

EXPLORING DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY AND CULTURAL MUSICOLOGY THROUGH MY OWN PH.D. RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

The present paper seeks to establish the distinction (if there is any) between contemporary ethnomusicology and cultural musicology by using my own Ph.D. research project as a case study. One way to approach this task is to assess the extent to which the very topic and objectives of my Ph.D. project, as well as at the theories and methodologies used, correspond to the current tendencies in the two fields of studies. The aim of such a survey is twofold: one is to open a debate on the (im)possibility of drawing clear disciplinary boundaries, and the other is to try and position my Ph.D. research along disciplinary lines.

Keywords: cultural musicology, ethnomusicology, my Ph.D. project

1. Introduction

A discussion on whether my Ph.D. project should be situated within the musicological or the ethnomusicological camp clearly depends on the aspect from which I seek to pinpoint its affiliation to each and/or to both of them. The answer to this question will therefore vary in accordance with the debate framework, be it formulated in terms of topicality, the dominant theoretical paradigm, or the methodology used. However, before I turn to this debate, it is necessary first to do away with the confusion created by a range of terms circulating in academia to designate the new research currents in the field of musicology since the 1990s. I set out with a clarification of the terms, such as: "new musicology", "critical musicology", "popular musicology", "cultural musicology", and "the cultural study of music", by discussing them not only in relation to each other but also with respect to the latest definitions of ethnomusi-

cology as an academic discipline. Then I proceed to an analysis of the sites of convergence and divergence between the different aspects of my Ph.D. project and the corresponding elements in the definitions of contemporary musicology and ethnomusicology.

2. My Ph.D. project

My Ph.D. project is concerned with two major Serbian music festivals whose conceptual differences provide fruitful ground for the exploration of issues of construction, negotiation and representation of Serbian national identity in times of the country's political transition from dictatorship to democracy. One of them is the Exit festival, a pro-Western popular music festival founded in Novi Sad (the second largest city located in northern Serbia) in 2000, which developed into the greatest international musical specta-

cle in South Eastern Europe. The other is the Guca trumpet festival held in the town of Guca in the Dragacevo region of western Serbia since 1961 with the aim of promoting what is regarded to be authentic Serbian music tradition and other Serbian “brands” within national costumes, customs, the food and drink industry. Not only do these festivals reflect to a certain degree the country’s division on two mutually opposed political, social and cultural tendencies in post-communist Serbia (i.e. “progressive”, “urban”, “pro-European” versus “conservative”, “rural” and “nationalistic”), but they also serve as a good starting point for examining a number of perspectives on the relationship between the local and the global which plays a significant role in the processes of establishing and negotiating (Serbian) national identity.

For the purpose of my research I adopt Anderson’s (1991) concept of the nation-state as an “imagined community” as well as Bhabha’s (1990) definition of the nation as “a system of cultural signification”. The latter suggests an approach to analysis of (Serbian) national identity as a discursive field within which various and very often contradictory cultural texts take part in its continual (re)construction and negotiation.

In addition, the book *National Identity in Russian Culture: An Introduction* (Franklin & Widdis eds. 2004) points to several key areas around which a discussion on national identity revolves: 1) identities in time and space (which are mainly narrated through interpretations of national history and myths); 2) “contrastive” identities (indicating the identity formation processes in contrasts and comparisons to an Other); 3) “essentialist” identities (which are understood as unique and innate to any one nation); and 4) “symbolic” identities (which are projected onto prominent visual, verbal and sonic emblems) – all of these might serve as a solid theoretical background and guidance for my inquiry about different articulations of national identity through the Exit and Guca festivals.

Tightly linked to this conceptualization of national identity is also Hall’s (1992) list of five major discursive strategies by means of which nation is usually represented, whereas his reflection on the three possible effects of globalization on the articulation of national identities in late modernity (namely, “cultural homogenization”, the intensification of “resistant” national/local identities, and the development of new hybrid identities) is also very illuminating for analysis of the complex intersection between the global and the local in the Exit and Guca festivals’ representation.

Finally, the sections of my proposal that deal with the subject of cultural memory are informed by Assmann’s (1995) model of “cultural memory”, which he defines as a reservoir of knowledge on the grounds of which every society continues to reconstruct its self-image and to reshape its rules of conduct in a given cultural context of the present.

Within the above-specified theoretical framework, the analysis of thematically different parts of my Ph.D. research is conducted through a combination of two methodological approaches: 1) an ethnographic approach; and 2) a critical discourse analysis (CDA) as proposed by Fairclough (1995). The former approach includes all conventional types of fieldwork such as participant observation at the festivals, and formal and informal interviews with the festivals’ organizers, performers, and visitors, as well as with various governmental officials and cultural workers. The latter approach allows for a differentiation of several layers within analysis of discourse practices involved in the articulation of Serbian national identity through the Exit and Guca festivals, by looking into processes of: 1) text production (i.e. the festivals’ conceptualization, organization and economic structure); 2) text distribution (i.e. the festivals’ promotion and marketing); and 3) text consumption (the festivals’ public reception and reviews). This analysis is supported by the data gathered from the fieldwork (i.e. from the festivals’ sites and conducted interviews) as well as by the various and most relevant media texts on the festivals. In addi-

tion, it is also important to emphasize that all the above data will be analyzed: 1) in light of the crucial academic and journalistic debates about Serbian society in times of its political transition; and 2) with respect to the above mentioned theoretical frameworks.

3. The clarification of terminology

In *Introduction to Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*, (Scott ed. 2009: 1-21), Derek Scott notes that the term “new musicology” is equivalent to that of “critical musicology”, and that both derive from the U.S. musicology circles. He emphasizes, though, that the latter has righteously succeeded the former, seeing that it does not imply dismissive value judgments about the work of the “old musicology” advocates (Scott 2009: 2).

Furthermore, the term “popular musicology”, proposed by the same author, is being defined in two ways – either as a counterpart to “popular music studies”, which is perhaps problematically seen as a predominantly sociology’s province, and which is therefore complemented with a popular musicology’s “focus on criticism and analysis of the music itself” within a given social and cultural context; or, as “a branch or subset of critical musicology” with a special interest in the area “of the music industry, its output and its audiences” (Scott 2009: 2). Both critical and popular musicology overlap significantly in terms of the diversity and breadth of their objects of study and their theoretical models, drawn from a wide range of disciplines (from anthropology to queer studies) – which gives us also grounds to think of them as “post-disciplinary” fields. Yet, while popular musicology is exclusively occupied with popular music phenomena, “[c]ritical musicology is [...] driven by a desire to understand the meanings embedded in musical texts, whatever kinds of musical texts those may be” (Scott 2009: 2).

Conversely, in the book *The Cultural Study of Music* (Clayton, Herbert & Middleton eds. 2003), the term “critical musicology”

is replaced with that of “cultural musicology”. It appears that both the terms mean the same, considering Lawrence Kramer’s (in Clayton, Herbert & Middleton eds. 2003: 125-126) definition of cultural musicology as “a habit of thought more than a program or consensus” with “widespread interest in the interaction of music with social and cultural forms”.

Another two contributors to this edition, John Shepherd (69-79) and Jeff Todd Titon (171-180), also explicate on the astonishing development of “the cultural study of music” since the 1990s. However, the context of their reflection on this subject matter not only mirrors either author’s research background – namely, Shepherd is a popular music studies scholar, whereas Titon is an ethnomusicologist – but it also suggests that “the cultural study of music” has been understood and utilized as an umbrella term for the totality of academic endeavors directed at the production of musical knowledge from a cultural perspective.

Moreover, I would argue that the dividing line between musicology (with all its branches included) and ethnomusicology has come to become profoundly obscured with respect to their objects of study as well as the theories and methodologies at their disposal. In both the disciplines a partial shift from “classical” and “traditional” music respectively to “popular” music has been documented alongside the shift in interest towards “music as culture” in place of “music as an object”. If the recent developments in musicology are marked by “the move to ethnography”, providing “the specific details of lived cultural-musical realities” (Shepherd in Clayton, Herbert & Middleton eds. 2003: 75), contemporary ethnomusicology is constituted by the fieldwork itself and defined as “the study of people making and/or experiencing music” (Titon in Barz & Cooley 1997: 87-100). In consequence, both the disciplines are increasingly being engaged in studying and understanding music as lived experience, epistemologically grounded in experiential, participatory, dialogic, reflexive, non-

objectivist and experimental scholarship. Last but not least, what both contemporary musicology and ethnomusicology have in common is their preoccupation with “the theorization of music and identity [or subjectivity in Kramer’s language] and, by implication, difference” (Born & Hesmondhalgh cited in Shepherd in Clayton, Herbert & Middleton eds. 2003: 76).

Viewed in this light, the overall arguments for the porous boundaries between musicology and ethnomusicology support the case for the hypothesis by which there is a new paradigm for the cultural study of music on the horizon.

4. Positioning my Ph.D. project along disciplinary lines

My Ph.D. project’s concern with the very subject of national identity articulation through two major Serbian music festivals from 2000 onwards, within the highly interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological frameworks, automatically suggests the approach to music which is congruent with that proposed by both cultural musicology and ethnomusicology. In my Ph.D. research the music performed at the Exit and Guca festivals is, indeed, discussed as cultural symbol, social practice, commodity, performance and lived experience. The performative and experiential dimensions of music have a special value in my study given the essential role which musical performances play in music events such as the Exit and Guca festivals. What is, however, particularly relevant to the issue of national identity construction is the fact that these two festivals can be deemed as “occasions for exploiting the encompassing capacity of sound to marshal a sense of *communitas*, of trance, or of transformation from one state to another” (Finnegan in Clayton, Herbert & Middleton eds. 2003: 186).

The overall agenda of my Ph.D. research seems to fit the academic ground recently shared by both cultural musicology and ethnomusicology in two additional respects.

First, the underlying presumption to the entire analysis of music in my Ph.D. project is a constructionist one, which is in turn closely linked to the theoretical paradigms of postmodernism and poststructuralism. This position implies “an interpretative model according to which society does not precede music, but rather music and society are in a complex interconstitutive relationship” (Suvakovic 2004: para. 8). Understood as one of the society’s “ideological apparatuses” or as “one of the technologies of performing subjects/bodies”, music as a study object brings musicology and ethnomusicology close to one another. In Suvakovic’s words, “musicology and ethnomusicology [...] no longer contemplate and study different incomparable music systems, but perform culture-centred models of interpretation of the heterogeneous field of multiplicity of musical as social practices. Artistic, ritually religious, ceremonially political, mass media or everyday popular music are different systems for heterogeneously instrumenting the articulation of a body/subject in a field of multiple social identifications (from racial and ethnic to class and gender, generational and professional)” (2004: para. 8).

And second, by partially adopting a so-called “bottom-up” approach to sociocultural theory and analysis, I hope to develop some fruitful theoretical arguments on the grounds of my ethnographic encounters and be able to create a profoundly reflexive, dialogic and non-objectivist ethnography in the end.

Clearly enough, my Ph.D. research can in its objectives and its theoretical and methodological background be affiliated to both cultural musicology and ethnomusicology, or to what we can broadly call “the cultural study of music”. There is, however, one crucial point of disjuncture where my Ph.D. project begins to diverge largely from ethnomusicology and from what is seen to be its very hallmark – one-of-a-kind fieldwork.

The book *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Barz & Cooley eds. 1997; 2008) highlights the importance of learning about music-

culture through “musicking”, that is, through an active musical participation within a social group under study. For ethnomusicologists then “[l]earning how to make music is an extension of participant-observation research” and can be therefore regarded as a central and distinctive epistemological framework, if not privilege, in the process of knowledge production (Wong in Barz and Cooley eds. 2008: 80). Conversely, the emphasis in my Ph.D. research is not placed on learning about music through making it or playing it, not even on the lived experience of people making music – even though I do intend to interview several Serbian trumpet players and rock musicians taking part in the Exit and Guca festivals. Rather, I wish to focus on an audience perspective on the music as part of the festivals in question. Or, to put it differently, what interests me most is how music (especially the Serbian trumpet sound) is perceived and lived out in the experience of those who listen to it (including myself) within the context of the two Serbian festivals.

Another point of departure from ethnomusicology (and popular musicology for that matter) is my Ph.D. project’s complete disinterest in documenting and analyzing structural elements of the music performed at the festivals. Nor do I look into how certain musical elements might reveal something about “the structure of feeling” in Serbian society in times of its political transition; or, more specifically, how they might correspond to the particularities of sociopolitical, cultural and individual realities, and thus to the identity formation of different social, professional, ethnic, gendered and age groups under study. If the music is by any means to figure as an object of my study in its own right, I intend to ground my inquiry solely in the listeners’ verbal accounts, in which the musical sounds and structures are usually being described by means of their association with specific feelings, images and memories. I feel that only through the emphasis on connotation as “the dominant mode of musical signification” according to Born and Hesmondhalgh (cited in

Shepherd in Clayton, Herbert & Middleton eds. 2003: 77), I might be able to establish a relationship between the musical meaning and the complex processes of national identity construction, as being perceived by all actors involved in the Exit and Guca festivals (be they cultural workers, governmental officials, academics, journalists, festival organizers, performers or visitors). Bearing in mind the key questions and objectives of my Ph.D. project, the greatest deal of my study revolves around analysis of the various discourses surrounding music production, distribution and reception within the context of the two festivals. In so doing, I hope to uncover the contextual and institutional forces that may condition (or may once have conditioned) a particular way of listening to and talking about the music on offer at the Exit and Guca trumpet festivals. This attempt at situating the musical meaning within two spectacular, large-scale music events (the Exit and Guca festivals) and channeling it through reference to the issues of national identity articulation, brings my Ph.D. research closer to the field of popular music studies and sociology of music, both of which may be understood primarily as the branches of cultural musicology (even though ethnomusicology may also act as a popular music studies’ parent discipline, whereas sociology of music may be affiliated with sociology).

5. Conclusion

To sum up, by exploring the correlation between the different definitions of contemporary musicology and ethnomusicology, on the one hand, and the respective aspects of my Ph.D. research, on the other, I hope that the previous discussion has pointed to the sites of their mutual convergence and divergence. Not only does it appear that the developing paths of the two disciplines have recently come together to the merging point, as the very term “the cultural study of music” might suggest, but it can also be speculated that the only noteworthy distinction between them nowadays may be the ethnomusicology’s

strong affiliation with a particular kind of fieldwork and ethnographic writing. The foregoing discussion has shown as well that my own Ph.D. research moves away from the field of ethnomusicology on the same grounds, despite its chief orientation towards fieldwork and ethnographic evidence. Then again, due to its conspicuous lack of concern for (critical) analysis of the music itself as well as its heavy reliance on the details of the institutional, sociopolitical, economic and cultural realities in Serbia, my Ph.D. project at times seems to extend in its scope beyond the competences of both (cultural) musicology and ethnomusicology and embark on the fields such as history, historiography, international relations, political and social sciences.

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