

Istanbul: A Rhythmanalytical Approach to the Composition of Conflict, Rhythm and Flow.

E. Şirin Özgün

Musicology Department, Istanbul Technical University Turkish Music State Conservatory

e-mail: sirinozgun@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper, the aim is to develop an analytical approach to the relations of the rhythmic structures, sonic structures and everyday life in Istanbul. The point of departure for this purpose is the soundscape studies and the rhythmanalysis approach. Soundscape is the sonic environment of a specific place, turning that place into a “space” through the meanings of the sounds, which constitute it. Examining the soundscape can give the listener a perspective to grasp the relations between people and structures in a given environment. On the other hand, the rhythmanalysis approach considers the society and the city, functioning as a living organism, having multiple rhythms overlapping and forming bigger patterns. The combination of rhythmanalysis and soundscape approaches can provide us with a deeper understanding of the everyday life, of the dynamics inherent to conflict and flow in Istanbul.

Keywords: Soundscape, Rhythmanalysis, Istanbul, Acoustemology,

Rhythms. They reveal and they hide. Much more diverse than in music, or the so-called civil code of successions, relatively simple texts in relation to the City. Rhythms: the music of the City, a scene that listens to itself and image in the present of a discontinuous sum. Rhythms perceived from the invisible window, pierced into the wall of the façade... but next to the other windows, it is also within a rhythm that escapes it...

(Lefebvre 2007:36)

1. Introduction

Istanbul is an ages-old city with a distinctive spirit created out of its multiple histories and their consequences. Every aspect of its daily life interacts and creates this soul collectively. The main characteristic of this soul is its instability/fluidity, its 'free floating heterogeneity' (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009: 11). What makes stay together as a whole, such an instable city? How do people in the city relate to each other and to the city? How are social relations structured in the city? One way to investigate these questions is to look at the everyday life, and to focus on the meanings produced in the flow of the everyday. These meanings are produced in a variety of realms, and one of these realms is the soundscape. This soundscape constitutes the aural text of Istanbul; sounds fly over the city like a curtain of meanings held in suspension.

The purpose of this paper is to develop an analytical approach towards the rhythmic characteristics of the life in Istanbul, departing from the theories of acoustemology and rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre 2007). The concept of acoustemology, introduced by Steven Feld, is often defined as "the sonic way of knowing a place" and the emphasis is on the primacy of sound as a modality of knowing and being in the world" (Feld, 2003:223-240). The soundscape is essentially the manifestation of rhythmic systems, both in the sonic and subsonic realm, in their objective constitution and subjective evolution (Winkler 2002: 3). This subjective evolution is developed through sensing the city, listening to it, internalizing and comprehending it. I will explore the rhythmic fluidity of the city as a musical composition; multilayered and polyrhythmic. The perception of the city life and its sounds as a musical composition is by all means subjective and ideological, albeit having objective roots in the material world.

2. The everyday flow of conflict

Istanbul has both eastern and western cultural traits, is in a state of between and betwixt in every realm and especially in everyday life. This state reveals itself in a more western tendency towards 'a militarized conception of everyday experience, warfare as the preferred trope for everyday life' (Sennett 1990: 30). Parallel to this is a growing tendency towards creating impersonal public spaces, gated communities that minimize personal contact between different groups. One ever-growing result is the separation of the subjects from their environment, separation of self from the society and the city. On the other hand, this city still has eastern characteristics: the urban life is still not neutral to the end. It has vivid and heterogeneous layers of interaction in much of its social terrains where social meaning is created: market places, streets, sounds and smells; although 'this radical mixing is neither enjoyed nor appreciated by everyone in such cities and is the site of enduring conflicts' (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009:10).

Despite the growing inclination towards eliminating social contact, especially among upper-middle classes, even the highway, constructed as one of the most impersonal channels in the city and which physically divides the city from one end to the other, is a realm of social and symbolic interaction. To start with, there is a permanent unsolved traffic problem, which leads people to communicate on the road in different ways. Furthermore, people use the highway as they use other public places: on 10th of November, the anniversary of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's (founding leader of Turkish Republic) death, people stop their cars at 9:05 a.m., get out on the road and stand silent for a minute in respect for his memory accompanied by the sound of sirens, as people in many other places in Istanbul do at the same time. Another example is the protests against the petrol prices, which took place on the E-5 highway. A popular Radio programmer announces to the audience listening in their car to light their hazard lights to protest high petrol prices in Turkey. And suddenly a majority of the drivers join the protest as it is announced. In other words, even the highway, one of the symbols of

high modernity, eliminating public interaction with its promotion of speed and acceleration, is transformed to and experienced as a public space full of meaningful sounds as constitutive social components.

The two tendencies, namely the overwhelmed public space and the ever growing upper middle class interest for more impersonal living spaces reveal one of the main contradictions of life in Istanbul: there is conflict and contradiction in every aspect of the everyday life where interactions between people exist. Despite its exotic and epic image, Istanbul is a real city with the E-5 highway crossing between the neighbourhoods of different classes, with the new peripheral neighbourhoods for different class groups, with the process of gentrification where unprivileged groups are pushed upon the boundaries of the city. Also, there are unseen boundaries within the city: there exist hyperghettos in terms of what Setha M. Low defines: ‘a racially and socioeconomically segregated section of the inner city characterized by the “depacification” of everyday life, “desertification” of organizations and institutions, social “dedifferentiation” and “informalization” of the economy’ (Low 1996: 390). *Tarlabaşı* - a quarter nearby the Taksim square which is considered as the heart of the city in terms of social/cultural gatherings- nowadays subject to gentrification, is an example which fits to this definition, with the ethnic identity of its inhabitants –Kurdish and Gypsy- , its location just in the heart of the entertainment centres of the city, and its inner alternative social organizations. On the other hand, even if there are no real ghettos, peripheral neighbourhoods too form their own methods for resistance and organization. One example is the case of *Gülsuyu* and *Başibüyük*; two small villages on the hills of *Maltepe*; a district on the Asian side of Istanbul. These neighbourhoods are subject to gentrification due to their excellent location with the splendid view of the islands and the sea and most importantly with their geological strength against the earthquakes. These are the places where every kind of revolutionary organization can get followers, and especially *Başibüyük* is a place where people resist against the municipal decisions by guns. In one sentence, Istanbul is a city where the boundaries between different groups are sharp; where the interaction and the conflict as an everyday way of life are inevitable.

Istanbul is a city in the midst of global flows- of everything- and it is a part of a bigger system- namely the world system. In that case the fact that it can be at once a global financial centre and an exotic capital of “The Orient” can be explained as the result of this same process. The centres where people pass by to get to work, to socialize or tourist centres are the dominant areas of cultural consumption which form this illusion against the disillusioning realities of injustice, inequality and socio-economic disruption. All those different worlds are lived side by side, separated with unseen ideological walls of global preferences. The everyday flow, then, is a perfect realm to investigate the conflicts out of the encounter of those multiple actors, from different social backgrounds. The roads, the public squares, the entertainment centres - all these places are milieus of social contact and of inevitable conflict, which makes visible the ideologies behind the constitution of those separate realms.

In the context of the conflicting and ever-flowing everyday life in Istanbul, the sounds (including noises as well as silences) and the rhythms (micro and macro level) can be considered as an intersecting ground upon which the conflict alongside harmony, the chaos alongside order could be “heard” and “seen” at once. The acoustemological rhythmanalysis approach can provide just an alternative way of grasping the “meaning” in this daily, annual and seasonal flow.

3. Compositional poetics of everyday sounds

Once we consider sound systems as rhythmic systems, we can start to hear the polyrhythmic harmony within them. Polyrhythmia can be defined as the overlapping multiple rhythms, which fit together and constitute a whole working unit. Polyrhythmia can be

perceived in the functioning of every single organism/organization (Lefebvre 2007: 31). From this point of view the everyday, the normal flow of life on a street, in a city can be considered as polyrhythmia. Hence the soundscape of Istanbul can be conceptualized as the revelation of everyday polyrhythmia, where different rhythmic cycles overlap to form a whole: traffic lights, sirens, horns of every kind, the call to prayer, the various small repetitive sounds in the street and finally the sound of the roads, functioning as a drone in this composition. It is those striking overlaps, which composes the music of the city out of its noises, constituting its urban sonic text, which are a mirror of the reality of the everyday life. This music out of the sounds of Istanbul mirrors the realities of Istanbul from a different angle; it is the expression of a specific truth, a narrative about the city.

Following Henri Lefebvre's ideas on the rhythmic character of the city life- and of all organisms- it is obvious that Istanbul is a city of rhythms, and the main characteristic of the rhythm is repetition: 'urban sound, even in its complexity, has a tendency for repetition and spatial order' (Atkinson 2007: 1906). The repetition of sounds in Istanbul is one of the flow and the conflict. This repetition is mostly cyclic, so the rhythm is: everyday people get to work, do their job, get lunch and go back home following a pre-set timetable; and at home they close the cycle by the dinner, family gatherings, watching popular TV shows and finally sleeping.

The analysis of this cycle can be done in different layers of social life, based on rhythmic observation as proposed by Henri Lefebvre, a method he calls the rhythmanalysis. The method he proposes is a triadic form of analysis, which goes beyond the Cartesian dual character of dialectic analysis. According to him, in the case of rhythms, the elements of this kind of triadic analysis would be time-space and energy: 'thus the triad 'time-space-energy' links three terms that it leaves distinct, without fusing them in a synthesis. ... Everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm' (Lefebvre 2007: 12). In the context of Istanbul, the third factor, linking the time and the place and acting as a catalyser; the source of the energy is the flow. Ours is an ever-flowing city.

In the flowing city, the way to capture the groove is to be dissolved into its rhythm, and opening wide all the senses, especially the ears. One of the best ways to capture the groove is walking in the streets; a walk with that intention serves one to let oneself to be grasped by the flow; and a simultaneous awareness about the existence of the rhythm serves to grasp the groove in turn. According to Lefebvre, one must learn to 'give or abandon oneself "inwardly" to the time that is rhythmmed, be grasped by the rhythm at the same time that one situates oneself outside it' (Lefebvre 2007: 88). In the case of acoustemological rhythmanalysis, this two-dimensional situatedness can be constructed by means of sound recording devices. While walking, the listener is in the rhythm, recording the sounds, and then outside the flow of the street the listener hears the sounds again from the recorder, and this time s/he is out of it. This is that interval where the compositional poetics of the rhythmic soundscape of the city reveals itself more clearly.

Listening and recording (both by the ears and the brain, and by the recording devices) relate time and space; the rhythm itself is a function of time through space. Therefore, one of the most effective ways to know Istanbul and to listen to its rhythmic soundscape is walking. In fact, this is true for all cities, as Michel de Certeau puts it: while walking citizens at once constitute and challenge the social structures in the city, and 'their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces; they wave places together' (de Certeau 1984: 97). Yet besides walking as an inevitable everyday practice, there is another kind of walking: walking for the sake of grasping the city; which aims to open up all the senses- and especially the ears- and grasp as much as one can; which aims at an ultimate interaction with the city as a multilayered text of multiple meanings. We may call this kind of walking as *flanerie* in sound and rhythm.

The flaneur is a male figure of 19th century modern city, who experiences the city while strolling around. His aim is to grasp the new life in the city, with all its visual stimuli and to express himself through poetry. As the flaneur of modern times was trying to capture the spirit of his time through the eyes, the soundwalker can grasp compositions out of sound; she hear the poetry of the composition of the sounds, strolls within the sonic text of the city. Walking, coupled with the acoustemological interest, helps to penetrate deeper in the streets and the meanings of sounds. Walking is a bodily –physical interaction with the environment; and while walking the body as a whole is tracked by the places one walks by. Our cognition of time and place, and how they are related is shaped by moving in time and place; and walking, an act where the body as a whole is involved, teaches us the ways to cope with and to recreate the relational networks of the city's daily life.

4. Micro and macro level rhythms in Istanbul

Istanbul is a city, which is spread along the northwest-southeast direction, as a narrow line, due to the geographical constraints. The two sides of that line -namely European and Asian sides- are separated by the Bosphorus. The neighbourhoods and districts of the city are articulated to each other along these lines, and the fundamental highway, crossing across the city. The daily rhythmical layer is followed by weekly, seasonal and annual cycles. The daily rhythmic cycle is provided first by the car traffic. The rush hours constitute one of the basic “pulses” of the city: everyday from 07:00 to 09:00 and from 17:00 to 19:00, people find themselves within the interrupted flow. These elongated moments of intense traffic can be considered as the strong beats of the rhythmic pattern of the car traffic. The second layer of the daily rhythmic cycle is, it goes without saying, the call to prayer. The call to prayer, namely *Ezan*, is recited five times during the day, and its times shift everyday according to the movement of the earth around the sun. The *Ezan*, while notifying people in which portion of the day they are, also contributes to the creation of a sense of place. At times of call to prayer, voices emanating from different mosques overlap and create a sense of centeredness wherever the individual is: one finds himself/herself surrounded by a sphere constructed by the voices reciting *Ezan*. Thus, while the call to prayer is a rhythmical trait of everyday life, it is also fluid; strolling around the whole city through overlapping voices. In the micro level, every morning at the same time, school children gather on the courtyards of primary schools-situated in every neighbourhood- and chant their pledge. Their voices is one of the basic constituents of neighbourhood soundscapes and their chanting marks the start of the day, it is another “pulse”, created at the micro level but having repercussions in the macro level of the city. In the daily basis, human fluidity is not only limited to the car traffic: in Istanbul there is an unstoppable rhythm of marine and air traffic, which also form another rhythmic and sonic level of the city's overall soundscapes. The weekly cycle is also marked by the car traffic and children's voices: the pulse of the car traffic is strongest on Monday mornings and Friday afternoons; and the school children recite the national anthem outside and aloud, both on Monday mornings and Friday afternoons.

The annual rhythm on the other hand, is constructed through specific days of celebration, memorial and protest. These days, with their social organization- official or unofficial- provide with an alternative way of dealing with the flow of the city (some main routes are closed, finding and using alternative roads and coping with new conflicts become unavoidable), and add a different sonic input (the voice of the crowds, the sound of police apparatus, including helicopters and panzers, gas bombs and sirens) to the city. These days – May Day, Women's Day, Newroz/Nevruz (a kind of politicized spring feast), New Year Celebrations, the sending off of the young men to the military (there are re specified times of the year when the soldiers are collected), official feasts such as Republic Day, Youth and Sports Day, the memorial Day of Atatürk (the founding leader of the Republic of Turkey), the

Memorial Day of Hrant Dink (an Armenian journalist assassinated in 2006 by nationalist terrorists) etc.- all constitute annual strong pulses of the rhythm the society lives in.

Through an acoustemological understanding, these multiple rhythms of the city can reveal the keystones of the life together in that city, and in the country. The existence of the polyrhythmia side by side the conflict can teach us to develop ways to solve problems and construct a 'true' polyrhythmia, depending lesser and lesser on chaos.

5. Conclusion

Istanbul, contrary to its exotic and touristic image is a real and living city with is multiple inner conflicts in various realms. These conflicts turn visible when different masses that do not prefer to touch each other inevitably meet in the flow of everyday life. The places for those encounters are actually those where the public life of the city is constructed: public squares, roads, public transport, workplaces, places for entertainment, streets...

Besides the conflict emerging in the realms of encounter, a second characteristic of the city's life is its rhythmic composition. Istanbul is –as all other cities and organisms- a rhythmic construct. This is a sum of complex patterns woven out of every single step and act in the everyday life. These patterns overlap, sometimes contradict and otherwise flow in a polyrhythmic harmony. One of the multiple layers where the conflict and the rhythm is produced and reproduced is the soundscape(s).

The third and the linking element is the flow (of everything). Fluidity is one of the main characteristics of everyday life in Istanbul: this city is a channel where people, histories, various cultures flow both simultaneously and diachronically. This the flow which links the time and the space, which is at once the cause of the conflict and the reason life can go on despite the problems this conflict creates. And eventually, this is that specific kind of flow that creates the particular rhythmic structure of Istanbul, which keeps this texture as vivid as it is.

The flow –and the fluidity- dominant in the everyday life of Istanbul, is also one of the core concepts in theories of globalization. Following Arjun Appadurai who uses the suffix '-scape' to indicate the fluid and irregular shapes of the 'imaginary landscapes' of the globalisation (namely ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, finanscapas, and ideoscapas) (Appadurai 1996: 33), the soundscape as a concept can be articulated to the other dimensions of globalization; especially in the case of Istanbul. In Istanbul, as components of the city as a chaotic subsystem of the global whole, the sounds are sensitive to the fluidity in the other realms. Consequently, the analysis of the everyday life of the city out of the three core elements-conflict rhythm and fluidity- can be done in the realm of soundscapes, through analysis of everyday composition of sound narratives. Those everyday sonic narratives are objective constructions as well as subjective ideological compositions.

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E. Şirin Özgün is a lecturer in the Department of Musicology at Istanbul Technical University. She received her B.A. in Sociology in Boğazici University, her M.A. and PhD in Istanbul Technical University, Center for Advanced Studies in Music (MIAM), Ethnomusicology Department. On her researches she focuses on the relations of sound and the society; on popular musics in general; and on gender-related issues in traditional and popular musics in Turkey, from an ethnomusicological and sociological perspective.