

***“Paint Me Black and Gold and Put Me in a Frame”: Turbofolk and
Balkanist Discourse in (post) Yugoslav Cultural Space***

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1. Introduction

Folk is the people. Turbo is the system of injecting fuel under pressure to the motor's inner combustion. Turbo-folk is the combustion of the people. Turbo-folk isn't music.

Turbo-folk is the love of the masses. Activation of the lowest passions of the homosapien. Turbo-folk is the system of injecting the people. I didn't invent Turbo-folk, I gave it its name. (Antonije Pušić aka. Rambo Amadeus)¹

Turbofolk is generally considered to be a musical genre that emerged in 1990s Serbia which represents a mixture of electronic dance sounds, kitsch folk music and an oriental tone.² This developed from Yugoslav *novocomponovana narodna muzika* (newly composed folk music; henceforth NCFM) the market history of which began in the early 1960s.³ NCFM is commonly considered within the context of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in Yugoslavia in the post World War II period, having emerged to meet the cultural needs of the 'transitional majority seeking to rid itself of the baggage of rural origin while psychologically unequipped to accept models of urban culture'.⁴ Even in NCFM's early stages it provoked debate about rural/urban and eastern/western divides in Yugoslavia. Turbofolk is frequently

¹ Hrvoje Prnjak "Bratstvo i Jedinstvo u Pjesmi i Veselju [Brotherhood and Unity in Song and Happiness]" H-Alter (Zagreb, 04 November, 2008) Available online at <http://www.h-alter.org/vijesti/kultura/bratstvo-i-jedinstvo-u-pjesmi-i-veselju/print:true>

² Tea Nikolić, "Serbian Sexual Response: Gender and Sexuality in Serbia during the 1990s" in Aleksandar Štulhofer and Theo Sandford, (eds.) *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: the Haworth Press: 2005), 125-140.

³ Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen, "From source to commodity: newly-composed folk music of Yugoslavia" *Popular Music* 14 (1995) 2, 241; Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen "The Southern Wind of Change: Style and the Politics of Identity in Prewar Yugoslavia" in Mark Slobin, (ed.) *Returning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 99-116. Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen, *Newly Composed Folk Music of Yugoslavia* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴ Rasmussen, *Newly Composed Folk Music*, xix.

viewed as the 1990s manifestation of NCFM reflecting the socio-political circumstances of the Milošević era, representing war, nationalism and isolation.

In this thesis I seek to demonstrate that much of the discourse that turbofolk generates in former Yugoslav cultural space and beyond is inherently Balkanist (or Orientalist) with regard to turbofolk. This means that turbofolk has been endowed with a number of (often contradictory) essentialist traits linked to its 'Balkan' or 'oriental' nature. In reaction to these processes, turbofolk commonly relies on strategies of stereotype inversion, recontextualisation and self-exoticism. This links turbofolk to broader discussions of Balkanism and internalised Balkanism (or 'nesting Orientalisms'), hierarchies of perceived 'Europeanness' in the realm of symbolic geography and cultural space. Turbofolk is not only criticised on this basis, a number of other common criticisms arise which I conceptualise as 'patterns of associations', a series of dichotomies which can be tentatively posited under the Balkan/Europe umbrella (a visual aid is provided in section 3.4). A number of empirical uncertainties related to turbofolk are addressed by this thesis. While the main focus is on relating turbofolk to the wider discourse of Balkanism, a number of questions detailed in the methodology section (2.1) are addressed at times throughout the text and part of the thesis conclusion (5.2) revisits these with empirical content of the chapters three and four in mind. This helps to provide some indicators regarding the controversial and disputed nature of turbofolk.

As well as providing a theoretical backdrop, the literature review section (2.2) gives a general impression of the academic discourse of turbofolk. The third chapter analyses (post) Yugoslav discourse of turbofolk. The first sections examine turbofolk as a conceptual category (3.1), as a metaphor (3.2) and link Balkanist discourse to turbofolk (3.3). By examining the discourse of Newly Composed Folk Music (NCFM, the predecessor to turbofolk) within socialist Yugoslavia (3.5) I seek to demonstrate that many of the points of

contention raised in the 1990s about turbofolk were already articulated in relation to NCFM since at least the mid 1960s. This rhetoric focused on three main criticisms of NCFM (which was later to be deployed against turbofolk) – its kitsch aesthetics, rural (or ‘peasant urbanite’) character and its oriental influences. The chapter then goes on to examine the discourse that turbofolk has generated in Serbia and Croatia since the 1990s (3.6, 3.7). The fourth chapter examines turbofolk in the wider context and linking discourse from the former Yugoslavia to neighbouring Balkan states. Similar themes are identified suggesting that turbofolk may be best conceived of as a Serbian manifestation of a local phenomenon context rather than as an isolated development in 1990s Serbia. The way in which turbofolk contributes to Balkanist discourse through self-exoticism (4.3) and the interplay between world music and turbofolk (4.4.) are also examined.

Having originated in Serbia in the 1990s it has often been claimed that turbofolk is a specifically Serbian phenomenon, closely linked to the Milošević regime, and thus a social ill. However as the section about NCFM demonstrates, its roots stretch back further than the nationalist mobilisation in Serbia during the late 1980s. Turbofolk appears to cohere with similar trends in the region and rather as being interpreted as a symptom of Serbian isolation during the 1990s war and embargo, it may be more representative of post-communist trans-Balkan cultural movements.

Though linked to nationalist mobilisation in the early 1990s, turbofolk poses a problem for adherents to the conception of a static and clearly bounded national culture as seen in Serbia and Croatia in the last two decades (the narrow interpretations of the nation held by Franjo Tuđman or Vojislav Koštunica for example). Following a Gellnerian understanding whereby similarity of culture as the basic social bond is a contingent for the

political principle of nationalism,⁵ the dynamism and cultural heterogeneity that turbofolk often engenders by fusing disparate musical traditions and modern styles makes it a problematic instrument of dissemination for nationalist agitators. For most Balkan nationalisms a hostile view of the Ottoman Empire and its legacy is a prerequisite and the oriental tone of turbofolk is frequently considered part of this legacy. The participation of non-Serbs in the Serbian turbofolk scene during the 1990s similarly challenges the notion of turbofolk as an instrument of nationalist mobilisation. Regime change in Serbia in 2000 has not seen turbofolk wane in popularity and performers have made inroads in neighbouring states. The increasing popularity of Serbian performers across Croatia and Bosnia Hercegovina seem to indicate that it is not merely a Serbian but (post-) Yugoslav phenomenon and that turbofolk can thrive even in the face of official hostility on the part of political and cultural elites. The case of Croatia in particular indicates this. Even though some turbofolk performers appear to espouse certain liberal values the genre is habitually ostracised by liberal elites.

With the benefit of hindsight and lively regional debate which has taken place in post-Yugoslav cultural space since 2000, this thesis seeks to posit turbofolk within the wider discourse of Balkanism in the regional context without consigning it with normative judgements. By doing so it seeks to demonstrate the importance of both ethnic *and* non ethnic identification in popular culture and contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon beyond the pro/anti Milošević regime dichotomy which much scholarship has placed turbofolk in.

Before proceeding to the methodology section and literature review, I would like to cite Dubravka Ugrešić who also considers music to be an important factor in social memory

⁵ Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 2-4.

of Yugoslavia an influence on contemporary discursive practice in post-Yugoslav cultural space.

The area where music really did forge brotherhood and unity...was the broad and democratic stage of pop music. While folklore drummed variety into us, pop music forged unity. That is why the whole country rang with a cheerful sound, like a music box!

Today when ex-Yugoslavs meet – crushed by the amnesiac steamrollers of war and thoroughly rinsed in national brainwashing machines – the most frequent common ground, that still familiar warm terrain of common references, is the history of popular music! They no longer remember the party congresses, or years of change, or the replacement of political terminology every ten years, or the years of ‘self management’, or the names of political leaders; they hardly remember their common geography and history: they have all become Yugo-zombies! But what they do most often and most gladly recall are the years of festivals of pop music, the names of singers and songs. In other words, they remember the history of triviality poured into verse, rhythm and sound, they remember their common ‘musical idiots’. And it is just this culture of everyday – and not a state or a political system! – that is the source of Yugo-nostalgia, if such a thing exists today. Nostalgia belongs to the sphere of competence of the heart. Just like pop music.⁶

⁶ Dubravka Ugrešić *The Culture of Lies* (London: Phoenix, 1998), 133.

2. Methodology and Literature Review

Can one take a ‘scholarly’ interest in turbo folk when it is so obviously allied with a corrupted system? It is a question tacitly raised by indiscriminate criticism and a sceptical attitude even towards researchers, which fails to acknowledge that it was Serbia’s intellectual elite who provided the blueprint for the country’s political orientation in the 1990s. The music’s guilt by regime-association affords turbo folk a political power that, in reality, it never had. Ljerka V. Rasmussen⁷

2.1 Methodology

This thesis is primarily concerned with discourse generated by a particular musical category – turbofolk – in the cultural space of the former Yugoslavia, and the value judgments that this discourse reproduces. It seeks to demonstrate that turbofolk is frequently associated with Balkan stereotypes, articulated in the Balkanist discourse that Todorova and other scholars have brought to light. This has influenced both public opinion and academia rendering it Serbia’s ‘most controversial export’.⁸ In addition to turbofolk as an object of Balkanism, I also seek to demonstrate that the musical style has participated in this process; mainly through self-exoticism as its performers seek to turn negative stereotypes upside-down and commodify them for a local audience. The added value turbofolk has gained makes it a powerful rhetorical tool both in cultural and broader fields as taken for granted

⁷ Ljerka V. Rasmussen, “Bosnian and Serbian Popular Music in the 1990s: Divergent Paths, Conflicting Meanings, and Shared Sentiments” in Donna A. Buchanan, (ed.) *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 57-94, 90.

⁸ Needs citation

connotations of banality, kitsch and violence and above all – degenerative *oriental* characteristics. I believe that upon examining turbofolk in the former Yugoslavia (and its predecessor NCFM) with reference to comparable hybrid musical forms in neighbouring Balkan states it becomes clear that a recurrent theme is the presence of the orient which is deemed unsuitable for the national culture. This statement appears to be applicable to both liberal elites who see turbofolk as threatening towards ideas of European cultural belonging, and to conservatives who want to retain a particular narrow brand of national culture. While the primary focus is to relate turbofolk to the discourse of Balkanism, other related value judgements also come into play. I suggest that turbofolk and the concept of ‘Balkan’ are part of a wider set of binary associations which include but also transcend ethnic identification, frequently being deployed against members of the ‘in’ group.⁹

When I refer to ‘(post) Yugoslav’ cultural space, this generally refers in practice to Croatia and Serbia, or, more specifically, Zagreb and Belgrade as the largest cultural centres. I view this ‘cultural space’ though contested, as a valid object of analysis to a certain extent, based primarily on two factors, the legacy of the common state (SFRY) and a common language, Serbian/Croatian. Nevertheless I treat Serbia and Croatia as separate units within this space. The regional context is examined in the fourth chapter. Neighbouring Balkan states share some similar socio-political and cultural features as the former Yugoslavia (including an Ottoman heritage and transition from socialism to market economy since 1990). The regional context is called upon to illustrate that similar patterns of cultural production (in this case hybrid folk music) emerged generated similar discourse across the Balkans. These examples are linked back and compared to Serbia and Croatia.

⁹ See Table 1, (3.4)

This analysis, in addition to complementing literature relating to symbolic geography and identity construction in Eastern Europe, should also help to in clarifying a number of uncertainties pertaining to turbofolk.

- 1) Is turbofolk is a particularly nationalistic phenomenon (in comparison to other cultural forms)?
- 2) Did turbofolk develop at a grassroots level due to genuine popularity or was it forced upon the (Serbian) populace?
- 3) Was turbofolk a result of Serbian war-time isolation or as an expression of new post-socialist networks that developed with more porous regional borders and technological advancement?
- 4) Does the emergence of trans-national cultural patterns suggest the emergence of a regional sense of identification that transcends the national?

While definitive answers to these complex and contested questions are beyond the scope of this thesis and require further analysis, examining turbofolk with the benefit of hindsight in the regional perspective should help in at least providing some useful indicators.

My research draws upon a broad range of primary and secondary sources and academia from various disciplines; historical, sociological, ethno-musicological, anthropological and literary. In addition to academic works from the former Yugoslavia, the Balkan region and abroad, various daily newspapers and weekly magazines from Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia are used for both their empirical value as well as functioning as primary sources for topical debates. The lyrical and musical content of songs is examined at various points in this thesis. This method is used to illustrate certain features of turbofolk relevant in

my research but I do not engage in a systematic analysis of songs. A discography is attached in the bibliography; all songs are accessible online on youtube.com.

Many aspects of this thesis were discussed with individuals from post-Yugoslav cultural space and I am very grateful for the input of friends and scholars who provided critical feedback and provided a contextual background to performers, songs, public debate and other aspects of cultural life relevant to this thesis. In April and May of 2009 I drew upon press archives as well as Serbian and Croatian secondary sources at the National University Library Zagreb (NSK) and the Open Society Archives (OSA), Budapest.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Balkanism

Maria Todorova has pioneered the notion of ‘Balkanism’.¹⁰ Addressing the inconsistent stereotypes associated with the Balkan Peninsula, she believes that the ‘reductionism and stereotyping of the Balkans has been of such degree and intensity that the discourse merits and requires special analysis’.¹¹ In addition to Todorova, other authors have established Balkanism and symbolic geography as a critical study of representation including works by Vesna Goldsworthy,¹² Stathis Gourgouris,¹³ a collection edited by Dušan Bjelić and

¹⁰ Maria Todorova *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 3.

¹² Vesna Goldsworthy *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹³ Stathis Gourgouris *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Obrad Savić,¹⁴ and Larry Wolff who has examined how Eastern Europe as a whole has been imagined and invented in opposition to the ‘enlightened West’ predating the iron curtain.¹⁵

In Hammond’s view¹⁶ Said’s *Orientalism*¹⁷ not only continues to inform critical analyses of Western views of the Middle East but informs scholarship on Western representations of other parts of the world and imaginative geography in general. As a result very few such studies forgo Orientalism as a starting point. Bakić-Hayden¹⁸ treats Balkanism as a variation of Orientalism as she believes it is a perpetuation of the same underlying logic. Todorova views the relationship between Balkanism and Orientalism as similar (in that they are both discourses of power) yet distinct from each other.¹⁹ The Balkans has real ontological status, the Orient does not. Considering that many national identities in the Balkans have been constructed in opposition to an ontologically secure oriental ‘other’, treating Balkanism as a separate discourse rather than a variation of Orientalism appears to be a more suitable approach. Lindstrom writes

What distinguishes Balkanism from similar critical traditions such as Orientalism...is that the Balkan is located in a distinctively liminal position: at the same time part of Europe as well as its antithetical periphery, the “other” within. This in-between position can often generate contradictory identity constructions whereby Balkan identity is internally embraced and/or rejected in response to negative external representations.²⁰

¹⁴ Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Larry Wolff *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Andrew Hammond “Typologies of the East: On Distinguishing Balkanism and Orientalism” *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 29, 2-3 (2007), 201-218, 201.

¹⁷ Edward Said *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1978).

¹⁸ Bakić Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia” *Slavic Review* 54, 1 (1995) 917-931.

¹⁹ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 11.

²⁰ Nicole Lindstrom, “Between Europe and the Balkans: Mapping Slovenia and Croatia’s “Return to Europe” in the 1990s” *Dialectical Anthropology* 27 (2003) 313–329, 314.

Though primarily concerned with intellectual traditions treating the Balkan Peninsula from outside it, Todorova observes that Balkanist discourse has also been internalised within the region.²¹ A hierarchy at a multinational level in the Former Yugoslavia was identified by Bakić-Hayden termed ‘Nesting Orientalisms’.²² Slovenia is ‘Balkan’ vis-à-vis Germany, Serbia vis-à-vis Croatia and so on. Lindstrom examines this theme as a form of identity construction in Slovenia and Croatia.²³ Razsa and Lindstrom, extending this gradation to processes *within* the nation, identify a hierarchy within Croatian national space whereby Hercegovina is ‘Balkan’ vis-à-vis the rest of Croatia, the rest of Croatia vis-à-vis Istria and even the southern blocks of Novi Zagreb vis-à-vis the old town of Zagreb.²⁴ Marko Živković examines the symbolic geography of Serbia illustrating how various geographical features are perceived and negotiated in terms of the Balkan/Europe construction.²⁵ The rivers Sava and Danube can be perceived as demarcating ‘Europe’ (Vojvodina) from ‘Balkan’ (the rest of Serbia) thus dividing Belgrade equally between Europe and Balkan.²⁶ Reflecting this liminal position Serbs as a people have been posited as somewhere ‘between Germans and Gypsies’²⁷ symbolically in between the occidental and oriental other. Civilizational explanations for innate ‘Balkan’ behaviour gained common currency in the 1990s and were reproduced in the region. Slavoj Žižek writes of a situation whereby Yugoslav states struggled to secure a place in the pecking order of symbolic geography during the time of crises in order to be included into the developed capitalist order. ‘Every participant in the bloody disintegration tries to legitimate their place “inside” by presenting themselves as the

²¹ Todorova, *Balkans*, 39.

²² Bakić Hayden “Nesting Orientalisms”.

²³ Nicole Lindstrom, “Between Europe and the Balkans”

²⁴ Maple Razsa and Nicole Lindstrom “Balkan is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tuđman's Croatia” *East European Politics and Societies* 18, 4 (2004), 628-650.

²⁵ Marko Živković “Nešto između: Simbolička Geografija Srbije [Something in between: the Symbolic Geography of Serbia]” *Filozofija i društvo* 18 (2001), 73-112.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 82.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 90.

last bastion of European civilisation (the current ideological designation for the capitalist “inside”) in the face of oriental barbarism’.²⁸

However the persistence of negative Balkanist discourse does not necessarily mean that negative connotations of the Balkans are all pervasive. The stereotype can be inverted. As Hayden and Bakić Hayden write

the images of the Balkans and central Europe can be inverted, as they are in an aphorism heard in Belgrade in the summer of 1988: "The Balkans gave the world two great civilizations: the Greek and Byzantine. Central Europe gave the world two ideologies: communism and fascism."²⁹

Similarly, certain ‘authentically Balkan’ virtues can be posited as positive attributes against others. For Jovan Cvijić in *The Balkan Peninsula*,

the “patriarchal regime” of the “Dinaric type” is not an inferior degree of civilization but on the contrary, its regenerating factor, standing in contrast to the *raya*, the plains’ “inferior and servile class,” and to the urban population which degenerates within a few generations.³⁰

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, “Ethnic Dance Macabre”, *The Guardian* (28 August 1992), 21., cited in Jane C. Sugarman “The Criminals of Albanian Music”: Albanian Commercial Folk Music and Issues of Identity since 1990 in Donna A. Buchanan, (ed.) *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 269-308, 295.

²⁹ Milica Bakić Hayden and Robert Hayden, "Orientalist Variations on the Theme "Balkans": Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics", *Slavic Review* 51, 1 (1992), 1-15.

³⁰ Cited in Xavier Bougarel "Yugoslav Wars: The 'Revenge of the Countryside' Between Sociological Reality and Nationalist Myth" *Eastern European Quarterly*, 33, 2, (1999), 157-175, 161.

The alleged 'national purity' of the country side gained a new sense of purpose amongst Serbian intellectuals and nationalist agitators in the 1980s and 1990s.³¹ Civilizational discourse also made its way into journalistic and academic works as a means to explain the wars in Yugoslavia.³²

Balkanist discourse can also be instrumentalised as a means of self exotification in cultural spheres. Diana Iordanova, discussing Balkan film, writes that

The 'orientalisation' of the Balkans cannot be declared a purely Western project, as it is a process which has been embraced, internalised and partially carried out by many consenting Balkan intellectuals...the result is a specific voluntary 'self-exotification' which becomes the preferred mode of self-representation for many Balkan film makers. [...] By accepting, not challenging stereotypes, Balkan film makers remain uncritical and fail to recognise the Euro-centric construct.³³

The concept of 'Balkan', according to some Western views and reproduced for this audience can be a profitable commodity as Zala Volčič observes in a study of Serbian intellectuals' notion of the west.³⁴ She demonstrates also how the inversion of Balkan stereotypes on the part of Serb intellectuals is coupled with a discourse which creates an essentialised 'other' out of the West.

Močnik believes that in the international dimension, the Balkans are defined as a particular region with specific codes of behaviour which are opposed to the universal goal of

³¹ See Jasna Dragović-Soso, *'Saviours of the Nation': Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2002), 64-114; Sreten Vujović, "An Uneasy View of the City" in Nebojša Popov (ed.), *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000), 123-145.

³² For example Robert Kaplan *Balkan Ghosts* (London: Macmillan, 1993), Stjepan Mestrovic, Slaven Letica and Miroslav Goreta *Habits of the Balkan Heart. Social Character and the Fall of Communism* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1993).

³³ Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 56.

³⁴ Zala Volčič, "The notion of 'the West' in the Serbian national imagery" *European journal of Cultural Studies*, 8 (2005), 155-175, 168.

cooperation. Such a view is thus a mechanism of international domination.³⁵ He identifies the same processes of domination within the Balkan countries themselves. Presupposing a ‘European’ view, the rhetoric partakes in the mechanisms of domination, structured along a teleological axis (Westernisation as normalisation, modernisation as the course of history).³⁶

Lindstrom writes that

Portraying Croatians and Slovenians as more progressive, prosperous, hard-working, tolerant, democratic or, in a word, European, in contrast to their primitive, lazy, intolerant, or Balkan neighbours to the southeast served two purposes. First, national elites could frame their quest for independence as a necessary emancipation from the Balkans, a region to which leaders alleged that Slovenia and Croatia were artificially tied over the last century. Second, casting Slovenian and Croatian national identity and culture as European was viewed as a means to further their goal of joining European institutions.³⁷

Razsa and Lindstrom provide further and more complex examples of the functions of Balkanist rhetoric in Croatia.³⁸ They observe how Croatian political discourse and media in the 1990s consistently instrumentalised Balkanist themes, both on the right and left of the spectrum.

³⁵ Rastko Močnik, "The Balkans as an element in ideological mechanisms" In: Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (eds.) *Balkan as metaphor: between globalization and fragmentation*. (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002), 79-116, 85.

³⁶ Ibid. 96.

³⁷ Lindstrom "Between Europe and the Balkans", 317.

³⁸ Razsa and Lindstrom "Balkan is Beautiful".

2.2.2 Newly Composed Folk Music in Socialist Yugoslavia

Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen's research of NCFM's genesis within socialist Yugoslavia is an invaluable starting point for a contextual backdrop to turbofolk.³⁹ She is the only scholar to substantially treat NCFM in English though studies in Serbian by Ivan Čolović⁴⁰ and Milena Dragojević-Šešić⁴¹ consider the music in terms of social change and processes of urbanisation within socialist Yugoslavia. Rasmussen believes that the pluralism and regionalism of NCFM was a major source of its popularity.⁴² She demonstrates how cultural dichotomies (Western/Eastern, rural/urban, Croatian/Serbian) were deployed and negotiated. On the basis of her research it becomes clear that contemporary discourses of turbofolk are in many aspects a continuation of cultural debates that began in Yugoslavia as early as the 1960s.

The notion of 'newly composed culture' (the predecessor of 'turbo culture') recognised music as a formative system of values as well as a social class associated with these values.⁴³ Dragičević-Šešić describes this as a 'populist, brand-new coined cultural model' the audience of which has a 'relatively low' cultural level.⁴⁴ She employs a rural-urban dichotomy as an explanatory factor for the emergence of *neofolk kultura*.

The rural youth oppose tradition but also the urban model of living which they find unfamiliar, different and foreign. They are building up their own model of a specific

³⁹ Rasmussen, "From source to commodity", Rasmussen "The Southern Wind of Change" Rasmussen, *Newly Composed Folk Music of Yugoslavia*.

⁴⁰ Ivan Čolović *Divlja književnost: etnolingvističko proučavanje paraliterature* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1985).

⁴¹ Milena Dragojević-Šešić *Neofolk kultura Publika i njene zvezde [Neofolk Culture and its stars]* (Sremski Karlovci, Novi Sad: Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića, 1994).

⁴² Rasmussen, *Newly Composed*, xxv.

⁴³ *Ibid.* xxiv

⁴⁴ Dragičević-Šešić, *Neofolk*, 219-220.

‘mosaic culture’ combined of element of the traditional, elite, urban-commercial and new folk culture.⁴⁵

2.2.3. Turbofolk: ‘the balladeers of ethnic cleansing’

Robert Hudson observes that

A lot has been written about Turbo Folk by both journalists and academics in the West. For example, journalist Peter Morgan described Turbo Folk as ‘the music of isolation’, while another journalist, Robert Black, described the singers of Turbo Folk as the ‘balladeers of Ethnic Cleansing’. Black added that Turbo Folk represented ‘the sound of the war and everything that war has brought to this country’.⁴⁶

These comments portray a trend whereby turbofolk is condemned as being the soundtrack to the Milošević regime. Turbofolk has been accused by numerous Serbian and foreign authors of being a medium for the promotion of the lowest cultural habits, a key lever in the promotion of chauvinism, violence, criminal acquisition of wealth, a patriarchal social order and other aspects of the ‘cultural and moral downfall’ of 1990s Serbia.⁴⁷ Consequently, ‘turbo-culture’ was interpreted as highly specific to Serbia – in opposition to open global culture.⁴⁸

Eric Gordy accounts for the longevity of the Milošević regime in Serbia by tracing his attempts to destroy, silence, or cut off the expression of alternatives.⁴⁹ The largest chapter of his book examines the destruction of musical alternatives; he argues that neofolk and

⁴⁵ Ibid. 221.

⁴⁶ Robert Hudson “Songs of Seduction: popular music and Serbian nationalism” *Patterns of Prejudice* 37, 2 (2003), 157-176, 172.

⁴⁷ Branislav Dimitrijević “Globalni Turbo-folk [Global Turbo-folk]” *NIN* (Belgrade, June 20, 2002)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Eric Gordy *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 19.

turbofolk were state-sponsored and occupied urban space to the detriment of the Yugoslav rock scene. His work is probably the most familiar account of turbofolk for an English speaking readership and contains a wide array of empirical data. Gordy posits rock and turbofolk in relation to pro- and anti-regime sentiment, though later admitting that he may have over dichotomised this, stressing that it was a relative position at a certain point in time.⁵⁰ Rock music is viewed as the antithesis of folk genres, associated with ‘European’ or ‘Western’ world view. Such a view has also been advanced by Sabrina Ramet who asserts that rock music was inherently linked to the post-1980 anticommunist revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe.⁵¹

Ivana Kronja offers a harsh feminist critique of turbofolk aesthetics,⁵² reducing turbofolk solely to an expression of to the Milošević regime’s new elite and the negative social conditions of Serbia in the 1990s; ‘the aesthetics of turbo-folk played a crucial role in the ideological indoctrination which was both produced by the regime and brilliantly served it’.⁵³ Tea Nikolić, also writing from a feminist perspective similarly does not withhold her distain for turbofolk as a cultural component of the Milošević regime.⁵⁴ Tomislav Longinović also criticising turbofolk aesthetics, considers turbofolk as an unacknowledged postcolonial culture. ‘The techno rhythms are embraced from the colonial cultures of the north’, markers of superiority and hegemony while the wailing trill represents ‘a suppressed, shameful legacy

⁵⁰ Eric Gordy “Reflecting on the *Culture of Power*, ten years on” *Facta Universitatis, Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology* 4, 1 (2005), 11-19, 15.

⁵¹ Sabrina Ramet (ed.) *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Boulder, Colorado University Press, 1994).

⁵² Ivana Kronja, *Smrtonosni sjaj: Masovna Psihologija i estetika turbo folka [The Fatal Glow: Mass Psychology and Aesthetics of Turbo-Folk]* (Belgrade: Tehnokratia, 2001).

⁵³ Ivana Kronja ‘Politics, Nationalism, Music, and Popular Culture in 1990s Serbia’ *Slovo* 16, 1 (Spring 2004), 5-15.

⁵⁴ Nikolić “Serbian Sexual Response”

of one's slavery to the Turks who are regarded as a part of the inferior cultures and races of the East and South'.⁵⁵

Gordy, Kronja, and Nikolić do not consider the regional perspective of turbofolk, the hybrid genres which developed in most Balkan states simultaneously or the discourse of NCFM that Rasmussen illustrates. For example, the authors do not include Rasmussen's 1995⁵⁶ work in their bibliographies though it was already published during the time of their respective research. As a result turbofolk appears to have emerged as an anomaly, a symptom of Serbia's isolation and as a deliberate cultural policy on the part of the Milošević regime.

A number of empirical errors are evident in some works and certain performers are interpreted quite contrary to the way in which they have presented themselves and been perceived in the public arena. For example Longinović writes that the rise of turbofolk in Serbia was 'part of the same political current that countered the Titoist version of multicultural communism in the name of Pan-Serbian self-determination' and posits Lepa Brena as instrumental in this movement, the 'mother of turbofolk' (citing Dragičević-Šešić⁵⁷). However the general consensus amongst observers is that Lepa Brena represented a 'last cry' of pan-Yugoslav culture, a Yugoslav variant of the American dream,⁵⁸ and identified herself (and continues to do so to this day) as 'Yugoslavian'.⁵⁹ Nationalist ideologue Dobrica Ćosić saw this Yugoslavism as its 'evil incarnation' (i.e. not the 'Greater

⁵⁵ Tomislav Longinović, "Blood and Song at the End of Yugoslavia" in, Ronald A Radano and Philip V Bohlman (eds.) *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 622-643, 641.

⁵⁶ Rasmussen "From source to commodity"

⁵⁷ Dragičević-Šešić, *Neofolk*

⁵⁸ Đorđe Matić "Lepa Brena" in Vladimir Arsenijević, Iris Andrić, and Đorđe Matić, (eds.) *Leksikon Yu Mitologije* [Leksikon of YU Mythology] (Belgrade: Rende, 2005), 223-226.

⁵⁹ Brena has confirmed this in a number of recent interviews. For example see: S.C. Lepa Brena: Nisam ni Hrvatica ni Srpkinja, ja sam Jugoslavenka! [Lepa Brena: I am not Croatian nor Serbian, I am Yugoslavian!]" *Index.hr* (2 March 2009). Available online at: <http://www.index.hr/xmag/clanak/lepa-brena-nisam-ni-hrvatica-ni-srpkinja-ja-sam-jugoslavenka/412754.aspx> Brena's 1994 song *Ja nemam drugi dom* (I don't have another home) is believed to be a lament the former socialist state.

Serbia' variant) as a “democratic” mask for anationality and anti-Serbianism’.⁶⁰ Dragičević-Šešić has stated that she believes the Brena phenomenon sustained [*održavala*] Yugoslavia in the 1980s.⁶¹ In a similar vein to Longinović, Hudson incorrectly states that Lepa Brena amongst others wrote songs which celebrated the deeds of Arkan’s paramilitary tigers in Bosnia-Hercegovina.⁶² Brena is an ethnic Bosnian Muslim whose songs generally focused on the themes of love and satisfaction with life.

2.2.4. New approaches to Turbofolk

Catherine Baker demonstrates how performers and are interpreted as symbolic reference points in national ethnopolitical discourse in the process of identity construction in former Yugoslavia.⁶³ She treats the reception of Serbian musicians in Croatia and vice versa in the early 2000s with an emphasis on pop and folk music. Baker also examines the specific concept of turbofolk in Croatia and the inclusion and/or exclusion this generates in the construction of national musical identity.⁶⁴ Following the work of Grujić,⁶⁵ Baker believes that turbofolk can be understood as a conceptual category rather than a conventional musical genre.

⁶⁰ Cited in Gordy *Culture of Power*, 126-127.

⁶¹ “Sav taj Folk [All that Folk]” (TV B92 documentary, Serbia, 2004).

⁶² Hudson, “Songs of Seduction”, 173.

⁶³ Catherine Baker “The Politics of Performance: Transnationalism and its Limits in Former Yugoslav Popular Music, 1999-2004” *Ethnopolitics* 5, 3 (September 2006), 275-293, 275.

⁶⁴ Catherine Baker “The concept of turbofolk in Croatia: inclusion/exclusion in the construction of national musical identity” Catherine Baker, Christopher J Gerry, Barbara Madaj, Liz Mellish & Jana Nahodilová (eds.) *Nation in formation: inclusion and exclusion in central and eastern Europe* (London: SSEES Occasional Papers, 2007) 139–158.

⁶⁵ Marija Grujić, Inclusion/Exclusion of the “Turbo-folk” Music Scene in Post-Socialist Serbia: Transgression of Cultural Boundaries or a new Model of Cultural Exclusion?” Paper presented at Inclusion/Exclusion: 7th International Postgraduate Conference on Central and Eastern Europe, UCL-SSEES, (16-18 February, 2006).

A modest number of works have emerged since 2000 (mostly from Serbia) which address ideological positions towards turbofolk and more critically examine the phenomenon. Two articles in Serbian weekly *NIN* are extremely critical of conventional views of turbofolk. Dimitrijević observes that in post-Milošević Serbia, turbofolk is increasingly being ideologically recognised as a ‘threat to values that should be promoted in the new democratic movement’, in particular to the concept of ‘urban and cosmopolitan culture that implies a European identity and favours a mix of classical and pop-rock music’.⁶⁶ He notes the irony that this discourse is based on the same ideological premise as a far-right nationalist viewpoint which sees turbofolk as part of a ‘Tehranisation’ of Serbia – based on a ‘cultural-racist resistance to cultural influences that are recognised as malignant tissue in the healthy body of the true Serb tradition’.⁶⁷ Cirjaković, following this argument, locates turbofolk as a local expression of global trends.⁶⁸ Miša Đurković articulates these arguments more theoretically in his analysis of ideological conflicts about popular music in Serbia and maintains that turbofolk flourished due to the collapse of state control over media rather than being imposed.⁶⁹ Marija Grujić explores broader ways to examine turbofolk including as a liberating and transgressing phenomenon which she believes is ‘just as possible to a certain extent’ as the conventional value loaded approaches which view the music’s transgressive qualities as culturally threatening rather than liberating.⁷⁰

In response to works which link turbofolk and the Milošević regime (such as those by Gordy and Kronja) Grujić argues that this connection was never sufficiently theorised. Despite numerous connections between turbofolk performers, businesspeople and politicians

⁶⁶ Dimitrijević, “Globalni Turbo-folk”.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Zoran Cirjaković “Turbofolk: Naš a svetski [Turbofolk: Ours but Global]” *NIN* (Belgrade, October 21, 2004)

⁶⁹ Miša Đurković “Ideološki i Politički Sukobi oko Popularne Muzike u Srbiji [Ideological and Political Conflicts about Popular Music in Serbia]” *Filozofija i Društvo XXV* (2002), 271-284.

⁷⁰ Grujić “Inclusiveness of the “Turbo-folk” Music Scene”

in Serbia (exemplified by the 1995 marriage of Ceca Veličković and Željko Ražnatović - Arkan) it has not been possible to prove that a specific politics created a music market in Serbia nor to identify how the domain of entertainers would directly dictate the behaviour of consumers.⁷¹ Grujić additionally observes that nearly all critics of turbofolk employ a rural-urban dichotomy which implies a value hierarchy of these two concepts – favouring the urban. While Gordy for example included the voices of ‘urban’ rock listeners, interviews with alternative musicians such as Rambo Amadeus and various music critics, the articulations of fans and producers of turbofolk receive no space in his work. This type of discourse lends itself towards a ‘silent cultural discrimination of the cultural identity of the so called rural population, or semi-urbanized population or urban working class’.⁷²

2.2.5. Regional Hybrid Musical Trends

Examining recent hybrid musical trends in the Balkan region, an edited collection by Donna Buchanan follows the view of Đurković⁷³ in asserting that hybrid folk genres flourished in the 1990s due to the lack of state control over media, increasingly porous borders and technological advancement.⁷⁴ These musical forms are frequently related to the Balkan and orientalist themes. The volume builds upon earlier works by Buchanan,⁷⁵ Rasmussen, Levy,⁷⁶ Rice,⁷⁷ Stokes⁷⁸ and Kurkela⁷⁹ which examine aspects of identity

⁷¹ Ibid. 6-7.

⁷² Ibid. 7.

⁷³ Đurković, “Ideološki Sukobi”

⁷⁴ Donna A. Buchanan (ed.) *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008).

⁷⁵ Donna A. Buchanan, “Bulgaria’s magical *Mystere* tour: postmodernism, world music marketing, and political change in eastern Europe’, *Ethnomusicology* 41, 1 (1997), 131–57 and, “Soccer, popular music and national consciousness in post-state-socialist Bulgaria, 1994-1996 *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 11, 2 (2002) 1-27.

⁷⁶ Claire Levy “Who is the “other” in the Balkans?: local ethnic music as a *different* source of identities in Bulgaria” in, Richard Young (ed.) *Music, Popular Culture, Identities*. (New York, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 215-230.

construction in relation to new musical forms and the Balkan theme. While the volume lacks a chapter dedicated to Croatia, recent doctoral work by Catherine Baker treating Croatian popular music and narratives of national identity supplements this well.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Timothy Rice “Bulgaria or Chalgaria: The Attenuation of Bulgarian Nationalism in a Mass-Mediated Popular Music” *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 34 (2002) 25-46.

⁷⁸ Martin Stokes. *The Arabesk debate: music and musicians in modern Turkey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁷⁹ Vesa Kurkela. “Music Media in the Eastern Balkans: Privatized, Deregulated, and Neo-Traditional” *Cultural Policy* 3, 2 (1997), 177-205.

⁸⁰ Catherine Baker. *Popular music and narratives of identity in Croatia since 1991* (University College London, unpublished PhD Thesis, 2009).

3. Yugoslav Turbofolk: Tracing Discourse Patterns

They constantly say that I song turbofolk, which isn't true... if somebody could firstly explain to me what turbofolk means, it would be easier – because I wouldn't be able to explain to you what turbofolk is, I don't actually know what that kind of music is!

Ceca Ražnatović, turbofolk singer⁸¹

This chapter seeks to examine the discourse of turbofolk in (post) Yugoslav cultural space. It begins by explaining what is meant by turbofolk (3.1). I employ not a specific ethnomusicological definition, but consider it a conceptual category; something that is often contested and implies a value judgement. I use the term ‘folk hybrid’ is used to describe various musical styles that emerged in the last decades in the region; this includes turbofolk as well other styles from neighbouring countries. The second section examines the use of turbofolk as a metaphor. The third section examines the links between Balkanist discourse and turbofolk (3.3) while the fourth section provides a tentative means to understand the linkages between stereotypes associated with the Balkans and turbofolk (3.4). The fifth section looks at the discourse generated by NCFM in socialist Yugoslavia (3.5), while the sixth and seventh sections examine turbofolk in Serbia (3.5) and in Croatia (3.6), in particular observable themes in the discourse it has generated.

⁸¹ Interview, “Sav Taj Folk”

3.1 The Concept of Turbofolk and Turbo-Culture

Grujić writes that uses of the term ‘turbofolk’ carry certain cultural inclusions and exclusions, surpassing ‘pure musicological or technical demarcation’.⁸² Rather than tenuous debates about what constitutes turbofolk in an ethno-musicological sense, it appears more pertinent to ask who is using it, and why? Concurring with this view, Baker considers turbofolk to act less as a concrete definition of musical directions and ‘more as a conceptual category which aggregates connotations of banality, foreignness, violence and kitsch in order to provide a critical apparatus with a ready-made strategy of distancing’.⁸³

This thesis shall follow this strategy. ‘Turbofolk as a conceptual category’ sufficiently captures the nature of turbofolk (and by proxy NCFM, related variants and their synonyms) as a loaded term which usually imposes particular value judgements upon its subject (e.g. as nationalist, trash, eastern, peasant etc...) as well as functioning as an exclusionary rhetorical device. It is not important for the purpose of this thesis as to whether a particular performer or song can be considered as ‘turbofolk’ in a strict ethno-musicological sense (if such a judgement can even be made). Rather, by the use of the term ‘turbofolk’ (or alternatively synonyms *cajka*, *narodnjak*, *neofolk* or even *folk*) certain attributes are projected upon the performer, song or audience and a value judgement is made. For example Croatian ultranationalist performer Marko Perković - ‘Thompson’ is sometimes derided as a turbofolk artist by critics,⁸⁴ his nationalism and militant persona being linked to the turbofolk stereotype and derided as ‘Balkan’ by some of his critics. This enables Thompson to be

⁸² Grujić “Inclusiveness of the “Turbo-folk” Music Scene”, 3-5.

⁸³ Baker “The concept of turbofolk in Croatia”, 139.

⁸⁴ Catherine Baker “Myth, War, Memory, and Popular Music in Croatia: The Case of Marko Perković Thompson” *Slovo* 17, 1 (Spring 2005) 20-32, 28 and, Reana Senjković and Davor Dukić “Virtual Homeland? Reading the music on offer on a particular webpage” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8, 1 (2003) 44-62, 51.

analysed within the bounds of turbofolk discourse with the understanding that the category functions as a rhetorical device or metaphor rather than a purely descriptive musical genre.

3.2 Turbofolk as metaphor

The concept of turbofolk (and *neofolk* or *novokompovana* (newly composed)) has been extended to refer pejoratively to various phenomena in a metaphorical sense, far removed from turbofolk as a musical genre. Rasmussen writes that ‘implicit in the term ‘newly composed’ are novelty, temporariness, bricolage and kitsch...a lack of historicity, stylistic coherence and aesthetic/artistic attributes’, the widening of this semantic field being noteworthy.⁸⁵ For example the 1990s architecture of Dedinje, an upmarket suburb of Belgrade, acquired the name ‘turbo-architecture’. According to Slobodan Bogunović’s encyclopaedia of Belgrade architecture, these ‘turbo’ forms are founded on the ‘reinterpretation and politicisation of folklore’, and ‘a nationalist mania for mythmaking based on incorrect readings of national history’.⁸⁶ In the same vein, pyramid-scheme ‘bankers’ became the *novokomponovana elita* and corrupt politicians *novokomponovani političari*.⁸⁷ Croatian historian Ivo Goldstein refers to ‘newly composed history’ and writer Dubravka Ugrešić to ‘newly composed political folklore’.⁸⁸ Žarana Papić links the nationalist mobilisation in Serbia in the late 1980s to turbofolk calling the process *Turbo-Fascism*.⁸⁹ Thus value judgements associated with turbofolk and NCFM have been extended in various metaphors which criticise various aspects of public life in post-Yugoslav cultural space.

⁸⁵ Rasmussen, “From Source to Commodity”, 242.

⁸⁶ Cited in David Norris, *Belgrade: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173.

⁸⁷ Eric Gordy, *On Urban Identity in the Global Palanka: Perceptions of Self Among Belgrade Rockers*. (n.d.) Available online at: <http://www.kabi.si/si21/IASPM/gordy.html>

⁸⁸ Celia Hawksworth, *Zagreb: A Cultural History* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 199.

⁸⁹ Žarana Papić “Europe after 1989: The Ethnic Wars, Fascisisation of Civil Society and Body Politics in Serbia” (1 December 2001) available online at: http://www.komunikacija.org.rs/komunikacija/casopisi/sociologija/XLIII_3/d01/html_gb

3.3 Linking Balkanism and Turbofolk

Having gained a host of extra-musical attributes, turbofolk can be understood as an explicitly Balkanist construct both due to its geographical origins and its implications of violence, eroticism, barbarity and otherness that Todorova identifies as attributed to the Balkan stereotype.⁹⁰ Just as ‘Balkan’ has a liminal position within Europe, as its internal other; turbofolk has a liminal and peripheral position within former Yugoslav cultural space as a cultural other which is often used as a discursive means of marginalisation or exclusion. For many, turbofolk is interpreted as a cultural frame with uncivilised eastern and rural roots which poses a danger either to the autochthonous national culture and/or the possibility of a ‘European’ and cosmopolitan future. Branislav Dimitrijević believes that this type of discourse is based on the same ideological premise that Milošević used during the late 1980s – a ‘cultural-racist resistance to cultural influences that are in general recognised as malignant tissue in the healthy body of the true Serb tradition’.⁹¹ Dimitrijević believes that both regional and international authors when addressing turbofolk make one fundamental assumption; ‘turbo-culture’ as a medium for the promotion of the lowest cultural and civilisational habits specific to Serbia and opposed to global culture.⁹² He views turbofolk however, as an indication that Serbia is *increasingly* adopting Western values. This parallels the view of Todorova that the homogenising national forces at work in Balkan Europe today, with their violent manifestations wrongly attributed to some Balkan essence, are actually the ultimate Europeanisation of the Balkans.⁹³

⁹⁰ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 1997

⁹¹ Dimitrijević *NIN*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 13.

Rather than being specific to Serbia (or even former Yugoslavia) Balkanist discourse generated by music is visible across the region. Hybrid musical genres (or categories) such as *chalga* in Bulgaria,⁹⁴ *muzică orientală* in Romania,⁹⁵ *arabesk* in Turkey⁹⁶ and *cro-drance* in Croatia⁹⁷ have generated similar discourse and resulting ‘moral panics’, the common denominator being the presence of the internal ‘eastern’ other viewed as a threat to the national self. Central to these regional moral panics is the notion that sources from the east remain of lower value than those regarded as national or from the west and more securely ‘other’ (and implicitly better) locales.

Referring to Bulgarian *chalga*, Kurkela points out that Saidian Orientalism does not fit well; the meaning of Orientalism for Bulgarians is very different from meanings in Western Europe or America.⁹⁸ Bulgaria, like the rest of the Balkan Peninsula, has been subordinated to eastern empires in the past, Byzantine, Ottoman and Soviet and thus cannot be considered post-colonial in the conventional sense. Geographically it is securely in Europe (though not necessarily ‘of’ Europe). Thus Todorova’s Balkanism, valued either as a variant or separate discourse to Orientalism, is better able to capture the Bulgarian and regional situation. Kurkela writes that the ‘Ottoman legacy makes the meaning of oriental popular music positive – the negative connotations typical of the Saidian idea of orientalism disappear’.⁹⁹ Contradicting this view however, it a consistent theme in Balkan nation states

⁹⁴ Vesa Kurkela “Bulgarian Chalga on Video: Oriental Stereotypes, Mafia Exoticism, and Politics” in Donna A. Buchanan, ed., *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 143-174.

⁹⁵ Margaret H. Beissinger “Muzică Orientală: Identity and popular culture in Postcommunist Romania” in Donna A. Buchanan, ed., *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 95-142.

⁹⁶ Stokes, *The Arabesk debate*

⁹⁷ Branko Kostelnik “The Decline and Fall of Rock ‘n Roll: Main Characteristics and Trends of Croatian Popular Music in the Second Half of the Nineteen-Nineties” in, Mark Yoffe and Andrea Collins, (eds.) *Rock & Roll and Nationalism: A Multinational Perspective* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 20-33.

⁹⁸ Kurkela, “Bulgarian Chalga on Video”, 170.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 172.

(particularly amongst national elites) – the shame of the Ottoman era and its legacy. It is precisely against this legacy that hybrid oriental folk styles are criticised.

Self-exoticism and inversion of Balkan stereotypes have both played an important role in the turbofolk scene. Just as Iordanova deduces that the ‘orientalisation’ of the Balkans has been partly carried out by Balkan filmmakers,¹⁰⁰ the same can be said for turbofolk and the creative industries in general.¹⁰¹ In the turbofolk scene, ‘Balkan’ is often invoked either in the form of self-exoticism or alternatively, the stereotyped concept is inverted and positive attributes are gained by ‘Balkan’ while an occidental other may be scorned (this is examined in more detail, see 4.3). Ivan Čolović writes that of the examples of resistance to negative stereotypes of the Balkans which found expression in the 1990s, the new music folklore (turbofolk, chalga etc...) is at the forefront. ‘This culture arrogantly glorifies the Balkans as they actually are: backward, oriental, but own and close’.¹⁰² While this type of culture can be regarded as affirmative in the face of both cultural exclusion on the part of both national elites ‘who put forward their programmes for national emancipation, modernization and democratisation as a flight from the Balkans’¹⁰³ and stereotypes stemming from abroad it also shows that hybrid genres are ultimately dependent on national and western cultural hegemony.

The processes of ‘Nesting Orientalisms’ which gained a strong impetus in 1980s Yugoslav political and intellectual discourse were also reproduced in the sphere of pop-music as the next section treating NCFM highlights. In the early 1990s nationalising processes in Yugoslav states made national ambiguity undesirable and led to the ostracism of musicians

¹⁰⁰ Iordanova, *Balkan Cinema*, 56.

¹⁰¹ Volčič, “The notion of the West”, 168-170.

¹⁰² Ivan Čolović “Why do we take Pride in the Balkans?” *Bulgarska Etnologija* 1 (2007), 9.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

on the basis of ambiguous national declaration. For example Neda Ukraden, a Yugoslav pop-folk singer articulates the paradoxical nature of this. In 1993 she declared

the Bosnians call me a traitor because I'm not in Sarajevo; the Serbs call me an Ustaša and Alija's [Izetbegović] whore because my career was connected to Sarajevo and Zagreb and they don't know I'm a Serb from Imotski; and the Croats claim I'm a Četnik because after 20 years of working with Zagreb's Jugoton, I chose Belgrade as the place I would live! When I thought about it all, I understood that my only sin was: being a Serb born in Croatia!¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Pero Zlatar, "Neda Ukraden tuži Republiku Hrvatsku za 200.000 DEM! [Neda Ukraden sues the Republic of Croatia for 200,000 DM]", *Slobodni Tjednik*, (Zagreb, 16 April 1993), Cited in Baker, *Popular Music*, 206-207

Table 1, The Balkan/Europe construct: Patterns of Association

| Balkan | Europe |
|---|---|
| <u>Negative Stereotypes</u> | |
| Turbofolk NCFM Rural Low Culture Village East Oriental Foreign Gypsy Other South Authoritarian Mud Islamic and/or Orthodox | Rock/pop 'Real' folk/'Ethno' Urban High Culture City West Western National Local Self North Democratic Asphalt Christian |
| <u>Inverted Stereotypes</u> | |
| Fun Soul Home Uniqueness Ancientness Authenticity | Work Coldness Abroad Conformity Rootless Modernity |

3.4 The Balkan/Europe construct: Patterns of Association

Following patters of internalised Balkanism (or Nesting Orientalisms)¹⁰⁵ the Europe/Balkan dichotomy is remapped and reappropriated across the region. The images and stereotypes supplied by the West form markers by which to reposition oneself in relation to others within.¹⁰⁶ Based on the various sources used in this thesis I provide a tentative chart (Table 1) which maps patterns of associations; dichotomies which frequently relate to each other. The chart is divided into Europe/Balkan vertically and common dichotomies are grouped horizontally under these terms. Some groupings are of course contestable; dependent upon which ‘bulwark of civilization’ an individual considers himself or herself to be located (if any), as well as personal opinions. The most variable are religion and political orientation which are particularly fluid depending on origins (i.e. ethno-religious identity) and ideology. Nevertheless I consider the chart to be a useful visual aid in conceptualising negative stereotypes and inversion of these associated with the Balkan Peninsula and turbofolk. While I do not wish to reify discourse by suggesting that it is entirely based upon the dichotomies listed above, such tendencies are nevertheless apparent in a number of studies of the region, particularly those with an anthropological slant where respondents were encouraged to discuss their impressions and interpretations of particular phenomena.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Bakić Hayden “Nesting Orientalism”

¹⁰⁶ Volčič, “The notion of the West”, 167.

¹⁰⁷ For example see the following; Gordy *Culture of Power*; Stef Jansen, *Antinacionalizam: Etnografija Otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu* [Antinationalism: An Ethnography of Resistance in Belgrade and Zagreb] (Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek, 2005); Miroslava Malašević, “Are there Nations on Planet Reebok? Local vs. Global Identity among Young Serbs” *Ethnologia Balkanica*, 7 (2003) 181-194; Volčič, “the notion of the West”; Karmen Erjavec and Zala Volčič, “War on terrorism’ as a discursive battleground: Serbian recontextualization of G.W. Bush’s discourse” *Discourse & Society*, 18, 2 (2007) 123–137 and “The Kosovo Battle: Media’s Recontextualization of the Serbian Nationalistic Discourses” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 12, 3 (2007), 67-86; Baker, *Popular Music*; Anders Stefansson, “Urban Exile: Locals, Newcomers and the Cultural Transformation of Sarajevo” in Xavier Bougharel, Elissa Helms and Ger Duijzings (eds.) *The new*

3.5 Newly Composed Folk Music – The Origins of Turbofolk

This section seeks not to narrate the development of NCFM in Yugoslavia but rather to link the discourse it generated from the 1960s onwards to turbofolk and related categories which developed in the 1990s. Similar themes are visible from the music's inception in the 1960s until the hyperproduction peak (*hiperprodukcija*) of the 1980s. NCFM was criticised on the same basis as turbofolk due to its rural or newly urbanised character, its kitsch aesthetics, eastern musical influences and as threat to 'genuine' folk (*izvorna*) music traditions.

From its inception, NCFM accentuated the difference between traditional and commercial folk music (folklore and kitsch) and a set of 'institutionally and psychologically maintained boundaries reinforcing perceptions of culture-core differences between Balkan and (western) European culture'.¹⁰⁸ Dragičević-Šešić, (writing in the early 1990s) opines that Eastern European cultures are 'almost exclusively' analysed from outside within the context of two contraposed models; an official dogmatic culture and a dissident culture,¹⁰⁹ these both being of limited scope with regard to socialist Yugoslavia. East/west, rural/urban dichotomies were more commonly invoked. By the 1980s, belonging to different cultural and civilizational frameworks became a central metaphor of a new type of 'ethnically based totalitarianism' with implicit racial undertones.¹¹⁰

Rasmussen writes that NCFM

Bosnian Mosaic: Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-War Society (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007); Živković, "Nešto Između"; Levy, "Who is the Other"; Buchanan, *Balkan Popular Culture*.

¹⁰⁸ Rasmussen, *Newly Composed Folk Music*, xix.

¹⁰⁹ For example Ramet, *Rocking the state*

¹¹⁰ Longinović, "Blood and Song", 635.

crystallized internally divisive issues, chief among them the distinction between Yugoslavia's east and west. The dominant position, that NCFM embodies an "eastern" cultural model of Yugoslavia, drew on two facts of regionalism: the greatest concentration of its audience (and commercial production) in the southeast (Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro) and its "orientalist" features, most prominently expressed in singing styles.¹¹¹

The 'eastern' image of NCFM was advanced by commentators particularly in Slovenia and Croatia where cultural distance was asserted against this 'populist, commercially assertive and aesthetically inferior' genre which threatened to reach national cultural dominance.¹¹²

The genuine popularity of NCFM in these republics was often attributed to migration from other more 'eastern' and 'southern' parts of Yugoslavia to Croatia and Slovenia.¹¹³ Processes of distancing in these republics were based on the assumption of cultural superiority (musically epitomised by *šlager*, rock and pop), rationalised by that which it negated – the Balkan other self, epitomised by NCFM.¹¹⁴ This should be seen in the context of the 1980s processes of differentiation within Yugoslavia and a revival of nationalism in Slovenia and Serbia. Intellectual discourse in this period emanating from Ljubljana stressed the innate civilizational difference between Yugoslavia's West and East and concern was raised about migration from the South and East and the possible effects this would have upon the Slovene nation. Calls were made for Slovenia's adherence to 'Central European space' and the loosening of ties with the rest of Yugoslavia.¹¹⁵

Central media in both Slovenia and Croatia curtailed NCFM's exposure. For example Radio Zagreb played NCFM only once a week during a listeners request show and TV

¹¹¹ Rasmussen, *Newly Composed Folk Music*, xix.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.183.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 138.

¹¹⁵ Dragović-Soso, "Saviours of the Nation", 166.

Zagreb effectively banned its broadcast for a period.¹¹⁶ Media ‘uncovered’ the thriving newly composed scene which had the ‘subcultural appeal of culturally “illegal” activities’.¹¹⁷ In this atmosphere, Željko Pervan recorded a NCFM version of the old Zagreb song *Serbus Zagreb Dragi Moj*. He turned this old ‘city’ song (which echoes to the Austro-Hungarian past) into an ironic parody of both the panicked cultural discourses and ‘Western’ Balkan stereotypes.¹¹⁸ The NCFM scene is portrayed by Rasmussen as encompassing both oppositional political activity and ethnic minority participation by the late 1980s.¹¹⁹ By this time processes of cultural and political nationalisation were occurring across Yugoslavia. NCFM consumption could be interpreted as a way of rejecting these dominant patterns. In Slovenia, ‘Balkan parties’ (featuring NCFM amongst other offerings) proliferated in the early 1990s on the alternative scene. On the eve of Slovenia’s declaration of independence on June 25 1991 a ‘Balkan Party’ was organised in one of Ljubljana’s alternative clubs and *Radio Študent* kept broadcasting Yugoslav music during the war in Slovenia after it had disappeared from official airwaves.¹²⁰

Asserting the popularity and omnipresence of NCFM somewhat challenges works which revere the heyday of Yugoslav rock and alternative music (celebrated for example by the 2003 film *Sretno Dijete* (Happy Child) and the subject of a number of scholarly works).¹²¹

This period (1979-1989) also coincided with a peak in production of NCFM thus suggesting

¹¹⁶ Rasmussen, *Newly Compsed Folk Music*, 184.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Svanibor Pettan “Balkan Boundaries and How to Cross them: A Postlude” in Donna Buchanan (ed) *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 365-383, 370.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Mitija Velikonja “*Ex-Home: Balkan Culture’* in Slovenia after 1991” Paper presented at Conference *Cultural Boundaries in Europe: the Balkans in Focus* (University of Lund, Centre for South-East European Studies, 19-20 October 2001), 13-14.

¹²¹ For example Gordy, *Culture of Power*; Ramet, *Rocking the state*; Gregor Tomc, “The Politics of Punk” in, Jill Benderly and Evan Kraft, (eds.) *Independent Slovenia: Origins, Movements, Prospects* (London: MacMillan, 1997), 113-134; and “We Will Rock Yu: Popular Music in the Second Yugoslavia” in D Djuriy and M Suvakoviy, (eds.) *Impossible Histories* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2003) 442-465.

that the dominance of rock music in urban Yugoslav cultural space was not at all absolute. Like rock music, NCFM also sustained a pan-Yugoslav orientation, exemplified by the rise to fame of Lepa Brena in the 1980s and her declared Yugoslav orientation. Ana Miljanić describes Brena as a ‘state project’ and Milena Dragević-Šešić considers her persona to have sustained [održavala] Yugoslavia.¹²² Brena incorporated this pan-Yugoslav loyalty directly into her work in a series of films and songs which celebrated Yugoslavia.¹²³

3.6 Serbian Discourse of Turbofolk

This section examines discourse of turbofolk that has originated in Serbia since the early 1990s. It identifies three general orientations towards turbofolk. This by no means an exhaustive list and frequently discourse overlaps between the groups. However such a division is useful in terms of analysis and helps to give an impression of some of the divergent views in Serbian society regarding turbofolk. The three groups follow the orientations identified by Miša Đurković and the fourth section serves to provide a space for the protagonists and consumers of turbofolk, absent in Đurković’s categorisation.¹²⁴ A far-right nationalist viewpoint generally considers turbofolk to be ‘garbage’, (*šund*) a danger to Serbian culture due to its inauthenticity – in particular its oriental and Islamic qualities. A non-nationalist or anti-nationalist orientation generally castigates turbofolk as an enabling factor of the Milošević regime and as a reflection of cultural and moral degradation of Serbian society. The ‘critical observer’ viewpoint attempts to examine turbofolk in a more logical way, taking into account the arguments of both nationalist and liberal circles in regard

¹²²Sav Taj Folk

¹²³ The three part film series *Hajde da se volimo* [Let’s love each other] and songs *Jugoslovenka* [Yugoslav woman] and *Živela Jugoslavija* [Long live Yugoslavia].

¹²⁴ Đurković, “Ideološki i Politički Sukobi oko Popularne Muzike”, 280-282.

to turbofolk (frequently pointing out the similarity of both viewpoints) and avoids the excessive value judgements of the former groups. The orientation of turbofolk performers, consumers and associated media (generally tabloid dailies and weeklies) take a more agnostic view in terms of the alleged values that turbofolk espouses, being concerned primarily with production and consumption though entering debate occasionally though not in a cohesive pattern.

3.6.1 Conservative Nationalist Discourse of Turbofolk

Turbofolk has encountered conservative resistance which seeks to ‘erase’ the phenomenon as a part of an undesirable ‘Turkish’ aspect of Serb identity that must be uprooted.¹²⁵ ‘This discourse is based on a cultural-racist resistance to cultural influences that are in general recognised as malignant tissue in the healthy body of the true Serb’.¹²⁶ Ivan Čolović opines that

Nationalists strive to split the continuous spectrum of various hues and varieties of a single cultural model into two or more radically different cultures. For example their goal is to split shared cultural heritage of Serbs, Croats and Muslims into separate systems of national cultures, with different languages, different cultural traditions and separate social and cultural histories¹²⁷

Turbofolk meshes various components of different cultures (e.g. Turkish musical traditions with Dutch sounding techno) thus violating the bounded national culture model. According to Živković, when it comes to ‘deep self-recrimination,’ ‘nothing in the Serbian repository of

¹²⁵ Dimitrijević, *NIN*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Ivan Čolović, *Kultura, Nacija, Teritorija [Culture, Nation, Territory]*” *Republika* (Belgrade, July 1 2002), 25-40.

themes could be as powerful as the entangled complex of the Turkish Taint'.¹²⁸ For traditionalists, cultural conservatives and self-declared nationalists such as composer Zoran Hristić, Pavle Aksentijević, singer Miroslav Ilić and media figures such as Nena Kunijević, turbofolk is seen as an attack on the Serbian spiritual tradition.¹²⁹ Đurković adds that holders of this view consider communism to have intentionally imposed 'Asiatic rhythms' and oriental elements upon Serbs while what he terms 'an incorrect historical perception of Serbian identity' wishes to see this identity derived exclusively from central Serbia (Šumadija).¹³⁰ For example during a July 1994 session of Serbian parliament, member of the opposition coalition DEPOS (and choral singer) Pavle Aksentijević played a song by Serbian turbofolk performer Dragana Mirković. He juxtaposed this with a nearly identical sounding contemporary Iranian pop song, accusing the establishment of deliberately polluting "Serbdom" with oriental tunes.¹³¹ Ultranationalist *Radio Ponos* (Radio Pride) director Zoran Đokić showed similar contempt towards the oriental nature of turbofolk, for example stating that even though folk performer Branka Sovrić was not Muslim, her songs 'sound very Islamic' and as a result his station did not play her.¹³²

In the post 2000 period, Čolović writes of the return of culture as a means of nationalist instrumentalisation.¹³³

'National workers' are no longer engaged in drawing maps of the future Serb lands, which used to be their main preoccupation before and during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia Hercegovina, but are instead concentrating on the preservation of the allegedly endangered Serb 'spiritual space', i.e. of Serb national identity. In that, they rely on a model of national culture in which cultural activity is seen as an integral component

¹²⁸ Marko Živković, "Too Much Character, Too Little *Kultur*: Serbian Jeremiads 1994-1995" *Balkanologie*, 2 (December 1998).

¹²⁹ Đurković, "Ideološki Sukobi", 280.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 280-281.

¹³¹ Živković, "Serbian Jeremiads"

¹³² Gordy, *Culture of Power*, 134.

¹³³ See the song 'Oro' (4.5) for an example of this in the Serbian music industry.

of preparing the nation for war, as support for the war effort, or as a continuation of war by other means¹³⁴

Thus preserving the national cultural corpus remains (with the exclusion of turbofolk as a necessary corollary) an integral nationalist strategy. Despite the often cited links between nationalist mobilisation and turbofolk, this category of music remains contested in nationalist circles, particularly amongst those who stress the necessity of maintaining a homogenous national culture.

3.6.2 Anti-nationalist discourse of turbofolk

Anti-nationalist (or non-nationalist) views of turbofolk frequently castigate it as a by-product of the Milošević era. Đurković terms the opponents of turbofolk of this orientation as ‘so called globalists or cosmopolitans’, mainly drawn from the ‘pre Milošević socialist elite’.¹³⁵ He includes a number of Serbian public figures who have addressed turbofolk within this group including scholars Milena Dragičević-Šešić and Ivana Kronja, and journalist Petar Luković. However opposition of turbofolk is not based solely an anti-nationalist viewpoint but also generally included further criticism of turbofolk.

During fieldwork in Belgrade in 1996-1998 Stef Jansen asserts that in addition to a musical style, turbofolk (and synonyms *narodnjaci*, *neofolk* etc...) ‘constitute a whole universe of meaning, closely linked with the rise of nationalism and wars’.¹³⁶ He considers those who opposed turbofolk on this basis to generally be self-declared non-nationalist or

¹³⁴Čolović “Kultura, Nacija, Teritorija”

¹³⁵ Đurković, “Ideološki Sukobi”, 281.

¹³⁶ Stef Jansen, “Svakodnevni Orijetalizam: Doživljaj ‚Balkana‘/ ‚Evrope‘ u Beogradu i Zagrebu [Everyday Orientalism: the experience of Balkan/Europe in Belgrade and Zagreb]” *Filozofija i Društvo* XVII (2002) 33-71, 40.

antinationalist and politically oriented within the opposition to Milošević.¹³⁷ Gordy's research shows a similar pattern; he observes that musical taste became an important indicator not only between the 'distinction between urban and peasant culture' but of orientation towards the regime'.¹³⁸ So while turbofolk was opposed as a symbol of Serbian nationalism, moral decline and Milošević's regime, other value judgements are also very apparent. From the anti-nationalist standpoint this includes 'xenophobic', 'violent', 'cheap', 'kitsch', 'tasteless' and vulgar;¹³⁹ and 'garbage', *gastarbeiter*-like, 'primitive' and 'Balkan',¹⁴⁰ giving turbofolk more symbolic potency than its nationalist connotations alone.

More recently, Miroslava Malešević gauges the attitudes of a number of Belgrade high school students with regards to turbofolk. She finds that their evaluations are uniformly negative. She writes that many of their responses mirror that of newspaper articles which had severely criticised turbofolk in that time period (2002-2003). Three notable criticisms arose, based on a rural/newly urbanised/peasant qualities, kitsch aesthetics and the oriental nature of the music¹⁴¹ thus continuing the trend that Gordy and Jansen have observed in the previous decade apart from the notable absence of turbofolk as connected to the (by then defunct) Milošević regime.

Gordy observes that in Belgrade, rock music is perceived as high art and 'implicitly opposed to neofolk, which is regarded as "Balkan" and "primitive".¹⁴² It is abundantly clear that turbofolk feeds into the larger rhetorical framework of urban versus rural; (a framework which is probably the most common non-nationalist way of understanding events in

¹³⁷ Ibid. 41.

¹³⁸ Gordy, *Culture of Power*, 105.

¹³⁹ Jansen "Orientalizam", 42.

¹⁴⁰ Gordy, *Culture of Power*, 140-164.

¹⁴¹ Malešević "Are there Nations on Planet Reebok?", 186.

¹⁴² Gordy, *Culture of Power*, 144.

Yugoslavia)¹⁴³ and the Balkan-Europe dichotomy. During the anti-Milošević protests of winter of 1996/1997 in Belgrade there was ‘a self-conscious ban on turbofolk’ which ‘was considered the antithesis of urban dignity and subjectivity’.¹⁴⁴ The opposition radio station B92 ‘prided itself that it had never played one *narodnjak*’.¹⁴⁵ *Otpor*, the anti-Milošević student resistance group based part of their official Memorandum on the Orientalist theme providing possibly the most blatant example of orientalist on the part of Serbian liberals. The group asserted that in Serbia ‘two fundamentally opposed tendencies’ were present which stemmed from ‘two completely disparate historical and cultural roots’, one European, the other ‘Asiatic’ not called so because of its geographical origins but rather due to the ‘mentality it inherited from the Ottoman sultanate and Islamic Jamahiriya’.¹⁴⁶ During a demonstration in Niš in February 2000 entitled ‘Converts to Islam Investigation’ *Otpor* activists incited people to speak their minds in favour of an Asiatic Serbia modelled upon Turkey, Iraq or Lebanon or in favour of a ‘European democratic Serbia’.¹⁴⁷ Through such rhetoric *Otpor* both distorts Serbian history and identity and discredits swathes of the Middle East and Islam as a religion in general. The distance between *Otpor*’s view and that of nationalists which proclaim Serbia as a ‘bulwark against the Islam’ and dread the ‘terrible Turk’ is revealed to be not so great in that the same rhetorical techniques is used in terms of Islam and the orient in general. This can be interpreted as part of an ongoing political

¹⁴³ Keith Brown, “Beyond Ethnicity: the politics of urban nostalgia in modern Macedonia” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 11, 2 (2001), 417-442; see also, Stef Jansen “Who’s Afraid of White Socks? Towards a critical understanding of post-Yugoslav urban self-perceptions” *Ethnologia Balkanica*, 9 (2005) 151-167, 154.

¹⁴⁴ Stef Jansen “The streets of Belgrade. Urban space and protest identities in Serbia” *Political Geography*, 20 (2001) 30-55, 49-50.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (Ironically in the post 2000 period B92 television is often criticised for emulating TV Pink (with ‘low culture’ programming and incessant advertising) presumably for commercial reasons).

¹⁴⁶ Vladimir Marković “‘Druga Srbija’ u Diskrepanciji: Elementi ideologija neoliberalizma i orijentalizma u procesu konstituisanja jednog balkanskog civilnog društva [The Other Serbia’ in discrepancy: The Elements of Neoliberal and Orientalist Ideologies Incorporated in the Process of the Development of a Civil Society in the Balkans]” *Diskrepancija*, 2, 3 (2001) 1-6, 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

problem in Serbia today whereby the liberal elite is incapable of communicating with a large portion of the nation it wishes to lead, ‘imprisoned’ by false stereotypes.¹⁴⁸

3.6.3 Critical Observer – Problematising ‘turbo’ discourse

Đurković writes that since 2000 a number of observers have strongly criticised the previous two views of turbofolk declaring them to be ‘culturally racist’ or even ‘protofascists’ because of their negative stance towards oriental elements in music.¹⁴⁹ There has been a corresponding interest in examining turbofolk as the local expression of global processes in Serbia.¹⁵⁰ This group centres around *Citok* and the magazine *Prelom*.¹⁵¹ In mainstream press two articles criticised conventional narratives about turbofolk in *NIN* in 2002 and 2004. Branislav Dimitrijević stresses the similarity of the arguments between conservative right-wingers such as Aksentijević and liberals such as the *Otpor* (Resistance) anti-Milošević movement with both hinging on the idea of ‘European Serbia defending ungrateful Europe from an Ottoman invasion’ with Turbofolk being a sign of this ‘Asiatic mentality’.¹⁵² Zoran Cirjaković furthers this argument and links turbofolk to global trends maintaining that similar styles of music have appeared all over the world ‘from Casablanca to Jakarta and Tirana to Tijuana’.¹⁵³ He polemically castigates an ‘urbane leftist’ Belgrade view of turbofolk in terms of Orientalism.

They appear to be horrified with everything coming from the Serb cultural scene south or east of the centre of Belgrade. Anything coming from Guća or Vranje,

¹⁴⁸ Cirjaković, *NIN*

¹⁴⁹ Đurković, “Ideološki Sukobi”, 281; (Alternatively, the term ‘urban-micro-fascist’ has been suggested by Olga Dimitrijević)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Cirjaković, *NIN*.

frequently resembles products of distant Bombay, Algiers, and Cairo, is for them part of everything that prevents the acceptance of ‘Western Civilisation’. The real problem is not, as they claim that turbofolk is bad (which it often is) or that is nationalist (which it usually isn’t) but rather that turbofolk is too ‘Asiatic’ and ‘Oriental’. The majority of these cultural racists are convinced that most of Serbia, Asia and the Orient are in fact ugly, dirty, primitive and incurably un-European places.¹⁵⁴

Both authors point out that conventional aesthetic criticism associated with turbofolk – (e.g. by Kronja or Gordy) – iconography of ‘objectified women’ and ‘gold chains on muscular men’ is representative of the average music video shown on MTV¹⁵⁵ while the authors assert that turbofolk can also be ‘anti-establishment, subversive, feminist and even avant-garde’.¹⁵⁶ Similarly a recent Croatian television programme featuring a stand-up comedian translated the lyrics of American/British music to demonstrate that misleading assumption that Balkan song lyrics have a monopoly on sexism and banality.¹⁵⁷

Following this more critical approach towards turbofolk, Grujić argues that ‘understanding of turbo-folk as a transgressing and liberating phenomenon is, to a certain extent, as possible as treating this as a pro-conservative and traditionalist main-stream social concepts concept’.¹⁵⁸ However she notes that generally the hybrid nature of turbofolk has not been perceived as an expression of cultural freedom but on the contrary, as an act of repression over other cultural forms.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Dimitrijević, *NIN*.

¹⁵⁶ Ćirjaković, *NIN*

¹⁵⁷ Ivana Ćosić, Personal Communication, 16 May 2009.

¹⁵⁸ Grujić “Inclusiveness of the Turbo Folk Music Scene”, 1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 6.

3.6.4 Performers and media: Ambivalent turbofolk producers and consumers

The general response of performers and producers of turbofolk to criticism is to claim that it is the music of ‘the people’ (*narod*), the type of music that people wanted to hear at concerts, weddings, and other public gatherings and that criticism is discriminatory and based primarily on cultural elitism.¹⁶⁰ Performers themselves have often been unwilling to use the term ‘turbofolk’ outright to describe their music. Ceca states that ‘in the beginning of my career I sang a lot of folk [*narodna*] music. In the beginning of the 1990s I mixed rock with *narodnjake* [NCFM] ... I think what I sing is not folk music. You have some of it, folk motifs, techno ... it’s something in between’.¹⁶¹ When genre came into question during an interview, performer Mira Škorić also avoided terming her music turbofolk, instead focusing on defining ‘good’ or ‘bad’ music. ‘On every album I have a lots of pop, and super, super folk [*narodnjake*]...I just divide music into good or bad, the genre isn’t important’.¹⁶²

Some performers have stated that they have been victims of prejudice because of their ‘turbo’ profession. Indira Radić declares that her vocal support of former Yugoslavia’s gay community is linked to her own experience of prejudices associated with her turbofolk career and her rural background. She declares

People who hate somebody because of their sexual orientation, slave themselves to stereotypes. I have myself often felt these [stereotypes], because they have hated and patronised me [*omalovažavati*] because of the work that I do. They have called me

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 7.

¹⁶¹ Interview with Ceca, *Sav Taj Folk*

¹⁶² Interview with Mira Škorić, *Sav Taj Folk*

provincial, folkie [narodnjakuša]...they hate a picture of me which they have created in their own head.¹⁶³

Jelena Karleuša also includes herself as a victim of prejudice, somebody who has ‘many times felt not accepted in this country’ (presumably due to her controversial turbofolk public persona), including herself with the gay minority on this basis, while defending gay rights on a TV Pink talk-show in November 2008.¹⁶⁴ While initially appealing to the Serbian public on a the basis of national flattery (‘our people [narod] always displays an inclination to accept and understand’), Karleuša later invokes the Balkan/Europe construct, attributing an ‘open mind’ and tolerance for gays as inherently European, and appealing for acceptance for gays so that Serbia can ‘finally be a part of Europe’. In contrast she warns that ‘people who think like Saša [Pantić – homophobic actor] bring us back to the 19th, 18th and 17th centuries of Serbia’,¹⁶⁵ thus evoking orientalist imagery of a less civilised past.

Serbian tabloid newspapers (*Alo*, *Dnevni Kurir*), magazines (*Svet*, *Skandal*) and commercial television stations (*Pink*, *DM Sat*, *BN TV*) report on the professional activities and personal lives of turbofolk performers (as well as other Serbian, former Yugoslav and international celebrities) and rather than taking ideological or value oriented stances towards turbofolk as a concept, are concerned chiefly with its production and consumption. While some take a rather hard-line political stance (particularly daily tabloids such as *Dnevni Kurir*) the majority generally treat celebrity lifestyles in former Yugoslavia as occurring within a single cultural space and in a way contribute to maintenance of a post-Yugoslav pop-cultural community.

¹⁶³ Jordan Ginović “Indira Radić: Stala bih uz svog gej sina [Indira Radić: I would stand behind my gay son] *Svet* (Belgrade, 7 February 2009) Available online at:

<http://www.gayecho.com/interview.aspx?id=8175&grid=4481&page=11>

¹⁶⁴ “Piramida”, *TV Pink*, 20 November 2008. Available online at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ha5k-jHxcPY>

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

3.7 Croatian Discourse of Turbofolk

The term ‘turbofolk’ is said to have been introduced to Croatia in 1994 in a report in the weekly *Globus* which emphasised the ‘conspicuous consumption and macho gangsterism’ surrounding it.¹⁶⁶ While the turbofolk category in Croatia can serve as an exclusionary discursive tool as in Serbia, it additionally draws upon the ‘Serbness’ of turbofolk as a further source of ‘otherness’ furthering its exclusionary power in Croatian discourse. The first section examines this; the symbolic exclusion based on turbofolk’s ‘Serbness’ (3.5.1). The second section looks at turbofolk as an annoyance, or a social ill (3.5.2) which is not necessarily due to its ‘Serbness’ but rather the implicit danger and subversiveness that turbofolk can represent and its ‘low culture appeal’. The third part looks at how turbofolk can provide a rhetorical tool of inclusion and exclusion in Croatian cultural space (3.5.3) and the fourth part accounts for alternative views (3.5.4).

3.7.1 The symbolic exclusion of Serbia/Yugoslavia

The processes of nationalisation that occurred during the Tuđman era (1990-1999) have been documented by many authors.¹⁶⁷ Features of this included the purification of the Croatian language, renaming of streets and other symbolic practices, most of which remain intact to this day (for example the omission of a road sign for Belgrade on the Zagreb-Belgrade highway until close to the border). As part of this broader process, Croatian popular

¹⁶⁶ Baker, *Popular Music*, 166.

¹⁶⁷ See Ugrešić, *Culture of Lies*; Mark Thompson *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina*. (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1999) 135-209; Marius Sjøberg, “Croatia since 1989: The HDZ and the Politics of Transition” in Sabrina Ramet and Davorka Matic, (eds.) *Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value Transformation, Education and Media*. (College Station TX : Texas A & M Press), 31-63; Gordana Uzelac “Franjo Tuđman's Nationalist Ideology” *Eastern European Quarterly*, 31, 4 (1998); Alex Bellamy, *The Formation of Croatian National Identity*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003).

music was conceptualised as ‘excluding any signifiers of ‘enemy’ Serbian culture’.¹⁶⁸ Beginning in the late 1990s and particularly after the 2000 regime changes in Serbia and Croatia, new forms of cooperation began between former Yugoslav republics, both economic and cultural.¹⁶⁹ These processes in popular music have been observed by Baker who demonstrates how transnational musical figures are interpreted as ‘symbolic reference points in ethno-political discourse’ and believes that the reception of Serbian music in Croatia was more fraught than the reverse process.¹⁷⁰

Perhaps the most extreme example of Croatian exclusion of the folk category was the 1996 attack on Bosnian band Zabranjeno Pušenje in Zagreb. Indicative of the official position towards cultural products from Serbia and Bosnia, the president of the Croatian Music Union responded to the incident by legitimising physical violence against oriental music – ‘The Zagreb audience who beat up Zabranjeno Pušenje just showed that there is no place in Croatia for the eastern melos’.¹⁷¹ He added that his organisation would continue to make every effort to ensure that *narodnjaci* do not return to Croatia and if they did he promised their confinement to ‘*gastarbeiter*-like cultural reservations at the outskirts of the city’.¹⁷² Despite the relative normalisation of turbofolk in Croatia (in comparison to the 1990s) it is still excluded from all domestic television and radio stations (other than in satirical form or Croatised *ijekavia* variants) and represents a cultural, societal, and political phenomenon unacceptable for the wider public.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Baker “The concept of turbofolk in Croatia”, 139.

¹⁶⁹ Bojan Baskar “Within or Without? Changing Attitudes towards the Balkans in Slovenia” *Ethnologia Balkanica* 7 (2003) 195-206, 198.

¹⁷⁰ Baker, 2006, 275, 279,

¹⁷¹ Rasmussen, *Newly Composed*, 199

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Orhidea Gaura “Tinejdžeri opijeni turbo-folkom [Teenagers drunk on turbofolk]” *Nacional* 641 (Zagreb, 25 February 2008)

The controversy of ‘Folk-revija’, an event which would have been independent Croatia’s largest turbofolk music event demonstrates the contested nature of folk in public space in Croatia. Planned to be held in Zagrebački Velesajam with the participation of over a dozen Serbian and Bosnian folk singers, the event collapsed in ‘unclear circumstances’ in February 2007 after protests by a war veterans’ group. The organiser, *BN Televizija* from Republika Srpska, blamed the cancellation on threats while the veteran’s group accused it of being a publicity stunt.¹⁷⁴ For the veterans’ representative and a host on Croatian (folk) *Narodni Radio*, who appeared together on a Nova TV talk-show, the primary offence of turbofolk was political. The symbolic connection between turbofolk and Serb aggression against Croatia was invoked; “we had been attacked by that music.”¹⁷⁵ While turbofolk may represent a mere annoyance for many in Croatia, this incident shows the salience of the connection between turbofolk and Serbian nationalism for others.

3.7.2 Turbofolk as a social ill

Turbofolk as ‘garbage’, a social ill or a mere irritant, often based on urban-rural, west-east dichotomies (favouring the urban and western), is a prevalent view in Croatia and visible in public discourse. This view is not however necessary nationalistic or opposed to Serbian music per se – for some urban Croatians, ‘Serbian pop-rock and alternative performers exist as a cultural resource with which to distance themselves from musical genres they associate with the ruralisation (and Hercegovinisation) of Croatian city space’.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, ‘genuine’ folk is viewed in the context of ‘world’ or ‘ethno’ music hence avoiding the value connotations of turbofolk. This parallels its use in Serbia (see 4.5). By this logic consuming

¹⁷⁴ Baker, *Popular Music*, 198.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Baker, “The Politics of Performance”, 283.

‘authentic’ folk like Šaban Bajramović (Roma ethno-folk singer from Niš) can be understood as participating a global process for a Belgrader or Zagrebian who may loath both Croatian pop and Serbian turbofolk in equal measure.

Turbofolk in Croatia has often been addressed in media in the same manner as social ills such as drug abuse or teenage binge drinking. A 2008 report in *Nacional* cited young Zagrebians in a turbofolk club

“I am dead drunk amongst whores and bandits. Mother told me not to go, but here I am at Seka Aleksić. I have to go and see Ceca and then I can die” says a visibly drunk seventeen year old at the concert of the Serbian turbofolk singer... “Although we are intelligent, young and pretty, and we go to one of the best schools in Zagreb, we listen to *narodnjaci* already for three years. There are those who despise this music, but we stick with our taste” [the girl’s friends from 16th Zagreb high school].¹⁷⁷

Rather than a legitimate musical choice, turbofolk is often treated as a deviant and potentially violent activity. However increasingly there is a begrudging acknowledgement on the part of the media about the ‘normalisation’ of turbofolk clubs. As early as 2003 it was observed that ‘*narodnjaci* move from a booze holes (*birtije*) to so called elite clubs’¹⁷⁸ and that ‘in contrast to the 1990s...when music associated with the east was played only in dingy bars (*krčme*) on the edge of town because to listen to Serbian music was shameful, today kids in Zagreb have a wide choice of places to go out in that style’.¹⁷⁹ As well as being portrayed as rural or marginal, turbofolk is also associated with nouveau riche youths (*Zagrebačka zlatna mladež*)

¹⁷⁷ Orhidea Gaura “Tinejdžeri opijeni turbo-folkom”

¹⁷⁸ Ilko Čulić “ Severina je promjenom menedžera zauvijek nadišla ‘kulturnu razmjenu sisa’ sa Srbijom: Hrvatska Glazbena Scena 2003 [Severina, with a change of manager has forever ‘overcome the cultural exchange of breasts’ with Serbia: Croatian Music Scene 2003].” *Nacional* 424 (Zagreb, 30 December 2003).

¹⁷⁹ Orhidea Gaura “Turbobiznis narodnjačkih klubova [Turbobusiness of Folk Clubs]” *Nacional* 684 (Zagreb, 23 December 2008).

and the decay of the city's urban spirit and rock scene.¹⁸⁰ As *Jutarnji List* journalists observe, turbofolk is 'unfortunately, omnipresent'.¹⁸¹

3.7.3 Turbofolk as a Discursive Tool

The concept of Turbofolk is frequently used to as an exclusionary device in Croatia. Baker writes that the notion of Serbian turbofolk being rehabilitated in Hercegovina (commonly shaming the same milieux as *ustaše* music and insignia) has developed into 'a quick journalistic cliché'.¹⁸² The alleged penchant for turbofolk on the part of Hercegovinans is seen as evidence of their primitiveness and aggressiveness.¹⁸³ Journalist Boris Dežulović invokes turbofolk to demarcate long term Split residents (*Splićani*) from newcomers. 'It is forgotten that the new Split audience has been recruited largely from Hercegovina, where in the last ten years tens of thousands of new *Splićani* have moved, and to whom *narodnjaci* are somewhat closer than Oliver Droagojević [a native Split singer]'.¹⁸⁴ Yet within Hercegovina, there has been a concerted effort on the part of folk singers to distance themselves from turbofolk, thus exhibiting increasingly localised patterns of 'Nesting Orientalisms'. Mate Bulić, a singer who could be categorised as singing NCFM, described himself as a 'barrier against the east'.¹⁸⁵ Duško Kuliš, another Hercegovina folk singer (self declared *narodnjak*) stated that he can 'more than successfully...position [his music] against aggressive, eastern

¹⁸⁰ Kostelnik, "The Decline and Fall"; Jansen, "Orijentalizam"

¹⁸¹ Perić et. al. "Moja Štikla: Hrvatski folk ili nova Lepa Brena [Moja Štikla Croatian folk or a new Lepa Brena]" *Jutarnji List*

¹⁸² Baker, *Popular Music*, 168.

¹⁸³ For more about the stereotyping of Hercegovina Croats see Rasza and Lindstrom "Balkan is Beautiful", 637-639; Bellamy *Croatian National Identity*, 93.

¹⁸⁴ Boris Dežulović "Kraljice Marakane u Slobodnoj Dalmaciji [Queen of Marakana Stadium in Free Dalmatia]" *Dani* (Sarajevo, 5 July 2002).

¹⁸⁵ Baker, *Popular Music*, 167.

turbofolk’¹⁸⁶ He describes how turbofolk has ‘infected our youth almost like the flu attacks the body with a weak immune system. And with my songs I avoid that’.¹⁸⁷

Collaborations between (arguably the most famous Croatian singer) Severina and Serbian musical figures have triggered countless tabloid and broadsheet articles in Croatia often with the crux being her ‘Serbianisation’; evident from her work with music producers in Serbia and the incorporation of oriental sounds in her music.¹⁸⁸ A *Slobodna Dalmacija* headline reacting to her new single Gas Gas (described as a fullblooded ‘turbonarodnjak’) stated ‘*Kako je Seve postala Cebe*’ (‘How Seve[erina] became *Cebe*’, the Serbian Cyrillic equivalent of her nickname).¹⁸⁹ The concept of turbofolk is invoked either out of horror that a Croatian singer with such regional (Dalmatian) and national symbolism¹⁹⁰ had become involved in ‘Serbian style’ show business or to at least to present Severina’s career in sensationalist manner. In either case the contentious nature of turbofolk makes it a subject of interest, an occurrence that demands media attention and explanation to the wider public and a rhetorical tool with which to endow Severina’s musical endeavours with the connotations of cheapness, kitsch and ‘Balkanness’.

3.7.4. Alternative views of Turbofolk

In contrast to Serbia where a number of public figures and academics have challenged conventional views towards turbofolk in recent years and articulated a range of varying stances, it has remained a marginal object of interest to critical observers in Croatia. Branko

¹⁸⁶ Tanja Šimundić-Bendić “Duško Kuliš: Pravim narodnjacima protiv turbofolka [Duško Kuliš: With real folk songs against turbofolk]” *Slobodna Dalmacija* (Split, 20 April 2008)

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ See Baker “*Štikla* controversy”.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Pauletić “Pauletić: Kako je Seve postala Cebe [How Severina became *Cebe*]” *Slobodna Dalmacija* (Split, 17 May 2008).

¹⁹⁰ See Baker, *ibid.* 742-746.

Kostelnik has written a chapter for an edited work treating the decline of rock music in 1990s Croatia.¹⁹¹ This is however, of limited analytical use. Kostelnik concludes that the rise in popularity of Croatian dance music can be attributed to factors including ‘Poor education and the awareness of the majority of the population that one can easily submit to a commercial and trivial dance song’ and the ‘emergence of nouveau riche elite in the Croatian society that has kept its provincial cultural habits’.¹⁹² Rather than explaining the social processes at work, he laments that Croatia ‘as part of the sphere of Western European culture and civilisation’ was influenced by Hercegovinans who ‘culturally gravitate toward the east’¹⁹³ and thus adds to the Balkanist discourse of hybrid musical forms.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the principal themes in the discourse that turbofolk has prompted in (post) Yugoslav cultural space in the last decade. Clearly criticism levelled against NCFM/turbofolk on the basis of its kitsch aesthetics, peasant urbanite character and orientalist predates turbofolk’s association with the Milošević regime; such discourse is visible in tandem with the rise of NCFM. It has also outlived it – turbofolk still provokes strong negative reactions amongst many, despite its enduring popularity amongst others. Its potency as metaphor remains and it can be invoked as a rhetorical device to distance and vilify, particularly in the case of music which relies on folk motifs. The case of Croatian group *Magazin* discussed in the next chapter illustrates this well (see 4.4).

¹⁹¹ Kostelnik “The Decline and Fall of Rock”

¹⁹² Ibid. 31.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 22, 28.

4. Turbofolk in the Regional Context

This chapter examines turbofolk in the regional context. The first section (4.1) examines music as instrumentalised by nationalist agitators in Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s. By doing so I seek to demonstrate that turbofolk was not unique in that many of its performers lobbied behind the national cause. To juxtapose rock/pop and turbofolk in more than a metaphorical sense (or as more than a *relative* position at a point in time) is analytically problematic, a point that Gordy retrospectively notes regarding his *Culture of Power*.¹⁹⁴ The second section examines hybrid folk styles in the Balkan region which are comparable to turbofolk (4.2). Showing the interplay between the various styles in terms of their origins shows that turbofolk did not develop in isolation. It owes its origins at least partly to increased trans-national flows in the Balkans in the latter and post-socialist period. A comparison of the discourse that folk genres have generated in neighbouring Albania, Bulgaria and Romania shows that many of the criticisms of turbofolk are mirrored across the regional and are to an extent generalisable across the Balkan region. The third and fourth sections look at self-exoticism (4.3) and ‘world’ (or ‘ethno’) music in relation to turbofolk and Balkan. Departing from purely negative stereotypes which characterised much of the discourse already discussed in chapter three, examining these themes shows how Balkan stereotypes can be inverted, the meanings changed and commodified for a local and/or external audience. The conclusion then explores whether the similarities in popular culture in Balkan states suggests the emergence of some sort of a pan-Balkan cultural identity which transcends the national or alternatively whether these patterns, although similar, are still framed in national terms.

¹⁹⁴ Gordy, “Reflecting on the *Culture of Power*”

4.1. The Nationalist Instrumentalisation of Music: Comparing Croatia and Serbia in the 1990s

Rasmussen holds that a large majority of musicians of diverse genres (NCFM, *zabavna*, rock, *izvorna*) ‘supported, either explicitly or tacitly, the official positions of the emerging nationalist regimes and fracturing political units’ in Yugoslavia.¹⁹⁵ At the same time musicians who were amongst the sharpest critics of the socialist regime became champions of the nationalist cause,¹⁹⁶ mirroring the prior of nationalisation of the Serbian intelligentsia. For example rock musician Boro Čorba in Serbia wavered between support for Milošević and advocating an ultra-nationalist alternative. In Croatia formerly socially critical *novi val* band Prljavo Kazalište pre-empted nationalist mobilisation with the 1988 *Ruža Hrvatska* (Croatian Rose).¹⁹⁷ They continued with the 1993 album *Lupi petama i reci sve za Hrvatsku* (Stamp your feet and say all for Croatia) and played at HDZ gatherings. The nationalist instrumentalisation of NCFM can be seen as part of a general musical trend rather than a genre specific trait. It’s exclusion from Croatia national space however, gave it a certain potency as an allegedly autochthonous ‘Serb’ product. (A similar transformation occurred with the *gusle*, a single stringed musical instrument. While common to all Yugoslav peoples, in the 1990s wars it came to be appropriated and associated as an exclusively Serbian cultural symbol.¹⁹⁸)

A new genre of ‘war songs’ proliferated in the beginning of the Serbo-Croatian war. Drawing upon familiar a stock of Serbo-Croatian poetry, pop, rock and folk music, it reproduced this in contemporary colloquial forms characterised by obscene portrayals of

¹⁹⁵ Rasmussen, *Newly Composed*, 197.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Baker *Popular Music*, 60.

¹⁹⁸ Marko Živković “Violent Highlanders and Peaceful Lowlanders: Uses and Abuses of Ethno-Geography in the Balkans from Versailles to Dayton” *Replika: Hungarian Social Science Quarterly* (Ambiguous Identities in the New Europe, Special Issue, 1997).

actors in the war.¹⁹⁹ In both Serbia and Croatia the poor production quality and limited distribution networks for most unofficial war music (see page X later in this section for this division in Croatia) which was typically pirated and sold in kiosks through informal networks, appears to indicate that the respective regimes did not substantially support the subgenre.

Often these songs used the same melodies and symbols with the respective nation's lyrics represented.²⁰⁰ Čolović shows for example how anti-war Serbian band Električki Orgazam's *Igra rokenrol cela Jugoslavija* (All Yugoslavia dances rock and roll) was used by ultra-nationalist football fans from both Partizan Belgrade and Hajduk Split with lyrics adapted to glorify team and nation.²⁰¹ Radio B92 produced a special programme *Yu-Topije* (a play on the words 'utopia, Yugoslavia and *topiti* – to melt) to convey just how similar many of the war songs were.²⁰²

Some musicians engaged in dialogue by song. Croatian new wave rocker Jura Stublić released the 1991 *Ej moj družo beogradski* (hey my Belgrade mate), dealing with a wartime encounter between two former friends and now opposing soldiers. This was followed by a chauvinistic response in the same melody from Bora Đorđević (of Riblja Čorba) who takes up a Serb Barbarian stereotype. 'Good Zagrebian chicks, they were like toys to us; Ah my Zagreb pal, soon you'll sing in German...here we come to plunder all of you; My Zagreb brothers, I'm a peasant from Čačak, don't let me finish all of you.'²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Rasmussen, "Bosnian and Serbian Popular Music", 61-62; Longinović, "Blood and Song" 637-39; Svanibor Pettan "Music, Politics and War in Croatia in the 1990s: An Introduction" in Svanibor Pettan (ed.), *Music, politics and war: views from Croatia* (Zagreb: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1998) 9-28, 17-18.

²⁰⁰ Gordy, *Culture of Power*, 131; Longinović, "Blood and Song", 637.

²⁰¹ Ivan Čolović "Football, Hooligans and War" in Nebojša Popov (ed.), *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000) 373-398, 385.

²⁰² Dragičević-Šešić, *Neofolk Kultura*, 192.

²⁰³ Cited in Rasmussen, *Newly Composed*, 197-198.

Svanibor Pettan categorises Croatia wartime popular music into ‘official’ and ‘alternative’ categories.²⁰⁴ Official music cohered with official Croatian narratives during the 1991-1995 war and received the most airplay. Croatia was glorified in these songs and the cause of independence and war legitimated in a way to appeal to ‘European’ values of civility and democracy. Croatian state television (*Hrvatski Radijo i Televizije*, henceforth HRT) produced two of the wars most iconic songs of this kind, the 1991 *Moja Domovina* (My Homeland) by Hrvatski Band Aid (Croatian Band Aid) and Tomislav Ivčić’s *Stop the War in Croatia*. The Hrvatski band Aid project gathered ‘all but a handful’ of Croatia’s active pop and rock musicians under the tutelage of two well known show-business producers, Zrinko Tutić and Rajko Dujmić.²⁰⁵ Tutić described the project as ‘a musical symbol of the unification of Croatia’, the lyrics reflecting this, emphasising the righteousness of the Croat cause – ‘there is only one truth’ and ‘the whole world is now with us’.²⁰⁶ Most of Croatia’s most famous performers of all genres participated, communicating that there was no room for dissent in face of the Serbian aggression. It became a pop national anthem of sorts²⁰⁷ and is often sung at political gatherings to convey an appropriate sense of *domoljub* (love for the homeland). Ivčić’s *Stop the War in Croatia* of the same era strongly emphasised Croatia’s Europeanness and democratic leanings – ‘Let Croatia be one of Europe’s stars...we all want democracy and peace’ (sung in English) included footage from Brussels and EU flags.

More pro-ustaše variations on the war theme contained a more aggressive message and ‘Balkan’ as opposed to ‘European’ stylistic elements.²⁰⁸ As a result they were marginalised to varying degrees by state media though flourished on the black market as the previous section observes. Thompson’s *Čavoglave* is considered as paradigmic of the

²⁰⁴ Pettan, “Music, Politics and War”, 19.

²⁰⁵ Catherine Baker, *Popular Music*, 48.

²⁰⁶ *ima samo jedna istina.../...cijeli svijet je sada sa nama*, Baker, *Popular Music*, 49.

²⁰⁷ Senjković and Dukić “Virtual Homeland”, 53.

²⁰⁸ Baker, *Popular Music*, 61.

alternative variation of war music and remains a well known song.²⁰⁹ Baker observes that this division into official and alternative musical manifestations made by Pettan was more complicated in practice and considers that the divisions should be regarded as a ‘continuum’, not a binary division and she demonstrates the room for contestation within the broadly hegemonic discourse of the war effort.²¹⁰

In Serbia in the early 1990s the sort of state engineered productions that HRT engaged in did not occur because officially ‘Serbia was not at war’. The homogenisation processes of collecting a range of musicians from different generational and stylistic background (e.g. *Moja Domovina*) did not occur in Serbia until during the 1999 NATO bombing. Nevertheless the war and nationalistic themes were highly evident in the early 1990s. Dragičević-Šešić²¹¹ believes that all of the cultural models in Serbia that she identifies, (including what she terms ‘urban’ and ‘youth rock culture’) were affected by war discourse and exhibited various degrees of war idolatry. However she affirms that it was ‘populist newly-composed culture’ which exhibited this to the greatest extent.²¹² NCFM proved to be particularly vulnerable to nationalist appropriation due to its association as the ordinary people’s [narod] music (and thus reflecting popular national sentiment) as well as being viewed by some commentators as a ‘symbol of national homogeneity and refuge of Serbianhood each time external pressure threatens it’²¹³ However at the same time the nationalist discourse which berated turbofolk ‘making Turks out of Serbs’ and the rejection of turbofolk on the part of the far right should be kept in mind.

Despite some clear links between turbofolk and Serbian ultra-nationalism (in particular relationships between some performers, politicians and known criminals) the contribution of NCFM and turbofolk to the nationalist cause seems relatively weak.

²⁰⁹ Pettan, “Music, Politics and War”, 19.

²¹⁰ Baker, *Popular Music*, 62.

²¹¹ Dragičević-Šešić *Neofolk Kultura*, 187.

²¹² *Ibid*, 187-188

²¹³ Rasmussen, *Newly Composed*, 198.

Comparing the cases of Serbia and Croatia shows examples whereby a variety of musical genres became involved in nationalist agitation. While the identification of neofolk genres specifically with Serbia after its exclusion from Croatia and its folkloric bent certainly gave it a degree of potency, Rasmussen appears correct in commenting that ‘the music’s guilt by regime-association affords turbo folk a political power that, in reality, it never had’.²¹⁴ In a similar fashion *Vreme* music critic Teofil Pančić writes

All those who regard the turbofolk subculture as responsible for the dominant retrograde models and strategies of Serbian discourse should read again the last ten years of our respectable literary magazines and the cultural supplements of our most respected daily paper: in the endless poems of the ‘Kosovo cycle’ and other ‘nationally grounded’ creative works (*umotvorinama*) which will be found there, there is more simpleminded archaic kitsch (*arhikič*) and slimy (*sluzave*) pathetics than the turbofolk machinery could think up in the next two hundred years!²¹⁵

While Ceca is generally imagined at the far extreme of Serbian nationalist turbofolk (with Thompson as her Croatian equivalent) she separates this from her musical career to an extent. ‘Although I consider myself a big patriot, I have not one patriotic song in my repertoire; they are all love songs’.²¹⁶ Her role as Arkan’s wife is sufficient to engender notoriety that Thompson has gained from both his military persona *and* musical content. She does not claim this reputation on a musical basis. As if trying to divorce the nationalist and military (presumably masculine) associations further from her work, Ceca maintains that she is predominantly popular with women, particularly in her concerts abroad (for the diaspora) where she claims that 80 per cent of concert goers are female.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Rasmussen, “Bosnian and Serbian Popular Music”, 90.

²¹⁵ Teofil Pančić “Slika Orijana Džeja (The Picture of Dorian Džej)” *Vreme Zabave* (February 1995, 56-57 (cited in Gordy, *Power of Culture*, 160-162).

²¹⁶ Sav Taj Folk

²¹⁷ Sav Taj Folk

4.2 Regional trends of Balkan Hybrid Music

This section seeks to demonstrate that much of the discourse surrounding new folk hybrids at a regional Balkan level²¹⁸ resembles that in Serbia and Croatia. Comparing turbofolk in the former Yugoslavia to post socialist hybrid music forms in other Balkan countries is a useful exercise. Firstly, it suggests that turbofolk was not a specifically Serbian phenomenon but rather a Serbian manifestation of a regional trend. Secondly, stemming from this, it brings into question as to whether turbofolk was an organic development, stemming from grassroots popularity as turbofolk defenders claim, or rather enforced from above as detractors argue. The regional picture suggests it is part of a post-socialist grassroots phenomenon which can thrive without state media support (and even in the face of outright hostility). Thirdly, similar discourse patterns emerged in the region in response to the new folk hybrid genres. As with the Serbian case, a pattern is visible whereby turbofolk is consistently criticised on the basis of being an expression of ‘low culture’ exhibiting poor aesthetics, rural, oriental and uncivilised ‘Balkan’ qualities. The oriental nature and presence of ethnic minorities within hybrid folk music scenes is negatively evaluated against a bounded conception of national culture, the threatening presence of the ‘internal other’ is observable in all Balkan states.

²¹⁸ Here Bulgaria, Albania and Romania are examined in detail as they share some similar socio-political features as the former Yugoslavia, more so than Greece or Turkey. Macedonia is examined by proxy – part of Albanian cultural/political space encompasses Western and Northern Macedonia while Macedonia is involved in the Serbian and Croatian show business scene, e.g. many performers sing in Serbian/Croatian for the sake of a wider market.

4.2.1 Regional development, dissemination and exchange of hybrid musical categories

*The first verse is from Turkey, the second verse is from Serbia, the third verse is in Gypsy style, and the refrain from Greece, only instead of a bouzouki they've put a çifteli [Albanian instrument] (Announcer on Kosovo Radio, 2002).*²¹⁹

Chalga (чалга – also called popfolk or ethnofolk) is the most common name for a musical folk hybrid that emerged in Bulgaria in the 1990s. In Romania a similar phenomenon is known as *muzică orientală* and in Albanian inhabited lands (Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Western Macedonia) *muzika popullore*. All three genres in some way owe part of their origins to Yugoslav NCFM and in the 1990s were influenced by turbofolk.

In the Romanian region of Banat, Serbian musicians performed at weddings and NCFM audio cassettes began to circulate in the 1970s and 1980s.²²⁰ No official recordings were sold and neither was the music aired in media.²²¹ From the south, Bulgarian *svatbarska muzika*, (wedding music performed mainly by Roma bands) made its way into Romania.²²² As a result Timișoara (the capital of Banat) and Southern Romania became centres where the *muzică orientală* became popular underground forms, despite government initiated measures to eradicate the music in the 1980s due to both its Serbian qualities (and thus 'foreign' nature, which violated the national culture) and the presence of Roma performers in this scene who were at that time subjected to harsh assimilationist practices under the Ceaușescu regime.²²³

In Bulgaria, Yugoslav NCFM influenced domestic performers, becoming well known primarily with the dissemination of pirated cassettes.²²⁴ When the genre emerged it lacked a

²¹⁹ Cited in Sugarman, "The Criminals of Albanian Music", 271.

²²⁰ Beissinger, "Muzică Orientală", 106

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, 107.

²²⁴ Kurkela, "Chalga", 146.

single label but commentators insisted it derived from ‘Serbian ethnopop prototypes’.²²⁵ Adhering to the concept of ‘nesting Orientalisms’,²²⁶ patterns of perceived gradations of ‘westernness’, it has been suggested that Yugoslav NCFM was considered ‘more western’ than anything produced in Bulgaria and yet ‘closer to home’.²²⁷ The comparatively more liberal nature of Yugoslav socialism with its western trappings and glamorous *estrada* (show business scene) combined it to make it an attractive product of consumption for Bulgarians – NCFM was considered both ‘own and close’.

In the Albanian inhabited lands of the Balkans, cultural transmission which led to the emergence of *muzika populllore* occurred on a number of fronts. NCFM (and later turbofolk) was present since its inception in all parts of Albanian inhabited Yugoslavia as a direct influence. Cultural exchange with Turkey occurred via Albanian migrants, tens of thousands who had left Yugoslavia since the Second World War but had maintained links with Kosovo and Macedonia.²²⁸ Albanian musicians in Macedonia purchased Turkish synthesisers which came equipped with pre-programmed rhythmic patterns based on various Turkish genres and audio cassette recordings of *arabesk* stars were sent as gifts to remaining family members in Yugoslavia during the 1980s.²²⁹ At the same time in Serbia, *arabesk* began to enter public space beyond Albanian inhabited areas by the recordings of cover versions by Romani performers such as Muharem Serbezovski who sang these in Serbian. Commercial links between Bosniaks from Sandžak (a part of Serbia bordering Kosovo) and Turkey functioned as another source of *arabesk* and other Turkish genres. In the 1990s with the opening of

²²⁵ Donna A. Buchanan, “Bulgarian Ethnopop along the Old Via Militaris: Ottomanism, orientalism, or Balkan Cosmopolitanism?” in Donna A. Buchanan (ed.) *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008) 225-268, 233.

²²⁶ Bakić Hayden “Nesting Orientalisms”

²²⁷ Buchanan, “Bulgarian Ethnopop”, 233.

²²⁸ Noel Malcolm. *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 322-323.

²²⁹ Sugarman, “Albanian Music”, 287.

Albania's borders these influences began to take root across the entire Albanian community in tandem with influences from Greece, where many Albanians had begun emigrating to.

In Croatia where Serbian music was under a de-facto embargo in the early 1990s resemblances to turbofolk and the 'eastern melos' of NCFM was a recurring criticism in the domestic music scene. Nevertheless the common Yugoslav musical market until 1991 already provided Croatia with enough NCFM raw materials to repackage elements of it, albeit with a decidedly 'Croatian' flavour. In the reverse, it has been suggested that the proliferation of Croatian dance music in the early 1990s which facilitated the creation of a Belgrade dance club scene provided turbofolk with the source of its techno sound.²³⁰ Despite embargoes, piracy flourished in both directions and thus while not officially recognised, Serbo-Croatian cultural exchange continued albeit at low levels and in marginal spaces.²³¹ In war time Sarajevo a market seller when asked why he sold the music of Ceca, wife of paramilitary 'Arkan', (in)famously retorted, 'Art knows no borders'.²³² Similarly a Serbian journalist found himself in early 1996 the conduit for a number of Serbian turbofolk albums requested by soldiers of the Bosnian Army – 'Turbofolk was the only Serb product that the suffering and almost ethnically clean post-war Sarajevo yearned for'.²³³

4.2.2 Comparing Regional Discourses of Music to Turbofolk

The 'moral panic' generated by *chalga* in Bulgaria is remarkable similar to that of turbofolk in Serbia and Croatia, leading to heated public debates in the 1990s based on certain understandings of national identity which were perceived to be threatened by *chalga* due to its supposed primitivism and backwardness. This type of discourse can be considered

²³⁰ Rasmussen, "Bosnian and Serbian Popular Music", 88.

²³¹ For an examination of the resumption of inter-republican musical transnationalism in Yugoslav space see Baker "The Politics of Performance".

²³² 'Dimitrijević, *NIN*.

²³³ Cirjaković, *NIN*.

as excluding, or at least pushing to the margins, the ‘local other’ represented in *chalga* by Bulgaria’s largest minorities, Turks and Roma.²³⁴ A petition to the Bulgarian parliament initiated in December 1999 by various prominent cultural figures, requested the ‘cleansing’ of the national soundscape of what were deemed to be ‘bad’, ‘vulgar’, and ‘strange’ sounds coming from the ‘uncivilised’ experiences of local Roma and Turks.²³⁵ Levy notes the irony of established pop and rock musicians who had protested against censorship during communism, ‘loudly crying against *chalga* and calling for new institutional control to limit its access in media space’.²³⁶

Muzică orientală can be seen as an expressive form that both attracts and repulses segments of Romanian society by ‘challenging deeply held assumptions about culture and aesthetics’ – threatening beliefs about both where Romania lies in relation to the Europe/Balkan construct as well as where national minorities (chiefly Roma) find their place within contemporary post-socialist Romania.²³⁷ Like Croatia, Romania has a contested position on the Balkan Peninsula and the romance roots of the Romanian language and Romanian non-Slavic origins are often invoked in national narratives to distance the nation from its ‘Balkan’ neighbours following a trend whereby associations with the West are venerated. In contrast association with the east are interpreted as uncivilised and degenerating. Katherine Verdery observes that Romanian intellectuals frequently engage in a ‘defence of culture, of ‘authentic’ values...wrapped around definitions of national identity and national values’.²³⁸

The explicit oriental tone of *muzică orientală* has a polarising influence in Romanian society by challenging national narratives of ‘European’ belonging, and is used a cultural

²³⁴ Levy “Who is the ‘Other’ in the Balkans?”, 199.

²³⁵ Ibid. 208.

²³⁶ Ibid. 208-209.

²³⁷ Beissinger, “Muzică Orientală” 97.

²³⁸ Katherine Verdery. *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 94; cited in Beissinger 132.

shorthand which produces dichotomous value judgements. Its fans and supporters are considered to belong to ‘a nouveau-riche class that has emerged during the postcommunist period’, urban working classes and new rural migrants to the city while its detractors are ‘by and large, the urban elite – the ethnic Romanians who are relatively or well educated’.²³⁹

Beissinger notes the paradox that some of the most

outspoken critics of the ‘foreign’ nature of *muzică orientală*, comes from those who relish Western European and American popular music without seeing the irony within their own perceptions of what ‘foreign’ means. Foes of *muzică orientală* hear its ‘alien sounds’, ‘contaminated’ culture, and ‘banal’ lyrics; some also hear the death throes of the traditional genres with which they identify. Many view ‘Gypsy’ musicians as altering the direction of Romanian popular culture, a trend they loath. This phenomenon is not unique to Romania. It was and is happening elsewhere in Eastern Europe.²⁴⁰

Regarding Albania, Sugarman opines that ‘perhaps the most striking aspect of the genre [*muzika popullore*] is how much Albanians love to say they hate it’.²⁴¹ Like the Serbian turbofolk, the criticism is directed in three main streams; firstly its aesthetic values – deemed garbage (*shund*) or kitsch (*kiq*); secondly, as rural or peasant (*katunarë*); and thirdly, as oriental (*orientalizu*), Turkish (*frymë turke*) or Roma (*magjupsu*).²⁴² The development of this modern Albanian music according to many Albanian commentators occurred due to the lack of state oversight and thus is ‘symptomatic of what happens when there is no top-down monitoring of cultural production’.²⁴³ This implies the necessity of elite driven national cultural production to ensure a certain degree of cultural authenticity is maintained. A video director in Kosovo implicates Serbs in the ‘orientalisation’ of Albanian culture in a 2002 interview. ‘Albanians are a Western people, but this music [*muzika popullore*] had

²³⁹ Bessinger, 129, 131.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. 131.

²⁴¹ Sugarman, “Albanian Music”, 289.

²⁴² Ibid. 289.

²⁴³ Ibid. 292.

orientalised Albanians a great deal. The Serbs have imposed this music on us so as to associate the Albanians with the Orient, fundamentalism, and the like. This isn't our culture'.²⁴⁴

Across the region the respective folk hybrids are criticised remarkably similar grounds. For both cultural elites and a significant part of popular opinion these new musical forms represent something allegedly unnatural in national culture which is propagated by national minorities (Roma in Romania, Turks and Roma in Bulgaria, Serbs in Kosovo). This reveals an essentialist view of the nation and the taken for granted inferiority of the orient. This orient appears to manifest as resident minorities, influences from neighbouring countries and the Ottoman heritage as experienced by inhabitants of a state.

4.2.3 Grassroots popularity of musical hybrids

A dominant criticism of turbofolk music in Serbia is the Milošević regime's deliberate forcing of turbofolk upon the wider population as an instrument of his rule. Thus turbofolk is understood as an unnatural phenomenon which did not develop organically but rather was imposed from above. Gordy identifies a small number of production networks (four) in Serbia suggesting this as evidence of inorganic production methods.²⁴⁵ Yet the Croatian pop music scene shows a similar pattern whereby a small number of producers (Tonči Huljić, Zrinko Tutić, Rajko Djumić) work with large amount of domestic performers perhaps indicating that such a concentration is to be expected in small post socialist states. A more common criticism is that these producers in both Serbia and Croatia used political connections to for financial gain, which has been detrimental to other musicians and producers who may be more talented but lack important political connections necessary for

²⁴⁴ Ibid. 296.

²⁴⁵ Gordy *The Culture of Power*, 133.

success. Here the interests of business and ideology should not be conflated – TV Pink for example, often lauded as a Milošević regime tool has shown it is equally willing and capable to operate within the post 2000 political scene in Croatia. The first post-war return of Croatian pop performers to Serbia was believed to have been ‘greatly facilitated’ by Željko Mitrović, owner of TV Pink and City Records.²⁴⁶

Across the region various folk hybrids exhibit overwhelming grassroots popularity. Audio cassettes have been an important mode of transmission of folk-hybrids both within states and transnationally and in region folk artists appear to have consistently outsold more ‘high cultured’ genres, chiefly rock. Sales figures however are extremely contestable due to widespread piracy. In 1995 for example over 90 per cent of cassettes in Romania were pirated.²⁴⁷ Currently pirated music is easily accessible in most Balkan countries both in audio CD form and on the internet. Nevertheless estimated figures provide an indication of the popularity of folk hybrid music. In Kosovo, where the most successful pop or traditionally folkloric recording may sell up to 20,000 copies, a top folk album could exceed 70,000 copies.²⁴⁸ Serbian folk star Ceca was the best selling female singer in Slovenia by 2002.²⁴⁹ Folk hybrids have thrived in Croatia and Romania despite state media hostility hindering its transmission on radio or television.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Baker, *Popular Music*, 196-197.

²⁴⁷ Vesa Kurkela, “Music Media in the Eastern Balkans”, 181.

²⁴⁸ Sugarman, “Albanian Music”, 279

²⁴⁹ *Nacional* Editors “Slovenski hvalosjev Svetlani Veličković i zločincu Arkanu [Sloveneian eulogy to Svetlana Veličković and criminal Arkan]” *Nacional* 363 (Zagreb, 30 October 2002).

²⁵⁰ Beissinger, “Muzičá Orientalá” 128; Gaura “Tinejdžeri opijeni turbo-folkom”.

4.3 Inverting the Balkan Stereotype: Self-Exoticism (or Auto-Orientalism)

ma, kakva Evropa , na svetu nema to!

(Stoja, *Evropa*)

In unofficial cultural spheres of Balkan states, in arenas not dominated by national elites or self-declared cosmopolitans, the Balkan stereotype has indeed been inverted, negotiated and undermined. This manifests clearly in the case of turbofolk and comparable hybrid genres that have been identified in the previous sections.²⁵¹

The very nature of turbofolk and comparable genres, a mix of styles borrowed from numerous Balkan and European sources, appears to celebrate the heterogeneous and hedonistic aspects of the Balkans. The Balkans is frequently affirmed with positive attributes reflected in song lyrics. Seka Aleksić's *Balkan* appeals, 'this life is not bad...let everybody hear how we enjoy ourselves in the Balkans.'²⁵² Stoja's *Evropa* (Europe) similarly makes favourable reference to Balkan hedonism. 'You should know nobody has the life that we do, what's a dream for them [Europe] is every day for us. Once again, Opa! Everyone up on the table, who cares about Europe? Nowhere in the world do you have this!'²⁵³ Mile Kitić and Vesna Đogani similarly invert the Balkan stereotype using the *Gastarbeiter* theme, long a source for NCFM. In *Nema više cile Mile* ('The time for messing around is over', a pun on the name Mile), Kitić is working abroad in Europe and his lover (Đogani) wants to join him. Alluding to the problems that many Balkan citizens have obtaining visas she sings – 'I will search through the embassy, I don't care how such things work, I'll get a visa, it's urgent that

²⁵¹ Ivan Čolović "Pride in the Balkans", 9.

²⁵² Ovaj život nije loš.../ Baš svi, nek čuju svi / kako se veseli na Balkanu

²⁵³ Nema niko, to da znaš / ovaj život kao naš / što je njima pusti san / to je nama svaki dan / hej Još jednom pa opa / zajedno svi na sto / ma, kakva Evropa / na svetu nema to!

I go to you, what women in love wouldn't?'²⁵⁴ Kitić affirms that his heart is in the Balkans,²⁵⁵ and throughout the songs confirms to his girl that 'Balkan is better' – 'No Swedish or German woman can compare to you, there is no chance I would ever cross the border with them my love. France or Sweden is not your destiny, no chance my love, a Balkan soul is calling'.²⁵⁶

In Bulgaria, a 1998 album by Slavi Trifonov, *Vavilon* featured a story in the album sleeve. A venomous snake met a dog at a Balkan riverbank. The snake asked the dog to take him across as the dog was able to swim. The dog said he would but was worried that the snake would bite. The snake replied, 'why would I do that? If you sink I'll drown'. The dog agreed and the snake climbed on his back and they began to cross. In the middle of the river the snake bit him. As they sank, the dog asked, 'why did you do it? Now you'll drown too'. The snake replied, 'Because we are in the Balkans'.²⁵⁷ Levy views this not as a metaphor for dark and stereotyped sides of 'Balkan mentality' but rather as a semi-dramatic, semi satirical parable intended to parody debates and understandings of national musical identity according to which *chalga* is viewed as the enemy.²⁵⁸ Additionally, it can be considered a scoff at hegemonic western discourse which was given greater impetus during the 1990s Yugoslav wars.

Interpreting *chalga* in terms of this positive inversion Alexander Kiossev writes

It turns the lowermost picture of the Balkans upside down and converts the stigma into a joyful consumption of pleasures forbidden by European norms and taste. Contrary to the traditional dark image, this popular culture arrogantly celebrates the

²⁵⁴ Tražicu te preko ambasade / baš me briga da li takve stvari rade / hoću vizu, hitno idem tebe / koja žena kada voli ne bi

²⁵⁵ Srce je moje na Balkanu

²⁵⁶ Ni Svedjanke, ni Nemice / ti nisu ni do kolena / da s njima predjem granice / ma, nema sanse, voljena / Ni Francuska, ni Švajcarska/nisu tvoja sudbina/zove duša balkanska/nema šanse, voljena

²⁵⁷ Levy, "Who is the 'Other' in the Balkans?", 199-200.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Balkans as they are: backward and Oriental, corporeal and semi-rural, rude, funny, but intimate....It is a kind of willing regression into a great, scandalous, Balkan “neighbourhood” away from both Europe and the annoying official homelands.²⁵⁹

These types of representations help to define Balkaners as irrational, proud, passionate, loving and destructive, more so than Western Europeans. This can be considered as one particular strategy in the search for difference as a necessary emancipation from the west or as a bold form of resistance to western hegemonic practices (and local vehemently pro-European elites).²⁶⁰ Clearly essentialist, it exhibits a reverse ‘othering’ process launched against the west.

Volčić observes comments from Serbian intellectuals regarding Western Europe and America. In the words of a theatre director from Niš; ‘I travelled quite a bit in the western countries...Everyone is so nice there, but nice in a fake and boring way...I love life full of unpredictability, passions, love and hate. Westerners are dead, they are all dead. It is just that no one has certified them yet’.²⁶¹ This type of discourse still depends heavily on western hegemony and discourse of Serbia and The Balkans, resting upon the Balkan/Europe dichotomy albeit in reverse form. Self-exoticism has become a commodity and according to Volčić, a number of artists are able to convert Balkan marginalisation into a commercially viable product. ‘[R]espondents consciously borrowed and employed exotic cultural constructions inherited from the West, reproducing them in their artistic portrayals and mirroring (selling) them back to the west’.²⁶² This is particularly important in the genre of ‘World Music’, detailed in the following section (4.5).

²⁵⁹ Alexander Kiossev “The Dark Intimacy: Maps, Identities, Acts of Identification” in, Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (eds.) *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Boston: MIT Press, 2002), 165-190; 184.

²⁶⁰ Volčić, “the Notion of the West”, 162.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 163.

²⁶² Ibid. 168.

4.4. World Music and turbofolk

While turbofolk and similar hybrid categories are viewed as degenerative and usually hold negative connotations internationally, the category of ‘ethno’ or ‘world music’ in the Balkan context is on the contrary, frequently perceived as a valuable cultural resource, both cosmopolitan and urbane.²⁶³ In the narratives of world music in Serbia, Čolović considers ‘Balkan’ to act as a marker not in a geographical sense but as shorthand for certain qualities, implying that the music promises; ‘ancientness’ and ‘authenticity’.²⁶⁴ He observes that three prominent ‘ethno’ groups and a number of albums and compositions feature derivatives of ‘Balkan’, a metaphor for cultural roots and a Balkan temperament. This temperament means ‘spontaneity, passion and emotion, a temperament which goes to the ends of joy and pain’.²⁶⁵ Thus the Balkan stereotype is selectively activated but simultaneously steered away from neofolk identification due to its alleged authenticity and tradition.

In an effort to avoid ‘turbofolk’ categorisation, the inclusion of certain instruments and a specific ‘ethno’ sound can be combined with pop music and performed by pop or folk singers. Turbofolk turned ‘ethno’/pop singer Željko Joksimović successfully achieved this with his 2004 *Lane Moja* which was based on this formula. The song came a close second in the Eurovision Song Contest and became one of the biggest hits of the last decade in Serbia. The successful Eurovision placing, (gaining 12 points from most neighbouring states including Croatia) legitimised this approach in the mainstream music scene. A 2008 song *Oro* by Jelena Tomašević (composed by Joksimović) followed this pattern. It also cohered with the new

²⁶³ Ivan Čolović *Etno: priče o muzici sveta na Internetu* [Ethno: Stories about Musical World on the Internet] (Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek, 2006).

²⁶⁴ Ivan Čolović “Balkan u Naraciji o *World Muzici* u Srbiji [Balkan in the Narrative of World Music in Serbia]” *Novi Zvuk*, 25.5.2004, 59-62.

²⁶⁵ Čolović “World Muzici u Srbiji”.

model of nationalist discourse in popular culture as identified by Čolović²⁶⁶ (3.4.1). The song makes allegorical reference to Kosovo – ‘On Vidovdan, wake me up, so I can look at him/it [Kosovo] once again’.²⁶⁷ Though ‘newly composed’ with a folksy sound (thus fulfilling certain criteria for inclusion in the NCFM category) the song avoids the value judgments that this category entails by appealing even further to a ‘world music’ interpretation of Serbian folk – featuring ‘ethno’ musician Boro Dugić in medieval robes on a decidedly European platform – the Eurovision Song Contest.²⁶⁸

However despite the hybridity and multicultural nature of Balkan interpretations of ‘world music’ which celebrates the ‘Balkan mixture’, Čolović observes that the Turkish influences and the Ottoman legacy are still marginalised while a focus is placed in the Byzantine past.²⁶⁹ Ethno musician Bora Dugić, while respectful of the synthesis of the Balkans and valuing Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian or Macedonian styles equally, still views Turkish musical influences as a danger to the national identity and thus as something which should not be communicated to foreign audiences ‘lest they mistake Serbia for Turkey’.²⁷⁰ For Čolović it is evident however that the ‘ethno’ listeners are a minority in Serbia and the ‘wider population continues to mistakenly enjoy their Balkan music with ‘oriental spices’ – turbofolk.²⁷¹

In Croatia the ‘ethno’ or ‘world’ label is invoked in the same way as in Serbia, to provide legitimacy for ‘real’ folk while avoiding the problematic implications of the turbofolk or NCFM category. However such a strategy may not necessarily be successful. Croatian group *Magazin* (frequently accused of imposing NCFM type sounds upon Croatia in the 1990s) included a duet with notable Macedonian Roma musician Esmā Redžepova in

²⁶⁶ Čolović “Kultura, Nacija, Teritorija”.

²⁶⁷ *Na Vidovdan / probudi me / da ga opet pogledam*

²⁶⁸ See Čolović, *Etno: priče o muzici sveta na Internetu*

²⁶⁹ Čolović, “Balkan u naraciji World Muzici”, 62.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

2002.²⁷² Weekly *Nacional* however called it a ‘trash-*narodnjak*’ which followed ‘the Leskovac–Vranje–Kumanovo highway... [to]...the first *kafana*’. In Yugoslav symbolic geography the ‘*južna pruga*’ (southern track), on which these Serbian/Macedonian towns are situated, are a particularly loaded symbol of Serbia’s own orient, the south while the *kafana* is the source of folk music and a symbol of debauchery.

The distance between turbofolk and world music can be marginal; the most famous modern Balkan composer to an international audience, Goran Bregović, transgresses folk, rock and world music. His work with Severina is considered proof of her turn towards Serbian *narodnjaci* in some Croatian media discourses while Bregović is considered more ‘ethno’ in an international setting. His band Bijelo Dugme straddles the rock/folk divide in a Yugoslav context as well as appealing to Yugonostalgia.

World music allows ‘authentic folk’ to be consumed as part of a valued global process. In the Balkan context turbofolk is often seen in opposition to this, as unvalued and local. This allows claims of ‘ethno’ inclusion to be derided by counterclaims of exclusion and categorisation as ‘turbofolk’ or ‘narodnjak’. Evident in Serbian (and presumably Balkan if we consider the similarity of discourse of musical hybrids in the region) ‘ethno/world’ music is the exclusion of Ottoman/Turkish. While both ‘ethno’ and turbofolk utilise the symbolic ‘Balkan’ in their musical corpus as a form of self-exoticism, different meaning is interpreted. In world music Balkan represents ancientness, authenticity and (limited) multiculturalism while in turbofolk it frequently represents fun and wild nightlife as well as ‘home’. Both sets of connotations rely on the commodification of stereotypes.

²⁷² Baker, *Popular Music*, 169.

4.5 Conclusion – towards a pan-Balkan identification?

Considering the growth of pan-Balkan musical trends in hybrid folk genres (and to an extent ‘world’ or ‘ethno’ music) as identified in the previous sections this begs the question, do these cultural trends hark towards a form of pan-Balkan identification? Adela Peeva’s recent film documentary *Whose song is This?* seems to indicate not. In search of variations of the same song with different lyrics and interpretations in Balkan states, Peeva concludes that aspects of a common cultural heritage do not necessarily bring people together and in fact contested musical forms can become divisive. But her portrayal of the Balkans as an area of intercultural commonalities mired in ethno-nationalism does not portray the full story.

While cultural links are visible in hybrid folk forms and boomed since the end of socialism, these are not necessarily backed by an acknowledgement of intercultural practises on the part of artists. Stylistic eclecticism does not have to correspond with an unqualified embrace of regional belonging.²⁷³ Alliances vary between hybrid scenes. Rice writes that in Bulgaria *chalga* has provided space for an extended sense of national identity which includes Turkish and Romani elements.²⁷⁴ Serbo-Bulgarian exchange has proliferated since the 1980s, while Serbo-Albanian exchange has stagnated. Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian exchange has increased markedly since 2000 but this is often contested by elites. Sugarman reads the patterns of musical similarity in the region as ‘evidence for both alliance and cleavage, and as resulting in part from factors that are independent of political resonances.’²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Sugarman, “Albanian Music”, 300.

²⁷⁴ Timothy Rice “Time, Place and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography” *Ethnomusicology* 47, 2 (2003), 151-179, 42.

²⁷⁵ Sugarman, “Albanian Music,” 301.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Balkanism and Turbofolk: From exclusion to self-exoticism

Looking at turbofolk from the development of NCFM during socialist Yugoslavia to the present day in Serbia and Croatia, a coherent trend emerges whereby turbofolk is criticised in terms of its poor aesthetics, its alleged rural or newly urbanized character and its oriental properties. In Serbia this orient is considered to be both the Turkish/Islamic other and the internal Serbian orient, the south of Serbia (*južna pruga*). In Croatia the oriental quality of turbofolk is heightened by the additional Serbian association. This shows a pattern of ‘Nesting Orientalisms’ – each cultural barrier is seen as a defence against the east. Serbia must preserve its own integrity against ‘Turkish’ or ‘Islamic’ sounding music to prevent to ‘Tehranisation’ of Belgrade. Croatia must prevent the ‘inundation’ of Serbian turbofolk, music which is widely associated with the 1990s wars. This association makes turbofolk a far more potent style in Croatia than other Serbian music (for example rock or ‘genuine’ folk).

The negative attributes that turbofolk is commonly said to contain are usually multiple. Discourse shows that while for example anti-nationalists in Belgrade or urbane *Zagrepci* may criticise turbofolk due to its nationalist credentials this criticism is usually coupled with objections on account of its urban-peasant nature, kitsch value, banal lyrics and/or oriental sound. Like the image of an Armani suit paired with white socks, turbofolk provided a suitable metaphor for the processes of urban decay and cultural decline which are said to have occurred in (post) Yugoslav cities since the late 1980s.²⁷⁶ As a result, the use of ‘turbo’ or ‘newly composed’ metaphors has expanded into areas beyond the musical (see 3.2). The pro and anti turbofolk division (when it departs from a purely musical preference to the polemic) can be considered to symbolise a deeper problem in post Yugoslav states; the

²⁷⁶ Jansen “White socks”

inability of urban liberal elites to communicate with the wider population and the symbolic rejection of large swathes of the population they seek to politically represent.

The regional context suggests that (apart from the Yugoslav specific association between the Milošević regime and turbofolk) discourse is extremely similar across the Balkan nation states. Hybrid folk forms are rejected by sections of both the political right and left based on its kitsch aesthetics, rural/peasant urbanite nature and oriental sound and presence. This (internal) orient can include Turkish, Roma and Serbian to name a few. Rejection is frequently articulated in relation to national values; the conception of a nation state with a suitable bounded high culture or alternatively, the conception of a European leaning state which should consume the valued cultural products of Western Europe and America or an appropriate global or world sound. This global sound can sometimes be found locally, paradoxically, in the form of ‘genuine’ folk music.

In reaction to stereotypes and hegemonic discourse, some performers of turbofolk and comparable categories in regional celebrate the Balkan concept, inverting stereotypes and affirming ‘Balkan-ness’. This type of discourse can in turn Occidentalise the west to a certain degree, relying on an essentialist dichotomy of Balkan/fun versus Europe/boring – ‘what’s a dream for them [Europe] is every day for us’.²⁷⁷ While ‘world’ or ‘ethno’ music consists of local sounds commodified for an international (usually ‘Western’) audience, turbofolk commodifies the local for local/regional consumption. The ‘ethno’ category can be contested with reference to turbofolk music. In the Balkan context, turbofolk functions as a discursive means by which to disparage an appeal to ‘ethno’ categorisation. In Serbian narratives of ‘world music’, multiculturalism is celebrated but only to an extent – a line is drawn which excludes ‘Turkish’ or ‘Oriental’ elements from this genre and a focus is made on the Byzantine rather than Ottoman heritage of Serbia.

²⁷⁷ Stoja, *Evropa*

5.2 Some concluding remarks about turbofolk

In the methodology section, a number of questions were posed regarding turbofolk. Having examined turbofolk discourse and examined the regional perspective, this section refers back to these questions bearing in mind the empirical research of chapters three and four. Firstly, is turbofolk a particularly nationalistic phenomenon, in relation to other cultural forms? Some commentators from the region and abroad have declared so. On the other hand other commentators have pointed out that it was the Serbian intellectual elite which provided much of the ideological framework from which the 1990s cataclysm emerged with turbofolk being primarily guilty by association. Certainly the generally interethnic NCFM forms which dominated during the latter 1980s, exemplified by Lepa Brena and her Yugoslav variant on the ‘American dream’ and ‘satisfaction with life’ is at odds with the nationalist rumblings and the *mitinzi* (nationalist rallies) taking place across Serbia at the same time. Even Ceca, turbofolk singer and wife of Arkan, often posited as the ultimate symbol of turbofolk intersected with Serb nationalism began her career in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidža in the pan-Yugoslav folk festival scene. In the post-war cultural space of Yugoslavia her music is consumed widely by all national groups and her repertoire stays clear of patriotic themes. The most successful turbofolk artists perform across this post-Yugoslav cultural space and steer clear of political themes appealing for an audience beyond the national. Performers such as Stoja, Mile Kitić, Indira Radić, Seka Aleksić and Đogani are far more likely to invoke the Balkan theme in their lyrics rather than national (Serbian) themes. While turbofolk has certainly not resisted nationalist mobilisation at times, evidence suggests that it is not any more nationalist than many other cultural forms, particularly in the last decade. Examining the nationalist instrumentalisation of music in Croatia and Serbia (4.1) shows that many varying styles served the respective nationalist causes – that turbofolk cohered with this pattern does not appear to be an anomaly.

The second question in the methodology section inquires whether turbofolk was forced upon the Serbian populace or developed due to grassroots popularity. Section 4.2.1 shows that hybrid folk forms in the Balkan region disseminated frequently through informal networks often in the face of official (elite or state driven) hostility and that in terms of music sales, section 4.2.2 demonstrates that folk hybrids usually outsell other genres, sometimes at ratios as high as 3:1. In Croatia despite a generable media blanket on turbofolk, live concerts by Serbian and Bosnian performers are extremely popular as are *narodnjaci* clubs displaying a grassroots and somewhat countercultural appeal. While some business links between the Milošević regime and turbofolk scene are clearly visible this can be interpreted as pragmatic business move rather than ideological alliance; turbofolk producers are equally willing to work with the post-2000 political/economic actors as well as with other national business networks in former Yugoslav republics.

While turbofolk is often suggested as being an expression of Serbian isolation, section 4.2 shows how the various interlinks between Balkan styles of music which have interacted with each other. The regional context shows that post-socialist borders became more permeable while simultaneously the socialist state's dominance upon the cultural sphere waned allowing for the cultural production outside of ideologically or nationally appropriate forms which had previously dominated. Rather than suggesting that turbofolk arose due to Serbia's isolation, it can be convincingly argued that turbofolk thrived on new transnational cultural exchanges which flourished in the region. Similarly political and economic upheaval in Serbia and the region lent itself to widespread piracy, another enabling factor of turbofolk and similar musical styles to circumvent proscribed musical styles.

As discussed in the last section in the previous chapter (4.5) the emergence of transnational cultural patterns provide the means to both engender a regional identity as well the maintenance of existing barriers. While it is clear that performers appeal to a supranational

audiences at times, (for example to a pan-Balkan or pan-Yugoslav audience), these appeals are often contested and rejected. For example a controversy surrounding Lepa Brena's alleged war-time support for the Republika Srpska Army is currently surfacing in Croatian and Bosnian media (late May 2009) in response to large arena concerts planned for this summer in Zagreb and Sarajevo.²⁷⁸ A regional identification based on new forms of popular culture such as turbofolk is patchy and uneven. While Serbian-Bulgarian exchange for example is an ongoing phenomenon since the 1980s, Albanian-Serbian exchange appears minimal. Often exchanges are perceived as plagiarism – turbofolk has been described by a group of Belgrade teenagers as '*the worst of the lowest taste....mere imitation of Greek or Turkish tunes*'.²⁷⁹ Associations with eastern cultural forms are seen as lesser in value than those with 'Western' cultures (for example Yugoslav rock which could also be considered a local imitation of British and American forms but is generally held to be of high cultural value²⁸⁰). Manifestations of regional identification do not occur coherently and when they do, they are often rejected by parts of the domestic audience.

Following the view of Grujić who believes it is just as possible (to a certain extent) to consider turbofolk as liberating and transgressing than as pro-conservative and traditionalist,²⁸¹ turbofolk (and related regional styles) can be regarded as a musical form which challenges both national conceptions of culture as well as 'western hegemony' and 'cultural imperialism'. The chaotic fusion of styles renders it familiar and close but simultaneously exotic and decadent. It also should not be assumed that the music is always produced and consumed at face value –space for ironic distance exists. Both turbofolk and

²⁷⁸ See for example, S. B. "VIDEO / Lepa Brena u uniformi Vojske Republike Srpske u Brčkom: "Trenutak koji sam dugo vremena očekivala [Video / Lepa Brena in uniform of teh Republika Srpska Army in Brčko: „The moment which I have waited a long time for“]" 24 Sati, Available Online at: <http://www.24sata.info/mobile/vijesti/dogadjaji/6721-VIDEO-Lepa-Brena-uniformi-Vojske-Republike-Srpske-Brckom-Trenutak-koji-sam-dugo-vremena-ocekivala.html>

²⁷⁹ Malašević, "Are there Nations on Planet Reebok?", 186.

²⁸⁰ See Gordy, *The Culture of Power*, 144

²⁸¹ Grujić "the inclusiveness of the Turbofolk Scene", 1-2.

the panicked discourses it engenders can be a source for artists not usually considered as turbofolk – Rambo Amadues, Tijana Dapčević and Let 3 for example explore these themes in their work. Perhaps this shows that the distance between rock, pop or more alternative forms of culture is actually not that great.

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