of national life by implanting modern values to society; yet, it had to address the people generally in their private realm, in their intimate domestic settings.²⁷

After 1936, the tension between *alafranga* (western music) and *alaturka* (Turkish music) was visible in the radio's programming policy. Alaturka music was completely banned from radio, in favor of *alafranga* music, however the ban was revoked after two years. From that point on, the listening habits of the radio audience spoke for itself, showing their demand for Turkish tunes.

Zeki Müren luckily came of age during a time when radio programming had to respond to the demands of their listeners, therefore *alaturka* music was in the rise against *alafranga*²⁸. As a faithful radio listener, Müren built a repertoire of new Turkish Art Music; while he also practiced the classical tunes and the tradition of *meşk*²⁹ with his private tutors. The previous traditional

²⁶ "Gelenekten Gelenekçiliğe: Osmanlı ve Müzik | Cem Behar" Ottoman History Podcast, accessed June 15, 2016, <http://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/2013/04/music-modernization-tradition-ottoman-empire-behar.html>.

²⁷ Ahıska, 67.

²⁸ Uygur Kocabaşoğlu. "Şirket telsizinden Devlet radyosuna." A. Ü, SBF yayınları 442 (1980).

²⁹ Ottoman - Turkish traditional music was traditionally taught and transmitted through an oral system named *meşk*, by practicing with a master, learning by practice and memorization, rather than documenting the music in notation. The transmission and education chain created a strong community that had sustained itself for centuries.

music education structure and oral transmission chains had been closely tied to the Ottoman Court patronage and the musical practice in the Mevlevi lodges³⁰. Both establishments were abolished as a part of secularization and democratization efforts of the Republic, putting the future of Turkish music production into jeopardy. In addition, music conservatories of the Republic did not teach Turkish music from 1926, surprisingly until 1976³¹. Müren was right: Radio was not just the medium to introduce him to the country, but it was also the only institution where he can get a formal musical education.

By the time he decided to take the radio entrance exam in 1950, radio had already established its popular culture following and they were waiting for a radio star to emerge. When multi-party system was introduced to Turkey's young democracy in 1945, state-sponsored radio programming turned into an arena of political influence. Since its nationalization, radio had already been used as a tool for political propaganda. However, during its single party rule, the Republican People's Party (CHP) had felt free to impose its west-oriented cultural agenda through music, disregarding public's taste. After the parliament entered a multi-party system to further the democratization process, the previous top-down cultural program had to come to an end. A nation-wide survey about radio programming was conducted in 1948 and it revealed a high demand for Turkish art and folk music, in opposition to, mainly, western classical music. In 1950, conservative and anti-westernization Democrat Party (DP) rose to power with a populist agenda. In 1952 — one year after Zeki Müren had emerged as a radio star, enchanted crowds, and became a national phenomenon; and two years after Democrat Party's inauguration — Turkish and western music received equal airtime for the first time on radio. Equipped with both traditional and modern Turkish music, a 19-year-old Zeki Müren was the most suitable person to please and mobilize various audiences; not to mention he was also incredibly talented. It would be accurate to say that the official music ideology and market demand incubated the birth of Zeki Müren as a Turkish Art Music pop star.

³⁰ Mevlevi lodges were shut down by the government in 1925 as a part of secularization efforts.

³¹ Cem Behar. *Klasik Türk Musikisi Üzerine Denemeler*. Vol. 4. (Bağlam Yayınları, 1987), 140.

Reception

Müren's first broadcast at Istanbul Radio and its aftermath is another story that has been retold numerous times and has taken a mythical form. When the famous Turkish art music vocalist Perihan Sözeri cancelled her live radio concert, Zeki Müren was asked to substitute for her. Realizing the significance of this opportunity, Müren came all the way from Bursa, and began the live concert after a brief rehearsal. Müren completed the concert successfully with the support of experienced radio musicians accompanying him, however they finished eight minutes early, whereas they were obliged to fill a forty-five minute program slot. The clarinet player conducted a short *taksim* (an improvisational solo). Entirely unrehearsed, Zeki Müren accompanied the clarinet with a *maya* (a folk song improvisation). When they ended up being one minute short, he even sang a fragment of a folk song that he had learned from a school mate, completing the program just on time³².

Müren's first program was received with enthusiasm by both radio listeners and professional musicians. Not only he sang each assigned song with a perfect technique, using his impeccable and unique pronunciation of the Turkish language that would later on become his signature; but he also proved that he could improvise, which is one of the building blocks of the Ottoman-Turkish musical tradition. After the program, prominent Turkish Art Music vocalist Hamiyet Yüceses called the Radio to speak to the young talent. She said to Müren: "I listened to you and cried. Who are you my child, who are you?"³³ It is rumored that the radio was flooded with calls asking the same question. The radio audience was also curious about if this young talent was female or male, because Müren's young and naive voice did not possess the markers of a specific gender.³⁴ This opportunity indeed turned into a great breakthrough for Müren, and within the same year, he secured his place in Istanbul Radio's evening music program.

³² Stokes, 38

³³ Ergun Hiçyılmaz. *Zeki Müren için bir Demet Yasemen: Dargınım Sana Hayat*. (Istanbul: Kamer Yayınları, 1997), 43.

³⁴ Aşan, 27.

Commercial Success

Müren's sudden rise as a radio star did not go unnoticed by commercial record labels. Record label Sahibinin Sesi (His Master's Voice) held some of the biggest names of Turkish art music in its portfolio but it was also in search of a young, charismatic star who could mobilize a large audience. In 1951, Müren made his first record 'Bir Muhabbet Kuşu' (A Parakeet) with this label and began his career as a recording artist³⁵.



Figure 1: An advertisement of new releases of Sahibinin Sesi record company, featuring a Zeki Müren record, on Milliyet newspaper on May 1, 1952. Image is taken from Milliyet Newspaper Archives.

From 1951 on, Müren made commercial recordings in a variety of genres such as folk songs, lullabies, rumbas, 'fantasy' songs, waltzes, mayas... He made 10 records for the label 'Sahibinin Sesi' and 183 for Grafson³⁶. In 1955, Müren made a record for the song 'Manolyam' (My Magno-

³⁵ İşte Benim Zeki Müren, 50.

³⁶ Cemal Ünlü. Git Zaman, Gel Zaman: Fonograf, Gramofon, Taş plak. (Istanbul: Pan Yayıncılık, 2004), 434.

lia) under his own record label 'Zeki Müren'. 'Manolyam' became the best selling record of the year, and received a 'Golden Record' award that was being awarded for the first time.



Figure 2: An advertisement of newly released Zeki Müren records on Milliyet newspaper on July 30, 1955. Image is taken from Milliyet Newspaper Archives.

Unlike radio's early years, record industry was completely market-oriented; it served the demands of the public, and eventually began shaping people's taste. Along with *gazino* night-clubs, private record industry was blamed for corrupting Turkish music. Rather than taking part in the Republic's music reform and help develop a refined national music taste, they supported the production of what was popular and easily consumable. Popular tendencies of the industry neither satisfied the defenders of a hybrid 'national music' that took Turkish folk melodies as a base to be rearranged within western canons, nor those who supported the revitalization of Ottoman-Turkish traditional music classics. Following the multi-party system, radio also had to yield to the popular music taste that was supported by the record industry. Journalist Refi Cevat Ulunay, a strong critique of the so-called 'corrupt' Turkish Art music, asked in his newspaper column: "Dear God! Where is the owner of the radio?". In the article, he expressed his dissatis-

faction with what he called an artless music, which he thought belongs to the *meyhane* (a Turkish restaurant that offers food, alcohol and live music), not to the radio. He said that a talented vocalist like Zeki Müren, who deserved to perform the grand masterpieces of the genre, was being exploited in the hands of the composers and musicians of the new music.³⁷

On the other hand, Derya Bengi — journalist and the curator of 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' (It's Me Zeki Müren) exhibition — considers Müren a revolutionary in music. In an interview with Bant Magazine, he said that Zeki Müren's significance laid not only in his flamboyant outfits of his later years and his unconventional mannerisms. According to Bengi, the fact that he performed songs in both modern and classical genres, felt close to Balkan and western infused Turkish music, insisted on composing waltzes (Beklenen Şarkı), rearranged folk songs (Mühür Gözlüm), and even performed a Neapolitan piece in Turkish (Yaseminler Solmadan Gel) made him a revolutionary of his own kind — one that did not let the revolution devour its own children³⁸. In his essay for 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition, Bengi even goes on to draw a line between the new simplified Turkish language and the reformed music:

While the language of poetry and literature were also getting simplified along with the vernacular language, lyrics of the time also found a comfortable bed within the *makams* such as nihavend, hicaz, and rast that resembled western scales. The pioneer of this transformation, its number one advocate was Zeki Müren.

Bengi also rejects the claim that Müren adulterated the traditional Ottoman-Turkish music and argues that, on the contrary, Müren regenerated this music as a pop genre. He says, otherwise it would have died away, while the country underwent various cultural transformations.³⁹

When asked about his commercial work, Müren argued that his records allowed him to reach *halk* (the common people) — those who could not afford his live performances, or those who lived across Anatolia where Istanbul Radio's signal was not accessible. This was true and his records were so widely circulated that they could even be found across the border in Aleppo,

³⁷ Refi Cevat Ulunay, "Radyonun Sahibi Nerede?," *Milliyet*, 19 January 1953.

³⁸ "50'ler, 60'lar, 70'ler ve Zeki Müren," Bantmag, accessed June 4, 2016, <http://www.bantmag.com/magazine/issue/post/35/420>.

³⁹ *İşte Benim Zeki Müren*, ed. Derya Bengi (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014), 15.

Syria. Müren was quite resourceful in adopting to evolving musical styles in order to fulfill the wishes of a demanding government, a capitalist and consumerist industry, and people who had been oscillating between tradition and westernization; between their familiar tastes and the national image they aspired to. Müren was a skillful mediator within this triangle of demands and his records allowed him a larger flexibility that he could not find in the strict realm of radio's early years. As a result, as Stokes states: "it was commercial recordings, not radio, that made Zeki Müren's voice a national institution".⁴⁰

Image

Figure 3: An advertisement of a Zeki Müren record on Milliyet newspaper on October 26, 1955. The title says "Good news... Precious musician Zeki Müren releases his new record that you've been waiting for impatiently..." Image is taken from Milliyet Newspaper Archives.

During his early radio career, Müren's image was circulated through magazines of popular culture and radio, daily schedule of radio programs published on the newspapers, and advertisements of his commercial records. The cover of his early records might have served the same purpose, however it is surprisingly difficult to track down his discography, let alone these early

⁴⁰ Stokes, 40-41.

records' matching cover images. In his record advertisements, he always appeared in a suit and his iconic glasses. His public image communicated profession and seriousness as he was a part of a long and esteemed tradition. During a time when 'tradition' and 'old' were sensitive topics due to the overprotective nature of the Kemalist revolution, Müren appeared as a modern young Turkish man who happened to be trained in traditional music; he consolidated the past and the present in his music and his image. He was educated, hardworking, well-mannered, urban, in proper western attire, so he presented a great potential as an emerging star who could promote the modernization ideals of the Revolution from within the realm of music and popular culture, while staying accessible to the common folk. Quickly, he became the beloved young star of the country, which is apparent in numerous magazine covers that featured him in everyday scenarios and in less formal settings.



Figure 4: Zeki Müren on the cover of popular culture and radio magazines. Image is taken from 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition curated by Derya Bengi (Yapi Kredi Kültür Merkezi, İstanbul, 2014).

The interest in the revived *alaturka* music and its accompanying pop culture was evident in the spread of radio technology: in 1950 the number of radio receivers per 1000 people was 17, while in 1960 it almost tripled and reached 49. Müren's presence in radio helped to popularize the technology and establish an audience; both the state radio and private radio manufacturers benefited from Müren's success. A commonly repeated anecdote states that people who intended to buy their first radio, wanted to make sure to get one that played Zeki Müren! During

these years, newspapers were filled with radio advertisements and Müren's image was one of the most effective advocates of the radio technology and certain radio brands.



Figure 5: Zeki Müren in a Siemens radio advertisement. Image is taken from 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition catalogue, page 45. Date of the advertisement is not stated.

Advertisement above reads as:

Zeki Müren says Siemens is a fantastic radio! Listen to Zeki Müren, whose enchanting voice you admire, this Saturday on a Siemens radio. The unequalled musician, whose knowledge in music you hold in high esteem, listened to music in each and every brand of radios with his God-given sensitive music ear, and confirmed that none of these radios matches the quality of a Siemens radio. We are sure you will agree with Zeki Müren.

The advertisement ends with a reminder: "When you buy your Siemens radio, don't forget to ask for your complimentary, autographed Zeki Müren photograph."

Alone with Zeki Müren: Radio Days

A three album compilation of Zeki Müren's radio recordings was released between 2007 and 2015, and named 'Zeki Müren ile Başbaşa: Radyo Günleri' (Alone with Zeki Müren: Radio Days). These albums not only document Müren's songs from the 60s and 70s but also give an insight into his persona on the radio, especially through the announcements between the songs.

To this day, Zeki Müren is considered to have the best pronunciation of the modern Turkish language⁴¹. In various interviews, he has emphasized his effort to pronounce every single word very distinctly, both during songs and speech. He is famous with his over-enunciated ‘r’s, which are usually swallowed or softened into a ‘sh’ sound when they are positioned at the end of a word. He did not only speak with utmost clarity, but his speech also carried an exaggerated level of politeness and poetic ornamentation, almost reminding one of a noble order of conduct. One cannot deny that Müren’s intelligible way of speaking follows the path of the Kemalist language reform which had replaced the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet and gotten rid of words with Arabic and Persian roots, for the sake of simplicity and a higher literacy rate amongst citizens — and for the underlying motivation of cutting the ties with the Ottoman past. Despite the clarity in his speech that leveled him with his *halk*, the courtly demeanor and embellishment in Müren’s speech also flirts with public’s yearning for an aristocratic class of a recently lost past.

One of the most memorable recordings from Müren’s radio years is an advertisement for the tyre company Pirelli. In the advertisement, he says: “Keep your eyes on the road and ears with me, dear drivers.”⁴² The message plays with the idea of a personalized message, by addressing specifically the drivers who might be driving long distances during the time of the radio announcement. Such an approach to personalization through mass media is visible throughout Müren’s body of work, which demonstrates his exploration of the limits of mass communication. We cannot know the extent of Müren’s creative input to this radio advertisement but even if the copy was written by someone else, it surely imitates Müren’s personal style. In this advertisement, Müren attempts to break the fourth wall between his star persona and the ordinary person listening to the radio — offering them a special moment ‘alone with Zeki Müren’.

⁴¹ Turkish language has various dialects while Istanbul dialect is considered the official one. Istanbul dialect usually suggest being urban, thus it is sometimes interpreted as a higher class status or education level. The fact that Müren speaks in Istanbul dialect allows him to become a model for the nation with his perfect speech.

⁴² Hakan Gence, “Benim çok sevgili dinleyicilerim” *Hürriyet*, Accessed 16 February 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/benim-cok-sevgili-dinleyicilerim-8236362> .

CHAPTER 2

The Talented, Naive and Amorous Musician of Melodramas

“In the early 2000s, I was a student in The Netherlands. We were watching a Zeki Müren film. A Spanish friend of hours entered the dorm room and said: Isn't this guy gay, why is he flirting with that woman?”

— Anonymous message from Zeki Müren Hotline

Between 1953 and 1971, Zeki Müren starred in 18 films almost always using his own name and playing characters whose stories frequently overlapped with his own star narrative. Cinema offered him a new venue where he could consciously blur the lines between his real-life persona and his fictional roles, strengthening his star narrative as an extraordinarily talented, honest, self-made, and accessible-to-all national celebrity. In this chapter, two of Müren's films — ‘Beklenen Şarkı’ (The Awaited Song) and ‘Hep O Sarki’ (Always That Song) — are analyzed in order to explore the ideological work undertaken by these films and tease out how Müren further concretized his public persona and mythology through the magic of cinema.

Beklenen Şarkı ‘The Awaited Song’

Early years of cinema in Turkey and its search for identity follow a similar path with radio programming. The period between 1923 and 1940 is referred to as ‘The Period of Theatre Men’ under the leadership of Muhsin Ertuğrul, who had worked as a theatre actor and director in Germany, before he returned home in 1922. During this period, cinema in Turkey borrowed from theatre's aesthetics and storytelling tools, rather than attempting to explore the medium's own language. Ertuğrul's cinema is often criticized for imitating the West, rather than telling stories inspired by local culture and it is “comparable to the one-party system of the early years of the Republic, its governing policy and its perception of society.”⁴³ Up until the 1950s, cinema attendance was an elite social activity; theatre-goers would dress up in evening gowns and see the

⁴³ Gönül Dönmez-Colin. *Turkish cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 26.

films in elegant movie palaces.⁴⁴ They expected to watch films that confirmed their faith in the Kemalist Revolution and the modern way of life they had adopted, such as Ertugrul's 'Ateşten Gömlek' (The Shirt of Fire) — which told the story of Turkish National Resistance through the eyes of a woman, and featured the first Turkish and Muslim actress — or his later films that featured 'Turkish Greta Garbo' Cahide Sonku whose blonde hair and modern attire were simply a manifestation of the westernized Turkey.

Another genre Ertugrul introduced to Turkey's audience was the adaptation of operettas. This was followed by a period of imported Egyptian musical films, which had to be dubbed in Turkish. Ertugrul comprehended the successful business model of musical films that required the collaboration between film and record industries. In 1939, he directed 'Allah'ın Cenneti' (Allah's Heaven) in which the iconic Turkish Art Music vocalist Münir Nurettin Selçuk was the lead actor and as a part of his role, he performed his own songs. This was the first instance of Turkish musical films that integrated a singer and their music within the storyline of a movie; taking advantage of the readymade value of the musical product and its author within the flow of the film. This genre clearly offered a tremendous opportunity for a brilliant musician like Zeki Müren who would use the magic of cinema to reaffirm the star status he had gained on the radio.

Müren's debut film 'Beklenen Şarkı' (The Awaited Song) from 1953 can be considered within the Muhsin Ertugrul school of cinema and the musical films genre. The cast was composed of mostly Public Theatre actors and actresses. Cahide Sonku, the archetype of the westernized Turkish woman, was not only one of the leading actresses but she was the producer and co-director of the film. 'Beklenen Şarkı' is a great example of a musical film; throughout 90 minutes, Müren performs songs from various genres, from neoclassics to the popular songs of the time. Musical performances do not just complement the narrative but they have equal weight and presence within the film. The songs are mostly performed from the beginning to the end, offering the viewer almost a concert experience.

⁴⁴ Dönmez-Colin, 28.

'Beklenen Şarkı' is a tale of two love stories that span two generations, while the back-drop reveals the tension between two competing musical institutions of the 50s — radio and popular *gazino* nightclubs — and the art worlds and culture each of them cultivate. Müren plays a young and talented musician — also named Zeki Müren — who works at the music conservatory as a janitor, with the hope that he will very soon save enough money to put himself through the conservatory education. Despite his timid and modest nature, his musical talent becomes common knowledge amongst the students. Some are quite pleased with Zeki's company despite his lower class status, while others — mostly boys — are hostile towards him, for they lack his talents and charms, even though they are a lot more privileged. One of the students, Türkan pays special attention to Zeki, and their friendship soon turn into a passionate love affair. Türkan thinks the status difference between them would not matter to her family since her father is a self-made man and her mother, Seniha was once in love with her music teacher, whose request to marry Seniha was denied by her father for his lack of wealth and a certain social status; so he left to join Turkey's Independence War. In spite of their history, the family refuses to show any sympathy towards their love. Türkan's father offers Zeki a check and asks him not to see his daughter again. Heartbroken and humiliated, Zeki agrees. He does not take the check and he quits his job at the conservatory in order not to run into Türkan ever again. Instead, he auditions for a job at a poor quality *gazino* nightclub. When he sings a Turkish Art Music song, the reaction Zeki receives encapsulates the clash between market and art music scenes of the time, in a caricatured fashion. The *gazino* director says: "People want entertaining songs. They should drink and get exuberant, and then drink even more! This shop cannot sustain itself with Dede Efendi [the famous Ottoman - Turkish traditional music composer]."⁴⁵ Facing such condescending attitude, Zeki wants to leave the *gazino* at once, but he is persuaded by his friend to be reasonable and stay, and make changes to his repertoire. After his first show, the *gazino* director realizes Zeki's talent and tricks him into signing a blank contract that he would later use to blackmail him into staying in the *gazino*.

⁴⁵ "Ses neyse ama şarkılar gitmez. Millet kafayı çekmek için kıvrak hava ister kıvrak! Öyle ki içtikçe çoşmalı çoştukça içmeli. Bu dükkân dede efendi baba efendi ile dönmez."

Meanwhile, a coincidence brings Seniha and Zeki's mothers Bedia together. A long-awaited secret is revealed: Seniha's first love was Bedia's late husband! Each of them has one half of a song composed by this man, and until they meet each other, both lacked any knowledge of the other half. Bedia says that the song is not her husband's masterpiece but his son, Zeki is. Zeki should be the one putting two pieces of music together and performing it. Seniha immediately makes a plan to use her influence and help Zeki out with his musical career, so that he can earn the success he deserves and one day perform his father's song in a glorious music hall and in front of an elite audience. Indeed, with Seniha's invisible nudge, Zeki is freed from the *gazino* director's blackmail and his incredible talent and honest hard work are quickly rewarded with success and prestige.

By the time 'Beklenen Şarkı' was filmed, Müren had already become a major radio star. Even though he received proposals from renowned *gazinolar* for a program of his own, he turned down these offers until he received his diploma from the Fine Arts Academy. This was due to a promise he had made to his father, that he would finish his education first before appearing on *sahne* (the stage) of *gazino* nightclubs⁴⁶. As a result, 'Beklenen Şarkı' became the first medium in which Müren's radio audience would see him in flesh and blood. The film utilized this momentum very well, and within its narrative, strengthened Müren's status as the new face of Turkish Art Music and the paramount pop star of modern Turkey.

In *The Stars*, Edgar Morin eloquently investigates the relationship between the star and his/her character in cinema:

The star determines the many characters of his films; he incarnates himself in them and transcends them. But they transcend him in turn; their exceptional qualities are reflected back on and illuminate the star... The actor does not engulf his role. The role does not engulf the actor. Once the film is over, the actor becomes an actor again, the character remains a character, but *from their union is born a composite creature who participates in both, envelopes them both: the star.*⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "Zeki Müren Röportajı," Mete Akyol. accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.meteakyol.com.tr/roportajlar/zeki-muren-roportaji.html>.

⁴⁷ Edgar Morin. *The Stars*, Trans. Richard Howard. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1960), 28.

Morin's analysis applies to the case of Zeki Müren in 'Beklenen Şarkı' very well. The film acts as a negotiator between the fictional 'Zeki' and real life 'Müren'⁴⁸ identities; the two are not distinct personas but they are designed to complement one another — very possibly by Müren himself. The fact that Müren breaks the industry convention and insists on dubbing Zeki character with his own voice strengthens the interchangeability between the two personas⁴⁹. Famous for his clear and expressive manner of speaking, Müren, for sure, was not going to give up the opportunity to voice his own image. After all, sound is one half of the moving image, rendering it as tangible and close to real as possible. In addition, Müren insisted on using his own name in almost all of his films. This was another strategy Müren used to interweave his fictional characters in films and his star image. In 'Stars' Dyer writes that the name of a film character both particularizes him or her, and also suggests personality, which are two qualities of the novelistic conception of a traditional character⁵⁰. By using his real name in films, Müren transfers the connotations of his star persona over to his fictional character. During 'Beklenen Şarkı' further links between Müren's real and fictional personas are created, blurring the distinction between the two. While certain parts of the film alluded to Müren's actual biography, some fictional elements reinforced the pop star's real-life myth.

Conditions preparing fictional Zeki's breakthrough follow an almost identical path with the incidents that help launch real-life Müren's career. Zeki passes the radio exam with a tremendous success, leaving an extraordinary impression on the radio musicians. Soon after, when a vocalist calls in sick on the day of her live radio concert, radio manager invites Zeki to substitute for her, and this would be the major event that kickstarts Zeki's career. This story is almost identical with the incidents leading to Müren's emergence as a radio star. By reenacting his life events in 'Beklenen Şarkı', Müren reminds the spectator of the mythical status of these

⁴⁸ In my analysis of 'Beklenen Şarkı,' I will use 'Zeki' for the fictional character and 'Müren' for the real life Zeki Müren.

⁴⁹ *İşte Benim Zeki Müren*, 57.

⁵⁰ Dyer and McDonald, 109.

events and reaffirms his legend through the magic of cinema. As a result, fact and fiction are interweaved to create a hybrid and stronger star narrative

On the other hand, the fictional Zeki has one major deviation from real life Müren: his class background. Zeki is from a penniless family and even has to earn his own tuition money; he did not attend good schools or have private tutors like Müren. Throughout the narrative, he stubbornly insists on pursuing his music career only by his own means. In real life, Müren was born into a middle class, urban family. Even though he is said to have had an unhappy childhood, and that he loved his father “only seventy-five percent,” he grew up as a privileged child. He was often the valedictorian of his classes; he had many friends from school and his neighborhood. With his outstanding academic success, he easily persuaded his parents to hire music tutors for him from an early age. Upon his request, he was even sent to Istanbul for high school, so that he could practice with the best musicians from Istanbul’s cosmopolitan and sophisticated music scene.⁵¹ Müren’s privileged life was an obstacle for his star persona, distancing him from the common people. Therefore, Müren utilizes fictional Zeki character and rewrites his own origin story.

In ‘The Powerless ‘Elite’: Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars’, Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni explores the function of stars. Drawing on Weber’s notion of ‘charisma’, Alberoni states that stars are charismatic leaders; they become a reference point for the industrialized community and occupy a central space in people’s lives, but they lack any concrete influence or decision making power that the power elite possesses. However, one powerful function stars have is the popular admiration they cultivate through their success:

Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren, Marilyn Monroe bear witness, by their existence to the large possibilities for social mobility. From the point of view of communal orientations of evaluation, the problem is to demonstrate that such a great improvement of status has been obtained not by illicit means but thanks to meritorious conduct and to exceptional or charismatic qualities.”⁵²

⁵¹ Seçkin, 40.

⁵² Francesco Alberoni. “The Powerless ‘Elite’: Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars.” *Stardom and celebrity: A reader* (2007): 72.

Zeki character from 'Beklenen Şarkı' serves exactly this purpose: Zeki reassures the public that the upward mobility that they desire is indeed attainable — the creation of a middle class through upward mobility had been an important part of young Turkish Republic's social and economic program — and before our eyes, he acts out how fame and success can be achieved through honest hard work and true talent. With the aid of his fictional doppelgänger, Müren's personal history is rewritten to better fit his star narrative and appeal to everyday people.

Like most media produced in the 50s, 'Beklenen Şarkı's thematic undercurrents touch upon the modernization process in Turkey, specifically focusing on the modernization's repercussions for music. The film begins in a classroom at the music conservatory⁵³: A chorus is singing Dede Efendi's famous song 'EyBüt-i Nev Eda'; a song composed during the genre's transition period from old, heavy, and ornamented classics to lighter and westernized songs. Ideology behind the film is set up from the very beginning, based on the chosen song, as well as the use of a chorus which was introduced to Turkish music as a part of the westernization efforts. Pro-westernization theme is played out throughout the film in multiple occasions.

The song that the film is named after, 'The Awaited Song' provides the aural texture of the film; it is performed at various key moments throughout the narrative. It weaves in and out of the storyline, and subtly effects the characters' lives, most of the time without them knowing it. The song holds the power to resolve the personal conflicts of and between three major characters; but these characters need to go through their destined hardships in order to achieve 'The Awaited Song'. In the final scene, we finally hear 'The Awaited Song' in its full length — a waltz composed by Zeki Müren that utilizes *nihavend makam*; the Turkish music scale that perfectly corresponds to western G Minor — the westernized Turkish tune releases the ghosts of Seniha and Bedia's sorrowful pasts, while offering a clean slate to Zeki and Türkan's unspoilt and pure love. The past and present lovers' unresolved melancholy is only a stand-in for a larger national conflict. 'The Awaited Song' embodies the negotiation between competing ideologies; Müren's

⁵³ Even though there was no Turkish music education at the music conservatories at the time.

song and his voice create the perfect harmony between the East and the West, traditional and modern.

While the undercurrent theme of the film touches upon Turkey's modernization project and the outcome of national music reform, the storyline in the foreground speaks of the conflict between music institutions. The state-sponsored radio and music conservatories, which promote and produce classical music with high artistic standards, stand against the commercial *gazino* nightclubs that cater to the taste of the common people. In the film, the patrons of the *gazino* seek no intellectual stimulation from music but they are only concerned with being entertained alongside a glass of *raki*. Lack of elite taste, class, and intellectual aspiration within *gazino*'s realm is mirrored and pronounced further in the *gazino* director's corrupt character, especially when he attempts to scam Zeki for financial profit. On the other hand, the employees and musicians of radio are all decent people. When his radio career leads to a concert opportunity, Zeki performs in a glamorous music hall to people in evening gowns and tuxedos, who are clearly wealthy, educated, urban, and modern. Therefore — we are asked to think — they must have good taste in music, appropriate to their social standing. The clash between two institutions that offer patronage to music production parallels the state's elitist vision of the time: the people needed a top-down education in every aspect of their recently adopted lifestyle, until they could develop their own identity and taste. Such ideology was the norm during Republican People's Party (CHP)'s one-party rule, from 1923 until the Democrat Party (DP) took over the government in 1950, diverted the cultural policy of CHP, and advocated the rule of the people.

Hep O Şarkı 'Always That Song'

The year 1950, brought many changes to Turkey. With the inauguration of the DP, Turkey entered a period of economic liberalization, picked USA as its Cold War ally, sent troops to the Korean War, and was soon rewarded with NATO membership. Turkey's alliance with the US led to significant changes in the society; US Marshall Aid⁵⁴ helped modernize the agriculture in-

⁵⁴ The Marshall Plan was an American initiative to aid Eastern European countries after the end of World War II and prevent the spread of communism.

dustry and created a nouveau riche class in rural towns. The shift in the societal dynamics and the rapid increase in the population led to a massive migration from rural villages to urban centers⁵⁵ and this movement, along with the populist politics of DP affected the country's film industry. Popular films began using village life or villagers in their films, in order to appeal to this new urban demographic.

In the early 50s, 'Period of the Theatre Men' gave way to a 'Transition Period' followed by 'Period of Cinema Men' during which a cinematic language began to take shape. During this period, films in various styles, such as French poetic realism, American film noir, historical and nationalistic epics, and social-realist 'village films' were made, but the major financial success was achieved with 'Yeşilçam cinema' — a commercial genre that modeled itself after Hollywood's 'boy-meets-girl' narrative and Eastern melodrama. Yeşilçam dominated the industry for two decades with stories about love and class difference. In *Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*, Gönül Dönmez-Colin writes that similar to the American melodrama, rural/urban and rich/poor dichotomies made up the backbone of Turkish melodrama. She continues:

Yeşilçam equated the lower class/rural with the East/local culture and upper class/urban with the West/foreign culture. The upper class was the object of desire but also the source of moral corruption, displayed via American cars, blonde women in provocative dresses, cocktail parties, whiskey and gambling. Rural/lower-class women were chaste and loyal. They dressed modestly, respected their elders and never contradicted their men.⁵⁶

Directed by Turkey's celebrated filmmaker Atif Yılmaz and featuring Zeki Müren and Belgin Doruk, 'Hep O Şarkı' (Always That Song) is a typical Yeşilçam film. 'Hep O Şarkı' (1965) is a love story between Ali (Zeki Müren), a tractor driver who is renowned for his beautiful singing voice in his village, and Mine, a fashion designer from Istanbul who meets Ali during her visit to her uncle's farm. From the moment Mine enters the village, she is intrigued with the simple yet authentic rural life. She ecstatically films her surroundings not unlike an ethnographic filmmaker who is eager to reproduce the images of the exotic, and make them her own to capitalize on.

⁵⁵ Derya Bengi, "Zeki Müren: İstikbalin En Parlak Delikanlısı" in *Türkiye'nin 1950li Yılları*, ed. Mete Kaan Kaynar (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015), 466.

⁵⁶ Dönmez-Colin, 31.

She envisions new design ideas inspired by the patterns of local tapestries and tells her fiancé Burhan, "I'll bring innovative ideas to the fashion world [in Istanbul]!" During a wedding in the village center, she observes the local rites and exclaims, "This is so interesting!" while pointing her camera to the bride who is busy kissing the hands of all the guests. Her fascinated gaze is nothing less than condescending, and at times exploitative; the encounter between Mine and Burhan, and the villagers clearly points at the disconnect between the emerging urban bourgeoisie and the rural folk.

During the wedding, Mine witnesses Ali's singing and is very taken by it. She engineers a plan despite her fiancé's protest: She would take Ali with her to Istanbul, have him take singing and social etiquette lessons, and when he is ready, she would present Ali to her community under the pretense that Ali has recently arrived from Europe to pursue a singing career in Istanbul. Ali eventually agrees to this plan and goes to Istanbul. We witness his comedic transformation from a simple village man to a groomed artist and a socialite. Meanwhile Burhan senses Mine's growing affection towards Ali and blackmails Ali to leave the city. Burhan's scheme does not work out; Mine brings Ali back and presents him with the new name 'Zeki Müren' to her social circle. The event takes a different turn at the end when Mine discloses Ali's secret by projecting her footage from the village. The film shows Ali getting off of his tractor and getting in Mine and Burhan's car. Mine also reveals that her makeover project was a bet between her and Burhan. Devastated by this humiliation and his disappointment in Mine, Ali leaves the house again. He finds refuge in a small music club and a community of musicians. Thanks to the music classes he took and his natural flair for singing, he does not go unnoticed by the larger industry. While Mine spends time in Europe in an attempt to forget her mistreatment of Ali, and Ali quickly climbs up the ladder of fame. Mine comes back home to find her friends and family, who once looked down upon and rejected Ali, all very much impressed by his recently published music. Determined to give these socialites a lesson, Ali throws a party during which he switches to his village clothes, reminding them that they are nothing but hypocrites. Despite all that happened, Ali still thinks Mine is the only honest person he knows in this community and he

is still in love with her. In the film's finale, Ali finds Mine in the village where they first met; they reunite once and for all.

'Hep O Şarkı' deals with the clash between a rural and backward yet decent east, and an urban and modern yet corrupt west. Distinction between the village and Istanbul is the backbone of the main conflict. Istanbul and the modern lifestyle is an aspiration, even for someone like Ali who is perfectly happy in the village and has no career or material ambition until Mine's proposal. On the other hand, villagers are naive, uncomplicated, and honest which are qualities that the modernized urbanites lack. Mine and Ali are liminal characters between the village and Istanbul; two characters negotiate the terms of the two worlds, most distinctly in their performance of gender.

In Yeşilçam cinema, women's bodies are often the utmost signifier of the modern identity. Blonde women are recurrently used as an unspoken reference to Europeanness, while nonconservative and feminine outfits are markers of freedom, gender equality, education level, social status, and urbanity — all in all representing the embracement of the Republic's modernist reforms. Such qualities are not usually only shells, as these modern Turkish women also have careers and independent lives; they drink, smoke, dance and have partners out of wedlock as freely as men; they certainly claim what they are promised by the Republican reforms. Yet their appearance is the most instant and effective pointer to and a shortcut symbol for modernity — as in the case of Mine from 'Hep O Şarkı'.

In the first scene of the film, we see Mine in the car with her fiancé, driving on an unpaved road which is clearly not the city anymore. She is wearing a strappy dress and a large fashionable straw hat. From her appearance we immediately know where she is coming from both literally and figuratively. We sense the conflict her presence may stir up in a traditional and conservative village setting while the apparel of the modern man — her fiancé Burhan — would not strike us as alarming. When Mine and Burhan attend a wedding in the village, her uncovered body stands out amongst the village women as the pointer of modernity and independence. While the village women prefer not to, or perhaps cannot dress like her, she is sheltered

from any disapproval from the locals by the presence of her male guardians, the fact that she is engaged to be married, and also her wealth and social status. Indeed, she is welcomed and even very much liked by the villagers. She can have her cake and eat it too, unlike other women who do not have the same privilege to be independent, virtuous, and likable, all at once. Many aspects of the Republican reforms brought a similar dilemma in social life; modern and traditional, urban and rural could reconcile only through the means of certain class privilege and power.

While Mine's body is a stage of forced reconciliation between urban and rural female identities, Ali's performance of gender offers an alternative masculinity that combines the honesty and naiveté of a villager, sensitivity of an artist, and courteous and cultured nature of an urban man⁵⁷. Burhan is an antithesis to Ali. He is controlling and manipulative towards Mine. He constantly interferes with her decisions and unsuccessfully attempts to impose his ideas on her. He is competitive and profit-oriented in business. When he first meets Mine's uncle, he immediately gives him unsolicited business advice. His way of confronting obstacles usually involve aggression and manipulation, which is apparent in how he deals with Ali's presence around Mine. On the other hand, Ali is kind-natured, easy-going, confident, and humorous; he does not feel the need to act within male-coded norms in order to be accepted, liked, or respected. For instance when Mine invites him to Istanbul, he says:

I'm perfectly happy with my life here. I was born and grew up here. I tell a joke in the local coffeehouse, people faint from laughter! I sing a folk song in a *meyhane*, people are just mesmerized. If a machine is broken, they call me to fix it. Everyone on the street says hi to me. Why would I come with you?

He is the sweetheart of the village, even though he acts completely outside of the codes of patriarchy and conventions of maleness. He is rather a sympathetic leader who is followed by people for his sincerity and likable nature, unlike Burhan.

As a financially and socially independent urban woman, Mine does not want a traditional, authoritative male figure for a partner. She does not need to be provided for, protected or guid-

⁵⁷ Each of these identities are far from realism and depth, as the plot of 'Hep O Şarkı,' and they reveal the simplicity of the identity politics of the time.

ed. Even though she is with a possessive man like Burhan in the beginning, later on she realizes that she needs a companion with whom she considers herself equal. With his confident, sensitive and modest nature, Ali offers an alternative male identity that is compatible with and desired by the 'new woman' of the Republic — represented by Mine. Ali and Mine's eventual union is not only worthy of celebration as the happy ending of a love story, but also because the couple offers a model for new gender roles in 1960's Turkey.

•

In his discussion of star versus character and life-as-theatre, Dyer suggests that stars collapse the distinction between the actor's authenticity and the authentication of the character s/he is playing. He says, "this collapse may root the character in a 'real', 'authentic', 'true' self (the star's)"⁵⁸ In the case of Zeki Müren and the characters he plays, Dyer's proposal offers an appropriate framework, yet it may be applied to the star and the character in both directions. The similarity between Müren's public persona and film character — their occupation, artistic and sensitive personality, their attempt in consolidating competing values such as tradition and modern, urban and rural, east and west — render Müren's characters as symbolic extensions of the real. His fictional characters root themselves in his star image which is already loaded with layers of meaning and provides authenticity. In return, the film characters correct, strengthen, and enchant Müren's star image. For instance, in 'Beklenen Şarkı,' the character absorbs the qualities of a self-made man, filling a void in Müren's privileged past. This way, Müren's star persona reaffirms the ideal of a classless society promised by the Republic and cultivates even further admiration for his otherworldly success. Another instance would be Müren's gender performance and sexuality in 'Hep O Şarkı' in which Müren redefines the character traits of a straight male hero in his own terms. This way, he not only offers a 'new man' who defies conventional codes of maleness and is a good fit for new Turkey's modern woman, he also denies the rumors about his homosexuality. Appealing to the young female demographic is significant for the commercial success of his movies but while doing that, he also complies with the popular

⁵⁸ Dyer and McDonald, 21.

heteronormative conventions of the society and clears his path for further success. In the cyclical scenario of interchangeable characters and personalities, Zeki Müren fluidly moves in and out of fictitious and real worlds, and his mythology expands over and encompasses both realms.

CHAPTER 3

The Flamboyant *Gazino* Nightclub Star

Between 1957 and 1960, when I was in elementary school, we went to Müren's show at Küçük Çiftlik Park gazino. Us kids, lined up our chairs in front of the stage. Zeki Müren was the headliner. I saw him in his mini shorts and shiny platform boots. This image is still in my memory; I remember the feeling of awe and admiration.

— Anonymous message from Zeki Müren Hotline

In 1955, Müren started a new phase in his career and entered his golden period as a *gazino* nightclub star. For over two decades, he reigned the most renowned *gazin*os as the headliner *assolist*. His presence in *gazino* economy was so significant that the owners of the nightclubs had to agree to take turns in featuring Müren; otherwise they could not endure the unfair competition. Encouraged by the cultural and financial power he had accumulated, and the intimacy that the *gazino* space accommodated, Müren transitioned from his discreet public image into a rather subversive, crossdressing nightclub star. He executed this 'coming out' so well that by the time he wore his minidress and 12-inch boots, the conservative Turkish public had long been in love with him and the *gazino* directors could not afford to lose him. The shows he put on stage were extraordinary in their choreography and artistic merit. At the same time, he skillfully navigated the limitations of his society's conservative norms and undertook his own agenda within these restraints as a daring artist.

Four years after his first radio concert, on May 23, 1955 Zeki Müren made his first appearance in Küçük Çiftlik Park *gazino* as the headliner *assolist*. By then, he had already become a major pop icon. He was featured frequently in newspapers' radio sections and beyond, and radio and popular culture magazines, and had starred in two films, and concretized his space in the radio's evening program. Before entering the world of *gazino* nightclubs, he also earned his college diploma in the Art Academy's Illumination department, as he had promised his father. He was hired by Küçük Çiftlik Park *gazino* with an incredibly high fee for the time (1200 Turkish Li-

ras per night). This extravagant deal proved to be quite lucrative for the *gazino* administration; during the summer of 1955, his shows not only sold out but those who could not afford his shows even filled up the green field of Maçka Park behind the *gazino*⁵⁹. He soon became the most sought after *gazino* star; in return, he popularized *gazin*os as the predominant live entertainment venues of the time. Zeki Müren had already showed his genius in every media platform he had conquered so far, and had added new layers to his star myth at each stage of his career. But *gazino* was the space where he outshone everyone else and he undeniably made this medium his own.

Gazino can be simply defined as a nightclub that serves food and alcohol, and presents a variety show that includes music, and sometimes dance and comedy. It is a hybrid space that combines *alaturka* (Turkish) and *alafranga* (western) elements. The origins of *gazino* architecture can be traced back to the European establishments of 19th century Istanbul, specifically the Pera (Beyoğlu) district where most of the embassies, non-Muslims and intellectuals resided or spent time. World War I and later on, the Republic's discriminatory policies against minorities caused many foreigners and non-Muslims to flee the country; as a result these establishments changed hands and were appropriated by Turkish owners.

The program of the *gazino* consists of a variety show that begins with a section called *fasıl* — during which classics of Ottoman - Turkish traditional music, and sometimes more lively urban dance forms are played — which may be followed by a belly dancer or a comedian. The main and final act of the variety show that lasts for about two hours, is the section of a Turkish Art Music soloist. The origins of *fasıl* music go back to Ottoman coffeehouses and court music, while the format of a variety show can be traced back to Ottoman ceremonies such as royal weddings.⁶⁰ Meanwhile the establishment of Turkish Art Music as a popular genre goes back to the early years of the Republic, and it consists of simpler *makams* of the original Ottoman - Turkish traditional music, as described in detail in Chapter 2.

⁵⁹ Bengi, 466.

⁶⁰ Münir Nurettin Beken. "Musicians, Audience and Power the Changing Aesthetics in the Music at the Maksim Gazino of Istanbul," UMI (1998), 94.

Gazino audience of the late Ottoman period and early Republican era embodied a higher level of knowledge and a refined taste in Turkish music. The length of the opening act *fasıl* used to be longer and real music enthusiasts — intellectuals such as the famous writer Yahya Kemal Beyatlı and important statesmen used to frequent *gazinos* — stayed only for this traditional portion of the program and left before the Turkish Art Music soloist entered the stage. Recession in the urban centers post World War II and socio-economical policies in the 50s led to a shift in the audience demographic. The urban and elite class was replaced by the nouveau riche who had immigrated to Istanbul from the rural parts of Anatolia. This population demanded a less ornamented and uncomplicated music with simple Turkish lyrics as opposed to the embellished *makams* and the heavy Ottoman Turkish of the genre's classics, which they did not understand or enjoy. As Stokes states, the new class of immigrants were “anxious to celebrate, simultaneously, their rural roots and the promise of the modern”.⁶¹

When he entered the world of *gazinos* in 1955, Zeki Müren had excelled at appealing to the new audience's demands and providing them with unchallenging and intimate aural pleasures. At the same time, he slowly dialed up the visual splendor of his shows. He offered the Turkish audience a spectacle they would have never imagined or asked for. He wore his first jacket covered with sparkling beads right after he returned from his military service, and his first appearance in a skirt was soon after his father had passed away.⁶² Looking back from today, these coincidences reveal that the milestones in Zeki Müren's transformation from a straight male figure to a queer icon were marked by personal events during which the patriarchal and heteronormative conventions tended to break, or at least bend. When he wore his mini skirt with an attached ornamented veil 'Uğur Duvağı' (Veil of Luck), he actually kept matching pants in the backstage, in case he received any negative response from the audience. He later said that his audience liked the costume so much that he never needed the pants.⁶³ His daring outfits eventually received some negative reaction to which he responded with a manifesto titled 'Why did I

⁶¹ Stokes, 25.

⁶² Derya Bengi, interview by author, Ayvalık, Turkey, January 08, 2016.

⁶³ *İşte Benim Zeki Müren*, 103.

wear mini and maxi skirts?' The article published in *Hafta Sonu* magazine on August 16, 1970 broke down the reasoning behind his costumes in 16 clauses. His main argument stated that as an artist, he was at liberty to wear anything he wanted based on the demands of his profession; he also wrote that he had to be innovative with his looks in order to sustain public's interest. He added some examples of men's clothing that might have been considered feminine in different contexts such as outfits of Ottoman sultans, Turkish oil wrestlers, whirling dervishes, priests, Roman gladiators and so on. It was never made explicit that his stage persona alluded to his gender identity; his costumes were justified as a part of his glamorous show and any objections were publicly silenced with statements such as this manifesto.

After he was transferred to the legendary *Maksim Gazino*, he even designed stage shows such as the one in which he descended down onto the stage on a swing, or performed in platform boots and a mini dress.⁶⁴ By that time, he had already established himself as the most celebrated pop star of the country and an indispensable asset to the *gazino* directors. His courageous image was widely accepted by the Turkish society that is considered traditional and conservative for the most part. This was due to his diplomatic approach towards the gatekeepers of the industry as well as state authorities who shape the dominant political and social ideologies. He calculated the limits of the conservative Turkish society, and the institutions that regulated it; within these parameters, he created a nuanced balance between his power and his gender nonconforming self-presentation.

One story exemplifies the influence Müren had over the *gazino* economy and politics: When the famous *gazino* director Fahrettin Aslan, who had earned the nickname 'The King of the *Gazino* Directors' due to his success with Zeki Müren shows, told the star that the president of the time Cevdet Sunay — a military general turned politician — was going to attend the evening program and asked him to be mindful of his outfits, Zeki Müren reassured him that he would dress up very properly. But later that evening, he appeared on stage in one of his most

⁶⁴ Uzayda Bir Elektrik Hasıl Oldu, ed. Derya Bengi (İstanbul: Anadolu Kültür / DEPO, 2012), 57.

flamboyant and feminine outfits. After his performance he told the *gazino* director that as an artist he would not alter his image on demand⁶⁵.



Figure 6: Zeki Müren is kissing President Fahri Korutürk's wife Emel Korutürk's hand in a government reception from 1978. Photograph from Sabah newspaper article at <http://www.sabah.com.tr/galeri/kultursanat/zeki-murenin-bilinmeyen-fotograflari/12>.

Müren's *gazino* shows were frequented by various political figures, one of them being Adnan Menderes of the conservative Democrat Party who was the Prime Minister between 1950 and 1960.⁶⁶ The fact that political figures with conservative or even military backgrounds did not shy away from being seen in his *gazino* show points at Müren's merits in diplomacy as well as his accessibility to people from all walks of life. Having people of political influence in his circle of friends and audiences, Müren achieved an indirect endorsement of the official ideology; even when the dominant ideology shifted over time, he realigned himself accordingly. This way, as a queer man, he gained a comfortable maneuver space within a heteronormative, patriarchal and conservative societal system. In fact, according to Derya Bengi, it was not Müren himself who aspired to get along with the government officials, it was the politicians who wanted to appeal to Müren's audiences.⁶⁷ A photograph from 1978 supports Bengi's argument in which Müren is seen with the President Fahri Korutürk — also a navy officer turned politician — and

⁶⁵ Hiçyılmaz, 50-51.

⁶⁶ Seçkin, 45.

⁶⁷ Derya Bengi, interview by author.

his wife in a government reception, depicting the prestigious status Müren had achieved by then⁶⁸.

On May 27, 1960, the Democrat Part government was toppled by a coup d'etat; the power shifted hands and passed on to the military — the so called guardian of democracy and secularism in Turkey. The process led to the execution of Adnan Menderes, and ironically the creation of the most democratic and liberal constitution of the Turkish Republic's history. A *gazi-no* advertisement from June 1960 read as: "Every night at Tepebaşı Garden, Zeki Müren is honored to present 'Osman Paşa' national folk song, the liberty anthem of the heroic Turkish army and the noble Turkish youth." During the events leading up to the coup, Osman Paşa march had become a symbol for the opposition to the Democrat Party, especially evident in the song's suggestive lyrics: "Can it be like this, can it be? / Can a brother shoot a brother? / Damn you the dictators / Would this land be left to you?"⁶⁹⁷⁰



Figure 7: Zeki Müren in Osman Paşa outfit in Tepebaşı Bahçesi in 1960, following May 27, 1960 military coup. Photograph is taken from 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition catalogue.

⁶⁸ "Görmediğiniz Fotoğraflarıyla Zeki Müren," Memurlar. Accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.memurlar.net/album/6912/12.resim> .

⁶⁹ Uzakda Bir Elektrik Hasıl Oldu, 28.

⁷⁰ ("Olur mu böyle olur mu? / Kardeş kardeşi vurur mu? / kahrolası diktatörler / Bu vatan size kalır mı?")

Following the coup, Müren immediately showed his support for the new regime with this grand gesture. Yet the military soon banned him from continuing the Osman Paşa performance and this program was cancelled. Despite his good intentions, perhaps Müren's costume as the Ottoman general Osman Paşa and the Ottoman *Mehter* (Military) Band accompanying him were sending mixed messages to the public. Even though he did not succeed to complete his plan, this attempt and many others to come evidenced Müren's compliance with the dominant power as a mode of survival.

While he was reluctant to take a solid position in the politics outside of the *gazino*, inside, Müren was defining the rules by his own terms. With his indispensable position within the *gazino* economy and the intimate relationship he had built with his audience, he had earned enough leverage to construct himself a bold, gender-bending image. For his *gazino* shows, he worked with fashion designer Ayla Eryüksel and tailors Yalçın Say and Muzaffer Çağ on his costumes, which he also helped to design and name.⁷¹ He was known to change his outfits many times during his performances, mostly in tandem with his three-act show. He would begin in a black tuxedo while singing classics from the 18th and 19th centuries. He would then change into a white tuxedo or *frak* (tail coat) when he moved on to Turkish Art Music pieces from the 20th century. In the last section, he would maximize the excitement with contemporary art, pop and folk music, accompanied by the visual plenitude of his flamboyant outfits. In this last part, he would sometimes change three or four costumes that compete with each other with their embroidery and ornaments. On the other hand, he imposed strict dress codes on his musicians — they were to wear only black suits and were not allowed to put on any accessories, not even watches.⁷²

One of his renowned costumes was named “A Prince from Outer Space” because he likened his cumbersome walk on 12 inch platform boots to Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon!

⁷¹ Stokes, 45.

⁷² Beken, 238.



Figure 8: Zeki Müren in 'A Prince from Outer Space' outfit 1974. Photograph is from 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition catalogue.

He gave other costumes similarly poetic names such as "The Dream of the Champagne," "The Smile of the Mimosas," "Thirsty Oyster," "Parisian Nights" and so on⁷³. In 1958 Hayat Magazine wrote: "Soloists usually appeared on stage like a penguin, or a crow, in blacks. But the outfits of those western singers we see in the movies are of such beauty. Don't our *efes* or *zeybeks* (Western Anatolian folk dancers) also wear such ornamented outfits?"⁷⁴

Perhaps the most significant reform Müren brought to *gazino* aesthetics, which later turned into a *gazino* staple, was the famous 'T-shaped stage'. A long and narrow platform was added to the original stage which would extend out from the middle of the stage and cut perpendicularly into the audience's space. Sometimes this extension would also branch out into two, at the very end. With his innovation, Müren broke the fourth wall between the audience and himself. Even though he still preserved his elevated position on the high platform, the T-shape maximized the interaction points between Müren and his audience. He utilized a hand microphone rather than a stationary one, actively engaging the audience while dancing his way from one end of the stage to the other. These efforts even helped partially democratize the *gazino*

⁷³ *İşte Benim Zeki Müren*, 99

⁷⁴ *It's Me Zeki Müren* exhibition catalogue, 86

space; the cheap tables in the back could get a better view of the pop star when he walked into the realm of the ordinary people and to the end of the extended stage.

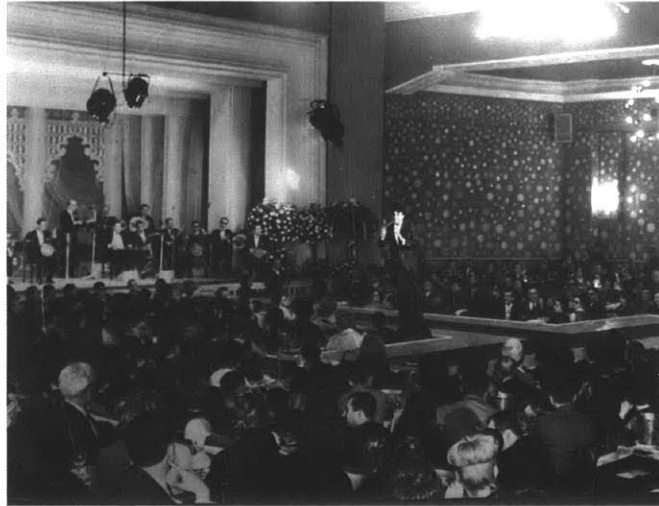


Figure 9: Zeki Müren in the legendary Maksim Gazino in 1960. Photograph is taken from 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition catalogue.

Gazino shows catered to a large number of people per night, but Müren still attempted to simulate a personal interaction between himself and the individuals in the audience. In his performance from Lunapark *Gazino* dating 1985, he enters the stage with music and immediately walks from one end of the stage to the other, greeting the audience with utmost humility. He holds his arms on two sides as if he is virtually embracing the audience; he bows down holding his right hand on his heart when he sees a familiar face, as a sign of modesty and respect; he even makes a motion of kissing a hand and putting it on his forehead — a gesture symbolizing respect for the elders. After he finishes the first song, he salutes the audience in an overtly exaggerated manner. His courteous style has a tone as if he is addressing a royal family, but at times, he seems to be speaking to a dearest, long-lost friend or a lover: “My beloveds! My unique ones! Those whom I’ve missed so much! My beautiful friends! My precious friends! My saintly guests! I am incredibly fortunate for being in your presence, my dears. As usual, I offer

you my limitless love and my deepest reverence, with the hope that you will accept them.”⁷⁵

Such attitude created a magical atmosphere within the *gazino*, took the audience into a realm in which they were not ordinary people but worthy of a star’s personal attention.



Figure 10: Zeki Müren in a women’s matinee in *Gençlik Parkı Yazar Aile Bahçesi* in Ankara circa 1960s. Photograph is taken from ‘İşte Benim Zeki Müren’ exhibition catalogue.

Müren occasionally spoke to, danced with or kissed people who managed to jump onto the stage, and accepted flowers from children. He knew the names of the important people in the audience and those who had sent him gifts; he studied each night’s guests before the show, in the backstage⁷⁶. Similar to his faux interaction on the radio, he also attempted to achieve a certain intimacy and a personalization effect on the *gazino* stage. A story I received through Zeki Müren Hotline — a project that collects everyday people’s stories and memories about the pop star through a telephone line ⁷⁷ — reveals the level of intimacy he inspired within the magic of *gazino*, especially amongst his women fans:

My late father used to work in a bank. The bank organized summer camps in Ataköy in Istanbul... When we went to the camp, we always organized a program in the city which would definitely include a night with a Zeki Müren concert... Especially because my mother is a Zeki Müren fan. One summer, we went to a women’s matinee.

⁷⁵ “ZEKİ MÜREN İN 54. YAŞ GÜNÜ LUNAPARK GAZİNOSU,” Youtube, accessed July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9OUqU7zCC4> .

⁷⁶ Beken, 189.

⁷⁷ Zeki Müren Hotline will be discussed in further detail in the conclusion chapter.

The musicians came on the stage one by one and sang. The last one, the *assolist* was Zeki Müren. Everyone was waiting for him with excitement and there was not a single sound in the hall. Then that magnificent artist appeared on stage and began singing his first song. While singing, all of a sudden, a huge chandelier fell right in front of him with a loud noise. Everyone panicked of course. Zeki Müren couldn't know what to do with fear and shock... A middle aged woman from the audience hopped onto the stage and started collecting the glass pieces around Zeki Müren's feet so that they don't hurt him. Later on we found out that she was Müren's biggest fan. She was in love with him and she didn't miss a single performance... Then Müren tried to calm down the audience. He said that the great Allah protected him and granted him to us, to his fans. His words touched me very deeply. Everyone witnessed what a faithful believer he was. And of course there was an insane applause in the venue... This is one of the most important memories of my childhood.

The story of the committed fan reveals the level of selfless devotion Müren inspired in his audience. For this woman, Müren was not only an image and a voice but he was a person she genuinely cared about; she was willing to take action to protect him in expense of her own safety. If someone asked her, she might have said Müren would have done the same for his audience. Müren brilliantly turns around the unfortunate incident by thanking Allah and designating his audience as the sole reason for his survival. With such statement, he reaffirms that he shares the same values and belief system with the Muslim majority amongst his fans. Moreover, he contributes to his mythic status by surviving a near-death experience before the eyes of his audience — foreshadowing his death on national television in 1996.

In an article from *Milliyet* from 1964, Nezihe Araz paints a lively picture of Müren's women's matinee shows. This commentary is significant in depicting how women behaved freely around Müren, most likely due to his ambiguous gender identity:

The young man (Zeki Müren) speaks to these women who adores him with his songs, threatens them, scolds them, invites them, flirts with them affectionately. And these women... I've never seen anything like this. Women are free from all the suppression, they protest all the prohibitions, they threw away all the corks, they are acting careless, reckless, and unconditionally; they turn completely towards the one on stage as if there is only this man in the white suit in the whole wide world... A young woman holds him from his arms and wipes his sweat. And then she shows the chiffon handkerchief to the rest of the crowd, she kisses it and puts it in her bosom!⁷⁸

⁷⁸ *İşte Benim Zeki Müren*, 116.

Such intimacy Müren created in the *gazino* was in fact twofold. *Gazino* space was marked as public; anyone who paid the fee could enter its realm. However once the show started, the audience came under Müren's aura and Müren made them believe that they were his 'beloved and precious friends' — not paid customers. The tables did not speak to one another but they all interacted with the star on the stage; this interaction could take the shape of an exchanged gaze, a hand gesture, singing along, or just being under the influence of Müren's magical presence, especially his otherworldly voice. Such connection rendered the *gazino* as a private space; the customers were Müren's personal guests and they enjoyed this privilege for that evening.

On the other end of this intimate connection was Zeki Müren himself who tested the limits of his audience day after day with his flamboyance. In the previously mentioned manifesto, he writes, "Years ago, when I first began my *gazino* performances, people wrote [negatively] so much about the single pearl I attached to my bow tie and the bordeaux tuxedo I wore... Look at me today?" *Gazino* offered the perfect balance between public and private, and Müren used this space to complete his transformation within its controlled environment. Müren shifted his appearance from his earlier image of a serious Turkish Art Music musician and a straight man, to a flamboyant pop star and a gender-nonconforming icon, whose homosexuality was an open secret. He revealed his identity initially not on national television to millions but in the controlled environment of the *gazino*, and one show at a time. The fact that he was cross-dressing publicly, even if it was on stage, in the late 1950s is certainly a courageous act and the public aspect of this action is worthy of appreciation. On the other hand, the fact that *gazino* was not a true mass medium and a certain intimacy was cultivated between Müren and the audience, protected him from the disapproval of conservative masses. It is no wonder that any footage from Müren's most notorious *gazino* performances is non-existent (at least in his personal and TRT archives, and on the web), and his most daring outfits only exist in a limited number of still images.

A photograph from the 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' (It's Me Zeki Müren) exhibition depicts the outside decor of the Manolya Bahçesi *gazino* in İzmir, from 1974. The building is covered

with portraits of musicians featured in the *gazino*; Zeki Müren's portrait is four times the size of other singers and his name is reiterated above all the portraits — as if it is the name of the building itself. In addition, a larger than life, 20-meter-high cardboard Zeki Müren in his 'A Prince from Outer Space' costume is attached to the side of the building. The giant model's feet are depicted in a position between a Greek sculpture in contrapposto and a graceful ballerina; his right hand is on his hip while the left one salutes the passers-by elegantly. Besides the fact that the two-dimensional sculpture's outfit challenges gender-proper fashion conventions, its posture and gestures are clearly feminine-coded. The giant Zeki Müren speaks openly and loudly about Müren's gender ambiguity outside the *gazino* walls and it must have been visible from a far distance. Perhaps it was the ridiculous size that provided a safe space to Müren's giant double; with its proud look, it seems immune from public judgement and denunciation. If something was that big and exaggerated, it obviously did not have any connection to the everyday reality! It served a fantasy world that everyone enjoyed from time to time — just like Müren on his protected *gazino* stage.



Figure 11: A large Zeki Müren cardboard image is attached to the façade of Manolya Bahçesi in Izmir International Fair, in 1974. Photograph is taken from 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition catalogue.

CHAPTER 4

The State Artist, Aging Parrot, and Queer Symbol on Television

"Hello, I was born in 1994. I was a naive kid. I grew up in a nostalgic atmosphere. I watched a lot of Yesilçam films. When I was little, I used to think of Zeki Müren as Turkey's Michael Jackson... One day I said to my mom "Don't you think it is so great that all the world is listening Zeki Muren's songs? I'm so proud!"

— Anonymous message from Zeki Müren Hotline

When Zeki Müren made his initial appearances on Istanbul Technical University's amateur television channel, he had already conquered radio and recording industry as the new face of Turkish Art Music and a state-sponsored musician, reaffirmed his star mythology through the magic of cinema by expanding his public persona over fictional characters, and popularized and reigned the *gazino* nightclubs for two decades. The rise of television in Turkey marks the beginning of the end of Müren's era. The official culture ideology that popularized Turkish Art Music was in decline and *gazinolar* slowly turned obsolete with the availability of cheap home entertainment. Yet, Müren's images from television are widely circulated today. Those who came of age in the 1980s during TRT's monopoly era remember Zeki Müren's television performances and music videos with nostalgia. Müren's image on television was also a source of hope for the LGBTQ individuals who had not established a movement or a nation-wide network at the time. Even though television represents Müren's years of decline, it is the medium that gave birth to the wide circulation of his image as a resistance icon after his death.

When Zeki Müren visited the United States in 1963, he was enchanted by television technology. In an image from his personal archive that was exhibited in the 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition, he is photographed in his hotel room in New York, lying on his stomach on the carpeted floor, his hands clasped under his chin, his feet in the air, watching tv from a very close distance like an excited child. He actually owned a television since 1952 — which was a privilege at the time — and watched Istanbul Technical University's (İTÜ TV) limited 'trial' programs.

He was even featured on İTÜ TV and sang a couple of his songs. At the time, there were only 35,000 televisions in Istanbul but this number rose rapidly with the nationalization of broadcast rights in 1968 and after Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) Ankara started its transmissions.

TRT Ankara began broadcasting on January 31, 1968 and with only three days a week and three hours a day. A year later the number of days went up to four; in 1970 and 1971, Izmir and Istanbul TRT Stations were established consecutively. By 1974, 19 million people — %55 of the population — were watching television. TRT channels held the monopoly on broadcast rights up until private television was permitted in 1990.

During the TRT's television monopoly era, Zeki Müren was a significant attraction for the tv audience. In 'Türk Televizyon Tarihi 1952 - 2006' (Turkish Television History 1952 - 2006), television producer and writer Ömer Serim mentions two tv programs that left a memorable mark on the year 1969: Neil Armstrong's moon landing and Zeki Müren's Ankara concert.⁷⁹ For this concert, Müren did what he knew the best and transformed the television studio into a *gazi-no* stage. He used fountains, gazebos, and live doves as stage props; he wore a different costume for each of his seven songs. The program was watched by approximately 150.000 people and according to Müren, there was a great increase in television sales.⁸⁰ Popularization of television marked the beginning of the end of Müren's reign on Turkey's pop culture scene; aware of this or not, Müren helped to establish the medium.

One of the most prestigious television events of the TRT era was the New Year's Eve program. In the second half of 1970s, high inflation rates in the economy and political unrest escalating on the streets resulted in people spending their New Year's Eve at home in front of their single-channel televisions. The newspapers used to follow TRT's preparations very closely and on December 31st they would publish a detailed schedule of the night's show. The New Year's Eve program was a variety show which was not unlike the *gazi-no* program but offered a

⁷⁹ Ömer Serim. *Türk Televizyon Tarihi, 1952-2006*. (Istanbul: Epsilon, 2007).

⁸⁰ *İşte Benim Zeki Müren*, 218.

'more eclectic line up of music and entertainers. Arabesk⁸¹ musicians and belly dancers — both of whom were not normally allowed on TRT — were permitted to perform on this special night of the year. And it was the highest prestige to be the *assolist* of the night⁸².

TRT's New Year's Eve show continued to be a major attraction throughout the next two decades, especially as a symbol of westernized and modern Turkey. The program on the night of December 31, 1983 featured Zeki Müren as the *assolist* alongside a very diverse list of performers. The show included an Indian themed ballet performance, comedy sketches, a jazz band, folk music, a belly dancer, ballroom dancing, famous pop star Nilüfer dubbing 'What a Feeling,' Turkish Art Music singer Emel Sayin, and *arabesk* musician İbrahim Tatlıses — overall, a manifestation of a 60-year-old Republic's cultural policy. For Müren, being the headliner in this program was important for establishing his legacy. He had already moved to the Aegean town of Bodrum and had been living in seclusion. He was going to give his legendary farewell concert in nine months, and stop performing for good due to health problems. By taking part in this show, Zeki Müren concretized his position as a state-sponsored artist and an integral contributor to the modernization project.

On December 31, 1983, minutes before midnight, Zeki Müren was surrounded by his fellow celebrities and cameras, in a glamorous reception room. He wore a black tuxedo, a bow tie, and fashionably large glasses; his hair was golden and fluffed. He was accompanied by Ajda Pekkan — a singer and actress whose European features were a great asset to the modern Turkish image of TRT — as he walked amongst the crowd, soon to be handed over the microphone for a New Year message. After expressing good wishes for the new year on behalf of everyone in the room, he pointed at the camera — thus the audience behind it — and he politely ordered them: "Smile please!" He pointed at the camera again and said one more time: "You too, you should smile as well!" He repeated the same trick for a couple of times as if he could

⁸¹ A genre of Turkish music inspired by Arabic and Byzantine sound. Arabesk emerged in the 60s and catered mainly to the urban working class. Arabesk was banned from state television and radio for it was considered backwards and inferior to the genres included in the national music project.

⁸² Ayfer Tunç. *Bir Maniniz Yoksa Annemler Size Gelecek: 70'li Yıllarda Hayatımız*. (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 2014), 72-73.

see the viewers who were sitting on their couches in their living rooms — a make-believe interaction he had experimented with both on radio and in *gazino* previously. Following the music cue after the New Year message, all celebrities began dancing arm in arm. Zeki Müren and Ajda Pekkan broke away from the crowd to dance with each other; rest of the people created a circle around them, all facing the couple with admiring eyes. Soon, Zeki Müren's song began and he took the center stage as the headliner of the night.

During 1980s, Müren produced a number of music videos for TRT. One of the most iconic of these videos is for the song 'Ah Bu Şarkıların Gözü Kör Olsun' (Oh, Damn These Songs) from 1981.⁸³ The music video has a rather bizarre mis-en-scene: Müren is in what seems to be a deluxe living room; he is standing behind a golden chair with carved ornamentation; behind him there are two sets of lit candles and a painting between them; the distant left corner seems to open into a second room, from which a heavy purple light leaks in. He is wearing a black blouse of a shiny, satin-like fabric. It is heavily embroidered with golden patterns and has golden epaulets which is quite fitting for the nickname he earned in the 1980s: 'Paşa' (high ranking Ottoman military general).

During the instrumental opening section of the song, Müren accompanies the music with his elegant yet overtly dramatic hand gestures. His deep and flirtatious gaze is almost hypnotic. He sings about the songs that remind him of his lost love, but his body language and eyes want to communicate something more urgent than the music and lyrics. This man, who once added an extension to his *gazino* stage to increase his mobility, is now anchored behind a golden chair; it is rumored that he felt overtly self conscious about the extra weight he had gained. Instead of dancing, he puts his energy into illustrating the lyrics of the song with his hands and mimics; his gestures come across as too passionate, exaggerated, sometimes scary, or even ridiculous.

⁸³ "ZEKİ MÜREN - Ah bu şarkıların gözü kör olsun," Youtube, accessed July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCXfMJnGWaA> .

Müren made several more music videos and television appearances in 1980s but he slowly dissolved into his secluded life in Bodrum. Private television channels started up in the 1990s and TRT had a difficult time keeping up with the competition. Within this new mediascape and the changing Turkish society, Müren must have known that he completed his time as Turkey's 'Sun of Art' — another nickname given to him in order to emphasize his importance for the Turkey's music scene. Two popular cultural elements that had made him a star, Turkish Art Music and *gazin*os, were then both, more or less, obsolete. His television appearances made his contemporaries yearn for his younger golden days; meanwhile his image offered a different meaning to those who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as to the marginalized queer members of Turkish society.

Speaking of the recent 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' (It's Me Zeki Müren) exhibition, curator Derya Bengi says:

“To tell you the truth, I think Zeki Müren has been forgotten. New generations remember him as a kitsch, aging parrot who was only around in the 80s, which is only the last period of his life. He is seen as if he had never lived in the 50s and the 60s, and had not left his significant mark on those years. [In the exhibition] We went back to the very beginning, in order to remind people of that journey, and to present the notion of history to those who were not aware of it.”⁸⁴

Bengi's analysis is accurate. Today Zeki Müren's most remembered and circulated images are those of his television appearances from his later years — his music videos, New Year's Eve programs, and his shocking death on live broadcast — not his images as modern Turkey's golden boy the radio star, nor the sensational *gazzino* legend.

In an interview I conducted with Gaye Su Akyol — a Turkish indie-pop musician whose music combines psychedelic rock elements with Turkish Art Music inspired vocals — she said Zeki Müren holds a special place in the subconscious of those who grew up in Turkey in the 80s and 90s, like herself. 'Zeki Müren' corner of Akyol's subconscious surfaces in her embellished vocals accompanied by her passionate hand gestures, her lyrics that reference travel to outer space, and her outfits that usually incorporate a heavily embroidered cloak reminding one of

⁸⁴ “50'ler, 60'lar, 70'ler ve Zeki Müren”.

Müren's later years as a 'kitsch parrot'. Like Akyol, I also remember my fascination with Zeki Müren as a child in the late 80s and early 90s. Even though his music was too dark and gloomy for a child, I enjoyed watching him because he was different from anyone I could see on television or on the streets. My child mind was seeing a fantasy world in Müren's queerness, in his surreal outfits, his exaggerated mannerism, and his piercing gaze. Akyol and I are a part of a generation who came of age in the paralyzed society of the post 1980 coup d'état; we did not have the Republican pride of the 1930s, 1940s, or 1950s, ideals and freedom of the 1960s, revolutionary anarchism of the 1970s. We were born into a society of depoliticization and suppression; Zeki Müren's presence in our living rooms and on our televisions offered the promise of a different, a rather queer world where one was free to be whoever she or he wanted.

The presence of Müren's image on television in the 1980s was especially invaluable for the LGBTQ individuals who were mostly closeted or lived underground lives at the time. Even though being LGBTQ has never been illegal in the Turkish Republic nor in the Ottoman Empire,⁸⁵ social norms and religious conservatism have put unofficial restraints and pressure on the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ movement in Turkey officially started in the early 1990s and helped to increase the visibility of LGBTQ people immensely.⁸⁶ Even though queer identities are still underrepresented and almost invisible in mainstream Turkish media today, at the very least the LGBTQ community has organizations, festivals, Pride week, publications in print and web, as well as in the academia. The emergence of the web and especially social media, helped LGBTQ people to connect with each other and create virtual or physical safe spaces for their community. In the 1980s when such resources did not exist, Zeki Müren's image on mass media was a place of refuge for LGBTQ individuals, who had felt like they did not belong in the world they lived in.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ In ""Zen-Dostlar Çoğalıp Mahublar Azaldı": Osmanlı'da Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Cinsellik ve Tarihyazımı" Serkan Delice argues that reaction against homosexual relationships increased in the 19th century Ottoman Empire due to westernization and modernization efforts. Westerners viewed homosexuality in Ottoman Empire as decadent and corrupt.

⁸⁶ Cem Başeskiöglü, interview by author, Istanbul, Turkey, August 11, 2015.

⁸⁷ Demet Demir, interview by author, Istanbul, Turkey, August 7, 2015.

In the oral history project '80lerde Lubunya Olmak' (Being 'Lubunya' [Queer] in the 1980s), one informant reminisces about her childhood as a boy, in a village in the conservative Black Sea region: "When I was a kid, there was something about me. I was known in the village. I used to go to elementary school with a headscarf and a skirt. Everyone in the village knew about me. They called me 'Zeki Müren'; I did not know Zeki Müren as Zeki Müren at the time... I understood it later on."⁸⁸ A testimony of an anonymous participant from Zeki Müren Hotline reveals a similar story: "When we were all kids and trying to figure out our identities, we all used to say, 'There is only me and Zeki Müren in the whole wide world.'" Even though at the time, many to many form of communication did not exist to connect LGBTQ people to each other, Zeki Müren provided the first (and for a long time only) queer image on television, and perhaps saved many LGBTQ people from self doubt and rejection,⁸⁹ one being poet Arkadaş Zekai Özger, who is believed to be a gay man based on the queer themes in his work. Özger was allegedly murdered by the police during the turbulent 1970s. Despite his young age, he left behind a body of work, the most popular one being 'Merhaba Canım' (Hello My Dear). This poem, offers us a window at Zeki Müren's meaning, for a possibly queer man from 1970s:

...
 Don't be fooled, one day it also changes
 The direction of the wind, which worships the sun and penis
 ...
 My body that grows into the sun and manhood
 Will fall from your hands and
 One day, for sure
 You will love Zeki Müren
 (You must love Müren)⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *80lerde Lubunya Olmak*, (Izmir: Siyah Pembe Üçgen, 2012), 24.

⁸⁹ A second significant image alongside Zeki Müren was Bülent Ersoy who was openly transgender and courageously went through a sex change operation in the public eye. Ersoy's claim for a 'pink' female state ID, ban from stage and exile in Germany during the post 1980 coup era marked her as an antigovernment revolutionary — an identity Zeki Müren refrained from pursuing openly. Although, today, Ersoy's revolutionary identity is contested.

⁹⁰ "Merhaba Canım," Siir, accessed July 30, 2016, http://www.siir.gen.tr/siir/a/arkadas_zekai_ozger/merhaba_canim.htm.

⁹⁰ "ZEKİ MÜREN - Ah bu şarkıların gözü kör olsun," Youtube, accessed July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCXfMJnGWaA>.

CHAPTER 5

Posthumous Zeki Müren: The Model Citizen, The Resistance Icon

“I wonder why Zeki Müren left his money to the army. For instance, couldn't he leave it to LGBTQ organizations?”

— Anonymous message from Zeki Müren Hotline

Turkish society was devastated when Müren died on live television in 1996. Thousands attended his state funeral. The fact that he left his wealth to two non-profit organizations — Turkish Education Fund that provides scholarships to students and Mehmetçik Vakfı which serves military veterans — defined his legacy as a philanthropist and nationalist model citizen. Even though he had aligned himself with the dominant ideology during his lifetime, years after his death, his image was revived as an anti-establishment resistance icon and appeared in 2013 Gezi Park protests and Turkey's recent Pride Parades. Today, Zeki Müren's posthumous public persona signifies these two recurring themes — a model citizen and a resistance icon — and his star image still reconciles different publics in the same way he did during his lifetime. Especially after the recent military coup attempt (7/15/2016) that was followed by civilian unrest, further polarization in Turkey's society and the declaration of a state of emergency, nostalgia for Müren and the values he implicitly advocated grow even stronger.

Death of a Model Citizen

Zeki Müren died on 24 September 1996 in TRT's Izmir studios. TRT had convinced him to take a break from his seclusion in Bodrum, and was producing a documentary about his life and work. The final scene of the documentary, which was also being broadcast live, was a ceremony during which he was going to be awarded a life-long achievement award. In this final public appearance, 65-year-old Zeki Müren, in a black jacket, his usual make up and hair, looked much older than his age. He was accompanied by Ajda Pekkan, his dance partner from the 1984 New Year's Eve TRT program, and Muazzez Ersoy a younger generation Turkish Art

Music singer. He was called up to the stage to receive his award — the very microphone he had used on January 1, 1951, during his first radio transmission that had introduced him to the public. Receiving this meaningful award, he said: “[With this award] I go back to the old days. I don’t know if I should laugh or cry. I am thankful, to you and to our grateful people.” He descended from the stage holding the presenter’s arm tightly; his tremendous effort to hold his large body upright was visible from his pale and serious face. Minutes later, he collapsed in the backstage. The miracle that had once saved his life on the *gazino* stage and had granted him to his precious fans, was absent this time.

The news of Müren’s passing traveled fast on television and other media. One of the users of the microblogging website *ekşisözlük* writes about their experience of hearing about Müren’s death:

I’m one of the people who remembers the soccer match [between Beşiktaş and RWD Molenbeek] not with its score but with Zeki Müren’s death... During the first half of the match, captions on tv said Zeki Müren’s health was in critical condition. I was reading the captions out loud to my mother and all of a sudden I found myself saying: “Zeki Müren passed away.” The captions had just changed at that moment. As a little kid myself, I was shocked. I can’t imagine how sad I would have been then, if I loved Zeki Müren as much as I do know... Death of Zeki Müren left the greatest impact on me. I guess that’s the reason why I remember every single detail of this incident. And for the same reason I remember the name of an unimportant soccer team like Molenbeek.⁹¹

Müren’s death caused a nation-wide mourning. Cem Başeskioğlu, a filmmaker and an LGBTQ activist, remembers the night of Müren’s passing very vividly. His memory underlines how Müren’s death affected audiences from different subcultures within Turkey, yet they all mourned for the pop star: “We were so upset that we wanted to go out and buy some beer or something, and sit by the Bosphorus. When we went out to get drinks, there was a long line in front of each liquor store.”⁹² Similarly, hundreds of thousands flocked to Müren’s state-sponsored funeral in his hometown Bursa. The news footage from the funeral shows that celebrity

⁹¹ “24 eylül 1996 beşiktaş rwd molenbeek maçı,” *Ekşisözlük*, accessed July 11, 2016, <https://eksisozluk.com/24-eylul-1996-besiktas-rwd-molenbeek-maci--1811503>.

⁹² Cem Başeskioğlu interview.

musicians, politicians, and ordinary people were praying side by side, while soldiers on rooftops provided security throughout the funeral ceremony.⁹³

By giving Müren an official funeral, the state reaffirmed his identity as a ‘state artist’ — a title he had earned in 1991 with his service to the country. It was an unusual thing for the Turkish state to hold a queer pop star in such high esteem. Only three months before Müren’s death, the City Government of Istanbul had carried out a citywide ‘cleansing project,’ ironically in preparation for the United Nations Habitat II conference. The project’s aim was getting rid of transgender people in Istanbul — specifically targeting the community on Ülker Street of Beyoğlu district — alongside stray dogs, and homeless people.⁹⁴ During the Ülker Street resistance,⁹⁵ mainstream newspapers depicted the transgender residents of the street as immoral and mentally ill; they were eventually forced out of their neighborhood and their community was dispersed. Three months after, the same media outlets depicted Müren’s state funeral with utmost respect, treating the queer star as a national hero.

Stokes argues that the debates around Müren’s queerness opened up a space for speaking about other kinds of citizenship in Turkey — the only identity that had been recognized by the official ideology had been that of ‘Turkish’ — at a time of ethnic conflict in the country’s Kurdish southeast. Stokes also adds that the public debate around queer identities can also be seen as “a displacement of the more politically difficult topic of discussion: “ethnic” and class fractures in the modern state.”⁹⁶ So, these discussions were revealing and concealing all at once.

Regardless of the state’s intentions, Müren had already established the narrative of a ‘model citizen’ for himself, by donating one half of his wealth to Turkish Education Foundation (TEV) that provides scholarships to underprivileged students, and the second half to Mehmetçik

⁹³ “Zeki Müren Cenaze Töreni - Tam Kayıt (24.09.1996),” Youtube, accessed July 30, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnHw67nJqZ4> .

⁹⁴ ⁹⁴ “Habitat II’nin 10. Yılı Mevlütü,” Arkitera, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://v3.arkitera.com/k153-habitat-ii-nin-10-yil-mevlutu.html> .

⁹⁵ Ülker Street resistance is documented in detail in Pinar Selek’s book *Maskeler, Cariyeler, Bacılar*.

⁹⁶ Stokes, 70.

Vakfı, an organization serving army veterans and their families. Güsel Bilal, a TEV representative I interviewed, said that Müren initially donated his fortune to TEV only; but after seeing the rise of Kurdish insurgency in the Southeast Turkey in the 1980s, he decided to provide support to the families of Turkish soldiers who had lost their lives in this war. Müren's decision to support Mehmetçik Vakfı has definitely marked him as a nationalist ideal citizen and became a major defining aspect of his legacy, but it has also been a debated issue: Why would a queer pop star donate his wealth to the veterans of Turkish army — an institution notorious for its discriminatory policies against LGBTQ people?⁹⁷ According to Stokes' analysis, the public discussion of queer identities and the state's embrace of Müren were strategies to displace the topic of discussion from a more complicated subject of ethnic minorities to a rather harmless issue of LGBTQ identities. On the other side of the coin, Müren might have employed a similar strategy by complying with the popular nationalistic tendencies in order to divert attention from the debate about his queerness. He had always found a conciliatory position in accord with his society norms, the dominant ideology that regulated it, and his own agenda. His rebellion was a peaceful one, and he did not want to change that after his death.

Interventions from the Beyond

10th year anniversary of Müren's death was crowned by a posthumous album 'Batmayan Güneş' (The Sun That Doesn't Set). On the parallel timeline of Turkey's LGBTQ movement, the same year was marked with an attempted lynching of Bursa Gökkuşuğu Travestileri, Transseksüelleri, Geyleri, Lezbiyenleri Koruma, Yardımlaşma ve Kültürel Etkinlikleri Geliştirme Derneği (a Bursa-based LGBTQ solidarity organization) by the supporters of Bursaspor soccer

⁹⁷ Turkish military defines homosexuality as a psychosexual disorder. An exemption report ('rotten report') can be granted to those who can prove their homosexuality through a set of steps that may include psychological tests, character testimonies from 'elders', and even documentation of sexual intercourse with another man. For further information on military's treatment of gay men, see Oyman Başaran's article "You are Like a Virus: Dangerous Bodies and Military Medical Authority in Turkey".

team and owners of local businesses.⁹⁸ A decade later, 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition has traveled 6 cities around Turkey, has been accompanied by numerous satellite events such as concerts, homage albums, production of a new TRT documentary and so on, and has attracted a record number of visitors. Meanwhile, the 2015 Istanbul Pride Parade was attacked by the police, who used water canons and tear gas to disperse the crowd;⁹⁹ and the 2016 Istanbul Pride Parade was canceled altogether by the City Government, due to alleged security risks. It is fascinating to observe how official discourse and popular perception of LGBTQ identities in Turkey have been at odds with Müren's ever-growing posthumous fame. At the same time, it has also been increasingly fashionable to utilize Müren's image as an icon of resistance in anti-establishment protests, as well as works of art.

Beginning on May 28, 2013, a wave of citizen unrest shook Istanbul's Taksim Square. What started as a protest against the destruction of Gezi Park, soon turned into a powerful resistance against Turkish government's totalitarianism, opportunistic economic policies, alleged corruption, disregard for human rights, liberties, and freedom of speech, and its move away from secularism in favor of religious conservatism. The Gezi Protests brought a spark of hope to the secular and democratic sections of the society, who had long been disturbed by the policies of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). AKP's authoritarianism surprisingly brought various subsections of the society together in the occupied Gezi Park; nationalists, Kemalists, Kurds, LGBTQ communities, leftists, feminists, and many others who do not usually act together protested side by side. Solidarity between such a mixed group of people was unprecedented in Turkish politics and social movements, but was reminiscent of the diverse masses of audiences who had shared a common love for Zeki Müren's music. So, it was no surprise that Müren's

⁹⁸ Serkan Delice, "'Zen-Dostlar Çoğalıp Mahublar Azaldı': Osmanlı'da Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Cinsellik ve Tarihyazımı" in *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet (Muamma Sexualities: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey)*." ed. Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice (Istanbul: Metis 2012), 329.

⁹⁹ The City Government argued that the Pride Parade did not have the required permissions. The unofficial excuse for the police intervention is believed to be that the Pride Parade corresponded to the holy Muslim month of Ramadan. Although Pride Parades in Turkey have corresponded to Ramadan many times in the past. The growing tension was rather the result of the upcoming general elections and many believe that the police intervention was a show of power.

stenciled image and his lyrics found their way into Gezi Protest slogans: “The one who stands up against TOMAs (acronym for ‘riot intervention vehicle’) / It’s me Zeki Müren!”¹⁰⁰ The same image and slogan appeared once again next year during the presidential elections, attached to a voting ballot and circulated the web widely. A citizen, disenchanted by the deadlock in politics, decided to think outside of the box and not vote for any of the official candidates. Instead, they nominated Zeki Müren for the presidential office.

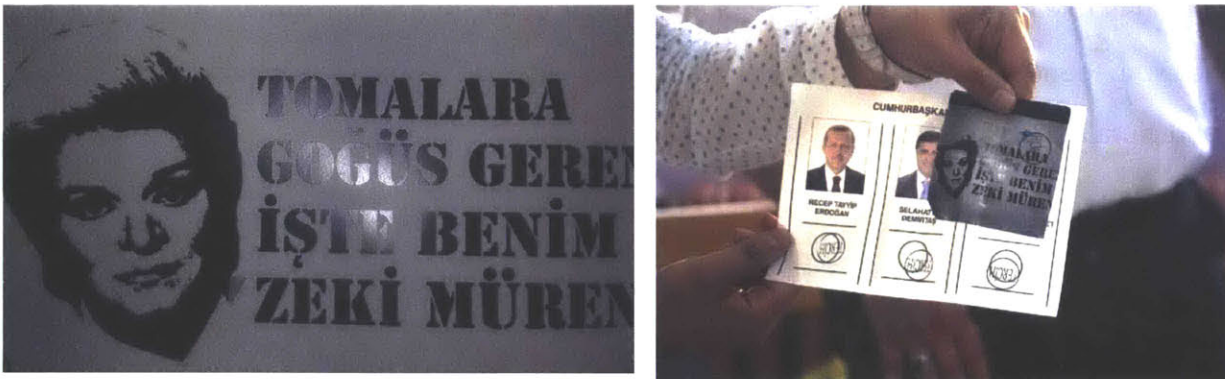


Figure 12: Stencil of Zeki Müren’s image and a slogan that says, “The one who stands up against TOMAs / It’s me Zeki Müren!”. Photograph is taken by @istanbulpride account at Twitter at <https://twitter.com/istanbulpride/status/351290028112109568>.

Figure 13: Zeki Müren’s image attached to a voting ballot during 2014 presidential elections. Photograph is taken from the news website Haberler. <http://www.haberler.com/sandiktan-tomalara-gogus-geren-iste-benim-zeki-6364275-haberi/>.

Gezi Protests brought a sense of optimism to those who had been marginalized by the AKP rule such as ethnic and religious minorities, queer people, and the seculars who had adopted nontraditional, westernized lives. Having experienced a type of solidarity and tolerance that they had never known before Gezi, LGBTQ community celebrated 2014 Istanbul Pride Parade with utmost hope. Zeki Müren was again mentioned in various picket signs in a playful manner. One sign from Pride bears a picture of 1960s’ Zeki Müren and says, “I asked Zeki Müren, he said #resist!”, putting words in Müren’s mouth that he had never uttered during his lifetime, at least explicitly. Another hand written sign reads as “We are Zeki Müren’s soldiers!”, a clear reference to the Kemalist slogan “We are Mustafa Kemal’s soldiers!” that has been fre-

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/fatih-ozguven/delikanli-kimmis-bakalim-1139312/>

quently used in anti AKP protests, which also signifies a society sympathetic to the notions of military. A third popular sign that circulated in social media was a pink poster on which there was a Zeki Müren portrait with a rainbow heart stuck to its corner. Next to this image, the slogan said: “We don’t recognize another paşa [military general].” Another paşa could have meant a variety of things: Any military general that undertook military coups in Turkey’s history — most notorious one being Kenan Evren of the 1980 coup —, the current government which exercised an authoritarian rule comparable to a state of martial law, or Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his ruling friends who founded the modern Turkish Republic but failed to establish a sustainable, egalitarian, and pluralistic democracy.



Figure 14: A sign that says “I asked Zeki Müren, he told me to #resist” from Istanbul Pride Parade 2013. Photograph is taken from website Listelist at <http://listelist.com/lgbt-2013-onur-yuruyusu-fotograflari/onur-yuruyusu-2013-zeki-murene-sordum-diren-dedi-lgbt/>.



Figure 15: Man holding a sign that says “We are Zeki Müren’s soldiers!”. Photograph is taken from @LGBTDireniscisi account at Twitter at <https://twitter.com/lgbtdireniscisi/status/495362313755844608>.

Figure 16: Man holding a sign that says “We don’t recognize another Paşa”. Photograph is taken from KaosGL website at <http://www.kaosgl.com/sayfa.php?id=16135>.

In the spirit of Gezi, the overarching message of the Pride Parade reflected the LGBTQ community’s anxieties about Turkey’s patriarchal military culture which had been one of the building blocks of the Republic from its inception, and the antidemocratic practices that had gone hand in hand with it. During the last peacefully conducted Pride Parade of 2014, Zeki Müren emerged as a symbol of non-violent and humorous resistance. Almost 20 years after his death, his colorful and courageous persona spread hope to the hearts of those who had been fed up with authoritarianism and discrimination.

In ‘Zeki Müren: Sun of Art, Ideal Citizen’ Martin Stokes speaks about the posthumous narrative of Müren as a figure of civility and virtue, and the nostalgia that emerged in his absence. He says this nostalgia acts as “a palliative to the broad condition of cynicism that prevailed after the Susurluk car crash of 4 November 1996.”¹⁰¹ On the mentioned date, four bodies were found in the same car, in a traffic accident in the city of Susurluk: a parliamentarian, Istanbul’s former head of police, a pan-Turkish mafia member, and a prostitute. The accident affirmed corruption of the government and led to a state of pessimism that presented itself in everyday “microperforming” such as wearing Atatürk pins or deploying flags. According to Stokes, nostalgia for Zeki Müren was another type of response to Susurluk cynicism:

In this nostalgia, Müren appears above all as a figure of sincerity, honesty, and warmth. If his films are narratives of failure, it is a failure that springs from his refusal to recognize the wickedness, shallowness, and general shabbiness of the world around him — a refusal, ultimately, to be cynical. Zeki Müren nostalgia might then be seen as a public assertion that although Müren himself may have passed on in 1996 a few weeks before the Susurluk incident, the citizenly virtues to which the republic aspired had not necessarily died with him.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Stokes, 70

¹⁰² Stokes, 71

20 years after the Susurluk incident and Müren's death, Müren's face as a resistance icon still has not been replaced by another popular image. Naturally, its meaning has not remained the same either. The Zeki Müren nostalgia Stokes writes about refer to him as an ideal, virtuous citizen, which is an account that is still valid today. However the picket signs from Gezi and Pride speak of a rather subversive Zeki Müren narrative; one that represents an anti-authoritarian discourse and supports repressed identities. A similar use of Müren's image appeared during the 2015 general elections in Turkey: Some unofficial campaign images and street graffiti supporting Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP) — a left-wing, pro-Kurdish and pro-minority party — urged people to vote for HDP on behalf of Zeki Müren. It is hard to imagine Zeki Müren — the nationalist citizen we have come to know who had always complied with the mainstream ideology — as a supporter of HDP. It is also unrealistic to envision Zeki Müren openly encouraging people to #resist the anti LGBTQ establishment, as he had never raised his voice to support the LGBTQ movement in Turkey which had been active for 3 years before Müren's death in 1996¹⁰³ or the transgender community that was forcefully displaced during Ülker Street resistance. In fact, some members of the LGBTQ community feel resentment towards Müren for his conformism. Demet Demir — a human rights and LGBTQ activist who was at the forefront of Ülker Street resistance and still lives on that street — thinks Zeki Müren should have used his influence to empower LGBTQ community in Turkey. Demir is a socialist and feminist trans woman — recipient of the 1997 Felipa de Souza Award from OutRight Action International — who was jailed for eight months after the 1980 military coup. She had survived various forms of torture and mistreatment typical of the era, as a result of her gender identity and her revolutionary politics. Despite all this, unlike Müren, Demir has been unapologetically open about her gender identity and political beliefs since the 1980s. Rightfully, Demir believes Müren's contribution to LGBTQ rights in Turkey was not sufficient, or at least it was not proportional to the social power Müren held.

¹⁰³ Erdal Partog, "Queer Teorisi Bağlamında Türkiye LGBTT Mücadelesinin Siyasi Çizgisi" in *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet* (Muamma Sexualities: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey)." ed. Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice (Istanbul: Metis 2012), 170.

Müren's all-pleasing attitude rendered him both accessible to various publics in Turkey's society but at the same time, it could alienate people like Demet Demir whose contribution to the LGBTQ community is uncontested. Yet, it is also important that through Müren's public persona, a platform of conversation emerges. In addition, despite everything Müren had, or had not done during his lifetime, today, Müren's significance lies equally in his own actions, as well as what Turkish public has made out of his star image and his artistic practice.

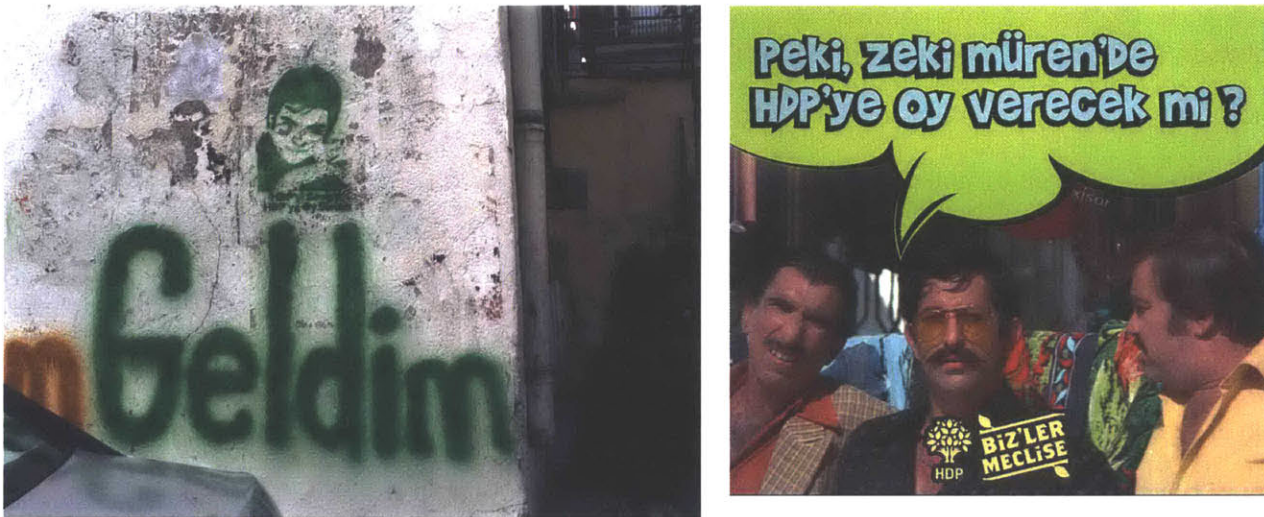


Figure 17: Spencer Hawkins, Street Art in Beyoglu, Istanbul, Turkey 2015. Zeki Müren's stencil image in Istanbul. Small text under the portrait says, 'Vote for HDP' and the large inscription reads "I'm here".

Figure 18: An unofficial HDP promotion poster from 2015 general elections. Image is taken from @seraysahinler Twitter account at <https://twitter.com/seraysahiner/status/592775342030487552>

Uncovering Layers, New Meanings

In the past decade, interest towards Zeki Müren's work and star image has visibly increased. Many artists, musicians, and media makers produced work inspired by Müren, and with the efforts of Turkish Education Fund (TEV) and Mehmetçik Vakfı, the pop legend has been rediscovered again and again. The work produced by young generations often seeks ways to subvert the conservative 'ideal citizen' depiction of Müren. This portrayal of the star has been

strictly guarded by TEV and Mehmetçik Vakfı, as well as TRT, which often repurpose and monetize its Zeki Müren archives and is currently in production of a new documentary about Müren's life and work. It is useful to analyze how Müren's image is reproduced by his guardian institutions while it is being deconstructed and appropriated by independent efforts.

The recent 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' (It's Me Zeki Müren) exhibition provides a good example to Müren's story being retold under the supervision of TEV and Mehmetçik Vakfı. The show unearthed Müren's vast personal archives and successfully revealed his career trajectory between 1951 and 1984. It laid out Müren's life and work in a seamless narrative through his photographs, letters, costumes, films, and songs, while contextualizing the star's career against the grain of Turkey's troubled history. At the same time, the narrative strategically navigated around Müren's nonconforming gender identity and his sexuality, just as Müren would have done it. When I interviewed the curator, Derya Bengi, and asked him about this overtly careful approach, he replied by pointing at the name of the exhibition: 'It's Me Zeki Müren'. The exhibition is a placeholder for Müren's voice as a public figure; its narrative unveils everything Müren would have willingly revealed about his star persona, but nothing more. Even the exhibition's timeline stops in 1984 at Müren's legendary farewell concert, instead of his death in 1996; implying that what happened in those 12 years did not constitute a part of his public image. The protected narrative the exhibition follows was constructed by Müren himself during his lifetime, so it was only appropriate to title the show with Müren's own words 'It's Me Zeki Müren' which is also the title of one of Müren's most popular, late-career songs. The lyrics of the song provide a glance at Müren's double life; Müren speaks of himself as a lonesome artist who finds solace in his music and art, his happy memories of lost lovers, his fans and their applause. Despite its upbeat melody, the song portrays Müren as a sorrowful person surrounded by crowds but without a single friend or family. The last stanza ends with "My name is Happy and my last name is Fortunate. You all knew me with this name for years. And listened to songs from 'Happy Fortunate.'" The exhibition portrays Müren as a successful artist with a glamorous life, but the story is a bit different for those who can see between the lines and read Müren as a closeted queer man

celebrated by a traditional audience. The exhibition subtly alludes to Müren's ability to survive within the limitations of his society but it is likely that this could not be explicitly uttered under the institutional sponsorship of TEV and Mehmetçik Vakfı.

'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition was accompanied by a homage concert. Famous singers gave voice to Müren's renowned songs and the income from the concert and an album that resulted from it was donated to charity. During this concert, Müren was remembered with his unique voice, impeccable Turkish, philanthropy, kind and respectful personality, and work ethics. The songs were performed as their originals; some of the singers even attempted to imitate Müren's passionate style of singing. The event was everything one would expect it to be; it reaffirmed Zeki Müren's myth without touching upon any controversial subjects that might disturb the harmony of the audience. Interestingly, the concert took place in Zorlu Shopping Mall's Performance Arts Center; less than a year earlier the same venue had withdrawn from a concert by Boston Gay Men's Chorus due to pressure from conservative groups and their media.¹⁰⁴

The Zeki Müren homage concert was performed a second time in another contentious venue in Istanbul, the renovated Emek Cinema.¹⁰⁵ Having opened its doors as a movie theatre in 1924, Emek Cinema was a landmark of cultural life in Istanbul until it fell victim to an urban renewal project in 2013. Despite protests by the cinema community and larger public, Emek Cinema was relocated, and installed into a shopping mall, leaving its original building vacant for a more profitable development. Many landmarks in Istanbul have faced a similar scenario, one famous instance being Maksim Gazino which was synonymous with Müren's name. Maksim had been defunct since 1990s. After fulfilling its purpose as a parking lot, it was demolished in 2000s. Both Maksim Gazino and Emek Cinema were landmarks that preserved Istanbul's cultural memory and their peak era intersected with Müren's golden years. Ironically, the Zeki Müren commemoration concert at Emek Cinema was named 'Zeki Müren Gazino'; the show

¹⁰⁴ "Boston Gay Men's Chorus Sings Its Stories Through The Middle East," wbur, accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.wbur.org/artery/2015/07/07/bgmc-middle-east> , paragraph 18.

¹⁰⁵ "Zeki Müren Gazinosu" Sabah, accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/yasam/2016/05/27/zeki-muren-gazinosu> .

reenacted the lost *gazino* tradition, inside of the shell of a destroyed movie theatre. Müren's work ended up being repurposed in two venues that went against what the star's memory stands for. Such decisions provoke questions about the level of understanding Müren's beneficiaries have of his work, and his historical and cultural significance. On the other hand, young and independent artists and media producers offer fresh eyes on the star's image, providing new ways to unpack him as a media text, diverging from the conservative, institutional approach.

In the past decade, Zeki Müren's image has inspired a new generation of visual artists who embrace a liberal world view that stands against conservatism, nationalism, and Turkey's militaristic tradition. These artists attempt to excavate layers of meaning within Müren's star image and investigate the tension between Müren's identity and the society they live in. Similar to the LGBTQ movement's claim of Müren's image, they also imagine him as an icon of resistance against contemporary dominant ideology.

Eriş Seymen's 'Portrait of a Paşa' (2009) consists of a performance piece and its outcome in the shape of a 'drawing'. Seymen installs the outline of a Zeki Müren portrait in a shooting range and traces the image by shooting bullets at it. The result is a pointillist style portrait of Müren, each brush stroke corresponding to a bullet hole. According to Cüneyt Çakırlar's review of the 'Portrait of a Paşa,' the inspiration for the piece has come from a frequently recited rumor/story about how Müren came to be known as *paşa*. In this story, Müren offers a quick witted explanation to the query about his nickname. He says, people have given him the title *paşa* because they could not call the generals of 1980 military coup 'faggots'. Embodying the highest rank in military's patriarchal order and the queer male identity all at once, Zeki Müren's star image was an arena of negotiation and this was the only way for his survival. Similarly, in Seymen's piece, the aggressive and confrontational act of shooting both assaults and gives meaning to Müren's powerful image, which would have otherwise stayed as a faint outline. This very

well choreographed, virile performance — very much like the military service required by every Turkish man — acts out the tensions within being a queer male citizen of the Turkish Republic.



Figure 19: "Portrait of a Pasha," bullet holes on a wooden board form an image of the singer Zeki Muren. Credit Reha Arcan, Courtesy of Erinc Seymen and Rampa Istanbul. Photograph is taken from New York Times at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/17/arts/international/seducing-dealers-without-giving-in-to-their-demands.html?_r=0.

Figure 20: "HOPE Join the army of Nesren Jake - (Zeki Muren)" a sticker from a street in Istanbul by artist Nesren Jake. Photograph is taken from Galeribu Instagram account at https://www.instagram.com/p/BA6_5i7FJZy/.

Another provocative appropriation of Zeki Müren's image can be seen in Nesren Jake's 'Hope' portrait (2016). Jake, a self-proclaimed 'propaganda artist,' photoshops a famous portrait of Zeki Müren imitating Shepard Fairey's Barack Obama 'Hope' poster which had been a symbol of Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential Campaign. In the original portrait, Zeki Müren wears a dark suit, a white shirt and a tie; his face and golden hair are made up in the usual style. His piercing gaze is directed at us; he is a proud queer man in an indisputably masculine attire, and he is unapologetic about it. Jake points at optimism sprung from USA's first black president and Turkey's embrace of its queer *paşa*; both public figures revolt against the system using the system's own mechanics. During a time of severe societal polarization, Jake takes refuge in the

reconciliatory image of Zeki Müren and reproduces these portraits as stickers that would find their way into the streets of Istanbul. Similar to musician Gaye Su Akyol, Jake is interested in the pop culture images that are rooted in their generation's collective subconscious. Born in 1984, Jake must have also grown up watching Müren's late-period images on TRT shows. Jake's 'Hope' provides a nostalgic and naive effort seeking peace in an imagined ideal past but at times turns into a cynical commentary on Turkey's contemporary state of socio-political despair.

Artist Sadi Güran's illustrated story 'Libertango' portrays Zeki Müren cruising for what turns out to be a tango partner. At the beginning, we cannot make out Müren's identity as he is only a silhouette with a big hair who follows the gender-bending Jamaican singer, actress and queer icon Grace Jones. It is only when Jones enters a room and turns the lights on, Müren is revealed in his iconic 'A Space from Outer Space' outfit. In the next scene, Müren poses just like one of his album covers, holding his left hand with his right in an awkwardly elegant position, while his gaze is directed at us as if he is suggesting a secret that we already know. In the final panel, we see Jones and Müren passionately dancing in a trance like state; depicting Müren as a man who cross dresses off-stage and in actual life, without any apologies and excuses.¹⁰⁶

It is quite popular to depict Müren in surreal settings befitting his norm-defying and marvelous outfits; expressionistic styles are favored over realism, queering Müren's image even further in search for his deepest and sincerest meanings. A portrait of Müren by Melike Koçak — a painter and animator whose expressionistic work remixes elements from Turkish and Ottoman history, fantastic fictional characters, and early web aesthetics — excavates Müren's inner desires through some free flowing brushstrokes and vivid colors. While the painting is based on one of Müren's record covers, the style of the artist takes the image much further; the untamed curls of Müren's hair, his scarf that has a personality of its own and expands its roots into the world, the wild orange that leaks out of Müren's eyes and splashes on the background, all sug-

¹⁰⁶ "Libertango," Bantmag. accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.bantmag.com/english/issue/post/40/217> .

gest a subversive and disobedient version of Zeki Müren, unlike the official ideal citizen depiction.



Figure 21: Illustrated story featuring Zeki Müren ‘Libertango’ by Sadi Güran on Bant Magazine’s May-June 2015 issue, also at <http://sadiguran.tumblr.com/post/120923089582/libertango> .

Another illustration from GZone, a gay life and culture magazine from Turkey, imagines Müren as a superhero wearing a pink version of ‘A Prince from Outer Space’ costume, and repeats the slogan from Gezi protests: “The one who stands up against TOMAs, it’s me Zeki Müren”. Based on the scale of the buildings around him, Müren is depicted as a giant, reminding us of his larger than life sculpture attached to the building of a *gazino*. In this scenario, his innate superpower is his size that he utilizes to protect people from the powerful establishment. An anecdote from GZone’s December 2015 issue speaks about a side of Müren that is rarely mentioned as a part of his mainstream persona but is along the lines of the depiction in this illustration. During 1970s and 1980s, when Istanbul’s gay clubs were often raided by the police, Zeki Müren opened up a nightclub and provided protection to the club’s patrons with his presence. Müren’s friend Tunç Kökkaya remembers that if policemen would enter the club and see

Müren, they would immediately apologize for the inconvenience and leave the venue.¹⁰⁷ In real life, Müren's superpower was his stardom thus the prestige his presence brought; he used this power to provide safe spaces for LGBTQ communities in Istanbul. So, claiming his image as a resistance and queer icon is not completely baseless. This is perhaps Zeki Müren's most explicit support for the LGBTQ community, yet the story is left out of Müren's official narrative that is protected by TEV and Mehmetçik Vakfı, his official biographies, as well as the heteronormative discourse of mainstream media.



Figure 22: Illustration from *Gzone Magazine*. Image is taken from http://www.imgrum.net/media/1026154055058764583_1475761707.

Figure 23: Zeki Müren illustration by Melike Koçak 'Pope Queen'.

In its July 2016 issue, culture, literature and humor magazine *Karakarga* featured Zeki Müren on its cover alongside this text that references recent incidents: "Those who beat up the one who doesn't fast in Ramadan, those who can not tolerate the Pride Parade, those who sexually assault women and think of them as inferior, those who call lovers 'perverts' and silence the laughter of the protesters... Let Zeki Müren kiss you!" Another literature and 'street' magazine *Bavul* also devoted its May 2016 issue to Zeki Müren in which Sibel Arna wrote "He [Müren]

¹⁰⁷ Onur Özişik. *LGBT Destekçisi En Büyük Yıldız: Zeki Müren*. *Gzone*. December, 2015.

is the reason behind our hope for tomorrow and our courage... We have internalized his colors. We can breath because of his colors and love our country no matter what and we are able to tell to our children that we will live to see beautiful days”.

In ‘Collective Search for Identity’, Klapp discusses three ways in which stars deal with the status quo: reinforce, seduction, and transcendence. Throughout his career and after his death, Müren’s public persona utilizes each of these approaches successively: he is an ideal citizen who reinforces the norms of national identity — even when these norms and dominant ideology are in flux, he skillfully adopts accordingly — and contributes to the Turkish modernization project via his music; he breaks gender norms but seductively manages to get away with it; and especially after his death, his image is repurposed as a resistance icon, transcending the conservative, traditional, and heteronormative rules of the society. Building upon Max Weber’s notion of charisma, Dyer analyzes stars’ charismatic appeal in unstable and ambiguous social orders, and how it might be utilized to transcend dominant norms. He situates Marilyn Monroe in the flux of contradicting ideas about morality in 1950s America: “Monroe’s combination of sexuality and innocence is part of that flux, but one can also see her ‘charisma’ as being the apparent condensation of all that within her.” Same is true with Zeki Müren’s; his star image has accommodated various ideological configurations. His charisma is both a product of these negotiations and it is also an empowering tool to transcend the existing norms within the society. Especially for those whose identities are marginalized by the dominant culture, Zeki Müren offers hope for reconciliation.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Dyer and McDonald, 24 and 30.

CONCLUSION:

Reading Turkey's Gender-Bending Pop Legend as a Transmedia Star Through a Transmedia Project

From his first public appearance in 1951 until his death, Zeki Müren developed his star narrative piece by piece, revealing a new layer at a time on each of the new media platforms he encountered. He emerged as a Turkish Art Music star on state radio and quickly became the paramount popular culture icon that the modernizing Turkish Republic had been yearning for. Even though his acting skills were never praised as much as his musical talent, he utilized the magical language of cinema in order to add new layers to his star narrative; he recreated himself as a naive but talented, self-made musician, who was desired by young, urban, independent and modern 'new' Turkish women. In these musical melodramas, he did not only established himself as a heterosexual lover, but he also reaffirmed his role as a significant Turkish Art Music musician, in a changing Turkish society whose cultural taste had been evolving accordingly. When he started his *gazino* career, he accumulated enough power and influence that this time it was his turn to set the rules of this art world. His crossdressing in the public, yet intimate space of *gazino* marked him as a subversive public icon that Turkey had never witnessed before. After he moved on to television, he still preserved his queer-coded self-representation and this time reached masses of people all around Turkey. Today, his star image still provides inspiration and offers hope to Turkey's disenfranchised publics, especially the LGBTQ community.

Like a transmedia story, Müren's public persona unfolds over various media and across almost seven decades. Besides his talent as a musician and an entertainer, Müren's genius lies in his ability to examine the limits of each medium as well as his society, and maximizing within these constraints. As a result, he achieved an incredible access to the hearts of common people. Aiming for such all-encompassing rapport is usually a lost cause in Turkey's fragmented society. Turkish politics is a clear manifestation of such fragmentation; the power dynamics are always in flux between two poles — East and West, tradition or modern, religion or secularism... Like in a successful transmedia story, Müren studied his tools and his target audience meticu-

lously throughout his career, and revealed a different part of his star image within each branch of his narrative. Branding himself so strategically, he achieved to be a ‘transmedia star’ years before Jenkins coined the term for multi-platform storytelling.

The transmedia stories Jenkins writes about work the best when they present a fictional world. These worlds, such as *The Matrix*, operate within their own set of rules and this aspect allows them to generate more and more stories over time. As a result, transmedia stories are quite profitable in the long run. Müren’s transmedia character has a similar generative quality. The rules he set up for his public persona easily allow for what Dyer calls a ‘structured polysemy’; his star image can be adopted for varying world views and ideologies and it would still function based on how a specific group of audience prefers to consume it. Today, he is championed as a nationalist model citizen and a subversive resistance icon all at once. These varying points of view depend on how one would like to approach and understand Müren’s posthumous image; it might not be wrong to speculate that Müren intended to accommodate multiple layers of meaning and embody such a generative nature, even two decades after his death.

.

Inspired by Müren’s transmedia public persona that tells different stories to different audiences, and portrays a complex text when observed from distance, I decided to explore Zeki Müren’s star image through multiple methods. When I began this research, I wanted to unpack Müren’s mystique by looking back at his era through historical research and textual analysis, but I also wanted to chase the star’s mythology into the present through a media component — a documentary film.

In order to undertake the primary photography of this documentary, I spent the summer of 2015 in Turkey, chasing Müren’s ghosts on the streets of Istanbul, Bodrum, Izmir, Bursa and Ayvalik. I interviewed his friends, fans, scholars, journalists, musicians, artists and activists. I traced his path in Istanbul Radio, TRT Ankara Studios, his house in Bodrum, contemporary *meyhanes*, defunct *gazin*os, disastrous 2015 Istanbul Pride Parade, and so on... I realized reading Zeki Müren as a historical media text on paper could offer only so much. It was fascinat-

ing to be in the spaces that belonged to him, and imagine him navigating through them with elegant yet calculated steps. I was intrigued to find the echoes of his work and star image so frequently in today's Turkey: His song 'Beklenen Şarkı' was the highlight of the Turkish Art Music concert I attended in TRT's Harbiye Studios; his wax sculpture in a glass container greeted me in the Sapphire Shopping Mall; his tunes were still the audience favorites at *fasıl* nights at Cumhuriyet Meyhanesi; dozens of people, young and old, praised him so dearly in the guest-book of 'İşte Benim Zeki Müren' exhibition... I found out that a Bodrum-based Zeki Müren chorus had been rehearsing his songs every week in his former house and current museum, and performed every year on Müren's birthday; I was thrilled to be the single audience of a Zeki Müren jam-session in indie-pop musician Gaye Su Akyol's house; I felt lucky when hip-hop producer Ethnique Punch found me through a Facebook post and lent me a Müren-inspired song for my documentary... I, as a filmmaker, personally experienced Müren's power in connecting people from different walks of life. I believe my experience is symptomatic of the unifying quality of Zeki Müren in general, which I have outlined in detail in the previous chapters.



Figure 24: Audience and musicians are getting ready for a Turkish Art Music concert in TRT's Harbiye Studios in Istanbul. Still from documentary 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren'.



Figure 25: A wax sculpture of Zeki Müren in Sapphire Shopping Mall in Istanbul. Still from documentary 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren'.

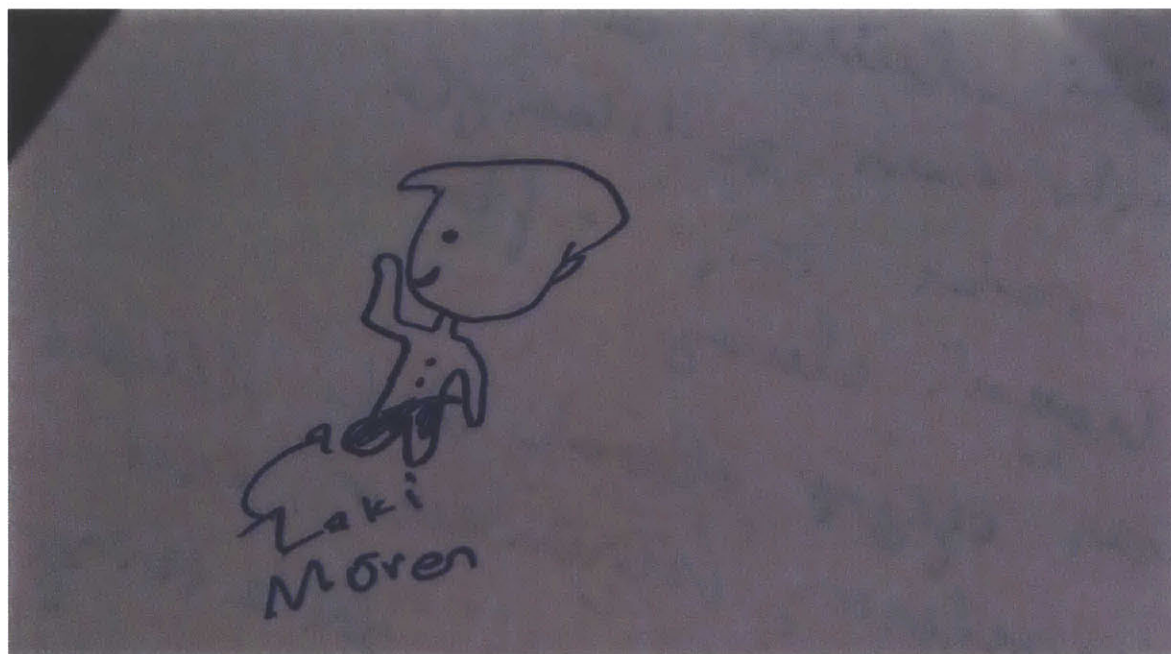


Figure 26: A drawing from İşte Benim Zeki Müren exhibition's guest book. Still from documentary 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren'.

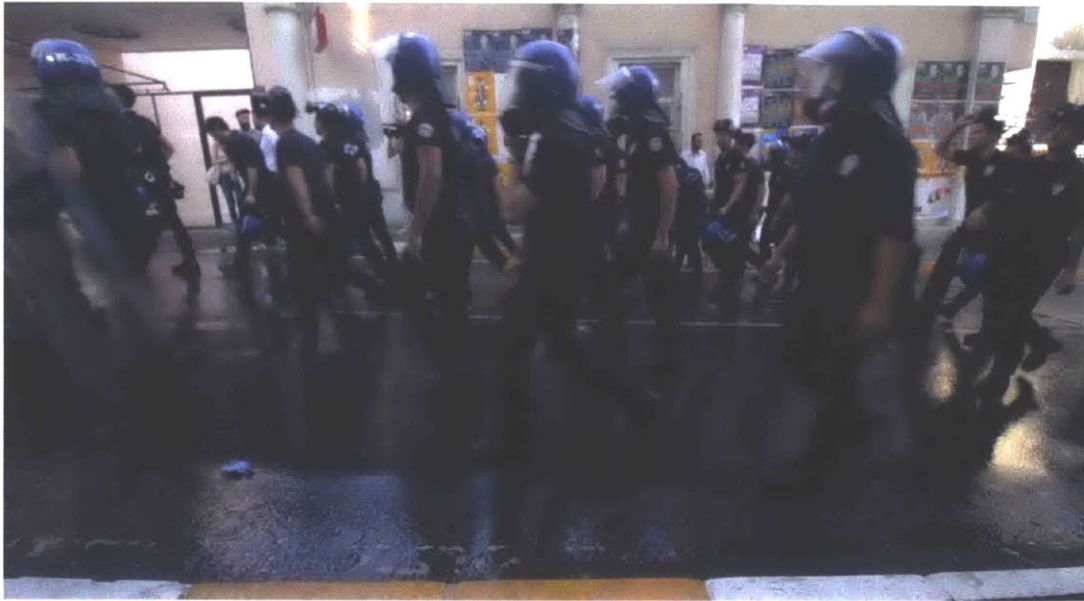


Figure 27: A photograph from police intervention around Taksim Square during 2015 Pride Parade, Istanbul. Still from documentary 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren'.



Figure 28: After the police intervention in Taksim Square, people reconvened in the close-by Cihangir neighborhood to continue the Pride Parade celebrations. They were chanting: "Would the world turn upside down, if 'faggots' were free?" Still from documentary 'A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren'.

Throughout this time I spent in Turkey, a brief mention of this project opened up endless conversations with random strangers; everyone seemed to have a story about Müren. Some of these stories were surprisingly similar. For instance, the memories of the first encounter with Müren's voice were usually described in the same mythical fashion: People had been usually in the middle of an activity (playing soccer, driving, working in an office etc) when they serendipitously had heard Müren's voice — usually on the radio — and the magic of this beautiful voice had paralyzed them; they could not even move until the song was over! I believe these stories have originated from urban legends that people have heard many times and have eventually decided to own them. In addition, I realized that there was a certain way people spoke about Müren, as if they all agreed to do so. People seemed to have a unanimous agreement when it came to describing Müren's voice with adjectives such as 'crystal-like' or 'velvety'. There was a consensus amongst Turkish people that Müren spoke the most correct and most beautiful version of Turkish language, and that no one could challenge his mastery... It was clear to me that the issue of Zeki Müren pointed to a depository of myths and stories in Turkish society's collective subconscious, and this database had long been waiting to be tackled. And it was not possible for me to collect these stories one-by-one through traditional documentary interviews.

My desire to reach out to as many people as possible and collect their stories on Zeki Müren gave birth to the third component of my research: Zeki Müren Hotline. The Hotline utilizes a system named Vojo which is designed by MIT's Center for Civic Media. By using Vojo, I can collect audio stories of everyday people via inexpensive mobile or landline phones; their messages are automatically uploaded to Vojo's website which allows anyone to browse and download them. I launched Zeki Müren Hotline in January and within seven months I received more than eight hundred messages. The project has been featured on national television network NTV, as well as prestigious newspapers such as *Milliyet* and *Radikal*, and blogs like *Atlas Obscura* and *SanataTak*. The amount of messages proved once again the nostalgia Turkish people feel about Müren and his conciliatory nature that they desperately need in today's polarized society.



Figure 29: Zeki Müren Hotline flyer in a dolmuş minibüs in Istanbul says: “Will Zeki Müren hear us?” Photograph is taken by the author.

Zeki Müren Hotline messages include comments and memories about Zeki Müren’s performances in radio, gazino, cinema and television, personal anecdotes and confessions, reflections on contemporary events and even questions about Müren that seek answers. In a large number of recordings, participants mention their love for Müren’s music and sing one of his songs in homage to him. Interestingly, many people speak as if Zeki Müren is actually on the other side of the line. I believe this is a response to the Hotline’s automatic voice message: When a person calls the local Turkish number +90-212-988-02-08, they are welcomed with a brief phone ring followed by Zeki Müren saying, “Hello”. I edited Zeki Müren’s voice from a TRT documentary in which he received fan calls and responded to them on the phone¹⁰⁹. I believe

¹⁰⁹ “Zeki Müren hakkında bilmediklerimiz... birinci bölüm,” Youtube, accessed July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAMz7HuOOPI>.

people are familiar with this video that has been circulating the web for a while; therefore they have made an instant association between the Hotline project and Zeki Müren's personal response to the phone calls. In addition, the intimate interface of a telephone call encourages people to leave a sincere and personal message, be it a one-to-one conversation attempt with Müren himself, a heartfelt comment, or a very personal story. Such intimacy imitates the sincere connection and the make believe reciprocity Zeki Müren had achieved through his personalized messages on radio and television, as well as on his interaction with the audience via the T-shaped stage in the semi-private *gazino* space. The Hotline plays with the limitations of a mass medium and the premise of interactivity, just like Müren did in various media during his lifetime.

Zeki Müren Hotline achieved a tremendous success in Turkey in terms of call numbers, as well as the intimate and nostalgic aesthetics it achieved. The stories that reflected upon the past offered a window to Turkey's cultural history, meanwhile others speak of contemporary Turkey through the lens of Zeki Müren's star image. In Zeki Müren Hotline, one can find audio documentation of 1960s' *gazin*os as well as a heartbroken phone call about a bombing in Istanbul on March 19, 2016.

As the database kept growing and bringing more fascinating stories, I decided to turn it into an art piece that lives on the web. Media artist Jeff Soyk and I began our collaboration on Zeki Müren Hotline, in order to create a permanent online home for these audio stories. Our approach could be describe as rather artistic than utilitarian or functional. We wanted to create a meaningful browsing experience for the Zeki Müren Hotline archive; the purpose of the website would not just be providing access to audio stories, but the process of searching should offer an experiential value to the audience.

Our design for the Zeki Müren Hotline 'interactive documentary' or an 'i-doc' — a non-fiction story that lives on the web, and possibly have interactive and participatory functions — allows the viewer to browse a set of curated and semi-randomized audio stories by using a timeline function. The timeline consists of Zeki Müren images from 1950 to 1984. The audience may flip through the images by hovering over the either edge of the screen. As they flip through

and therefore animate the images, Müren's faces morph into and out of one another. One can go through images in different speeds based on the position of their cursor. If the cursor is on the very edge of the frame, the images flow in a high speed and seamless fashion, revealing Müren's evolution from a young and discreet radio musician into a gender-bending, flamboyant nightclub star. As the cursor moves away from the edge towards the center, the animation slows down. In order to stop the animation, one has to move the cursor away from the 'hot spot' on the right or left border of the frame and bring it to the center. In order to listen to the audio stories associated with a certain image, the viewer may click on the telephone icon at the bottom of the screen. Each image has a bucket of audio stories; it is possible to come back to the same image and discover a different call. A caption on the left corner of each image reveals the date of the photograph. If one clicks on this caption, a short description about the portrait pops up.

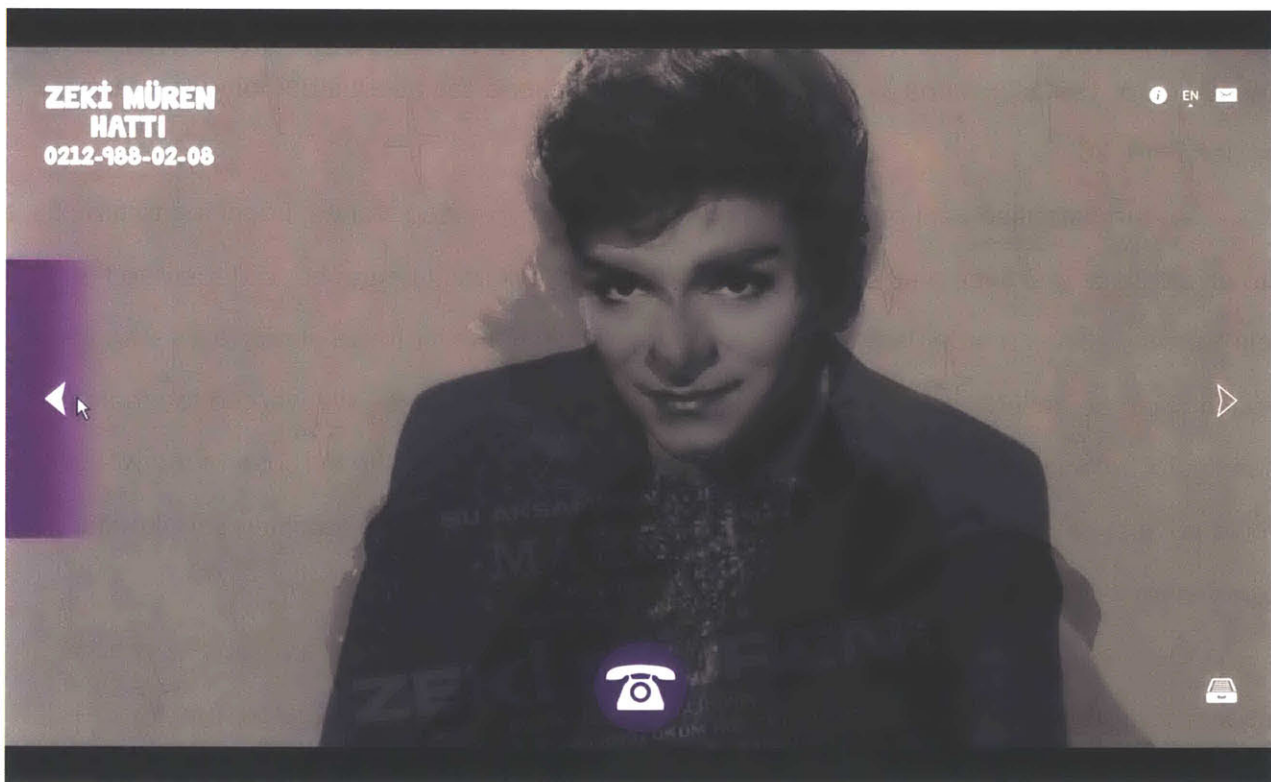


Figure 30: Example of a morphing image from 'Zeki Müren Hotline' i-doc. Still from Zeki Müren Hotline by Beyza Boyacioglu and Jeff Soyk.

The relationships between the images and audio stories are based on my curatorial choices. For instance, the *gazino* story from page 50 is paired with Zeki Müren's 'A Prince from Outer Space' outfit. This heartfelt story tells a near-death experience Müren lived through during a *gazino* performance, and the caller vividly remembers him thanking to Allah for saving him, and granting him to his fans. I believe the juxtaposition of image and audio offers an interesting commentary which alludes to Müren's overall discourse about his gender identity and his conservatism. With this pairing, I am not suggesting that Müren was wearing this outfit during the incident. I am pointing to the fact that he was perceived as a faithful Muslim man, yet his 'A Prince from Outer Space' outfit could not be further away from one's conventional vision of a 'faithful Muslim'. The combination of audio and image speaks to Müren's talent in consolidating competing values of the society, and inadvertently promoting tolerance. Similar to this example, the other images and audio also complement one another, and deepen the experience of the viewer.



Figure 31: Still from 'Zeki Müren Hotline' i-doc by Beyza Boyacioglu and Jeff Soyk.

The design of the i-doc attempts to imitate the intimacy of a one-to-one telephone call, not literally but on an emotional and experiential level. The experience opens with Müren's song 'Bu Yağmur' — from the soundtrack of 'Hep O Şarkı' — whose simple and sincere melody immediately draws the audience into a nostalgic soundscape. The viewer is free to stay on this page as long as they want, read the text leisurely or listen to Müren's youthful voice from 1965. When they click 'enter,' a portrait and navigation tools appear. The music changes to an instrumental oud *taksim* (solo) which allows the viewer to focus on the audio stories while sustaining the intimacy of the soundscape. During each story, the screen dims a little and a film-like flicker vignettes Müren's portrait, creating a feeling of being in the presence of Zeki Müren. The viewer may interpret this scene as a conversation between three people — them, the caller, and Zeki Müren — or they might put themselves in the shoes of the caller and imagine the emotional state of the anonymous voice. While meditating on the portrait and the audio message, the viewer may also uncover layers of information about Müren, Turkish history, contemporary Turkey and so on. Through this design, we aimed to create an experience that could enchant any audience — Turkish or not — reflect upon Müren's overarching significance for various Turkish publics, and reveal the intimate connection he can cultivate, even after his death.

.

In this thesis, Zeki Müren's star image is investigated as a transmedia text by utilizing a transmedia methodology. Zeki Müren's star image and his artistic practice branch out to various media platforms; tell varying stories in each of these venues and therefore reach out to multiple publics. The structured polysemy of these layers may generate new meanings based on the perception of the viewer as well as the dominant ideology of the time. Yet, when these layers come together, they create a sum larger than its parts. In order to tackle this complex, multi-layered, conciliatory yet sometimes contradictory text, I used a methodology that incorporated historical research, textual analysis, interviews, and anonymous messages. By producing a documentary and a participatory i-doc as a part of this project, I pieced together a kaleidoscopic look at Müren's transmedia star image. Perhaps this experimental transmedia methodology offers

the best view on Zeki Müren, 20 years after his death. As any good transmedia story or 'trans-media star,' I hope my work evolves into new shapes, conquers new venues, and generates new meanings in time.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

"24 eylül 1996 beşiktaş rwd molenbeek maçı," Ekşisözlük, accessed July 11, 2016, <https://eksisozluk.com/24-eylul-1996-besiktas-rwd-molenbeek-maci--1811503> .

"50'ler, 60'lar, 70'ler ve Zeki Müren," Bantmag, accessed June 4, 2016, <http://www.bantmag.com/magazine/issue/post/35/420> .

Ahiska, Meltem. *Occidentalism in Turkey: Questions of Modernity and National Identity in Turkish Radio Broadcasting*. London: IB Tauris, 2010.

Alberoni, Francesco. "The Powerless 'Elite': Theory and Sociological Research on the Phenomenon of the Stars." *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, edited by Redmond, Sean, and Su Holmes. London: Sage, 2007.

Arslan, Umut Tümay. "Sublime yet ridiculous: Turkishness and the cinematic image of Zeki Müren." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 45 (2011): 185-213.

Aşan, Emine. *Rakipsiz Sanatkar Zeki Müren*. İstanbul: Boyut, 2003.

Başaran, Oyman. "'You are Like a Virus' Dangerous Bodies and Military Medical Authority in Turkey." *Gender & Society*, Vol. 28. No. 4, August 2014 562–582.

Bavul, May 2016.

Behar, Cem. *Klasik Türk Musikisi Üzerine Denemeler*. Vol. 4. İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 1987.

Behar, Cem. *Osmanlı - Türk Musikisinin Kısa Tarihi*. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2015.

Beken, Münir Nurettin. "Musicians, Audience and Power the Changing Aesthetics in the Music at the Maksim Gazino of İstanbul," UMI, 1998.

Bengi, Derya, "Zeki Müren: İstikbalin En Parlak Delikanlısı" in *Türkiye'nin 1950li Yılları*, edited by Mete Kaan Kaynar. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015.

Boyacıoğlu, Beyza. *A Prince from Outer Space: Zeki Müren* (Uzaydan Gelen Prens: Zeki Müren). Documentary film. Directed by Beyza Boyacıoğlu. In production. İstanbul and Cambridge, MA: Unreleased. HD Video.

Boyacioglu, Beyza and Soyk, Jeff. *Zeki Müren Hotline* (Zeki Müren Hattı). Interactive and participatory documentary. Directed by Beyza Boyacioglu and Jeff Soyk. In production. Istanbul and Cambridge, MA: 2016. Multimedia project.

Bozdoğan, Sibel, and Reşat Kasaba. *Rethinking modernity and national identity in Turkey*. Vol. 7. University of Washington Press, 1997.

Cem Başeskioglu, interview by author, Istanbul, Turkey, December 30, 2015.

Çak Ersoy, Şeyma. (2015). Postmodern göstergelerin ışığında Zeki Müren'in müzikal yaşamı. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 12(2), 950-964.

Çak, Şeyma Ersoy, and Ş. Şehvar Beşiroğlu. "HÜNSA SESLİ POSTMODERN BİR AKTÖR: ZEKİ Müren." *Porte Akademik: Journal of Music & Dance Studies* 8 (2013)

Çakırlar, Cüneyt. "Queer Art of Sodomitical Sabotage, Queer Ethics of Surfaces: Embodying Militarism and Masculinity in Erinç Seymen's Portrait of a Pasha (2009)." *Nowiswere: A Contemporary Art Magazine* 5 (2009): 38-43.

Çankaya, Özden. "Dünden bugüne radyo televizyon." (1997).

Çankaya, Özden. "TRT: Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi 1927-2000." *Istanbul: YKY Yayınları* (2003).

Çankaya, Özden. "Türkiye'de Radyo Yayıncılığının Öyküsü." *Istanbul Radyosu* (2000).

Dilmener, Naim. *Bak Bir Varmış Bir Yokmuş: Hafif Türk Pop Tarihi*. İletişim Yayınları, 2003.

Delice, Serkan, "'Zen-Dostlar Çoğalıp Mahbublar Azaldı': Osmanlı'da Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Cinsellik ve Tarihyazımı" in *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Queer Kültür ve Muhalefet* (Muamma Sexualities: Queer Culture and Dissidence in Turkey)." edited by Cüneyt Çakırlar and Serkan Delice. Istanbul: Metis 2012.

Delice, Serkan. "the Janissaries and their Bedfellows: Masculinity and Male Friendship in eighteenth-Century ottoman istanbul." *Gender and Sexuality in Muslim Cultures* (2015): 115.

Demet Demir, interview by author, Ayvalik, Turkey, January 08, 2016.

Derya Bengi, interview by author, Ayvalik, Turkey, December 30, 2015.

- Dönmez-Colin, Gönül. *Turkish cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.
- Dyer, Richard and McDonald, Paul. *Stars*. London: British Film Institute, 1998.
- Dyer, Richard. *Heavenly bodies: Film stars and society*. Psychology Press, 2004.
- Ergur, Ali. "Türkiye'nin Kapitalistleşme Sürecinde Türk Musikisinde Tampere Sistem ve Zeki Müren." In *Biyografya 3*. Istanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2002.
- Erol, Ayhan. "Bir Dönemin Popüler İkonu Olarak Zeki Müren." In *Biyografya 3*. Istanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2002.
- Ertür, Başak, and Alisa Lebow. "Coup de genre: the trials and tribulations of Bülent Ersoy." *Theory & Event* 17.1 (2014).
- Gaye Su Akyol, interview by author, Istanbul, Turkey, January 10, 2016.
- "Gelenekten Gelenekçiliğe: Osmanlı ve Müzik | Cem Behar" Ottoman History Podcast, accessed June 15, 2016, <http://www.ottomanhistoricalpodcast.com/2013/04/music-modernization-tradition-ottoman-empire-behar.html> .
- Gence, Hakan, "Benim çok sevgili dinleyicilerim" Hürriyet, Accessed 16 February 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/benim-cok-sevgili-dinleyicilerim-8236362> .
- Gorkemli, Serkan. "Gender Benders, Gay Icons, and Media: Lesbian and Gay Visual Rhetoric in Turkey." (2011).
- "Görmediğiniz Fotoğraflarıyla Zeki Müren," Memurlar. Accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.memurlar.net/album/6912/12.resim> .
- Gülizar, Jülide. "Türkiye Radyoları." *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye Ansiklopedisi, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları* 10 (1985): 2738-2747.
- Gülizar, Jülide. *TRT meydan savaşı*. Ümit Yayıncılık, 1995.
- Gülizar, Jülide. "Burası Türkiye Radyoları, Ankara." (2008).
- Gürsu, Erdem and Sinan Elitemiz. *80lerde Lubunya Olmak*. İzmir: Siyah Pembe Üçgen, 2012.
- Güsel Bilal, interview by author, Bodrum, Turkey, August 18, 2015.

- Hasan Bülent Kahraman, interview by author, Istanbul, Turkey, July 06, 2016.
- Hiçyılmaz, Ergun. *Zeki Müren için bir Demet Yasemen: Dargınım Sana Hayat*. Istanbul: Kamer Yayınları, 1997.
- İşte Benim Zeki Müren*, edited by Derya Bengi. İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2014.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York and London: NYU Press, 2006.
- Karakarga*, July 2016.
- Karahasanoğlu, Songül, and Gabriel Skoog. "Synthesizing identity: gestures of filiation and affiliation in Turkish popular music." *Asian Music* 40.2 (2009): 52-71.
- Kocabaşoğlu, Uygur. *Şirket telsizinden Devlet Radyosuna*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010.
- "Libertango," Bantmag. accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.bantmag.com/english/issue/post/40/217> .
- Morin, Edgar. *The Stars*, Trans. Richard Howard. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1960.
- Müren, Zeki. *Bıldırıcın yağmuru: şiirler*. Basıldığı yer: İstanbul Matbaası, 1965.
- Nesren Jake, interview by author, Istanbul, Turkey, January 09, 2016.
- Özbek, Meral. 1997. "Arabesk culture: A case of modernization and popular identity". In *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, eds. S. Bozdoğan and R. Kasaba. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. Pp. 211–232.
- Özışık, Onur. *LGBT Destekçisi En Büyük Yıldız: Zeki Müren*. Gzone. December, 2015.
- Partog, Erdal. "Queer teorisi bağlamında Türkiye LGBTTT mücadelesinin siyasi çizgisi." *Cinsellik Muamması: Türkiye'de Querr Kültür ve Muhalefet*(2012): 162-184.
- Rojek, Chris. *Celebrity*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2001.
- Seçkin, Nalan. *Zeki Müren*. Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1998.
- Selek, Pınar. *Maskeler süvariler gacılar: Ülker Sokak: bir alt kültürün dışlanma mekanı*. Vol. 8. Aykırı Yayıncılık, 2001.

- Selen, Eser. "The stage: a space for queer subjectification in contemporary Turkey." *Gender, Place & Culture* 19.6 (2012): 730-749.
- Serim, Ömer. *Türk Televizyon Tarihi, 1952-2006*. Istanbul: Epsilon, 2007.
- Stokes, Martin. "The Tearful Public Sphere: Turkey's 'Sun of Art' Zeki Müren." *Music and gender: perspectives from the Mediterranean* (2003): 307-328.
- Stokes, Martin. *The Republic of Love: Cultural intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Süreya, C. (2010). *99 Yüz İzdüşümler- Söz Senaryosu, Bütün Yapıtları Deneme*, İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları.
- Şahin, Mustafa and Duman, Ruşen. "Cumhuriyetin Yapılanma Sürecinde Müzik Eğitimi." 2008.
- Tunç, Ayfer. *Bir Maniniz Yoksa Anneler Size Gelecek: 70'li Yıllarda Hayatımız*. İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2014.
- Turner, Graeme. *Understanding celebrity*. Sage, 2013.
- Ulunay, Refi Cevat, "Radyonun Sahibi Nerede?," *Milliyet*, 19 January 1953.
- Usta, Nazli. "Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye'de Müziğin Dönüşümü." *Erciyes İletişim Dergisi* 1, No. 4, 2010.
- Uzayda Bir Elektrik Hasıl Oldu*, edited by Derya Bengi. İstanbul: Anadolu Kültür / DEPO, 2012.
- Ünlü, Cemal. *Git Zaman, Gel Zaman: Fonograf, Gramofon, Taş plak*. İstanbul: Pan Yayıncılık, 2004.
- Yüksel, N. Aysun. "TÜRKİYE'NİN KUYRUKLU YILDIZI: ZEKİ Müren." *Biyografya: Zeki Müren* 3 (2001): 13.
- "Zeki Müren Batmayan Güneş Belgeseli," Youtube. accessed July 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AphSxUTuJXA>.
- "Zeki Müren Cenaze Töreni - Tam Kayıt (24.09.1996)," Youtube, accessed July 30, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnHw67nJqZ4> .
- "Zeki Müren hakkında bilmediklerimiz... birinci bölüm," Youtube, accessed July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAMz7HuOOPI> .

“ZEKİ MÜREN İN 54. YAŞ GÜNÜ LUNAPARK GAZİNOSU,” Youtube, accessed July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9OUqU7zCC4> .

“Zeki Müren Röportajı,” Mete Akyol. accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.meteakyol.com.tr/roportajlar/zeki-muren-roportaji.html>.

Zurcher, Erik Jan. 2004. *Turkey: A modern history*. 3rd ed. London, New York: I.B. Tauris.