

## Music and Conflict Transformation in Bosnia: Constructing and Reconstructing the Normal

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### ABSTRACT

Can music play a role in positive conflict transformation? Having developed a theoretical basis from a previous examination of the contrasting musical conflict transformation projects of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and Hip Hop, I have collected data on an inter-religious choir in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina with an explicit conflict transformation remit. Data was collected using ethnographic interviews and participant/observations with fifteen of the choristers in an attempt to answer this question. There was no direct access to audience data and any references to audience reception are from the choir members' points of view. This detail highlights the issue of application of cultural findings within the choir to the wider social context. For the purposes of this paper therefore any discussions of wider social context are assumed to be mediated through the choristers themselves as members of the choir and the larger Sarajevo and Bosnian society. This data is compared with the previously developed theories and emerging themes are discussed. The fieldwork is ongoing and this article is a summary of findings thus far.

The data conflicts with many of the original theories and this highlights the importance of a grounded theoretical approach. The emerging themes include questions of Bosnian and musical identities; what is 'normal'; 'knowing one's place' in a formal musical environment; and the difference between the choir's 'mission' of conflict transformation and the motivations of the choir members.

The findings so far indicate that this particular music conflict transformation project has had some success but it is limited to the types of people who become involved as choristers or audiences (all current data on audiences is from recall from the choristers, as no data collection directly from the audiences was possible). Data also indicates that music projects themselves should be reflexive as conflict situations are not static.

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## INTRODUCTION

My initial interest in music and conflict transformation was sparked upon discovering Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. After reading about the Orchestra in more depth, I wondered just how successful it had been in helping to transform conflict in the Middle-East. What started out as a simple search for a book or article to satisfy my curiosity has led me to further research exploring the same topic: can music help to positively transform cultural conflicts and if so how? To date, I have undertaken this research in two stages: an initial completed project which I will summarize below, and further ongoing research aimed at addressing the questions raised by this initial project.

Following my early research in music, I began to realise that while many music departments were beginning to look at cultural theory and sociology and how they might incorporate these disciplines, they still remained secondary considerations. Music departments did not seem to be exploring the wider social meaning of music, which I began to feel was crucial in order to understand how music might assist in conflict situations. I slowly began to reposition myself towards sociology.

In this repositioning, I first examined Barenboim's project (2006a-e; Barenboim and Said, 2002) as well as Hip Hop (Ards, 2004; Chang, 2005; Dyson, 2004; Forman, 2004; Toop, 2004) in more depth in an effort to ascertain if music might be used in a conflict transformation setting. Drawing on current conflict transformation practices (Bercovitch, 1984; Burgess, 2003; Fisher, 2001; Paksoy, 2001; Quigley, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999), anthropological theories of conflicts and conflict transformations (Bowman, 2001; Clastres, 1994; Kloos, 2001; Schmidt and Schroder, 2001), social geography (Connell and Gibson, 2003; Mitchell, 1996), ethnomusicology (Merriam, 1964), cultural theory (Levy, 2004), arts approaches to conflict transformation (Aharoni, 2002; Skyllstad, 2004), music therapy (Forrest, 2006), and music education (Small, 1998), I came to the conclusion that music did seem to have some traceable reflexive influence on group cultural identities that could theoretically be included in a conflict transformation scenario. This conclusion was possible since a majority of conflict transformation authors claim that long-term successful conflict transformation requires an acceptance of differing cultural identities or the creation of a new shared cultural identity. The two aforementioned projects were deemed to have largely been unsuccessful or fatally flawed since they met very few of the theoretical criteria that was synthesised from the conflict transformation and music sociology fields (Robertson, 2006). This conclusion is supported by what limited literature is available explicitly on music and conflict transformation (Avruch, 1998; Beckles Willson, 2009; Bergh, 2006; 2008; Liebmann, 1996; Pettan, 1998; Urbain et al, 2008; Zelizer, 2003). I will summarise my findings from my initial research project below as it forms the basis for my current research followed by a brief examination of the current literature on music and conflict transformation.

## SUMMARY OF ORIGINAL THEORETICAL RESEARCH

According to conflict transformation and mediation professionals such as Bercovitch, there seem to be three primary methods of resolving conflicts: through violence and coercion, negotiation, or third party intervention (Bercovitch, 1984, p.2). Fruitful negotiations appear to be impossible without a degree of trust between conflicting parties and a third party to facilitate trust-building exercises. Non-binding third party interventions seem therefore more appropriate than binding

interventions, since they permit the participants to explore their commonalities (Bercovitch, 1984, p.23; Burgess, 2003; Quigley, 2002, p.14) which are required in order to build trust. Bercovitch (1984, p.26) argues that this exploration must occur in a neutral environment, and that once commonalities have been discovered, the building of a set of shared beliefs and values can begin. This shared set of values and beliefs would then form the basis of a new shared cultural identity, the existence of which could lead to a mutual motivation to negotiate for a transformation of the conflict (Aharoni, 2002, p.12; Bercovitch, 1984, pp.16- 22; Burgess, 2003; Merriam, 1964: p.12; Quigley, 2002, p.15; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Some commentators note that cultural identities can be created through violence, and that some cultural identities seem to depend on it (Bowman, 2001, pp.27, 37; Schmidt, 2001, p.9). Violent means are presumably not acceptable to all parties involved with a conflict and therefore not appropriate in the context of cooperative conflict transformation. Shared identities can form through exposure to the other's beliefs and values, but this often needs assistance from a third party (Aharoni, 2002; Paksoy, 2001; Quigley, 2002). Community groups are often considered to be appropriate third parties since they are believed to be more trustworthy than government organisations or NGOs (Paksoy, 2001; Quigley, 2002, pp.14-15). Cultural channels, of which music is one, are considered by many to be effective means through which these beliefs and values can be propagated and reinforced (Forrest, 2006; Small, 1998, pp.40, 131, 142).

While it is not universally accepted, music is increasingly broadly considered to be an effective resource with which to build shared cultural identities, since it represents the values and power structures of the societies from which it originated (Merriam, 1964, p.226; Mitchell, 1996, p.67; Paksoy, 2001; Small, 1998). It follows, then, that the creation of new music should contain values and power structures that are representative of a newly formed social group. It is also deemed to be an effective means of propagating and reinforcing these new shared values through the performing and teaching of the new music. It has been argued by Bergh and DeNora (2009), as well as by DeNora (2000, pp.62-3) and Born (2005), that listening is an active, reflexive activity which involves much self /group identity and memory work. This, as will be seen later, is a very useful conceptual tool. Bergh, DeNora and Born focus on the consumption rather than the production of music, however, which seems less likely to produce new shared cultural identities, since it could be argued that late capitalist societies very quickly appropriate new music artefacts and commodify them, or indeed create demand before these artefacts even exist (Shepherd 1991, pp.150-1; Hesmondhalgh, 2008: pp.332-4), although they focus on music reception rather than music production.

In order to be effective, it seems that the music used in conflict transformation activities does not need to be attached to a particular time and place (Mitchell, 1996, pp.1, 29), but that the parties involved must feel connected to the music ethnically and ideologically, or feel attracted to the possible social structures it may represent (Mitchell, 1996, pp.1, 67; Small, 1998). It has been suggested music must be hybridised with another form of music that is already a part of the group's culture, although hybridisation might not succeed if the requirements of the groups involved are not taken into consideration, and even a successful hybridisation may marginalise smaller groups (Connell, 2003, pp.69, 121, 169; Levy, 2004, p.44; Mitchell, 1996, pp.29, 56, 67; Small, 1998; Toop, 2004, p.235). Finally, it is deemed necessary by some that the music does not represent an undesirable power structure, in order to be able

to successfully build shared cultural identities (Connell, 2003, p.15; Small, 1998, p.196).

As a result of this investigation, I concluded that a successful musical conflict transformation project should be possible if the above criteria were met, a conclusion which has since been challenged by the data that I have collected in my recent fieldwork. This will be explored further in the Analysis section towards the end of the article. Against such a set of criteria it was clear to see how the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and Hip Hop projects could not have feasibly succeeded in transforming the cultural conflicts from which they originated. This has since been supported by Beckles Willson who has noted that not only has the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra not made a measurable difference to the conflict in the Middle East, the meaning of the orchestra has at times been appropriated by the Palestinian freedom movement and the Andalucían government for quite separate reasons (2009).

There is nothing as yet in the emerging literature of music and conflict transformation that has disputed this. There is very little current literature that is explicitly about music and conflict transformation and the only previously published grounded study of this topic is Arild Bergh's look at a community music project in Norway and music in refugee camps in the Sudan (see elsewhere in this edition) (Bergh, 2008). On one hand his research provides no evidence to support claims that music is useful in a conflict transformation setting yet on the other hand, it does not prove that it is not possible. At a glance it seems that these projects would not have complied with my suggested criteria. Perhaps the defining difference between Bergh's research and my own is that Bergh looks at an increasing amount of research that illustrates the problems with using music in conflict transformation as evidence that music is unlikely to be used successfully in this manner. I am attempting with my research to investigate why music-conflict projects often do not work and how future projects might work. Aside from that, Bergh's views seem to be broadly in line with my own.

The only published book explicitly dealing with the topic of music and conflict transformation is Olivier Urbain's *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics* (2008). Many of the authors within discuss music in terms of extra-musical meaning as found in lyrics (Gray, Whitehead, Palieri), how music has some ineffable power to heal with little or no grounded evidence to support these claims (Galtung, Skyllstad, Jordanger) or even illustrating how music can have the opposite, negative affect (Cohen, Kent). Nevertheless it is interesting that so many established academic authors have been involved in such an overtly romantic endeavour. Perhaps there is something performative about this writing that is designed to provoke thought and action in the manner of Adorno and McClary rather than to provide grounded research to support their claims.<sup>1</sup>

To test the validity of this set of criteria, I began to search for an existing musical conflict transformation project that satisfied as many of the criteria as possible. After investigating several possible research sites, I settled on the Most Duša<sup>2</sup> inter-

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in depth discussion about performative writing, see Phelan (1998) and Denzin (2001). A performative writing interpretation of Adorno is discussed in Pollock (1998). While there has not as yet been any discussion about the performative nature of some of McClary's writing, there is evidence that she supports such an approach (see her review of Savigliano's performative writing book, *Angora Matta: Fatal Acts of North-south Translation* (Music Culture) found on Amazon.com ([http://www.amazon.com/Angora-Matta-North-South-Translation-Traduccion/dp/0819565997/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1267198892&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Angora-Matta-North-South-Translation-Traduccion/dp/0819565997/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1267198892&sr=8-1))).

<sup>2</sup> All names of organisations and individuals have been changed in this article.

religious choir from Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). Most Duša has a membership that represents all the communities (Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim) that had been involved with the Bosnian conflict; the choir sings liturgical music from all these traditions.

Comparing Most Duša to the above criteria, it is apparent that they do not meet all the objectives discussed. They do, however, meet more of the criteria than any other music project involved with conflict transformation that I have discovered thus far. For that reason, I approached Most Duša and received permission to begin my fieldwork with them. Most Duša will be discussed in greater detail later in the article.

Since immersing myself in the literature of the sociology of music and continuing my research into music and conflict transformation, I have broadened my conceptual basis and this has consequently informed my approach to fieldwork in Sarajevo. I had hitherto not been exposed to much of the body of work within the sociology of music, but as some commentators have noted, the trend within this field seems to be a conviction that music has social meaning that is derived from the societies that produce it and, in turn, reflexively influences the same society (Born, 2005; Bull, 2000; Eyerman and Jamieson, 1998; Eyerman and McCormick, 2006; Frith, 1997; Kane, 2005; Leppert, 1995). I have found the writings of DeNora (2000; 2003) particularly valuable, especially her concepts of affordance and agency and how they relate to memory, emotion, perception, cognition, consciousness, and the (re)construction of self and group identities (2000, pp.5, 20, 41, 45, 47). These concepts appear to be key in understanding some of the themes that have thus far emerged from my fieldwork. Other writers from the conflict transformation profession (Lederach, 2005), ethnomusicology (Cooper, 2009), and a growing field of music and conflict (Bergh, 2007; Urbain, 2008) have begun to make explicit connections between these disparate fields that thus far have either supported my initial arguments or at least not disputed them. I am heavily indebted to the methodological models devised by Atkinson (Atkinson, 2007), Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and Spradley (Spradley, 1979) and my research approach has included ethnographic interviewing, participant/observation and analysing other forms of writing produced by and about Most Duša.

What follows is an excerpt of my field work organised into emergent themes that developed out of my first trip to Sarajevo in July 2009. In light of my theoretical and conceptual basis I primarily investigated Most Duša's sense of cultural identity and how music has affected it.

## BACKGROUND

### MOST DUŠA

Most Duša is an inter-religious choir formed in 1996 by Jadranko Nirić, a Franciscan theologian, and Kresimir 'Kreso' Lakoš, a professional opera singer, who became the musical director, immediately following the Balkan conflict<sup>3</sup>. It began as a choir for a Catholic church but it quickly expanded to include singers from the other dominant faiths in the region for purely practical reasons, as there were simply not enough skilled Catholic singers in the area. From the very beginning of this project, in other words, the music itself was of greater importance than any cultural, religious, ethnic or political identity. It was not long before Nirić developed his concept of 'a

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<sup>3</sup> In this context the Balkan conflict refers to the series of conflicts that followed the break-up of the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995. See Carole Rogel (1998), Jeffrey Morton (2004), Paulos Sarles (2000).

symphony of religions' and renamed the choir 'Most Duša', derived from the Bosnian for 'bridge of souls'<sup>4</sup>. (Conrad, 2009).

Most Duša performs songs from these three traditions with the addition of Jewish music, since the Jewish community had been a significant and thriving part of the regional culture from the fourteenth century until their near elimination in World War II. Some newly composed material from composers within these traditions has also been commissioned by the choir. Most Duša has a very high profile and has performed around the world for such events as UNESCO in Paris (2003) and the World Council of Churches Inter-religious Conference in Geneva (2005). From their inception, the choir has had to confront resistance from their own community and even within the choir itself. Despite this they are now widely respected not only in Sarajevo and BiH, but anywhere in the world where music groups have been attempting to transform conflicts as evidenced by their Common Ground Reconciliation Through the Arts Award received in 2004 (Search for Common Ground).

Nirić is the philosophical force behind Most Duša and has defined the choir's mission as providing *"hope, vision, foresight and longing of humanity that the strongest spiritual energies of humankind not be used up in quarrels and conflicts, but turned towards shared goals."* (Conrad, 2009, p.5). The choir gives equal importance to each religious tradition and a typical Most Duša concert would consist of two songs from each faith. They perform frequently (on average more than 25 performances per year (Conrad, 2009, pp.137-145)), and Nirić prefers to perform in places of worship from the predominant religious communities in the region. For example Most Duša has performed Muslim songs in Catholic churches, Orthodox churches and synagogues, and Orthodox songs in courtyards of mosques.<sup>5</sup> The members of Most Duša are more or less equally representative of these traditions but there are also a number of self-proclaimed atheists and other faiths. They perform mostly around BiH in areas worst affected by the war. Choristers have reported that audience reactions to their performances have ranged from anger and death-threats to tears of joy. Either way, most audiences were observed to have reacted with "shock" to some degree. No data on audience composition was available; however choristers have reported that the audiences usually consist of a combination of classical and liturgical music lovers and/or religious people who attend many of the events held in their chosen place of worship.

Most Duša resembles a classical choir in as much as they read from scores, the parts are arranged in a typical SATB<sup>6</sup> format, the musical director directs using classically-trained gestures, the sound production is classical in technique and at least a dozen choristers are professional opera singers. On occasion, Most Duša will sing pieces from the classical repertoire, especially if they are attending an international choir competition. They have won a number of musical and peace initiative awards, including Best Interpretation of an Early Sacred Work at the international Zlatna Vila choir festival in 2005, Common Ground Reconciliation Through the Arts Award in 2004 and the Tanenbaum Peacemakers in Action Award from the Tanenbaum Center for Inter-religious Dialogue in New York City in 1998.

<sup>4</sup> The name of the choir and its derivation have been altered to maintain anonymity.

<sup>5</sup> Most Duša have never been permitted to perform within a mosque. Some Most Duša members claim that this is due to the Islamic rulings that only Mullah's may sing within a mosque. Others have said that it is because Most Duša sing their monophonic male songs in polyphony and with both genders.

<sup>6</sup> SATB refers to Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass.

Today, BiH as a country and society seems to be in a dire state. The common feeling is that the war has never ended; just that the killing has ceased at least temporarily. People of all faiths struggle economically (the 2008 unemployment rate was over 45% (Index Mundi, 2008)) and the current government is believed by many to be actively part of organised crime or at least in collusion with it. Mostar, for example, the second largest city in Bosnia, remains completely divided, with Muslims on one side of the famous Stari Most and Catholics on the other. There has not been a mayor for over a year in Mostar as the Muslim and Catholic communities cannot agree on one and buildings that were shelled sixteen years ago remain crumbling husks.<sup>7</sup>

Conversely, Sarajevo has long been considered the most tolerant and ecumenical city within BiH and even all of Europe (Malcolm, 2002, p.149). According to members of Most Duša, this tolerant attitude was common in pre-war Sarajevo but has changed since the war. They claim this has changed due to the amount of original citizens who were killed in the conflict or escaped to other countries and who have not returned. The space that was left in the city was filled by people from the surrounding countryside. Most members of Most Duša are original citizens and they feel that these newcomers are less tolerant and more likely to succumb to the divisive nationalistic and religious propaganda. This implies that Most Duša is no longer representative of the Sarajevo community as it currently stands; it is representative of a pre-war Sarajevo society. Even within Most Duša itself, signs of dissent are emerging. Some within Most Duša are beginning to question for the first time in the history of the choir if Nirić's original mission is relevant anymore.

## EMERGING THEMES

### MOST DUŠA AND BOSNIAN IDENTITY

Bosnian identity is a hugely complex issue, as succinctly described in Noel Malcolm's (2002) book, *Bosnia: A Short History*. For the purposes of establishing a background context, I will summarise some of his work here. For most of recorded history the area currently known as Bosnia-Herzegovina had been part of other kingdoms and empires, from Byzantine, Greek, Roman, Gothic, Ottoman, Hungarian, Austrian, Yugoslavian, Croatian, to Serbian and countless others. Historically, the only times Bosnia ever seems to have existed as an independent entity was during the middle-ages (Kingdom of Bosnia, 1180-1463), and when the UN recognised Bosnia as an independent state on April 6, 1992. Of these two periods of independence in Bosnia, only the former was completely independent, since within days of gaining independence in 1992 Serb nationalists had established control over vast swathes of the territory (Malcolm, 2002, pp.234-6). Modern BiH is split into two autonomous regions, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (a Muslim and Catholic federation) and Republika Srpska (an Orthodox federation), of which the latter is very much associated with Serbia. Yet almost all members of Most Duša preferred to be identified as 'Bosnian'.

Historically speaking, BiH was originally a pagan territory, like most of Europe. The people in this area had for the most part converted to Christianity by the seventh century. When Rome and Constantinople split into the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic branches in 1054, BiH formed the Catholic border. At this time Serbia was the nearest dominant Orthodox region and Croatia was the nearest

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion of local political life, see Chandler (2000).

Catholic region. BiH had elements of both. Over the centuries BiH changed shape and hands but most rulers allowed unprecedented religious freedom, chiefly since they would not have been able to maintain control of the population without it. In other words, there had been religious tolerance in the region for at least a millennium. (Malcolm, 2000, pp.1-12).

Hungary exiled its Jewish and Muslim population in the fourteenth century and many resettled in BiH, establishing the first Jewish and Muslim communities there. By the middle of the fifteenth century the Ottomans had taken over the region. Many Bosnians of all faiths converted to Islam shortly after, possibly since the Ottomans granted Muslims certain tax and legal benefits. The Jewish communities expanded rapidly when the Sephardic Jews, who had been exiled from Spain in 1492, resettled in BiH. By the sixteenth century BiH was a relatively even mix of these four religious traditions. In the intermittent periods between wars and rebellions fostered by outside interests, these communities co-operated peacefully. (Malcolm, 2000, pp.13-50). It is this period that many members of Most Duša refer to when they say that is normal for all religions to coexist peacefully in BiH.

During the Ottoman rule, however, those that remained Catholic turned to Croatia for support and tended to migrate to the regions bordering Croatia. Similarly, those that remained Orthodox turned to Serbia for support and migrated to that border region. (Malcolm, 2000, pp.82-92). Muslims and Jews remained dispersed throughout the region until World War II when almost all of the Bosnian Jews were killed by the Nazis and Ustaša. (Malcolm, 2000, pp.176). Over time, this led to the nationalisation and politicisation of religious identities. Leading up to World War I, Croatia began to view the Catholic Bosnian region as part of Croatia, and Catholic priests in BiH began to pressure Catholics to identify themselves as Bosnian Croats. This also happened in Orthodox regions, where the people there began to identify themselves as Bosnian Serbs after pressure from Orthodox priests and Serbia itself. The Muslims, meanwhile, began to refer to themselves as Bosniaks. As these outside pressures began to separate the country it was usually the Bosniaks that attempted to keep BiH unified. If Croatia and Serbia annexed the Catholic and Orthodox lands within BiH, the Bosniaks would not have much territory left. Meanwhile, Serbs and Croats increasingly began to see Bosniaks as ethnic Serbs or Croats who had converted during the Ottoman reign (Malcolm, 2000, p.153).

Within Most Duša there is general agreement that to be Bosnian means to be born within the borders of BiH, regardless of one's heritage or religion. There is agreement that BiH was a "model for the world"; an exemplar of how different religious communities could live peaceably and cooperatively together. The idea that to be Bosnian is to be complex and accepting of other traditions has been iterated to me on many occasions during interviews and informal discussions with Most Duša, despite the current and recent political situations which continually work at dividing the population along religious/nationalistic divides. Officially, this division is so pronounced that in order to apply for a Bosnian passport one must identify oneself as a 'Bosnian Serb' (Orthodox), 'Bosnian Croat' (Catholic), 'Bosniak' (Muslim) or 'Other'. There is no option of identifying oneself as a Bosnian of Serbian heritage who happens to be a Muslim (of which there are some within Most Duša). If a Bosnian does not fit these categories they have the option of becoming 'Other', but many have told me that this option creates difficulties in accessing travel visas. Most Bosnians claim membership of the predominant culture in their family's history in their passport applications, regardless of whether or not it is their personal belief.



Ethnographic data from my fieldwork suggests that most Bosnians wish they could just identify 'Bosnian' on their passport applications.

Members of Most Duša are mostly from Sarajevo, but not exclusively, and most identify themselves as Sarajevo or Bosnian. There are some from different regions and there have been members from other countries in the past. During the rise of nationalism prior to World War I, it seems Sarajevo remained a tolerant and religiously mixed city. They will also identify themselves along the lines of their personal heritage but they all say that is not how they prefer to identify themselves. This last point is particularly interesting since members of Most Duša claim that when people from outside Bosnia attend one of their concerts, they seem to see a collection of Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholics and Bosniak Muslims all singing together. But for Most Duša, this is not remarkable, it is 'normal'; they view themselves simply as a group of Bosnians singing together. The members of Most Duša that I have interviewed all claim that Bosnians just want to get on with 'normal' life as best they can without having to worry about nationalistic tensions. This is illustrated in the quote below from an interview with Entoni Istvanić, a young professional musician member of Most Duša with Croat/Catholic heritage:

“That was so normal before, you know, and that tradition was old. Maybe about 8-900 hundred years, maybe more. And it was so normal. We was (sic) here all like brothers. My best friend is Catholic, my best friend is Orthodox, and my other friend is Muslim and we are thinking like that but not all the people are doing so. And that is so specific here.”

### **CONSTRUCTING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE 'NORMAL'**

The concept of what is 'normal' is the theme most frequently discussed by members of Most Duša. In other words, they feel that prior to the last conflict it was 'normal' to hear liturgical music from all the major faiths in everyday life in BiH. More specifically, they say this was normal in Sarajevo. They do not view Most Duša as being unusual and they mention several choirs that existed before the Bosnian War that would also sing songs of every faith. It was a 'normal' thing to do and in their minds it continues to be 'normal' and it is 'normal' people who wish to take part. It is the country, the politicians and the religious leaders whom they believe are 'not normal'. In other words, Bosnians cooperating towards a common cultural goal regardless of ethnicity or religion is believed by Most Duša members to have been a normal, common occurrence in pre-war BiH, and therefore Most Duša is normal since it continues in this manner despite existing in an abnormal, divisive society. According to the choir, when Most Duša sing the songs of all faiths they feel they are remembering what it is like to be 'normal' again and they feel their performances enable audiences to embark on this remembering. Most members of Most Duša, except for Nirić, do not consciously think about Most Duša's mission while they rehearse or perform, but, if asked, most believe that this act of remembering through music will help communities re-learn how to co-operate and 'un'-learn their nationalistic tendencies.

The concept of a classically oriented choir with clearly defined musical roles is also seen as normal by Most Duša. It is one thing to claim Bosnian normality is a harmonious mix of religions and that Most Duša represents this "*symphony of religions*" (Conrad, 2009, p.5), but it is quite another to claim that Bosnians singing in a classical choir represents the same level of normality. Classical choral societies became popular and widespread in the late nineteenth century when the Habsburgs

occupied the region (Hodi, 2006). Bujić has suggested that this popularity was due to the relative ease with which members of society could appear to participate in the rising bourgeoisie without any formal musical training. (Bujić, 2006). Whatever the regional separatists might have felt about the occupation at this time, the Habsburgs seemed to provide a certain level of stability and a sense of knowing where you fit in and what is expected of you. According to members of Most Duša, this feeling of stability and knowing what is expected of you is felt to be missing in today's Bosnia.

This strong choral tradition continued throughout the Tito era after World War II although the focus began to shift away from amateur choirs towards professional choirs and operas (Bujić, 2006). Many members of Most Duša refer to the Tito era with fondness and yearning. One 30 year old architect said *"Tito was like a father to us"* and this sentiment is common. Most can remember a time under Tito when choral music flourished and their daily lives were 'normal'.

Most Duša believe that the current Bosnian government is nothing more than the official face of organised crime. They do not trust anybody official as a result, including the police, who they believe are openly corrupt. I have seen some of this corruption firsthand in Sarajevo. I witnessed a policeman who was ticketing illegally parked cars skip over any car that looked expensive. I was later told that this was due to the policeman's assumption that anybody with a nice car in Sarajevo must be affiliated either with the government, organised crime or both. Most Most Duša members express the feeling that they are powerless in their society; they do not know what is expected of them, and they do not believe that there is anything they can do to improve matters. A classical choir may not be historically 'normal' in Bosnia, but the structures, roles and expectations found within a classical choir organisation seem to represent what the members of Most Duša wish was normal in their day to day lives.

### **SATB, CLASSICAL HIERARCHY AND KNOWING ONE'S PLACE**

Most Duša is structured for the most part in a traditional classical manner. There is a musical director, singing parts and an arranger. Nirić is the spiritual and philosophical leader of the choir, which makes it a little unusual structurally. Nirić decides on the path that Most Duša takes, including the idea of equal representation of the four religions in the chosen musical material and performing in holy places of each religion. The musical director, Kreso, demands a high level of concentration and technical skill from the choir. The choir itself is split traditionally into Soprani, Alti, Tenori and Bassi. There are often splits within these sections of Firsts and Seconds. In addition, there are on occasion further categories such as contra-alto and baritone which place the singer between the alti and tenori lines and the tenori and bassi lines respectively. Once a singer has been designated a part, they do not change parts. Kreso also accompanies the choir on piano during rehearsals. There is no piano used during performance.

To anyone who has ever seen or been part of a choir from the Western-European classical model, the above description would indeed probably seem normal. To the Most Duša choir, however, it seems this structure has further significance. Within this context they temporarily leave behind their complex personal, regional, religious and ethnic identities and they transform into their musical identities, by which is meant identifiable roles within a musical context. They seem more proud of Most Duša's musical achievements than their peaceful achievements. The choir is open to all faiths and ideologies but singers wishing to join the choir must have a certain level

of skill. This immediately provides potential members with an obtainable goal: they must practice their singing enough and audition well and they can be a part of this 'normal' choir. Once a member joins Most Duša and is assigned a new musical identity, they 'know their place'. If a member desires to become a soloist, there is a structured method of rehearsing and improving followed by a structured process of auditions that can possibly lead to such an existence. This level of structure and possibility of progression and pride in achievements seems to be felt to be absent from most of current Bosnian society, and members of Most Duša seem to cling to the choir as evidence that life was very different in pre-war Bosnia, coupled with the hope of change for the future. To an outside observer, this might seem ironic due to the ethnic cleansing and forced migrations that also occurred in Bosnian past, but this is how the choristers have expressed their feelings on the matter during the interviews.

### THE MISSION

Nirić's philosophical and spiritual goals and plans for Most Duša are referred to by the rest of the choir as 'The Mission'. When used, it is often accompanied by a rolling of the eyes by the choir members. Nirić believes that

"The fundamental orientation of Most Duša's work is always determined by the peacebuilding challenges of the moment...we created a symphony of religious music, a musical vision of the relationship between religions that would help to heal the wounds of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the entire region, restore damaged trust, and promote peace and reconciliation." (Conrad, 2009, p.128).

Nirić has reiterated this mission statement on numerous occasions. The rest of Most Duša, however, primarily belongs to the choir to sing and to sing well. There does seem to be this added notion of being 'normal' as mentioned previously, but not one of my informants talked about 'The Mission' as being a primary concern of theirs. They are glad 'The Mission' is in place and they are generally happy for Nirić to lead them in this manner, but it is not a prime motivation for them to join the choir or continue singing in it. In fact they are very proud of Nirić for standing up in front of the choir to address audiences who have displayed varying degrees of distress, pain and anger. Nirić has been unwavering in his promotion of 'The Mission' within BiH and around the world, and Most Duša seem generally satisfied with this, since promoting 'The Mission' has enabled them to sing at so many high profile events.

### SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND: MUSIC AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Search for Common Ground is an international NGO that

"...works to transform the way the world deals with conflict - away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. We work with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts constructively: to understand the differences and act on the commonalities." (Search for Common Ground, 2009)

With this remit it should come as no surprise that Most Duša was presented with the Common Ground Reconciliation through the Arts Award in 2004. But what is the common ground that Most Duša represents? Two key themes have begun to emerge from my fieldwork over the past several months: musical conflict as a substitute for physical conflict (the conflict for status within the choir is accepted in exchange for

feeling like one ‘knows their place’), and the perceived importance of strong charismatic leaders in community music projects (Most Duša and every other music-conflict transformation project examined<sup>8</sup> has been perceived by its members to have had strong leadership). A third theme that has emerged the most prominently regarding Most Duša, however, is the idea that musical meaning and memories reflexively construct themselves and each other, which directly relates to the theories purported by DeNora (2003, pp. 74-82).

### **MUSIC AND MEMORY: RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST TO CREATE THE FUTURE.**

Most Duša seem to equate the concept of ‘normal’ with ‘common’, hence the notion that it was ‘normal’ (or common) for many choirs to be inter-religious before the Bosnian War. At other times ‘normal’ seemed to represent something that they wished existed in their society, for example the existence of a clear structure and set of expectations found within a classical choir. The process of singing music from all of the predominant faiths in the region, in spaces that were believed to have very specific cultural resonances to audiences with very specific religious and nationalistic identities, seems to enable Most Duša to recall and reconstruct their past in order to provide hope for their future; recall in the sense that there had been times in Bosnia’s past where all of these communities thrived alongside each other; and reconstruct in the sense that these times were sporadic and brief yet are discussed as if peace in the region had been common. Simultaneously the choir members temporarily create purely musical identities based on their singing role within the choir. For the duration of their singing they are no longer divided along ethnic and religious lines, they are Most Duša, an exemplar of an orderly, successful and peaceful co-operation regardless of personal background. Once the singing finishes, members of Most Duša often note a feeling that this is how their society should be working. They have recalled many times where audiences have spoken to them after concerts and expressed how they cried when they heard the music of all the faiths together in one setting, as they, too, as audience members, remembered such events from before the war. This remembering seems to enable both performers and listeners to imagine and hope for a future when choirs like Most Duša are no longer uncommon

### **ANALYSIS**

Prior to my fieldwork, I predicted that research might show the Most Duša choir to have had only marginal success, if any, at transforming conflicts in the Bosnian region, since the criteria of choir did not meet even half of my suggested conflict transformation criteria. However, with a fair amount of collected data and new perspectives gained from music sociology, I now believe that my original set contained some assumptions that had not been substantiated. The data thus far does seem to support DeNora’s theoretical matrix of music, memory, belief, reality, possibility and identity (2000, pp. 20 and 146). To examine this further, I shall compare the data to the original criteria set followed by a brief exploration of how some of DeNora’s theories may be supported by the fieldwork.

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<sup>8</sup> Most Duša have never been permitted to perform within a mosque. Some Most Duša members claim that this is due to the Islamic rulings that only Mullah’s may sing within a mosque. Others have said that it is because Most Duša sing their monophonic male songs in polyphony and with both genders.

## COMPARISON OF DATA TO ORIGINAL CRITERIA SET

The Most Duša choir does not readily fit into any of Bercovitch's conflict transformation models. Rather than violence and coercion, negotiation or third-party intervention, Most Duša resembles a grassroots movement with a very strong and charismatic leadership. This counters the theories of Burgess and Quigley on this matter. Bercovitch's belief that successful conflict transformation can only develop within a neutral space (1984, p.26) is again countered by the data here, as Most Duša rehearse in a Franciscan monastery, which is Catholic and therefore Croat. Furthermore they tend to only perform in spaces that are loaded with strong cultural and religious meaning, such as Catholic churches, synagogues and mosques, none of which can be considered neutral.

Most Duša have explored commonalities but these do not form a shared music. Instead, the different identities are celebrated together and this triggers a common memory of a time when all of these religious traditions could co-exist peacefully. It is these memories rather than the music itself that seem to contain shared values and beliefs. It would therefore appear that through the combination of performing and listening to the juxtaposition of the music from the traditions in question, this could serve as a trigger to a common memory that contains their common values and beliefs. It is this process of remembering which seems to provide the members of Most Dusa with the motivation for positive conflict transformation and the belief that this transformation is possible.

Most Duša is a community-level organisation, however, and the data does support the concepts of Paksoy (2001), Quigley (2002, pp.14-15) and Small (1998, p.40) that cultural movements at this level have a greater chance of success than those that are directed from the top-down. My original set of criteria suggested that a member of the community would need to act as a facilitator for the groups involved to work together towards conflict transformation. It could be argued that Nirić has this role within Most Duša, as he is from the community and brings representatives from the different groups together; however he is very much a leader rather than a facilitator.

The shared values that have emerged from the data suggest that the Most Duša choir is cohesive despite disparate cultural backgrounds. It was predicted that a sense of equality in a musical conflict transformation project was necessary for all participants in order for it to succeed, and that any musical structures would therefore need to reflect this. As a consequence, it was therefore surprising to see an unequal hierarchical structure working well in this manner. It now seems that this is due to Most Duša's desire for stable social identities that they feel are missing in their daily lives. It had been expected that members representing all sides of the conflict would wish to have equal participation in a musical project, and it could be argued that all Most Duša members are equal despite being beneath the musical and spiritual directors. There is a definite hierarchy within the group, however, even within the singers. There are soloists who are considered superior to the rest of the choir and within the singing divisions, firsts are considered to be more highly skilled than seconds. Most Duša seems to succeed despite this hierarchy, since it still provides all members with a stable musical identity, at least temporarily.

The music Most Duša generally engages with supports the theories of Mitchell (1996, pp.1, 29) and Small (1998), who claimed that music can be used to help build identities regardless of its location in time and place, since most of it is very old and often from locales beyond the Balkan borders. This is supported by DeNora and the

new music sociologists who claim that music's meaning, and therefore power, is socially reflexive (2000, p.5).

There is little in the way of hybridisation within Most Duša as suggested by Connell (2003, pp.69, 121, 169), Levy (2004, p.44), Mitchell (1996, pp.29, 56, 67), Small (1998) and Toop (2004, p.235), with the exception of the *ilahija*, or Islamic songs. *Ilahija* are traditionally sung in mosques monophonically by a male Mullah. Most Duša sing *ilahija* polyphonically in a mixed choir setting. Some groups, including the influential Islamic Council, are more offended than encouraged by this hybridisation of Christian and Islamic sound-worlds, and they continue to this day to boycott all of Most Duša's activities. The rest of the music that the choir sing is very much in its original form.

Most Duša have performed extensively throughout BiH as well as internationally. The purpose of this seems not to have been to propagate a newly formed shared cultural identity, but rather an attempt to provide audiences with a reminder that there were times in the past when it was a common occurrence to hear this combination of music. In the process of remembering, it becomes possible to recreate a sense of co-operation in the future since it can be imagined in the present (DeNora, 2000, pp. 65-6). Actual audience perceptions are unverified by this research but have been discussed at length by the choristers.

Finally, it was originally believed that music reception would have little lasting effect compared with active music creation and production. As already mentioned earlier by Bergh and DeNora, listening is very much an active process and chorister reports of audience reactions and subsequent behaviour within this fieldwork indicate that it does have at least some power to move and influence group identity through memory. It is presently unclear what differences, if any, exist in levels of affordance if music is produced or consumed in this context.

## CONCLUSIONS SO FAR

At this early research stage, music does appear to have had a positive effect on members of Most Duša and their audiences in the context of transforming conflict. It does not appear that this has occurred through creating new music that embodies shared cultural values. Here, music appears to have been mobilised in the manner described by DeNora to "*invoke, stabilise and change the parameters of agency, collective and individual... feeling, cognition and consciousness.*" (2000, p.20). Most Duša seems to have essentially afforded its members the ability to engage with identity, emotional, memory and biographical work (DeNora, 2000, pp.45-7) through a reflexive process. The creation of new music reflecting new identities seems to have been undesirable in this instance since the choir had access to a shared memory of separate yet peaceful identities through pre-existing music.

Some members of Most Duša have pointed out that the choir is not representative of modern BiH, but of a fantasised past BiH. Modern BiH is for the most part still divided and there is no evidence of this changing at this time. Comments from the choir and audiences so far indicate that they believe that this fantasy represents a possible desired future for BiH, and that the continuation of the project only increases the belief in the members and the audiences that it can become reality. Indeed some choir members believe that The Mission is not as relevant in modern BiH as it had been. One longstanding member of the choir whom I interviewed, Emil Celebić, a 35 year old professional musician, stated "*Music will not fix Bosnia*" and

“Bosnia needs a kick up the ass, not more music.” Increasingly, this attitude is growing amongst Most Duša members. It seems some Most Dusa members are beginning to feel that the musical process of remembering better times in order to recreate them in the future is too slow for the suffering population. It remains to be seen if this belief in the possibility of a more positive future, as propagated through the Most Duša choir, can result in a reality where all the communities involved remain culturally separate yet unified in their appreciation and support of each other.

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