The Last National Anthem of the Ottoman Empire: Musical Code, Sociopolitical Control and Historical Realities

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Abstract : 19th century was the era of changes and transformations for the Ottoman Empire. The first sultan of this century, Mahmud II (1808-1839), was the architect of Ottoman modernization and fundamental changes. The most radical of these was abolishing the Janissary corps and the traditional Ottoman military band, Mehteran. Mahmud II introduced modernized military corps as well as western style royal and military music. Mahmut II invited the Italian composer Giuseppe Donizetti to establish a modern military band for the new army and to compose the Sultan's royal anthem. In 1828, Donizetti composed the first western-style Ottoman anthem, Mahmudiyye anthem. During the 19th and early 20th century, four other western style Ottoman anthems (Aziziyye, Mecidiyye, Hamidiyye, and Resadiyye) were composed but the last anthem adopted in the reign of Mehmet VI (r. 1918-1922) was again Mahmudiyye anthem. This paper aims to analyze the Mahmudiyye anthem composed as royal anthem in 1828 but adopted as national anthem in 1918. Research questions of this paper are as follows: What were the characteristics of the Mahmudiyye anthem making it the best choice of the last sultan for the last national anthem? Are there specific reasons of the last sultan to adopt Mahmudiyye anthem or not to adopt any of the other four anthems? The musical characteristics of the anthem are analyzed based on the Cerulo's empirical research. Cerulo examined the musical structures of 124 western style anthems from 150 countries in the 1580-1976 period. Cerulo's research categorizes musical codes of the anthems as basic and embellished related with the level of sociopolitical control. Musical analysis of the anthem indicates that the basic musical code of the anthem implies a high level of socio-political control during the reign of both Mahmut II and Mehmet VI. Historical analysis of each sultans' reign shows that both sultans were autocratic. Mahmut II designed authoritarian government policies to suppress possible reactions against his reforms. On the other hand, authoritarian policies of Mehmet VI are related with the domestic and international political conditions following the World War I. Historical analysis of the research questions show that compared to the other western style Ottoman anthems, Mahmudiyye anthem remained the only neutral anthem symbolizing modernization and westernization of the empire. Other anthems were all the symbols of failed ideologies such as Ottomanism, pan-Islamism, and pan-Turkism. In the early 20th century, there were a few common things remained among the diverse communities of the Ottoman Empire: The land they shared as homeland and the idea of modernization to save the homeland. For this reason, the last sultan Mehmet VI adopted Mahmudiyye anthem as the memory of a unified empire under the rule of a powerful and modernist sultan. The last sultan's reign lasted just for four years, and the Ottoman Empire disintegrated in 1922, but his adaptation of the Mahmudiyye anthem indicates his unifying policies, his attitudes to save the empire and the caliphate.

Keywords : Mahmudiyye anthem, musical code, national anthem, Ottoman Empire, royal anthem