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Music, Collective Consciousness, and National Identity

Abstract

This paper explores the transformative role of music in shaping collective consciousness and national identity through the lens of Al-Farabi's philosophical understanding of music. It examines how music, notably the national anthem, is a powerful tool for expressing loyalty, faith, and unity within a nation. Drawing on the principles of rhythm and harmony, this paper highlights the importance of music in fostering a sense of belonging and national pride, as exemplified in the Algerian context during its liberation struggle. The work further discusses the relationship between music and the emotional bonds of individuals, suggesting that music, as a universal language, serves as a bridge between the past and the present, the individual and the collective. By invoking Al-Farabi's ideas on music, the manuscript proposes a framework for understanding how music contributes to building trust, loyalty, and social cohesion, especially during national transformation.

Keywords: *music, Al-Farabi, collective consciousness, national identity, rhythm, liberation struggle, loyalty, faith, national anthem, social cohesion*

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Musiqi, kollektiv şüur və milli kimlik

Xülasə

Bu məqalə Əl-Fərabinin musiqiyə fəlsəfi baxış bucağı baxımından musiqinin kollektiv şüurun və milli kimliyin formalaşmasında transformativ rolunu araşdırır. Burada musiqinin, xüsusən də milli himnin bir millət daxilində sədaqət, iman və birliyi ifadə etmək üçün güclü bir vasitə olduğu araşdırılır. Ritm və harmoniya prinsiplərinə əsaslanan bu məqalə Əlcəzair kontekstində azadlıq mübarizəsi zamanı nümunə göstəriləndiyi kimi, mənsubiyyət və milli qürur hissini inkişaf etdirməkdə musiqinin əhəmiyyətini vurğulayır. Əsərdə musiqi ilə fərdlərin emosional bağları arasındakı əlaqə daha ətraflı müzakirə olunur və universal bir dil olaraq musiqinin keçmişlə indiki, fərdlə kollektiv arasında körpü rolunu oynadığı irəli sürülür. Əlyazma Əl-Fərabinin musiqi ilə bağlı fikirlərinə istinad edərək, musiqinin xüsusən də milli transformasiya zamanı etibar, sədaqət və sosial birliyin qurulmasına necə töhfə verdiyini anlamaq üçün bir çərçivə təklif edir.

Açar sözlər: *musiqi, Əl-Fərabii, kollektiv şüur, milli kimlik, ritm, azadlıq mübarizəsi, sədaqət, iman, milli himn, sosial birlik*

Introduction

Music theory generally involves understanding the different types of melodies, what they are made of, how they are composed, and the conditions under which they should be formed to achieve the most effective and impactful performance. This field has two main branches: practical music theory and theoretical music theory. Practical music theory is concerned with creating tangible melodies through naturally or artificially made instruments. The practitioner of practical music theory conceptualizes melodies and their various components as they manifest through the instruments used to produce them.

La, La, Fa, Mi, Re, Mi, Fa, Fa, Mi, Re, Fa:

To avoid ambiguity in the title, let me let you listen to it performed. (The musical piece from the national anthem will be played.)

The ambiguity is now clear; the musical notes in the title were nothing other than what we had just heard. Therefore, it is no longer a secret that the title of my presentation is the first line of the Algerian national anthem but rather a musical arrangement.

This confirms that any music learner can perform the previous piece without needing to learn the linguistic language of the piece, meaning that there is no requirement to learn the Arabic language of the national anthem (Ben Meziane B. ch., 2019).

Therefore, we can conclude the following result: a musician needs to perceive sound, not local linguistic fluency, because the nature of music implies universality, especially when considering that language is associated with a nation or country. Thus, a musician's universality is akin to mathematics.

Research

Al-Farabi, in his *Great Book of Music*, affirms the same truth, namely, the universal nature of music in terms of melody, when he says: "It should be known that the melodies from which tunes are composed are similar to the letters from which words are formed, especially the metrical ones. Just as the letters are limited in number, so too are the melodies limited in number. Furthermore, just as the letters, as a whole, have a specific order and arrangement in every language, which enables them to form words when combined in a specific sequence, likewise, the melodies are limited in number, and there is a specific arrangement in which they exist, prepared so that a person can take from them whatever they wish and compose or compose a melody of any kind" (Al-Farabi).

For Al-Farabi, music was a science taught through practice, not for any other reason except that such a science is related to two levels that define the nature of musical perception required by the learner. Therefore, Al-Farabi divided the science of music into two sciences: theoretical and practical. He states: "As for the science of music, it generally includes understanding the types of melodies, what they are composed of, what they have been composed for, how they are composed, and under what conditions they must be to make their effect more powerful and impactful. This science is known by two names: the science of practical music and the science of theoretical music. Practical music is concerned with creating tangible melodies through instruments that are either natural or artificially made... The practitioner of practical music visualizes the melody and its various components as they exist in the instruments from which they are created" (Al-Farabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, 1991).

Following this division, the researcher Salem Al-Ayadi emphasized two main points:

The first point relates to the relationship between experience and the development of musical sensitivity in the individual, whereas the second concerns the philosophical goal that Al-Farabi aimed to achieve through music.

The first issue concerns experience, resulting from the distinction between theoretical and practical music. The latter, practical music, can be acquired only through experience, even though, as the same researcher emphasized, Al-Farabi does not deny the innate nature of music. However, this approach is not sufficient. Therefore, "the experimental and historical nature of the occurrence and completion of practical music negates any metaphysical claim that would make the emergence of melodies an extraordinary or transcendent event attributed to a 'superior nature,' like that of philosophers or prophets... Thus, music is experimental and historical, even if some of its melodies

and tunes arise from those with superior natural talent” (Salem, pp. 62–63), which means that a musician must necessarily go through learning to acquire experience.

For the second issue, Al-Farabi's engagement with music is an extension of his thoughts on the city, and this, in my opinion, is what concerns us here. The realization of social harmony within the city or state, according to Al-Farabi, is aimed at achieving happiness. Therefore, Al-Farabi's goal was to find solutions to replace metaphysics with music, and to achieve this, he sought to make music, melody, and tune—regarded as knowledge—subordinate to the purpose of civilizing industry. “Thus, its subject—viewed from this teleological perspective—is defined on the basis of the difference in the forms of truth achieved by the people of the city” (Salem, p. 173). In this way, Al-Farabi presents music as the opposite of metaphysics, according to the researcher.

What distinguishes music and makes it universal, regardless of singing that follows the tongue, is the issue of rhythm, as it unites the struggle of opposites. It is the possible and acceptable potential for everything that can occur in confrontation. Therefore, the skill of the conductor, the leader of the orchestra, in tuning the instruments within a single rhythm performs the function of organizing opposites, or it is the system of harmony and discord, unity and disintegration, not to form harmony but to host and encompass opposites (Al-Aziz, 2013, p. 13). Thus, through the act of rhythm, we can understand Al-Farabi's aim of using music to achieve harmony in the city.

Music has been able, through rhythm and only through rhythm, to bring the metaphysics of existence, in terms of its metaphysical elements, closer to what we can grasp in reality as the poetry of society, not for any other reason but rhythm, as it unites opposites, fostering affection and hospitality. This is because “the formula for breaking familiarity, intensifying transition, breaking boundaries, and supporting the multiplicity of individualities is what can be synonymous with what is known in music as the refrain or *ritournelle*... Therefore, the refrain, as the musical language says, is a back-and-forth at the same time; it is the anthem of the earth” (Al-Aziz, 2013, pp. 36–37).

Suppose that this is the philosophical advancement that Al-Farabi uniquely contributed to and distinguished Arab philosophy in his time. In that case, it should not surprise us to find the ideas of others, especially when we know that most of what Western philosophers have written about music is very limited. Western thought has scarcely treated music as an independent subject for philosophical contemplation (André, p. 1706). Owing to Al-Farabi's vision, this drives us today to think about how music, as he envisioned it, could be a source for addressing many of our current issues. How can we think philosophically about music today?

We can address this dilemma in three important moments that I believe crystallize our vision and conviction regarding music.

The first moment: Reconstruction of the self

Today, we Arabs find ourselves in a situation that strategically resembles that of Al-Farabi, which necessitates invoking Al-Farabi and seriously addressing the transformation that philosophy underwent in its engagement with music. Arab thought in general, and Arab philosophical discourse in the last century, clearly revived the elements of cultural revival under various terms (Ezzine & Benkadour, 2024), such as renaissance, reform, revival, authenticity, modernity, renewal, and other terms, which filled the writings of scholars and thinkers. This was all under the banner of attempting to build an Arab intellectual vision and an Arab-Islamic vision that could help us emerge from the multiple crises and challenges we face owing to our backwardness and inability to keep pace with the advancements of other civilizations.

In such an environment, the Arab world, politically speaking, was rebuilding the concept of the nation-state in all its forms and variations without realizing that what we aim to achieve requires a deeper understanding of the spirit of the people or the reconstruction of the collective consciousness.

We can argue the opposite and say that educational systems play an important role in the upbringing of citizens, an aspect that no one can deny. However, at the same time, they could not build the collective consciousness in their emotional connection to the Arab individual because music, such as rhythm/the refrain *la ritournelle*, did not experience the harmony or alignment necessary for the Arab individual in their relationship with their heritage. Music was, and remains, the music of the

people, the music of the land, and the music of heritage, as it represents beauty outside the battle of reconstruction.

To be fair, we must not consider this situation as being outside the movement of time; instead, the circumstances at the time imposed this kind of preference for beginnings. We do not doubt that most, if not all, Arab and Islamic countries were newly independent and had suffered from the devastating effects of colonialism (Ben Meziane B. ch., 2004), which aimed to erase the Arab identity in its political, economic, social, and anthropological structures.

Therefore, today, after significant progress has been made in our history of independence, can we invoke Al-Farabi to build a new vision for collective consciousness? Moreover, we can pose the following question differently: what can music offer us from a philosophical perspective if we wish to invite it into the development field?

The second moment: Music and the education of collective consciousness

Collective consciousness does not fall under systematic educational programming as we might think. Rather, it is an education in the concept of citizenship and integration into work that pertains to the nation or the *ummah*. To be precise and clear, we can return to the title of the presentation after we have explained the stakes of musical work as understood by Al-Farabi (Elaiadi, 2009).

In the musical division of the title, three levels allow us to understand the work we do when we wish to address the issue of educating the collective consciousness:

First:

La La Fa Mi Ré Mi Fa Fa Mi Ré Fa

Second:

We can read the previous passage in linguistic terms as follows:

“I swear by the devastating calamities ***** and the pure, sacred blood.”

Third:

We can read this metrically from the perspective of poetic division on the basis of the first and second points as follows:

Fa'ilatun Fa'ilatun Fa'ilatun.

Fourth:

Cell number 69, Barbarous Prison.

Let us pose the following question, which indeed sparks astonishment: did we ever imagine that a solution in the style of Al-Farabi would emerge from Cell 69? With inspired intelligence, the poet of the revolution, Mouloud Feraoun, was able to articulate what we can call displacement and substitution (Smail, Ait, 2025), through which he reinterpreted Al-Farabi's musical approach.

The rhythm, as a rhythm—i.e., the organization of opposites and unity—links collective consciousness with the effect of the poetic word. Therefore, what precedes the playing of part of the rhythm of a military march serves to liberate and connect the collective consciousness. The liberation of consciousness is connected to the possibility of freedom, and the linking of consciousness is in its aspiration for freedom. This dialectical relationship necessitates further clarifying the matter to avoid leaving the image vague. The liberation of consciousness in connection with the possibility of liberation is embodied in the military rhythm that precedes the chorus, i.e., outside of the traditional Arabic poetic meter, which is a distinctive choice that expresses strength in confrontation.

Meanwhile, the linking of consciousness to its aspiration for freedom comes immediately after the first verse, marking the declaration of separation—both verbally and in action—from colonialism, to the extent that the poet included verses in his poem, saying:

“Oh France, the reproach is gone, and so is the reproach,

Moreover, we folded it as one folds a book.

Oh France, this is our day of reckoning,

So prepare and take from us the answer.

In our revolution, there is the final word,

Moreover, we have decided that Algeria shall live.

So bear witness, bear witness, bear witness.”

This explains two things for us. The first concerns the extent to which the people are connected to their national spirit, regardless of how differing opinions may arise. This helps us understand how we can interpret images of loyalty. The second concerns the state's commitment to ensuring that the national anthem is an integral part of the foundation of the state because it represents its essence—indeed, its collective consciousness. “What is given with the people is the strength of their choices as an existential gift, and what the people give is proximity and fear of the other, both of which are interconnected because they are forms of similarity... similarity is the being of the people, for what has no sovereignty” (Nancy, p. 355).

The third moment: Music between faith and building trust

The first two words of the national anthem, “Qisma Qisma” (“I swear, I swear”), carry more philosophical meanings than religious ones. The oath here does not refer, as one might initially think, to belief but rather to faith in the space of trust and loyalty. “Trust is faith—faith and loyalty. There are no people without loyalty and without faith. Faith is not belief” (Nancy, p. 356).

Faith—the people's faith in their homeland and land, a person's faith in their beloved, the father's faith in his children, and the workers' faith in their work—all rely on loyalty and trust. These are concepts whose meaning we only truly grasp when we lack them. Therefore, a loyal individual sacrifices their life or martyrdom for the nation.

The displacement and substitution—displacement of metaphysics and substitution with music—that Al-Farabi carried out in the realm of music have no meaning unless they are possible within the effort to build harmony and unity within the city/state. This is the challenge faced by the state when, through revolution, it announces its independence from the colonizer and seeks complete freedom (Ben Meziane B. ch., 2018).

Therefore, the state works through its national anthem to ensure that it is an honest expression of faith built on trust in instilling the principle of loyalty to the homeland. While the principle of loyalty primarily concerns the individual, it also refers to the group/community.

In this case, rhythm, as rhythms, is understood on the basis of the idea that “it is the connection between two pieces of wood and that harmony or alignment is essentially the bracing elements that hold together the planks of a raft or ship” (Al-Aziz, 2013, p. 245).

We cannot talk about the collective consciousness of a state or people without music—the music of the people—as an expression in daily life. Therefore, institutions, in their broad sense, and the family play important roles in educating the collective consciousness of the individual as a citizen capable of merging into the struggle to overcome the challenges of time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper underscores music's crucial role in forming national identity and collective consciousness, particularly in the context of revolution and independence. By revisiting Al-Farabi's ideas, we see that music, through rhythm and harmony, can unify individuals around a shared vision, fostering individual loyalty and collective solidarity. The Algerian national anthem is a prime example of how music can be a tool of liberation, expressing personal devotion to the homeland and collective aspirations for freedom. Ultimately, music transcends the boundaries of language and culture, offering a universal language linking individuals to their shared history, values, and aspirations.

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