

UDC 781.1
DOI 10.59850/SARYN.2.14.2026.365

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ARTICLE

MYTHS AND PITFALLS OF EUROCENTRISM: UZEYIR HAJIBEYLI'S OPERA *KOROGHLU* THROUGH THE PRISM OF WESTERN MUSICOLOGY

The author has reviewed and approved the final manuscript and affirms that there is no conflict of interest.

Received by editorial: 18.03.2026

Accepted to publish: 24.06.2026



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CITE

Aliyeva, Imina. "Myths and Pitfalls of Eurocentrism: Uzeyir Hajibeyli's Opera *Koroghlu* through the Prism of Western Musicology." *Saryn*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2026, pp. 17–33, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59850/SARYN.2.14.2026.365>.

KEYWORDS

Uzeyir Hajibeyli (Hajibayov), opera *Koroghlu*, Marina Frolova-Walker, Azerbaijani modes, cultural colonialism, Orientalism, transdisciplinary approach, hearing, psychoacoustics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the *Saryn's* editorial office for the invitation to publish this article and to the anonymous reviewers for their positive evaluation of the manuscript.

ABSTRACT. Modern musicology demonstrates a noticeable research perspective: the national musical component in academic genres is viewed as an ideological construct. The article analyzes Marina Frolova-Walker's interpretation of Uzeyir Hajibeyli's creative breakthroughs in the opera *Koroghlu* through the prism of such phenomena as nationalism, cultural colonialism, Orientalism, and socialist realism. The denial of modal specificity in *Koroghlu* — an opera based on the modern theory of Azerbaijani modes created by the composer — is capable of being extrapolated to the academic genres of other national cultures that lack similar theoretical systems. Furthermore, the Eurocentric approach transmitted in Frolova-Walker's work, as it diffuses throughout the scientific community, becomes a methodological foundation for subsequent research. The relevance of this study is driven by the necessity for a critical deconstruction of Eurocentric methodology and the substantiation of its insufficiency when analyzing national musical cultures.

The cognitive approach serves as the primary method, evolving into a transdisciplinary one operating at the intersection of musicology, informatics, psychoacoustics (Nikolai Garbuzov's concept of the zonal nature of musical hearing), and the East-West discourse (Edward Said's concept of orientalism and Yevgeniy Smirnov's theory of meaning-making). The concepts of "cognitively organized hearing" and "intuitive-empirical hearing" are introduced into scholarly discourse as two interconnected components of professional musical hearing. While intuitive-empirical hearing relies on sensory experience and musicality, cognitively organized hearing is based on a theoretical understanding of music, including immanent national theories, which necessitates the compulsory verbalization of knowledge to ensure an adequate analysis of musical processes.

The intonational preservation of Azerbaijani modes under the conditions of 12-tone equal temperament is explained by the resistance of their scale-degree functional relationships to pitch deviations within Garbuzov's zones, whereas their "recognizability" in European genres is determined by the researcher's type of cognitively organized hearing. It is demonstrated that Uzeyir Hajibeyli's modal system represents a conscious civilizational breakthrough that ensured the preservation and evolution of national tradition at a new cultural and historical stage.

It is concluded that a new metalanguage must be applied to analyze the otherness of musical culture, facilitating a peer-to-peer dialogue and overcoming the East-West dichotomy.

UDC 781.1

DOI 10.59850/SARYN.2.14.2026.365

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МАҚАЛА

ЕУРОПАЦЕНТРИЗМНІҢ МИФТЕРІ МЕН РИФТЕРІ: ҮЗЕЙІР ҒАЖЫБЕЙЛІНІҢ «КӨРОҒЛЫ» ОПЕРАСЫ БАТЫС МУЗЫКАТАНУЫНЫҢ АЙНАСЫНДА

Автор қолжазбаның соңғы нұсқасын оқып, мақұлдады және мүдделер қақтығысы жоқ деп мәлімдейді.

Редакцияға түсті: 18.03.2026

Басылымға қабылданды: 24.06.2026



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Дәйексөз үшін

Алиева, Имина. «Еуропацентризмнің мифтері мен рифтері: Үзейір Ғажыбейлінің «Көрөғлы» операсы батыс музыкатануының айнасында». *Saryn*, т. 14, № 2, 2026, 17–33 б, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59850/SARYN.2.14.2026.365>. (Ағылшынша)

ТІРЕК СӨЗДЕР

Үзейір Ғажыбейлі, «Көрөғлы» операсы, Марина Фролова-Уокер, әзербайжан ладтары, мәдени отаршылдық, музыкалық ұлттықшылдық, ориентализм, когнитивтік музыкатану, трансдисциплинарлық тәсіл, музыкалық есту, психоакустика.

АЛҒЫС

Автор осы мақаланы жариялауға шақырғаны үшін *Saryn* журналының редакция алқасына, сондай-ақ қолжазбаны оң бағалағаны үшін анонимді рецензенттерге шынайы алғысын білдіреді.

Аңдатпа. Қазіргі музыкатануда айқын зерттеу ұстанымдары байқалады: академиялық жанрлардағы ұлттық музыкалық компонент идеологиялық құрылым ретінде қарастырылады. Мақалада Марина Фролова-Уокердің Үзейір Ғажыбейлінің «Көрөғлы» операсындағы шығармашылық жаңалықтарды ұлттықшылдық, мәдени отаршылдық, ориентализм және социалистік реализм құбылыстары тұрғысынан түсіндіруі талданады. Композитор қалыптастырған қазіргі заманғы әзербайжан ладтарының ладтық теориясына негізделген «Көрөғлы» операсындағы ладтық ерекшелікті жоққа шығару ұстанымы ұқсас теориялық жүйелері жоқ басқа ұлттық мәдениеттердің академиялық жанрларына оңай экстраполяцияланады. Сонымен қатар, Фролова-Уокер мақаласында көрініс тапқан еуропацентристік көзқарас ғылыми ортада тарала отырып, кейінгі зерттеулер үшін әдіснамалық негізге айналуға. Зерттеудің өзектілігі еуропацентристік әдіснаманы сыни тұрғыдан талдау және ұлттық музыкалық мәдениеттерді зерттеуде мұндай тәсілдің жеткіліксіздігін негіздеу қажеттілігімен айқындалады.

Зерттеудің негізгі әдісі ретінде музыкатану, информатика, психоакустика (Николай Гарбузовтың музыкалық естудің зоналық табиғаты тұжырымдамасы) және Шығыс–Батыс дискурсының (Эдвард Саидтің ориентализм тұжырымдамасы мен Евгений Смирновтың мағына қалыптастыру концепциясы) тоғысындағы когнитивтік тәсіл қолданылды. Ғылыми айналымға кәсіби музыкалық естудің өзара байланысты екі құрамдас бөлігі ретінде когнитивтік ұйымдасқан есту және интуитивті-эмпирикалық есту ұғымдары енгізіледі. Интуитивті-эмпирикалық есту сезімдік тәжірибе мен музыкалық қабілетке негізделсе, когнитивтік ұйымдасқан есту музыканы, соның ішінде ұлттық мәдениеттерге тән имманентті тұжырымдамаларды теориялық тұрғыдан түсінуге сүйенеді. Бұл музыкалық үдерістерді неғұрлым барабар талдауға мүмкіндік береді.

Автор әзербайжан ладтарының 12 сатылы тең температура жағдайында интонациялық тұрғыдан сақталуын олардың сатылары арасындағы функционалдық қатынастардың Гарбузов сипаттаған зоналар шегіндегі дыбыс биіктігі өзгерістеріне қатысты резистенттілігімен түсіндіреді. Ал олардың еуропалық жанрлардағы «танылуын» зерттеушінің когнитивтік ұйымдасқан есту типімен байланыстырады. Автор Үзейір Ғажыбейлінің ладтық жүйесі ұлттық дәстүрдің сақталуы мен оның жаңа мәдени-тарихи кезеңдегі эволюциясын қамтамасыз еткен саналы өркениеттік серпіліс болғанын көрсетеді.

Зерттеу нәтижесінде өзге музыкалық мәдениеттерді талдау барысында теңқұқылы ғылыми диалог орнату және Шығыс–Батыс дихотомиясын еңсеру үшін жаңа метатілді қолдану қажеттілігі туралы қорытынды жасалады.

UDC 781.1

DOI 10.59850/SARYN.2.14.2026.365

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СТАТЬЯ

МИФЫ И РИФЫ ЕВРОПОЦЕНТРИЗМА: ОПЕРА «КЁРОГЛЫ» УЗЕИРА ГАДЖИБЕЙЛИ В ЗЕРКАЛЕ ЗАПАДНОГО МУЗЫКОЗНАНИЯ

Автор прочитал и одобрил окончательный вариант рукописи и заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Поступила в редакцию: 18.03.2026

Принята к публикации: 24.06.2026



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Для цитирования

Алиева, Имина. «Мифы и рифы европоцентризма: опера "Кёроглы" Узеира Гаджибейли в зеркале западного музыкознания». *Saryn*, т. 14, № 2, 2026, с. 17–33, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59850/SARYN.2.14.2026.365>. (На английском)

Ключевые слова

Узеир Гаджибейли (Гаджибеков), опера «Кёроглы», Марина Фролова-Уокер, азербайджанские лады, культурный колониализм, музыкальный национализм, ориентализм, когнитивное музыкознание, трансдисциплинарный подход, музыкальный слух, психоакустика.

Благодарности

Автор выражает глубокую благодарность редакционному офису журнала *Saryn* за приглашение к публикации статьи, уважаемым анонимным рецензентам за одобрение рукописи.

Аннотация. В современном музыкознании прослеживается заметный исследовательский ракурс: национальный музыкальный компонент в академических жанрах рассматривается как идеологический конструкт. В статье анализируется интерпретация Марины Фроловой-Уокер творческих открытий Узеира Гаджибейли в опере «Кёроглы» сквозь призму таких явлений, как национализм, культурный колониализм, ориентализм, социалистический реализм. Отрицание ладовой специфики в «Кёроглы» – опере, опирающейся на созданную композитором современную ладовую теорию азербайджанских ладов, – легко экстраполируется на академические жанры других национальных культур, не имеющих подобных теоретических систем. Между тем транслируемый в статье Фроловой-Уокер европоцентристский подход, распространяясь в научной среде, становится методологической основой для последующих исследований. Актуальность работы продиктована необходимостью критического разбора европоцентристской методологии и обоснования недостаточности такого подхода при анализе национальных музыкальных культур.

В качестве основного метода применен когнитивный подход, который на стыке музыкознания, информатики, психоакустики (концепция зонной природы музыкального слуха Николая Гарбузова) и дискурса Восток – Запад (концепция ориентализма Эдварда Саида и смыслополагания Евгения Смирнова) выходит на трансдисциплинарный уровень. В научный обиход вводятся понятия когнитивно организованного и интуитивно-эмпирического слуха как два взаимосвязанных компонента профессионального музыкального слуха. Интуитивно-эмпирический слух основан на чувственном опыте и музыкальности, а когнитивно организованный – на теоретическом понимании музыки, включая имманентные национальные теории, что подразумевает обязательную вербализацию знаний и позволяет адекватно анализировать музыкальные процессы.

Интонационная сохранность азербайджанских ладов в условиях 12-ступенной равномерной темперации объясняется автором резистентностью функциональных отношений их ступеней к звуковысотным изменениям в пределах гарбузовских зон, а их «узнаваемость» в европейских жанрах – типом когнитивно организованного слуха исследователя. Показано, что ладовая система Узеира Гаджибейли представляет собой осознанный цивилизационный прорыв, обеспечивший сохранность и эволюцию национальной традиции на новом культурно-историческом этапе.

Сделан вывод о необходимости применения нового метаязыка при анализе инаковой музыкальной культуры для паритетного диалога и преодоления дихотомии Восток – Запад.

The study of the historical heritage of the founders of national compositional schools and professional opera in the former Soviet republics remains highly relevant for contemporary musicology. These iconic creative figures are linked not only by a shared historical era and similar socio-cultural conditions but also by the sheer scale of the objectives they set and achieved. Within a short historical span, Azerbaijan and the republics of Central Asia made a rapid transition from an oral monodic tradition to European-style professional composition. This rapid civilizational breakthrough, which historically spanned centuries in the evolution of music, defined the trajectory of national art and integrated it into the global musical space as a fully-fledged branch of academic music.

The music of these composers, profoundly revered in their respective countries, remains vital and widely performed today. At the same time, how their work is conceptualized by foreign music critics, representatives of different cultures, is a question of compelling interest. It must be noted, that the number of English-language publications is negligible¹, with their authors' research interest focusing primarily on issues related to postcolonial discourse and the sociology of music. Musicological and ethnomusicological issues inherently associated with the transition to alternative "musical civilization" as defined by Izaly Zemtsovsky (11) rarely become the object of in-depth study. Meanwhile, it is precisely the problems of musical tuning, the reconstruction of traditional musical instruments, harmonization, and the preservation of national modal-intonational systems that should form the basis for analyzing the composers' creative process. These aspects should serve as the foundation for an objective evaluation of the artistic value of their works, shifting the analytical focus from a perceived political commission to the highly complex process of adaptation and survival of national modal systems within new cultural and historical contexts.

Topics such as "debunking the myth of Russianness" in music, the concept of cultural colonialism, the relationship between the artist and the authorities, and the construction of a "new culture" in the Soviet Union have become mainstream in post-Soviet foreign scholarship. A prominent place among these issues is occupied by the problem of "musical nationalism" in the Soviet republics, which Western authors view as an instrument of political engineering.

In her article *National in Form, Socialist in Content: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics*, Marina Frolova-Walker² defines the subject of her study as "unique and bizarre project: the attempt to create, within the Caucasian and Central Asian republics of the USSR, national musical cultures that would reflect the musical nationalism that grew up in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the previous century" (331). Outlining the scope of her research, she adds that "the study of this music holds great promise, provoking reflection on a constellation of topics: nationalism, cultural

colonialism, orientalism, and the history of socialist realism" (Frolova-Walker 332).

The article is devoted to a reconceptualization of the creative heritage of Russian composers and those from the republics of Transcaucasia

1 This is evidenced, in particular, by the scarce bibliography in Gregory Salmon's articles on the state of opera in the republics of Central Asia and Transcaucasia, published in the multi-volume *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (28).

2 Marina Frolova-Walker is a Professor at the University of Cambridge, specializing in Russian and Soviet music.

and Central Asia: by questioning the very presence of the national element in national operas, the author intends to “debunk the myth of the Russianness of Russian composers’ musical language”³ and the “myth of overcoming the traditions of Russian Orientalism” by the composers of the Eastern republics.

In an attempt to shift the discourse from an ideological plane into the field of theoretical musicology to strengthen her position, Frolova-Walker turns to an analysis of Uzeyir Hajibeyli’s⁴ opera *Koroghlu* (See Fig. 1). This choice is not random.⁵ Hajibeyli’s opera, for which the composer was awarded the Stalin Prize, is one of the most brilliant and innovative musical-theatrical works of that era. In the preface to the first edition of his book *Foundations of Azerbaijani Folk Music* (1945), he specifically emphasized: “For me as a composer, my work on studying the foundations of Azerbaijani folk music had the practical significance that I was able to write an entire opera, *Koroghlu*” (Hajibeyli 6). Thus, the modern theory of Azerbaijani modes created by Hajibeyli comes under the author’s intense analytical focus.

At first glance, the numerous citations provided in Frolova-Walker’s article create the impression of a well-grounded study. However, refracted through the author’s personal interpretation, taken out of context, and accompanied by her own commentary, these quotes tend to distort the actual picture. They testify either to the article author’s pronounced Eurocentrism or to a bias shaped by political conjuncture.

Frolova-Walker writes: “Gajibekov began, naturally enough, with a careful study of ‘Azerbaijani’ folk music and on the basis of his findings

3 As Frolova-Walker notes, “by the turn of the century, it was already becoming painfully obvious that Russian composers’ claims to have created a national musical language could no longer be taken at face value” (*National in Form* 345). In another article, she observes: “During the last few decades the tendency to deromanticise Russian music history has become quite strong, owing to Richard Taruskin, Caryl Emerson, Robert Ridenour and others, but the hour of final victory still seems far off” (Frolova-Walker, *On Ruslan and Russianness* 21). Beyond articles, presentations, and conference papers, Frolova-Walker’s personal contribution to bringing this “hour of final victory” closer includes such major works as *On Ruslan and Russianness*, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin*, and others.

4 By agreement with the author, the editorial office of the *Saryn* journal uses the spelling of the composer’s surname as Hajibeyli across Kazakh, Russian, and English languages. It should be noted that a number of sources, including certain works cited in this study, utilize the alternative spelling Hajibeyov. These discrepancies are due to the existence of differing traditions of surname transliteration in academic and reference literature, as well as the returning to historical national forms. In turn, within the quotations from Frolova-Walker, the composer’s surname is maintained as “Gajibekov.”

5 A substantial part of the publication is dedicated to Hajibeyli. Suffice it to say that in an article whose proclaimed topic was the creation of compositional schools and the development of opera in the Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics, Hajibeyli’s name appears 43 times (by comparison: Mikhail Glinka — 22, Reinhold Glière — 20, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov — 13, Aram Khachaturian — 7, Alexander Spendiariov — 5, Yevgeniy Brusilovsky — 3 times; Zachary Paliashvili, Mukhtar Ashrafi, Vladimir Fere, and Abdylas Maldybayev appear fewer than three times).



Figure 1. Uzeyir Hajibeyli (18 September 1885 – 23 November 1948). Photograph restored using ChatGPT.

attempted a theory of melodic modes. ...But when the time came for him to apply his theories to his opera, he was immediately confronted with a series of excruciating problems involving tuning, polyphony, harmony, and vocal style. He could not indulge in hand wringing for long, however, since he had a job to carry out at the behest of the Soviet authorities. In the end he was apparently unable to reconcile the demands of his nationalist agenda with those of the task in hand, for his earlier pronouncements are clearly at odds with the actual score of *Keroglu*" (355).

Discussing the tuning of the *tar* — a stringed Azerbaijani national instrument with tied frets — Frolova-Walker compares two statements made by Hajibeyli: one from 1926 ("Musical Development in Azerbaijan")⁶ and another from 1939 ("On Folk Character in Music")⁷, utilizing the Russian translation she obtained from Zemfira Safarova's study *The Musical and Aesthetic Views of Uzeyir Hajibeyov*.⁸

Regarding the 1926 article, Frolova-Walker writes: "...Gajibekov lucidly described how a modern piano would completely distort a folk melody that had a tonic on *E*, another degree roughly the same as the piano's *E-flat/D-sharp*, and a third, *functionally distinct degree* falling between these two" (*emphasis added*) (355).

Frolova-Walker then quotes Hajibeyli's 1939 statement: "I myself ignore the groundless claims of some musicologists that the international musical alphabet is not sufficient for the representation of the characteristics of Azerbaijani music. This opinion is wrong, since the chromatic scale satisfies us completely" (356).

The article's author then offers the following commentary: "By 1939, however, he (Hajibeyli) had enacted a rather bizarre volte-face, saying that Azerbaijani music possessed no intervals smaller than the semitone and even adding, with peculiar satisfaction, that 'our semitone, in fact, is wider.' By this stage of his career, Gajibekov was no longer a mere nationalist of local standing, but a celebrated composer of the Soviet Union. His change in status appears to have colored his judgment considerably" (Frolova-Walker 356).

First of all, it must be emphasized that in the original text of the article "Musical Development in Azerbaijan" (1926), Hajibeyli does not speak of *functionally distinct scale degrees*. Rather, he discusses the major and minor semitones preserved in Eastern music — in contrast to European music, where this distinction was eliminated following the introduction of equal temperament. Nor is there any mention of functionally distinct scale degrees in Safarova's study.

What kind of "agonizing," insoluble problems, in Frolova-Walker's view, did Hajibeyli actually face? How does she explain the composer's *volte-face*, which she finds so strange

— or rather, how does *she* understand the *evolution* of his musical thinking that ultimately led to the creation of the modern theory of Azerbaijani modes? Can we agree with Frolova-Walker when she attributes the shift in Hajibeyli's views merely to a change in his status...? to the necessity of following Party directives...?

6 Hajibeyov, Uzeyir. "Musical Development in Azerbaijan (In connection with the report of the Commissar of Education, Comrade Mustafa Kuliev).", *Maarif və mədəniyyət*, no. 8–9, 1926. (In Azerbaijani)

7 Hajibeyov, Uzeyir. "On Folk Character in Music." *Narodnoe tvorchestvo*, no. 4, 1939, pp. 22–23. (In Russian)

8 Safarova, Zemfira. *The Musical and Aesthetic Views of Uzeyir Hajibeyov*. Moscow, Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973. (In Russian)

or to the fact that he had “sincerely convinced himself of this orthodoxy of Soviet music” (Frolova-Walker 356)?

Frolova-Walker writes that on matters of tuning, equal temperament, and European notation, Hajibeyli was compelled to adopt the viewpoint of Mustafa Kuliev, the People’s Commissar of Education of Azerbaijan at that time: “...there was probably little room for disagreement” (355). In doing so, she fails to mention that European notation had been utilized by the composer as early as 1907 during the composition of his first *mugham* opera, *Leyli and Majnun*⁹ — long before “M. Kuliev’s reforms” or “ideological pressure from Moscow.” For this opera, Hajibeyli used European notation to score the Overture, song-and-dance episodes, choruses, and orchestral accompaniment within the *rast*, *shur*, *segah*, *chahargah*, and *shushtar*¹⁰ modes. In 1913, Hajibeyli composed his musical comedy *Arshin Mal Alan*, which achieved worldwide popularity. This musical comedy was likewise written in various Azerbaijani modes (for instance, Askar’s Aria from Act I in *segah*, Gulchohra’s Elegy in *shushtar*, and Gulchohra’s Lament in *bayati-shiraz*), and it, along with his two preceding musical comedies¹¹ and five *mugham* operas, also employed European notation. It is crucial to emphasize that already in Hajibeyli’s earliest compositions, one finds neither clichés, nor stylizations of the Orient, nor “generic Eastern intonations” (such as the augmented second, the flat sixth scale degree in major, alternating major-minor keys, alterations, etc.), but rather clearly differentiated Azerbaijani modes.

Regarding the issues of tuning, equal temperament, and European notation, it should be noted that the intervals of Azerbaijani modes are comparable to Garbuzov’s pitch zones. The functional relations of their scale degrees are resistant to pitch variations within the limits of these zones.¹² This implies that the abstraction of European notation and equal temperament is applicable to Azerbaijani modes to the exact same extent as it is to any other musical phenomena. When performed on equal-tempered instruments, Azerbaijani modes remain readily identifiable to the ear. This was the very result — *both artistic and practical* — that the composer achieved in his earliest works, testifying to the independent nature of his genius.

In developing the modern theory of Azerbaijani modes, Hajibeyli abstracting from minor pitch and intonational variances, identified the essential and systematic features of the modes. Having recognized an intonational affinity across more than eighty *mughams* and their sections under various names, he classified them on the basis of this intonational similarity into seven principal modes, thereby ascending to a next, hierarchically higher level of generalization.

When in his 1929 article¹³ Hajibeyli presents nine modes, writing: “At present, Azerbaijani music, along with its entire multitude of *shobas* and *gushas*, possesses the following independent tunings: *rast*, *segah*, *shur*,

9 The opera premiered on January 25, 1908.

10 Note on terminology: Following the established convention in Azerbaijani musicology and ethnomusicology, modes are written in lowercase (e.g., *rast*) to distinguish them from the *mugham* genre of the same name, which is capitalized (e.g., *Rast*).

11 The first musical comedy, *Ər və Arvad* [Husband and Wife], was written by the composer in 1909.

12 For a detailed discussion, see: Aliyeva, Imina. “N. A. Garbuzov’s Theory of the Zone Nature of Musical Hearing and the Significance of European Notation for Azerbaijani Modes.” *Musiqi dünyası*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2012, pp. 20–25. (In Russian)

13 Hajibeyov, Uzeyir. “On Azerbaijani Turkic Folk Music.” *Na rubezhe Vostoka*, no. 3, 1929. (In Azerbaijani)

chahargah, shushtar, zabol, shahnaz, bayati-shiraz, and humayun. All Azerbaijani Turkic folk music is based solely on the aforementioned tunings"; when in his 1939 article¹⁴ he asserts: "The chromatic scale completely satisfies us," and further in the same text: "There is an opinion that there are over eighty modes in Azerbaijani music. I have concluded that we have only eight independent modes with their own distinct structures <modes *rast, segah, shur, chahargah, zabol, shahnaz, bayati-shiraz, and humayun*>"; and when, finally, in the *Foundations of Azerbaijani Folk Music* (1945), he definitively arrives at seven primary modes (*rast, segah, shur, chahargah, shushtar, bayati-shiraz, and humayun*) and employs European notation for their presentation¹⁵ — this demonstrates that the composer's mind had isolated, that his cognitive system had definitively formed, what has today been conceptualized as the macro-intonational schemata of Azerbaijani modes (Aliyeva, *The Intonational System*).¹⁶

This represented a fundamentally altered, novel approach to modal categorization. Hajibeyli distinguished the primary modes neither by the principle of melodic formula (*popovka* in Russian) — that is, by their affiliation with a specific *mugham, shoba, or gusha* — nor by the principle of fixed pitch relations within a 17-tone scale, which typically underlies the classification of modal systems. Instead, he categorized them based on their intonational affinity. This reveals an astonishingly modern comprehension of the mode, one that stems from the capacity of human consciousness to generalize "quantitatively" differing phenomena into a single quality — a cognitive mechanism that serves as the foundation for Lotfi Zadeh's renowned fuzzy set theory. This process of abstraction ultimately led Hajibeyli to his definitive decision to establish only seven principal modes, reclassifying the *zabol* mode as a variant of the *segah* mode.

Frolova-Walker characterizes Hajibeyli's harmony at times as "impoverished" and at others as producing a "startlingly inappropriate functional effect." However, the point is that the harmony of Azerbaijani modes is intrinsically linked to the physical

construction of the *tar*¹⁷ and the *saz*, as well as to the specific performance techniques unique to these instruments, where the musician executes the melody on a single string while simultaneously striking the remaining strings with a plectrum. The resulting vertical sonorities are directly determined by the tuning of the variable drone strings, which varies depending on the *mugham* being performed. This technical feature generates quartal, quintal, quartal-quintal, and other sonorities, including configurations equivalent to sixth chord triads (first-inversion triad).¹⁸ The *mugham* harmonies that accompany the *Segah mugham* structurally correspond

14 Hajibeyov, Uzeyir. "On Folk Character in Music." *Narodnoe tvorchestvo*, no. 4, 1939, pp. 22–23. (In Russian)

15 See: Hajibeyov, Uzeyir. *Foundations of Azerbaijani Folk Music*. Baku, Izdatel'stvo AN Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR, 1945. (In Russian)

16 For a detailed discussion, see: Aliyeva, Imina. *The Intonational System of Azerbaijani Modes in the Context of Contemporary Music Theory*. 2017, Baku, Uzeyir Hajibeyli Baku Music Academy, PhD thesis's abstract. (In Russian)

17 It should be recalled that Hajibeyli linked the scale of the *tar* directly to the principles of mode formation and regarded the instrument as the foundational and most vital one.

18 This harmonic feature of Azerbaijani modes was discussed by Hajibeyli in his 1919 work "On the Music of the Azerbaijani Turks." *Istiqlal digest*, 1919 (In Azerbaijani); it has also been the subject of research by contemporary Azerbaijani musicologists, including Tariel Mamedov, Vagif Abdulkassymov, Saadet Abdullayeva, and Dzhamilya Hasanova. Hasanova terms these sonorities as *mugham harmonies* or *mugham chords* (66).

to a major sixth chord (first-inversion triad), which Frolova-Walker misinterprets as merely creating a “functional effect.”

Existing simultaneously across different civilizations — from monody to the creative explorations of contemporary composers — Azerbaijani modes offer a unique opportunity to trace how the evolution of musical thinking has unfolded over the centuries. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Hajibeyli’s harmony encompasses *mugham* drones, canons, *mugham* chords, characteristic *ashugh* harmonic accompaniment, and the polyphonic “combination of logically constructed

independent melodies” (Hajibeyov, *Osnovy* 33), as well as the intersection of modality with the norms of tonal-harmonic thinking, a feature characteristic of early classical harmony. As the Russian musicologist Mark Etinger writes, “it is precisely within this synthesis that its (early classical harmony’s) originality and peculiar charm lie” (*Ranneklassicheskaya garmoniya*). Yuri Kholopov discusses a similar phenomenon in European music in his article “On the Harmony of H. Schütz”: “In polyphonic music (already in the Middle Ages, and particularly during the Renaissance), the traditional church modes, which are monodic by nature, were modified and essentially transformed into something new — into modal-harmonic modes (referring to the harmonic system of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries). ...What our ear perceives as an inconsistently expressed tonality, ‘blurred’ here and there by strange progressions, is in fact the very type of seventeenth-century harmony that arises on the basis of modality, yet is increasingly permeated by the powerfully emerging system of classical tonal functions” (134).

Finally, it is worth analyzing Frolova-Walker’s arguments regarding Aria from Act I of *Koroghlu* opera (See Fig. 2). Hajibeyli employed the *segah* mode in this composition. Frolova-Walker, however, hear — or rather, her cognitively organized ear recognizes in this aria — nothing but an alternation of major and minor and a minor subdominant in a major key, which she labels as “cliché

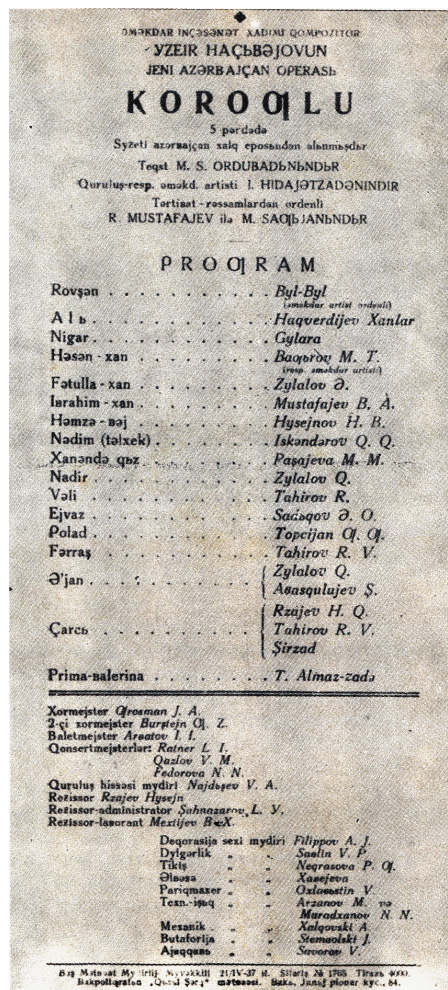


Figure 2. Programme of the first performance of Uzeyir Hajibeyli's *Koroghlu* opera, 1937.

Source: Abassova, Elmira. *Uzeyir Hajibekov*. Baku, Azerbaijan State Publishing House, 1975, pp. 80–81.

of exoticism ...fully in line with the orientalism of Glinka or Gliere” (357). Based on her own music-theoretical sets, Frolova-Walker asserts that “Gajibekov employs Western tonal idioms¹⁹ more crudely..., and this tended to obliterate the modes he employed in his melodies” (357). Yet, despite the vast diversity of their manifestations across

both traditional and European genres, Azerbaijani modes never forfeit their differential intonational characteristics.

Such extensive quotations have been intentionally provided and commented upon to demonstrate the confusion and distortions resulting from a superficial treatment of the highly complex contemporary existence of Azerbaijani modes. It would be simpler to accuse the article's author of biased judgment; however, this is recognized as a broader issue stemming from a Eurocentric approach to researching non-European music.

<19 A familiar argument stated by proponents of the incompatibility of Western and Eastern musical systems. As Marina Drozhzhina notes in her doctoral dissertation, *Young National Compositional Schools of the East as a Phenomenon of Twentieth-Century Musical Art*, the thesis concerning the inevitable destruction of the modal system and its absorption by the more mobile and dynamic tonal-harmonic (major-minor) system tends to appear as a "periodic reminiscence".

20 The concept of "epistemic injustice" was first introduced and applied by Miranda Fricker in her article: Fricker, Miranda. "Rational Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 98, no. 1, 1998, pp. 159–177. This publication laid the foundation for her fundamental monograph: Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, 2007. Miranda Fricker writes: "Where that imitation brings about a mismatch between rational authority and credibility — so that the powerful tend to be given mere credibility and/or the powerless tend to be wrongly denied credibility — we should acknowledge that there is a phenomenon of epistemic injustice" (170). Projected onto musicology, this concept highlights why Eurocentric scholarship maintains an absolute conviction that national music theory is applicable only within traditional music-making and must remain "on the margins" of musicological analysis of academic genres. The author's concepts and terms introduced in this article allow us to recognize and overcome this rigid limitation.

21 Critique of Schenkerian analysis and the issue of racism in musicology resonate actively and prominently in the works of Philip Ewell. See: Ewell, Philip. "Tonality, Racism, and White Indifference." *Journal of Music Theory*, vol. 68, no. 1, 2024, pp. 89–97; Ewell, Philip. *On Music Theory, and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2023.

22 These trends — ranging from the deconstruction of Eurocentrism to the justification of local theoretical and pedagogical models — constitute the common field of the latest international research. See, in particular: Li, Edwin, et al. "Introduction: Music Theory in the Plural." *Music Theory Online*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2024, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30535/mto.30.4.6>; Attas, Robin, and Margaret Walker. "Exploring Decolonization, Music, and Pedagogy." *Intersections*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2019, pp. 3–20, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075339ar>; Chua, Daniel. "Global Musicology: A Keynote Without a Key." *Acta Musicologica*, vol. 94, no. 1, 2022, pp. 109–126.

This problem finds a direct reflection in the concept of "epistemic injustice" introduced by Miranda Fricker²⁰ which may well be projected onto contemporary musicology. Notably, international scholarship of recent years has increasingly recognized the methodological limitations of Eurocentrism.²¹ Authors of these works focus their attention on such areas as sociological and cultural studies, and construction of national musical theories.²² However, the problem of difference in intercultural auditory perception itself (which also arises within a single national culture at the crossroads of civilizations), as well as cross-national perception, requires transdisciplinary approach and deeper immersion into fields such as cognitive and psychoacoustic analysis.

Frolova-Walker identified the problematic issues — the 'pain points' of a transitional process, the process of the emergence and development of a new branch of academic musical art. A comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of these issues is impossible from either a West- or East-centric perspective. Azerbaijani modes have transitioned to a new level of development, demanding a new approach and a new 'metalanguage' to comprehend and explain this reality.

Comprehending a national musical language presents a frequent and widespread challenge for Western musicologists who hold *a priori* Eurocentric music-theoretical sets that prevent them from understanding and explaining

the phenomena of Eastern musical culture. Western musicologists, for whom the system of Eastern modes remains unmapped in a music-theoretical sense — which implies a lack of a correspondingly trained, cognitively organized hearing — are unable to grasp the grandeur of the task achieved by Hajibeyli. Furthermore, the intuitive-empirical hearing of such scholars, having absorbed the opulence and rich coloration of “Eastern” harmonies and timbres from Orientalist composers, evaluates Hajibeyli’s music against these “benchmark”.²³ We should note, and indeed emphasize, that Frolova-Walker herself admits: “While it is possible that a native Azerbaijani might detect in *Keroglu* some faint traces of national characteristics, ... *westerners are unlikely to share this perception*” (*emphasis added*) (357). This admission, however, does not prevent her from categorically declaring: “As an anti-orientalist gesture, however, *Keroglu* was a failure” (Frolova-Walker 361).

Frolova-Walker’s article serves as a vivid illustration of a broader problem: the profound difficulty the West faces in understanding and accepting the East. Adopting a deconstructivist stance toward Russian composers — thereby dismantling the “myth of Russianness” — Frolova-Walker, when addressing the oeuvre of Hajibeyli, falls captive to her own Eurocentric construct.

Consequently, the Eurocentric bias of the article under discussion converges with its author’s own Orientalism. Orientalism, as a mode of thought, is a direct product of Eurocentrism — its continuation and its reverse side. Edward Said²⁴, in his prominent work *Orientalism*, notes: “Books are written and congresses held with ‘the Orient’ as their main focus, with the Orientalist in his new or old guise as their main authority. The point is that even if it does not survive as it once did, Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental” (10).

However, if a Western listener fails to perceive what a native musician hears, this must not imply that the phenomenon itself does not exist. In accordance with Eastern tradition, the Azerbaijani modes of Uzeyir Hajibeyli are explicitly named, which aids in their differentiation. It is impossible to “dispel the myth” of their existence. For a scrupulous and profound scholar, this reality dictates a singular directive: one must endeavor to hear.

Attention is drawn to the extreme urgency of the problem for the current global confrontation of confessions and peoples. Although institutions, conferences, congresses, and publications are designated to establish mutual understanding between East and West, the problem remains profoundly difficult to resolve.

Andrey Smirnov, the editor-in-chief and co-author of the collected volume *Otherness Problematized: Russia and Islamic World*, discusses the inevitable and systematic effect of semantic refraction that occurs during the transition between two cultural environments when their modes of information processing differ.

23 The concepts of cognitively organized hearing and intuitive-empirical hearing were introduced by the author of this article as two interconnected components of professional musical hearing. Intuitive-empirical hearing is grounded in sensory experience and general musicality, whereas cognitively organized hearing relies on a conscious, theoretical understanding of musical structure, enabling the analysis of musical processes. For a detailed discussion, see: Aliyeva, Imina, “On the Formation of Cognitively Organized Modal-Intonational Hearing Based on Azerbaijani Modes.” *Musiqi dünyası*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2012, pp. 24–30. (In Russian); Aliyeva, Imina, *A Practical Guide to the Study of Azerbaijani Modes and the Development of Modal-Intonational Hearing*. Baku, Adiloğlu, 2010. (In Azerbaijani and Russian)

24 Edward Said’s epigraph features a notable quote from Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”.

Differentiating between Eastern and Western cultures, Smirnov writes: "The method of constructing the body of a culture... I term as the mode of meaning-positing. The essence of the concept of a 'macrocultural area,' therefore, reduces to the indication that the cultures comprising such an area rely on a mode of meaning-positing common to them all. ...Two cultures represent otherness to one another if they differ in their mode of meaning-positing" (19). Smirnov categorizes Eastern and Western cultures precisely as such mutual alterities, distinct in their respective modes of meaning-positing.

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," — this line from Rudyard Kipling's ballad has become a classic sentence for researchers examining the relationships between East and West. However, it is equally significant to consider the subsequent lines of the ballad, which are frequently omitted:

*But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!*²⁵

Hajibeyli succeeded in overcoming the East-West dichotomy: in his music, East and West came together. He managed to bridge the otherness of musical thinking characteristic of distinct macrocultural areas (in Smirnov's terms) and establish a new musical civilization while preserving the pre-existing one (in Zemtsovsky's terms). His desire to "bring something new to the common cause of world musical art" (Hajibeyli 127–128), and his brilliant foresight into the future of Azerbaijani musical culture, inspired Hajibeyli to hear and grasp within *mugham* monody that Azerbaijani modes could be adapted to European musical culture — not as a form of "conventional Orientalism," but as a manifestation of authentic national music that preserves its individual intonational distinctiveness, and thus illuminated the path into the European musical community for other Eastern musical cultures, thereby forging a truly universal human unity.

25 Rudyard Kipling. *The Ballad of East and West*.
First published in 1889.

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