

THE KAPITAL OF MUSIC: A COMPARISON OF “MUSICKING” IN DIFFERENT ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

MÜZİĞİN KAPİTALI: FARKLI EKONOMİK SİSTEMLER İÇİNDE KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR “MÜZİKLEME” İNCELEMESİ

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ABSTRACT

Today, despite the fact that numerous economic systems exist all over the world, common opinion adopts the idea that they are derived from two opposite systems: socialism and capitalism. These two systems have both upsides and downsides concerning the free will of musicians as well as many difficulties and restrictions during the musical production. This study focuses on two different countries and their societies as its basic models. Cuba is the representative of the socialist system and the United States of America is the representative of the capitalist system. The purpose of this research is to compare two different societies based on their economic systems and to hypothesize regarding their aptness to the notion of musicking coined by Christopher Small.

Keywords: Music, capitalism, socialism

ÖZET

Bugün dünya üzerinde birbirinden farklı çok sayıda ekonomik sistem var olmasına rağmen ortak kanı bunların iki karşıt sistemden türediğini benimser: sosyalizm ve kapitalizm. Müzik üretimi sırasındaki birçok zorluk ve kısıtlamanın yanısıra müzisyenlerin özgür iradesi açısından her iki sistemin de hem olumlu hem de olumsuz tarafları var. Bu inceleme temel model olarak iki farklı ülke ve toplumuna odaklanıyor. Kübayı sosyalist sistemin temsilcisi olarak Amerika Birleşik Devletlerini ise kapitalist sistemin temsilcisi olarak ele alan bu araştırmanın amacı iki farklı toplumu ekonomik sistemleri temelinde karşılaştırarak Christopher Small tarafından müzikleme olarak tanımlanan kavrama uyumlulukları açısından bir hipotez kurmaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Müzik, kapitalizm, sosyalizm

JEL CODE: P1, P10

INTRODUCTION

Canadian director James Cameron’s movie *Titanic* shows many characteristics that you would usually expect from a love story based on a romance of a poor boy and a rich girl. Unlike others, however, *Titanic* carries some other characteristics that pass beyond a regular love story and reach some realities of life such as the end in which the rich remains on the surface whereas the poor drowns; that almost never happens in this sort of love stories but it is very likely to happen in real life where the rule of “rich survives” is strictly observed. More importantly, this movie provides a stimulus to make a more comprehensive comparison between different classes in a society.

The ocean liner, *Titanic*, in which the story takes place has special passengers who travel in the first class section and others who belong to the third class. I always remember the function of music in two different sections. We hear trumpet music used for the first time to invite first class passengers to the dinner. The boy joins the first class dinner from the third class and tries to pretend that he is comfortable. The audience empathizing with the character feels the same way. The guests enjoy waltzes of Strauss and string quartet music before and during the dinner. The music is a medium here. After the dinner, the boy asks the girl whether she wants

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to go to a real party or not. It then goes to a scene of a third class party and we greet a completely different atmosphere here. This is a kind of community where we are always welcome to join. Irish music is being played and people are dancing around cheerfully. They are singing, playing or clapping. They are living the music. The music is life here. What they do is simply “musicking”.

What is musicking then? Christopher Small by whom the term was originated defines it as follows, “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small, 1998). It is not very difficult to sense the quest for naturalness, purity and innocence in his description. Being acquainted with Christopher Small’s image of the “classical” concert hall in the first chapter of *Musicking: The meanings of Performing and Listening* can simply remind you of the hall of the “Titanic” in which all members of the state cabin dine. According to Small’s picture, a noticeable separation between the performing and listening exists and people attending a concert have no connection not only with the performers but also with the people around them. One can find the similarity between the dining session of the first class passengers and the concert hall audience. Small observes that “the aloneness of the individual during the performance is felt not as a deprivation but as the necessary condition for full enjoyment and understanding of the works being played” (Small, 1998). Musicking, on the other hand, is an activity which is integrated into/with life itself. It is a set of relationships found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning, but also between the people who are taking part in the performance (Small, 1998). Small mainly discusses that music is not an object but an activity, and that performance “does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform” (Small, 1998).

I am inclined to believe that lots of scholars, ethnomusicologists and many other world music enthusiasts who travel all over the world are seeking not only something different, unusual, untouched or something has not been explored before but also more intimacy, more warmth, more tenderness; to some degree, they are seeking less commodification but more musicking. In my opinion, it might be worthwhile to look for it not only in unexplored territories or in unknown societies but also in some places that already exist.

The purpose of this study is to inquire into certain societies and to draw cardinal inferences in terms of their economic systems’ aptness to the notion of musicking coined by Christopher Small. Today, despite the fact that numerous economic systems exist all over the world, general consensus is that they are derived from two opposite systems: Socialism and Capitalism. These systems both have some advantages as well as disadvantages concerning the free will of musicians. On the other hand, if one takes the differences between two societies into account, a classless society might appear to be more suitable to collective activity, which is a corollary of social solidarity. Except for the fact that there are many difficulties and restrictions during the musical production – which is very likely in both economic systems – people’s reaction in a classless society has more to do with appreciation at the time of performance.

The study intends to focus on two countries and their societies as its basic models one of which is Cuba as a representative of a socialist system and the United States of America as a

representative of a capitalist system. It would be helpful, of course, to discuss first the concept of musicking in the context of community in detail.

The Community and Musicking

The structure of a community is an important factor in determining the quality of social intercourse among people. If that is so, then what is the major factor in determining the quality of the structure of a community? My answer would be “social equality”. I tend to avoid using the word “democracy” at this moment because this word is associated with a form of government or a political system that has been adopted largely by capitalist societies. Capitalism, on the contrary, has, to a large extent, to do with an economic system in which democracy would be quite controversial. If you look up the synonyms of the word “democracy”, you will be surprised to see some words such as “equality” and “classlessness”. However, it seems that societies that uphold capitalist economy have social and economic classes and correspondingly, they do not have a real equality as their governments suggest.

At a minimum, real political equality requires a greater degree of economic equality than is currently the case or more effective assurances that economic power will not translate into political power. Equality means that the needs and interests of privileged individuals and groups must not take systematic precedence over those of more marginalized individuals and groups (Mattern, 1998).

In this case, any socio-economic structure necessitates two essential principles to construct a democratic (used in its real sense) community: freedom and equality. “Without a commitment to these stronger versions of freedom and equality, democracy will remain incomplete, falling well short of its ideals” (Mattern, 1998). Therefore, it would be quite straightforward to say that neither capitalist nor socialist economy can create a democratic community. Capitalist society’s problem is lack of equality whereas socialist’s is lack of freedom. In this case, it would be appropriate to ask one question. Which one would serve better for the quality of social intercourse or for, as in the definition of musicking, “the set of relationships”? Is it freedom? Or is it equality?

It is essential to include a proper definition of the word “community” at this time. Community is defined in Oxford English Dictionary as “the quality of appertaining to or being held by all in common; joint or common ownership, tenure, liability, etc” (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). It is not surprising to find out that there is a close relationship between common and community. However, qualities belonging to or shared by people are not enough to form a community. In a certain community, people could have history, culture, beliefs, interests, experiences, principles, or other characteristics in common. Besides, apart from having many similarities and commonalities, people could also have many differences such as race, gender, age, ethnicity and economic status; and as Mattern states, “How these differences are handled partly determines the democratic or undemocratic character of the community” (Mattern, 1998).

I strongly believe that people encounter more difficulty in dealing with the differences of economic status than they do in dealing with the differences of race, gender, sexual orientation, culture or ethnicity. Class formation can simply disrupt both potential and existing commonalities in a community since differences between economic classes are more

difficult to eliminate for people. It is difficult to accept the socio-economic inequality for an average human brain because it is not natural. Humankind invented it. People are not supposed to be born as rich or poor but they are. As in the *Titanic*, as long as people are financially equal, they are able to find a way to form a social intercourse, a set of relationships. Why do first class passengers and third class passengers always hate each other?

In the context of musicking, natural differences of humankind contribute to the diversity of a community. What makes them form an integrated activity is music. What makes music have such an important role in their life is their socio-economic equality. Their lives are integrated both into music and into each other’s life not because they share the same age, same color, same race, and same ethnic backgrounds but because they share the same living standard.

As for the condition of performance, the influence of the socio-economic equality would be distinctive. This community would have a self-control mechanism that prevents the emergent deification of performers. As the separation between performer and audience, which is a desire to protect the mysterious power of the performer according to Small (1998), is being extended day by day, the organization of a community takes an important place in serving for the idea of musicking. If everyone were allowed to have a proper music education without considering the financial situation, people could be closer to music, and music could be closer to people as well. People would regard a performer as someone belonging to the whole community since performing would not be seen as an extraordinary ability. Musical productions would not have to determine neither a class nor a target group. It would be accessible for everyone.

If that were so, what would be the situation from the perspective of audience? As it is discussed by Small in the chapter titled “Sharing with Strangers”, the distance between not only the audience and performer but also among the audience is another important point in the context of musicking (Small, 1998). Concert audience of a classless society would never be as stranger to each other as it would be in a capitalist society. If one attended the same concert described by Small in this type of community, the circumstances would be different because the feelings of every individual, either performer or audience, would be different. It would be fair to say that economic equality gives people enough reason to feel comfortable since there is no class distinction among them, either consciously or subconsciously.

Capitalist Economy and Music

It is a common knowledge that the Western world has been dominated by capitalism since the end of feudalism and the great part of the non-western world has been influenced by its rapid expansion particularly since the end of the twentieth century. Since there are plenty of countries maintaining capitalist economy, it is meaningful to observe a society not only in socio-economic but also in historical context when determining the most suitable country following the principles of market economy. I believe the United States of America, reflecting the best examples of political, socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, and historical diversity of a nation state, is one of the finest models to comprehend a capitalist society. Not only does the United States have a proper capitalist economy itself, but it also has an international influence on other countries to update the principles of capitalism.

Being constituted by innumerable migrations from Europe, Asia, and Africa, one of the most important characteristics of the American society is diversity. However, I could not help imagining American society would be able to appreciate the value of diversity if the espousal of capitalist economy did not exist in such a strict sense. Having been consisted of various socioeconomic groups, American society prevents itself from being grateful for the constructiveness of this concept. As a matter of course, being an important element of the diversity, musical activity is highly affected by decisiveness of economic status in a society.

Like in any other capitalist society, the course of music is strongly conditioned, shaped, and dominated by a few crucial concepts such as marketing, advertising and profit making in the United States. Musical customs, activities and products are reduced and simplified within the operation of market economy to make more profit. “Record companies are structured into a series of business units that are fudged according to clearly defined economic criteria of success/failure (budgets, profits, return on investment, market share figures)” (Negus, 2001). For that reason, music could simply become a commodity, a consumable item that is available and affordable to certain people, not to everyone and naturally music and musicians are being isolated from the society. The distance between the musician and the audience is being wider and musicians can no longer have personal relationships with audience. This formation gives rise to a position in which certain people are designated to make music whereas some of others are designated to listen. Anne Dhu McLucas makes further clarification on this matter:

The socioeconomic group to which an individual belongs- his or her class- is a strong determinant (though certainly not the only one) in decoding the meaning of a particular kind of music created or enjoyed by that person. In surveying the wide variety of genres and styles of music in the United States, it is clear that social class has a great deal to do not only with the creation of music but also with its consumption, meaning within society, and modes of study (Mc Lucas, 2005).

The problem, of course, is not merely limited to the alienation of music from the community to which it belongs but also covers the process of production and consumption of music. Who has the authority to make the decision of what type of music and which artist is allowed to be shown in public or to be available for use? And more importantly, how do they decide it? Abundance in the financial return of the investment has an impressively determinant role to answer these questions. Artists who have previously achieved international success and who have already achieved success in a specific part of the world and seem likely to be able to ‘break out’ from a territory will have little difficulty attracting radio play, media coverage and gaining sales (Negus, 2001). In addition, one should never underestimate the value of being “sexy” and/or “cool” for a performer since these qualities create another market in which all spin-offs of the product are exhibited. As Roe and Meyer point out with an example from mass media, the music business has to do not only with music but also with other products regardless of economic area.

The main purpose of MTV is to deliver a particular audience segment to advertisers. Everything on MTV – from the looks and presentation style of the VJs, the music, and the videos themselves – must fit in to the narrow-casting prescription of what is perceived to appeal to this audience group...Artists and labels feel themselves required to produce sophisticated, expensive music videos in order to promote their products (Roe & Gust de Meyer, 2001).

Nevertheless, it would be reasonable to emphasize that United States has had the most competitive and active music industry on earth. Besides, there has never been lack of incentive for musicians to work harder. Many American artists have acquired both domestic and international success and fame. American music industry without a doubt has improved the quantity, “quality” and variety of musical products. Entrepreneurial spirit has always found a way to promote and publicize its products. As far as can be seen, reputation is an extremely efficient incentive in the development of musical creativity and artistic power, albeit it barely serves the development of musical concept that is supposed to be inextricably intertwined with the community. To some extent, it is quite unfortunate that competitive music industry is primarily motivated and judged by economic criteria and this leads to the advent of “head-count” popularity.

Even if a musician decides to produce his or her own music...the goal of “head-count” popularity easily can supersede that of “soul” popularity. Profit making can become the primary rather than the secondary purpose as musicians tire of the immense struggle required to survive on small albeit intensely appreciative audiences. Making it into the “big time” means more food on the table and greater recognition (Robinson, Buck & Cuthbert, 1991)

One of the most dominant factors controlling the production, promotion, and marketing of music in the twentieth century is mass media. Radio was the first medium to enable music to access more number of people. Additionally, recording technology grew and rendered the faster mass production of recordings possible. In the meantime, television came into existence and it has been one of the most important media for the distribution of music in the United States and great part of the world since that time. Today, internet technology has joined the group as another promising medium and all of them - and their owners - tell people what songs are supposedly the most popular during any particular day or week. In other words, they tell people what to listen to (Lornell & Rasmussen, 1997). The practice of Payola in the American music industry is one of the best examples to support this statement. Payola (Pay for Play) is the practice in which record companies make payment or offer inducement to make performers to sing particular songs to generate popular interest in them. The more a song is sung or broadcasted, the more popularity it gets. Another point that bears resemblance to payola is the dependency of the DJs in decision-making process. Many DJs are not allowed to decide on what songs to be played. They play what their program directors or general managers tell them to play. Of course, directors or general managers set the general song-playing policy on their owners’ requests

It is quite essential to ask a few questions at this point. Who are these owners? What do they own? How much influence do they have on people? Let me refer to George Carlin, a remarkable American stand-up comedian, actor, and author, both for a summary of all these hodgepodes and for a panorama of musical activity in a capitalist society:

“I am talking about the real owners now; the big, wealthy business interest that control things and make all the important decisions. Forget about the politicians. They are an [sic] irrelevant ... the politicians are put there to give you the idea that you have freedom of choice. You do not. You have no choice. You have owners. They own you. They own everything. They own all the important land. They own and control the corporations. They have long since bought and paid for the senate, the congress, the

state houses, the city halls. They got the judges in their back pockets. And they own all the big media and news companies so they control just about all of the news and information you get to hear” (Carlin, 2006).

Socialist Economy and Music

As the capitalist economy has penetrated the greater part of the world, it might be appropriate to set eye on a classless society for the search of musicking alongside existing methods. Apparently, Cuba is one of few countries maintaining the socialist economy as it should be and therefore its culture and community has an exceptional position for us to evaluate the potential suitability of a socialist economy to the concept of musicking. There might be some objections at this point regarding the number of socialist countries and my preference for Cuba over other socialist countries might be regarded with suspicion as well. However, I have attempted to consider the model that is strictly attached to anti-capitalist ideology as well as socialist doctrine. These two criteria are important for me to emphasize the contrast between two different socio-economic systems. As far as I can see, Cuba is the most appropriate model that meets these expectations. On the other hand, I have followed the same path as I prefer taking U.S.A. to many other capitalist countries for considering that it has the most appropriate capitalist economy that takes the furthest position to socialism.

In the preface to his article “Musical Pluralism in Revolutionary Cuba,” Peter Manuel elucidate the uniqueness of the Cuba with these striking words, “Cuba has come to serve as one of the only examples of a surviving society providing a heuristic alternative to the hegemony of bourgeois ideology and the commodification of all aspects of life, including music” (Manuel, 1991).

Cuban society is a classless society in which almost all adults are wage-earning proletariat employed by the state (Manuel, 1991). Even though workers are paid different levels of wages, community does not let them to construct classes since the community itself controls the property and the distribution of wealth. At this rate, what are the benefits of living in a classless society in terms of music? To begin with, “Because basic levels of nutrition, housing, education, and medical care have been maintained for all citizens, Cuban musicians, like all on the island, have enjoyed a cradle-to-grave security which they regard as a responsibility of the state” (Manuel, 1991). A musical production does not have a target group in a classless society. If a musician wishes to make and/or broadcast her/his music, she/he does not have to take into account whether she/he could make profit or not. On the other hand, as Manuel touches upon, official cultural policy of Cuba constitutes a strong mechanism for the dissemination of music. “In socialist Cuba, aspects of the 'market' -for example, supply and demand - remain fundamentally influential, but the 'demand', including taste, may naturally be strongly affected by the class revolution, while aspects of the 'supply' - especially, the diffusion of music - may be largely determined by official cultural policy” (Manuel, 1987). Discussing Cuba’s dissemination of music is similar to that of United States in terms of corporate music production. James Robbins clarifies the difference – which is one of the greatest signs of a community’s aptness to musicking – between the two countries with a strong observation:

But socialism is more than an inefficient-but-equitable way of producing consumer goods; it is also an attempt at redefining the relations of production and consumption as

inherited from capitalism. With respect to that attempt, one of the great achievements of Cuba has been the support and promotion of amateur music making (Robbins, 1991).

Music education in Cuba, which is one of the most important key points of a community’s musical life, is available to each individual regardless of her/his background, location, race, ethnicity or socio-economic class, which is quite the same for each individual in the first place. In this way, the community is given the opportunity of having more people involved in music and people, who already have the same living standard with each other, have a chance to improve their relationship by means of music. “Music education has been introduced throughout the countryside via neighbourhood cultural centres; where funds have been lacking, songs have been taught in schools via the radio” (Argeliers Léon, interview, 1984, as cited in Manuel: 1987). “Competitions and performance forums for amateurs have been established (such as *Todo el mundo canta* and the Adolfo Guzman competition) and regular festivals of all kinds of Cuban music have been held, public admission being free or at a nominal cost” (Manuel: 1987).

There are some disadvantages of being a Cuban citizen as well. The main problem in Cuba is bureaucratic and financial restrictions. For instance, if a musician needs an instrument, a score, an album, a publication, a computer program or any other material concerning his project, it is never as easy for her/him to obtain it as it is in the United States. It may not be affordable for an American musician either but it is always available as long as she/he fulfills financial requirements. Similar difficulties are effective for any music enthusiast whose profession is not music as well and musicologists, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, scholars, students or any other music research workers are subjected to various regulations. Russian ethnomusicologist Izaly Zemtsovsky articulates the fundamental dilemma of Marxist state policies in relation to musicological practice:

As we know, every discipline is made up of four components: an object, a subject, material, and a methodology. In the conditions total censorship of state Marxism-Leninism we were not ideologically free in any of these four components. We could not freely write about anything, could not freely ask any question we wished, could not freely use any type of material or freely adopt any given methodology or method. It was not just texts that were censored, but the very context of scientific investigation (Zemtsovsky, 2002).

Another problem in Cuba, which is common in most socialist states, is the politicization of musical productions. Nueva trova is one of the best examples that indicate the intervention on the free will of musicians and to some degree, it can be regarded as the equivalent of the Payola concept in the United States. Nueva trova, which was emerged in Cuba in the early years of the socialist period, is a movement in which songs are written and performed in the style of traditional folk music with politicized lyrics. Nueva trova is an example how Cuban “government agencies promote songs with overtly political lyrics, incorporate particular composers, performers, and genres into public discourse as symbols of national heritage, and create musical festivals commemorating events of the socialist revolution, to mention only a few examples” (Moore, 2003).

A music enthusiast in the United States is likely to have many musical events to attend, and more variety of music to access than in Cuba. Even though these matters partly arise from the

blockade of capitalist countries, I do not wish to include these details in a musicking-related article. The real question is how much these hindrances affect the social solidarity or social intercourse of people in a community.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the connection between practice of musicking and the socio-economic structure of a community. The thoughts emphasized reflect the multifaceted interaction of capitalism, socialism, community, and musicking. Since the main point of the discussion is musicking, and musicking is an activity that is mainly carried out by a community, to discuss factors that are likely to have important roles in forming a collective community is particularly important.

As we have seen, both economic systems discussed above have specific drawbacks regarding production, dissemination, and performing of music. Both economic systems are required to set up some restrictions and to stick with the existing methods in order to survive. As far as professional musicians are concerned, both systems have serious problems in respect of their welfare. It seems that bureaucratic inflexibility in Cuba has been replaced by the excessive flexibility of corporations' decision-making in the United States. A capitalist society requires more equality whereas that of socialist feels the necessity of more freedom.

Nevertheless, when we consider the factors that have major effects on communal activity, equality seems more valuable for musicking. No matter how limited its resources are, a community can manage to provide the best musical interaction under the energy of equality. Do third class passengers need the most expensive and classy silverware to eat their appetizers prepared by the most skillful chefs of Great Britain before they throw a party?

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