

EDITORIAL

FRAMING THE MESOREGION: SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN CULTURAL SPACE

TATJANA MARKOVIĆ

AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, VIENNA

Starting with this issue, the journal *Thema – Theatre, Music, Arts* will be dedicated to Southeast European i.e. Balkan Studies as one of the focal points of the Don Juan Archiv Wien (DJA). Numerous activities of the DJA related to this topic have included conferences, workshops, guest lectures, and public lecture series, as well as academic publications and fiction published by its partner institution within the Hollitzer company, the Hollitzer Verlag.

The idea of historical regionalization, or Area Studies, was traditionally defined and criticized as being conservative; it was transformed after the Cold War and is today a thriving theoretical and interdisciplinary area. The determination of historical regions is not very precise, especially when considered essentially, for there are various criteria for definition without covering all historical, political, and cultural perspectives. In the case of the Balkans, this indeterminacy is also a result of frequent border changes, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, or migrations.

Area Studies have been significantly transformed since they first entered university curricula after World War I. Scholars from a wide variety of disciplines helped to develop their new concepts, including “historians, linguists, anthropologists, geographers, and literature and culture specialists,”¹ as well as musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and theatre scholars, as this issue of *TheMA* demonstrates. It is important to note that the term ‘area’ can be understood in various ways: “areas are hardly physical phenomena, existing naturally by themselves. They are intellectual constructs, with shifting borders, drawn at different times with different aims in mind. However, this does not mean that areas are absolutely arbitrary or fictitious: they are based on historical, political, linguistic, cultural and religious legacies, real or perceived, and often supported by the self-perception of those who inhabit them.”²

1 Zoran Milutinović, “Introduction: Area Studies in motion”, in *The Rebirth of Area Studies. Challenges for History, Politics and International Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Zoran Milutinović (London et al.: I. B. Tauris, 2020), Kindle edition.

2 One can add music legacies to the quoted list. Milutinović, “Introduction”.

The Balkans are included within east-central Europe, southeast Europe and the Mediterranean. For this reason, it seems to be more appropriate to define them as non-essential and changeable mesoregions. Pluricultural Southeast Europe is here considered as a pluricultural entity with constantly changing borders marked by their long- shared histories, legacies, and cultures within empires and national states, covering a territory belonging to Europe or Asia or the Middle East. It is thus understood as a mesoregion “connected by the time that crosses the boundaries of a state, society, nation, and civilization.”³ The term ‘mesoregion’ in a supranational sense designates a group of several states forming a region, such as a case of the Baltic region, the Balkans, or the Middle East, in historical terms and in political terminology.⁴ The mesoregion is a relative category in the framework of conceptual history, defined as a space in terms of “the premises of its social production, its ideological underpinnings, as well as the various forms of interpretation and representation that it embodies.”⁵

The two names of the mesoregion – the Balkans and Southeast Europe – are often used as synonyms,⁶ although there can be certain differences in their territorial definition. Both terms are politically loaded, and both have negative connotations. On the one hand, the Balkans have been seen as backward resulting in ‘Balkanism’ not only outside but also within the mesoregion.⁷ On the other hand, Southeast Europe has also been related to the Nazis’ vision of Europe with Germany as its centre.⁸

3 Stefan Troebst, “Meso-Regionalizing Europe: History Versus Politics”, in *Domains and Divisions of European History*, eds. Johann Pall Arnason and Natalie J. Doyle (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 79.

4 Ibid.

5 Diana Mishkova, Balázs Trencsényi, eds., *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books: 2017), 2.

6 This is common practice in scholarly works by numerous historians, see Diana Mishkova, “The Balkans as an Idée-Force. Scholarly Projections of the Balkan Cultural Area”, *Civilizations. Revue Internationale d’anthropologie et de sciences humaines*, 60/2 (2012): 39–64; Jim Samson, *Music in the Balkans* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013); Karl Kaser, “The Visual Culture in Southeastern Europe: Elements of Decentred Theory Construction” in this issue. Kaser directly addressed this terminological issue in his paper in this issue: “By ‘Southeastern Europe’ I understand here the European regions of the former Ottoman Empire and its successor states – in other words, the Balkans.”

7 See Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Diana Mishkova, *Beyond Balkanism: The Scholarly Politics of Region Making* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

8 Namely, Südosteuropa was included in the national socialist vision of new Europe, that is, their economic plans for Great Germany (Großdeutschland) regarded as the centre of Europe or Mitteleuropa. The Balkans were defined as Großdeutschland Südost or Ergänzungsraum Südosteuropa or the German life space (Lebensraum), as well as an economic space (Wirtschaftsraum). See Hans-Erich Volkmann, *Ökonomie und Expansion: Grundzüge der NS-Wirtschaftspolitik. Ausgewählte*

After the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, which co-established and belonged to the non-aligned countries, the geopolitical map of the continent was deeply changed and research changed accordingly. This also led to the definition of a so-called New Southeast Europe, as Andrew + Wachtel, for example, proposes a journey from the Balkans to Southeast Europe.⁹

The Balkan countries are Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey, and the countries of former Yugoslavia, including their imperial Ottoman and Habsburg legacies.¹⁰ Southeast Europe usually includes Hungary and Slovakia as well. Finally, according to the European Union regional map, southeast Europe comprises sixteen countries: in addition to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine, there are also Austria, Moldova, and partially Italy and Ukraine. These last two countries are represented by Lombardia, Bolzano/Bozen, Trento, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Emilia Romagna, Umbria, Marche, Abruzzo, Molise, and Puglia Basilicata in Italy, as well as by the Ukrainian regions of Chervivitsi (Чернівецька область), Ivano-Frankivisk (Івано-Франківська область), Zakarpatska (Закарпатська область), and Odessa Province (Одеська область).¹¹ Furthermore, the above-mentioned countries are classified into three areas – Adriatic-Ionian, Balkan-Mediterranean, and Danubian. Obviously, there are differing ideas about the mesoregion, from various historical, geo-political, economic, and cultural points of view.

Furthermore, the national self-representation provides yet another perspective on this question. Let me mention my experience while working on editing a recent issue of the *Studia Musicologica*: the Hungarian colleagues refused to accept classifying Hungary into Southeast Europe – for them, their country belongs to Eastern Europe. Most of the mesoregional countries object to being called the Balkans, although they take part in ever more events and research under that name, or, more precisely, the western Balkans – another political invention designed to exclude Turkey. With any of the usual names and ideas about the territory, this geopolitical and cultural space can readily be conceptualized as a mesoregion.

Schriften, ed. Bernhard Chiari (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 2003); Carl Freytag, *Deutschlands 'Drang nach Südosten'. Der Mitteleuropäische Wirtschaftstag und der 'Ergänzungsraum Südosteuropa' 1931–1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

- 9 See Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially the last chapter “The Twentieth Century: From the Balkans to Southeast Europe”.
- 10 This is the definition of prominent scholars on the Advisor Board of the Balkan Studies Library, published by the Brill Academic Publishers, https://brill.com/view/serial/BSL?qt-qt_serial_details=0.
- 11 See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/atlas/programmes/2007-2013/crossborder/operational-programmesouth-east-europe-see, (accessed April 15, 2020).

Besides Southeast Europe as a whole, the current issue of *TheMA* addresses Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, and Slovakia. The ten contributions, presented mainly in the framework of the public lecture series I organized in the years 2012–2016,¹² or on other occasions, shed light on various aspects of the music, theatre, arts and culture of southeast Europe and the research history of the mesoregion. After the general framework provided by the insight in the formation of the Balkan Studies in Vienna in the nineteenth century (Maximilian Hartmuth) and the mesoregional specific visual cultures (Karl Kaser), reader can be acquainted with Franciscan music repertoire in Bosnia, Italy, and Slavonia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Zdravko Blažeković). It is followed by Southeast European theatre practices, such as the church baroque allegorical theatre of the eighteenth-century Serbian Orthodox Church in the Habsburg Monarchy (Jelena Todorović), the Municipal Theatre in Pressburg/Pozsony in the late nineteenth century (Jana Laslavíková), as well as the stage works organized by the Serbian soldiers and prisoners during World War I (Gordana Marković Ilić). Two contributions on Greek (Alexandros Charkiolakis) and Romanian opera (Beat Föllmi) respectively conclude this group of articles. Finally, southeast Europe is presented also through the literature (Gertraud Marinelli-König) and cultural heritage (Naila Ceribašić) of the microregions (Yugoslavia, Croatia).

Maximilian Hartmuth discusses the research of the Balkans in the Austrian i.e. Austro-Hungarian Empire capital through the discipline of art history at the University of Vienna. As he pointed out, the interest for the Balkan art history started immediately with the foundation of the chair/department of art history at the University of Vienna in 1850 by its first professor Rudolf Eitelberger. His steps were followed by the ethnologist, naturalist, geographer, and archeologist Felix Kanitz and art historian Josef Strzygowski. While Kanitz investigated Serbia, Strzygowski's research of the Middle Eastern impact on Southeast European and Armenian art is rather famous. However, despite these early research results, Vienna did not reach the status of the southeast European Studies centre.

Through his seven theses of the decentred (non-western) theory construction of visual culture of Southeast European, Karl Kaser is proposing a new approach to the topic aiming at more profound further research. These theses are related to the beginnings of mechanically reproducible and digital pictures in the Balkans with the roots of visual cultures in religious paintings. Due to the multireligious context of the mesoregion, there are different iconic practices in the western and

12 See *Südosteuropastudien: Theater und Musik /Southeast European Studies: Theatre and Music*, Don Juan Archiv Wien, Austria, 2012–2016, organization and moderation by Tatjana Marković: <http://www.donjuanarchiv.at/veranstaltungen/vortraege-und-vorlesungsreihen/vorlesungsreihe-suedosteuropastudien.html>.

eastern Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities, related to the question of depiction of human figures among others. The religious perspective was modified and secularized only with photography and resulted in the Southeast European “semi-secular” societies. This milestone also contributed to the gender perspective, for the images of women were later introduced in the Balkan patriarchal societies. Despite of acceptance of the western canon, it is necessary to consider Southeast European visual culture from the point(s) of view of their specific practices adapted to the local contexts. The first visual revolution in the mesoregion, as Kaser called it, started with the Balkan Wars and World War I, which led to Balkanism.

Zdravko Blažeković discusses the eighteenth-century Franciscan practices and activities in the province *Bosniae Argentinae*, the territory occupied by Bosnia, Slavonia, Srem, Dalmatia, and partially Hungary and Transylvania. Besides the repertoire, including the masses, hymns, non-liturgical music performed in monasteries, the author considers also the Franciscans as organ builders. As Blažeković’s profound investigation shows, the repertoire of the Franciscan monasteries in this extended area is the result of a double cultural transfer, coming first from the south i.e., from Italy (Loreto, Rome, Ancona, Milan, Bologna, and Venice) and afterwards is more oriented to the north, the Habsburg lands, especially after the Theresian and Josephinian reforms. The languages of congregations were Italian, Croatian, Hungarian, and German.

The next group of five papers are related to the stage i.e. spoken and music theatre. The first of them is dedicated to the Serbian Orthodox Archbishopric in Karlovci in the Habsburg Monarchy. Namely, after the great migration of Serbs caused by the Ottomans conquering the Balkans, the Archbishopric was displaced from Peć, Kosovo to southern Karlovci, Hungary in 1690. In the 1730s, this significant religious centre started with theatre life in the form of school theatre marked by the transfer of the Jesuit theatre. It was led by the Ukrainian teacher Manuil Kozačinskij, who was later the rector of the Slavic Latin academy. In that way, Kozačinskij’s play *Traedokomedija* (1733) established Serbian school theatre. Jelena Todorović sheds life to the political or diplomatic role of the theatre since the Orthodox Christians were a minority in the Catholic empire.

The nineteenth-century imperial and pre-national theatre practices are exemplified with the *Városi Színház / Stadttheater* in Pressburg. Jana Laslavíková analyzed its activities from the foundation in 1886 to the beginning of the twentieth century starting from the new building made by the well-known imperial architects Ferdinand Fellner, Jr. and Hermann Helmer, which were alike to other municipal theatres in Central Europe. The season of the theatre life lasted half a year

and included the repertoire in German and Hungarian. Until 1899 there were two directors responsible for the two parts of the season respectively. This politically loaded division was related not only to the language, but also to the repertoire and financial aspects of the institution's work. For instance, Timișoara financially supported Hungarian performances with the sum more than four times higher than the German ones. The paper also discusses the ensemble of the Municipal Theatre, including among others, actors, and musicians (singers, choir, orchestra). Like in many other theatres, the orchestra was sometimes supported by the military band and the stage works had to be adapted to their possibilities, so that Bruno Walter modified certain scores during the season 1897/98, as the author pointed out. The repertoire reflected policy of the imperial capital, as was the case with numerous Lehár's and Kálmán's operettas, for instance. Like in Vienna and other Central European cultural centres, aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and higher officials attended the performances. The imperial theatre performance history slowly led from the imperial (German, Hungarian) via Central European Slavic (Czech) to national practice (Slovak).

Rich archival documentation and other primary sources from the first decades of the twentieth century witness the complexity of Serbian (music) theatre practice during World War I. Gordana Ilić Marković presented performance history and practice before the war, followed by activities of the soldiers of the Serbian army, as well as prisoners of war. One of the most tragic periods in the new national history resulted in more than one million deaths and the country was ruined. Even the government of Serbia was in exile in Corfu during the war. The author presented theatre life at different territories: in Serbia proper that is in Belgrade, organized by the occupation forces and only partially accessible for the local inhabitants, at the front and convalescent camps exile in Corfu and Thessaloniki in Greece or Bizerte in Tunisia, as well as at the Habsburg internment camps (Mauthausen, Aschach an der Donau, Frauenkirchen, Neusiedl am See). All along the way, where Serbian soldiers were struggling or recovering, they organized and performed numerous theatre plays, sometimes including musical numbers.

The repertoire included European and popular national dramas, as well as adaptation and nationalizations (*posrbe*) of international plays. One more aspect of transformation and adaptation of the repertoire to the specific circumstances is related to the gender of performers – for understandable reasons, almost exclusively amateur actors were men, performing female roles too. The audience consisted mainly of soldiers, but also the highest-ranking officers of different armies were present. The theatre plays, often comedies, played during the breaks between the battles had a role of entertainment against the reality of war. These performances

raised great interest and enthusiasm, so that in Bizerte “a very large amphitheater (with 5,000 seats and a gallery for 1,000 people) was built /here/ out of stone. the stage was roofed over and the actors had two changing rooms at their disposal. Work began in March 1917 and lasted until October 1918. 186 performances were held. the audience numbers for this entire period are also impressive: 800,000. the last stage performance was organized on 23 october 1918.” (see fig. 3 in this article).

Two authors discuss opera in the light of national – Romanian and Greek – self-identification. Beat Fölmi considers Romanian opera in the context of the national self-representation and accordingly constructed national identity at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. After the insight into the musical culture of the Danubian Principalities, assuming the impact of two empires through Viennese as well as Ottoman music, Fölmi writes about Romanian “national opera” considering contributions of the following composers: Alexandru Flechtenmacher, Johann Andreas Wachmann, George Enescu, and Eduard Caudella. According to Romanian music historiography, Caudella’s *Petru Rareș* (1889, perf. 1900) with the libretto by German Theobald Rehbaum, fulfills the idea of the “first national opera” due to the topic – the sixteenth-century history given through a Romanticized episode celebrating male heroism and presenting the female role as a victim).

Quite different perspective is offered by Emilios Riadis, a significant Greek Macedonian composer, in his unfinished opera *Galateia*. The composer abandoned this extensive project as he regarded it as “not Greek enough”. An interesting analysis of the manuscript of this opera after libretto of certain Ph. Jablonski by Alexandros Charkiolakis is dedicated to the national identity as an idea of the composer he regarded as unfilled. “Riadis musically moves within contemporary European trends: a well-crafted aria at one place, a duet and an elaborated orchestration somewhere else. Throughout the available pages one cannot spot an appeal to his Greek soul in terms of the musical material, since there is a profound lack of exotic scales or augmented seconds or even the tune of a folk or folk-like melodic pattern.” Recognizable impressionism and the “French style” of Riadis’s music was obviously an obstacle for the composer to finish this stage work.

Gertraud Marinelli-König provided an insight into German translations of Yugoslav literature – more precisely, *belles lettres* in the Serbo-Croatian language. This article provides an extensive insight in the interest of German publishers and readers in Austria, Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic, and Switzerland in the literature by numerous writers from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro. In other words, works written in Slovenian,

Macedonian, as well as the language of minorities like Albanian, Hungarian and others, were not included. Among the translated authors are the most prominent representatives of Yugoslav literature 1945–1980, like Ivo Andrić, Mehmed-Meša Selimović, Branko Ćopić, Vladimir Nazor, Vasko Popa and others, but also less known authors such as Danko Angjelinović or Zvonko Plepelić. There are translations of the poetry and fiction of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, like the poems of the Serbian writer Jovan Dučić. Interestingly enough, the libretto of the significant Yugoslav opera by the Croatian composer Jagov Gotovac with libretto by Milan Begović, *Ero s onoga svijeta* (1936) was translated and published in 1952 and 1955 (under licence from Leipzig in 1938, when Gotovac and some other Croatian composers were close to the regime in Germany). Political writings by the Yugoslav dissident Milovan Đilas attracted attention of German-speaking audience for decades. This issue is concluded by the paper dedicated to Croatian cultural heritage in an interesting context of southeast Europe and China. Naila Ceribašić considers cultural policy of the Republic of Croatia in juxtaposition with China as “internationally commended guardians of intangible heritage” in relation to other cases from southeast Europe.

This rich variety of contributions providing a wide panorama of the pluriculturalism of Southeast Europe in different historical periods, reveals multiplied cultural transfers in various directions. On the one hand, research on Southeast European cultures resulted in the publications about Balkan architecture, monuments, ethnology, opera, or translations of the mesoregional literature into German. The process of Europeanization in the Balkans, on the other hand, conveyed the cultural institutionalization, a theatre and music repertoire or research agenda (art history, visual cultures), and a music canon among other things. The transfer of the Western canon, generally accepted as “universal”, was adopted and adapted to local needs. This process resulted in the construction of peculiar self-presentations of Southeast European individual cultures, officially registered – and sometimes contested among the Balkan countries due to their shared legacies – on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage.