

## Transcript: Sustaining Vanishing Cultures in Dömaniç, Turkey - A Conversation with Olcay Muslu Gardner

Mehiyar 0:00 Welcome to the Nahrein network podcast series. Today we're with Dr. Olcay Muslu Gardner, founder of the Antioch State Conservatory at the Hatay Mustafa Kemal University in Turkey. How are you?

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 0:10 I'm okay, thank you very much Mehiyar, to host me today.

Mehiyar 0:13 It's a pleasure to talk to you and you're an assistant professor at the Antioch State Conservatory?

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 0:19 Yes. Yes, correct is the new music school established in 2018. We completed the pre preparation time in 2016-17, with the leadership of our Rector, Professor Dr. Hassan Kaya. He's director of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University. We started to work build of the construction of the State Conservatory in 2017 in Antioch, which is at very center of town of Hatay. And we started our education in 2018. With our very, very first students, around six students, we set up Turkish music program first, right now, we just completed our first year, and we are preparing to take our second year students. It's a very, very new school right now we are seeking a new recruitments, planning to open up new music programs, music technologies...

Mehiyar 1:15 And you've just completed a Nahrein Network British Institute at Ankara scholarship at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Could you tell us about your scholarship?

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 1:24 Thank you very much. My scholarship was based on researching a first kind of sustainability project in the region, city called Urfa, south east of Turkey. Because my previous studies research is based on sustainability, to sustain already disappearing cultures in Turkey, which was held in North Asian side of Turkey documenting intangible cultural heritage. The first project was about how to sustain traditional dance and music in a place called Dömaniç it is like not Asian side of Turkey, completely different. When I was doing my PhD in Istanbul Technical University, it was part of my PhD study was based on applied ethnomusicology. As many ethnomusicologists know applied ethnomusicology requires to work with very different systems. So, that obliged me to document all the traditional music, folk music of that region and the dances. Then we try to find some solutions, how to sustain their vanishing cultures. And that enabled us to look at the conventions, international conventions, treaties between the countries, between the unique stakeholders in Turkey. We kind of developed a cultural sustainability model for specifically for that region. Then I began to wonder if that model would work if I applied in different regions. So there are this UCL and British Institute at Ankara comes into the stage

when I applied the scholarship, Nahrein Network scholarship. Thank you very much. By the way, it has been very fruitful for two months, I was supposed to stay at SOAS, University of London to conduct my researches. Basically, I was trying to find what the variables would be in different regions in Turkey. I mean, the basic fundamental reasons behind the disappearing cultures are very obvious in the world, it's not specific to one country, actually. But because of the settings or the cultural, historical, geographical differences between regions the stakeholders are different. And they vary a lot. And I was trying to find what would be the best approach to do this work for Ulfa, Turkey.

Mehiyar 3:51 How do you safeguard a dying culture or music or music heritage? What are the steps? And then could you tell us about the model that you've developed and working on?

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 4:00 Safeguard itself as vocabulary is a bit problematic. Actually, it's caused so many controversial, you know, like so many debates, so many arguments in the world of academia. Should we safeguard tradition? Or who are we as academics or researchers to this, you know, trying to sustain other people's, you know, culture. So it depends which, which perspective, you're looking at, but if the local people are not interesting to sustain a culture, no way you can sustain anybody's culture. So it has to be like an inner motivation, but what I developed, what I saw in that region when I conducted my fieldwork was they really needed to remember their traditions. They were longing for to remember they were longing for them. I mean, they were forgotten actually. There were two traditional instruments that they began to display in their cultural, like a little cultural house they made in there. One day in 2010, when I visited Domaniç, I was taken to that house. And I was shocked when I saw those traditional, like a drum, big drum and the reed pipe demonstrated to me like it is already gone, you know, like, this is our traditional drum and reed pipe because I am living in Istanbul, I was living in Istanbul, then I graduated from Istanbul Technical University, when you live in a big city, you're not really realizing that these instruments are, but they are very, used for us to see everyday in our everyday life, it already disappeared in different regions in Anatolia. So it's like, a shocking effect. To me that, you know, like they are saying our local musicians who knows how to play them, they passed away, and they didn't transmit their knowledge to the younger generations. And they like to keep the materials themselves at least to show to the little children. So that region, Domaniç, it is a very historical region, the first Ottoman State was established in Domaniç area, it is very well known for that. So the villagers are very proud of that historical background, but even even so, you know, their very unique properties of their culture, rapidly disappearing because of the art migration. You know, the place the location of Domaniç is very hard to get it's a mountainous area, even though it looks on the turkey map. When you look at the you know, the map of Turkey, you see, like a bit closer to Istanbul or it's about three hours in time from Istanbul, it is hard to get it's very mountainous area, the winters are very, very tough there. The factories used to be there, they just closed down and the schools closed

down and people, you know, the men cannot find any jobs. So they had to move out. And the younger generations, they don't, they're not interested in staying in there because they don't want to do any animal husbandry kind of things. So, the population of the region shrank. When it is, when that happened, the first thing people are interested in how to live properly, you know, gain their life. So the music is always, the cultural perspective of life, it's always been secondary as usual. So, the disappearance happened so quickly in that like in 15 years gone. 15 to 20 years ago, they used to do their traditional weddings, took like three days or four days, you know, such a such a fantastic weddings, they were having and everyday a birth to record, you know, full of different traditional skills that are demonstrating. Man different, women different, and the society social structure of the region is very segregated, you know, women are entertaining differently, and men are entertaining differently. The things are not only based on the religious thoughts, but you know, like, it's the custom like that. But the women, I mean, women of Domaniç, they were very shy to demonstrate their skills, some of them are very talented in thinking and it is there is a practice based on verses, like spontaneous, or they say they develop like limericks, you know, like humor inside them. So it's like, when somebody's daughter is getting married, you know, the person who is very well known to do this kind of things are starting reading the verses, and it is so nice. And men have their own dance forms and women have their own traditional dances. And the musics are lovely, but they were, they are not doing any more. Weddings are usually they usually entertain with electronic music like electronic clavier. They don't use balama anymore, or drum and reed pipe completely gone. So that evokes the project, you know, what can we do because they have some local traditional musicians then, I work with two of them, and they helped me a lot, they still sing in their weddings and the tradition bearers in the regions are the key factor of safeguarding, if we want to call safeguard, if we can manage to safeguard. It is the documentation actually, if they have lost, if they think that they have, the cultures are not disappearing like that, but if they transform in time, because of the you know, the globalization, because of the technological changes...

Mehiyar 9:44 And how do you capture the changes, particularly in musical tradition, the archive of music? Do you use an anthropological approach? What kind of methods do you use?

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 9:53 Ethnographic studies, of course, is very important in this kind of documentation in a set of say field works, you have to conduct. First you have to talk to villagers, you have to get to know people. And of course, there's another key factor in any kind of fieldwork is who are you as a researcher, you know, if you're outside there is different if your insider is different if you're half insider and half of outsider is different. So I kind of developed my relations by living in there over two years. So I was half insider and half outsider, I was more lucky. But still done, it took quite a lot of time for me to approach many female, many of the women of Domaniç, because they are not trusting. You know, like, even though we spent all week together, you know, like, in the middle of the night, she might share very important information

when she's singing by, you know, why she's not using that specific part, but she's changed because of some kind of fears. So we catch that kind of informations. And in, like, try to reflect it transparently. Recordings are important, very important. First, you interview with people, and then your, you know, like, dictate all of them. And because I did my first field work in the same region in 1998, I had chance to compare contrast kind of situation, because I knew how they used to do things. And there were all local villagers in there, like over 80 years old, they have memories and they shared a lot of information. And some of them they even demonstrated, we filmed them. And there is a specific musical form: they dance along with it called Kimani [Howusa?], in Domaniç. It is completely gone, for example, but some of them still remember. It was there 20 years, yes, maybe 30 years ago. And there is a specific instrument called Kimani, they say, but it's a violin, but played on the lap, not the, you know, like traditional way of playing violin, they play violin on the left, but the for that region, seeing violin is impossible. Miracle! But all villagers are saying oh, this is it was one of our key instrument, and I have videos and you know, they some of them knew how to dance along with it. It's so fascinating that how things are vanishing, because the older people are not you know, transferring their skills to the youngest because there there is no interest of you know, any younger pupils towards their tradition. When you know, these kind of things, you start wondering why young people are not interested, there are some, you know, like, usually male dancers of [Place?] and if it's specific about its region are very popular. Because they are they are sat outside you know, like in the big gardens usually, men gather outside area, because they have more freedom, but usually the women are gathering inside you know, like, because there is a segregation and they usually, they play music in their houses, whichever size that their houses are. And that effects in time that affects the form of the demonstrations, you know, how they sing is also is also you know, like limited by that there is a limit limitation. So, we talk about gender issues as always. In gendered, when you look at the musical cultural expressions from the gender perspective, you can see all the chords you know, like attributed roles to the you know, the group of people in in the society and when we analyzed, you know, after documentation of the practices, musical pieces and the dance forms. And you could see this general approach in every performances. It was so obvious, maybe it is too cliché for us to say like women dances are a very simplistic way you know, like men and are very complicated peak moments some, but it is true, it is actually the reason women are not extending their arms very widely is because they are shy to move independently. The reason they are not doing any hopping movements is because they are shy to hop, you know, like, very limited very small steps and like a one to one kind of linings. But man man you look at you know, like a big circus. There is a fire in the middle, you know, like, from 30 to 100 people are in the garden. And the movements are unbelievable. They are beautiful, you know, so beautiful, beautifully choreographed. That still sustain. You know, I didn't need to try to sustain the male dancers because they were beautiful and because it's so repetitive. Every weddings every like military ceremonies we have in Turkey, they get together and they perform. Females watch them all the time, you know, women usually watch from the garden, when male people are, you know, like when men are performing. They learned and very young girls knows how to, including me, knows how to dance male dances. So that

cause you know, like sustainability of male dancers were okay. Because we always watch them, outside, you always happen to see them. But, you know, womens dances are vanishing because the nobody can see them, they just entertained, you know, with each other. So, that kind of things are different from region to region, I can't say it is very, it is going to be varied in the north Asian side of Turkey, like we call Black Sea or South is it you know, we have different national backgrounds, groups living in that. So, gender is always there. When we come to the Urfa region, there is also a gender issue, gender discrimination, and it is a part of the disappearing of the especially female practices, but it is different, you know, in which way different is because the populations are also different. And regional difficulties, obstacles, also different religious thoughts also different, you know, but in my model, what I want to point out, if we want to try to sustain any culture, we should think about the holistically, you know, we can't just go to the region, I mean, you can, of course, you know, it's an ethnomusicologist everybody can choose their work area, but what I want to propose, but you know, the stakeholders are different. And if we aim to reach one of, or a couple of them, we will get more, you know, into the what we really want to do, the one of them is like public entities, you know, like, it is really, it's a long way solution to establish a music, educational curriculum, you know, like, including music, courses, music and dance, if it is possible, preferably from me. Music and dance courses or folklore studies in the curriculum. So what you do is to reach out to Minister of National Education. So I look at the different ministries in our government, because each ministry role has some kind of sub unit underneath that, that have a tremendous amount of contribution in terms of economically or socially responsible projects, you know, it has a direct effect into the culture.

Mehiyar 17:48 Just on this point, do you think state institutions are important in terms of the sustainability of digital heritage?

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 17:56 I think for a long term solutions, the education is the is the most important one, because we are always talking that our younger generations are losing, you know, the heritage of heritage of how can I say, background memories. For especially if we are talking about early education system, this is the best way to reach out, you know, to give our cultural values because values are very important to every society, we look at the curriculums, but in Turkey. I don't I don't have much knowledge about European education system I'm familiar with. But in Turkey, we have music courses. And the dance courses are like not obligatory. Music courses was obligatory. But music courses that are based on the western music education, like two hours for a week, kind of music education, is like every like primary school, five years, three, three, you know, it's going it used to be like four, four, but later on some governmental people, politicians and educators offered to include folklore courses into the obligatory music education, which was very fruitful because it included the games like all traditional children, games and the epic history of Turkey, the literature, the tales, you know, like music, folk music, folk music composers, you know, all the more traditional maqam and lately the Government of Turkey, the Republic of Turkey

decided to include Turkish maqam music for example, which is completely new step from the government because maqam music has been taught as a very, very complicated musical form. It's very hard to get, but we never included in our music education before. I think this is a very positive thing, because I think ,as long as I know, in Europe folk music is not, cannot be part of education system. Pop music, folk dances this kind of things, but it is usually given in an associational area, like informal settings. But in Turkey because of the new direction of the cultural policies, changing, you know leaning on to value our own cultural stuff and to be known widely in the world, you know, like our president's message is very, very clear about that, you know, if one who is very good at their own traditional values will reach the whole world. If you use the right tools. So it I think the new atmosphere of Turkish culture or cultural policy is going through that channel at the moment. And when we look at the higher education system, we have different settings. Conservatories, Faculty of Educations has music training, music teacher training programs, but every music school, every conservatory, Turkish music is State Conservatory or musical conservatories are different than each other. I think government decisions are very important to reach more people because whichever region you are in Turkey or in everywhere in different countries, you reach more people through the educational channels from like the year years of three, to the years of, you know, the 17. It's very important.

Mehiyar 21:39 And the communities that you work with, could you tell us a bit about them? How are they involved with you in terms of documenting some of the intangible cultural heritage that you work on? How do you involve them in your work day to day basis? Do you have workshops? Do you go to their houses? Can you tell us a bit about the processes of documenting the simple...? Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 22:02 If you if you have a little bit knowledge about that community in the place they live in... What I did was I tried to I was living in there first and I began to visit neighbors through their friends, you know like distant friends. Because I was living there I had to do my shopping, like kitchen shopping, and that involved me to go there market open markets every Tuesday. And that helped me a lot because when you go to the little villages open market you see each other a lot on you happen to chat a lot. It was the custom in that region. And they say youi hi or hi how are you what are you doing? And you know why don't you come for a drink? Why don't you come for a coffee or tea? And it's a very very food eating oriented society as you can imagine. And they are lovely, they are very hospitable, they share a lot and because I knew this before the like what we call in Turkey is like [?] we call it in Turkish [?] it means like a day among women like let's get together on that day, but we call it the day. Many places will know this as chai, chai means tea, like chai, why don't you come for a tea. But if you call it like we will do a chai day it means that friends will get together and we will share our you know like pastries, they tell me we'll chat over it. And these kinds of settings the house gatherings, I thought I try to motivate more women to do this because in this kind of chatting environment we began to exchange knowledge in our musical practices. So I began to ask you know, how was the that kind of I couldn't remember the lyrics. Can you repeat it? You know the ones who skillful, they just want to say it anyway. So they began to sing them because they are using the kitchen tools as

percussion instruments. They, some of them brought their the heaviest couple of pans from the kitchen and they began to play and I you know, accompanied them, so that they kind of created a nice musical dance atmosphere in our days. You know, like in those tea gatherings. It was the first first step we started, like once in a week we organized like house gatherings to entertain. Some of the, in my friend groups that involve them to pray. They were starting the day with praying sessions then the foods like the traditional month and all the other tradition lovely foods were setting up on the floor. Everybody was sitting on the floor and we were eating first. Then after we finished: Why don't you know, did you have that kind of costume you used to have before? Why don't you wear it? And they also put me some nice scarves and nice tradition stuff. So we have very nice bond between us. Then after that, because I also realized that many villagers are watching [Broadcaster Name] TV channels. There's a specific TV channel, they were watching, they were very fond of it. I hadn't seen it before. Then I learned that TV program is being broadcast from Istanbul. And because you know, I'm based in Istanbul, I found the TV programmers and asked if we can I film a program based on Domaniç. And then I had to offer some villagers to come to Istanbul in order to demonstrate the skills. So the first organization was very tough for me. Because, you know, like, elder women are very, they don't want to sing, basically. And they don't want to dance. They don't want to sing. So younger generations, some of them are very modern minded, and they live outside of Domaniç. So they were invited, the ones who are, you know, willing to contribute to the program. They came, municipality of Domaniç was very, very supportive. He sponsored the transportations from Domaniç to Istanbul. Local musicians, Mahmet and Osman Avi, they were also they were always leaders and you know, hypens of the project. So, we did three programs. The first one was very challenging. Then, because the other villagers saw their neighbors on TV, many people volunteered for the second part, because they were very happy to see each other on on TV. They began to I know this, you know, I can show this. So it was a TV program project. So we run I developed five or six different projects, it was for me like, after I developed model, it was like a checkpoint, you know, if it works or not, because we are applying this by involving many stakeholders that I am showing on the map. The local agent stations were in it, the local villagers were in it. I mean, of course, you can't involve more international media private sector, there wasn't any non NGO in the region. We couldn't involve an NGO but you know, we tried to involve as many as possible. Then we did a studio recording, music accompanied studio recording that was had in Istanbul ACM studios. The third one, the fourth one, I thought maybe what will happen after I leave the field, then I come up with the idea establishing an association is called [Name]. You don't manage cultures to not association so I prepared regulations based on the UNESCO safeguarding intangible cultural conventions, you know, like we set up a kind of modify the articles according to the region's you know, properties. Tried to involve as many women as possible, and that association is still alive. I mean, it's still very active. For that we did have we did workshops, I mean workshops in Domaniç they were always there, but I was interested in if our Istanbul Technical University students would be interested in learning some alternative you know, like Domaniç traditional dances with six local villagers came to Istanbul again, with the with the support of Domaniç mayor.

The folk dance department students met with them but the local villagers didn't know how to teach. I mean, we had some difficulties during the process first, and our students found the steps very complicated, you know, it took like two hours for us to get into the you know, the spirit. But it was very successful. Then I think another project was the 29th of April every year has been celebrated as a World Dance Day and Istanbul and big universities or there are big festivals in Istanbul, there are so many big stage shows going on and Istanbul Technical University Turkish Music State Conservatory has a nice hall. Then I offered to bring the other male dancers and the female dancers to demonstrate whole dances. And musicians as well. So we had a successful dance night that night, it was the last project. So there are so many different depends on the researcher actually, or how active you want to be and the conditions. You know it all these projects were done without any kind of grants you know, like I didn't have any support, I did just by myself. This kind of field works should shouldn't be run without any help because I had such a difficulties, because now I am thinking if I had better tools for my recordings, they would be safeguarded better. First, I think I should start safeguard my own documents. Mehiyar 29:54 On that note going forward. How do you see the work you've done at the School of Oriental and African Studies helping you? Has it equipped you? Has it facilitated opportunities that you could use for your own work and what are your future activities in Turkey?

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 30:09 I applied the scholar[ship], I mean the grants, to reach out more, more information about you know, the similar kind of projects done in the world. Scientifically or practically whichever way or talking meeting with people who has such an experience in this field. So anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, historians and archaeologists. When I started to go to SOAS first of course, I used the libraries they have nice databases in like online databases from different journals. I reach, I could read some information, not specifically about Ulfa because Ulfa is a very specific subject, you know, as a city, you can read historical information about Ulfa, but what we are working on is very applied ethnomusicology, or ethnomusicological study. And the musical practices of that region is not known by many international academia. These journals are in English. I mean, the Turkish ones I could reach anyway. I mean, I read all of them before anyway, but the English, I mean, if we are targeting to find different examples of the same kind of fieldworks, the same kind of aim, you look at, you know, like Afghan study, or you know, the ethnomusicologists like John Baileys did tremendous works in the past, like everybody knows in Afghanistan. How did they set up the school in there? How do they record the traditional musics? And how did they approach the young people? These are important for me. And the difference between studying from Turkey is that I think I had more opportunity to read more, usually more online databases. I also went to additional [?] that and I met with other colleagues. But I want to say I would like to thank the BIA Office, [Name]. Not Ankara, It's based in London. Right from the beginning of my research or my journey in London, the archaeologist [Name] has been very helpful. And she introduced me with many valuable colleagues around London, you know, whoever she thinks it is related to my study area. My academic consultant was Rachel Harris, from SOAS. They also facilitated many different conferences, you know, like she emailed me in different



conferences, I was very busy in terms of that, you know, listening different case studies from different universities. My work about Urfa: Thank you very much to UCI. And for Nahrein network, to you aswell Mehiyar, for thinking such an important outreach, you know, like a project to reach out to scholars who doesn't have many tools, many opportunities to conduct their studies, even it is for a short time or a long time. It has a great effect on it. I hope I will continue my study in Ulfa or in Antioch, I am sure I will continue with different approaches. I think what the most importantly the outcome of the two months research is creating future projects with different colleagues. And we made such plans that you know, our colleagues from London may come to visit in Antioch, you know, come to Antioch and help us to develop different musical programs or seminars, you know, we will continue our academic activities in the future.

Mehiyar 33:45 On that note, thank you very much Dr. Olcay Muslu Gardner, assistant professor at Mustafa Kemal Hatay University and co founder of the Antioch State Conservatory, thank you very much.

Dr Olcay Muslu Gardner 33:56 Thank you very much.