



The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music (Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology)

By Martin Stokes

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At the heart of *The Republic of Love* are the voices of three musicians—queer nightclub star Zeki Müren, *arabesk* originator Orhan Gencebay, and pop diva Sezen Aksu—who collectively have dominated mass media in Turkey since the early 1950s. Their fame and ubiquity have made them national icons—but, Martin Stokes here contends, they do not represent the official version of Turkish identity propagated by anthems or flags; instead they evoke a much more intimate and ambivalent conception of Turkishness.

Using these three singers as a lens, Stokes examines Turkey's repressive politics and civil violence as well as its uncommonly vibrant public life in which music, art, literature, sports, and journalism have flourished. However, Stokes's primary concern is how Müren, Gencebay, and Aksu's music and careers can be understood in light of theories of cultural intimacy. In particular, he considers their contributions to the development of a Turkish concept of love, analyzing the ways these singers explore the private matters of intimacy, affection, and sentiment on the public stage.

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Editorial Review

Review

“*The Republic of Love* is a wonderful book. Strikingly original, theoretically sophisticated, and brimming with ethnographic and analytical detail, it is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand Turkish politics and culture of the second half of the twentieth century through its complex soundscape of crooning voices and sentimental songs. Stokes is a master at unpacking the ‘cultural intimacy’ of aspects of modern nationhood and personal identity that in the West are often thought of as polar opposites: civic virtue and lugubrious melancholy, democracy and intense emotionality, modernism and nostalgia. I love it.”

(Veit Erlmann, University of Texas at Austin)

“With eloquent and engaging prose, Stokes analyzes the lives and music of three Turkish popular singers, delineating how they create public sentiments often quite distinct from (and sometimes in contradistinction to) those associated with the nation. In their sentimentality, their nostalgia, their gender ambiguity, and their themes of love, these artists model alternative ways of being a modern subject in post-Kemalist Turkey. Engaging the political complexities of the contemporary moment, with its strains of secularism and rising religiosity, Stokes contributes to theories of the emotions by demonstrating the importance of style, voice, and personality to the social construction of ‘public intimacy.’ Stokes delves deeply into the historical context of Turkey, but this book has ramifications far beyond the cases examined, breaking new ground in ethnomusicology, anthropology, and Middle Eastern studies. A beautiful and insightful achievement!”--

Deborah Kapchan, New York University

(Deborah Kapchan)

“A brilliant, compelling, and erudite study of key figures in Turkish popular music who have often been regarded with some embarrassment in official circles. Stokes ably demonstrates the critical importance of affect and sentimentality in their music, and how in turn these play a key role in contests over civility, urbanity, national identity, and globalization. *The Republic of Love* will not only help readers comprehend the centrality of Turkish popular music in creating affectionate views of public life, but should also inspire many readers to love the music itself.”

(Ted Swedenburg, University of Arkansas)

“Stokes's project resonates with familiar themes in the ethnomusicology of the last two or three decades. Nevertheless, it is his richly textured and original approach to these themes that makes this book a remarkable piece of ethnomusicology. In addressing Turkish national culture, he chooses to focus on how these popular stars have voiced a ‘sustained public discourse about love [that] has mediated the underlying tensions of the whole period’....a book that deserves to become a classic of our field.”

(Abigail Wood *Ethnomusicology Forum*)

“*The Republic of Love* is a work of great subtlety on a subject that lies at the heart of Turkish cultural and political history: popular music in Turkey....Readers familiar with Stokes's earlier work on Turkey would know that he has always been interested in drawing out the complex links between music, politics, and emotions. This analytic concern takes its boldest form in the *Republic of Love*. Here Stokes convincingly argues that the elevation of Müren, Gencebay and Aksu into national icons involves more than an

appreciation of the aesthetic elements crafted in their work (although their musical brilliance is important). His book unpacks the political conditions articulated with their mass popularity and underlines the critical role played by each artist in the public discourses of post-1950s Turkey. More importantly, the book shows how in the voices of these artists, and in their songs, lyrics, persona, and demeanour a broad Turkish audience finds a certain familiarity, something to affectively relate to.”

(Banu Senay *European Journal of Turkish Studies*)

“*The Republic of Love*, ‘a cultural history of Turkey since 1950 told through its music,’ is a strikingly insightful analysis of the intricate ways in which popular musicians—focal points of intense nostalgia, and voices of cultural intimacy, as [Martin Stokes] calls them—have connected the private and public spheres of everyday life in Turkey, shaping an intimate as opposed to an official idea of the nation from the 1950s onwards, carrying society through a major urban transformation.”

(Alan Duben *New Perspectives on Turkey*)

“*The Republic of Love*, more than any book I’ve ever read, is a model for how to make music relevant to cultural studies and cultural studies theories relevant to thinking through music and the lives of musicians.”

(Eliot Bates *The World of Music*)

About the Author

Martin Stokes is University Lecturer in Ethnomusicology at Oxford University and a fellow of St John’s College, Oxford. He is the author or editor of several books including *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*.

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