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BORDERS AND BRIDGES: PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON BALKAN MUSIC

Abstract: The author discusses methodological questions concerning his broad research project on music in the Balkans. He raises a number of questions related to defining national, cultural, and other identities in this region. The text is organised into four sections: 1. An ecumene, 2. Culture as appropriation, 3. Centres and peripheries, and 4. Music gets its own back.

Key-words: Balkan music, East and West in music, centres and peripheries, musical modernity.

The Project

Recently I began to think about an extended research project on musics in the Balkans. The attraction of the Balkans for musicology is threefold. First, the region allows some investigation of periphery, and with it broader questions of cultural value. Second, it raises in acute form questions of identity---national, regional, social and cultural. And third, it invites us to bring many very different musics under one scholarly roof, notably in relation to themes of modernity. The research questions addressed by this project are already suggested by these three formulations. They might be presented in summary form as follows:

- What does a study of music history in the Balkans tell us about the construction of cultural traditions, East and West, and about the consequent relationship between cultural politics and aesthetic value?
- What is the role of different musics in defining national, regional, social and cultural identities in the Balkans?
- How do Balkan alterities illuminate European projects of modernity? And what has been the impact of westernisation and modernisation (and, conversely, of orientalisation) on the Balkans themselves?

Repertorially the project will involve discussions of the Ottoman legacy, of Central European-influenced art music, of Byzantine and Glagolitic chants, of the music of Jews and Roma, and of oral traditions, including urban songs, rural folk music, and contemporary popular music. Historically the focus will be on the post-1800 era.

There is of course an extensive existing literature on music in the Balkans, and there are other major projects underway, notably by the distinguished

ethnomusicologist Risto Pekka Penanen.¹ However, this literature is by and large the province of specialisms that cross over only to a limited extent. My intention, in contrast, is to investigate methodological approaches that can do justice to all these musics on something like an even footing, and can also register the blurred and shifting edges between them. In some measure the project responds to a growing democratisation of repertory within the evolving discipline of historical musicology, but it also reflects my belief that traditional disciplinary divisions, notably between musicology and ethnomusicology, will in due course have outlived their usefulness.

Since the project is as yet only in its planning stage, the most I can do in response to the kind invitation to contribute to this issue is to offer some preliminary thoughts on methodological questions, without any real discussion of the music itself. Moreover, I am alive to the probability that even these basic remarks will be subject to revision when the research gets under way. I identify four themes in what follows, and it is perhaps especially in the third of them (Centres and Peripheries) that I address the overall topic of this volume, East and West.

An ecumene

It might be expected that students of world musics would draw heavily on the already well developed field of world history. In particular, leading figures in world history have addressed the dialectic of interactivity and identity that occurs when definable units--- in practice, usually societies, nations or civilisations---come into contact. More than that, they have considered two alternative approaches available to the study of world history. The first would place the spotlight on unique units which interact, while the second would examine rather the field of their interaction, described by Robert Dunn as an 'interactive zone', and by William McNeill as an 'ecumene'.² The first approach stresses the transformation of collective identities as they come into contact with other such identities, perhaps to the point at which their unique configurations break down. The second approach focuses rather on the development of a so-called 'world system',³ tracing this from embryonic through to more fully developed stages. This latter approach, incidentally, for all the dangers of systemic systems, counters an inherent

¹ His major Humboldt Foundation project 'Music and Nationalism in the Balkans' has already resulted in several important publications, most recently 'The Nationalization of Ottoman Popular Music in Greece', *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 48 No. 1 (2004), 1-25.

² See William McNeill, 'The Changing Shape of World History', in Philip Pomper, Richard H. Elphick and Richard T. Vann (eds.), *World History: Ideologies, Structures, and Identities* (Oxford and Malden, 1998), 21-40.

³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 2 vols (New York, 1980). See also Janet Lippman Abu-Luhod, *The World System in the Thirteenth Century: Dead-End or Precursor?* (Washington DC, 1993).

tendency of the historiography of individual societies, nations or civilisations to overestimate the morphological cohesion which is presumed to generate their uniqueness, while at the same time underestimating the extent of their interaction with the world beyond their borders. Simply by labelling any such unit, we run the risk of embracing contradiction within what may prove to be a dubious synthesis, and thus subordinating constitutive diversity to an identity principle.

While the relevance of these questions to the study of world musics seems rather clear, it may be argued that they can have little application to music in the Balkans. However, I would counter that the tools and methods of world historians can usefully be adapted to examine what I called the 'dialectic of interactivity and identity' in regional as well as world contexts, and that a region such as the Balkans, with its mix of ethnicities and religions, presents an especially rich field of study in this respect. How then might the two approaches outlined above bear on a study of music in the Balkans? Within the first approach we would examine the nature of musical identities, which by and large exhibit, and may even encode, membership of particular cultural communities, and we would recognise that historically such identities will be subject either to transformation or defiant preservation as they come into mutual contact. Within the second approach we would consider rather an *ecumene*, peculiarly attuned to our present age of globality but by no means unique to this age. I accept that the term has its limitations, and I should stress that I use it here without any of the prophetic resonance it has acquired in ecclesiastical contexts. Such an *ecumene* would have its own developing history, of course, but it is perhaps not necessary to invoke history at all (and thus to interpret plurality as somehow postmodern) in order to envisage it. We might think of it rather synchronically, imagining a systemic field of criss-crossing musical idioms, a 'zone of interaction'. In a sense, this approach puts history in its place (as one means of unpicking present-day complexities), and I will return later to some of the implications of this. But I will note here that the approach opens up the possibility of a scholarship that would embrace many musics within a single explanatory framework, a scholarship, in short, that would cut across such traditional disciplinary boundaries as historical musicology, ethnomusicology, analysis, and performance studies. The 'borders and bridges' of my title, a banal but somehow inescapable metaphor, might therefore operate in disciplinary as well as in political, cultural, and specifically musical domains.

Just how borders are constructed, and once constructed how they may be crossed, are themselves questions that will need careful investigation in this project. Borders may be imposed, of course, but equally they may result from self-generated delineations of collective identities. This is a difficult issue. Of course, as Fernand Braudel reminds us, political, socio-economic

and cultural boundaries are by no means always congruent.⁴ But more crucially, we may note that those engaged in the construction of collective identities are simultaneously engaged in constructing the environments for those identities. The two activities are inseparable. The one defines the other in a symbiotic and continuously evolving process, where selections are made from among available resources, and interrelations and coalitions are then established between constitutive elements, so that an environment becomes defined very largely by negations and exclusions. It goes without saying that the borders defining collective identities foreground alterities at various interlocking levels (institutional, cultural, personal), and of various, often conflicting, qualities (religious, linguistic, geopolitical, social, ethnic). And while the borders themselves remain historically in flux as different collective identities come into contact, there is usually an in-built resistance to crossing from one to another at any given time. There may be coercion, of course, where the connections and commonalities between people are deliberately eliminated. But there may also be conversion. And above all there may be bridge-building, designed precisely to facilitate movement across the more difficult borders, often through a process of strategic forgetting. For whether we build bridges or borders, and whether these are real or in our heads, part of the process involves silencing historical voices, or deciding not to hear them. There is a sense in which bridges are 'against' the status quo.

Such issues of collective identity might be addressed at a geocultural level for the Balkans as a whole, in relation to competing claims from Central European, circum-Mediterranean and Ottoman-Turkish identities. And here particular borders and bridges may loom large in our thinking for their symbolic resonance: the so-called military border that served as a buffer between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans for more than three centuries,⁵ or the bridge over the Drina linking these same worlds in the powerful imagination of Ivo Andrić.⁶ In both cases there are again suggestive evocations of a 'zone of interaction' or an ecumene. It is noteworthy too that one of the most persuasive contemporary commentators on the Balkans, Maria Todorova, distinguishes balkanism from orientalism precisely on the grounds that it deals with differences within a type (ecumenism) rather than differences between types.⁷ Of course, when we look at those differences in

⁴ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949), p. 141. See also Dimitri Obolensky, *Byzantium and the Slavs* (New York, 1994), p. 302.

⁵ For a discussion of the musical resonance, see Koraljka Kos, 'East and West in Military Music on the Ottoman-Habsburg Border', in Svanibor Pettan (ed.), *Music, Politics, and War: Views from Croatia* (Zagreb, 1998), 29–54.

⁶ Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, trans. Lovett F. Edwards (Belgrade, 2003; orig. edn., 1945).

⁷ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford, 1997), 19.

detail---when we turn, in particular, to the constitutive regions of the Balkans---notoriously complex problems in the definition and interaction of collective identities instantly arise. Throughout the Balkans dramas of identity have played out not only in terms of ethnicity and nationality (the diaspora and the state), but also through religion and culture. In the former Yugoslavia in particular the mix of religions and ethnicities is so complex that we may question the merits of studying groups at all, however these may be constituted. Certainly, where imaginative culture is concerned, it seems obvious that simple homologies of repertoires and groups will not adequately describe Balkan texts and practices. The alternative, as all ethnologists know, is to study situations. Here we invoke subjective constructions of identity, which in many cases will not conform to group identities. But this raises its own difficulties, especially when we seek, as we must, to arrive at useful generalisations. It is an evasion to exclude collectivities from the picture, for it is in relation to these that personal choices are made.

A moot question here is just how far stylistic borders in music may be compared in their nature and operation to other kinds of border. As a starting position, we might assume that musical styles are susceptible to at least some measure of disinterested description, and to the extent that this is so the borders between them might be regarded as borders like any others. A musical style, in other words, might function as another mode of collective identity. Leonard B. Meyer has observed that it is the selection of some elements rather than others from an existing stock of handed-down, 'pre-formed' materials that constitutes a style,⁸ and it is rather obvious that, as in the construction of any collective identity, selection also means negation. Styles are also defined by historical processes of standardisation, establishing their own normative markers, and confirming these by setting them against others, and also by temporarily falsifying them---by deviating from norms. Of course, in music as elsewhere borders may be imposed externally, and post-war music history in the Balkans is not short of examples. But the delineation of stylistic borders is usually a more subtle process than this. Musical styles are, after all, symbolic as well as social systems. In consequence, their borders tend to be more fluid than those in political and socio-economic domains, just as the commerce between them and the diversity within them are often greater.

Just how particular musical styles, as symbolic systems, map onto, or are harnessed by, particular social groups is of course another question altogether, and it is one that will need to be addressed in some detail in this project. There would be no harm in beginning with the crudest of ideal types: 'folk music', for instance, prone to stability as long as peasant societies remain stable and relatively isolated; 'art music' inclined to constant transformation in response to high-cultural interaction promoted especially by a

⁸ Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, Ideology* (Philadelphia, 1989).

middle-class public; 'popular music' favouring eclecticism as a mark of globality, especially among sub- and counter-cultural components of a wider so-called 'youth culture'. However, you only need subject any one of these to a moment's careful scrutiny to realise that ideology rides high in the alignment of symbolic and social systems; borders, after all, are reinforced by the exercise of power, and especially institutional power. And nowhere does it ride higher than in the Balkans, as I will briefly suggest in the second section of this essay. The larger point here is that we need to take account not only of symbolic systems, but of the social relations within which such systems are embedded, and of the role of ideology in promoting both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. Our stance as researchers might be that cultures are to have equal status, but it is obvious that they have not been equally promoted. I will return to this briefly in the next section.

My proposal, then, is not just that the Balkans may serve as a working model of how collective identities may be constructed and deconstructed through music, but also that this region may have a capacity to reveal to us with special clarity the workings of a musical ecumene, perhaps even standing as an exemplar for the wider interactivity that characterises world music today. Indeed at least one commentator has gone so far as to suggest that this interactivity has been so comprehensively embraced by the culture industry of late modernity that world music may have transmuted into something akin to a classical music of our time.⁹ In any event, I suggest that it is not enough to categorise the multiple musical styles in the Balkans by describing the surface features that distinguish them and make them unique. Nor is it enough to locate deep structures that supposedly unite them on another level, adopting in short a premise that sustained an earlier orientation of some music researchers.¹⁰ The commerce between musical styles is more fluid and more dynamic than either of these exercises will allow. Moreover the picture is complicated yet further by the subjective identities of those who have agency in creating style systems and of those who respond to them. This is a crucial perspective, which implicitly critiques or qualifies systemic models of the kind suggested by an ecumene. Such models do, after all, give the appearance of closed systems rather than networks; they are over-reductive; and they often seem to de-personalise culture, to remove human agency. They are valuable only if agency is given its due.

⁹ Jan Ling, 'Viennese Classicism and World Music', in Masakata Kanazawa (ed.), *Globalization and Musicology: Proceedings of the International Congress in Shizuoka 2002* (Tokyo, 2004).

¹⁰ See, for example, János Maróthy, *Music and the Bourgeois; Music and the Proletarian*, trans. Eva Rona (Budapest, 1974).

Culture as appropriation

To think in terms of ideal types, as I did briefly in the last section, is to invoke genres and sub-genres, for it is the tendency of genre to close off meanings in this way. At the same time, it is no less the tendency of individuals to open up such meanings through a process of negotiation with collective identities. This dialectic is peculiar to no one time and to no one place. But it may be that in our present mass-media age (and here history creeps back into the discussion) the negotiation takes on a new significance, complicated by the international character of those cultural resources from which selections are made, and perhaps also by the contingent tendency (noted by Adorno) for 'originality' to take on a constructed, artificial quality in an age of mass culture. It may be too that the Balkans is a privileged site for any discussion of this kind of negotiation. Here many musics jostle for attention; they cross over in novel ways; their affiliation to political and social units is far from stable. In such a context the individual can *use* music in a variety of ways, establishing unusual alliances, breaking down old borders, and erecting new ones, building new bridges and destroying old ones. (What matters ultimately in this regard is less what an individual is or was; more what he or she wants to become.) And it follows that some engagement with ethnological methods, embracing those who create music (composers and performers) as well as those who respond to it, will be a necessary component of my project. In other words, a balanced approach to the research field will need to keep in play not only symbolic systems, social relations, and ideology, but also subjective identities. To leave any one of these out of play will be to distort our findings.

The last two of these categories, ideology and subjective identities, invoke the notion of 'culture as appropriation', a term adopted above all by the cultural historian Roger Chartier.¹¹ I will say just a few words initially about the first category, the use of music to ideological ends, and by ideology I mean principally the exercise of power to promote a view of how the world works. There is a spectrum here, and I will confine myself to illustrating just three notional points along that spectrum. We might begin with blatant imperialism or conquest, where cultures are assimilated and original identities threatened or marginalised. The category of indigeneity will need to be probed here, for example in relation to the singing *na glas* characteristic of the dinaric alps, or the singing 'à tue-tête' in the Pays de l'Oach, Romania.¹² Such a category, while it can never be absolute, stands all the same in sharp contrast to the more characteristically synthetic musics of the Balkans: *sevdalinka*, for example, with its blend of Ottoman and Slavic

¹¹ Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Ithaca and New York, 1988).

¹² See in particular Jacques Bouët, Bernard Lortat-Jacob and Speranța Rădulescu, *À tue-tête: Chant et violon au Pays de l'Oach, Roumanie* (Nanterre, 2002).

elements, and its later transformation when *saz* is replaced by accordion; or *smyrneika*, mixing Ottoman and Greek components;¹³ and of course, almost axiomatically, Rom musics from all over the region. In exploring how indigenous musics can be appropriated by dominant cultures we might derive some critical perspectives from Larry Wolff, who used the Morlacchi (and thus the culture of the dinaric alps) as a case study of the wider tendency of enlightened Europe to construct a marginalised cultural other to its own educated, sophisticated, and well-bred circles.¹⁴ Alternatively we might turn to Bartók, whose understanding of the 'natural beauty' of peasant music was harnessed to a broad framework of social Darwinism (though his views on this did not remain a constant). Or indeed to Adorno, who saw critical potential in rural folk music precisely because it had escaped those dominant processes of rationalisation that had shaped European art music.¹⁵

Secondly, there are more insidious appropriations resulting from the institutionalisation of cultures, often in the service of a nationalist ideology; indeed the carving up of the dinaric musics mentioned above into separate national properties available in separate national histories affords us a useful example.¹⁶ Or consider the role of nationalism in late nineteenth-century debates over the polyphonicisation of Byzantine chant in Greece. Here the points of dispute were in part doctrinal (does the new music corrupt a sanctioned truth; or is it a necessary adaptation to the contemporary world?); in part about the perceived Greek character of the chant (here the debate focused on the need to preserve the chant from corruption from East as well as West); in part about origins (imagined constructions of the nation included stories bridging ancient Greece, Byzantium and the modern nation state); and in part about musical integrity (how do we harmonise the intervals of the Byzantine echos within a Western rational system?). In twentieth-century art music (and still today) comparable debates---ideological in inception, but not devoid of personal rivalry---surround the opposing claims to 'Greekness' of the Kalomiris circle and the Ionian school of composers. Another example would be the hijacking of *Ilahje* in Bosnia in the aftermath of the war in 1990. Here simple, and essentially private, devotional 'songs' belonging to Sufi traditions of Islam were transformed into public statements, in which the *Ilahje* repertory (much of it newly-composed) would be

¹³ See Risto Pekka Pennanen, 'The Nationalization of Ottoman Popular Music in Greece', *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 48 No. 1 (2004), 1–25.

¹⁴ Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford, 2001).

¹⁵ See Max Weber's classic text, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, trans. and ed. D. Martindale, J. Riedel and G. Neuwirth (Illinois, 1958; orig. edn. 1921). Weber's ideas were later adapted by Adorno, notably in *Aesthetic Theory*. For a discussion, see Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, 1993), 135–148.

¹⁶ To an extent this was a by-product of the ideology of folklore studies promoted by Communist regimes in Eastern Europe following World War II.

accompanied by orchestra and associated with big, glitzy events in an obvious assertion of Bosnian national identity. And one final example, this time pan-Balkan rather than national in impulse: in the case of the Turbo-folk idioms that developed in popular music from the 1980s, ‘orientalisms’ (of musical style, and interestingly of concert rituals too) were widely adopted as a mark of Yugoslav counter-cultural identity in the face of new political elites, and ironically at a time when popular music in Turkey was adopting a more western orientation.¹⁷

Thirdly, we might understand ‘culture as appropriation’ rather more widely, closer indeed to the sense that Roger Chartier had in mind when he introduced the term. In a nutshell, Chartier’s proposal is that classifying repertoires in terms of genres, forms and materials is less important than examining the use made of these repertoires. This criterion of social utility can lead in some cases to interesting transformations and even inversions of categories such as ‘rural’ and ‘urban’, ‘private’ and public’, ‘elite’ and ‘popular’, ‘new’ and ‘old’, though we need to be careful about using some of these terms in relation to societies where middle-class values on a Western model struggled to gain a footing. Again numerous examples could serve: the ‘rurbanisation’ process associated with *novokomponovana narodna muzika* [newly composed folk music] in parts of the former Yugoslavia, where forms of urban origin were ruralised, partly in response to the inability of rural people to adapt when they moved to urban settings. Or consider Serbian Orthodox chant. Here the rejection of ‘traditional’ Serbian chant by the so-called ‘newly baptised’ (or ‘neo-Byzantines’) took the form of a return to earlier, supposedly ‘pure’ Greek models, such that the old becomes the new. Or think of the division, even within a single Romanian village, between ‘roma’ and ‘gypsy’ musics, a division highlighted by Speranta Radulescu,¹⁸ and in many ways inflated to a global scale in widespread resentment of the international success achieved by bands such as the *Haïdouks*.

Appropriations of this kind can of course work to unite as well as to divide peoples. They can act as bridges rather than borders. Nor is it necessary to attach to this function some sense of music’s transcendental, transformative power. More often than not, the underlying impulse is straightforwardly pragmatic. Thus, bands in today’s Istanbul play bouzouki as well as native instruments, just as Greek musicians are showing renewed interest in their post-Byzantine Ottoman inheritance, not least through the initiatives

¹⁷ See “Turbo-folk u sjaju devedesetih” [Turbo-folk in the Light of the Nineties], in Vladimir Djurić and Goran Tarlać (eds.), *Pesme iz stomaka naroda: Antologija o turbo-folku* [Songs From the Stomach of the People: A Turbo-folk Anthology] (Belgrade: Studentski kulturni centar, 2002).

¹⁸ In her liner notes for the CD *Roma și țigani din satul Gratia, Teleorman* [Roma and Gypsies from the Village of Gratia, Teleorman] (Ethnophonie, 2004).

of the Byzantine musicologist Christodoulos Halaris since the early 1990s.¹⁹ Likewise, musicians and dancers on the Greek-Macedonian border may well change costumes and instruments while using the same melodies and dance steps as they perform respectively at Greek and Macedonian dance feasts within the same village.²⁰ Or consider the Kosovo Roma. It is well known that Rom music in diaspora has tended to reflect the forms and genres of the adopted country. This was a pragmatic strategy, by means of which the musicians would seek out and very quickly imitate the most marketable idioms from the first moment of arrival in a new territory. Yet there is some evidence from ethnological studies that the Kosovo Rom musicians deliberately adopted transnational idioms, including Western popular music, if not to promote a universalist ideology then at least to maintain ethnic neutrality at a time of prevailing ethnic tension and dispute.²¹

In considering culture as appropriation, we are addressing what in conventional semiological terms would be described as the aesthetic level. Effectively we are analysing the social production of musical meanings, the ways in which music threads its way through many different social and cultural formations, attaching itself to them in different ways, adapting its own appearance and in the process changing theirs. A more traditional social history of music would perhaps begin at the other end, and concern itself rather with the social cause of the music. In other words, it would seek to explain the music with reference to the conditions of its production, investigating the external motivation for musical creativity, and the environmental and circumstantial factors---the ecology, in a word---that helped to shape it. In a word, it would address the poietic rather than the aesthetic level. A good deal of ethnomusicological writing operates on this level, and it will play a part in my project too. But it may be worth singling out just one dimension of it that seems especially germane to the troubled history of the Balkans. I refer to the role played by what Alain Badiou calls the 'event'.²² It will not be possible to explore this fully here, but I will at least point towards a few of the relevant associations. An 'event' involves some sort of exceptional break with the status quo, usually occurring in a context where prevailing values have been at least temporally neutralised (it could, for example, be a war). The flow of history is, as it were, arrested, and in the space left available (the 'site événementiel') new directions, alternative visions, become possible, driven by human agency. Susan Buck-Morss refers, admittedly in a slightly different context, to a 'wild zone' of arbitrary, vio-

¹⁹ Walter Feldman, *Music of the Ottoman Court* (Berlin, 1996), 17.

²⁰ Ioannis Manos, *Visualising Culture – Demonstrating Identity: Dance performance and identity politics in a border region in northern Greece*, Diss. (Hamburg 2002).

²¹ See the film by Svanibor Pettan, *Kosovo through the Eyes of Local Rom (Gypsy) Musicians* (Krško, 1999).

²² Alain Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement* (Paris, 1988).

lent power.²³ Where music history in the Balkans is concerned, it is interesting to contrast this approach, suggestive of explosive transformative innovation, with a more traditional, Dahlhausian view (in which a *kairos* would function as the culminating point of a particular stage of historical evolution, generating a kind of essence that is then presumed to characterise that stage as a whole). It may indeed be necessary and important to find some accommodation between Dahlhaus's *kairos* and Badiou's 'event'.

Centres and peripheries

At this point I would like to return to the first of the research questions posed at the beginning of this essay, with its familiar implication that the Balkans might be viewed as a bridge between East and West. Even Todorova evokes the bridge metaphor, and indeed extends it to refer to a bridge between different stages of growth as well as between East and West.²⁴ Yet it may be that the no less familiar description of the Balkans as a frontier region---a frontier in several senses---meets the case rather better. We are reminded by Owen Lattimore that a frontier is not the same as a border.²⁵ A frontier is a peripheral zone, which often takes on rather particular characteristics, and creates a specific *mentalité*, a 'periphery of the imagination' against which the cultural and political identities of others might be constructed. As Charles King remarks, people shape themselves against the image of the frontier.²⁶ One of the interests of frontiers, of course, is that they are potentially privileged sites from which to look critically at a centre, if not indeed to probe the stability and durability---even the very idea---of that centre. More than that, a frontier usually invites us to look in two directions. It is conventional to think of the Balkans as transitional between something that is an 'essentially' European culture and something else, whatever that may be. It is natural for us to think in these terms, not only because we approach the topic from a European perspective, but because Europe itself has become a global hegemon (having once been a peripheral zone on the fringes of Islamic civilisation!). But we can of course turn the whole thing around. We can face east, and then we might see another, quite different, centre, or putative centre. That surely demands some kind of comparative analysis.

The peripheral status of the Balkans, in relation to both East and West, was not an historical constant, in that different parts of the region oscillated constantly between relative withdrawal from, and relative integration within, the wider European and Eurasian worlds, each of which had its own very

²³ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), 3.

²⁴ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford, 1997), 16.

²⁵ Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York, 1951), chapter 8.

²⁶ Charles King, *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford, 2004), 8–11.

different socio-economic and political systems. Moreover, the spectral positioning of both East and West has itself been an historical variable (it is obvious not just that today's centres are not yesterday's, but also that today's reading of yesterday's centres is not yesterday's reading of them). For historians, then, there is both a danger and a challenge. The danger is that they will understand the Balkans as no more than a kind of adjunct to either central European or Ottoman histories (I might add here that to read Balkan history as a series of discrete ethnonational stories is no solution either). The challenge is to re-assess periphery: not to deny it, but to afford it its own explanatory value, to give it its due. Where music is concerned, this amounts to formulating an historiography of periphery in relation to both a Western canon and a pan-Islamic tradition of music-making. In the first instance, it means trying to determine just how cultural traditions (central European and Ottoman-Turkish), together with their associated values, are shaped, supported and promoted through symbiotic processes of marginalisation and canon formation. The point at issue is presumably the triumph of particular sets of values (embodied in European modernism and Turkish Classical music respectively), from which the Balkans have been sidelined. This task is one that I am as yet singularly ill-equipped to undertake, so the ensuing comments will be indicative only.

As to Europe, it seems clear that the Balkans have come to be viewed either as the dark (oriental) side of our consciousness, or as the emptiness at its heart; in other words, they have had to accept their inferiority and backwardness in order to affirm European civilisation. Although part of Europe, the region has been all but written out of European culture. This reading stems very directly from a Western liberal view of history that gained momentum in the nineteenth century, taking its stand on modernity and progress, on the quest for freedom, and on the idea of European exceptionalism. Progress, freedom, and exceptionalism: each of these produced its own dependent negative image, and it is for that cluster of negative images that the Balkans came to serve as an all too convenient exemplar.²⁷ The main thrust of European bourgeois culture from the early nineteenth century onwards was to promote and legitimate this liberal agenda. In the case of music, it was advanced in an increasingly monolithic fashion through the twin formation of a canon and an avant-garde. This was accomplished in a select cluster of high-prestige, charismatic cultural centres, increasingly associated with nationalist agendas (though paradoxically with universalist ambition). Critical discourses bolstered the agenda, coalescing, historically and analytically, around Beethoven's heroic style and its aftermath, and thus privileging the cultural movement usually called modernism. There is not much doubt about where the Balkans sit in relation to that particular story:

²⁷ Ideas of progress and degeneracy are inevitably drawn into these debates. See Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration* (Cambridge, 1991).

they barely make the history books. It is true that some of the central organising ideas of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe made only a belated appearance in the region. But our failure to acknowledge the potency of Yugoslav *Moderna* in music and the other arts is as much as anything a matter of cultural politics, and even in some cases of straightforward chauvinism. However we read it, that failure brings into focus major questions of cultural value, questions really about the reciprocity of art and history, to paraphrase Dahlhaus.²⁸

In our present political and intellectual climate, there are in any case other ways to read European history, and these may enable us to reconfigure the position of the Balkans. It will be enough to mention Edgar Morin, whose book *Penser l'Europe* invites us to 'think Europe' by engaging with the structural and cultural pluralism that shaped it in the first place, predating the monolithic thrust of modernity and arguably surviving its demise.²⁹ Morin refers to the meeting of multiple components in the construction of a collective European identity as a 'carrefour', and he goes on to argue that this multiplicity persists into modernity *de facto*, that there are markers of identity that prise open the closed borders defining territories, religions and ideologies. More than that, he demonstrates that even the elite centres depend on their peripheries to preserve their status. The traffic, in other words, is two-way. Not only do the common ideals that crystallised in the centres permeate the peripheries; the constitution of those ideals draws heavily on those same peripheries in the first place. Morin is not of course denying the importance of centres, and their universalising tendencies. But he does, at least by implication, accord to marginality a positive role beyond the obvious one in which it has served as an important motor of activism in European politics and society.³⁰ The application of Morin's 'carrefour' to music can only be hinted at here. We can trace it way back to the transalpine origins of Gregorian chant, the beginnings of a long process of mutual interaction and accommodation between northern and southern European styles and practices. And we can demonstrate that in subsequent periods peripheries not only served as stylistic 'feeders' to central musical traditions, but were themselves subject to radical reevaluation and even reconstitution with the rise of a nationalist ideology.

What about facing East? I am in no position as yet to 'think Eurasia', nor indeed to 'think Ottoman'. However, it is uncontroversial to remark on

²⁸ Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge, 1983; orig. edn., 1967), chapter 2.

²⁹ Edgar Morin, *Penser l'Europe* (Gallimard, 1987).

³⁰ This is not the place to elaborate such thoughts, but it is certainly tempting to look at redefinitions of civilisation that are emerging in the new Europe, in which the traditional legitimations of a highly centralised system seem set to be replaced by a greater acceptance of diversity.

the cultural colonisation that resulted from several centuries of Ottoman rule over large swathes of Balkan territory; indeed, as Mark Mazover has pointed out, finding a place for Ottoman rather than blanking it out is the major challenge facing Balkan historiography in general.³¹ Where music is concerned, specialist commentators commonly remark on a 'pan-Islamic tradition' of music-making (they refer variously to a 'mainstream' and 'the great tradition'),³² and while such formulations undoubtedly glaze over tricky questions about the diversity of practices and styles notionally gathered into this single pen, we could say much the same of a Western tradition. In reality when we look closely we find certain similarities between these two worlds, for all the undoubted differences between them. For pan-Islamic music, no less than Western, we can identify historically shifting centres of gravity within permeable boundaries. Specifically we can trace a journey from Persia towards Turkey that is not dissimilar to the journey from Italy towards Germany in the West, posing similar questions about cultural politics and aesthetic value. An Ottoman tradition of Classical music (an *ars classica*; an *ars subtilior*; *pace* the European reception!) forges its independence from earlier Islamic traditions not just through the adoption of Turkish texts, but through changes in instrumentarium, in maqams and usuls. This was an elite music, standing outside local ethnic and religious conventions, and as in the Western tradition, there is an impulse towards the emancipation of instrumental music from vocal, a comparable absorption of popular and folk traditions by art music, and even a growing separation of the popular and significant in the nineteenth century. Naturally the practices and repertoires associated with this Ottoman musical tradition left a huge mark on the Balkans, albeit largely in urban centres. But the important point is that in relation to the Ottoman tradition itself---and here is the parallel with our European story---the Balkan region has occupied a largely peripheral space.

On the other hand, again as with Europe, the traffic was by no means one-way. Bulent Aksoy has pointed out how this central tradition, while it remained separate from peripheral cultures, was itself constructed in part from those cultures.³³ It was a paradox of the Ottoman system that it was both highly centralised and at the same time a patchwork quilt of cultures and nationalities. Indeed it may be worth remarking here that at the very

³¹ See Mark Mazover, *The Balkans: From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day* (London, 2000), 15. One study which meets this challenge successfully is Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1983).

³² See William Malm, *Music Cultures of the Pacific, The Near East, and Asia*, 2nd edn. (Englewood Cliffs, 1977), 58, and Amnon Shiloah, *Music in the World of Islam* (Aldershot, 1995), 19.

³³ See Bulent Aksoy, *The Contributions of Multi-Nationality to Classical Ottoman Music (I)* ([http://interactive.m2.org/Music'aksoy.html](http://interactive.m2.org/Music%27aksoy.html)).

period in which the socio-political system was weakening at the centre (broadly speaking from the beginning of the eighteenth century) Ottoman high culture was entering its most creative phase, marked by a productive reciprocity of centre and periphery. Where music was concerned, not only was the central tradition itself inclusive of non-Muslim and non-Turk musicians (Jews, Greeks and Armenians were prominent in its constitution, and were attached to the Court and trained at the Royal school), but what survives of this oral tradition in notated form was largely due to musicians from the European periphery. The later development of the tradition---even down to basics of organology---likewise depended on imports, acquisitions and adaptations from folk traditions and from the constituent regions of the empire, notably the Balkans, but also the eastern territories. In this respect the Roma played a crucial role, not least in the context of shadow plays, but Greek musicians were also important (the possible influence of Byzantine echos on an Ottoman maqam system remains a tricky area of scholarship),³⁴ and so were Sephardic Jews. In other words, while the basic genres, scale systems and improvisatory devices belonged to a wider Middle Eastern culture, synthesising elements drawn from a pre-Ottoman musical practice into something uniquely and centrally Ottoman, the tradition maintained its vitality very largely through constant infusions from peripheral cultures.

In the later stages of this process, and here again one might draw a surprisingly close parallel with the European tradition, the core-periphery metaphor begins to break down, giving way to a much more fluid circuitry: a network of interactive musics in which local and global elements are in constant flux. This is the situation which obtains today, and it poses an intriguing question of historical method, one which in a sense brings me back to my starting-point, the ecumene. All history engages in a dialogue between 'then' and 'now'. If we write our history from the standpoint of a European Modernist tradition, privileging progress and evolution, we will create a narrative in which three categories of music---classical, avant-garde and commercial---are increasingly firmed up and separated out, with less and less leakage between them. The first two of these reinforce our core-periphery metaphor, in that they attach themselves to particular traditions and particular centres and thus disadvantage the world outside, while the third already begins to point towards a globalised culture. If, on the other hand, we write our history from the standpoint of an ecumene, we may well be encouraged to reconsider our three categories, breaking the force-fields that appear to keep them apart, exploring their interpenetration, and allowing them to coexist without *angst*. In the process we will find ourselves re-evaluating periphery.

³⁴ See Petar Dinev, *Guide to Contemporary Byzantine Neum Notation* (Sofia 1964).

Music gets its own back

As a very brief coda to this paper, I want to speculate on the possibility that a focus on musical materials may provide us with a privileged access to larger historical processes. This thesis will not be developed here, but will be presented simply as a suggestive possibility. The core assumption is that, although music may be hijacked and directed towards any number of ideological ends, there is a deeper sense in which its minimal referentiality allows it to function as a mode of cognition. There are, after all, fewer things to get in the way. Appropriately interpreted, so it would be argued, changes in the nature of musical materials---in what is often called 'musical language'---can reveal the world, since they encode its history at very deep levels. Music in this sense is a cypher; it possesses what Adorno described as a 'riddle character'. This is not a very original idea. We can track it back at least to ancient Greek understandings of music as a special case of *mimesis*, and we might cite just two later, very well-known adumbrations. One is Schopenhauer's contention that music is an analogue to the world, since they have parallel ontologies, a view that finds its clearest expression in his theory of four-part harmony. The other is Adorno's social dialectic, within which music's 'truth content' can supposedly be revealed through technical analysis; works, Adorno argued, *need* analysis for their truth content to be revealed. This is not an argument for musical autonomy, of course, but rather for the embeddedness of the social within musical materials themselves. The tantalising suggestion is that music, in a certain sense, tells the truth even when all around there may be lies.

To translate such ideas into a research agenda would be a daunting task. Indeed the instantiations I offered above have fallen short in several respects. The neo-Platonic notion that music might imitate the world through the power of numbers is a casualty of modern science. Likewise, Schopenhauer's universalist claims cannot conceal an historical specificity rooted in late eighteenth-century compositional praxes. And finally, Adorno offers little concrete criteria that I can find, beyond the notion of consistency (the consistency of the technical structure), to help us deal with that vital revelatory stage in which analysis reveals truth content; his own analytical observations seem somewhat unpromising in this regard, although there are apologists.³⁵ All the same, we should perhaps not be deterred from keeping such larger goals and possibilities in our sights as we embark on a study of musical materials. A first step in any such investigation, I suggest, might be the identification of tonal systems and/or compositional systems as ideal types, and then the study of their multiple modes of interpenetration. A second stage might well be to describe the relevant repertoires in terms of

³⁵ See the discussion in Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 158–74.

unique systems. And a third stage would be to relate such systems to performance practices.

In undertaking such a study, one would be aware of the difficulty in reconciling history and system. Consider, for example, early (pre-seventeenth-century) Western systems of hexachordal solmization, traces of which remained in compositional practice (as a kind of hexachordal thinking) well into the era of harmonic tonality. The question here, as indeed with traces of modal thinking, is whether we do justice to the relevant repertoires by identifying them as a site of theoretical transformation which contains elements of two systems, or whether we should rather be locating a third system. (In a way it invokes again the status of transition, an issue I raised earlier in relation to the geography and history of the Balkans more generally.) Similar theoretical issues might arise when we consider a *maqam* system, as operational in Turkish classical music (*makam*). There is of course nothing 'pure' or absolute about this. It exists as a constellation of historic practices related in varying degrees of proximity to certain well-known theoretical writings. Nonetheless it remains a system, within which there are clear conventions allowing for the modulation from one *makam* to another through tetrachordal invariance. Now intersections between a *makam* system and diatonic space represent one way of thinking theoretically about a vast corpus of music in the Balkans, notably in urban folk musics.

In the case of *sevdalinka*, for example, the journey from the one to the other is traceable historically as the *saz* is replaced by other accompanying instruments, notably the accordion (a symptom of the West which in due course became itself a symbol of Bosnia). Likewise in Greek *rebetika* we can note a parallel journey, where in some cases the *makam* or *dromos* develops from a systemic to a trace element. This is not a straightforward transformation from East to West. In some instances, equal temperament has resulted in a compensatory accentuation of *makam* features (for example, the sharper differentiation of ascending and descending forms of the *makam*) in an attempt to translate microtonal space into diatonic space. Such intersecting systems are of course a long way from the exotic appropriations associated with 'orientalisms' in Western music. But actually, as in my example of hexachordal thinking in Western music, the challenge to music theory may be to expose the limitation of thinking solely in terms of intersecting systems. If we seek to do full justice to transitional states it may be more realistic to look for new systems, which may reveal more precisely the worlds that lie behind them.³⁶ If we attempt to do that, we might even go on to deconstruct the very idea of transition.

³⁶ An interesting model of the possibilities here is found in Elliott Antokoletz, *The Music of Béla Bartók* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1984); see especially pp. 51–66.

Similar questions may be raised when we look at the modernisation of rural folk idioms. It is obvious, for example, that the theoretical system underlying dinaric singing *na glas* has few points of contact with diatonic principles. Quite how to describe it is another matter. In Western theoretical terms we might speak of a narrow-ambitus tetrachordal collection where the major second is regarded as a consonance, the upper note of the consonant major second has a kind of tonic status, and degrees of dissonance are measured by spatial distance from that tonic. Through processes of modernisation we can trace the intersection of this dinaric system with a makam system, where the lower note of the major second is treated as 7 within a new heptatonicism. This in turn can intersect with diatonic space when the cadences are harmonised diatonically. Both these later stages of transformation can be detected in, for example, the singing of some Montenegrin muslims, and again we might reasonably ask if justice is done to that singing by describing it in relation to mixed rather than integrated systems. Of course with repertoires of this kind any such system, whether mixed or integrated, is arrived at inductively from the study of existing practice; this in contrast to a repertoire such as *rebetika*, where theory may play a modestly prescriptive role, or Western-orientated art music, where it may be heavily prescriptive. But in all three cases, we confront the immensely difficult issue of how to relate social practices to cultural forms within an oral tradition.

This issue gets us to the nub of an Adornian social dialectic. Naturally, it is possible to account for the systemic changes I have described to the music of the dinaric alps in terms of the changing ecologies underlying social practices (most obviously, the effect of transposing peasant songs to urban settings). In the terms I used earlier, this would represent the social cause of the music, its poietic dimension. But we might also speculate that the coalescing of multiple minor changes to an existing musical system into what becomes in effect a new system—a new cultural form—maps the underlying realities of modernisation in the dinaric alps at a deeper level, and that it does so more literally and precisely than any amount of social commentary. Here the relation between the music and its social setting is not in some straightforward sense reflective or even directly causal. In Adornian terms, we would be speaking not of social cause but of social trace, where the social element is somehow imprinted directly onto the musical materials. Of course, to decode this process adequately, you would need to know the code. And I am as yet a long way off finding it.

Џим Семсон

ГРАНИЦЕ И МОСТОВИ:
ПРЕЛИМИНАРНА РАЗМИШЉАЊА О БАЛКАНСКОЈ
МУЗИЦИ
(Резиме)

У раду су изнете идеје и први закључци до којих је аутор дошао припремајући се за рад на пројекту о музици / музикама на Балкану. Образложени су главни мотиви за приступање овом проучавању: најпре, тежња да се дубље испита смисао односа културних центара и периферија; затим, жеља да се истраже проблеми везани за идентитет – национални, регионални, друштвени и културни; најзад, интересовање за проучавање разних врста музике у вези с темом модерности.

Треба напоменути да аутор својим радом жели да обухвати три категорије музике: класичну, авангардну и комерцијалну.

Разматрања су груписана око четири теме: 1. *Екумена* – Појам се не схвата у религиозном смислу, већ се њиме означава интерактивна зона у којој долази до контакта између друштава, нација или цивилизација. Циљ је да се истражи „дијалектика интерактивног и идентичног“ на примеру балканске музике. 2. *Култура као присвајање* – Музика Балкана се може сагледати из аспекта асимилације као последице освајања и борбе да се сачува самосвојност. Постоје и други аспекти, као институционализација културе која је често у служби националистичких идеологија. 3. *Центри и периферије* – Музика Балкана се може проучавати и с тачке гледишта граничног карактера ове регије, односно њеног припадања периферији и у односу на Запад, и у односу на Исток. 4. *Освета музике* – Полази се од претпоставке да би проучавање музичког материјала могло да обезбеди приступ разумевању ширих историјских процеса. Ако се тачно интерпретирају, промене у природи музичког материјала, односно „музичког језика“, могу да разоткрију свет, јер енкодирају његову историју на врло дубоким нивоима. Један од могућих теоријских приступа великом корпусу балканске музике састоји се у уочавању пресека између система макама и дијатонике (нарочито у градској народној музици).

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