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## THE BALKANS AS A CULTURAL SYMBOL IN THE SERBIAN MUSIC OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY\*

**Abstract:** The focus on the internalization of Western images in the Balkans has special significance in researching Serbian art. The functioning of Balkanism as it overlapped and intersected with Orientalism is indicated in the text by an examination of the cases of Petar Konjović, Miloje Milojević and Josip Slavenski, the three significant composers working in Serbia during the first half of the twentieth century. Their modernistic projects present different metaphors of the Balkans. Nevertheless each of them is marked by desire to change the Balkan image into a 'positive' one and thus stands as a special voice for Serbian and regional placing in European competition for musical spaces.

**Key Words:** Balkanism, Orientalism, Petar Konjović, Miloje Milojević, Josip Slavenski

The construction of identity in modern Serbian music was marked by exclusivity which had its roots in the imperial contexts of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires and changeable geopolitical and symbolic borders. In the continuity of change which was a distinctive feature of the first half of the twentieth century, the old question of 'ours' and 'foreign' was posed over and over in different ways. Acts of national identification – either Serbian and/or Yugoslav – survived longer, remaining relevant in the modernistic context as well and overlapping with the ways that Balkan, Slav and European collectivities were imagined.

Serbian composers of the first half of the century thought intensively about the Balkans as can be seen from their articles on music, the titles they chose, and other signs from a great number of works. This is also clear from their creative approach to the music of coexisting and interweaving Balkan ethnicities from certain areas of the region. Stevan Mokranjac (1856–1914) initiated this creative process, inventing his musical geography on the basis of the newly discovered folklore of the central Balkans, above all Kosovo, Old Serbia and Macedonia, blazing the trail

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for subsequent modernistic attempts and multiple collective positioning. Therefore, for example, *Legend of Ohrid* [*Ohridska legenda*], the most famous Serbian national ballet in which the composer Stevan Hristić (1885–1958) refers to Serbian, Macedonian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Greek folklore, can be perceived also as a distinctive representative of the Balkan musical identities.<sup>1</sup>

In the investigation of such collective identifications we cannot ignore the interpretative strategies in the Balkans which have, owing to positions of power and cultural ideology drawn on the idea of progress, set up by the West as a norm of objectivity. This essential system of knowledge and stereotyped images has been the subject of different concepts which were initially inspired by Said's Orientalism and as discourses on the ideology of domination, exploitation and marginalization they represent an interdisciplinary academic genre which more or less overlaps with postcolonial studies of culture.<sup>2</sup> Briefly, from the Western point of view, the Balkans has been characterized as the 'inner otherness' of Europe where it belongs geographically but is defined by the

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<sup>1</sup> Nadežda Mosusova reached this conclusion in the middle of the sixties, dealing later with the choreographic context of Hristić's ballet where Russian artists, inspired by folklore dances, made a priceless contribution to the creation of a special choreographic style which could be termed Balkan. Nadežda Mosusova, 'Ohridska legenda Stevana Hristića' [*The Legend of Ohrid by Stevan Hristić*], *Zvuk* [Sound] 66 (1966), 96–115; Nadežda Mosusova, 'Are folkloric ballets an anachronism today?' in Alkis Raftis (ed.), *Dance as Intangible Heritage*, Proceedings of the 16<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Dance Research, Corfu, 2002, 108–117.

<sup>2</sup> This has to do with the concepts of Orientalist variations and nesting Orientalisms by Milica Bakić-Hayden, Balkanism by Marija Todorova, Imperialism of imagination by Vesna Goldsworthy etc. The most important literature on this topic: Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, 'Orientalist Variations on the Theme "Balkans": Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics', *Slavic Review*, 51 (1992), 1–15; Maria Todorova, 'The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention', *Slavic Review*, 53 (1994), 453–482; Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of the Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review*, 54 (1995), 917–931; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of Imagination*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Kathryn E. Fleming, 'Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography', *American Historical Review*, 105 (2000), 1218–1233; Obrad Savić and Dušan Bejelić (eds.), *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003); Marko Živković, 'Nešto između: simbolička geografija Srbije' ['Something between: Symbolic Geography of Serbia'], *Filozofija i društvo*, Vol. XVIII, 73–110; Milica Bakić-Hayden, *Varijacije na temu 'Balkan'* [*Variations on the Theme 'Balkans'*] (Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju and I. P. 'Filip Višnjić', 2006); Miodrag Maticki (ed.) *Svoj i tuđ. Slika drugog u balkanskim i srednjoevropskim književnostima* [*Own and Foreign – The Image of Other in the Literatures of the Balkans and Middle Europe*] (Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost, 2006).

lack of European values and tradition. It is, actually, an extreme example of the strategy of ‘including’ and ‘excluding’ in European value rankings based, according to Hobsbaum, on the psychological mechanism of superiority and inferiority.<sup>3</sup> Marija Todorova attributes this negative inventing of the Balkans to the Ottoman heritage, and indicates a special rhetorical arsenal of Balkanism, positioning the images of region in a bastard, transitional world between East and West which actually corresponds to attitudes on life at the crossroads or border where Balkan peoples themselves established a sense of identity and importance in the preservation of European values. Therefore Milica Bakić-Hayden claims convincingly that such a perception, blurring the categories of ‘East’ and ‘West’, demands a more comprehensive approach appropriate to the region’s liminal position. This is because pejorative connotations related to the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, the creation of small national states and the problem of their status in Europe contain strata of earlier mapped divisions going back to the schism between the Roman and Byzantine Empire and they are also connected to the later, newest layer of Eastern-Western distinctions in the ideological restructuring to the world of communism and capitalism.

The focus on the internalization of Western images in the Balkans has special significance in researching Serbian art because creative reaction to stereotypes and stigmatization to a large extent determines its physiognomy. Processes of musical self-presentation in the first half of the twentieth century were marked by taking different stands towards westernization and modernization but simultaneously they were burdened by the problems of Turko-phobia which were not only part of the process of overcoming history but also originated from negative Western attitudes towards the Orient. A larger and more detailed study could indicate the functioning of Balkanism as it overlapped and intersected with Orientalism in the context of the music itself. Bearing in mind recent conclusions formed in the coordinates of the East-West crossroads, I will indicate such possibilities through a short examination of the cases of Petar Konjović (1883–1970), Miloje Milojević (1884–1946) and Josip Slavenski (1896–1955), the three most significant composers working in Serbia during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Erik Hobsbaum, *O istoriji* [On History] (Beograd: Otkrovenje, 2003), 238–239 (Serbian translation).

<sup>4</sup> On Serbian music in East-West coordinates in: Katarina Tomašević, ‘Istok – Zapad u polemičkom kontekstu srpske umetnosti između dva svetska rata’ [‘The East – West Relations in the Polemical Context of the Serbian Art between Two World Wars’], *Muzikologija*, [Musicology], 5 (2005), 119–129.

In relations of symbolic geography, Konjović distinguishes the term 'East', by which he maps the Slav East of Europe and the South-Slav territory of the Balkans, from the 'Orient' as the presence of a 'Non-European' heritage towards which he took a changeable and ambivalent stand in his work. Occupied by the aspects of Slavism as identification in the European context, he distinguishes 'Western' and 'Eastern Slav orientation' and emphasizes the need to observe works of Balkan Slav composers within the same coordinates.<sup>5</sup> In his most representative works he commits himself to the 'eastern' stream which was, in his opinion, first 'felt and consciously comprehended' by Modest Mussorgsky and presented in 'its purest expression' by Leoš Janáček.<sup>6</sup>

At first, Konjović welcomed a part of the Serbian romantic tradition referring to elements of younger folklore irradiated by Ottoman influences and points out the artistic form of the *Sevdalinka* as a peculiar local variant of the *Lied*, love-song to whose development he also made a personal contribution.<sup>7</sup> In articles dating from the thirties, as well as in certain works, he keeps his distance from such attitudes actually thinking about the Slav Balkans and the suppression of its peasant tradition under the negative influence of contemporary civilization. Thus he finds his modernistic alternative for worn-out western forms in the musical folklore of the Balkan patriarchal community.<sup>8</sup>

Even though in this context his creative work is directly comparable with Janáček's 'realism', it should be emphasized that his attitudes are related to some of Béla Bartók's but were reached independently from this modernist.<sup>9</sup> This has to do with the strict difference between peasant and popular music that is 'good' and 'bad hybridity' and contamination of the rural idiom by Gypsy musicians, which in Konjović's case, too,

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<sup>5</sup> Petar Konjović, 'Dve orijentacije u slavenskoj muzici' ['Two Orientations in Slav Music'], *Muzički glasnik* [Musical Herald], 8–9 (1938), 160–164.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Petar Konjović, *Ličnosti* [Personages] (Zagreb: Čelap i Popovac, 1920), 70, 133–134.

<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Konjović's modernist alienation might also be described by the words that Jim Samson, following Adorno, marked Bartók's relation to 'unrationalised peasant idioms' which 'served to critique the used-up forms of an increasingly fragmented art music tradition' in the West. Jim Samson, 'Placing Genius: the Case of George Enescu', *Trondheim Studies on East European Cultures and Societies*, 17 (2006), 31 pp; Jim Samson, 'Music and Nationalism: Five Historical Moments' in Athena S. Leoussi and Steven Grosby (eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism. History, Culture and Ethnicity in the Formation of Nations*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 55–67.

<sup>9</sup> Before the Second World War, Konjović was not aware of Bartók's views, but in his texts from 1947 onward he referred directly to some of Bartók's conclusions related to peasant folk songs, the problems of their origin and their blending.

indicates the contribution of discourses on social Darwinism and idea of racial purity.<sup>10</sup> However, an example of the modernistic split between the symbol of a rural, idealized peasantry and the deviant music of ‘Orientals within’ related to the process of urban and commercial, is more complex and ambivalent with this Serbian composer. Suitably for the Balkan terrain, Konjović felt the need to separate folklore from other aspects of the Orient, first of all from those revealing an Ottoman heritage. In search for ‘purity’ cleansed of ‘oriental deposits’ that were for him ‘clear signs of the degeneration of our folkloric motifs’, he finds a paradigm of values in Mokranjac’s *Tenth Garland* [*Deseta rukovet*].<sup>11</sup> Though he would later be guided by the same value criteria, with occasional use of tried orientalist rhetoric, Konjović made his discourses relative as if he actually saw the utopia of his conception by getting to know the folklore material of the Balkans better. The numerous examples from his monograph on Mokranjac, first published in 1956, actually confirm that he established a new and greater time distance towards the Orient as the Balkan past, at the same time justifying examples of the artistic tradition referring to this stream.<sup>12</sup> Thereby, Konjović surpasses the dualism of his concept of ‘hybridity’, as Bartók did, in his way.<sup>13</sup> His modernistic ideas, however, can also be characterized either as resistance against negative images of the Balkans or internal Orientalism and as a

<sup>10</sup> Konjović draws a distinction between ‘folk’ and ‘popular, not created [...] but just adopted by peasants’ because ‘what comes from outside, what travels, gets involved, becomes dirty or stained’ for him is ‘regularly without quality’. Petar Konjović, ‘Muzički folklor, njegova vrednost, čistota i interpretacija’ [‘Music Folklore, its Value, Purity and Interpretation’], *Srpski književni glasnik* [*Serbian Literary Magazine*], 5 (1936), 370–371.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>12</sup> His comment on the occasion of the song ‘Mirjano’ from *Fourth Garland* [Četvrta rukovet] can be an illustration: ‘Undoubtedly, the Orient has left a trace, not only in our psychology but in our creative work, too; somewhere, that trace is even very profound. Therefore, ‘Mirjano’, as well as all similar tone reminiscences, sounds like a distant echo of time and place when sensuality was the substance of each and every lyrical feeling. Shaped sophisticatedly or roughly, this sensual lyric with oriental coloration was maintained through the whole period of our romantic literature and [...] we had a number of poets attracted by the opium spirit of the Orient. It is completely natural that composers Marinković and Mokranjac and some generations that followed, fell under that influence from time to time’. Petar Konjović, ‘Stevan St. Mokranjac’ in: *Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac. Život i delo* [*Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac. Life and Work*] (Beograd: Zavod za Udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Knjaževac: Nota, 1999), 53.

<sup>13</sup> On Bartók in: Julie Brown, ‘Bartók, the Gypsies and Hybridity in Music’ in Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (eds.), *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, (Berkley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 2000), 119–142.

way to overcome Turko-phobia. Those different and mutually overlapping perspectives must be taken into consideration during detailed investigations of Konjović's work, especially his opera *Koštana* which, through an outer oriental layer, represents a kind of psycho-cultural reconciliation through integration of Roma, Ottoman and Slav rural elements.<sup>14</sup>

Two other characteristic, but in many ways opposite relations towards the Balkans are represented by the composers Miloje Milojević and Josip Slavenski.

Milojević is the musical representative of those Serbian intellectuals who considered the ideals of the modern man of Western European culture effective in the revival and modernization of the Serbian and Yugoslav nation. Being immensely open in a creative sense towards both French and German music as well as towards that part of the Slav tradition which Konjović saw as 'western', Milojević was at the same time an advocate of Slavophil ideas in his work as a critic. Nevertheless, his attitudes on modern Serbian music were determined by the dominant view towards the centre thinking of 'Serbia in the West'.<sup>15</sup> He imagined the Balkans in the same terms. Within that context, the words he wrote on the occasion of Josip Slavenski's *Four Balkan dances* are very indicative:

'The Balkans is a country attracting tourists. They take pictures of the Balkans' surface using cameras because tourists usually see the surface. That is how the surface of Balkan music is exploited the most. And since the Balkans in its time was presented [...] as "a man with a knife in his teeth", waves of these comprehensions can sometimes be felt: the Balkans is something wild, tactless and uncultivated, disproportionate. The Balkans, however, is original and friendly in its sensitivity. Exceptionally friendly. And exceptionally deep in the expression of colour and very pure in the expression of joy. The Balkans are not a cauldron of boiling blood, splattering everything.'<sup>16</sup>

With the obvious allusion to travel-books and similar articles describing the Balkans using common rhetorical metaphors about friendly or dangerous savages, Milojević's reaction is a reproduction of one part of the cultural stereotype, one which is, in the eyes of the West, seen as positive, unproblematic and which will not initiate fear of return to bar-

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<sup>14</sup> The same line can establish connection with Russian musical Orientalism which is directly related to Hristić's mentioned ballet *The legend of Ohrid*.

<sup>15</sup> Katarina Tomašević, 'Istok – Zapad u polemičkom kontekstu srpske umetnosti između dva svetska rata', 123–4.

<sup>16</sup> Miloje Milojević, 'Sedmi koncert Beogradske filharmonije' [Seventh concert of Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra] *Politika*, 6 May 1938.

barism in a civilized European citizen. The nature of Milojević's modernism and his attitude towards collective identifications were marked by vacillations and antagonisms but his view of the Balkans is consistently conveyed to his composer's work. It is implied by his late piano opuses which are a sublimation of the composer's broadly comprehended Romanticism, with occasional excursions towards elements of impressionism and expressionism, anchored in a new, neo-classical simplicity recognized in folklore.<sup>17</sup> Modal scales, a modal diatonic, dissonances that do not turn into roughness of sound, chords of fourth and fifth, sophisticated counterpoint comments on themes with the occasional achievement of picturesque, psychologically deepened, dramaturgically dampened sound scenes lead not only to Milojević's Western European stylistic experience but also to his imagining of a tame and sensitive Balkans. He probably reached this moment of synthesis owing to the experience gained during his melographic trips to Kosovo, Metohija and Macedonia in the thirties when he was writing down Serbian but also Macedonian, Bulgarian, Turkish and Albanian songs and dances among which some examples have archeological value by being part of old, then almost vanished, ritual practice.<sup>18</sup>

Milojević's opinion was a challenge to the music of Slavenski, to which he attributed the characteristics of the negative side of the mentioned stereotype. Slavenski, for his part, used the metaphor of the Balkans to criticize Western European bourgeois aesthetics and feedback mechanisms of provincial narrow-mindedness that created an image of cultural inferiority in the region. He deepened his creative affinities through contact with the aesthetic of *Zenithism*, the avant-garde movement whose ideas of Balkan *Barbarogenius* were founded on the opposition between the Balkans and (Western) Europe. He did not go so far in

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<sup>17</sup> *Melodies and Rhythms from Šara, Drim and Vardar* [*Melodije i ritmovi sa domaka Šare, Drima i Vardara*] op. 66, 1942; *Kosovo Suite* [*Kosovska svita*] op. 68, 1942; *Melodies and Rhythms from the Balkans* [*Melodije i ritmovi sa Balkana*] op. 69, 1942; *Povardarje Suite* [*Povardarska svita*] op. 71, 1942; *Motives from the Village* [*Motivi sa sela*] op. 73, 1942; *Sonata ritmica in modo balcanico*, op. 82, 1944.

<sup>18</sup> About some of these melodies used by Milojević in his late piano opus: Ana Matović, 'Odras etnopsihologije u delima Miloja Milojevića' ['Ethnopsychological Substance of the Folk Musical Idioms as Reflected Through Compositions of Miloje Milojević'] in Vojislav Simić (ed), *Miloje Milojević, kompozitor i muzički pisac* [*Miloje Milojević, Composer and Musical Writer*] (Beograd: Udruženje kompozitora Srbije, 1986), 289–301; Ana Matović, 'Doprinos Miloja Milojevića očuvanju folkloru sa Kosova i Metohije' ['The Contribution of Miloje Milojević for the Preservation of the Folk Tradition from Kosovo and Metohia'] in Vlastimir Perićić (ed.) *Kompozitorsko stvaralaštvo Miloja Milojevića* [*The Works of The Composer Miloje Milojević*] (Beograd: Muzikološki institut SANU, 1998), 203–215.

subversion as the followers of Zenith but, unlike them, turned his ideas into the work.<sup>19</sup> Slavenski accomplished this due to a unique connection of folklore and the investigation of sound which, in different emanations of the opus, determined the constants of his language based on analysis of mode-scale grounds, the intonation and rhythm of tunes, the structure of the natural harmonic row in vertical and horizontal sonority, micro-tones and an un-tempered system, the use of pedals, ostinatos, the realization of form based on a diptych of singing and dancing and so on.<sup>20</sup> His approach to folklore as an independent value and purely acoustic phenomenon included pensive, spiritual-emotional and extra-musical aspects, determined by its very attitude towards the Balkans. Slavenski had an extremely developed awareness of the co-existence, mixture and amalgamation of various cultures in the region.<sup>21</sup> He counted not only on the folkloric heritage of an entire region, from Croatia in the West to Turkey in the East, but in his quests for spiritual roots he imagined archaic pagans and the tunes of old religions, constructing sound visions of Plaut's antiquity and had presentiments of the musical images of medieval Byzantium.<sup>22</sup> Simultaneously he attentively kept up to date with the

<sup>19</sup> Ljubomir Micić, the founder of the Zenithist literature movement, was inclined towards avant-garde gestures and provocations, but his negation of Western bourgeois culture and demands for the 'balkanization of Europe' by his announcement of Balkan 'Barbarogenius' were only on declarative level. On the other side, his changeable constructions and concepts of the Balkans as well as stereotyping discourses are a part of the rich image repertoire of the region. Stanislav Vujnović, 'Prevazilaženje opozicije *svoj/tudj* u periodici srpske avangarde (časopis Zenit)' ['Overcoming of opposition of *own/foreign* in periodicals of Serbian avant-garde (journal *Zenit*)] in Miodrag Maticki (ed.) *Svoj i tudj* [*Own and Foreign*], 215–26.

<sup>20</sup> The most representative Slavenski's works referring to the Balkans in their titles are: *Songs and Dances from the Balkans* [*Pesme i igre sa Balkana*] for piano in two Volumes, 1927; *Balkanophonia* [*Balkanofonija*], suite for symphonic orchestra from 1927; *From the Balkans* [*Sa Balkana*], suite for chamber orchestra from 1930; *Four Balkan Dances* [*Četiri balkanske igre*], for symphonic orchestra from 1937. Many of his other works are connected with the Balkans and among the most important compositions resulting from the synthesis of regional folk idiom and acoustic explorations are: *Chaos* [*Haos*] for symphonic orchestra and organ from 1932; *Music for Orchestra/ Harmonies and Disharmonies/ Music 36* [*Muzika za orkestar/ Harmonije i Disharmonije/ Muzika 36*] for symphonic orchestra from 1936; *Music 38* [*Muzika 38*] for chamber orchestra from 1938.

<sup>21</sup> Biljana Milanović, 'Stvaralaštvo Josipa Slavenskog – prilog tumačenju opusa kao jedinstvenog dela' ['The Work of Josip Slavenski – A Contribution to Interpreting Oeuvre as a Single Work'] in Mirjana Živković (ed.), *Josip Slavenski i njegovo doba* [*Josip Slavenski and his time*] (Beograd: SOKOJ-MIC, Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, Muzikološki institut SANU, 2006), 141–149.

<sup>22</sup> Up to now, literature has not mentioned that Slavenski's composition *On the rivers of Babylon* [*Na rekama Vavilonskim*] (1937), originating from stage music for the drama *Kraljević Marko* by Đura Dimović, has undoubted comments on unisonous



most recent aspirations in Western European music but he reached them in his works via folklore. He perceived his integral image of the Balkans as an advantage, which carried the potential to create a new centre from the existing liminal position of the region. So, if Konjović's construction of the Balkans was in Eastern Europe and Milojević's in the West then, according to Slavenski's imagining, Europe was in the Balkans.

These three short case studies indicate changeability and relativity in the understanding of borders, time-space-place and metaphorical aspects of the Balkans. In the wider context of Serbian art, the repertoire of reactions based on negative images regarding the region is ranged starting from acceptance of the dominant stereotypes through their internal relocations and 'nesting Orientalisms' leading to the reversal of the value hierarchy into its opposite. This can be also perceived in certain relations in the Serbian music of the first half of the twentieth century. However, in spite of many examples demonstrating different musical ways of surpassing the various antagonisms, the image of the Balkans still remains a problem of contemporary Serbian culture due to the complexity of the historical context as well as recent political, social and cultural policies.

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БАЛКАН КАО СИМБОЛ КУЛТУРЕ У СРПСКОЈ МУЗИЦИ  
ПРВЕ ПОЛОВИНЕ XX ВЕКА  
(Резиме)

У проучавању српске музике прве половине XX века не могу се игнорисати интерпретативне стратегије о Балкану које је Западна Европа, сходно сопственим позицијама моћи и идеологијама ослоњеним на идеју прогреса, стварала и пласирала као објективне и непроменљиве датости. Стереотипне представе о овом региону као културно инфериорном, прелазном свету између Истока и Запада, посебно су кулминирале у историјском контексту првих деценија XX века. Оне су биле део геополитичких, економских и културних фрустрација уграђених у позитивну слику „цивилизоване Европе“, па тако и један од симптома кризе западног либерално-буржоаског друштва и његове модерности. Иако су директно повезане са падом Отоманског царства, настанком националних држава на Балкану и актуелизовањем њиховог статуса у Европи, оне упућују на континуитет различитих, али увек присутних подела у којима су се слике о Балкану, као религијској, културној, идеолошкој и/или политичкој другости „уже“ Европе

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singing practice which was probably heard by the composer in some monastery or church in the South of the Balkans.

међусобно смењивале и снажиле у историјском континууму од средњег века до данашњег времена.

У тексту се испитује могућност проучавања и разумевања српске музике прве половине XX столећа у контексту критике балканизма и оријентализма. Пажња је посвећена опусима и/или писаној речи Петра Коњовића, Милоја Милојевића и Јосипа Славенског, а стваралачке реакције ових композитора на лиминални статус региона сагледане су као три различите метафоре Балкана. У модернистичким концептима Коњовића и Милојевића, представе о регионалној музици и њеном месту у релацијама симболичке географије Европе указују на критички однос према негативним сликама Балкана, али у појединим аспектима откривају и репродукцију и варирање балканистичке и оријенталистичке перспективе. Везивање за „Исток“ или за „Запад“ делимично је решавало проблем перцепције Балкана као „прелаза“, а ставове о животу на раскршћу или граници светова, где су балкански народи заснивали смисао сопственог идентитета, било је, заправо, веома тешко изместити у неке нове, другачије когнитивне димензије. У том контексту, модернистичка перцепција коју је понудио Славенски, конструишући интегралну слику Балкана као потенцијалног музичког центра Европе, могла би се протумачити не само као критика већ и као уметничка инверзија устаљених стереотипа о региону.

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