

FLC 301/Fall 2001

Instructor: H. Kurthen

Minutes of 10/31/2001

Global Expression of Identities in Music

by

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1. Discussion about the Term Paper and Mid-Term Exam

Drafts of the collaborative term paper are due and will be discussed during the last two class sessions on December 5 and 12. The collaborative term paper ideally ties together a team's prior class briefing, the ensuing class discussions, extracurricular project activities, and the team's research interests. The 10-15 pages should contain a theoretically and empirically informed report on a globalization issue discussed in class. Topics have to be agreed upon by the instructor early in the term. The final version of the hard copy term paper is due no later than Wednesday, December 17, 5 p.m. at the instructor's office. The instructor recommends strongly that teams get in touch with him and/or the TA's if they have questions or need help during office hours or via email.

On 11/7 we will have a short (1-2 page) issue-oriented, essay-like, mid-term exam. The instructor recommended to review the reading and the web-posted minutes and briefings of our class for preparation. A possible essay question could be as follows: "Imagine you were a professor teaching globalization or an expert who was asked to testify before a panel, how would you--based on our reading--describe and explain the possible effects of American pop culture on our society and other societies?"

2. Information about the Minor in Globalization

The instructor distributed a flier about the Federated Learning Community Program in Spring 2002. He alerted the class about the possibility for register for the FLC by themselves. He also distributed an information flier and asked students for help in spreading the word about the Minor in Globalization. Once students have signed up for the program seminar FLC 301/2, seats are reserved in popular federated courses. Students who need help or have further questions should contact the instructor.

3. Global Media and Cultural Identity at the Turkish Example (Briefing)

In preparation for the guest lecture our class discussed how U.S. American media and pop culture influence other countries directly or indirectly. Haluk and Aksoy's article illustrate this kind of penetration at the example of the previously government-controlled Turkish media. Transnational ties resulting from travel and business relationships of the Turkish Diaspora in Germany and Western Europe in combination with Turkish politicians and print media business interests circumvented in the early 1990's the government media monopoly without formally breaking Turkish law. This led to a "backdoor" entrance of Western culture in just a few years. Turkish consumers readily embraced the new consumer culture and the marketing of Western styles and identities. The effects of this "opening" were ambiguous and led to a liberation (gender relationships, plural information sources, expression of sexuality and different lifestyles) as well a homogenization ("McDonaldization" effect). In addition, there was a backlash among traditionalist conservatives (re-Islamization).

The question was brought up if we experience a similar de-construction of traditional cultures in the heartland of globalization—the U.S. According to Hodson in *'Intercourse in every direction': America as a global phenomenon*, global cultural influences stream back and forth between the core countries and its peripheries, i.e., less developed countries. Global cultural intercourse is not a simple one-way interaction, though the core countries have more control over this process. Our class discussed as an example the current Latin music craze in the U.S. and how everybody is daily exposed to such trends.

4. Globalization Effects: the Example of Albanian Music

Professor Sugarman gave a multimedia presentation of how current Albanian music reflects as well rejects or reinterprets multiple influences of the surrounding world ranging from Western music styles (rap music) to technological advances in home recording, mass production, and distribution of music (video clips, cassettes, CD's, webfiles). She concluded that against the popular thesis of the dominance of a Western/U.S. controlled "culture industry," the supremacy of Western marketing and technology, and economic penetration by transnational media corporations, the example of Albanian pop music shows the persistence of local traditions and the instrumentalization of Western technologies and styles for political objectives and social themes of a non-Western culture.

Until the late 1980's, most Albanians were living socially and culturally isolated in the former Yugoslavia (Kosovo) and in Albania under an orthodox Stalinist regime. The community was influenced mainly from the outside by a influential Diaspora of Albanian migrants in Western Europe and North America. Though immense changes have taken place in the last 10 years after the break-up of Yugoslavia and the overthrow of the communist regime in Albania, most Albanians (the secular and the Muslims) remain committed to Albanian nationalism (language, folklore, literature) and traditional indigenous values, family structures, gender roles (subservience of women to patriarchal arrangements, arranged marriages), and perceptions about sexuality, the body, divorce, child and old age care, etc. Albanian emigrants, however, are torn between two worlds, the demands and influences of Western civilization and modernity and their nostalgic memories and sociocultural/ethnic bonds. Albanian music is reflecting this schism, for example, in the ironic hip-hop version of a remade folk song called *AlasAlas Germany* which mocks the nostalgia of emigrants and at the same time reconfirms Albanian collective identity and experiences.

In her analysis of musical styles and categories, Professor Sugarman distinguished strongly Western influenced Albanian pop from local Albanian folk/pop, which has Western influences yet maintains very Albanian themes. She also elaborated on regional, age, and education differences in music consumption patterns. As a result of previous exclusion from (inter)national music production and distribution in ex-Yugoslavia and communist Albania, Diaspora Albanians created their own de-territorialized music industry and imagery using local sources inside and outside of their countries of origin. Albanian music and videos are primarily produced by small entrepreneurs at home. The use of digital technology and circulation by email helps to

circumvent copyright restrictions and import taxes. A thriving distribution system exists in major emigration countries, such as Germany and Switzerland. Albanian music and videos are sold in small shops often combining travel agencies with other services directed at their ethnic compatriots.

In the Q&A session, our class discussed how Albanians maintain a viable music and entertainment "cottage" industry outside mainstream marketing and distribution channels. For them rules of copyright do not apply, prices are staggered depending on the buying power of consumers in a respective location, and artists receive only flat fees. It is remarkable how Albanians, against all odds of the global marketplace, without much control of public institutions/politics/media, and despite abject poverty/isolation/backwardness are able to maintain their cultural heritage through ethnic networks, family ties, and a Diaspora-based popular music industry.

Professor Sugarman's finding question the popular "cultural imperialism" argument at the level of the content of cultural forms, often promoted by the critics of globalization. Albanians have set up a lucrative and extensive pop music industry that is entirely independent economically of the transnational music industry. Although it is true that U.S. pop culture has been a major influence within the Albanian music industry, it has been significantly "indigenized" or perhaps "mongrelized." And against the thesis of the universalist effects of globalization, U.S.-derived pop forms (rock and hip-hop) have become major vehicles for consolidating particularist nationalist stances among Albanian youth, and thus have often worked against cosmopolitanism or internationalism.

In Albania other regional pop cultures, such as Turkish pop, which is Americanized but also very indigenized to the Middle Eastern Arab music tradition, are a major counter-influence to that of the U.S. Turkish music is embraced by many Albanians as a way of affirming more local values and aspirations. Elements of "global, Americanized culture" that have most pervaded the Albanian music industry are not the sounds of U.S. pop music but the practices of the transnational "culture industry:" the commodification of culture, the emphasis on consumerism, the encouragement of the development of a separate "youth culture" that challenges family-centered social life, and the objectification of youthful bodies, etc. All these processes have different implications abroad than they do in the U.S.