

COMMUNITY AND THE POPULAR:
WOMEN, NATION AND TURBO-FOLK IN POST-YUGOSLAV
SERBIA

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no parts of this thesis have been submitted towards a degree at any other institution other than Central European University, nor, to my knowledge, does the thesis contain unreferenced material or ideas from other authors.

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Abstract

The thesis explores the representation of women in the *turbo-folk* music scene in Serbia in the post-Yugoslav period by examining the signification of gender and nation in women singers' performances. Turbo-folk has been the most popular music genre and the most developed music market in Serbia since the break-up of Yugoslavia to date, while the peak of its success was in the nineties during the period of rapid national homogenization in Serbia. The genre has often been criticized for political conformism and sexism promoted by its performances. In addition, it is often seen as an authentic expression of Serbian nationalist political aspirations, and "Serbian culture" which represents the existing social order and social values. I explore in what way the relationship between national identification and the representation of women has been constructed in turbo-folk performances. More to the point, I examine the interconnection between sexuality and gender dynamics represented in turbo-folk performances, on the one hand, and models of community and nation, on the other hand. I explore in what way nationalism is produced in turbo-folk performances, and how representations of sexuality and gender dynamics are employed in the production of national homogeneity.

The thesis analyzes verbal and visual performances (song lyrics, videos and public statements), anthropological observation of the audiences' practices and the analysis of interviews. I argue that the connection between turbo-folk performances and nationalism derives from themes found within *newly composed folk music* (NCFM), the genre that preceded turbo-folk, and was launched in the sixties during the Yugoslav period. NCFM genre constructed the relationship between an individual and the *community* (country, region, town, village, or family) as the main genre convention and ideological value. Turbo-folk in the nineties promoted ethno-national community as the most relevant construct of the community. This process was based on the constructions of gender paradigms immanent to the concept of the ethno-national homogeneity. Central to these constructions are heteronormative representations of women as loyal to community values and sexually subject to the model of man, created on the basis of the

socially privileged image of men in Serbian society. I analyze the images of women as they were developed in NCFM performances and the way they were transformed into turbo-folk performances in the nineties. I show how nationalism, ultimately, emerged and evolved as the turbo-folk genre convention, constructed through women's performances of heteronormativity, or to put it differently, women's heteronormed "stage identities".

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Pokaži mi da si šarmantan
Pokaži se da si galantan
potrudi se pa me zavedi
s boginjom me uporedi.

Show me how charming you are
Show me how gallant you are
Try hard and seduce me
Compare me to a Goddess.

Pokaži da si muško na delu
da nisi snob u skupom odelu
pokloni mi sitnice razne
pusti reči prazne.

Show me that you are a real man,
That you are not just a snob in expensive suit
Give me various small presents
Don't give me just empty talk.

Ako imaš petlju, ako imas herca
pokloni mi bundu od nerca
ako imaš petlju, ako imas čuku
dijamantski prsten stavi mi na ruku

If you have the nerve, if you get the courage,
Give me a mink coat
If you have a nerve, if you have a heart
Put a diamond ring on my finger¹.

Bunda od nerca (Mink Coat),
a song performed by Tina Ivanović,
female turbo-folk singer from Serbia)

Turbo-folk music; shows featuring criminals and people from the social margins; false prophets, clairvoyants and healers... glamorous fashion;...kitsch Latin American soap operas; and the like, have been complementing the political messages on paramilitary criminals/heroes, nationalism and xenophobia, and the collapse of moral values in a 'porno-nationalism' culture of sorts.

This system of values...is based on a trivial understanding of human, and especially male-female, relations; low cultural aspirations and kitsch culture; provincialism; misogyny; fascination with fashion, the entertainment industry and the body cult; and, indirectly, on a non-progressive and extremist rather than democratic political orientation.

(Ivana Kronja, cultural analyst from Serbia, 2006)

Turbo-folk is today the most easily recognized and probably the most controversial Serb brand. The "author rights" of all other products that we recognize as our inventions - from plum brandy to pepper spread ajvar - are shared by at least one other nation in the region. Sins of turbofolk are nevertheless incomparably lesser than the huge stigma it bears.

(Zoran Ćirjaković, journalist from Serbia, 2004)

¹ The authorship of many of the songs that were part of my research material (in terms of music and lyrics) remained unknown to the public, since the concepts of originality and authorship were not always among priorities in music business and representational practices in Serbia in the nineties and after 2000. For this reason the songwriters, except a few most distinguished ones, usually were not publically promoted. In this dissertation I indicated the authorship of the songs included in research wherever it was possible. The sources for the lyrics of the songs in this dissertation are mostly websites: www.tekstovi-pesama.com and www.tekstovi.net.

The club in the heart of the city is overwhelmed with loud disco music and young long-legged women with short skirts, naked shoulders and big earrings, who are dancing in a provocative, sexually explicit way. There are visible signs of plastic surgery interventions such as silicone breasts and lips implants, or missing ribs on many of them. Men mostly stand around and watch them with great interest. Some of them are these girls' boyfriends, others are hoping to find a girl for the night. Some men are young, some are old enough to be these girls' fathers – still, without an exception, all of them are having expensive drinks, and showing off the keys of expensive cars in their hands. Many wear Serbian Orthodox crucifixes around their necks and keep pistols in their pockets. The music coming from the speakers is the latest song of Ceca, often proclaimed to be the most popular singer in Serbia, “ a real Serbian woman”, “ the Serbian mother”, “ the most beautiful woman in Serbia”. There are many girls in the club that look and speak exactly like her: stunning “silicone beauties” with the minimal dress on their bodies. The music is a hybrid of mixed ethnic music phrases from the Balkans and South-Eastern tradition, repeated so many times in so many songs, and the MTV dance style production, also similar to the copies of Shakira, or Ricky Martin hits. Nearby, a similar sound is coming from the open window of a humble private house, where a number of people are singing, dancing and having a good time: apparently, a whole family is watching a popular Friday TV show, probably enjoying the same song by Ceca, or another, similar one, and praising her gorgeous looks and the effective and touching color of her voice.

The two scenes I have described here represented the most common practices of people's entertainment in public and private spaces in Serbia as of the beginning of the nineties, and has remained the most popular ritual of entertainment up to the moment of finalizing of this dissertation. Usually, there is one common name which encompassed the music genre involved, the fashion style of these men and women, and ideological ground through which the admirers of this style are believed to construct their social relations: *turbo-folk*. However, this phenomenon is not about a particular lifestyle of an ethnic, cultural, sexual or any other minority within the Serbian context, or, to use an already abandoned term, ‘subculture’. In contrast to the usual understanding of popular culture phenomena, this is an entertainment practice considered to be the most dominant and most popular within the borders of the whole Serbian ethno-national

community, with the tendency to spread around the region to the other Balkan countries, or other Bosnian, Serbian or Croatian speaking communities. At the same time, in the modern history of former Yugoslavia or South-Eastern Europe, there have been few examples of social, cultural or political phenomena so far which provoked so much simultaneous adoration and animosity.

My thesis explores the relationship between the representations of women and popular music scene in Serbia commonly known as turbo-folk, which emerged after the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991. Turbo-folk is a form of popular culture production that I analyze through its genre conventions and the way they have been interrelated with the social context of their construction. The research is grounded in the historical and anthropological observation of the predecessor of turbo-folk, named newly composed folk music (NCFM), or simply new folk music, which emerged in the sixties on the region of Yugoslavia. This early form established the representation of heteronormativity as the key tool of (re)claiming the community in popular culture, which can be a family, region, ethnic group. The thesis traces how representations of women were shaped by the conventions of heteronormativity in the period of newly composed folk music and how this evolved into turbo-folk production in the post-Yugoslav period of Serbia, employing and reproducing ethno-nationalism as a dominant notion of belonging to the community. I will show how in the period of newly composed folk music (Yugoslav period) and that of turbo-folk (post-Yugoslav period), women's "stage identities", constructed within these scenes, were central to the representations of collectivity and preservation of heteronormative community values.

Turbo-folk is a common term for the music scene, genre or the type of production, locally specific for Serbia, but also maintained and performed in some variations in other countries of former Yugoslavia and the Balkans in post-Yugoslav period. The term was publically first used by Rambo Amadeus, a Serbian rock musician who played musical parodies of various genres and who used the term in a sarcastic sense very early, even in 1988, in one of his songs.² The implied meaning of the term was to denounce "grotesque" and "abnormal" character of the so-called invasion of "newly composed folk music" on Serbian music scene, in a parodic way.³

² The song entitled "Turbo-Folk" was the part of Rambo Amadeus's album "Tugo jesenja (Oh, Autumn Sadness)"(1988).

³ Many authors cite this in their texts (Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001; Đurković 2002). A number of popular dictionaries and internet web-pages also repeat this view. Rambo Amadeus himself also admitted the "authorship" of this term in his numerous interviews, although, as he often pointed out, his intention was to do the parody of this genre, and not to promote it.

Although it is difficult to follow all the connotations of this term, we can say that in the nineties it became widely used as a reference to the dominant music market in Serbia; and it was mostly used by journalists and observers who criticized the musical taste of its fans and its principles of music production in that period.⁴

My research questions are inspired by two general claims about turbo-folk, often expressed in the Serbian public: first, that turbo-folk is a scene that represents women in a sexist and conservative manner, and second, that the turbo-folk scene produces politically conformist, nationalist ideology. I aimed to explore the ground for these two claims, since the fact is that many women have got engaged with turbo-folk production either as performers or as consumers. I analyze the representations of women in relation to the symbols of collective belonging in the turbo-folk performances. My aim is to find out how the images of women and the representations of their subject positions or their stage identities correspond with the notion of belonging to the national community. The thesis examines the examples of lyrics, videos, public statements, and parts of history of turbo-folk music, in order to find out what gender and national symbolic constructs make up the ideological backbone of this genre. Since turbo-folk genre derives from NCFM, I first discuss the ideological contextualization of the conventions of NCFM genre. I argue that the main structural convention was the representation of an individual's notion of belonging to an imagined community, which could be a village, region, country, or just a family. While analyzing careers of NCFM women singers, I also found out that their "stage identities" were constructed through the paradigm of heteronormativity, as the main principle of their maintaining of the belonging to the community. On the basis of these insights, I analyze how the conventions of heteronormativity of women's performances and a notion of community were intertwined through the performances of the biggest female turbo-folk stars. In addition, I ask whether the turbo-folk scene includes some elements of irony or parody in the performances, which would imply some political or cultural subversion of dominant gender or social hierarchies.

The dissertation is a contribution to ongoing debates on gender and nation, gender constructed through popular culture, and nationalism in the sphere of popular culture and

⁴Interestingly, some of the performers expressed an awareness of the conceptual "novelty" of this type of production at the beginning of the nineties. Ivan Gavrilović, who was among the first performers who combined traditional folk music and aggressive techno beat in his performances, released the song "200 na sat (200 km/h)" which contained an important verbal motive, namely "techno-folk".

See the video at: http://www.youtube.com/results?search_type=&search_query=Ivan+Gavrilovic%2C+200+na+sat

everyday life, addressing literature and debates from all these fields. By *popular culture* I mean the culture produced by the people and for the people, implying two contrasted meanings: something which is liked by many people, and at the same time, something which is on purpose set out to be liked by many people (Williams 1976: 198-199). By *culture* I mean a particular way of life, including various aspects of its material and symbolic production (Ibid.).

The main themes and methodological approaches in this work have emerged as a response to the stereotypes of turbo-folk and its relationship with the political, social and cultural context, creating a dialogue with established notions, claims and scholars' biases regarding popular music and the representation of women and nationalism in Serbia. The main cultural conflicts represented here are constructed along the axes of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality. In addition, an application of theoretical concepts, mainly created in a western geopolitical context, to phenomena from South-East Europe, ex-Yugoslavia, and Serbia, and juxtaposing them to the concepts created especially for the local context, challenges the limits of both "local" and "western" cultural concepts. To sum up, in a larger perspective, I propose a theoretical framework for the analysis of the intersection of gender, popular culture and nationalism in relation to the construction of women's "stage identities" or women's subject position within popular music scene as heteronormative reproduction of community.

1.1. Social and Political Context

Turbo-folk emerged in the early nineties during the violent break-up of socialist Yugoslavia. The term "socialist" refers to the period from the end of World War II until the beginning of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the state of Yugoslavia was founded earlier, i.e. immediately after World War I, under the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. In 1921 its name was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It existed as a parliamentary monarchy until World War II, after which it became a republic governed by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. During and after World War II, the Yugoslav communist leadership inaugurated one-party-political system, as the mechanism of state authority and established the state that consisted of six constitutive republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) and two autonomous regions (Kosovo and Vojvodina). The

country was first officially named the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1946), and later in 1963, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The country was based on two political and administrative principles, "self-management" and "brotherhood and unity". These two ideological narratives were supposed to channel all political, economic, institutional, educational and cultural processes in the country (Jović 2009). One was the narrative of "self-management" system in the sphere of economics and institutional organizations. The other was the principle of "brotherhood and unity" which reflected the need to have all ethnic identities represented as equal (brotherhood), but also that they should somehow represent at the same time "unity", or "brotherhood in unity", a sort of supra-ethnic model of community (Hayden 1992b: 1378; Wachtel 1998: 17 ; Bose 1992: 938-939).⁵

However, in spite of greater political and cultural freedoms (in comparison to other countries under the rule of communist parties in Europe at the time) that were fostered by Yugoslav authorities, Yugoslavia in the seventies and eighties experienced many problems due to a number of discrepancies in the political, institutional, economic, legal and cultural contradictions among its own units. The collapse of communism contributed to the loosening of the ideological strings that kept parts of Yugoslavia together (Ramet 2005: 35-51). A strong "wind of change" passed through all countries ruled by communist parties in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, which undermined the narratives of trans-ethnic unity and reified the flame of ethno-nationalisms in all these countries. Yugoslavia found itself in the middle of many forces that contributed to its dissolution: economic crises, problems with ethnic-motivated conflicts among its many ethnic groups, institutional and legal difficulties, cultural differences between various regions and peoples, various and conflicting international influences and the opposing aspirations and interests of regional political elites (Jović 2009; Allcock 2000; Ramet 2005). Political separations between the republics of Yugoslavia, based on ethno-national exclusivity, led to the outburst of ethnic hatred among various ethnicities in Yugoslavia, which was manipulated by ethno-national leaders who promised that they would lead their followers and "straighten historical injustices" and create ethnic-based nation-states (Jović 2009: 253-

⁵ According to some authors, this concept of the state official politics was modified by the 1974 Constitution, which loosened the formal state authority and decentralized the country by appointing greater administrative autonomies to the republics and autonomous regions. However, this system also went for a stronger centralization of the political power, with the Communist party as the main political body in Yugoslavia, which created a conflicting atmosphere between central and local authorities (for example, see Jović 2009: 67-68). Still, in the context of cultural representations, and the organization of everyday life, the paradigms of "brotherhood and unity" and "self-management" remained largely used among Yugoslav peoples until the dissolution of the country.

257) . As a result of such aspirations, severe conflicts broke out in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo in which thousands of people got killed or lost their homes. Presently, there are a number of ethnically or politically negotiated states or entities that have emerged as a result of the break-up of Yugoslavia: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.

Since the nineties, statehood and ethno-national ideology in the Serbian case has been quite often confusingly posited. From the late eighties until 2000, the Serbian political elite was led by Slobodan Milošević, leader of the SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia), who officially claimed the principles of the socialist and communist struggle, while, in practice, fostered various forms of aggressive Serbian nationalism. Milošević's main political narratives also efficiently manipulated the votes of wide social circles in Serbia at the beginning of his rule. On the one hand, he publically argued for the preservation of Yugoslavia and its sovereignty. On the other hand, he proclaimed himself to be a Serbian patriot who just wanted to "protect Serbs", and "make some order" in the Yugoslav state. In other words, he presented himself as a political agent who would preserve the status of Yugoslav statehood, and, at the same time, improve the political and institutional status of Serbs all over Yugoslavia.

Milošević and his allies presented themselves as the leaders of the "antibureaucratic revolution", promising through Milošević's charismatic speeches at political rallies in the late eighties that they would sort out numerous problems in Yugoslav society. As Jović points out, "This mobilization, they concluded, would not only solve the economic and political crisis, eliminate the Kosovo problem, and democratize political life in Serbia, but it would also change the status of Serbia in Yugoslavia"(Jović 2009: 282). This "change" was usually described as improving the position of Serbian ethnicity within Yugoslavia, or protecting them from the outbursts of the ethno-nationalism of other ethnic groups in the country. Milošević's words won the support of Serbian voters, who also were bombarded by dramatic news of the coming separation of Slovenia and Croatia, as well as the news about Albanian movement for the independence of Kosovo (Bracewell 1996: 27-29; Gojković 2000: 341; Pešić 2000: 33). Majority of the citizens of Serbia at the time did not realize or did not mind the fact that the two above mentioned goals of Milošević were contradicting to each other, leading to the war amongst various ethnic groups in Yugoslavia. In this way, he won both votes of pro-Yugoslav oriented Serbs and Serbian extreme nationalists.

Milošević and his party won the first “free election” in Serbia in 1990⁶, which enabled him to appropriate enormous legal, military and financial power in Serbia. Soon after that, he became a key figure in framing military operations in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, trying to maintain control over these territories during the nineties. The initial umbrella of Yugoslav legacy, extended administratively to Serbia, enabled him to manipulate the legal basis of his power, and to justify his fight for the territories outside Serbia, since they were also treated as “Serbian lands” (“srpske zemlje”)⁷. The idea of borders of Serbian national entity, Serbian nation-state, and Serbian nationalism were often manipulated as the instrument of real and symbolic mobilization of human resources in Serbia for a “just fight” for the “protection of Serbs” outside Serbia. Milošević’s rule was overturned in 2000, after he lost the presidential election, as well as the protection of army and police, and was forced to admit his defeat. He was deported to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague in the summer of 2001, and died in his prison cell of heart attack on March 11, 2006. After the end of his rule, Serbia set out on a difficult and slow journey to its rebirth on the international scene, redemption for war crimes against civilians in other former republics of Yugoslavia and building of its legal system which had been ruined during Milošević’s times. However, these tendencies have still been burdened by strong nationalist sentiments within the country, unsolved questions of state sovereignty, corruption in various segments of state power, and significant economic poverty of the citizenry.

To summarize, during the period between 1991-2009, the region of former Yugoslavia was split into a number of ethnically-based nation states (with a partial exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina), out of which a few are still in the process of acquiring full international

⁶ The first “free election” is a commonly used expression for the first parliamentary election in Serbia at which the voters could choose between the candidates of more than one political parties, unlike the election in the period of state socialism, when it was possible to elect only the members of the Communist Party.

⁷ In the period between 1991-2001 Serbia, together with Montenegro, was still part of the state called “Yugoslavia”. The status of Yugoslavia in this period was controversial, since in 1992 the United Nations Security Council imposed economic, political and cultural sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (as Yugoslavia was called at the time). Formally, these sanctions were terminated in 1996. However, immediately after that, The United States of America, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, Germany and almost all other economically and politically influential European countries introduced their own packages of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This resulted in the exclusion of “Yugoslavia” from many international organizations and networks, which lasted till the end of the nineties. Regardless of these measures, in the nineties Serbia was formally governed through the double system of government, both “Serbian” and “Yugoslav”. Milošević used this situation to keep formally his position of the “president” during all this period. When his mandate for the “president of Serbia” expired in 1997, he became the “president of Yugoslavia”, appointed by the marionette body called “Yugoslav parliament”, which consisted of the representatives of parties from Serbia and Montenegro, which were loyal to Milošević. Thanks to that, he remained at the position of institutionalized power in Serbia until 2000.

recognition (Milosavljević 2000: 77). All these entities are conceptualized as parliamentary democracies, yet are predominantly governed by pro-nationalist, anti-communist and anti-Yugoslav forces which have been pro ethno-national self-determination of their respective societies in political and cultural terms. The symbolic framework of Serbian nationalism in post-Yugoslav period has been subject to much contestations, since it has been associated with the aspirations of Serbian ethnic communities not only in Serbia, but also within the borders of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo. Due to that, Serbian ethno-nationalism has been performed not only by nation-state building, but also through other more fluid and dynamic power relations, especially discourses of correction of imagined “injustices” from the pasts, which created what Pešić names as “resentful nationalism” (see Pešić 2000: 34-39).

1.2. Theorizing Nation and Popular Culture

An outburst of ethno-nationalist atmosphere in Serbia in the early nineties was also visible throughout the production and reception of various cultural forms (Udovički and Ridgeway 1997). In some cases, the claims to national values were produced for the public by open use of nationalist rhetoric in the media. This was the case with the complete production of national TV and radio station, and was reflected through daily TV newsreel, called “TV dnevnik”, documentaries, talk shows and other programs, as well as national and other radio-stations, newspapers, various publications and speeches of politicians, historians and many other public figures (Nenadović 2000; Milivojević 2000 ; Bracewell 1996). However, this dissertation shows that the spirit of nationalism and national belonging also were performed by cultural forms in which political vocabulary, in a strict sense of the word, was not directly in use. These were the forms and products from the sphere of people’s everyday practices and habits, leisure and entertainment, which construct what Michael Billig names as “everyday” or “banal nationalism” (Billig 1995). According to this author, it is reproduced through the set of symbols and practices which are seemingly politically neutral and unspectacular, but can be used any moment in the service of a national homogenization. Billig says: it is misleading to analyze always some extreme right-wing movements and phenomena as bearers of nationalism (such as

Serbian guerrillas, killing in the cause of extending the homeland's borders). The problem with such an approach, according to him, is that "it always seems to locate nationalism on the periphery" (1995: 6). He writes about the daily reproduction of national belonging, which often passes unnamed and thereby, unnoticed, pointing out that: "For such daily reproduction to occur, one might hypothesize that a whole complex of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices must also be reproduced. Moreover, this complex must be reproduced in a banally mundane way, for the world of nations is the everyday world, the familiar terrain of contemporary times" (Ibid.).

To illustrate, he speaks about the significance of a national flag hanging outside a public building in the USA, which usually attracts no special attention and belongs to "no special, sociological genus" (Ibid: 7). According to Billig, having no name, it cannot be identified as a problem. However, as he argues, the banal does not mean benign. In the context of everyday life, as Billig points out, citizenry are "daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations" (Ibid.). Moreover, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. These signifiers are forgotten reminders of nationhood, a phenomenon of "unwaved flag" as Billig names it, which is ready to be used in recreation of homogenization of nation, or community, whenever necessary. Billig correctly points out that, while the concept of nationalism so far has often been restricted to "exotic" and "passionate exemplars", the routine and familiar forms of nationalism have mostly been overlooked (Ibid.: 8)⁸⁸.

More to the point, the habit of studying nationalism only by studying extreme manifestations of nationalist violence, such as war combats massacres in Bosnia, Ruanda or Iraq, leave out an important yet not enough explored field of nationalism studies. This field relates to a whole range of everyday practices, habits, rituals, informative technologies, pleasures, entertainment, popular culture and other cultural productions and consumption. Ironically, Billig calls these practices "banal nationalisms", since they have often been left out from academic interest, as they did not seem to be enough "spectacular" and easy-to-identify manifestations of nationalist outburst.

⁸⁸ There have been exceptions to this principle, such as the work of Rogers Brubaker, who discusses the distinction between "civic" and "ethnic" nationalism. This distinction indicates two kinds of nationalism: "civic", which is based on "common citizenship" and, therefore often considered to be "liberal" and "legitimate", and "ethnic", based on "common ethnicity", and studied as "particularist" and "violent" (Brubaker 2004: 133).

I agree with Billig's notion that banal nationalism cannot be studied simply by applying ready-made methodologies or theories. Belonging to a community in political and cultural sense should be studied not only through extreme cultural manifestations of these belonging, but also through the mainstream cultural forms, such as the mainstream popular culture forms in society. Billig's work, although limited by its scope of analysis and examples, opens up the possibility of introducing many hybrid and innovative methods. The fluidity of everyday life, which often passes unnoticed, requires research questions and combined methods of fieldwork which are flexible and inventive enough to explore particular, contextualized everyday reminders of belonging to a particular community, region, ethnicity or nation. Researching of such everyday processes means looking into new and alternative ways of defining various aspects of group belonging and examining how they have been embedded in various everyday practices.

Tim Edensor, who writes about everyday nationalism in popular culture, is another author whose work describes the concept of community and nationalism used in my thesis. Basically, he draws on Billig's theorizing of banal nationalism, and defines, more precisely than Billig himself, what a domain of the banal, everyday or vernacular, means. He particularly explores the field of popular culture, indicating how this field is often missing from the studies of national identities, community and national belonging. He takes an account of several most influential theoretical concepts of nation and nationalism, written by Gellner, Hobsbawm, Anderson, Smith and Hutchinson (Edensor 2007: 2-10). He acknowledges the contributions of these authors to the studies of "nation" and "national belonging", especially, their orientation which argues that the nation does not come as a "natural" and given condition, but rather as a complex construction which is a result of modernity processes and communicational technologies. However, according to Edensor, each of these concepts are misleading or insufficient in a way: they overstress the significance of "high" or "elite" culture in production of national identity, and fail to look into the sphere of the everyday and the popular. For example, in Edensor's understanding, Gellner overemphasizes the notion of high national cultures and rational aspects of modernity as constitutive of the creation of national identities. Similarly, Hobsbawm underlines the significance of inventing national traditions through rituals, but, still, abandoning "the vernacular and the everyday" which often might renegotiate meanings of symbols and rituals (Edensor 2007: 5). On the one hand, the author supports Anderson's view of a nation as an "imagined community". However, on the other hand, he is concerned with Anderson's claim that the

national is predominantly reproduced through literacy and printed media, because, according to Edensor, this approach produces “a reductive view of culture”(Ibid.: 7). In Edensor’s view, such an approach overlooks the fact that the nation in its contemporary sense is reproduced through multiple ways, such as popular music, festivities, fashion, and various information technologies. In a word, Edensor criticizes these authors for implying a notion of culture either as an intellectual, elite-made construct, or as a construct with fixed meanings. As opposite to that, he acknowledges Billig’s efforts to focus on a whole set of “signifiers and reminders of the nation that form part of everyday spaces, routines and practices”, or in a word, “cultural dynamism” (Ibid.:11). Edensor points out that:

‘Traditional’ cultural forms and practices of the nation are supplemented, and increasingly replaced in their affective power, by meanings, images and activities drawn from popular culture. I do not want to suggest that the tradition-bound ceremonies and other cultural ingredients which most analysts of national identity have concentrated on are now irrelevant, but their power now is largely sustained by their (re)distribution through popular culture, where they mingle with innumerable other iconic cultural elements which signify the nation in multiple and contested ways (Ibid.: 12).

Both Billig and Edensor’s approaches are based on analyzing examples from the western geopolitical framework, which sets certain limits to the application of their ideas in other contexts, such as Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. For example, both of these authors analyze examples from so-called “stable societies”, as Billig calls them, which are usually not known as being a site of severe interethnic wars, in spite of being involved in similar conflicts outside their territories. Besides, both of these authors write about societies with developed, continual tradition of market economies, so that the analysis of material culture, commodity consumerism and the concept of popular culture have been rooted in capitalist economic relations much longer than in some other parts of the world.⁹ Here we should bear in mind that in former socialist societies, such as Serbia, the logics of market economies have been conceptualized in a different way (see Verdery 1991). In addition, many post-socialist societies, and former Yugoslav republics in particular, have recently passed through painful and dramatic social and political changes, turning many social relations upside-down, and creating new social elites that are often associated with suspicious origin of money and unclear records from the past.

⁹ Katherine Verdery pointed out in the early nineties that researchers must be careful when applying certain concepts in Central and Eastern Europe, as the idea of capital and market economy in the Eastern Europe might be very different from its “Western” counterpart (Verdery 1991).

Nevertheless, there are two reasons why I still follow Billig's and Edensor's theoretical frameworks. First, regarding market economy issues, it is known that the Yugoslav political, social and economic setting was to a certain degree more liberal, and more market oriented than in many other countries of socialist system. As it will be discussed in Chapter 3, this certainly was the case with the popular music market, where the state influence on cultural production was very often compromised by simple market demands and economic factors. The second reason is important for the explanation of the novelty of this work. Namely, my aim is to explore those aspects of social homogenization, and particularly, nationalism, in Serbia in post-Yugoslav period, which are usually overlooked and neglected in the studies of nationalism or cultural identity, because they have been treated as a marginal or trivial subject, labeled as just banal or benign entertainment for simple folks. The main stream popular music scene in Serbia is a perfect example of such an unexplored subject. Especially, since during the nineties, the war combats never took place on the central territory of Serbia, so that the great deal of Serbian population in Serbia lived with an illusion that "the war is happening somewhere else", and that they did not have much to do with it. This is why Billig's concept of subtle and "hidden" agents of everyday signifiers of nation is a good starting point for my research. In addition, Edensor theorize nation and community as constantly reproduced and negotiated on a daily basis through popular culture and other everyday routines and practices. His view contributes to my aim to discuss turbo-folk music scene as a cultural form which reproduces nationalism as a result of dynamics of its genre conventions.

I rely on Billig and Edensor's thoughts since they argue that nationalism should not be studied only through the examples of extreme violence that happened in Bosnia, Ruanda or Iraq, but that it should be also studied through the examples of so-called everyday practices in the regular conditions of public life. The studies of nationalism should not focus only on its extreme manifestations. In my thesis it is understood that studies of nationalism in popular culture cannot explain directly why the massacres in Srebrenica or Vukovar during the wars in former Yugoslavia 1991- 1995 happened. It was not turbo-folk or any other popular music form that produced murderers and rapists and sent them to the war. However, turbo-folk has been widely embraced by the society which did produce murderers and rapists, so that it requires to be studied in a way inherent to popular culture studies. By studying turbo-folk, we can understand how elements of nationalist ideologies were acquired from social and political discourses, used

in the production of popular culture, turned into a cultural form and reproduced through its own performances. Thus, it is possible to observe how elements of nationalism are performed in its popular forms, how they interrelate with other social paradigms, cultural codes and symbols, and how nationalism operates through them.

1.3. Community and Gender

In public and academic discourses, within the countries of former Yugoslavia as well as abroad, turbo-folk has been predominantly associated with the ideologies and practices of Serbian nationalism, as one of its most direct expressions (see Kronja 2001; Gordy 1999; Đurković 2002). Notably, in academic writings, the relationship between turbo-folk and nationalism was often seen as highly gendered. The over-sexualized bodily images of female stars were often associated with so-called turbo-folk model of a new Serbian woman, addicted to men from the new, criminal Serbian elite. A model of rich and criminal man from the nineties, is also, by default, connected with the image of a warrior (Čolović 2000a; Đurković 2002; Kronja 2001; Kronja 2006; Papić 2002;). However, since it has become apparent that young, attractive women have been the most visible stars on the turbo-folk scene so far, their gender performances were often politicized in the media and academic discourses on Serbia. Especially, the focus was on the way in which these female performances contributed to general status of turbo-folk as a cultural manifestation of Serbian political tendencies in post-Yugoslav period. For example, Kronja views turbo-folk images of women as a sort of main “requisite” of a destructive, aggressive image of a Serbian man in the nineties, a criminal, nationalist and warrior (Kronja 2006: 199-200). Papić, on the other hand, reads turbo-folk images of women as a radical symbolic dismissal of the body of “the other”, and incestuous admiration of “our”, “Serbian women bodies” (Papić 2002: 127-144). Gordy points out the direct relationship between a public success of singers such as Ceca Ražnatović and the vested interests of militant, nationalist-oriented regime (Gordy 1999: 136-138). In a word, turbo-folk, women and nationalism have been central to public debates, talk shows and numerous scholarly papers in and about Serbia. However, the relationship between these three components has still remained largely unexplored and lacking in systematic interdisciplinary theoretical contextualization.

I propose a historical and ideological platform for the examination of the connections between representation of women, popular music and national belonging. I examine how the relationship between gender, popular culture and nationalism has been constructed as a genre paradigm, or as a set of genre conventions. My approach is also a way to explore how gender and nationalism are reinforced through everyday imaginaries and practices. Many sections in this thesis are in a dialogue with existing discourses on the representation of women in the media and everyday life, discussions on nationalism in the Serbian context in former Yugoslavia, and the position of turbo-folk music and media culture in Serbia. My theoretical framework is also informed by the debates on gender and nation in comparative perspective, theories on popular culture as part of commodity consumerism, and popular music studies, initially launched within Western-contextualized cultural studies, but recently also present in the studies of non-Western, local music scenes and genres.

I propose a historical and anthropological approach to the genre conventions within which turbo-folk has emerged and was shaped as a scene and a cultural form. I observe the phenomenon of turbo-folk as a *text*, which means a system of signs and symbols constructed within a particular context, and developed and negotiated over time in interaction with various social and political changes.¹⁰ All visual and verbal performances, presented either as musical products or media practices, constitute a media text produced in interaction between producers and the audiences who denote the message (see Hall 1980: 135-137; Dyer 1998: 9-19). Videos and media statements of female singers, music and lyrics of their songs and the narratives of their life stories, create the texts that I observe here as the “stage identities” of women singers or “women’s subject positions”, or, sometimes, simply, “representations of women” within turbo-folk scene. These terms are not completely synonymous, since the “representations of women” have got much broader meaning than the other two which signify more concrete theoretical aspects within the process of representation. “Stage identities” mean the identities of performers as seen by the audiences, mediated both through their fictive characters that they represent, and the way how their lives are represented by the media. Women’s “subject position” is a term partially grounded in the conceptualization of Beverley Skegg’s studies of working class women’s identity in Britain (Skeggs 1997). Women’s subject positions in my thesis are

¹⁰ This approach has been developed within cultural studies and implies that every cultural form can be “read” and analyzed as a system of signs and symbols, similar to the principles of textual analysis that derives from literary studies, linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis.

representations of the life positions available for women, which are not necessarily occupied by them, but which are strongly suggested as desirable women's role models through popular performances.

It is also important to explain meanings of the turbo-folk *genre* and turbo-folk *scene*, although these meanings often overlap in the actual analysis. By a usual definition, *genre*, a word that derives from Latin, literally means "a class", or "a kind" of objects or ideas. Harris points out: "Genre is thus an umbrella concept that allows for many disparate, and often related, concepts to be conveniently divided and subdivided" (Harris 1995: 509). In my thesis genre means a set of historically developed patterns (conventions) of depicting certain topics in verbal sense and arranging them in musical terms. *Scene* includes the meanings of the *genre*, but it also contains some broader meanings, that of conditions of contextualization of a particular genre, as well as audiences' response to that genre. More to the point, turbo-folk genre means patterns of lyrics, music arrangements, and particular media texts I am dealing with, while the turbo-folk scene includes various aspects of social, political, economic and cultural particularities, negotiable on everyday basis, which cannot be ever described fully or anticipated in advance. As already mentioned, it is important that both concepts should be read as a *text* or *texts* mediated to the audiences. Though, the difference between them is that genre is imagined as an ideal, abstract set of conventions, while a scene is the indicator of its everyday actualization, something which is getting a different form every day and every hour, but still preserves some initial inner organization of meanings which keeps its conventions together. This difference is sometimes purely theoretical, but I believe that it is necessary to keep both concepts in the analysis of popular culture forms, as it also signifies a fine difference between the conditions of the encoding message to the audiences, and the circumstances of its decoding in everyday life.

As it will be elaborated in the thesis, the origin of turbo-folk dates to the period of emergence of newly composed folk music (NCFM) in the sixties. The NCFM genre was set up as a commercial, widely accepted and consumed genre which, according to the analysts (Čolović 1985; Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Ivanović 1973; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002), celebrated the connections among the members of a family or a community, between an individual and a

community, as well as heterosexual economy of relations within a community.¹¹ These genre characteristics, or conventions, were constituted in interrelation with the demands of the music market and social dynamics of everyday life in wide circles in the former Yugoslavia. The genre of NCFM, according to written sources and interviews with respondents, drew on a strong notion of a belonging to a community. The consumption of NCFM genre also reflected differently along axes of ethnic, regional, occupational and gender divisions. As I discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, the ethnic, regional and occupational stratification, visible among the audiences of NCFM, anticipated severe political divisions across former Yugoslavia that took place in the nineties (see Vidić-Rasmussen 1996).

Hence, to put it simply, in this thesis I explore how the conventions of representation of women relate to a notion of belonging to community. I primarily analyze the concept of community as a foundation of theorizing of the concept of nation. Benedict Anderson paved the path to such theorizing by defining nation as an imagined political community (Anderson 1992: 6). The predecessor of turbo-folk, NCFM genre, was ideologically shaped by the notion of community, which could be represented by family, village, town, region, country. This notion was expressed not only by lyrics, but also by fashion, looks, TV footages and other practices. In the nineties, NCFM grew into turbo-folk, and the notion of community grew into the feeling of national belonging. The construct of a community, which used to be fluid and subject to many identifications in Yugoslav period, got the form of the *nation*, meaning ethno-national unit. Therefore, my basic model for the analysis is a relationship between representation of women, and a belonging to community. I argue that this relationship is constructed through a paradigm of heteronormativity, understood as a key principle of locatedness of an individual within community. Following Joanne Nagel's formulation of this concept, I understand *heteronormativity* as a set of norms governing what are defined as acceptable and conventional sexual practices, based on heterosexual exclusivity (Nagel 2003). In Nagel's words, "Heteronormativity refers to the assumption that everyone is heterosexual and the recognition that all social institutions (the family, religion, economy, political system) are built around a heterosexual model of male/female social relations." (Nagel 2003: 50). As Cohen points out, *community* means an expression of boundaries constructed through "symbolic constituents",

¹¹ These authors mostly did not employ the terminology of gender or sexuality studies; however, their findings indicate the awareness of diversification of various problems along the lines of gender, ethnic, sexual and other identities.

which correspond with particular “categories” and “rituals” (Cohen 1995: 14-15). According to him, “Community is just such a boundary-expressing symbol. As a symbol, it is held in common by its members; but its meaning varies with its members’ unique orientations to it” (Cohen 1995: 15). Community here should not be understood as a traditional, fixed entity, but rather as a dynamic, changeable and temporally negotiable symbolic construction or notion of belonging. A paradigm of community in theory can be defined through many parameters: “local politics and governance, the difficulties and dilemmas of neighborhood and social movement organization, controversies over sex roles, parenting, and kinship and family relations” (Frazer 1999: 6). As Delanty points out, a concept of community is open to traditional, but also post-traditional possibilities (Delanty 2003: 92-110). It is also important to bear in mind that we should not see community as “something spatially fixed and corresponding to a particular kind of social arrangement”, but rather as a “a particular mode of imagining and experiencing social belonging as a communicative public happening” (Delanty 2003: 26). In particular, we should bear in mind that in the case of former Yugoslavia, after the collapse of a large socialist state that included many ethnic groups, notions of community and belonging were dramatically changed for many people within a short period of time.

Consequently, nationalism should also be understood as a dynamic construction that is re-created and differently experienced in various periods of time. In this thesis, nationalism appears as a form of communal feeling, i.e, a particular notion of belonging to a community that prevailed in public life in the Serbian context in the nineties, and has remained as a cultural pattern to date. Nationalism was (re)constructed in Serbia as ethno-nationalism as of the late eighties through social institutions and practices of everyday life. Namely, through its performative practices, during the nineties and after, nationalism remained a prevailing ideological constitutive force in many aspects of cultural production. The language of nationalism has created particular genre norms within many types of institutional, and media and everyday discourses.

My aim is to discuss ethno-nationalism in this dissertation as the prevailing notion of community, central to understanding of constructions of women’s “stage identities” in the nineties. As I already pointed out, women and men within turbo-folk (and earlier, NCFM) have been constructed as heterosexual individuals, located within a particular community, so as to meet the expectations of given social norms. Maintaining a communal spirit and belonging to a

certain background was an ideological and performative convention of NCFM production (see Čolović 1985; Dragičević-Šešić 1994). Further on, nationalism in turbo-folk performances in the nineties became a tool of reinforcing of heteronormativity. Simultaneously, performing nationalism through the strategies of popular culture means a constant reproduction of nationalist ideology as the prevailing social mind set, and as a main code of institutional practices and everyday social interactions.

The concept of ethnicity and ethno-nationalism poses many challenges to researchers, especially since there are many reasons to believe that ethnicity as category has lost its earlier monumental dimensions, and turned into “situational ethnicity” (Stayman and Deshpande 1989: 362; Verdery 1994: 44). However, recent Yugoslav wars, among the other examples, have indicated that ethno-nationalisms still could mobilize people and send them into violent conflicts. Barth’s proposal of studying ethnicity as studies of ethnic boundaries has received some new attention (Barth 1969). *Ethnicity* can be observed in many ways, and can be studied from many points of view. Yinger suggests that it can be observed as :1) related to the internal “social stratification and discrimination”; 2) as “culture” with regard to the paradigms of family and religion; 3) in relation to the wide political mobilization leading into movements and armed conflicts (Yinger 1985: 163-172). In more operational terms, I will rely on Levine’s “simple and minimalistic” definition of ethnicity, which says that: “ethnicity is that method of classifying people (both self and other) that uses origin (socially constructed) as its primary reference” (Levine 1999: 168). It is obvious from this definition, that each particular geopolitical context can set its own rules how ethnicity could be defined in more specific, locally significant way. As for the concept of *nation*, I certainly adopt Anderson’s definition of nation as an “imagined community”, which, according to some authors, sometimes appears to be reductionist (Edensor 2002) or partially misleading, since it might suggest that nation is something unreal, non-existent (Molloy 1995: 106). However, I follow Anderson’s notion that nation is basically a socially contextualized construct based on a notion of “horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1992: 7). *Nationalism*, according to Anderson, in European context, is historically constructed through the notion of common culture, common language and through the development of print technology, which enables spreading the belief that a belonging to a particular nation is more a matter of destiny, than a matter of choice.(Anderson 1992: 5-7; 37-46). Ethno-nationalism is a nationalism based on ethnicity as a main principle of such a comradeship. Besides that

explanation, I also draw on Brubaker's more specialized, triadic scheme of new nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe, according which there are three interrelated types of nationalisms: 1) "nationalizing" nationalisms of newly independent (or newly reconfigured) states"; 2) "homeland nationalisms" that "assert states' right – indeed their obligation – to monitor the condition, promote the welfare...and protect the interests of 'their' ethno-national kin in other states"; 3) the nationalism of "national minorities" (Brubaker 1996 : 4-5). In addition, I also adopt Nagel's formulations of nation and nationalism, which says:

By *nation* I refer to a collective identity associated with a region or territory that is sovereign or asserts sovereignty and self rule..." (Nagel 2003:148)

By nationalism I refer to an ideology that professes a common history, shared culture, and rightful homeland, and often is marked by ethnocentrism where nationalists assert moral, cultural and social superiority over other nations and nationalisms (Ibid.)

While I agree in principle with defining nationalism in this way, I should add that, in practice, as Edensor argues, we should not look at nationalist discourses as an elitist product, a phenomenon which is from top-down spread out in the society. Rather, we should be aware that there is a whole range of "cultural producers" of nationalist notions: "pop stars, advertisers, tabloid hacks, marketers, fashion designers, film and television producers and sporting heroes – as well as ...dancing, sport spectatorship, common pastimes, holidaying and touring" (Edensor 2002: 9). Accordingly, I aim to explore practices of this kind – seemingly neutral popular culture strategies, that actually signify a particular visibility of nation and nationhood through their own, masked logics. In this thesis, mainly, the term nationalism is used as a synonym for ethno-nationalism.

In that respect, the representation of women will be unpacked in this thesis by analyzing some of the practices in mainstream popular culture, using the example of turbo-folk. Representations of women are part and parcel of power relations that maintain main discourses of nationalism. Images of women reproduced in high or popular culture create a genre convention of its own, as nation is most often symbolically constructed as feminine (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989; Goscilo and Lanoux 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997). Representations of women often perform an ambiguous role within nationalist projects. The relationship between the representations of female sexual and reproductive functions, on the one hand, and the collective fantasies and ongoing communal narratives, on the other hand, is a topic that have received a lot

of attention of anthropological, historical and sociological scholarships, especially regarding the construction of national identity or nation-state, and the gender roles involved, as many authors would put it (Abu-Lughod 1990; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Bracewell 1993; Drezgić 2000; 2003a; Lilly and Irvine 2002; Mayer 2000; McClintock 1993; Papić 2002; Smith 1997; Yuval-Davis 1997; Verdery 1994; Walby 1992; West 1997; Žarkov 2007). These authors predominantly position their scholarly work as a feminist-informed rereading of influential theories of nationalism and a concept of nation which can be found in the works of Anderson, Hobsbawm, Brubaker, Anthony Smith, Bauer, and the others. As Tamar Mayer points out, "...control over access to the benefits of belonging to the nation is virtually always gendered: that through control over reproduction, sexuality and the means of representation the authority to define the nation lies mainly with men" (Mayer 2000: 2).

In other words, the ideological apparatus of nation-building reinforces the political instrumentalization and symbolic objectification of women. Women are visible in nationalist contexts through the debates about motherhood, family, the sexual division of labour and the victimization of female body, as well as by violation of the female body as the representative of the enemy in war conflicts (for instance, see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1995; Bracewell 1993; Đurić 2000; Helms 2003b; Žarkov 2007; Iveković 1993; Mayer 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997).¹² In addition to all that, there is a scholarship that observes women's active or semi-active contributions to the contemporary processes of national homogenization worldwide. These works mostly explicate the controversial nature of women's aspiration connected with nation, given that such enterprises mostly work for the dominance of male hegemonic patterns of the governing of the society, both on the social and symbolic level (see Kašić 2000; Lilly and Irvine 2002; Lukić 2000; Milić 1995; Patterjee 1989; West 1997).

Symbols of reproduction and sexuality, brought in connection with the symbols of collectivism and national identity, through women's performances, indicate participation of such performances in what Nira Yuval-Davis calls the project of constructing collectivity. In addition, there are differences among women per se, along the lines of class, sexuality, minority identities and the like (Yuval-Davis 1997: 11). Still, as Yuval-Davis points out, "Women are associated in the collective imagination with children, and therefore with the collective, as well as the familial,

¹² As Wendy Bracewell points out, women are central to those issues, but their needs and desires are not (Bracewell 1996: 31).

future...The ‘burden of representation’ on women of the collectivity’s identity and future destiny has also brought about the construction of women as the bearers of the collectivity’s honor...” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). However, on the other hand, paradoxically, women are often suppressed and marginalized within nationalist projects, since they are often identified as social “other”, as something “stupid”, “dangerous”, “impure” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 47; Iveković 1993), something in opposition to glorious dimensions of nationalist hegemony (Nagel 2003). For the most part, in popular culture forms, both of these tendencies can be identified. Images of women are an important element in the symbolic construction of nation, whether they are employed as imagined cultural reproducers of nation, or as an “other” against which the collective, nationalist “we” is constructed (see Yuval-Davis 1997: 47). As it will be shown, the turbo-folk performances are a manifestation of the dynamics between these two tendencies, embodying an image of a “Serbian woman”, which is constitutive for a community cohesion, but which needs to be performed as subordinated to the norms of heterosexual hierarchies.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of nation-state is not operative in my thesis, since the idea of Serbian nation-state in the nineties was blurred by the official attempts of Milošević’s regime to claim rights both to Serbia and Yugoslavia, i.e. the territories populated by Serbs outside the administrative borders of Serbia. According to Brubaker’s triadic scheme, the most visible form of Serbian nationalism of the nineties, perhaps, could be primarily classified as the second type of nationalism, as a nationalism that claims right to protect the members of the nation outside official borders of a nation state, while the other two types of nationalism, in Serbian case, were influenced and designated by this one (see Brubaker 1996). In a symbolic way, Serbian nationalism often worked mainly through cultural maintaining its newly-formed post-Yugoslav cultural boundaries. Likewise, it is possible to think of the established Serbian music market, and how it was created in the beginning of the nineties through exclusion based on the ethnic grounds of a performer, or a whole genre, or production (through exclusion of Bosnian, Croatian and Slovenian musicians). While the official Serbian politics acted expansively in relation to the other former Yugoslav republics, music production in Serbia set the boundaries, excluding “the other”, and all the voices from Serbia which promoted cosmopolitanism or pacifism, therefore creating the contours of the symbolic Serbian music

ethnocentric “state”.¹³

1.4. Turbo-Folk in the Context of Popular Music Studies

My thesis contextualizes turbo-folk within two current streams of popular music studies. One contains works on western popular music production, which has become a global music scene due to the development of MTV (Music Television), the internet and other international TV music channels. It mostly combines cultural studies, stressing media studies and discourse analysis, with historical and philosophical perspectives on cultural phenomena. This body of literature deals with the topics such as popular music and consumer society, popular music and arts, music audiences and music sub-cultures, reception of popular music, popular music and feminism and the like. The contributions in this field are mostly informed by the tension between two concepts of popular culture studies. The first comes out of the Frankfurt School, which criticizes popular culture industry as a mass culture produced for passive recipients (Adorno and Horkheimer 1973). The second is represented by Fiske, Kellner, Hall, and other cultural theorists who view popular culture as a contested field between the meaning encoded by producers and the meaning decoded or denoted by audiences (Hall 1980; also see Fiske 1989b; Kellner 1995). In particular, John Fiske argues for viewing a process of audiences’ readings of popular culture as a site of potential resistance to social and political oppression. According to Fiske, special attention should be paid to popular culture production, since its creators often come from the oppressed layers of society. Moreover, even if it is not produced among the oppressed, the way the oppressed read popular culture, should be seen as a sort of resistance to ideological oppression (Fiske 1989a; Fiske 1989b). Other authors, however, argue that reception of popular culture products is always contextualized, and conditioned by actual historical and political events, identity politics and a whole set of other agents, so that the audience’s reading cannot be always read as a resistance to oppression or liberating practices (Kellner 1995; Hall

¹³ In the year of 1992, a group of musicians, in collaboration with oppositional political parties, launched a campaign under title “Rimtutituki”. These rock musicians were widely popular in the period of Yugoslavia, but rather marginalized by the media in the early nineties. During the campaign, the musicians were playing on a bus which moved through the city, singing a song named as “Mir, brate, mir (Peace, Hey Brother, Peace)”. Similar projects could have never been seen or heard on main stream TV channels, but only on so-called oppositional TV station “Studio B” or later on, oppositional radio station “B92”.

1997a).

The combination of these contrasting approaches has reflected on my choice of intellectual approach to studying popular music and research methods. I rely on Fiske's point that it is important to take audiences as an agent of active response to popular culture product, which potentially challenges top-to-down hierarchies in cultural production. On the other hand, I think that Fiske's optimism should be followed by constant awareness that popular culture industries often consciously manipulate the taste and cultural values of subordinated and marginalized social groups, by incorporating and accommodating the signifiers of what they usually recognize as their own group identities. For instance, some of Madonna's videos could be easily read as a conscious manipulation with symbols of marginalized identities and issues of race and class segregation, which serves for *exoticization* of her video production, created more as a titillation for middle class white audiences, than for challenging social hierarchies.¹⁴ My dissertation aims to take both of these aspects into account, especially since turbo-folk production often tended to imitate some global popular culture technologies (see Dimitrijević 2002a; Dimitrijević 2002b; Sretenović 2002). Accordingly, my approach is a study of concrete verbal and visual texts, and audiences' response, informed by theoretical and empirical knowledge on historical, social and geo-political context of popular culture production.

My theoretical framework is informed by several important theoretical postulations from the popular music studies. Although I do not conduct, strictly speaking, audiences studies¹⁵, or studies of cultural identities constructed through music consumption, there are certain concepts from these two types of studies, which contribute to my method in a broader sense. These thoughts are the pre-concepts that are taken as givens in my work, when it comes to the relationship between production and consumption or the status or identity of the listener or viewer. First, I rely on the concept of Keith Negus, who theorize the relationship between music text and a listener arguing that it cannot be straightforward, but rather mediated. There is no

¹⁴ See Madonna's videos made for the songs: "Like a Prayer", "Express Yourself" and "Secret" at : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uORcKfgVJaE>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2vCDHFneEs> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6JY6fk2mu8>.

¹⁵ Here I refer to the body of literature that deals with youth studies, subculture(s), or clubbing culture (see Thornton 1996; Buckland 2002; Garratt 1999; Pini 2001; Hebdige 1987). These studies are not in the centre of my theoretical interest, because I believe that Serbian society has not been socially and economically stratified in a way that would allow for clear postulations of "the youth culture", or "club culture". The concept of "subculture" is not particularly beneficial for my research, as I discuss the cultural form which tends to be dominant in a society. In addition, "subculture" as a theoretical concept has proved to be insufficient to accommodate all contemporary aspects of social and cultural mobility even in other geopolitical contexts (see Thornton 1996).

“straightforward or intrinsic link between the lives of fans, the meaning of musical texts and the identity of a particular artist” (Negus 1996:133). According to him, the stars and the fans “articulate” the meaning through joint work. For him, processes of production and consumption are a “web of mediated connections”.

My thesis is also informed by writings of Sheila Whiteley who discusses the relationship between popular music and feminist postulations, analyzing various performances of gender and sexuality on the scene (Whiteley 2005; Whiteley 1997). My analyses of turbo-folk videos in chapter 5 and 6 are conducted with implied reference to Whiteley’s analysis of Madonna’s videos, and public images of Annie Lenox (Whiteley 2005). While I am critical of Whiteley’s over-enthusiastic conclusions about liberating dimension of Madonna’s videos, I have adopted her approach to theoretical problems of video production of popular music, such as concepts of “titillating”, “flirting with camera”, “performing femininity and “pleasurable looking” (Ibid.: 2005: 136-137) .

Important body of literature on popular music are also writings on particular music scenes, such as country music. This literature gave me a lot of ideas of how to explore the social background of genre conventions and common themes in NCFM and turbo-folk. Especially, Hill’s analysis of country music provided me with insightful observations of social embeddedness of the genre and the dynamics of its development. The author reflects on main cultural values that appear as basic form and content convention of this genre. He writes that the country music scene is based in the notion of tradition, continuity, unchangeable conditions of life, picture of “people who know their place” (Hill 2002: 162). There is a realistic representation of life, as author says, however, there is not much space given for personal freedom or escape. The identities are “organic”, rooted in the formations such as region, class, family, tradition and history. In the second part of the essay, Hill discusses modern variants of country music, and concludes that these variants actually fall outside the genre conventions of country music since they do not they present country style like the matter of destiny any more, but rather as a matter of a lifestyle choice. Although partially inconsistent, this essay represents an inspiring observation of how (in)flexible the ideological borders of certain genres could be. Looking into NCFM and turbo-folk production, I also argue that certain conservative values, inscribed in NCFM as a genre convention survived through turbo-folk up to nowadays.

The other stream of popular music studies includes ethnomusicological, anthropological

and historical literature on the music from the Balkans, former Yugoslavia, or South-Eastern Europe. I limited myself to the works on most recent music production¹⁶. My focus is on the literature on turbo-folk and newly composed folk music. I employ these pieces both as a source of theoretical concepts, and a subject of critical analysis, as many of these texts contributed to the construction of turbo-folk scene as a phenomenon, so that they represent cultural phenomenon themselves. They are written by authors from Serbia (and former Yugoslavia) educated in the country and abroad, authors from the USA and Western Europe, authors originally from Serbia based in the “western” academia, and authors of foreign origin (mostly coming from “western” world) who came to live in Serbia or former Yugoslavia.

This literature can be divided in several sections that, nonetheless, overlap with each other in many respects. First, literature on newly composed folk music, a predecessor of the turbo-folk genre, presents some early thoughts on popular music as a commodity and politicized social phenomenon (Čolović 1985; Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Ivanović 1973; *Nova narodna muzika* 1970; Prica 1991). These texts also show the first attempts of Yugoslav authors to apply theories of consumer society and media studies to local phenomena. Some more recent works on NCFM present much more complex theoretical analyses, introducing categories of gender, ethnicity, identity politics and post-colonial theory, discussing NCFM as an important social and political phenomena in the cultural history of Yugoslavia (Vidić-Rasmussen 1996; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002). The second group of works depicts the core of written works on turbo-folk, describing turbo-folk primarily as an ideological product, and only secondarily as a music genre (e.g. Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Đurić and Tarlać 2001; Đurković 2001; Gordy 1999; Gordy 2001; Kronja 2001; Kronja 2003). And a third group of texts situates turbo-folk into the context of local expression of so-called “global postmodern world trends” (Dimitrijević 2003; Slobin 1996; Sretenović 2001; Dimitrijević 2001).

There is also the fourth body of literature I am familiar with, which discusses similar regional music genres, scenes, or productions, in Serbia or in the neighboring countries: Croatian pop music, Rumanian *manele*, Bulgarian *chalga*, regional gypsy music, Turkish pop music and the like (for example, see Baker 2008; Beissinger 2001; Bonifačić 1995; Buchanan 1996; Stokes

¹⁶This is to say that my theoretical approach does not include works of ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and folklorists from the period before, or immediately after the Second World War. My aim here is to theorize a contemporary popular culture production and most contemporary framework of the analysis, which takes into account the recent social, cultural and political changes in Serbia, former Yugoslavia and South-Eastern Europe.

2007; van der Port 1999; Vidić-Rasmussen 1995; Voiculescu 2005).¹⁷ However, my research is not directly contextualized within this tradition, since my focus is not on exploring a synchronic aspect of spreading of turbo-folk, but rather to explore diachronic dimension of its development. For this reason, I will not focus on this literature, although I find it appealing for some future comparative analysis.

Thus, my dissertation stands theoretically between the two main bodies of popular music studies, by adopting principles of textual (semiotic) media analysis from the western academic world, on the one hand, and analysis of social, historical and geopolitical contextualization of South-Eastern Europe, on the other hand. More to the point, the thesis explores the representation, and, especially, the concept of stardom as a subject of analysis. As mentioned above, I rely on the assumption that when we talk about stars' stage identities we talk not only about the characters they perform in their songs, or videos but also the way they are mediated and communicated to the audiences as "real people", through their biographies, life narratives, statements published in the media. I draw on the semiotic approach as developed within cultural studies, assuming that all these elements create a *text* materialized by some mediators within a particular context to be *read* by the audiences, and relying on a postulation of Richard Dyer, who says that "Stars are, like characters in stories, representations of people" (Dyer 1998: 20). The social context of the genre conventions within which a particular text is produced vary and develop over time (see Hall 1980). A text, from the nineties, taken as a system of signifier, is produced, supported by particular methods and technological requirements and embedded in social context in a different way than a text produced in the seventies and eighties). However, the common themes, or motifs, or intersections of them which I call "topoi" (a term borrowed from literary theory), appear in different forms, still keeping some common features. Representations of women, or women's "stage identities" vary over time as the constitutive part of the genre conventions of NCFM and turbo-folk production, which interrelate to actual social and political circumstances. Women's stage identities have been created and altered by ideology of verbal and visual conventions of NCFM and turbo-folk. Through their various forms over time, they

¹⁷ Here I also count the documentary entitled "Posao snova (Dream Job)" produced in 2006 by a Bosnian author, Daniela Majstorović, which deals with a profession of woman singer at music scene in Bosnia. To a large extent, this scene is mixed with turbo-folk production in Serbia, regarding media promotion, performing styles, people who work in the music production houses, etc. The documentary contains conversations with popular Bosnian female singers from various generations, discussing the status of women singers, issues of sexism and women's up-word social mobility connected with the profession of singer.

symbolically have constructed the notion of belonging to the community. Most contemporary constructions of community through representations of heteronormativity, enhance nationalist tendencies, structured by taste distinctions and class stratifications, expressed in Bourdieu's terms (Bourdieu 1992), ethnic demarcations and fetishization of male/female hegemonic power relations.

1.5. Research Method

My method relies primarily on textual analysis of verbal and visual texts. The textual analysis applied here, in more accurate sense, means method of *close reading* in the case of written sources and semiotic analysis of signs and symbols in the case of videos. The verbal sources included lyrics, public statements of the music performers, and the parts of their biographies as presented to the public. The visual mostly relates to videos and partially to documentaries. For that purpose, I have watched more than six hundred videos and read and listened to more than thousand and three hundred songs. The second part of the fieldwork was ethnographic research, the core of which was conducted in Belgrade between 2004-2007. However, as Belgrade is my hometown, I have included many moments of personally experienced contextualization of turbo-folk in Serbia, some of which dated from the nineties, and sometimes even earlier. I used some personal memories of my own and of my informants to look for particular magazines, articles and visual (TV) sources from the seventies and eighties. The actual ethnographic work consisted of visiting clubs, parties, wedding parties and other social gatherings at which turbo-folk was played and consumed in a variety of ways (including group watching TV videos). The core of the fieldwork was done in Belgrade, but additional parts were done in the smaller cities of Novi Sad and Niš, as well as in the countryside around Belgrade.

The interviewing was the third part of my fieldwork, and, as it was expected, provided me with very ambiguous results. I did forty six in-depth interviews with the respondents (eight in Novi Sad, seven in Nis, and thirty one in Belgrade), and twelve in-depth interviews with professional musicians who agreed to contribute to my research anonymously. The reason for their anonymity was that they could assure me that their answers were as sincere as possible, as they did not pursue any interest in promoting their names or protecting the interests of the

women singers they worked with, since most of them are members of bands that play with popular singers at concerts, tours, or music recording in music studios. In addition, I did four group interviews with groups of informants at social gatherings (twice in coffee shops, and twice at private parties), which included twenty two additional respondents. I used my earlier professional social connections in Serbia to recruit as big number of informants as possible. It means I contacted a few acquaintances for whom I have known that they have been big fans of turbo-folk, who later on introduced me to other friends and acquaintances of theirs so that the number of my respondents was slowly progressing. My principle was to look for respondents who do not necessarily identify themselves as “fans” or “admirers of turbo-folk but who identify themselves as familiar with the turbo-folk scene, being interested in its development, who have attended turbo-folk clubs and parties for years and at least occasionally have listened to turbo-folk songs by their own choice. Being a native speaker of Serbian, and being familiar with socializing practices of the youth in Serbia, helped me in providing a substantial number of people for in-depth interviews, which lasted between forty five minutes and up to two hours, during which time I was taking notes and recording our conversations.

The age of respondents was predominantly from twenty to thirty five, but I did include five interviews with the respondents above the age of thirty five, since my immediate interest in particular issues demanded such exceptions. I experienced certain difficulties with providing an approximately equal number of male and female respondents for in-depth interviews. It turned out that male respondents were much more confident in discussing and presenting their views on popular music and turbo-folk, while women expressed certain lack of self-confidence. Some of them tried indirectly to avoid the interviews, giving apologetic answers, such as “I don’t know whether I will know how to answer your questions...”. After a few “ice-breaking” sentences, they would usually become more relaxed and talkative. In the end, out of forty six interviewees, twenty six were with men, and other twenty were with women. In addition, the interviews with male respondents were generally longer, compared to those with female respondents, and usually, it did not take much effort to solicit answers from them. The situation was different in the case of group interviews, where the atmosphere usually was much more relaxing, encouraging women to participate in the discussion as intensively as men did.

My original idea was to include respondents of various ethnic backgrounds. However, it turned out that this was easier said than done. Namely, some of the respondents, for whom I

speculated, on the basis of knowing their family histories, that they would declare themselves to be of a non-Serbian ethnic background, or non-Serbian Orthodox church confession, did not feel compelled to do so. I have got the impression that, at the moment, they did not want to be perceived as something “different” than the majority population, even for the sake of anonymous interviews. The only group of informants that did not mind to be recognized as the members of a minority was a group of gay respondents, who openly talked about how their sexual identity has been constructed through consumption of particular popular music genres or products. Also, some respondents said at the beginning of the interviews that they believed that their own ethnic background never meant much for them in the formation of their musical taste. On the other hand, many respondents said that language of the lyrics and origin of the performers did matter for them; however, some of them said that it was important for them that it was in Serbian (their mother tongue), while some of them claimed that, although they were very keen on turbo-folk performers, they still preferred to listen to lyrics in English.

After a few initial interviews, I realized that I would not identify a straightforward connection between particular musical practices and respondents’ notions of ethnic or cultural identities, by analyzing only openly expressed statements of respondents. I realized that I can discover a relationship between music performances and community, only after a complex analysis of data gathered through various methods, not only through interviews. So, instead of direct questions such as “How does your music taste relate to your (ethnic) national identity”, I introduced questions such as “Does the ethnic origin of a performer matter for you”, “Do you pay attention to the gender roles represented through the lyrics”, and the like. The interviews mostly provided conclusions into issues such as: how the gender identity of performers was perceived by the audiences in relation to particular social and political issues, how particular practices of turbo-folk were read, how women’s stage identities were received by the audiences, how women’s visibility within a collective was understood and how division of “high” and “low” taste in culture was perceived by the audience. The interviews gave me a broad insight into the status of turbo-folk women performances in the Serbian context. In the thesis, I do not analyze them as the main research material, but I rather use them as evidence, which tested my research hypotheses. My main research material were still lyrics, videos and public images of performers as presented in the media.

A separate part of my research, which was originally done for the purpose of another

conference paper, but was used in this dissertation as well, were eleven interviews I did in Sarajevo and seven interview I did in Zagreb in the summer of 2006. These interviews were included here in order to support some conclusions of the Yugoslav music market in the eighties.

All the pictures displayed in this dissertation can be found on internet websites which are cited in footnotes. The pictures are used here exclusively for non-commercial, academic purposes, in order to illustrate academic arguments. I do not claim any authorship of them.

1.6. Outline of Chapters

The dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 is a guideline to key debates and controversies around terminology and genre classification, as well as a social and political contextualization of the turbo-folk genre. Here I review the recent history of studies and debates on newly composed folk music and turbo-folk. The chapter also proposes a view of turbo-folk as a conceptual category, as a marker of the period and a mode of music production in Serbia in the nineties, rather than just a music genre. The aim of this chapter is to show that there are basically two conflicting views of turbo-folk, present in contemporary scholarly and journalist writings, in Serbia and abroad. The first one is critical of it, highlighting that turbo-folk represents a conformist, retrograde, conservative and aesthetically worthless form of commercial production, which was used by the Milošević's regime in order to position politically obedient audiences. The second one stresses affirmative social aspects of turbo-folk performances, picturing turbo-folk as a genuine "common people's entertainment", wanted by the folk, available for wide audiences and, even, for performing various elements of minority identities. The chapter concludes that turbo-folk production does allow transgression of boundaries between various styles, concepts, and ethnic, sexual and other identities (incorporating gypsy style, gay culture, and the language of city local cultures). However, instead of representing these cultures, turbo-folk appropriates their symbols and signifiers in order to enrich and reinforce its own main themes: heteronormativity and maintaining the ethno-national community spirit.

Chapter 3 examines the predecessor of turbo-folk, NCFM, the social contextualization of its conventions, and the representation of women within it. The chapter discusses the way Yugoslav intellectuals perceived NCFM as an "authentic" and "unique" phenomenon, something

“wanted by the folk” and self-sustainable. It also observes the early attempts of sociologists, aestheticians and musicologists to outline the studies of the popular music scene as a commodity product, which was a sensitive issue for scholars in socialist countries such as Yugoslavia. I particularly review two recent examples of theorizing NCFM, by Čolović and Vidić-Rasmussen, and their interdisciplinary readings of the ideological implications of NCFM. The chapter unpacks the images of three female icons of NCFM, Lepa Lukić, Silvana Armenulić and Lepa Brena and their “stage identities” and paying particular attention to how they interrelate with the notion of community. This section also introduces the concept of common themes, or *topoi*, as well as one particular form of female performance, that of the *kafana* performance.

The Chapter 4 occupies a central position in the dissertation in conceptual terms, since it looks at the changes in social and political life, and subsequently, in the popular music market, which occurred in former Yugoslavia in the beginning of the nineties. It analyzes the stage identities of the first big turbo-folk stars, and their transition from the sphere of NCFM to the turbo-folk performances. The aim of this chapter is to indicate that, after the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, the main principle of community homogenization in Serbia turned into nationalism which was based on belonging to Serbian ethnicity, exercised through many spheres of social and cultural life. The chapter also briefly observes how the initial theme of popular performance from the period of NCFM, urbanization, was replaced by the *biographization* of women’s performances, which constructed women stars as “all-Serbian” role models.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyze concrete examples of stage identities of women turbo-folk performers, by analyzing the videos, lyrics and parts of their life narratives presented to the audiences through the media. In Chapter 5 I analyze the stage identity of the most popular and most controversial turbo-folk star, Ceca Ražnatović, and the aspects of heteronormativity performed through her career. The chapter first explores commodification of feminine heterosexual appeal in her early performances, which depicts an image of a “simple girl from the neighborhood”. The central part of the chapter analyses two related videos of Ceca, made in a manner of a short movie. My analysis stresses the work of heteronormative hierarchical relations through these features, and how they have served in order to maintain desirable female role models in a Serbian context in the period of the nineties. The analysis of videos is intertwined with insights into details of Ceca’s private life narratives, and her marriage to a war criminal and mafia boss, which significantly added to the construction of her stage identity.

Chapter 6 consists of two parts: the first explores fetishes of sexuality and nation in performances of turbo-folk singers, and the second explores the status of irony in the stage identities of women's turbo-folk singers. It is examined how heteronormativity is reproduced through intersection of social (class) status, sexuality and signifiers of nation, and how it further reworks and reinforces everyday nationalism (Edensor 2002). There is also a section on how paradigms of motherhood and sexuality, as constitutive of symbolic construction of community, work through the plastic surgery interventions in the case of turbo-folk singers. The chapter shows the examples of lyrics and visual turbo-folk performances that present an "appropriate" merging of gender, sexual and ethno-national identity. The chapter discusses how symbols of the Serbian nation and the Serbian Orthodox Church have been employed in the turbo-folk performances and how their fetishized status has been used in heteronormative constructions of community.

The second part of this chapter discusses the ironic and parodic elements of turbo-folk visual and verbal performances. It argues that codes of irony, parody and alternative identities in the performances of women turbo-folk singers are appropriated into the heteronormative matrix and do not subvert existing hierarchical gender relation or belonging to the mainstream community. The Chapter 6 ends with the analysis of a song by Jelena Karleuša, a star of the "late turbo-folk phase" who has often employed images of cross-gendered, S/M and gay performances in her videos. I argue that in spite of the glamour, grotesque and aesthetics of exaggeration in her performances, the traditional ways of developing gender hierarchies, and loyalty to community, instead of being subverted, still prevail in them. Finally, I conclude that contemporary development of turbo-folk does not perform a genuine subversion of original premises of heteronormativity, but, rather, radicalization of performative strategies which maintain heteronormativity as crucial relationship between individual and community.

The conclusion of the dissertation is that the spirit of a national community, and mandatory heterosexuality is what prevails in the construction of turbo-folk culture and the way in which gender is constructed within the turbo-folk imaginary. The communal spirit does incorporate elements of many identities, however, the reproduction of heteronormativity as a main principle of an individual's place in relation to the community, remains as dominant. The community belonging in post-Yugoslav period within the turbo-folk scene is constructed as nationalism, or belonging to the Serbian nation. It is important to understand that it is not merely

grounded in the direct connection between turbo-folk and Milošević's regime, or between turbo-folk and sexism. The foundation of the connection between turbo-folk and contemporary Serbian nationalism is conditioned by the logics of turbo-folk genre conventions, which are rooted in the mandatory representations of the subordination of an individual man or woman to a larger community that is not subject to a critical reassessment. The thesis also shows how turbo-folk popularity was fueled by the elements of nationalist ideology, and how nationalism, in reverse, was reproduced by particular types of turbo-folk performance.

CHAPTER 2

Turbo-Folk Controversies Revisited

The transition from one-party political system to the political pluralism that started in Central and Eastern Europe in the late eighties has induced various local implementations of regional and global political phenomena. Despite the similarities in economic and political circumstances, the fall of state-socialist systems has opened up a space for the (re)creation of cultural traits specific for each particular regional unit in the former socialist countries. Turbo-folk music has often been treated and observed as a unique mark of the post-socialist cultural climate in certain parts of former Yugoslavia (Baker 2008; Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001;; Papić 2002; Dragičević-Šešić 1994). The turbo-folk scene has not been the only existing popular music scene in Serbia since 1991; however the extent of its production and consumption, its visibility throughout the mass media, and the amount of financial and symbolic capital re-produced within it has largely outweighed the significance of the other scenes.¹⁸

In this chapter I will present two divergent views on the social status and significance of the turbo-folk music scene that were produced in the circles of journalists, theoreticians and musicians in Serbia and abroad. I will briefly discuss both approaches and discuss in which ways the turbo-folk phenomenon presents itself as an interplay of popular entertainment, nation-making and re-constructions of national and gender identities.

The main question that has divided these turbo-folk discussions into two streams is whether turbo-folk is a spontaneous, all-inclusive cultural phenomenon that represents common people's expression, and has an emancipating social impact on the audience, or is it a pro-conservative and traditionalist cultural form, imposed from above, which reinforces the domination of a particular ideological setting in society? The question structured two

¹⁸ See more about this in the section "2.2.Turbo-folk and its Competition". There are very few works that genuinely treat the problem of the relationship between the turbo-folk music genre and other genres, and this field seems to be rather uncovered in the scholarship on popular culture in Serbia. Some suggestions on this topic can be found in works of Ivana Kronja (Kronja, 2001) and Miša Đurković (Đurković 2005), as well as Milena Dragičević-Šešić's early study on the audience of folk music (Dragičević-Šešić 1994) and Eric Gordy's pioneering work on the relationship between the Milošević's regime and cultural models in Serbia (Gordy 1999).

predominant types of arguing and reflecting, and, at the same time, two major poles of thinking about popular culture in academic scholarship worldwide today. The first one fosters a view of popular culture as a site of popular resistance toward the dominant ideological impositions of high culture contents and the second one perceives popular culture predominantly as an instrument of the ruling state apparatuses, programmed so as to buy a political compromise between social groups and to be mainly controlled by a state or capitalist elites. Most contemporary influential writers on popular culture (especially popular music) try to combine both of these views and come up with an original concept of popular culture studies, rooted mostly in an amalgam of neo-Marxist approaches and psychoanalytical premises (see Fiske 1989a; Fiske 1989b; Hall 1980; Kaplan 1993; Kellner 2006; Negus 1996; Walkerdine 1995; Whitely 2000). This third view can unpack many controversies around popular music scenes such as turbo-folk as it does not present a black and white picture of the role of the audiences in the actualization of popular culture forms. However, so far, the writing on turbo-folk produced in Serbia has mostly implied either extremely positive or negative value judgment of this music style.

Consequently, before I proceed with the analysis of the representation of women's subject position on the turbo-folk scene, there is a need to review some main discourses within these two approaches and to explicate the biases contained in both of them. In this process I will not only review the existing discourses on the subject, but also outline the social and political context within which the representations of women on the turbo-folk scene have been situated. Accordingly, as outlined in Chapter 1, I hope to show the importance of understanding the cultural, national and gender identity as sites of contestation of various social and cultural discourses and practices.

In particular, I suggest that, in the context of post-Yugoslav society, there has been a connection between controversial media and pop-culture production and the reinforcement of national identity, a process conditioned by many factors emerging as a result of the transformation from state socialism into the post-socialist political surrounding (see Čolović 1985; Đorđević 2000; Milivojević 2000;). This insight draws on the hypothesis that the turbo-folk scene still has been deployed more in the promotion of the dominant mainstream collective national identity, than in the promotion of alternative or marginalized social groups or contexts. Similarly, in this chapter I will examine this hypothesis and explore how grounded it could be, as

well as what theoretical perspective enables the complex assessment of the social, cultural and political context of turbo-folk in Serbia. The concluding paragraphs of this chapter will underline the academic significance of gender analysis of turbo-folk, especially the assessment of the relationship between turbo-folk, representation of women's images and nation-making. Before exploring turbo-folk controversies, I will address some difficulties in handling the term and concept of *turbo-folk*.

2.1. Problems of Classification and Terminology

So far, it has been very difficult to give a descriptive definition of the music genre loosely named “turbo-folk”, usually indicated as the dominant popular music scene in Serbia.¹⁹ The discourse on “turbo-folk” has been reproducing itself through the interplay of negative and positive connotations, and it is hard to detach this discussion from the question of who is using the term at the moment and why. Even from the beginning, it is clear that turbo-folk has brought in a new image of all-inclusive cultural practices, and another set of excluding practices of particular identities, or cultural models. These inclusions/exclusions have been seen differently by the occupants of different political, economic and cultural positions. It is only by re-assessing these inclusions and exclusions that we come to some more plausible ground for the academic study of turbo-folk.

One of the main reasons for the difficulties in defining turbo-folk is the implication of a moral judgment that is usually built into the definitions of cultural phenomena (see Đurković 2004). As the phenomenon appeared to be quite divergent, heterogeneous and mutable, a number of problems have appeared in terms of naming it, grasping its scope and enlisting all its possible sub-genres. For instance, Kronja divides the music production of the nineties in Serbia into three sub-genres: *novokomponovana narodna muzika* (newly-composed folk music), *turbo-folk* and

¹⁹ Turbo-folk music produced on the territory of Serbia has also been very popular in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia and Croatia, despite the fact that turbo-folk stars do not show up very often in the main-stream media in these countries. This popularity is indicated by the numbers of performances of Serbian turbo-folk singers in private clubs in Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Slovenia etc, and high attendance at the turbo-folk concerts in these countries (Stanivuković 2002; *Blic* 2008; *Kurir* 2008)

dens (Kronja 2001: 10). According to her, all three create what she calls *nova srpska muzika* (new Serbian music). Đurković argues for a similar classification within “popular music“ in Serbia: *neo-folk*, *warriors’ folk*, “*dens*” and *techno-folk* (Đurković 2004: 276). However, it seems that there are no more substantial explanations why these sub-divisions should be taken as theoretically relevant for analysts of music production in Serbia in 1990s, given that most popular music stars in the last fifteen years have combined the elements of all these music “sub-genres” outlined by these authors. Even the authors of these classifications have mostly discussed the entire music production in Serbia that have emerged within last fifteen years as a continual flow, despite their own attempts to differentiate formally between various music styles, and despite their hesitation to use one single term for the entire mainstream music production in Serbia in that period. The fact is that all these authors undoubtedly refer to the existing debates and opinions constructed around the term “turbo-folk”, even though they have manifested their intentions to replace it with some other terms or phrases.

Second, the diversity of classification has been mostly matched with confusion in academic analyses of turbo-folk. While the phenomenon has remained almost “untouched” by cultural studies theorists and anthropologists, it has been widely discussed by sociologists, political theorists, art historians, musicologists and visual arts scholars (Dimitrijević 2002; Gordy 1999; Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Đurković 2005; Iordanova 2001; Kronja 2001; Papić 2002). Mostly, either the visual or purely political aspects of this phenomenon have been analyzed, often without taking into consideration the complexity of popular culture studies, which has been so far quite developed in “western” academia and used in analysis of some other genres of popular music.²⁰ Although some authors have tried to raise the question of necessity of a special type of popular music studies, this question still has not been debated enough in the Serbian public space.²¹

Third, so far, a lot of stress has been put on the ultimate attachment of the turbo-folk culture to the political regime of Slobodan Milošević (Gordy 1999; Kronja 2000; Papić 2002). In

²⁰ For example, see: Brackett 1995; Frith and Goodwin 1990; Negus 1996; Redhead 2002; Shuker 1994; Whiteley 2000; Whiteley 2005.

²¹ Just to illustrate, Miša Đurković points out that the field of popular music should be observed as a subject of a new scholarly discipline, separately from the field of so-called “artistic” or “elite” music. He argues for initiating a “movement for serious studying of popular music” (Đurković 2004). However, Đurković also does not say what would be the key research questions of that “autonomous scholarship” that would provide an adequate method and theoretical tools for studying popular music in Serbia.

the book *The Culture of Power in Serbia*, while commenting on the Serbian regime in the nineties, Erik Gordy writes:

...In the war period, the interests of the party in power in Serbia found its greatest resonance among the social groups that broadly constituted the neofolk and the least among those that broadly constituted rock and roll audience. In this sense, important political and social divisions came to be expressed in differential access to media and publicity, which were widely interpreted as representing the cultural orientation of the regime.

As turbo-folk consolidated its dominance over the musical soundscape of cities as well, employing more elaborate and expensive production and promotion techniques, several of its products could be viewed as taking its position of official favor as its theme (Gordy 1999: 136).

Nowadays, it is still apparent that turbo-folk music has survived the end of Milošević's rule, without really losing its primacy in the cultural life of the Serbian society, which gives us a valid reason to look for some more complex contextualization of this cultural expression. Out of fifty eight participants in the in-depth interviews I conducted, fifty two expressed the opinion that turbo-folk was definitely the most represented, and structurally dominant type of popular culture production in Serbia, not only in the period of the nineties (the period of Milošević's rule), but also in the period until 2005, up to the point when the bulk of the research for this dissertation was conducted. All these difficulties have resulted in a number of documentaries, talk shows and articles in which various journalists attempted to explain the phenomenon on their own, by commenting on the opinions of a number of influential figures from public life. In this way, pieces of intellectual and pseudo-intellectual popular discourse on turbo-folk, both affirmative and negative, have been created, expressing the various social groups' interests and points of view.²²

Still, we are left with the question of what the turbo-folk musical genre is? As discussed in Chapter 1, it is widely believed that the term was first used by Rambo Amadeus, a Serbian rock musician, but it was widely embraced by various social circles in Serbia and abroad. The term has always provoked a lot of animosities though, and generated questions about whether it should be used in a more narrow or broader sense, as well as the question of whether one single term should be used as a reference to almost the entire Serbian popular music production that

²² So far, a number of popular talk-shows at various TV stations have organized discussions on the phenomenon of turbo-folk music. The most remarkable example is an eight-part-documentary series called "Sav taj folk (All That Folk)" produced by B92 TV station, and broadcast in the fall 2004. The documentary was made up of interviews with a large number of Serbian intellectuals, musicologists, fashion designers, politicians, popular music stars, and others.

emerged in last fifteen or twenty years (Đurković 2004). It has always seemed that the term contained implications of something grotesque, aggressive, artificial and imposed on the audience by aggressive media campaigns. Many authors purposefully used the term in a derogative sense: for instance, Kronja associates “turbo-folk music” with frivolity, banality, unruliness and adoration of everything which is trendy (Kronja 2001: 30). In addition, Gordy views this style as: “... accoutrements of MTV dance culture as understood by Serbia’s peasants and peasant urbanities”. (Gordy 1999: 133). Here Gordy employs the term “peasant” and “peasant urbanities” as formulated by Andrej Simić, who discusses a particular way of life of Serbian citizens who lived half-way between the rural and urban context in the period of Yugoslavia (1973). However, unlike Simić, Gordy uses the terms in an openly derogatory sense, indicating the phenomenon of “peasant urbanities” as a factor of destruction of what he describes as city culture (Gordy 1999). In addition, musicians, composers and music editors have often protested against the use of the term *turbo-folk*. In particular, protests emerged from those who were said to be the “generators” of such music production in Serbia in the last fifteen years²³. However, the term “turbo-folk” has persisted, suggesting meanings that obviously go far beyond some pure musicological or technical demarcation in relation to the other genres. A number of very recent scholarly pieces refer to this term (see Baker 2008; Đurković 2004; Kronja 2006) as well as press articles or documentaries²⁴

Another question is whether we should treat turbo-folk as a music genre that could be associated with various periods and geopolitical contexts, or rather as a marker of a certain period in popular music production in certain parts of former Yugoslavia, particularly in Serbia? In other words, does turbo-folk signify a trend firmly bound to a particular spatial, temporal and ideological context, or could it be associated with another situational framework as well? The question poses a range of challenges not least because turbo-folk has relied heavily on the traditions of popular music trends and orientations, coming from non-Serbian geopolitical spaces

²³ The director of Pink television, former musician Željko Mitrović, who is believed to be one of the most prominent figures of turbo-folk production, in his interview for *BH Dani*, emphasized that his television has nothing to do with turbo-folk and that turbo-folk “has been dead for years” (*BH Dani* 2002). Saša Popović, one of the directors of *Grand show*, a leading music show at Pink television (also a former musician), who admits that he participated in turbo-folk production, has recently said that turbo-folk emerged in 1992 and “disappeared” in 1996 (Stamatović 2006).

²⁴ For example the article in *Cristian Science Monitor*, “Turbo-folk is the sound of Serbia feeling sorry for itself” by Nicole Itano (2008), or “Serbs rally to “turbo-folk” music” by Matt Prodger in *BBC NEWS Online* (2005). The broadcasting of the recent documentary “Sav taj folk” (All That Folk) also indicates the relevance of this term in the analysis of public life in Serbia.

and overlapping with various genres or deriving from them (Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002;). In this respect, we cannot but relate “turbo-folk” to the phenomenon of “newly composed folk music (NCFM)”, the genre which emerged in the former Yugoslavia in the late 1960s, persisted under the same term throughout 1970s and 1980s, and was widely accepted in journalist discourses as well as in public debates, and even some scholarly analyses (Čolović 1985; Šesić 1994; Vidić -Rasmussen 2002; Vidić-Rasmussen 1996). Ljerka Vidić-Rasmussen defines NCFM as a “hybrid genre drawn from local folk music sources (rural nostalgia) and commercial pop patterns (aspirations to progress), thus reflecting the conflict inherent in migrants’ adaptation to institutions of urban culture“ (Vidić-Rasmussen 1996: 100). Vidić-Rasmussen also uses the terms “rural”, “urban”, “migrants” and the like as given categories, suggesting that there are some particular “cultural traits” that have played an unambiguous role in the creation of particular styles and meanings within popular music production, which also led to the reinforcement of social hierarchies and class stratification.²⁵ According to this approach, NCFM has emerged as a deliberate (but non-uniform or strictly guided) effort of the musical editors to make a popular and commercial musical expression which incorporated both the traditional elements of so-called village music and some “trendy” styles of musical arrangements (Vidić-Rasmussen 2002; Čolović 1985). But most of the works and journalistic analyses dealing with popular music in Serbia use NCFM as a key term only referring to the music till the beginning of the nineties. The fact that the term “turbo-folk music” has become widely employed, and heavily exploited as a signifier of a particular, post-socialist musical era, indicates that some visible change happened at the beginning of the nineties regarding the status of NCFM, which established a new cultural identity of both performers and consumers. The social contextualization of the production and consumption of the genre demanded the introduction of a new genre label and the musical concept, named informally “turbo-folk”. Although turbo-folk could not have been conceived without NCFM, the former should be analyzed as a distinct stage in relation to the latter.²⁶

²⁵ The labels such as “rural”, “urban”, and “peasant urbanities”, produced so far in intellectual discourses in relation to cultural issues, and the constructions of meanings associated to those labels in various contexts will be discussed further in Chapter 3 and, partially, Chapter 4.

²⁶ This is definitely not to say that turbo-folk represented a monolithic homogeneous cultural production over all this period, since 1991. Both musicians and theoreticians have argued very much against such generalisation, by explicating the diversity in the music production trends in the last fifteen years. With all respect for the various alterations of main-stream music production in Serbia, in this dissertation I will nevertheless argue for taking the mainstream music production in Serbia as a continual form of music production since the beginning of the nineties.

Moreover, what is “turbo-folk scene”, or “turbo-folk music” or “turbo-folk culture” in itself? Instead of striving for an “objective” definition of *turbo-folk*, I believe it would be much more fruitful to assess the constructions of the image of the turbo-folk scene in the context of critical and affirmative attitudes toward it. The confrontation of these two types of thinking could help us to understand the complex network of tensions within which this cultural model has been constructed. Hence, such an approach enables us to search for the contextualized and fluid definition of this genre, or phenomenon, in a way which will avoid the extreme biases inscribed in most existing definitions invented up to date.

Here I am not going to engage in a historical overview of the first appearances of the term “turbo-folk” or list the results of a thorough empirical investigation of all media discourses related to the explanation of this term.²⁷ In the next section of this chapter I will explain the contextualization of turbo-folk in relation to other popular music forms in the beginning of the nineties in Serbia. After this, I will briefly outline the key elements of critical and affirmative assessments of turbo-folk concept. These approaches have employed both academic and non-academic, everyday discourses channeled through the media and produced a lot of informal TV debates on this topic in Serbia.

2.2. Turbo-Folk and its Competition

The description of turbo-folk given above does not provide a clear notion of the distinctiveness of this scene, if we disregard the context and controversies of its emergence and position of other orientations in popular music in Serbia and former Yugoslavia. As will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapters 2 and 3, turbo-folk, according to the general opinion of analysts (Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002) derived from newly composed folk music (NCFM), which used to be one of the music scenes in Yugoslavia, while other commercial genres were clearly delineated scenes of rock and pop music, subsumed in some less clear but still visible subdivisions (punk, metal, underground, new wave, new primitivism, and other). The highest extent of media access and concert spaces were reserved for “rock”

²⁷ There are a few works that offer an inspiring insight in that respect, such as Đurković 2004; Kronja 2001; Vidić-Rasmussen 1996.

bands such as Riblja čorba, Zabranjeno pušenje, Bjelo dugme, Parni valjak, Leb i sol, as well as for “pop” bands such as Novi Fosili and Magazin (see more in: Janjatović 2001; Vukojević 2006; Glavan and Vrdoljak 1989; Gordy 1999). The “rock” and “pop” scene often merged with each other, which means the performers from both scenes could be seen performing in the same music TV show, or at the same concert. According to the logics of everyday communication, there was only one crucial hierarchical distinction, which also meant a difference in taste, social, educational and regional background, namely, the division between *zabavna* (entertaining) and *narodna* (folk) music. *Zabavna* included all those genres on a scale between “light” and commercial pop-rock music and very experimental punk music. *Narodna* unambiguously referred to newly composed folk music (NCFM). This division is clearly visible in one of the most influential popular magazines from the late Yugoslav period, *Radio TV Revija*, from the seventies and early eighties and the magazines *Rock* and *Džuboks*. The letters from the audience members (readers, listeners and viewers of programs), commenting on radio and TV programs, as well as personal ads in which young individuals always indicated their musical taste as the most important part of their cultural identity, testify to the existence of this dichotomy of lifestyle, taste and musical performances. The articles and interviews with “narodna” (NCFM) singers were published as often as those with the singers from the “zabavna” sphere. However, music charts and the letters of listeners and viewers often expressed higher appreciation for products from the “zabavna” scene. There were no real indicators that NCFM music was less consumed than Yugoslav or foreign rock and pop music. However, expressed in the terms of pre-established paradigms of symbolic capital (see Bourdieu 1984), in Yugoslav everyday life, it was much more prestigious both for individuals and various groups to present themselves as being associated with “zabavna muzika” which meant pop and rock genre.²⁸ Constructions of personal relationships, such as close friendships and dating, were often represented in popular culture and everyday life through the prism of the *zabavna/narodna* division, i.e, through the parameters of music taste. For this reason, it is interesting to observe the evolution of NCFM into turbo-folk scene in the beginning of the nineties, since it was not just the evolution of the genre

²⁸ For instance, a number of young people who decided to give a personal add seeking for a friendship or a date, in the issues between 151-192 in 1970, underlined in add texts that they listened “both *zabavna* and *narodna muzika*”. This statement contained the subtext informing a reader that they would not mind finding somebody on “either” side of musical and social taste, which still is a proof that the division in itself was potentially a signification of taste or a status, which must have been addressed in communication within personal relationships.

conventions over time. Additionally, it is also a development that indicated a change in the hierarchies of social positioning and people's social and cultural capital.

The nineties were marked by a huge media breakthrough of modified NCFM production, informally referred to as turbo-folk. This meant that national radio and TV station and new private stations started broadcasting NCFM songs, and promoting new singers and songs of that orientation. The new circumstances led to some transformations of the NCFM genre. Modernization, stylistic changes and new topics of lyrics and new visual performances together created a new stage for NCFM music, which came to be called turbo-folk music. The rock and pop scenes became commercially insignificant. Rock and pop musicians kept themselves to small concert spaces, participating only in small festivals, while many of the song writers (such as Momčilo Bajagić Bajaga, and Zoran Lesendrić Kiki) started writing songs for turbo-folk stars. The big Yugoslav scene of rock and pop music, together with influential magazines (*Rock*, *Džuboks*, *Radio TV Revija*, to name some of them) practically disappeared.

As of the middle of the nineties, a group of alternative pop-rock music bands in Serbia constructed a new scene, which might have been considered a sort of alternative to turbo-folk; it consisted of bands which mixed rock, funk, reggae, and sometimes jazz, singing mostly in English, such as “Darkwood Dub”, “Kanda Kodža i Nebojša”, “Atheist Rap”, “Love Hunters”, “Eyesburn”, “Jarboli”, and others (see Colin 2001). Their performances at concerts were often backed up by the music of some older alternative rock bands, which had started their career in the eighties, but stayed a part of “music underground”, an intellectual, “city culture” (e.g. Partibrejkersi, Eva Braun, Obojeni Program, Deca loših muzičara, and a few others). The main problem of the production and reception of the music of these bands was that its production was mostly oriented to city spaces (mostly in Belgrade and Novi Sad) and often proclaimed itself to be an “urban alternative style” compared to “primitive” and “peasant” turbo-folk. This scene gained bigger significance in the late nineties, just before the fall of the Milošević regime, when it openly joined the oppositional parties' campaign against Milošević, which gave them the meaning of a movement, including not only audiences from the big cities, but from all over Serbia. However, after the fall of Milošević, there was a significant decrease in the activities of these bands. Only a couple of them, such as Darkwood Dub and Eyesburn remained active. According to a member of a band from this scene, the main problem from the beginning was that

they could not find a way to be marketable enough, which would enable them to develop into a “genuine popular music band”. In the words of this musician:

We did not have the technical support necessary to get bigger on the market. We never had enough gas to travel to all parts of Serbia, never had enough money to sponsor our marketing campaigns. We could not ask for money from politicians, since it was known we were against Milošević and his regime...and certainly we could not count on money from our fans, since they were mostly students, young working people and people with a degree and no money...After 2000, some of us left the country, or started doing something else...many of us got other interests in the meantime (Ivan, 36, a Belgrade band musician).

Another relevant music scene that emerged as a potential competition to turbo-folk production is the “techno DJ scene”, which has become more developed as of 2000 in Serbia. A number of informants who talked to me mentioned that nowadays this is the only scene that can partially compete with the mass attendance at concerts of turbo folk stars, such as Ceca Ražnatović or Seka Aleksić. The “Techno scene” is operated through big techno parties, usually held in big spaces, accompanied by the consumption of alcoholic and energy drinks. The respondents mostly agreed that the consumption of drugs such as “ecstasy” and “speed” is also very typical of these parties. However, in spite of a great audiences’ interest in this music production, it should be mentioned that it does not involve the phenomenon of “stardom”, since it does not include the concept of a performer and performance in the usual sense of these words. Popular disk jockeys in Serbia are mostly known only through their names, or rather pseudonyms, while they are not visible in other aspects of public life or through the media. In that respect, in terms of the fandom/stardom paradigm, this scene is not really comparable to the phenomenon of turbo/folk and other scenes.

The other types of music played in Serbia in the nineties and after the year of 2000, never developed into a self-sustainable scenes, in terms of marketing and sales. They mostly belonged to specific genres, such as artistically arranged gipsy music, ethno-jazz music, popular classical music, and other types of performances which were not produced for mass audiences. The period of the nineties also marked the beginning of music piracy in Serbia and other former republics of Yugoslavia. The number of records sold did not really indicate the extent of popularity of a performer, since there was a huge illegal market of extremely cheap pirate copies. The producers and musicians did not earn much from selling records. Instead, the main parameters of the performers and main sources of income became dependent on informal markets, individual engagements of singers in private parties thrown by the wealthy in private

clubs or at weddings in the country and abroad, and other informal arrangements between singers, managers, media owners, rich individuals and politicians. This situation remained up to the late nineties, when TV Pink started publicizing some of its business arrangements with particular singers, especially when it launched “City records” production, a new music production house.²⁹ However, up to the closing of this research, piracy or internet piracy had not been completely suppressed in the case of Serbia, so that it is not possible to estimate the extent of a performer’s popularity on the basis of legally sold records. Instead, some different parameters could be considered, such as the number of performances in private clubs throughout former Yugoslavia, concerts financed by local governments and political parties, and the type and extent of the presence of the performers in the media.

While the music houses abandoned the production that they had practiced in the period before the nineties, the new marketing and economic conditions after 1991 have introduced new images of music entertainers, and particular economic and social organization of entertainment business. In a word, since the early nineties, the control of the entertainment business informally moved from official music establishment to the hands of actual centers of economic power. These were the sources of power that could operate with cash at the moment, outside institutions or legal state mechanisms that were collapsing. Such sources preferred the entertainment form which was able to bring some profit immediately, with the cheapest possible marketing campaign. As one of the respondents put it:

The folk wanted some entertainment, and the editors and managers had to give them something...something quick, good for drunk parties. We could not sell them rock music anymore, they wanted some crazy and sexy dance music, something that everybody knew about, easy to get hooked on. Croatian and Bosnian pop-rock bands which had been the main source of party music for the youth, were not there any more...so, we had to let Džej, Dragana and other Serbian folk singers take their place on radio and TV. It turned out, the folk was just waiting for that, to enjoy easy silly tunes and these simple lyrics (Dragana, 38, a female from Belgrade, formerly editor at a radio station in Belgrade in the mid-nineties).³⁰

²⁹ One of the first exclusive arrangements, openly reported to the public, was a contract signed between “City Records” and Marina Perazić in 1998, a Croatian pop singer, who was popular in Yugoslavia in the eighties, lived abroad during the war time and moved to Belgrade in 1998 to renew her career in former Yugoslavia. The late nineties was also the period when many Serbian radio and TV stations renewed collaboration with Croatian and Bosnian musicians and singers, however, still in a quite low-profile manner, and quite often without real legal agreements. They were often just playing Croatian videos or songs without any copyrights or any legal consent from Croatian and Bosnian musicians or music companies.

³⁰ Džej Ramadanovski and Dragana Mirković were famous turbo-folk singers in the early nineties.

Thus, the primacy of the pop and rock scene in mainstream entertainment in Serbia, typical for the period when Serbia was part of Yugoslavia, was replaced by the music scene deriving from NCFM, pejoratively named as turbo-folk.

2.3. Critical Views of Turbo-Folk

The first approach was generated from the predominantly negative evaluation of music entertainment in Serbia in the beginning of the nineties. This criticism came, in the first place, from the musicians who were outside the mainstream music production in Serbia, and who, subsequently did not perceive themselves as belonging to that scene.³¹ For instance, Kornelije Kovač, one of the most famous composers of so-called pop music in former Yugoslavia, argued that turbo-folk has ruined “the purity “ of traditional Serbian folk music, and subsequently, perceived it as something highly negative (Kronja 2001: 12). The main trait of turbo-folk music and culture, according to this view is an unlimited mass production of repetitive music forms, with very low quality interpretation and performing. The defenders of this position also criticized turbo-folk producers for the “transgressing the boundaries” between pop, rock and NCFM, and combining the elements from all of them. They viewed the very moment of transgression as a devastation of good taste and termination of cultural pluralism. The hybrid character of turbo-folk was not therefore perceived as an expression of cultural liberation, but on the contrary, as an act of repression over other cultural concepts. For example, Gordy explains:

...State-controlled media outlets began to intensively promote neofolk music and the transformation of neofolk into a dance-pop-folk commercial mélange under the name of “turbofolk”. With the resources of the state media monopoly available to it, neofolk quickly occupied the cultural space once dominated by rock and roll and even became established in the city of Belgrade, where folk and neofolk forms had long been marginalized (Gordy 1999: 104-105).

³¹ One of these musicians is the performer Rambo Amadeus, who made some first ambiguous criticism of the rapid commercialisation of popular music scene through a parody, launching the term turbo-folk, as was mentioned. However, many musicians, including Rambo Amadeus himself, from time to time performed in collaboration with the turbo-folk stars. In one of his interviews, Rambo Amadeus called his participation in one of such music projects a “mistake” (Georgijev 2005).

Similar “anti-turbo-folk” opinions, with explicitly negative and derogatory opinions of producers and consumers of “such a music style”, were expressed by some professional music editors and very alternative underground musicians and artists. One of the greatest opponents of turbo-folk, Serbian composer Zoran Hristić, expressed many times his disapproval of the dance style introduced by turbo-folk among Serbian youth, for it reminded him of “oriental style”, which was “disgraceful” in Serbian cultural circle (for example, in his recent appearance in the TV documentary “Sav taj folk”, broadcast in the fall of 2004). Nena Kunijević, one of the most respectable musicologists among the music editors at Radio Belgrade, publicly confronted Viki Miljković (who was one of the most popular turbo-folk singers as of the mid-nineties), by expressing her opinion that turbo-folk singers are incompetent, poor singers who cannot sing “serious”, “traditional” Serbian songs.³² On the other hand, a number of musicians coming from the sphere of non-commercial production repeatedly expressed heavily negative views of turbo-folk culture, always relating this phenomenon to low educational levels of the population, nationalistic trends of self-isolation of one part of the population, and the overall prevalence of low-taste musical habits.³³

This opinion was backed by other scholars who studied the overall social situation in the society after the fall of the one-party system, as well as a number of musicologists, analysts and journalists who opposed the authoritarian political regime in Serbia in the nineties. These authors unavoidably associated “turbo-folk” with the rule of the regime of Slobodan Milošević. A range of criticisms has emerged from this view. The prevailing view argued that the regime deliberately allowed the mass production of commercial, village associated, but highly modernized music entertainment, in order to keep the people occupied by cheap and mass produced sources of pleasure (Gordy 1999; Đurković 2002; Kronja, 2001; Papić 2002).

³² Nena Kunijević reportedly was one of the founders of the associations called “Koreni (Roots)”, which stood for the cultural policy according which at least 40% of the music broadcasting in electronic media must be Serbian old traditional music, as opposed to the usual prevalence of turbo-folk music in the nineties. She also argued for the introduction of the audition for the young singers at Radio Belgrade, a practice that existed in the early days of socialist Yugoslavia, but was abandoned with the expansion of NCFM (*Glas javnosti* 2002).

³³ There is a range of examples of such public statements, even open confrontations and arguments between producers believed to be responsible for the promotion of turbo-folk, and other groups of musicians. One of the most heated arguments, accompanied by personal insults, took place between Belgrade contemporary painter and musician Uroš Đurić and an influential music producer and manager, Sasa Dragić (TV Show Ključ, September 23, 2004). While Đurić called turbo-folk production a primitive and low cultural model, Dragić replied that Đurić’s position is unproductive, and self-absorbing, being a sort of an “intellectual masturbation” and being unrelated to the demands of contemporary Serbian consumers.

However, one of the main pitfalls of this approach was the fact that almost none of these voices articulated and explained, in theoretical terms, the connection between popular music and the political atmosphere in Serbia. Considering what Gordy says about the “state controlled media” in the period of Milošević, it should be taken into consideration that popular music production in this region was, at least, as much under control of the state apparatus in the Yugoslav period as it was during Milošević’s rule (Đurković 2004; Luković 1989). Despite the fact that there were numerous visible connections between music business magnates and politicians in Serbia (like the alliance of certain performers and music producers with the ruling political parties) or actual marriages and other types of alliances between female music stars and male politicians, it is still far too difficult to find an evidence that a specific political position dictated the music market in Serbia. The problem of reception appears to be common in the field of popular music studies, as Negus points out:

In discussion how production and consumption were interrelated, Marx had evoked the idea that a “product receives its last finishing touches in consumption” and suggested that a railroad on which no one rides is only “a potential railroad”(Marx 1973). Following this approach, I would argue that, for a song to be fully realized, for it to have any social meaning, then its production has to be *connected* to consumption, to an audience for the song (Negus 1996: 134).

One of the basic early texts of media studies, “Encoding/decoding” by Stuart Hall, conceptualized the problem of media messages in a discursive sense, challenging the idea that media contents can ever be totally imposed from above (Hall 1980). In her comments on this concept, feminist media theoretician, Liesbet van Zoonen writes: “A crucial feature of the ‘encoding/decoding’ model is that media discourse is supposed to be produced by media institutions and audiences at the same time, not as an activity of single institutions or individuals but as a social process embedded in existing power and discursive formations” (van Zoonen 1994: 8). For reasons of this kind, critical responses to turbo-folk were often rejected publically by the performers and producers, with the argument that “it was just music”, and that folks just wanted to have some entertainment, like everywhere else in the world. The high level of attendance at “turbo-folk” concerts in the beginning of the nineties also undermined the idea of “turbo-folk” as being imposed from above.

The second common claim of the negative discourses is even more problematic than the first one. Almost all of the critics of turbo-folk have reinforced the dichotomy of “urban/rural”, implying a value hierarchy between the two. These authors (journalists, musicologists, etc) have viewed turbo-folk as a deliberate effort of the political regime to suppress so-called urban music

genres (rock, pop, etc) because of their alleged, potential political subversiveness, and to support so-called folk music genres, associated with the life-styles of the working class and rural population, which were seen as socially less critical of the authorities (see Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001). In this sense, we could say that the chapter “The Destruction of Musical Alternatives” in Erik Gordy’s book *The Culture of Power in Serbia* is a famous example of this type of academic criticism, where Gordy states:

...Rural migrants, generally poor, came to the city to take jobs in the growing industrial and service sectors, and many did not entirely integrate into the culture of the city...Many newcomers continued to maintain close connections with their villages of origin as well, received food from relatives in the village, and took leave of their factory jobs to participate in the harvest...

The urbanities and peasant urbanities were publicly differentiated by taste, particularly musical taste. Whereas the urban residents of Belgrade, particularly the young ones among them, looked to the European and American West, developing a strong domestic jazz and rock and roll culture, the peasant urbanities developed a taste for neofolk, a hybrid form marrying the conventions of traditional folk songs with contemporary themes and also increasingly with contemporary instrumentation (Gordy 1999: 106-107).

This discourse, employed in debates on turbo-folk, has been subject to the criticism for its silent cultural discrimination of the cultural identity of the rural or semi-urbanized population or urban working class. That is why the anti-turbo-folk discourse was very often criticized by commercially oriented musicians and some analysts for being connected with what they called cultural racism of the “urban” and “educated” elite toward the culture of the “rural” and “uneducated” lower strata. Supporters of turbo-folk production have usually claimed, despite all critiques, that this was the real music of the “people”, the music that is really wanted at concerts, wedding parties, and celebrations etc., and that criticism of this type of entertainment means discrimination of the common people’s culture, which comes out of cultural elitism.³⁴

An additional theoretical controversy of the anti-turbo-folk criticism was its insistence on seeing turbo-folk as a harmful and culturally dangerous presence of “oriental musical style” in Serbian music production. The presence of “oriental musical styles, experienced as an unavoidable element of turbo-folk music, has mostly been denounced as detrimental and a fatal influence on the “purity” of Serbian music. Influence of the music from the “East” has been perceived as an expression of the lowest taste which flatters the “lowest” parts of human

³⁴ For example, see Petar Luković’s interview with Željko Mitrović in *BH Dani* (Luković 2002) or see: Branislav Dimitrijević article “Global Turbo-folk” in *Nin* (Dimitrijević 2002).

sensitivity, and which has been said to be completely inappropriate for the Serbian cultural context. As already mentioned, Serbian composer Zoran Hristić discussed many times, with an unhidden outrage, the way of dancing which is typical for the turbo-folk parties for it reminded him of “oriental style”, based on seductive movement of hips and gentle, “eastern-like” curving movements of hands. In his opinion, that was something inauthentic imposed by force, therefore inappropriate for Serbian soil, but the other authors also described the influence of “oriental” music as something negative and derogatory (see Kronja 2001; Milojević 2009).

At the same time, however, no commentator has ever explained why they believe that the “oriental musical style” is expected to have a particular or crucially destructive influence on people’s intellect. A few theoreticians have criticized the “orientalist view of turbo-folk” (see Dimitrijević 2002; Đurković 2004; Sretenović 2002), pointing out that accusing turbo-folk of being “low” because of its “oriental” character is a form of cultural racism and discrimination. The phenomenon of “othering” certain groups, peoples, practices, from the Euro-centric geopolitical position, and picturing the “other” as “lower”, “less valuable”, “exotic” and “wild”, has been conceptualized in theory as “orientalism” (Said 1997). Similar concepts are developed and applied to other contexts by Maria Todorova (Todorova 1997) and Vesna Goldsworthy (Goldsworthy 1998), who discuss the “Balkanization” in a similar manner, Lari Woolf (Woolf 1994) and his concept of Eastern Europe, and Milica Bakić-Hayden (Bakić-Hayden 1995), who discusses the internal “orientalizations” that happened in former Yugoslavia in recent history. Particular aspects of *orientalist* cultural practices have been discussed in a number of recent anthropological analyses of cultural discriminations or *exoticizations* based on East/West, Occident/Orient, rural/urban (see Jansen 2002 ; Helms 2008). Although there has not been a systematic study on the *orientalist* view of turbo-folk so far, turbo-folk is often constructed by the media and intellectual discourses through “orientalization” of its performances and the audiences.

Nevertheless, the “orientalist” views, cherished by Hristić and a few other intellectuals, has partially eroded with the break-through of so-called “world music” and so-called “eastern” or “ethnic” music into the global commercial music scene. Although turbo-folk has not had any visible connection with the “world music” scene, turbo-folk musicians have claimed many times that if various types of “Muslim“, or “eastern” music are good enough to be placed to the

“western” market, than they should be good enough for Serbian market, too (for example, Džej, one of the first turbo-folk singers, expressed such a view in the documentary *Sav taj folk*)³⁵

Finally, some of the authors raised the issue of gender and sexism in “turbo-folk”, especially in the domain of pornography and instrumentalization of the female body (Đurković 2004; Kronja 2001; Papić 2002). However, although the question of the female body in the turbo-folk scene has appeared many times in various discussions and lectures on popular culture, not much has been published that could be classified as a conceptual gender-informed analysis of the turbo-folk phenomenon. In my opinion, one of the most serious insights was produced by Žarana Papić, who discussed the symbolic role of the career of Ceca Ražnatović, the biggest Serbian turbo-folk star of the nineties, and the relationship between the displaying of female body on the turbo-folk scene and the general notion of Serbian national identity (Papić 2002). According to Papić, Ceca’s body and its changes reflect an urge in contemporary Serbian mythology to see the female body as exclusively “Serbian”, or “ours”. However, a lot of public speeches, in the newspaper and TV programs have been produced exactly in order to criticize the turbo-folk scene for the over-employment of young, sexy, and half-naked women’s bodies, which was mostly seen as a deterioration of public decency.

The question of “nudity” or “pornographic elements” within turbo-folk production is embedded in the more complex discussion of the trends of representing female bodies in the Serbian media, music videos, cinema, and the like. On the other hand, it is also a question of approaching some local specificities of “gendering” women’s visibility, and sexual representation, that have taken an important place in show business, marketing and everyday life in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, since the fall of state socialism. Viewed in that respect, it is not enough just to say that turbo-folk images of women are “sexist” and “pornographic”. It is in the first place, necessary to explain how these images relate to the positive and negative assessment of turbo-folk, and in what way they have stood up in the relation to other representations of women in popular culture

In this thesis I am not concerned directly with the images of turbo-folk stars and other music stars worldwide: this is a subject for further research. Similarly, I will not attempt to answer merely the question of whether turbo-folk women’s images are “sexist” or

³⁵ One should notice, however, that even terms like “world music” or “ethnic” music are not value-free, but on the contrary, they also imply certain hierarchies in worldwide show-business.

“pornographic”, because such a step would imply a position of negative judgment of women’s participation in turbo-folk scene *a priori*. The aim of this research, among other things, is to unpack the practices usually indicated as sexist and unacceptable by feminists, as part of a broader and more nuanced analysis of representation of recent women’s subject positions constructed in the post-socialist period in Serbia.

2.4. Affirmative Views of Turbo-folk

On the basis of the above, one might indirectly come to the conclusion that turbo-folk culture is a sort of common people’s cultural expression - liberating, cheerful and transgressing, in line with world trends, but still a genuine expression of the local “peasant” and “working” population. One might also come to the conclusion that the defenders of turbo-folk music have been able to produce a more accurate definition of what turbo-folk music genuinely is, and that their interpretation of the latter as a folk expression, can be close to a cultural materialist, i.e. Marxist-oriented interpretation of popular culture (see more on this approach in: van Zoonen 1996; Skeggs 1997; Lury 1996). Or, to put it more bluntly, one might conclude that these affirmative views have successfully applied John Fiske’s postulations of popular culture studies, which states that:

...Popular culture is not consumption, it is culture - the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities.

Culture is a living, active process: it can be developed only from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above...Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. (Fiske 1989b: 23-24)

However, the defenders of turbo-folk have also encountered a number of difficulties while trying to ground their arguments into some sort of social analysis of political or cultural hierarchies, or to prove that turbo-folk really represents a spontaneous musical trend, the entertainment of “marginalized people”, similar to the trends in the Western parts of the world, as many of its supporters argued (see Fiske 1989; Hall 1997a; Hall 1997b). Here I will encounter some of the arguments in favor of turbo-folk production and its pitfalls.

A number of musicians, analysts and journalists voiced apologetic attitudes toward mainstream music production in Serbia from the nineties. It is not that its supporters have argued that there is some inherent aesthetic *value* in consuming turbo-folk, but rather many of them supported the argument that it is only important to give the people the product that is the most wanted, in other words, to satisfy the principle of commodification of popular music to its ultimate goals. In these arguments, a lot rested on the capacity of this music production to engage in real communication with large circles of audiences.³⁶ Besides, many voices supported the ideas of the unlimited domination of marketing practices: if something is wanted, then it should be just mass produced in endless quantities and given to the consumers.³⁷ The cheaper the production, the bigger is the number of consumers, who are happy to have easily accessible and repeatable entertainment. This opinion has been largely expressed by music editors, composers, or the owners of recording studios. According to the words of Lepa Brena, one of the biggest music stars, and now the owner of a music production house, turbo-folk emerged when pop music bands from the other parts of former Yugoslavia stopped performing in Serbia, as a result of split of Yugoslavia. According to her, the audience in Serbia demanded a new type of hybrid music, which would contain a strong beat and electronic sounds, so that this might explain that turbo-folk emerged as a sort of making NCFM sound like a kind of pop music, as a substitution for the original pop music.³⁸ Obviously, economic laws were tuned in with the overall political trend of giving an ultimate justification to everything which was identified as “folk” (in Serbian: narod). The idea of folk, or common people, was equated with the idea of nation (in Serbian, also: narod), and anything which was wanted by the *narod*, was proclaimed to be justified. As *narod* in Serbian means both *the ordinary folk* and *nation*, ethnically determined, this dual meaning of the word has always played an ambiguous role in any discussions on social issues, as

³⁶ For example, in one of the popular talk shows in the nineties, Džej Ramadanovski, one of the biggest turbo-folk stars from the beginning of the nineties, commented on the connection between this music production and “ordinary” people: “I watched a man who was so moved by a song of Sinan that he made cuts on his skin in order to express his emotions. And I have never heard that anyone did anything similar while listening to a philharmonic orchestra playing classical music”. (Here he referred to Sinan Sakić, one of the most popular folk singers in Serbia in the last twenty years, whose singing was often discussed as sounding too “oriental” and “Turkish”).

³⁷ Saša Popović explained the production policy of the *Grand show*, his own music production house, in the following way: if a particular album, which is already made somewhere else is “suitable” for *Grand show*, then his company will be glad to place it on the market. But, if a particular singer is really good, but her/his music is not likely to bring money to the company, the company is willing to produce the singer’s album if the singer pays her/his own money into the company’s bank account (Stamatović 2006).

³⁸ This view was expressed in one of the talk shows aired at the end of 1990s (TV Politika, *Večeras slobodni*, 1998).

well as in everyday life use. As a result, addressing *the folk* in a sense of “ordinary people”, has often been equated with *the folk* in the sense of “ethno-nation”.³⁹

However, a number of questions could be raised in opposition to such affirmative views of turbo-folk. In the first place, it is disputable to view TV and radio station production as a “mere instrument” of the common people’s needs and interests. The emergence of several radio and TV stations in the nineties with clear policies of broadcasting exclusively newly emerged musical styles, which excluded musicians from other parts of former Yugoslavia, or musicians coming from “Yugoslav” pop and rock scenes, could be an indicator of a conscious tendency of Serbian show business elites to introduce cheap and highly commercial musical and cultural style which was grounded in Serbian musical resources, already available in huge amounts: young sexy female performers, aggressive repetitive music with folk motifs and simple easily memorable lyrics, musicians who were used to playing at wedding parties and fairs, easily adjustable to all working conditions.⁴⁰ In that sense, there are a lot of reasons to believe that the economic interests of Serbian musical circles merged with the overall political orientation of Serbian society, leading toward a coherent national cultural identity of both production and consumption of popular music. Subsequently, we could say that it is possible that both economic and political interests prevailed over “genuine communication” with so-called common people. As Cloonan points out, the nation-state is always present in any kind of cultural production, even when it seems that it is completely out of its control: “In order to legitimize its rule, the Nation-State may use certain cultural artifacts and will seek to exercise both cultural and political hegemony” (Cloonan 1999), and goes on to say:

But while it is obviously possible that people in one location might share musical influences with those thousands of miles away, rather than their immediate environs, they are likely to be subject to different constraints upon how they can indulge those tastes. As will become apparent, the main constraints may be the particular Nation-State which they inhabit” (Cloonan 1999: 193-194).

In other words, even when the presence of the nation-state is not visible, it should be considered. The nation-state still possesses the necessary tools to intervene, and may use those

³⁹ Neda Ukraden, an ex-Yugoslav pop star, who joined the Serbian turbo-folk scene after the break-up of Yugoslavia, also said once in a TV talk show that it did not matter whether she was a *pop* or *folk* singer, cause she was simply *singing songs* for the folk (narod).

⁴⁰ TV Palma, Radio Bubamara, Radio and TV Pink, Zam production, S Radio, YU radio, and others. At certain point Radio Television of Serbia, which was completely under the control of Milošević’s regime.

tools if it finds it convenient, by adopting certain legal measures or fostering particular cultural policies. The fact that the presence of legislative intervention in popular music production is not visible does not mean that the attitude of the state is irrelevant in the whole matter.

Another affirmative view of turbo-folk, created by a group of art critics, saw turbo-folk as a local Serbian contribution to global musical trends. They argued for viewing turbo-folk as an artifact, i.e. a contemporary fragmented, consumer oriented post-modern cultural production. For instance, the mass production of turbo-folk music has been placed in the context of the globalization of music production, with comparisons with the music of both US minorities and “ethnic music”, which appeared in the form of “world music production”.⁴¹ Although the products of “turbo-folk” have not made a breakthrough on the global music scene, there has been a significant effort to show that “turbo-folk” represented an authentic post-modern hybridized product of contemporary culture – a mixture of regional, repetitive melodies and new technologies. The mass production of the performers, disrespect of authorship and the concept of wedding party entertainment, have all been seen as an expression of contemporary post-modern status of globalization in the field of culture (Dimitrijević 2002).

Still, the understanding of turbo-folk as part of globalized music trends, observable as an artifact, also poses a number of challenges. To put it briefly, this approach could be criticized for neglecting the role of consumers in the production of turbo-folk, i.e. for scholars’ blindness to the interests of the wider audience. On the one hand, the post-modernist reading relies on the viewpoint of a very small number of scholars and artists. On the other hand, turbo-folk music has been consumed by a wide audience, whose understanding of turbo-folk contents might be very different from the scholars’ and artists’ “readings”. The question then becomes: to what extent we can speak of this particular interpretation of turbo-folk as relevant for its broader social significance? Most audiences of turbo-folk do not relate themselves to the trends of world music, do not follow foreign music nor are they aware of the positioning of turbo-folk scene in relation to world music market. Bearing this in mind, it is difficult to take the relationship between local and global cultural expression as a parameter relevant for the understanding of the communication between turbo-folk performance and its audiences.

⁴¹For example, here I refer to the authors like Branko Dimitrijević and Dejan Sretenović, and their articles in the journal *Prelom* (2002).

Finally, my analysis of talk show and various media discourses, and even interviews with female members of the audience in Serbia show that the profession of turbo-folk singer has been quite often been associated with images of women's empowerment, and women's upward social mobility. Although the "affirmative" aspect of this phenomenon has been very much questioned and often dismissed by feminists' voices, I will still consider these views here, as part of informal affirmative opinions of turbo-folk music careers, understood as career option for a woman in Serbia. A number of talk shows and TV reporters have contributed to the development of these discourses.⁴² In most of them, interviews with turbo-folk music stars emphasized the rich life-style of such stars and their ability to travel to attractive world destinations, to establish a happy family life, dress according to the latest fashion trends, and the like. The overall discourse of these talk shows constructed a picture of a female turbo-folk star as a woman who is able to challenge the typical bleak everyday life of a working class woman in Serbia and practice her own femininity in an active and glamorous way.

In terms of its social and economic manifestation, turbo-folk has conducted a project of communication to all social strata. A number of the performers have sung about the city environment and got dressed like rock performers, while still keeping elements associated with countryside style in their songs. The turbo-folk scene also created an opportunity for very young, poor girls, without any particular musical education, to make a career in public life. In this way, many turbo-folk stars have been taken as role models by certain circles, proving that it is possible to originate from very poor or socially very marginal backgrounds and still become national stars, well-to-do, settled in the capital city and be members of the social elite in Serbia.⁴³ In this way, it is also possible to conclude that turbo-folk was heavily involved in the images of post-socialist patterns of social mobility, especially for very young women: instead of through educational channels, which was encouraged in the socialist period, more and more women took an interest in making money on the basis of their good looks and interest in show business. In a way, this insight can be related to the notion of interconnectedness between gender dynamics and social changes in the region of the Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in the aftermaths of state-socialism. Referring to the remarkable changes in politics and market

⁴² Some examples include: *Magazine in*, *Tabloid*, *Svet plus*, *Ljubav i moda* (aired in the nineties).

⁴³ The two of the biggest stars of turbo-folk, Ceca Ražnatović and Dragana Mirković, for example, grew up in very small Serbian villages, while one of the biggest turbo-folk stars at the moment, Seka Aleksić, came to Serbia at the beginning of the nineties as a refugee from Bosnia. In the talk show "Svet plus", aired at the end of 2005, Aleksić talked about the extreme poverty of her family while she was a teenage girl.

economies of this region, Gal and Kligman point out that “...varying state ideologies and policies, and the diverse incentives of market economies, differently circumscribe the life possibilities for men and women and constrain relations between them. State policies and market forces reach far into intimate life and shape gendered subjectivities”. (Gal and Kligman 2000b: 16). Consequently, it is possible to view women’s career within turbo-folk partially as a sort of strategy of survival and economic improvement under post-socialist market circumstances.

However, this image of women’s mobility has brought a new type of social and cultural twist. While it allowed for the quick success of young, unskilled and socially marginalized women in the early nineties, soon after the break-up of the old state, this scene started reproducing the images of quick success as socially desirable, prestigious and the only ones worth striving for, opening up a space for numerous reproduction of social hegemonies. The life path of becoming famous, marrying a rich businessman and living in extreme luxury, has become the ultimate model of women’s desires suggested through this scene (Kronja 2006; Papić 2002). Video spots, talk shows and newspapers have become full of such life examples, associated with the profession of the turbo-folk female singer (in periodicals such as *Sabor*, *Estrada*, *Glamur*, *Svet*, *Skandal*, *Story*, *Gracija*, and the latest *Kurir*, *Press*, *Nacional*, and others)⁴⁴. The lifestyles of women who were not into aggressive sexual images of femininity and were not interested in the traditional role of “wife of a rich man”, disappeared from the mainstream media. Accordingly, soon after the beginning of the nineties, lyrics about the working class or “peasant” lifestyles, were completely abandoned, as the “turbo-folk model” ideal of achieving a certain type of social status changed into celebrating financially elitist social positioning, no matter how unreachable this was for the majority of Serbian citizens. As Kronja argues:

So the home-made folk singers become our variant of the Western glamour, whose success, requires an adequate TV-presentation, music video in MTV manner, as a TV-genre recently discovered in Serbia, which tries to follow all the fashionable trends. Music video fought hard to become the principal promoter of style and system of values in the turbo-folk era. New subcultural style of the nineties known as the “Warrior-chic style”, found its expression in the turbo-folk and dance music video. “Warrior-chic” typical of the recent rich ones, beautiful girls, homicides, “femmes fatales”, luxurious interiors and fancy cars are the elements of music video that turbo-folk rests on (Kronja 2000: 122).

⁴⁴ For example, see the articles on Ceca Ražnatović from *Kurir* (Tripić 2009; Kurir 2007a), the articles on Jelena Karleuša from *Svet* (Rilak and Kecman 2009; Milanović 2008) and the articles on Dragana Mirković from *Glas Javnosti* and *Svet* (Novković 2006; Halilović 2009)

Still, opposite to this position, there have been other strong opinions offered in favour of turbo-folk. One of the strongest was that turbo-folk is a truly transgressing and subversive cultural expression, having brought the culture of common people entertainment from pubs and wedding parties to TV broadcasts and concert halls. It has also been said that turbo-folk has incorporated elements of many “sub-cultures”: gay culture, cultures of urban ghettos, cultures of ethnic minorities, etc.⁴⁵. While the elements of gay visual iconography have been visible in the video production of turbo-folk, we can also say that the language of turbo-folk has been taken from various marginalized cultures, both from rural and urban surroundings, expressing various local markers, falling outside the standardized language.

Moreover, turbo-folk also appeared as an opportunity for the singers of minority ethnic background to become big stars with a wide national fandom, without being limited to the label of being a performer of a specific ethnic type of music. A number of singers of Roma origin, for example, gained access to a broad national market, which was literally unthinkable in the period of former Yugoslavia. For example, Džej Ramadanovski, a turbo-folk singer of Roma ethnic background, achieved huge success in 1991, performing concerts in Belgrade attended by thousands of people, which was considered to be a spectacular success for this type of genre at the time. In the next few years he participated in many radio and TV talk shows, telling about his life, of having lived in the Dorćol part of Belgrade (famous for its criminal gangs), and even being in prison in his young days. During these talk shows, many listeners expressed their admiration for Džej, as a real representative of the “ordinary” folk in Serbia. This was a change compared to the previous status of Roma performers in all of Yugoslavia, in which Roma music in general was mostly available only in some marginal, ghetto-like spaces, in particular, in *kafana* type of pubs, at wedding parties and various spheres within the Roma community (see van der Port 1999).

Here it is necessary to point out that the relationship between turbo-folk culture and various sub-cultures is one of the most controversial issues out of all discourses on turbo-folk ideological horizon. Despite a number of video spots and lyrics which contain some

⁴⁵ Discussions of turbo-folk music and turbo-folk stars are fairly represented on LGBT web-sites in Serbia, very often marked by some positive views on turbo-folk culture. (For more details, see www.gay-serbia.com, one of the most prominent Serbian LGBT websites.). Also, fieldwork carried out in the “Club X” “Floyd” and “VIP” clubs, and a few other so-called gay-friendly clubs and cafés in Belgrade, as well as club the “Džoker” in Novi Sad, revealed that turbo-folk music was frequently played at gay and lesbian clubs, and it was even a dominant music style in some of them.

iconographic elements of gay culture, or that play with homoerotic signifiers, the fact is that no turbo-folk performer ever in Serbia declared themselves *gay* in public. On the contrary, there has been a constant emphasis on the heterosexual relationship as the only mode of partnership in all contents related to turbo-folk. There have been a few exceptions in terms of lyrics, done in a manner of provocative style of girly homoerotic sex play, but none of them promoted openly any idea of gay sexual identity.⁴⁶ Female music stars have widely promoted the idea of being married to an influential man as the most desirable type of male/female relationship, commenting on their personal lives in talk-shows, newspapers and the like. The lyrics have usually depicted conservative and often manipulative modes of male/female relationships, picturing men as rough and unfaithful and women as docile, dependent and irrational. Visual coverage of this production has greatly contributed to the establishment of this kind of norm. Despite the fact that the iconography of video spots incorporates many elements of world trends, playing with the idea of performing homosexuality, still the examples of this type of performance have not gone beyond mere provocation and offering voyeuristic pleasure for a (predominantly) male audience. Unlike some music stars from the global music stage, who have openly declared their homosexuality, no music star from the turbo-folk-scene has ever admitted to having homosexual preferences.⁴⁷ Even those female music stars, who played with homosexuality on the stage, kept emphasizing their commitment to marriage, heterosexual relationships and an inclination toward the role of wife and mother. For instance, Seka Aleksić whose song “Sviđa mi se tvoja devojka” (I fancy your girlfriend) is surely the most famous song with lyrics that explicitly describe gay affections, has emphasized a number of times how strong her relationship with her boyfriend was, both in the press and on TV shows.⁴⁸ Thus, in spite of this exploitation of signifiers of “minority cultures”, turbo-folk performances in general have never really promoted in a declarative way any minority identity. Minority identities have often been incorporated, but never represented in sense of affirmative identity politics.

⁴⁶ Some of most provocative examples are “Da li me vara sa tobom (Is he cheating on me with you)” performed by Zana and Mina Kostić, and “Sviđa mi se tvoja devojka (I fancy your girlfriend)”, performed by Seka Aleksić.

⁴⁷ The example of Seka Aleksić is one of the best illustrations of this contradiction: despite the fact that she launched a song with the lyrics with open suggestion of gay flirtation, and despite elements of gay titillation in her performances on the stage, she decisively dismissed in her interviews any insinuation that her song has anything to do with the affirmation of gay identity. At the time of launching the song, she kept appearing in public accompanied by her boyfriend, with frequent announcements of their marriage plans.

⁴⁸ Many such articles on Seka Aleksić were published in *Kurir*, *Pres*, *Svet*, *Story*, and other periodicals, see: www.sekaaleksic.com/press

In addition, many male and female turbo-folk stars simulated elements of western gay culture through their dress. Some male performers, whose songs celebrated the most traditional and conventional aspects of heterosexuality, wore outfits that corresponded with the scenes from the movie “Cruising”, or imitated particular gay icons like George Michael, Freddy Mercury, and the like.⁴⁹ However, such elements of style were never commented on or recognized by the media or wider audience as culturally subversive. The particular elements of this style were commented on by the performers as pure fashion stylization, which indicated that they were up to date with “western” stage fashion. The only exception was the documentary “Sav taj folk (All That Folk)”, broadcast on B92 in the fall of 2004, which presented interviews with several Serbian fashion designers, who openly talked about the presence of the elements of “gay clothing”, coming from the “western” pop culture, emphasizing that such strategies are usually completely “misread” by the wider audience in Serbia, unaware of the iconography of gay culture in these performances.

The other issues of minority identities, in relation to the turbo-folk scene, particularly that of ethnic minorities, have also proved to have a controversial influence on the consumers of turbo-folk. Despite the fact that the turbo-folk scene included a large number of Roma performers or performers of non-Serbian ethnic origin, most of them have insisted on their “Serbian” identity by performing their devotion to the symbols of the Serbian Orthodox Church or giving other statements in public, supporting the collectivist nationalist spirit typical of the nineties. For example, Džej Ramadanovski, the turbo-folk star of Roma origin and Muslim faith, emphasized repeatedly his personal admiration for *Sveta Petka*, the Serbian Orthodox female saint, and his Serbian Orthodox religious practices. Turbo-folk singers appeared often in connection with the iconography of Serbian traditional items, or launched songs with lyrics associated with particular Serbian national symbolism. A number of turbo-folk singers of Muslim origin stopped using their personal names in public and took stage names that sounded more “neutral”. Recently, *Kurir*, a Serbian newspaper printed an article on popular musicians who have changed their real names to “stage names”. It can be concluded on the basis of article

⁴⁹ This question was mentioned by the participants in the documentary “Sav taj folk”, especially in relation to the appearance of Nino, a popular turbo-folk singer from the nineties. Another striking similarity is the appearance of Dragan Kojić Keba, another singer who copied one of famous “queer looks” of Freddy Mercury, feminine-styled navy-officer’s uniform. See this video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRT9pfNyg80>.

that a number of turbo-folk performers who did such a change originally were of Muslim ethnic background (usually born in Bosnia or southern part of Serbia). They replaced their real names with the names that sounded either more Serbian or “western” (*Kurir* 2006). This practice, however, was conducted even earlier, in the socialist period, in all parts of Yugoslavia. Undoubtedly, such a practice always involved the symbolic conversion of a socially undesirable identities into a socially acceptable performance of identity. In the nineties, turbo-folk performers, apparently, wanted to “avoid” any kind of open display of Muslim, Roma or Croatian identity through their careers, in order to target Serbian audiences. Being a dominant, mainstream culture produced for a predominantly nationalist audience, turbo-folk tended to represent a certain uniformity of Serbian culture.

2.5. The Dual Nature of Turbo-Folk Entertainment

What would be the most accurate summary of the cultural and social meanings of turbo-folk music production, based on the arguments I have discussed so far? Is turbo-folk an authentic, liberating and all-inclusive cultural expression of “ordinary people”, which came as a reaction to the cultural rigidity of the former state-socialist division between “urban” and “rural” genres, as well as the gap between “official culture” and “marginal cultures”? Or, is turbo-folk, essentially, part of the overall social and political trend in Serbia, according to which the cheapest and easiest-to-access type of entertainment has become the privileged mode of popular culture, which has reinforced the authoritarian cultural flow of national homogenization? It has turned out that these questions complement each other, although it might look like that they contradict each other.

There is an essential paradox in studying popular culture in general, since popular culture in itself is performed through a set of ambiguous roles in a community. In order to communicate with broad audiences, the performers are expected to support and cherish the dominant, collective needs and standards of entertainment. In a practical sense, this means that it also represents a balance between the powers and interests of the most influential ruling forces in a society and the most relevant political agents among those being ruled. Simultaneously, popular

culture production acknowledges the relevance of the folk and mocks it. At the same time, while promoting lascivious and benign carnevalist contents, many types of so-called low entertainment are at the same time establishing and subverting the main assumptions of the authoritarian state or society they refer to. As Bakhtin points out, carnival always holds highly ambiguous meaning. There is no pure negation in it, as both antagonist poles are encompassed in their contradicting unity (Bakhtin 1984).

The Frankfurt School of Social Research produced rather convincing arguments as to why the production of popular culture should be understood as an instrument of the elites in power in democratic government. With their concepts of “mass culture”, and, later, “culture industry”, used mostly by Adorno and Horkheimer, they claimed that popular culture is produced in order to fulfill the demands of a capitalist economy, i.e. to support the dominant political and economic system (McGuigan 1992: 47). However, these arguments, conceptualized in the mid-twentieth century, were often challenged, revised or built-up by those theorists who pointed out that this overcritical view of popular taste and entertainment implies a position of cultural and intellectual elitism of the individuals or groups who theorize popular cultural production in such a way, or, in other words, intellectuals (see Hall 1980; Fiske 1989; Williams 1976; Williams 1992; Bourdieu 1992). The latest authors, among whom feminist voices have been very prominent, try to merge the Marxist oriented approaches (marked by Gramscian and Althusserian influence) with psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology and linguistics, according to which popular culture production are texts that call for discursive communication with the audiences (for example, see: 1994; McRobbie 1999; Smith 1990; van Zoonen; Walkerdine 1997; Whiteley 2000; Whiteley 2005).

There are two trajectories by which I am trying to suggest a theoretical platform for the observation of the representations of women in relation to the symbol of nation in the field of popular music studies, as applied to the phenomenon of turbo-folk. One is the theoretical approach of the followers of Bourdieu’s notion of *taste*, according to which one should be aware of an emotional and intimate component of the production of social stratification, as well as of the fact that such an element plays an important role in the construction of subjectivity. In other words, it is not only economic welfare that divides people socially, but also the practices of consumption and cultural representation, and, in particular, self-representation. Subsequently, popular taste, consumption and popular culture in general should be observed as signifiers and

constitutive elements of the construction of social stratification (Bourdieu 1992; Skeggs 1996). The other is the Bakhtinian concept of studies of folk culture, and the phenomenon of the popular (Bakhtin 1984). According to Bakhtinian views, the field of popular taste, ritual and carnevalist behavior, which is inherent to popular entertainment, cannot be placed morally or politically either in positive or negative terms, but can be observed and deconstructed in its ambiguity, understood as a model that includes both appraisal and derogation.

Both of these approaches support the understanding of the phenomenon of popular culture as a complex battlefield of contested voices, influences and ideological constraints, political, cultural and linguistic, within which the subject positions of various agents are maintained. This is the reason why I have briefly reviewed the most visible segments of commonly expressed public opinions on the term, phenomenon and implications of turbo-folk, with all ambiguities that can be read into this discussion. The aim was to show how turbo-folk in itself has provoked very controversial, and often quite conflicting reactions in the media and academic spheres in Serbian and Serbian-related sources. This is also to point out that turbo-folk is also a complex social and cultural phenomenon and, accompanied with a dynamic and contradicting set of ideological implications, and therefore does not fit any ready-made definition of fixed meaning. What I can do is to identify the most influential agents within the network of influences that set the context for this discussion.

During the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, Serbian society developed a particular attitude toward the consumption of popular culture, compared to some established practices of popular culture production in the period of socialist Yugoslavia (see: Vidić-Rasmussen 1996; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002; Čolovic 2000; Šešić 1994, Đurković, 2004; Luković 1989; Gordy 1999). It can be said that turbo-folk is based on inclusions of various musical styles, both western and eastern rhythms. It also epitomizes the combination of both so-called urban and rural life styles. It is open to novelties in terms of performing commonly known signifiers of various minority identities. But, above all, it has been built on the transgression of the boundaries between what was perceived in Serbia as a “pro-western” musical package and “non-western” music themes. The phenomenon of cheap and easily memorable party music, which would, seemingly, erase the dichotomies of city/village, upper class/working class, majority/minority identity, conventional sexuality/queer sexuality was aligned with the political processes of ritual restructuring of the concept of collective identity (Radojević 2001: 12). Most

importantly, it questioned the structural and hierarchical dichotomy between so-called “cultured” pop and rock music, on the one side, and commercial, “low”, peasant-identified “folk” music, on the other side. The more it was emphasized that this was “just music”, the more it was clear that the act of its consumption (as well as production) has contributed to the performing of a new type of all-inclusiveness within a particular community.

However, the practices of turbo-folk culture have also shown that the *inclusiveness* as such also must have brought a number of ideological and aesthetical challenges for the music audience in Serbia. This is because the social conditions that enabled the emergence of the all-inclusive cultural model, coincided with the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the intensified attention to Serbian national identity, as a social identity applicable to post-Yugoslav emergence of nation-states. At that moment, other genres of popular music, originating mostly from other parts of former Yugoslavia, as well as the concerts of western music bands, became unavailable for the Serbian population. Subsequently, a sizable audience in Serbia started consuming turbo-folk, which could also be understood as an act of acceptance of a newly emerged cultural order, provided by “authentic Serbian sources” that existed at the time. The need of the audience for easily accessible entertainment, and the interest of the music producers, radio and TV stations in keeping their market, created a particular, *domestic* music, which supported the processes of cultural verification of “Serbian uniqueness”.

Accordingly, so-called marginal identities became barely visible in turbo-folk performances. As I have mentioned, some elements of dress, or iconography of particular “minority” movements were incorporated into the styles of some performers, but minority identities as such have never *represented* within that scene. In other words, only the worldviews that celebrated heterosexuality, traditionalist male and female roles, membership in the Serbian nation and in the Serbian Orthodox Church, were widely represented. The similar happened in purely musical terms. While, on the one hand, turbo-folk culture incorporated many elements of various musical styles, it mostly regarded them as less important ingredients, while the main principles of production remained almost untouched: musical simplicity, *kafana*⁵⁰ type

⁵⁰ The culture of *kafana* and its connection with female singing will be analyzed more in Chapters 3 and 4.

of singing, combined with the images of a luxurious life, which usually pictures the houses and the cars owned by a performer in his/her real life⁵¹.

I do not argue that turbo-folk is (or ever was) an original, newly invented Serbian product, in a musical sense. On the contrary, turbo-folk has constantly been absorbing and imitating musical forms from various regions in the world. However, the turbo-folk scene has been socially and culturally much more significant as a contemporary mode of production of culture, consumption of culture, and a dominant model of verbal and visual cultural representations. I would like to suggest that turbo-folk should rather be taken as a material and symbolic marker of a period of musical cultural production in Serbia than an “original” musical style. Turbo-folk has been bound to a particular system of social values and a particular market situation that emerged in the early nineties. If we position our problem in that way, we can outline a conceptual framework for understanding the cultural, political and social significance of the studies of turbo-folk music.

The weakening of the state-socialist divide between mainstream prestigious public culture and marginal private forms of entertainment in Serbia has not resulted in a truly liberating and socially subversive model, although it has emerged on the wave of cultural transgressions and inclusions.. Also, we can say that the project of nation-making in itself has prescribed certain informal regulations, imposed on individuals, which are based on a paradoxical interplay of inclusions and exclusions. A cultural form with a tendency to be inclusive in particular aspects has also proved to be exclusive toward other cultural forms, once it conquered a particular cultural and social space. Exclusions in terms of dismissing high cultural production, or non-traditional gender roles, or the commodification of women’s symbolic and social roles have been aligned with the post-socialist projects of re-creation of new societal structures.

Turbo-folk epitomizes the dual nature of many fields of popular culture production: on the one hand, it has been constructed as an alternative, transgressive and the “common people” worldview, while on the other hand, it has become part of the nationhood-making processes that contributed to the political mainstreams of Serbian nationalism. Not by chance, since the beginning of the nineties, the most exposed media stars of turbo-folk have been women. The

⁵¹ The practice of picturing the stars as rich and showing their material goods in the public was also typical for NCFM representations of music singers (see Vidić-Rasmussen 1995: 253)

need to produce a particular model of women's identity as the most visible in popular culture has been rooted in a post-socialist mode of re-creation of societal mainstream culture, which prevails over other, less visible popular culture orientations, and makes up a vital aspect of nation-making constructions.

This chapter was a summary of various value-loaded views of turbo-folk stylistic and political background, presented here in order to suggest that any attempt to reduce the political or cultural understanding of turbo-folk either as a spontaneous, "common people" type of entertainment, or as something imposed from above, as a politically controlled product, proves to be insufficient. The predominant tone however, still indicates that a cultural phenomenon such as turbo-folk that strives to reach wide social strata in a society still deploys strategies that reinforce overall dominant political discourses and practices that suppress political and cultural alternatives. As turbo-folk has emerged in the period of rapid national homogenization in Serbia, its popularity has been unavoidably intertwined with the spreading of nationalism. My aim here was to make a brief introduction into the further course of discussion, suggesting, even at this point, a theoretical approach to the relationship between representations of women, popular culture production and motifs of nationhood. As outlined, negative views of turbo-folk mostly argue that the turbo-folk scene promotes nationalism, sexism, cultural backwardness and the like. On the other hand, positive accounts of turbo-folk suggest that turbo-folk represents an authentic culture of Serbian nation, wanted by the "common people", and that it includes many elements of socially marginalized identities. According to these views, turbo-folk cannot be characterized as a repressive or hegemonizing project, since it reflects "what people really want" from popular culture.

However, there are also signs that "authenticity", cultural diversity, or images of women's social mobility in turbo-folk performances are appropriated and instrumentalized by the tendency of the turbo-folk scene to construct as homogenized audience as possible. Through such turbo-folk performances, nationalism as a dominant social principle of homogenization in Serbia as of 1991 has also been reinforced. In order to explore how this complex mechanism of mutual reinforcement between show business and nationalist social streams functions, it is necessary to analyze how the particular codes of nation and gender are employed in turbo-folk cultural texts. As the most visible group of performers of turbo-folk are women, their heteronormative "stage identities" are an important subject of research. The following chapters

will explore how development of NCFM, and later on the turbo-folk scene, in relation to the representations of women, interrelated with the constructions of communal and, in particular, national belonging.

CHAPTER 3

Women Chosen by the Folk: Engendering Newly Composed Folk Music in Yugoslavia

My favorite time for listening to music is lunch time: I like to listen to folk music while eating, from the radio, or so.. That's my habit from my childhood. I have got used to listening to female voices, women were the ones who were singing to me all my life (Momčilo, a male teacher from Belgrade, age 30).

I played in many wedding party bands, usually there were an accordion, rhythm-guitar, synthesizer, drums...sometimes violin. And of course, a female singer. Usually we had a male singer, in the band, too. But a female singer is a must in a wedding party band, simply, the celebration can't go without a woman in the band (Saša, a male professional accordion player from a Serbian provincial town, age 34).

Newly Composed Folk Music (NCFM), as pointed out in the previous chapter, was a stylistic predecessor of turbo-folk music scene, i.e. a commercial and widespread music scene in Yugoslavia in the period before its break-up (Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001; Čolović 1985). Perhaps it could be more to the point to call it “an early stage of the turbo-folk era”, however, I wish to avoid categorization, as a sort of theoretical entrapment for the researcher. Such categorization of NCFM would imply that it appeared to be less remarkable, or a “shorter” stage than the turbo-folk era in Serbia. However, for now, I have no firm indicators that the show business scene in Serbia should be classified in such a way.⁵² The second, more important point is the intrinsic importance of NCFM for the understanding of three structural issues of turbo-folk performances:

⁵² This was an academic “difficulty” that marked the early systematic works on turbo-folk music, such as those by Gordy or Kronja, who put a lot of emphasis on the connection between turbo-folk music and political everyday life under the Milošević's regime in Serbia, since they have done their research in the period of Milošević's rule. Likewise, being fully aware that the papers on popular phenomena are almost always dated, I will be most probably in the position to revisit my main assumptions expressed in this work, I would also like to acknowledge the early efforts of the researchers who dealt with this topic, in spite of some disagreements and criticism of their work I elaborate in this piece.

1) In what way has turbo-folk been connected to Serbian cultural heritage? 2) What are the main generic conventions of this genre that evolved into turbo-folk performances, and, in what way did social organization of everyday life participate in the setting of these conventions? 3) In what way have these conventions operated throughout turbo-folk performances, and how have their meanings produced in the nineties been informed by stylistic, linguistic and ideological investments of the earlier (NCFM) period? In this chapter, I will observe the way NCFM was perceived by the intellectuals in former Yugoslavia at the time of its emergence, and outline a few key concepts associated with it. I will particularly pay attention to the lack of adequate theoretical tools for the analysis of self-regulated music market at the time in former Yugoslavia, and the way some social circumstances inflected and shaped the characteristics of NCFM genre. It is important here to mention that a few researchers of the earlier period have concluded that NCFM genre was different from the other music genres as it was primarily triggered by the function of communication, which openly prevails over aesthetic or any other function (particularly, see Čolović 1985). Naturally, since this approach mostly rests on the analysis of lyrics of NCFM products, we have to be aware of the necessity to observe these popular music products as texts, i.e. systems of signs, and accept all the possible limits such an approach involves, i. e., to accept that the role of text in social contexts are always mediated and conditioned, however, not without actual political significance (see Dyer 1998). Since reading the texts of cultural production does not make much sense if we are not aware of the way texts potentially “work” as a social fact in a particular context, my discussion is, as in other parts in this thesis, informed by socio-historical data whenever possible.

3.1. Theorizing NCFM: Between Folk Poetry and Consumerism

As NCFM is empirically and symbolically interconnected with the phenomenon of social migrations and geopolitical negotiation of identity formations on the territory of former Yugoslavia (see Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Gordy 1999; Simić 1973), it follows that NCFM production has been informed by actual negotiations of gender identities in the society, on the one hand, and also contributed to constructions of various gender identities through their

representation within its production, on the other hand.⁵³ This approach should provide us primarily with the tools for the examination of the main patterns of representations of women within TF scene, the aspects according to which the *topoi*⁵⁴ of genre operated through the examples of their performances, and the further ideological implications implied by the structure of these performances. The place and significance of observing the *topoi* (forms, or set of motifs and themes that repeat and vary in popular songs) was anticipated already by the book *Divlja književnost* (Wild Literature) by Ivan Čolović, published for the first time in 1985, which is to be discussed in this chapter and employed in postulation of theoretical foundations.

This chapter primarily unpacks genre conventions that created constraints and/or opportunities for constructions of women's images within NCFM scene, as well as to point out the relevance of women's representation for the genre developments within NCFM and, later on, turbo-folk scene. In other words, in order to understand the ideological investments of representations of women in the period of turbo-folk production, it is necessary to investigate the gender dynamics and gendered investments of NCFM production, and its positioning within existing social and intellectual practices of former Yugoslavia. The examples I will mention are just a few among many others. I have chosen them since they enjoyed outstanding media coverage at the time and reportedly provoked significant reactions by audiences all over former Yugoslavia, since the extent of consumption and technical visibility of particular products makes one of the key criteria for judging the relevance of a particular popular cultural text.

In the earlier period of the emergence of NCFM, in the seventies and later on, not many scholarly works were published on the genre, which employed a broad interdisciplinary theoretical ground; mostly the field included articles and essays concerning folklorist perspectives of this genre (Ivanović 1973), or media analysis of TV representations of "new folk music" (Jevremović 1993), employing the categories and terms originally invented for other types of research (so-called history of folk arts, media content analysis, sociological studies and the like). Consequently, most of the research on NCFM was part of the sociological and ethnological studies on the "lifestyles of the youth", or "value orientations of the youth", "social

⁵³ See more on the re-construction of gender through representation in Theresa de Lauretis's article "Technologies of Gender" (de Lauretis 1987).

⁵⁴ *Topoi* is the plural of *topos*, a term "borrowed" from literary theory, and, according the Oxford Dictionary, it means: "...A traditional motif or theme (in a literary composition); a rhetorical commonplace, a literary convention or formula" (see more in: Curtius 1991; Spitzer 1948). In my thesis the category of *topos* is used in a modified way, in order to create an accessible way of defining the key topics of NCFM lyrics, as well as the other representational conventions of NCFM aesthetics.

stratifications within Yugoslav society” (see: Prica 1985; Pešić 1977). The strong tendency to look at the whole NCFM as a “phenomenon in itself”, “original cultural expression”, a “totally new style of music production” and the like, prevailed in the writings of sociologists, musicologists, and ethnologists (see Ivanović 1973; *Kultura* 1970). However, these approaches were not usually accompanied by adequate theoretical and methodological tools. The labeling of the NCFM genre, or scene, as a “phenomenon”, led into the strong tendency of scholars and analysts to observe, describe and explain it as a whole, grasping various aspects of its production at the same time, including the audience, modes of production, verbal and musical aspects of the genre itself, and the like.

One of the most inclusive and most ambitious efforts of that kind, although formulated and presented in the form of a radio discussion published in the journal *Kultura*, was a joint paper done by several prominent intellectuals of the time, created in the form of an informal discussion on NCFM or “New Folk Music”⁵⁵. The discussion published in the journal under the title “Nova narodna muzika (New Folk Music)” was divided into four parts: the first covered general notes on NCFM, the second was on the audience of this genre, the third was dedicated to the authors and singers involved in this scene, and the fourth gave some concluding remarks on the whole discussion from the perspective of aesthetic and sociological standpoints (*Kultura* 1970). However, the discussion did not quite follow the firm structure outlined in the beginning of its published version. The participants in the discussion unsystematically discussed many issues of popular music studies, however, often failing to reach theoretically rooted conclusions. On the other hand, the participants themselves showed awareness of the lack of theoretical tools available with regard to the analysis of such phenomena. However, instead of a higher degree of reflexivity on global issues of popular culture and mass media communications, they argued for viewing NCFM itself as a unique, particular, local phenomenon, comparing it to the production of classical music and its distribution and consumption. In general, although some of them mentioned overall changes in the production and consumption of culture as background information (Golubović-Pešić), these discussants mostly compared NCFM with other popular and artistic genres in Yugoslavia, failing to place it in the context of some broader theoretical

⁵⁵ As it will be shown many times, the terms *Novokomponovana narodna muzika* (Newly Composed Folk music) and *Nova narodna muzika* (New Folk Music) are interchangeable in this dissertation, similarly to the way they often replaced each other in media discourses and the writing of various authors in the sixties, seventies and eighties of the twentieth century.

discussion. This approach also legitimized the common way of discussing popular music in former Yugoslavia that entails discussion in an informal way, in a form of exchange of discussants' personal opinions on the matter, with no obligation to produce academic arguments which would support their views⁵⁶.

This form of scholarly discussion, or writing, mainly, remained a leading type of public, journalist or academic speech on popular music in Serbia, for decades later. The authors and discussants that dealt with this topic later referred to this event and paper (*Kultura* 1970), many years later (Čolović 2000; Đurković 2004; Ivanović 1973). The basic acknowledgment of NCFM as a totally new phenomenon, totally unique and original, was to provide a reason for the absence of theoretically informed criticism. On the one hand, it paved the way for the uncritical recognition of this phenomenon as an authentic expression of regional “common people’s taste”, which inaugurated its right to be produced massively for “the folk”. On the other hand, it opened up a space for commentators of all profiles to write about popular music either in extremely critical, or extremely praising manner, in accordance with their personal ideological preferences, without any firm point of reference or focal point which would relate the debate on popular music to some other intellectual debates in the country or abroad.⁵⁷ In both cases, it seemed that the analysts, commentators and scholars delineated themselves from the core audiences of NCFM (or later turbo-folk) audiences, declaring themselves as being “outside” the audiences’ perspective and without active participation in the consumption of this music.

The lack of theoretical insights in the discussion from 1970, however, should not be taken as a sign of scholarly mediocrity of Yugoslav intellectuals. It should be taken into account that in the sixties and seventies the world started experiencing massive novelties in the communication technologies, and media and film studies globally appeared to be in their early phase (Dyer 1998: 56), despite the influential academic tradition of the Frankfurt school and its followers. Moreover, the particular ideological settings of this state-socialist country did not really conform to the context within which the criticism of capitalist economy, such as that of the Frankfurt School, was conceptualized. The tradition of Frankfurt school, for example, criticized popular

⁵⁶ The style of discussing, lecturing and writing on popular music in Serbian intellectual circles has not changed much to date, since intellectuals and experts on musical and sociological questions are still prone to debating in a similar way. The illustrations of this approach are the documentary *Sav taj folk* (All That Folk, 2004) on B92 TV, and the similar discussions in the program *Večeras slobodni* (Tonight free, 1998) on TV Politika channel.

⁵⁷ The problems of extreme affirmative or negative views on popular music in the context of turbo-folk were already discussed in Chapter 2.

culture as a main stake of mass consumerism which deepened the class stratifications in capitalist society. To put it simply, the power relations within the state apparatus of Yugoslav contexts did not enable Yugoslav intellectuals to question the very economic basis of the society, as it was firmly intertwined with the normative ideological premises of the one-party political system, and therefore, did not acknowledge the criticism of its basis, or the existence of substantial economic inequality.⁵⁸ Subsequently, it is hard to imagine that the debate on popular music production in the early seventies in Yugoslavia could take a critical view of the profit-based nature of popular culture consumption, despite the intellectuals' awareness of the concept of mass culture and consumer society as already established in western academia at the time (see Lydal 1984; Prout 1985; Popović 1968).

The debate in itself revealed various issues which indicated possible fields of research that could have become the pattern for popular music studies. The five famous intellectuals (Zagorka Pešić-Golubović, Sveta Lukić, Dragoslav Dević, Dragutin Gostuški and Prvoslav Plavšić), and Vojislav Đonovic, the musical editor of music record production in Radio-Television Belgrade (PGP RTV), pointed out their ultimate recognition of the massive popularity of NCFM, which, therefore, created an academic platform for the recognition of popular music studies as a subject of academic research (see *Kultura* 1970: 96). Within this discussion several crucial conclusions were drawn, and I will present them here, briefly, in order to emphasize their relevance for future researchers. The main intention of this concluding part is to point out what was recognized as “new” or “original” in NCFM.

Firstly, the musicologist and folklorist input in this debate (initiated by Dragoslav Dević, Prvoslav Plavšić and Sveta Lukić) stated that new folk music does not appear as completely new since it heavily exploits musical ornaments of the previous periods of Yugoslav musical tradition. They pointed out that some of the popular songs from the NCFM genre were composed relatively early. In other words, the musical novelty of NCFM production was relative. What was much more important was the combination of various elements, a kind of hybridization, which appeared to be new, compared to previous classification of genres. The

⁵⁸ A number of studies from that period address social stratification, i.e. occupational, educational and rural-urban divisions within the society, with a variety of regional specificities. However, the concept of *class* such as formulated within a western context, did not correspond clearly with an adequate subject area of Yugoslav sociology or economics. Here I will not go deeper into the debate on the basis of Yugoslav society from the perspective of political economy, however, I just intend to point out that the economic and political basis of popular culture production in former Yugoslavia was not genuinely subject to a Marxist oriented criticism which was inherent to popular culture studies worldwide at the time.

novelty in itself came much more as a consequence of industrial developments in the production of records, record players and radio and television broadcasting of music. According to the interviewees I talked to, the technological novelties in the distribution of this music introduced the phenomenon of commodified consumption of folk music. Something which was not recognized as pop, rock or classical music, but rather as a genuine local, “home-made” product and was now commodified and available for wide consumption in a similar way like pop or rock products.

The second important element of novelty discussed here is the concept of authorship, which emerged in the sixties when the authors of popular folk music, who had originally played only in *kafanas* (pubs) and the fairs in the countryside, started benefiting from the regulations on authorship in popular music. This was followed by the foundation of the association of the authors of the NCFM music in 1967, “Savez muzičara dela u duhu narodnog stvaralaštva - SAMD (Council of the Musicians of the Works in the Folk Spirit). In other words, NCFM production introduced a significant novelty in the music business in comparison with “old” folk music period. The traditional folk music, or the music with folklore roots was believed to “communicate” with the so-called common people fulfilling both communicative and aesthetic function in its performance (see *Kultura* 1970: 123). NCFM adopted some features of “old” or traditional music and verbal forms, produced by anonymous creators and recorded and modified by local musicians. The similarities ranged from the particular characteristics of performances, particularly local rhythms, melodic lines and use of local instruments, to the regionally specific, local people’s language and particular folk’s phrases. Many of the the songs recorded were not authored by a particular author. Hence, the point is that the modernized folk production in the sixties and seventies resulted in the appearance of folk music authors (composers, authors of lyrics, band musicians and singers) whose work became officially paid and authorized, which was the beginning of the system of genuine stardom in the late seventies, and further on.

Third, as Lukić and others pointed out, this system of stardom of heroes from the “folk” reinforced a new type of principle of music communication: direct transmission of verbal, musical and even visual messages between the performers and the audience, the messages of which did not contain just metaphorical, sublime expression of folk wisdom or love emotions, but, on the contrary open and direct verbal messages, borrowed from the everyday, often banal language of communication, with formulations that incorporated clichés from the everyday

street, family, workplace, or *kafana* social interactions, and depicted scenes of everyday communication between family members, lovers, as well as the painful nostalgic recollection of subject's life in their homeland, or in the countryside (*Kultura* 1970: 130, see also Ivanović 1973: 181).⁵⁹ This “direct” and unmediated communication performed by this genre, was adopted by the strategies of NCFM as a new commercial music genre which significantly differed from the existing show-business practices in former Yugoslavia, despite the fact that similar changes in popular culture production were taking place in other contexts worldwide as well.⁶⁰ However, a comparative perspective was rarely present in the writings of Yugoslav intellectuals on the popular culture phenomena of that period, with a few exceptions.⁶¹ The new principle of production, hence, promoted the existence of the “stage” personalities of NCFM singers or composers, which would eventually become regional or national heroic figures, or at least, persons of certain authority. To put it differently, they epitomized the images of popular male or female characters, not only in terms of their biographical, “real” existences, but also as the models of gendered, classed, nationalized fictive personalities represented in their lyrics. Therefore, the main characteristics of NCFM production, especially in terms of lyrics, turned out to be the open representation of people's everyday scenes and experiences, almost in a preaching or life-narrative telling tone. In other words, the aesthetic function of these lyrics is suppressed

⁵⁹ Later on there will be more on the issue of difference between the so-called authentic folk lyrics and the lyrics of NCFM songs. Although there has been a lot of emphasis on the authenticity of NCFM, especially the contents of the lyrics, certain authors identified some key differences between the aesthetics of old folk songs and NCFM songs lyrics. A significant contribution to that field was made by Stanoje Ivanović, who analysed the motifs in lyrics, and compared the folk artistic lyrics with NCFM contents (Ivanović 1973: 176).

⁶⁰ It should be remembered that the late sixties were a period of the breakthrough for the country music genre in the USA, as a sort of counter-reaction to the leftist movements of the late sixties, the hippie orientation in rock music, the second-wave-feminist movement, and the like. Similarly, comparable variations in popular culture production took place in the neighboring countries in the region of the Balkans, such as Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania.

⁶¹ One of the examples that could be considered as an exception from that rule, could be an article by Slobodan Drakulić „Historijski značaj kontrakulture“ (Historical significance of Counter-Culture), in which the cultural movements in Yugoslavia were analysed in the context of global changes in the dynamics between dominant cultural patterns, and counter-cultural movements (Drakulić 1982). Drakulić claims that the period after World War II brought a huge counter-culture movement as a result of the rapid industrialisation, connected with the bohemian values of the life of the youth, and dependent of the subproletarian life of the youth population in big cities in the sixties, embedded in the culture of communes, the values of new left, pacifism, feminism, and the like. However, soon after this, the counter-culture was recuperated by the dominant culture through accommodation of such things as popular culture, fashion, and other practices and behaviours, so that instead of a negation of the classed worlds, the counter-culture has become vehicle of the preservation of the classed world. According to Drakulić, the hegemonic forces of society appropriated their forms and filled them with their own contents, forcing at the same time the counter-cultural forces to imitate their original mission in the world and the goals they used to have (Drakulić 1982: 97). The article by Drakulić mostly refers to rock and pop music and other types of popular culture that originally was the culture of lower classes. However, it is applicable to my research as it points out that changes in popular music nowadays are one of the most clear indicators of the emergence of counter-cultural movements in society.

by their entertaining, or life-telling and moralistic tones, which played the primary role in communication with the audiences.

Fourth, the participants in this discussion mostly agreed that what was “new” with regard to NCFM was, above all, the “audience” (*Kultura* 1970: 137). In saying this, they introduced the element of sociological analysis, since they admitted themselves (all of them) that there was no reliable tool which would really grasp the profile of the audience of NCFM and produce a valid sample of the consumers that would enable an “objective analytical insight” into who the consumers of NCFM were and what their occupational, educational or age background were (Ibid.: 138). The most insightful data were those produced by Vladimir Đonović, the music editor of the PGP RTV company, who shared his knowledge of general data on the distribution and sale of NCFM records. According to him, the statistics on records sale indicated that the biggest consumption of NCFM products was taking place in big cities, predominantly in Serbia, Bosnia and Montenegro. This fact was supported by the statistical data he presented, which showed that approximately 40% of the sample of interviewed informants from the city environments (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš) declared that there should have been more NCFM music shows on radio and TV, while the rest referred to all other genres together (in addition, 70% of the country population declared its interest in the shows with NCFM). This insight subverted a common stereotype about NCFM as a form of entertainment that is consumed just in the villages, seen as an intellectually less developed demographic space, while the city environment was mostly dominated by other, more “urban“, “western“, “intellectual“ music genres (see Gordy 1999). Consequently, all participants in the discussion agreed that, apparently, NCFM was inherently connected to the city environment and changes in the demographic structure. It is an urban environment which demanded the emergence of such a genre innovation. However, the discussants still spoke about those parts of the urban environment with some elements of stigmatization, picturing them as a particularly culturally marginalized. Namely, the general opinion of this music was that its predominant audiences consisted of city new-comers who had just moved from the countryside to the cities, and that NCFM was an expression of their nostalgia for a country life-style, and a resistance to the soulless and cruel conditions of city life. NCFM contained the elements of modern instrumentalization, and was related to contemporary everyday life in a big city (in terms of lyrics and visual performances), but was rooted in the traditional musical elements of folk, country entertainment (Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Gordy 1999;

Vidić-Rasmussen 2002). More to the point, one of the important conclusions of the discussion was that the profile of audiences of the NCFM was treated as the biggest novelty in relation to the previous images of the audience of so-called folk music (*Kultura* 1970: 125).

Fifth, the production of NCFM launched a new type of popular culture icon: the NCFM singer, or folk singer (*narodni pevač/pevačica*). Although mentioned in the discussion, it seems that this moment was the least observed in the writings on NCFM at the time. The phenomenon of stardom was quite known in Yugoslavia: the period of the sixties and seventies was a golden era for big Yugoslav film and pop music stars (see Janjatović 2007; Luković 1989). However, the position of the NCFM singer was textually encoded, and subsequently decoded, in a different way than the images of performers from other genres. Since the roots of NCFM were located in the codes of everyday communication, drawing purposefully on the connection between the performer and the taste of the common folk (*narod*), the set of signifiers encoded in the media construction of NCFM stardom was unique in the media sphere of former Yugoslavia. The insistence on “*narod*“, and being favored by the *narod*, has contributed to a significant ideological dimension to NCFM stardom, which was a cultural and political investment which was expected to be decoded by the folk as the “right one“ in a period of the nineties.

The new audiences of the NCFM is a subject of many works on popular culture in former Yugoslavia, such as Dragičević-Šešić’s (1994) book *Neofolk kultura: publika i njene zvezde* (Neofolk Culture: The Audience and its Stars). The book includes a review of popular sociological analysis of social stratification in Yugoslavia. Dragičević-Šešić draws on Vesna Pešić’s (1977) work which outlines a four-layer division of social strata, a division which reflects, among other things, the behavior of each stratum in the sphere of leisure, consumption, and the other. According to Pešić, these strata are: 1) top politicians and top managers, 2) administrators and intelligentsia, 3) the workers, and 4) agricultural producers (Pešić 1977: 128). The strata correspond with “adequate “lifestyles: exclusive style, status style, working class style, traditional style. It is not difficult to identify a system of hierarchical power relations built into this classification: apparently not only that this division reflected differences in terms of social privileges or even economic power but, additionally, this division reflected a hierarchical order in the matters of *taste* (in Bourdieu’s sense) in cultural preferences and practices of everyday consumption of each stratum . It is clear, that on such a scale, so-called working and traditional lifestyle were positioned as the least prestigious in the society. In her book,

Dragičević-Šešić postulates a similar division in a more elaborated sense: she underlines that in Yugoslav society, there are two dominant high culture models (elite culture and the dogmatic-enlightenment model), and then, the so-called dominant mass culture models which incorporated all types of behaviors including the receptive consumption of popular culture models, encompassing working class lifestyle and three other models: alternative, traditional and marginal. However, all these formations had a number of subdivisions. According to the research conducted by Dragičević-Šešić, the audience of the NCFM belonged to the population with the “dominant mass culture models“, i.e. predominantly *working class lifestyle* and the “traditional model“ with two subdivisions: the the “traditional cultural model“: the *agricultural* (rural) model attributed to the rural population and “cultural life model of ethnic groups”, such as Gypsies, Vlachs, and the others (Dragičević-Šešić 1994: 7-26). Although Dragičević-Šešić avoided making a clear statement that would firmly attribute taste for NCFM to particular social group(s), it is clear that it has been mostly associated with the social layers with lower level of formal education, and lower extent of social influence. In other words, NCFM was constructed as related to the social groups with a lower extent of formal institutional social privileges, and especially, groups devoid from some education in the sphere of humanities, arts or social sciences⁶². Namely, in her concluding summary, Dragičević-Šešić states:

Sociological and culturological profile of this audience is as expected: neither predominantly male nor female, mostly young (67% under 35), with industrial workers as the most numerous (25%), followed by those educated in technical schools both secondary and higher ones (20%) and private owners and artisans (15%). Social status of urban newly composed folk music fans is not unique, but nevertheless, two most frequent positions within social divisions of labour turned out to be in production and services.

The share of social power of adherents of this cultural model is relatively modest, and they are well aware of that. Occupational prestige is almost unworthy mentioning (with the exception of cafe and inn owners). Educational level is uneven: it ranges from university degrees to secondary vocational schools, but remains mostly of the technical kind. Thus *cultural level* in general, as well as this audience interest in various events (not only cultural), could be said to be relatively low.

Life style of newly composed folk music fans is characterized by its sociability, communicativeness and its orientation towards entertainment. Activity circle determining this life style is relatively reduced: work, outdoor leisure and entertainment (males) and work, home and family (indoor) entertainment (females). Two separate life orientations could be distinguished: young people prefer entertainment and fun (along with higher standard of living and professional career as preconditions for their yearn for amusement to be satisfied), while older people prefer family life. Range of interests and hobbies, as well

⁶² That was one of Šešić’s points she made in her book when she compared the leisure activities of the fans of NCFM, and the fans of other music genres, and, after the completion of survey“ pointed out that: „.....reading books, being a predominant activities among the admireres of books, does not fall even among first ten favorite acitivities of tha NCFM fans, who appreciate much more watching television and listening to radio programs“ (Dragičević-Šešić 1994: 40).

as topics and activities is clearly narrow. Cultural life takes place usually indoors, within the family circle and in the presence of mass media: television, radio, etc. Sometimes others are present, and these are, as a rule, people from the neighborhood.

The rural youth, regardless of whether they are students, workers or farmers, necessarily have a lifestyle different from that of urban youth. There are many reasons for this. In the first place, through their work in the home, on the field or in the factory, the rural youth contribute to the total income of the household. They are conscious of how difficult it is to make that income, or needs for investment in the farm, and therefore their demands for spending are more modest. This does not mean that their life has not changed in comparison with the life of their parents' generation. They bring new 'urban' elements both into life and work. But compared with the urban youth, they are still more conservative in their values, professional and social aspirations, family relations and so on. 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 'mosaic' culture combined of elements of the traditional, elite, urban-commercial and new folk culture (country) (Dragičević-Šešić 1994: 220-221).

Here I cited this long passage so as to illustrate a common description of the NCFM audience, enhanced by the fact that it was the conclusion based on the large survey done by a team of researchers, used as the basis for Dragičević-Šešić's book. I also cite this to explicate problems of the scholarly assessment of popular culture phenomena and the representation of social stratification in Yugoslav society. In discussion of NCFM, and later on, turbo-folk, approaches similar to Dragičević-Šešić's have been fairly common. The usual argument (or conclusion) operates with the terms *culture*, *cultural level*, *cultural life*, *cultural models*, and the like, emphasizing the existence of an essential difference between the lifestyle of the audiences of NCFM (or turbo-folk in the nineties), and the audiences of other genres in former Yugoslavia (or Serbia in the recent period). All these paradigms were to indicate various practices of *cultural life* as a deciding factor which tied NCFM to particular social layers, and to explain why they would be more interested in these genres, and not some other ones, which, according to them explained the high extent of the popularity of these genres (see Pešić 1977; *Kultura* 1970; Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Gordy 1999; Kronja 2000).

However, the main pitfalls of this approach were exactly in their persistent attempts to describe, or identify NCFM as a genre which is likely to be associated with a particular group of people: less educated, interested mostly easy entertainment and based mostly in the villages or a city environment that kept a close relationship with rural background of their citizens. The rural/urban divide, as a theme, dominated the discussions of contemporary Yugoslav and later on Serbian society, and the desire of the scholars to create as coherent picture as possible, resulted in creation of many stereotypes and essentialized images connected with particular identities or simply people located in certain geographic, or geopolitical setting, or associated with particular

taste. It seemed that urban-rural distinction substituted the well-known concept of class, i.e. that even Pešić's distinction between four social layers and all other social stratifications presented in the works on popular culture, derived from the basic platform of rural/urban divide. All social privileges of Yugoslav period were believed to come from the strata of top politicians and top managers, administrators and intelligentsia, clearly located in the (big) city environment, while the other two layers (workers and agricultural producers), still belonged to non-urban, or semi-urban environments, or, were seen to be (see Simić 1973).

It seems that due to such a characterization of social stratification, NCFM has gained the status of a widespread, but socially non-prestigious type of entertainment, (see Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001) or at least a genre that was persistently a subject of a patronizing discourse of intellectuals who discussed it but never identified themselves with the audience of this genre. The lack of identification between the authors of the analyses of NCFM and the ideological horizons of NCFM was a ground for these authors to comment on this genre as an „obscure“, „suspicious“, „low-classed type of entertainment“. Particular construction of male and female sexualities, performed through NCFM scene, represented the projection of gender identities of “lower” social groups, constituted through fantasies of the upper social class. In western contexts, this “upper” class was usually recognized as middle class (see Walkerdine 1997), while in Yugoslav context it was designated as the intelligentsia, managers and politicians.

Given this remark, I would like to point out that most of the researchers used the analyses of the audiences' preferences to stress the low “cultural level“, “taste“ and “educational background“ of the consumers of this music genre, outlining consequently the low or non-existent aesthetic value of this production. I would argue that such an approach has disabled some more complex research on the social status of this genre, since it did not advance much in relation to the pure position of an intellectual criticism of low-class taste in the society. I would argue for an approach which does not rely on random and controversial surveys and statistics, but on a more subtle textual analysis of the most relevant signifiers embedded in this production, grounded in a diachronic perspective on particular conventions of the NCFM genre the way they appear as socially and politically contextualized. In other words, I am interested in how particular forms (discourses and practices) within this scene have functioned as particular *topoi* (themes or cultural forms), how they operated within NCFM and later within turbo-folk, and,

ultimately, how the politics of gender functions and conditions these *topoi*, and the other way around.

My approach has been significantly influenced by the illuminative work of Ivan Čolović, in his book entitled *Divlja književnost* (Wild Literature), where he applied a method of textual analysis to the lyrics of NCFM songs. He correctly identified that the most repetitive and most visible motifs (emblems, themes, signs) in this production can be found as similar structures in some other type of practices and products of material culture. He grounded his approach in the established structuralist platform of Roman Jakobson, who observed language as a structure and discussed verbal production as a channel of communication, identifying various functions of language and textual messages⁶³ (Čolović 1985: 254-260).

Drawing on the valuable work of Andrei Simić (*The Peasant Urbanities: A Study of rural-urban mobility in Serbia*), I argue that NCFM consumption should not be associated merely with a particular essentialized and anticipated “low educational and aesthetic background“, or working class or peasantry in Serbia (or any other part of Yugoslavia). Rather it should be observed on the background of the particular social changes, or a sort of “cultural revolution” worked out through the process of constant rural-to-urban migration, or fluctuation. NCFM production should be understood as a particular set of discourses and practices and not some fixed, pre-determined class identities. This is why Čolović’s concept evokes this dynamic understanding of music production and concepts of its popularity, since he also insists on observing particular elements of music production as dialectic, diachronically changeable, and contextual.

In his book *Divlja Književnost*, Čolović argues that there is a continuity between the NCFM songs and certain parts of so-called folk poetry from the 18th century, especially cherished in the period of the mid-19th century, during the romantic intellectual movement in Europe called folclorism, and collected and edited by local and foreign scholars (see Čolović 1985: 140). He argues that folk poetry (pevanje na “narodnu“) nowadays exists outside so-called artistic literature, as an autochthonous para-literature, “wild literature“, manifested in necrologies in newspapers⁶⁴, in the epitaphs on grave stones, and, most visible, in the lyrics of

⁶³ Here Čolović refers to the essay “Linguistics and Poetics” by Roman Jakobson, using its translation to Serbian, entitled “Lingvistika i poetika”, published as a part of the book under the same title (Jakobson 1966),

⁶⁴ Necrology (obituary) is a short biographic note published in newspapers on the occasion of someone’s death, commonly present in the press in former Yugoslavia. Usually necrology is published when the late person is a

NCFM songs. In other words, he argues that the motifs, themes, symbols and formulations that could be named as *topoi* (travelling motifs), which are repeated and employed in these songs in limited number of variations and forms, clearly serve communication among the members of a particular community, or between an individual and a community. This formulaic character of the lyrics of NCFM is an indicator, in Čolović's opinion, that NCFM verbal expression should be observed as a contemporary form of (at least in some aspects) an epic, or epic-lyrical folk poetry from the past, which also, in his opinion served the purpose of communication between an individual and a community. For Čolović, this insight allows the researcher to identify structures in NCFM lyrics which are repetitive, and to analyze their meanings, since the semantic field of these texts are similar with variations of NCFM songs. Roughly speaking, the main circle of themes and motifs deals with family, love relations and patriotic feelings.

Similarly, Čolović argues that the formulaic character of the composition of these poems is also used in NCFM songs. According to him, the lyrics of these songs are organized through the variation of a limited repertoire of motifs and language tools. This principle of linguistic organization is inherited from traditional folk poetry. Still, this semantic structure has been reworked in NCFM songs by the addition of "realistic", everyday language inputs, resulting in what Čolović calls *linguistic realism*. These lyrics always have to fulfill one condition: to contain some element associated with the "narod" (folk), something that belongs to the folk. That is the first requirement, whereas originality is absolutely not the priority in the work of NCFM authors. The similarity between the songs is a desirable feature of this production. The established combinations of these motifs are constitutive of the songs. For instance, Čolović identifies five *topoi* of the connection between romantic love and the wealth. Apparently, there could be a number of *topoi*, within a particular theme, but the principle of combination of various motifs, and the scope of motifs is limited, reduced to the questions of family, marriage, unrequited love, erotic desire, weddings and other traditional ceremonies and celebrations (Čolović 1985: 150-199).

Here I have to disagree and suggest that it is rather controversial to insist on a direct connection between NCFM and the motifs and themes (*topoi*) with folk poetry from the earlier centuries since the formulaic character of traditional folk poems was mostly tied to epic poetry,

distinguished public figure. However, in the nineties, necrologies were often published in the cases of well-to-do individuals in general, and often, in the cases of criminals killed in the fights between antagonistic gangs.

which focuses on heroic combat and big historical events and less on the themes on family or love feelings, i.e. the topics that prevail in NCFM songs. On the other hand, the concept of *patriotic* belonging, as usually used in public discourses today, was not at work as a discourse before the ninetieth century and the modern period. Instead, epic folk poetry is full of contradictory and sometimes confusing set of motifs, with a controversial hierarchical set of heroes, with mixed and blurred indicators of religious and ethnic identity so that it can hardly be connected with contemporary concepts of nation, homeland, birthplace, etc, as they were depicted in NCFM lyrics (see Karadžić 1987). Nevertheless, Čolović's elaboration of "communicational function" as the predominant function of verbal expression in these songs, which dominates all other functions, contributed to a more academic and grounded approach to local popular culture production in former Yugoslavia. This stream of thought inspired Čolović to examine these formulaic forms not only in NCFM lyrics, but also in other forms of communication channels, such as newspaper necrologies, grave stone epitaphs, and football fans' slogans and songs (Čolović 1985: 17-139; 207-251). Such contextualization of NCFM lyrics proved to be fruitful as Čolović found a number of arguments that show how particular themes and motifs have travelled from one type of text to another, and how this process was connected with various outside factors: development of media technologies, discourses on rural-urban migrations, narratives on "gastarbajteri" (Yugoslav "guestworkers" abroad) migration, and the similar. This method paved the way for future analyses of particular structures or forms of the turbo-folk themes and the mechanisms of their social contextualization. This approach enables the observation of the connection between particular aspects of social reality and conventions of popular music production, in this case, turbo-folk production, or to put it differently, the relationship between text and context. Čolović named this method as linguistic anthropology, which also can be called *ethnolinguistics* (Ibid.: 14) . In this work I will try to follow Čolović's ideas of such an organization of the media texts, using a theoretical apparatus he was not aware of at the time. Generally speaking, these topics can be grouped as a) gender based relations (family and romantic bonds) and b) themes of collective belonging (to a country, nation, region, town, city, etc). The two groups of themes are interrelated and mutually shaped and serve to set the relations between individual and collective, and are shaped according to a particular set of expectations: for example, romantic affairs are always treated with accordance to the prediction of conventional heterosexual coupling, their future building of family and household.

Another important point is that an individual is always judged in terms of positive or negative personal values in relation to a group, collective, origin, homeland, family, which means a heteronormative relationship between an individual and the collective. In the lyrics an individual person is always represented and judged against the traditional collective set of norms, with gender variations. Such a concept always maintains the expected compliance of a “character” to a certain communal identity(ies), loyalty to a group, to a family, community, to the “spirit of the folk”, or a “collective destiny”. Following the logics of Čolović’s scheme, NCFM rests on a recognizable repertoire of topoi, which confirms this overall tendency of constructing the place of an individual within the ideological system of the community. This happens through tropes such as description of the regional context, signifiers of belonging to a certain community, communication with members of the family (mostly with the figure of the mother, which will be elaborated later), unfortunate love and the inability to establish a marriage and a household, a presentation of merciless object of erotic desire who requires an infinite obedience of the subject, a picture of social success coupled with a lack of happiness in a private life, acceptance of an unchangeable fate in terms of erotic love, and other gender relations, as well as a belonging to a certain community. These topoi were mostly manifested through the lyrics of the songs and partially through other media texts, such as the production of the images of these stars through the printed media, but rarely through TV videos. Only later on, in the eighties, the verbal signification of certain themes would become influenced by visual forms, creating some new emblematic situations, which took on more radicalized shapes in the nineties.⁶⁵ In the further course of this dissertation, I will discuss how NCFM female singers and the stage identities (characters) were positioned within this communication mechanisms.

In his book, Čolović deals only with lyrics and verbal structures. However, I propose to broaden the principle of semiotic analysis to the observation of various aspects of performing (through lyrics, visual facts, the life of the stars presented by the media and public statements of the stars outside the stage) as parts of a *text* mediated by various technologies of communication. Although all these aspects do not belong to the same level of social reality, it is still possible to say that they all participate in the creation of *stardom* as a text to be read, a particular structure I will call *stage identity* or *stage character*. According to Dyer (Dyer 1998: 16), stars are mediated as

⁶⁵ Later on in this chapter, I will discuss the way in which performances of Lepa Brena reshaped existing configurations of topoi of NCFM performances.

texts not only through the characters they play within a fictive world, but also through the representation of their “real” life, which is for the audiences as much magical and ideologically vested as the characters they play on the stage (see also van Zoonen 1994: 74-79).

3.2. Female Singers and *kafana* Performance

The *estrada* in the period of socialist Yugoslavia, in general, was caught in an ambivalent position. The stars were highly popular among ordinary people: record companies were earning a lot by selling their records, as were TV and radio stations and other production houses (Vidić-Rasmussen 2002; *Kultura* 1970). However, on the level of unspoken state cultural politics, personified through media politics of the most prominent media houses, the most commercial entertainers and types of entertainment were usually kept as still stigmatized, treated as suspicious, non-cultivated and non-refined type of cultural practices, always closely monitored by the state apparatus in the socialist, one-party-system.⁶⁶ In his collection of the biographies of the most popular singers and bands of former Yugoslavia, *Bolja prošlost: Prizori iz Muzičkog života Jugoslavije 1940-1989* (A Better Past: Scenes from the Musical Life of Yugoslavia 1940-1989), Petar Luković points out:

Since the first days of the victorious enterprise of socialism in our context, under special control of the mechanisms in charge, they [the singers and musicians] were forced to occupy the social margins: they have always been suspicious elements, potential enemies of social progress and mankind, always perfect victims who kept quiet in order to survive. The script did not change over time: they were pictured as cheap entertainers, dull in general, uneducated, greedy, evil and merciless, ready to sell themselves for a payment to every admirer and every country. The media have lived on their public statements, interviews and trivial arguments; when it was necessary, they were constructing the stories themselves, adding verbal applications, enhancing the fire in which we all burnt (Luković 1989: 7)⁶⁷.

This description of the status of entertainers, or popular music stars, is a cryptic description of the image of a popular culture figure in all spheres, not only in the sphere of

⁶⁶ See more on censorship in the article “Nova narodna muzika” (*Kultura* 1970), as well as in Vidić-Rasmussen, 2002, Vidić-Rasmussen 1995, and Luković 1989. Predominantly, the censorship referred to the lyrics, as it was high on media houses’ agenda not to allow completely “banal” or “provocative” language to occupy the media space. What could have been judged as banal or obscene was decided by experts educated in Serbo-Croatian language and closely monitored by editors in chief.

⁶⁷ The translation of this passage from Serbian is mine.

NCFM. It is clear that this kind of image was part and parcel of every popular entertainer in the context of the socialist state, not only the ones coming from NCFM genre. However, this rule was certainly applicable for the most popular and most commercial entertainers, and, since NCFM popularity was gradually increasing over the sixties, seventies and eighties, NCFM stars were becoming the ultimate popular music stars in big part of Yugoslavia.

The aura of “suspicious“ aesthetic and moral values was always present in the media representation of NCFM performers, or songs. Still, the biggest public stigma put on NCFM at the time, was not that of either musical or ideological criteria. It was rather the way NCFM was associated with rural lifestyle as a symbol of something backward, “low“, “local“, “non-international“, “primitive“, “uneducated“, “non-western“ and, often associated with a weak and submissive, in a word, passive attitude towards the world. This picture was opposed to the images of high-cultured, prestigious musical taste of intellectuals, such as a taste for classical music, or a taste for rock, hard rock or pop music, usually associated with higher standards of performances, higher level of education, more international, connected to the “progressive West“, and above all, “urban“. The idea of “urbaness“ was not only associated with some progressive ideas of social mobility, but it was also connected with the more powerful, more dynamic and socially prestigious, progressive, “manly“ type of power. This attitude had a lot to do with the hidden notion of “urban layers“ of being endangered or threatened by this “new class“ who increasingly migrated to the cities, with no intention of adopting cultural practices that were believed to be inherently “urban“. Such a picture was reflected in the writings of many sociologists and anthropologists, who discussed problems of cultural changes in the region of Yugoslavia in the nineties (see Gordy 1999). Gordy’s piece, made on the basis of research he did in Belgrade in the nineties, reflects the secret fantasy of the dangerous, suspicious, non-urban class which is emerging from some dark non-western depths, the “fear“ which was common among many Belgrade intellectuals, caught between rapid loss of social privileges in a post-socialist period and a trauma of the break-up of the Yugoslav state (see Chapter, page 58). The fantasy which had been buried during the communist period under the cover of ideological correctness towards the peasantry as a “pillar“ of Yugoslav society, in the beginning of the nineties burst into the whole variety of expression of that fear, which however, no longer had its particular cultural space in which to be expressed, but it rather found the reflection in anti-Milošević writings, journalist and scholarly works. As it can be read into Gordy’s writings, the

main “sin” of NCFM, as seen by intellectuals, was not actually its pure ruralness, but rather its potential *hybridity*, its ability to incorporate various images. In a way, the fantasies and fears of the intelligentsia proved to be “justified” in a symbolic sense: post-socialist changes brought a hybridism of genre, so that popular culture in general undermined the boundaries between the constructions of “urban” and “rural taste”. For instance, NCFM as a product of socialist times was observed as a homogenous phenomenon, without the analysis of regional, ethnic and gender mapping of the production and consumption of this genre.

A few researchers and analysts took a slightly different position in the commenting on NCFM, and partially its generic development. Here it is important to mention the work of Ivan Čolović and Ljerka Vidić-Rasmussen who introduced some new angles of analysis. As discussed earlier, Čolović stood for a particular sociolinguistic analysis of the lyrics of NCFM songs, placing his analysis into the field of *linguistic anthropology*, and bringing up some valuable insights in the social and ritual function of verbal messages of NCFM production, and their historical development (Čolović 1985: 9-16). He correctly noticed that many messages or linguistic formulations noticeable in NCFM lyrics have a formulaic structure, which had its semantic origin in old ritual practices of folk people, and are embodied not only in NCFM production, but also in some other forms of verbal articulation of everyday life, such as epitaphs on graveyards, or the songs of football fans. This approach does not rest on the analysis of the NCFM audiences through immediate polls or survey, as the latter has proved many times to be just a descriptive work, without ground for more general conclusions (see Dragičević-Šešić 1994). Instead, Čolović’s analysis deals with an anthropological contextualization of communicative functions of language of NCFM songs, i.e., through sociolinguistic analysis of the lyrics. Čolović deduced the conclusions about their function in ritual communication in the community they are associated with, and community’s discourses and practices. Second, Ljerka Vidić-Rasmussen was one of the first researchers who explored the fact that NCFM’s popularity was not equally spread over all of Yugoslavia, but that it had various regional contexts, creating symbolic regional borders what interestingly coincided with some political and historical divides that were exacerbated by the collapse of former Yugoslavia, indicating the specific hidden political load of the production of popular culture, grounded in the social history of this region (Rasmussen 1995; 1996). These two researchers, Čolović and Rasmussen, paved a path for a new type of deconstruction of popular folk music in Yugoslavia.

Interestingly, gender-informed analysis of NCFM is usually missing from all these writings, probably for a simple reason: feminism as an intellectual orientation was not influential enough in Yugoslavia in the sixties, seventies and eighties, and gender studies as the most contemporary intellectual articulation of feminist movements, reached its fully recognized position in western academia only in the eighties (in Eastern Europe not before the nineties). At the moment when scholars focused on cultural life in former Yugoslavia started writing on popular music in Serbia and other parts of former Yugoslavia, another highly gendered phenomenon was in the focus of their attention: turbo-folk music, mostly associated with the nineties and Serbian politics at the time. The pre-history of turbo-folk, i.e. the development of NCFM was rarely the subject of analysis, especially through gender. Besides, various gender hierarchies and the images of women from NCFM were usually said to be „childish“ and „naive“, especially in comparison to the period of the nineties, and the turbo-folk aesthetics (Dragičević-Šešić 1994). I will argue, in contrast, that the way female NCFM singers were gendered, and presented to the public, was related to the development of this genre, and its social context, as well as with the images and structural meanings incorporated in future turbo-folk modes of production .

Gender approach to the analysis of images of NCFM female singers can reveal many meanings and ideological horizons embodied in these images that were not identified in the older types of sociological analysis. For instance, previous analyses did not pay attention to the ways in which the images of women singers were constructed along the lines of their ethnic or regional belonging, or how their “womaness“ was constructed around the urban/rural dichotomies depicted as topics in the song lyrics. Similarly, the researchers who noted that women’s bodies became the dominant popular music product in Serbia as of the nineties, did not observe the way women’s bodies were introduced as one of the key phenomena in NCFM in the socialist Yugoslavia, which anticipated further developments of construction of emblematic women’s images in the nineties and later on. By women’s images here I predominantly think of those which embody the principles of ultimate heteronormativity, constructed through the fetishization of the symbols of the community belonging and sexuality. On the other hand, heteronormativity as a socio-cultural-political phenomenon, as well as a literary-anthropological construct, has been a constitutive element of communicative function. Čolović anticipated this argument by describing the constructs of family relations, roles and characters in NCFM lyrics (Čolović

1985:176-199). However, heteronormativity constructs basically derived from the cultural concept of the folk (*narod*): the instinct for survival, for reproduction, for interconnectedness, for *collectivization* of all aspects of life.

In the second part of this chapter I analyze the popularity of three major female stars of NCFM music, with references also to others, where applicable. These stars had various ways of “doing“ their gender identities as public figures, or, to put it differently, ways of “gendering“ their own stage identities. It has been widely believed that NCFM singer in general was coming from the “common folk“, from the “wide folk masses“, which was there to make sure that he/she knew what “real“, ordinary life was, and to sing in a language which was understandable to these people (Čolović 1985; Luković 1989; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002;). Although the singers would make a career by being selected by music editors from Radio-Television company in Belgrade, Sarajevo or Zagreb, talented singers were usually first „discovered“ by a famous musician, composer, or music manager, singing at some *kafana*, or by being awarded a prize at some folk music festival. Usually they originated from very poor, rural-based environments. That image was becoming an important part of their biographies, and a significant part of the mechanism through which the character of the singer was mediated in communication with the audiences.

However, there were certain clichés of the biographies of popular singers which did not confront the ideals of the state ideological narratives. Namely, there was a biographical, often romanticized pattern of the “quick“ success of a poor, young singer who, following the pattern of *per aspera ad astra*, coming from a small, remote village, succeeds in a big urban and modernized environment. This pattern could be described as a *picaresque biography*, a concept theorized within literary studies, describing the literary characters of the novels of the 18th and 19th century, usually characters of young men who struggled to raise their social status and rose from the lowest to the highest positions in the society.⁶⁸ Such a pattern of social mobility would, inevitably, demand a lot of compromising in terms of character’s moral beliefs and attitudes. Understandably, most of such protagonists in literary works are men: according to the 19th century’s moral conventions, it would be difficult to imagine a woman who would achieve such

⁶⁸ The term *picaresque* originates from adventurous novelistic prose from Spain in the 17th and 18th century, and *picaro* hero meant a pirate. I am using this term in its more modern meaning: namely, in the history of modern literature, this term signifies a narrative style which depicts the topic of social up-word mobility, and a hero (called *picaro* in metaphorical sense), is a character who comes from lower social strata and conquers higher social circles.

upward mobility, and still “keep her good reputation” in the public and her image of chastity. Applied to “real” lives, or narratives of life stories of popular music stars, it would also be more likely that within the framework of the state-socialist concept of public morality, such a picaresque life story is more likely to be attributed to male stars. There were a number of these: perhaps the best examples were Đorđe Marjanovic and Toma Zdravković, popular in the sixties and seventies (see Luković 1989: 79-92; 216-222). Although they performed in different genres, they both came from very disadvantaged life surroundings, being poor without a formal education and without social connections. Due to their great persistence and other talents, both became legends, acting at the same time as singers, entertainers, composers, lyrics writers, and musicians. Through the media, for the audiences, both were known as bohemians and womanizers. Both had fan clubs. During the period of state socialism, such life stories were not likely to be so easily attachable to female singers, for women were not gladly seen as controversial, persistent, and sometimes amoral picaresque heroes. Sooner or later, they would be either completely marginalized as “suspicious women”, or they would end up in a marriage which would provide them with certain “credibility” of a “normal” woman (Luković 1989; Tarlać and Đurić 2001; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002). Nevertheless, a few of them have been turned into iconic images, and consequently paved the way for future female figures, being read as legendary characters out of their own biographies.

However, speaking of their “stage identities”, or subject positions of these agents, certain features should be clarified here. The public image of popular music stars in Yugoslavia represented a *hero*, or *heroine*, i.e. popular performer, who was identified with two aspects of his/her public appearance: 1) the subject who was telling his/her life and love story, and 2) his/her supposedly “real” life story mediated through their images produced by the media. These two constructions sometimes were strikingly similar to each other and sometimes were quite the opposite. Still, they were constructed within a network of particular discourses and practices, intentionally creating a particular public image, or stage identity. One thing is certain: the models of gender identities, or maleness and femaleness they personified, were entwined with the idea of *changing* of one’s social status, *moving up* and gaining a position of social respectability (see Skeggs 1996)⁶⁹ We speak of subject positions, and not of subjectivities, as in Bourdieu’s and

⁶⁹ As mentioned elsewhere, Skeggs investigates the identity of working class women in England and notices that women of a so-called low background, presumably identified with working class context, often make a lot of effort

Skeggs's meaning of that distinction, subject position means just a locatedness within particular discourses, which may or may not be occupied by the subject. Here we speak of the subject positions that are available for performed characters, or, in other words, of the representations of femaleness that are constituted as available both to stars and, consequently, to the audience through their public images and artistic performances. In that sense, we could say that both instances participate in actualization of gender constructions: the performers who embody and utilize these discourses so as to create particular subject positions, and the audiences (viewers, listeners, readers), who are the recipients of these representations and who represent the target *for whom* such gender constructions are being made. Nevertheless, this thesis is not focused on psychoanalytical mechanisms of actualization or construction of subjectivities either of the audiences or the performers. My focus here is rather the examination of particular historically contextualized meanings of genre conventions, the way intellectual public and popular audiences have reacted to them, and to add my own readings of the contemporary developments of some elements of the genre (first NCFM and, later, turbo-folk).

In this thesis, a subject position of *heteronormative respectability* employs (through certain types of commodity fetishism) the paradigms of sexuality and nationhood as a sort of symbolic capital. The position of subject respectability has significantly changed over time since the first female NCFM singers started promoting the image of a decent rural girl who comes to a big city but still keeps her chastity and morality. The turbo-folk singers of the nineties and after the year 2000 who followed the NCFM stars constructed a position for themselves which transcended the imagined dialogue with a “desirable” middle class position (or rather: imagined, “decent”, intelligentsia-positioned in Serbian society). Turbo-folk stars strategized their performances so as to establish a position of “rightfully” and appropriately gendered, universal Serbian women, who did not come to “fit” into the respectable surrounding, but on the contrary, to dominate it.

to acquire various practices that deny the stereotypes of the inferiority of working class women in terms of clothing, taste, entertainment, sexual freedom, and gaining for themselves a special type of self-respect, which Skeggs calls the *position of respectability*. These practices are often in a complex and very critical dialogue with the discourses on their identities constructed by middle class women, often middle class intellectuals. In this thesis Skeggs' category of respectability will be negotiated and applied to a different social, political and cultural context, and various modifications of its meaning will be explained where appropriate. I was inspired to use it in order to emphasize that the images of female singers have also been in a dialogue with the cultural fantasies of “low” background of the people involved in the production of NCFM and turbo-folk music. However, in this case, it is about achieving an image of social position that has some more complex social implications than simply gaining respect in relation to middle class women's perception in the Serbian context.

Here I will discuss a few examples of the NCFM “heroine” character in the seventies and eighties. The image and narrative of Lepa Brena’s success-story, as well as the significance of her groundbreaking career in the mid-eighties, reflected and motivated many changes in popular culture conventions in the late Yugoslav period. Besides, the “phenomenon of Lepa Brena”, public representations of her life story and career introduced some significant innovations in self-creation of women public figures, produced at a moment of transition between the “old” modes of femininities in popular culture, and the new ones, born in the nineties (Dragičević-Šešić 1994; *Rock* 1983; Majkić 1983). Lepa Brena was the first multimedia glamorous pop-culture female *picaro*, in former Yugoslavia, who undoubtedly passed her way from being poor, uneducated, and socially unprivileged to being a top national Yugoslav star who was rich, adored, followed by others and even made the subject of scholarly research, despite the controversial nature of her performances, especially with regard to public morality at the time (see issues of *Radio TV Revija* and *TV novosti* in the period 1983-1987; see also Slobin 2001).

The popular image of Lepa Brena challenged some sets of beliefs and practices that had structured pop-culture conventions before her appearance on show business scene. Primarily, Brena’s music expression was a grotesque, shocking and provocative mixture of rock-pop sound, on the one hand, with a high-quality and modernized arrangements of music, and on the other hand, it was frivolous and banal, *kafana* type of show, a sort of music meant for the pure entertainment, without any artistic pretensions (see Šešić 1994; Kronja 2000; *Rock* 1983). It was clear that she and her band “Slatki greh (Sweet Sin)” merged two important demands, imposed on by the market, which were a precondition for the huge commercial success in former Yugoslavia. The first one was a demand for a form of “respectable” status of her music identity, as it was seen in former Yugoslavia. This was an ambitious, rock’n’roll music style, which also signified her relationship with urbaness, moderness and, last but not least, westerness. The other aspect was her tribute to NCFM, i.e. radicalized and simplified version of NCFM, with *kafana* style and often quite lascivious lyrics, often accompanied with provocative choreographies, costumes, and even elements of acting (Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Slobin 2001)⁷⁰. By exercising this latter practice, Brena was paying tribute to something which was often called the “common

⁷⁰ The most famous examples of Lepa Brena’s performances are available at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-o_2H9Odprs,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=14VZLsCzjDg>,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUsndZ3gZkM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNngx1rXWj4&feature=related>

people’s entertainment” (zabava za narod) that had existed in Yugoslavia since the end of 1960s, as a controversial subtext of many singers’ careers, but still way too long marginalized in the Yugoslav popular culture scene and kept outside the most “respectable” media and festivals (Vidić-Rasmussen 2002; Gordy 1999; *Kultura* 1970). Hence, a new hybridized music style was combined with a performance of open sexuality on the stage, and media representations of Lepa Brena’s work and life appeared in a form which had not been widely seen in the media in Yugoslavia before Brena’s appearance on the scene. What is more, in order to deconstruct and interpret any of these aspects of Brena’s innovative practice, we have to look at them as intertwined with each other and mutually conditioned. Before that, in order to understand what was in general so innovative in Lepa Brena’s concept of performance, we have to understand the meaning of two key terms (or issues) that proved to be of a great relevance for the development of Yugoslav pop culture in the transitional period (from the seventies through the beginning of the nineties). These two terms are: *kafana singer* (kafanski pevač/ica), and the *singer for the folk* (pevač/ica za narod).

The *kafana*, as an institution of drinking, eating, dancing and socializing, has a long history of being a cult place for the Balkan people, and additionally, as well as being constructed as such by foreign tourists, artists and travelogue writers. Like the phenomenon of Serbian folk music, for decades the *kafana* had a controversial reputation, with a significant gender-ambivalent, identity politics attached to it. The *kafana* was a place of everyday socializing and relaxation meant mostly for men. Traditionally, women were not expected to be there without a male escort, otherwise, they would have been taken as courtesans or just entertainers (which was almost the same), or just women of so-called low morality. At the same time, *kafana* was a place of spontaneous and joyful, carnivalist events, and a place of indecent, and often shameful, unruly expressions of emotions and attitudes, something considered an amoral place, of low taste, too frivolous and banal⁷¹.

Here I am not concerned with the history of *kafana*, since what is important here is the phenomenon of the *kafana* song and singer in the period of rapid industrialization and modernization of the region, which took place after the World War II. In the twentieth century, *kafana* became recognized as predominantly lower-class type of place, a place for men coming

⁷¹ See more about *kafana* phenomena and practices in: Golubović 2005; van der Port 1999; Vidić- Rasmussen 1995.

from lower class backgrounds, such as workers and peasants. There were exceptions to those rules, such as classy city *kafanas* in the biggest cities of former Yugoslavia, which have been frequented also by intellectuals and artists to date (however there were relatively few such places).⁷² Subsequently, the rapid growth of the working class population, in the period of state socialism, and, at the same time, the tiny growth of living standard of the peoples of Yugoslavia in the sixties, were fertile ground for the emergence of many *kafanas* all over Yugoslavia. The *kafana* could provide its guests with very simple and often untidy facilities, basic food and drink, and some sort of music entertainment, depending on the popularity of the place or the manager's will. *Kafana* music entertainers were mostly bands that travelled from *kafana* to *kafana*, playing popular folk songs. Many popular songs were first played in a *kafana*, then recorded and turned into radio hits. In addition, many songs were performed in *kafanas* at the audiences' request, as they also could have been heard on the radio, so that people knew them, and loved them. These *kafana* bands often included a male singer, but much more often, a female singer. They sang songs with sentimental melodies and lyrics, depicting unrequited love, poverty, melancholic moods, and the like. The singers were paid by their employers, but they also often had an opportunity to accept tips from the customers in exchange for fulfilling customers' song requests. The phenomenon of *kafana* music was closely connected with the popularity of NCFM (see also in: Vidić-Rasmussen 1995: 250).

The institution of female singer significantly differed from that of male singer. When Saša Popović described in an interview with him how he first met Fahreta Jahić, who would become the singer of his band, and later become known as Lepa Brena, he explained how everything started when his band was scheduled to play in a hotel restaurant in Bačka Palanka. The hotel was covered with the posters of the band, showing the provocative image of band female singer, when Spasa, the singer, suddenly got married and left the band. The whole band was in trouble, as the director of the restaurant had conditioned their engagement by the presence of a female singer on the stage. He told the members of the band to find whoever to replace her, just let it be a woman. As Popović says, out of 500 guests who came to hear the new restaurant band, 496 were men (Stamatović 2006). It was then that they found Lepa Brena as a

⁷² According to my informants over the age of 45 from Belgrade and Sarajevo, the best known „fine“ *kafanas* in Belgrade were Stambol Kapija, Mihajlovac, Košutnjak and a few others. The bands which were playing in them were often professional musicians, well-connected with radio and TV producers and editors. Being engaged in that kind of *kafana* place, already meant for a young singer a big step towards public success.

replacement for the previous singer. Aligned with that attitude, Lepa Brena became a most famous paradigm of just “any female on the stage” in Yugoslavia. She said herself many years after that: “Perhaps men had a picture of me as just a piece of ‘flesh’, thinking that it was all, but still this ‘flesh’ had brain in her head.” (Lepa Brena, interviewed in 2006 for the documentary *Dream Job*). Apparently, in this close, live communication with music audiences, women as singers were gendered in a particular way. While male singers were mostly not seen as objects of sexual fascination of the customers, female singers were expected to be sexually attractive for the gaze of kafana customers. Such a positioning of a female singer, who was not really expected *only to sing*, but to offer some other sources of enjoyment to kafana guests, constructed a position of exposed sexual objectivity for her. She could be paid, sometimes even forced, to provide services that would exceed pure visual exposure for male gazes. Due to such power dynamics, it was understood that in the case of the female kafana singer, her voice or musical talent was often not the major requirement for her to get hired. Although no extensive historical or ethnographic research was done on the subject of life stories of female kafana singers, plenty of cinematic or literary works testify to such a history of women in kafanas⁷³.

Further, what was the connection between the phenomenon of female kafana singer, and the high-profile national career of Yugoslav, or later on, Serbian turbo-folk stars? In order to answer this question, we have to look into a few works done in this field, as well as to look into the newspaper sources and record company statistics from the sixties, seventies and the eighties. For instance, Vidić-Rasmussen wrote on the influence of radio technology on the creation of music taste of large audiences all over Yugoslavia (Vidić-Rasmussen 1995; 2002). On the other side, Luković offered an insight into the significance of auditions and festivals organized by Yugoslav radio stations and record companies in the sixties and seventies (Luković 1989). The rapid introduction of radio and TV sets in almost every neighbourhood in former Yugoslavia, contributed to the *democratisation* and *popularisation* of popular music. Now, when working class (radnici) and peasantry (seljaci), and all others could enjoy more freely the music entertainment, such an enlarged audience could, indirectly, and perhaps, hesitantly but inevitably, pose certain consumption demands and influence production. Newly composed folk music emerged as a result of such innovation on the music market. The emphasis was on “new”

⁷³ In Yugoslav cinematography in the sixties, seventies and eighties, almost every film that depicted the life of workers or peasants contained many scenes with kafana performances, both in drama and comedy film genres. For example see: *Skupljači perja* (Feather collectors, 1967) or *Lude godine* (Crazy years 1978).

and “folk” music. “New” meant that it was freshly composed, it was a contemporary product, made by song writers in contemporary studios, and recorded and distributed to music shops. “Folk” meant that it was close and similar to the features of old folk songs, produced in some earlier periods, many of which were considered to be “authentic”, made by an anonymous author, coming from the simple folk. But NCFM was a modernized, “liberal-market” version of folk music. It was believed to comply with common people’s everyday interests, its lyrics concerned issues such as weddings, birth, dating, abandoned lovers, the departure of recruits to the army service, nostalgia for family members which are far away, and the like. (Čolović 1985). Given that, it is not a surprise that such a music genre was extremely popular in *kafanas*, among so-called ordinary people. One of the ways for music producers to “discover” some new talents in this field, and to test their ability to meet common people’s expectations in terms of music taste and visual fantasies, was to look for them in *kafanas*, as members of unknown, low-paid bands, hired for a month or couple of weeks (Luković 1989). So, the hunt for future female stars, would also often start in *kafana*. *Kafana* was the best test for an entertainer whether he or she was meant to be a singer of “newly composed folk music”.

That is why we have to look into the previously mentioned term, *pevačica za narod* (the singer for the folk). This is also why many of the female popular folk singers kept trying to “preserve”, but still to rationalize the “kafana part” of their personal histories, told publicly, through the media. As *kafana* was not the place where a *decent woman* was supposed to be seen without her male escort, it was clear that being *pevačica* in *kafana*, implied also some sort of sexual availability, some sort of ambiguous, a frivolous status among male guests, which was usually set by the house (*kafana*) rule. However, it certainly meant that a female music star, who used to be in her past *kafana* singer, once they have become a national wide stars, had to adjust the narratives from her past to her public image of an untouchable goddess. Their *kafana* history always suggested that they had a moment in their personal histories, when they were a sort of object of male gaze, or immediate male fantasies, which implied certain moment of losing a status of respectability, and usually increased the audience’s ideas of a singer as a woman of “low morality”.

We could add that a number of films produced in former Yugoslavia reinforced this picture of hegemonic gender relations bound to the status of female singers in *kafanas*. A famous film from the 1961, called *Opklada* (The Bet), inaugurated a shocking and persuasive portrait of

kafanska pevačica. Basically, it's a movie about conflicts between people with various life trajectories, showing a dark and pessimistic picture of the unsecured position of a poor, lonely woman who decides to leave her elderly husband whom she does not love. Seduced by a handsome and cunning womanizer in passing-by, who abandons her, she decides to leave her husband and start a search for her lover, which also leads her through bitter and disappointing experiences, and pictures of people's material and moral misery. Poor working class surrounding, merged with a hypocritical patriarchal setting of a social context that she faces, brings her at the very end to the decision to come back to her bad and unbearable marriage as the only way to survive in this world. There is also a significant digression scene in this movie: a scene of a female *kafana* singer singing and stripping at the same time, while standing on the roof of *kafana* house. At the beginning of the film, the main male protagonist utters that there is a "new, good female singer" performing in *kafana*. It turns out that the singer is a middle aged woman, with a good voice and a huge experience of *kafana* singing. Besides, it turns out that it is not her main performing quality. The culmination of *kafana* entertainment comes when a whole bunch of the workers, who have just come from their work shift, pay the singer good money to climb up the roof of *kafana* house, and to start singing a frivolous song, while half-undressing herself at the same time, and even touching herself. When the whole scene reaches its pornographic highest point, the spectators, who stand on the ground, far away from the singer, start throwing stones at her, in disgust, although she was performing exactly the performance they paid for. The whole scene is multilayered, with a whole set of implications, many of which cannot be analyzed here in detail. What is important to say is that, the representation of the behavior of female singer, her proficiency in negotiating and charging the "customers", and performing the whole scene, suggested that it was understood for her that her regular position included such tasks.

A very similar scene takes place in another movie, produced in the eighties, *I bog stvori kafansku pevačicu* (And Then God Created the *kafana* Singer). It rests on several clear references to *Opklada*. The female protagonist, Bela Seka, a gorgeous and talented *kafana* singer, makes her living by performing in very simple *kafanas*, for poor workers, who, on their part, often tend to pay a whole month's salary just to see the beautiful singer. On one occasion, when she has started undressing during her performance, which was meant to be the part of her job, one of the workers, who falls in love with her, prevents her from doing that. Symbolically,

such a gesture, draws a focus on her as a woman, human being, not a mere object. These two people start a married life, with a great desire to achieve a social respectability, and to be accepted by the society. However, such a gesture proves to be the beginning of numerous troubles in their life, as it turns out that the other people around them are not ready to break with the gender stereotypes on a *kafana* singer. The married female singer cannot find employment so easily: her married status does not meet the hopes and desires of male *kafana* visitors. On the other hand, her husband's family refuses to accept her as a family member, for her assumed lack of social respectability. At a certain point, her husband's uncle, in order to publically humiliate her, performs mockingly a lascivious song and imitates the singer's performance from *Opklada*, showing that a female *kafana* singer, cannot be a “decent” married woman, as she has an “indecent job”. The only way out of this situation was to attempt to produce a record and make a big music career. However, this attempt mysteriously fails in spite of all good intentions of her manager, and the *kafana* singer goes back to her “*kafana* destiny”, suggesting that there is a particular type of woman, a female *kafana* singer, who cannot be anything but that.

Interestingly, a famous NCFM singer, Lepa Lukić, plays a supporting role in this film, playing an older singer-colleague of Bela Seka. The older singer is an alcoholic, who apparently represents a pessimistic “older version” of Bela Seka. This little play with real and fictive characters indicates that Lepa Lukić, in reality famous singer herself, did not mind being recognized as a former *kafana* female singer, or connected with such a profession. Being a huge folk star at the time when the film was released, Lepa Lukić apparently was not perceived by the audience as a woman of a “low morality”. Her success was a metaphor of her own ritual “redemption” for having *kafana* history. In addition, the other successful NCFM singers also often referred, in various ways, in their public statements, to their *kafana* days. The fame they enjoyed enabled them to represent their *kafana* history as a necessary part of their career, something which contributed to their identities as “real singers”, singers for the folk. We can conclude that broad audiences were more likely to accept a female singer's imaginary “purification”, if the singer reached a huge success, and got some material power and influence.⁷⁴ The gaining of a respectable status, in sense of negotiating stereotypes of *kafana*

⁷⁴ In the seventies and eighties so-called „confessional interviews“ of popular singers were extremelly popular in the magazines such as *Radio TV Revija*, *TV novosti*, *Žena* and the others. In most of them the singers „revealed“ interesting details from their early youth that usually was full of hardships and struggle for survival, encounters with many both abusive and helpful people, numerous love affairs with men, touching relationships with the family

singers, was apparently closely connected with the image of upward social mobility. In general, most of these singers did not talk much about that in public, and especially, did not invest a lot of effort to “correct” the stereotypes of *kafana* places. That part of their life was ritually “forgiven” to them by the audience, but only if their “stage identities” became properly coded in relation to the issue of belonging to the community and its heteronormative setting. In the following sections these stage identities will be analyzed in details, with all their variations, which will explore the relationship between popular music, gender identities and communal belonging.

3.3. Lepa Lukić: A Wise Folk Woman and Dignified Adventurer

The NCFM singer Lepa Lukić started her career in the early sixties, reached the peak of her popularity in the seventies and eighties, and stayed respected and popular even today. In a way, she epitomizes the idea of a NCFM female picaroon, a village girl, who entered a commercial entertainment industry, performing exactly the image from her own background: singer from and for the folk (*pevačica za narod*). Luković called her the “first folk female adventurer” (Luković 1989: 205). In general, Lepa Lukić was known as a survivor, an individual and independent, who married several times but had no children, and was famous in the Yugoslav public for some practices in public sphere originally considered as typically masculine, such as gambling in the ambient of private Belgrade apartments and underground clubs, and her bohemian lifestyle.⁷⁵ Luković quotes the words of Rade Mumin in 1970, who pointed out that Lepa was the most wanted performer at NCFM concerts and other events, and the best paid at the time. Lepa epitomized a masculine form of fantasized countryside openness and immediateness as a type of gender respectability. This position indirectly constructed a legitimate field for her communication with the public, within which her “amoral” behavior was successfully

members and hard professional work. Such were the interviews with Zorica Brunclik, Vera Matović, Nada Topcagić, Vesna Zmijanac, Gordana Lazarević, and particularly, Lepa Lukić and Silvana Armenulić, who used to have their own fan clubs, and according to Luković, were giving statements on their whereabouts on a regular basis to *Radio TV Revija* and *TV Novosti* (Luković 1989).

⁷⁵ Lepa Lukić herself talked many times about her addiction to gambling, alcoholism and night life in general, which were usually considered to be manly characteristics in both Serbia and Yugoslavia (for instance, in the interview that Tatjana Vojtehovski did with her on TV PINK, 2002). The author of this thesis also took into consideration the interviews with two attendees of private Belgrade gambling sessions who also confirmed that Lepa Lukić has been well known in these circles up to date.

accommodated. Although she did not present herself as a motherly, modest type of woman, she still presented herself as an authoritative, wise folk woman, whose sins could have been taken as traditional sins of the folk, i.e., something which naturally can be forgiven.⁷⁶

Lepa's songs, appearances and public image in general corresponded with some common traumas of rural men and women confronted with the challenges of modernisation, upward social mobility, performing in a way the socialist success story. Lepa testified in her interviews that she was excited before her first audition, and determined to succeed, as she could not bear "going back to village life and looking after sheep again" (Luković 1989: 205). In the same interview, she even admits that she had a shot of *rakija* (strong fruit brandy), to "kill the butterflies" in her stomach, which was seen as a masculine, working class type of behavior. Later on, there is a description of how the whole village eagerly awaited to hear Lepa's first song on the radio, proud as "one of them" was becoming popular, visible, important (Luković 1989: 206). Lepa's stage femininity and sexual identity was intertwined with a particular type of belonging: since the beginning of her career, her stage identity was constructed as a "wise folk woman", but not really particularly tied to any kind of geopolitical identity: neither rural or urban, Yugoslav or Serbian. Her agenda was to come from the folk, to represent the folk, to sing for the folk, to be acknowledged by the folk (Dragičević-Šešić 1994: 137-159).

The meaning of the word "narod" (folk) was genuinely polysemic in the context of Yugoslavia. It could have referred to the population of a particular village, or an urban proletariat, the population of the whole country, of a particular region, or the republic. In any sense, it referred to the people who did not have much access to the decision making processes in the society, but who constituted the majority of consumers of any popular culture product (see Gordy 2001; Kronja 2001; Šešić 1994). Lepa Lukić was the prototype of a singer who is adjustable to various social situations. Recently, while participating in the documentary "Sav taj folk (All That Folk)", Lepa commented on the participation of the singers in the so-called "guardianship of Belgrade bridges", directed by the Milošević regime, during the 1999 NATO air raids. She pointed out that no political dimension should be attributed to the fact that most of the turbo-folk singers performed on the bridges and followed the will of Milošević government: "Nobody should blame the singers for this. A singer just go and sings whenever they are invited. The poor singers did not mean anything bad, they believed they were doing the right thing (Sav

⁷⁶ See Gordy on the connection between NCFM and the legitimisation of political authorities (Gordy 1999).

taj folk, 2004). This statement roughly sums up the general principle of the NCFM production, and later on, turbo-folk. While most of the other genres were connected in one way or another with the notion of some “desirable status” in society, NCFM made the industry which followed the principle of fulfilling the “folk’s need”, represented the “real” taste of folk (*Kultura* 1970: 100).

In such circumstances, the gender identity of Lepa Lukić as a wise and moderate voice of the people was more oriented towards the economy of belonging than to the economy of sexuality. Lepa’s image was more built on a position of a “clever country woman”, coming from a village, but capable of surviving in any situation, respectable in a way which is gendered through a combination of stereotypes: the cunning modesty of a woman and the decent integrity of a noble, folk man. Even her songs with lyrics concerning vivid, clearly sexualized contexts have some flavor of moderate, not really officially coded, but sexuality negotiated by folk practices. This performance of sexuality was constructed as a result of new generations of peoples of Yugoslavia, common folk who survived the horrors of World War II and developed various strategies of economic and political survival, between patriarchal Balkan up-bringing and modernized socialist paradigms of morality. Lepa’s stage identity, or stage character, derived from a background that was imagined as the largest, and geopolitically most “invoked” in various products of popular culture, i.e. the part of Yugoslav population that was most likely to fall under the category of “rural folk” (*narod sa sela*). This was epitomized by the Serbian countryside, the region of the central part of Serbia (so-called Šumadija), still close to the capital, Belgrade. Thanks to the close ties with Belgrade, the biggest city of Yugoslavia, and historical contextualization of Šumadija as the “heart” of the Serbian (and, even, Yugoslav) countryside and peasantry, even when the statistics indicated differently.⁷⁷ In such a context, the topics of Lepa’s songs, evoked a “Serbian folklorist motif, based on the basic melos, cleverly adjusted to pastoral, village landscapes....It was a melos of Šumadija, singing, flamboyantly seductive, funny enough to tell the story of cheerful love experiences”(Luković 1989: 207).⁷⁸ There is a famous example of the photo of Lepa Lukić, with a crown on her head, with the suggestion of

⁷⁷ In the period of socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1989), the country consisted of six republics, and each of them consisted predominantly of rural population. Hence, Šumadija was just a slice of overall rural population in Yugoslavia.

⁷⁸ *Melos* is used here as a word for a musical harmony, but in Serbia it is also commonly used as a word for a musical style, for example, Greek *melos*, or Southern *melos*, etc.

her as a “queen” of the folk song, and with *opanci*⁷⁹ on her feet (*Radio TV Revija* 1970). This poster was turned into an official poster for the music production house “Beogradska estrada” (Luković 1989). Here are the lyrics of one of her first and most famous songs:

Od izvora dva putića,
Vode na dve strane,
Ne znam kojim pre bih pošla
do tebe jarane

Two paths are running from the stream
Running two ways
I don't know which one
Takes to you, darling

Gledam jedan, gledam drugi,
Oba su mi mila,
I jednim sam I drugim sam,
S tobom prolazila

I watch one, I watch another
Both are dear to me
I used to take both of them
While walking with you.

Jedan vodi kroz vocnjake
iznad naseg sela
tu nas tvoja majka jednom
zagrljene sreła

One of them goes through fruit plants
Above our village
Once your mother saw us there
While we were holding each other.

Dala mi je od sveg srca
cvet iz baste vase
“uzmi,uzmi rano moja
ti si zlato nase”.

She gave me then wholeheartedly
A flower from your garden:
“Take it, my dear, she said,
You are our treasure”.

Leto prođe, jesen ide
sve se manje javljaš,
ružu moju I ne gledaš
mene zaboravljaš.

The summer has come, the fall is coming
You are not calling me,
You don't watch my rose any more,
You are forgetting about me.⁸⁰

(1964)

The language of the female subject who is telling her story comes from a marginalized background: it is the voice of a clever young woman, who is blessed by a great feeling of love. She sings about her love through the references to the idyllic village landscape. In the end of the song, the voice makes sure that her love is blessed by the approval of her boyfriend's mother, which is a guarantee of the future of her love that is to be actualized by a marriage, since the approval of the groom's mother in NCFM songs was inaugurated as the main proof that the marriage can be realized. All elements are there: two paths which are apparently both good, but the one, which is associated with the approval of her mother in law, is the more favorite one. The other elements: “our village”, the “wood” or the “vineyard” provide the other aspects of

⁷⁹ *Opanci* are a type of traditional shoes typical for the countryside in a great part of the region of former Yugoslavia; they are mostly associated with agricultural occupations.

⁸⁰ Author of the music is Petar Tanasijević.

general consensus and the rightness of this heterosexual love: the general consent about all factors employed around two people from the same village, who obviously have a future in marriage and happy family, confirmed by the words of the girl's mother in law who tells the girl "you are a treasure of ours", making sure that she is an adequate person to be confirmed as a proper wife and mother by the whole community in question. However, a final part of the song indicates that the potential groom is betraying their mutual and approved love. So the bitter feeling of an unrequited love is positioned against the memory of the brightest elements of lost happiness, expressed through the ecstatic "approval" of a potential mother-in-law and desired acceptance by the community, the groom's family.

Another example reveals a similar village wise girl singing about her sweetheart and clever ways of communicating with him:

Jedva čekam da nedelja dođe
tanana milena da nedelja dođe
da moj dragi u jagode pođe
tanana milena u jagode pođe

I am hardly waiting for Sunday to come
Tanana milena, for Sunday to come,
And for my Darling to come to strawberry plants
Tanana milena, come to strawberry plants.

I ponese šareno kotarce
tanana milena šareno kotarče
u kotarce svileni maramče
tanana milena svileni maramče

And bring a colorful basket with him,
Tanana milena, colorful basket,
In the basket, silky scarf
Tanana milena, silky scarf

U maramce sjajno ogledalce
tanana milena sjajno ogledalce
kad se gleda nek name pogleda
tanana milena nek na me pogleda

In scarf shiny mirror
Tanana milena, shiny mirror
When he looks at it, let him look at me,
Tanana milena, let him look at me.

The stage identity of this woman's character is properly gendered in Lepa's song: there is a hint of normative communication with the listener, while at the same time, her sexual desire does not violate the community codes. The extent of the erotic allusions is approvable, since it is accommodated within an ambivalent, moderate verbal expression.

A third example pictures a sad feeling for a lost lover, again neatly wrapped into a gentle, idyllic context of a regional, countryside belonging:

U grudima mojim
taloži se tuga
bez tebe sam dušo

In my chest
The grief is growing
Without you I am

k'o slavuj bez luga

Like a bird without the wood.

Bez tebe sam dušo
kraljica bez krune
izdaju me oči
oči tebe pune

Without you, darling,
I am like the queen without crown
My eyes are betraying me,
My eyes are full of you.

Svaki dan sto svane
na tebe me seća
bez tebe sam dušo
proleće bez cveca

Every day
Reminds me of you
Without you
I am like the spring without flowers.

Sve sto beše lepo
sve sa tobom ode
bez tebe sam dušo
k'o česma bez vode

Everything that was beautiful
Has gone with you
Without you
I am like a stream without water.

The female subject in this song reminds the listener of her noble and modest femininity: through a set of comparisons with some natural countryside beauties, the subject refers to her sad love feelings which are again the feeling of a folk-contextualised woman, who lived in the world of *slavuj* (a singing bird), *lug* (small wood), and flowers in the spring. In the chorus, the subject openly compares herself with a queen who has lost her crown, indicating her respectable, properly gendered love pain and a status of dignity and nobility.

To sum up, the central theme of properly coded gender identity in Lepa's songs depicts the feelings elegantly wrapped in a well-known countryside, non-conflicting landscape and stage of the feeling, which provides the subject singing of the unrequited love with an aura of dignity and respectability. The sexuality of the female subjects in Lepa Lukić's songs is well controlled, and intertwined with everyday wisdom and hidden belief in a stable identity of a woman who still knows where she belongs. In other words, the heteronormativity coded by Lepa Lukic's stage identity is constructed through sexuality controlled by a particular frame of local or cultural identity. In the heyday of Lepa's popularity, videos did not play the same role as today, so that most of the personal mark of a singer's performative style had to be communicated through the lyrics and printed media, each of them in its particular way. The emblematic character of Lepa Lukic's stage identity, as well as most of the singers of the period in question, was mediated more through her voice and lyrics than visual images.⁸¹ We can identify many topoi here in the

⁸¹ Lepa Lukić's most popular lyrics can be found at : <http://tekstovi-pesama.com/Lepa-Lukic>. Not all the songs of Lepa Lukić fall in the same category, as her later songs from the eighties and nineties have shown some elements of differently positioned sexuality. However, this was already the period after the culmination of her popularity, so that

sense that Čolović attributes to these terms, however, I will sum up only a few of them :1) a character of a „properly“ gendered woman coming from the province, who competes with urban identit(ies), being supported by „the folk“; 2) a dignified and playful transgressor of the conventional social gender norms, but still somebody who does not challenge the field of male dominated norms; 3) a subject suffering from unrequited love, but who accepts their destiny as an eternal and unchangeable matter of facts; 4) a social succes and acceptability of a singing subject (a form of respectability).The number of topoi that could derive from these forms is unlimited – and a subject for further research. Still, they are all made in accordance with unique principles of merging of gender and the belonging to the community. We will see later how the topoi mentioned above were developed and renegotiated in the context of turbo-folk genre in the nineties.

3.4. Silvana: An Urban Legend of Newly Composed Folk Music

In the late sixties and early seventies, there was another iconic female NCFM singer, Silvana Armenulić, who was proclaimed to be the real “rival” of Lepa Lukić. According to Luković, this rivalry was produced by the media: the imagined antagonism between two folk music heroines was fueled not only by the music industry, but also the newspaper industry (Luković 1989: 206). The popular magazines (predominantly *Radio TV Revija* and *TV Novosti*) fostered this “dispute”, founded fan clubs, published the statements of both singers and daily news on them, in order to raise their own popularity and sell more newspapers. Despite this insight of Luković’s, it is illuminating to observe the ground on which this opposition between two singers was created. While Lepa was famous for her image of a Serbian folk’s honest and wise woman, who sometimes possesses some typically manly vices, but which all falls under the category of being a common human being, Silvana’s image was constructed slightly differently. Being a woman with a highly sexualized visual performance, always appearing in dresses that showed lots of cleavage or in very short skirts, Silvana’s heteronormed image was constructed

the complete mechanism of her communication with the audience had a different role in the construction of heteronormativity. Here it was my aim to discuss the days of her biggest popularity as an example of media transmitted signifiers of women’s gendered identity, typical and indicative of the sixties and seventies.

less through identification with some rural-coded *narod* or regional community, and more with the imaginary of a poetic and tragic position of a woman in the modern world. Unlike Lepa Lukić, who insisted on the “folk” being behind her success, and her lyrics which pictured idyllic settings of the safety of the village, Silvana’s stage identity was proto-type of an “urbanized” woman, a woman who originated from the province but who succeeded in a big city, and who evidently has interiorized the values of the imagined “westernized urbanity”. This image was embodied in a sort of “Madam Bovary scenery” of suffering, and corresponded to the concept of upward social mobility of a Yugoslav woman, who strove to be a member of a modern, western-like world as delineated from the regional specific local contexts of former Yugoslavia. The stage identities of Lepa Lukić and Silvana are two sides of the same coin, in terms of the hybridized gendered stage identity of a female singer from the socialist period. While Lepa generates an identity of a successful woman who has never stopped being an experienced village folk member, Silvana constructed herself as a bohemian Belgrade-contextualized woman, adjusted fully to the urban environment of a modernized “complicated version” of female fate, that takes place in the romantic bohemian scenery of dark pubs of the capital.⁸² This spirit was nourished in her songs, lyrics, her public statements and her visual appearances.⁸³

Silvana’s stage identity epitomized a woman who is strong and glamorous, but still deeply unhappy because of her unrequited love and unspeakable sexual desire which remains unfulfilled. When asked about their memories of the popular singers from the earlier, NCFM period, nine out of twelve of my informants (eight of whom were women) mentioned Silvana Armenulić as one of their favorite singers. Snežana, an economist from Belgrade, who attended high school in the early nineties, stated:

Silvana’s song “Šta će mi život bez tebe dragi”, was one of my favorite when I was 17. We were often singing it at the parties, although none of us officially liked newly composed folk stuff...but this song was a real picture of how I felt when I fell in love, there was a guy who did not even notice me...I barely knew any particular thing about Silvana, but I felt like she must have been aware of how it was to be a lonely woman. When I heard this song for the first time, I thought it was some freshly made song...(Snežana, female, economist from Belgrade, age 37).

⁸² Silvana’s real name was Zilha Barjaktarević. She originally was from Doboj, a small Bosnian town, and her career personified, among the other things, a complex negotiation of her own identity with all controversies that could have been brought by that fact. Her path from a Bosnian girl, via identity of an “urban singer” in the capital (Belgrade) to an identity of a national star with a western female name, illustrates partially the narrative of socialist upward mobility, available for women.

⁸³ The „cult“ of Silvana was particularly supported by *Radio TV Revija*, a prominent popular culture magazine, in the period 1971-1976, by publishing articles, interviews and other statements about her.

Interestingly, the lyrics, music and the voice from Silvana's song communicated with young teenage women even twenty years after the song was written, at the time when Silvana was no longer alive, and her career no longer existed through any media promotion. The lyrics of her most popular song are the following:

Šta će mi život bez tebe, dragi,
kad drugu ljubav ne želim da imam,
sanjam te sanjam, skoro svake noći,
samo si ti u srcu mom

Noćas mi srce pati,
Noćas me duša boli,
Teško je kad se voli,
Pa ostaneš sam

Jesen je tužna već odavno došla,
Uzalud čeknem uzalud se nadam,
O majko moja toliko ga volim,
samo je on u srcu mom.

Why to live when I haven't got you, darling,
When I do not want to have another love,
I dream of you nearly every night
Only you are in my heart

Tonight my heart is suffering
Tonight my soul is in pain,
It is hard when you are in love,
And then you're left alone

The sad fall has already come
In vain I long, in vain I suffer
Oh, my mother, I love him so much
He is the only one in my heart.⁸⁴

(1970)

Seemingly, this song does not contain any context-specific markers. Moreover, in terms of geographical and historical context, it seems to be applicable anywhere. However, there are several specific signifiers of typical themes of the actual Yugoslav women's dream of emancipation from the sixties and seventies, although given in a metonymic way. More precisely, these are the signifiers of emancipation, and "modernization", but still shaped by with the traditional local collective belief that bad luck is typical for a woman's life. This imaginary is located in a particularly framed stage of a kafana place and imagined unfulfilled dream of a marriage and family home. The first verse reveals almost a metaphysical height of the lyrical subject who is telling us her sad story. She is denying her wish for life since she has lost the love she wanted. She does not want another chance. In spite of all her liberty for free love, her life still resembles the pattern of a monogamous, almost religious idea of matrimony. According to such a worldview, the freedom of love has its own price: once a woman can chose her lover or a husband, there is a danger of finding and losing love, consequently, gender emancipation can be a road to suffering, which does not appear as much different from the previous dictate of marital obligation. The refrain positions the whole love feeling in the centre of the attention of listeners,

⁸⁴ Author of the music and lyrics: Toma Zdravković.

since there is an emphasis on the word “noćas“(tonight) framing the whole situation in one definite moment, the moment of performing the song, giving it a kind of stage effect, the *illocutory* effect of addressing somebody. This effect invites the listener to construct some possible audiences next to the singer who completely identifies with the lyrical subject at the moment of performing.⁸⁵ And, finally, in the second katreen, the subject addresses her mother. Traditionally, the NCFM topos of addressing the mother while singing of the deepest love and sexual desires (without ever addressing a father), has something to do with the tradition of so-called „lyrical folk song“ (lirske narodne pesme), which were also-called „ženske pesme (women’s songs)“⁸⁶. In such a setting there was a convention of a young girl speaking to her mother, sometimes in a dialogue, sometimes in a monologue, opening up her heart, or sometimes asking for the approval, or complaining about the cruel but unavoidable family rules forbidding her to pursue the love she wanted. These creations are at the same time both songs and poems, since they are believed to be invented by anonymous poets and sung at folk gatherings, and only later recorded and written down by literate people, mostly foreign writers or scholars (Karadžić 1987). The construction of “motherly position” in a dialogue in NCFM songs has a meaning of the ultimate verification of the seriousness of the feeling, since the dialogue with parental figures in this frame of family relations would not happen without a serious personal drama which confronts an individual gender-positioned feeling with the motherly position. In this situation, mother embodies the givens of an appropriately gendered authority, as well as an ideally constructed imaginary of a woman, since she must be the only one who understands the sufferings of a constrained women’s sexuality and sensitivity. Addressing the mother means the firm connection between an individual woman (who speaks at the moment) and the whole community of women, who have suffered the same way, confirming the imaginary roots of a speaking subject. This connection also reinforces the local traditions of gendering of woman’s communicative and artistic expression.

⁸⁵ According to classical work by John Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, the illocutory effect means an act of “doing things”, “acting”, by addressing somebody in the act of communication (Austin 1962).

⁸⁶ See the edition “Srpske narodne pjesme (Serbian Folk Songs)”, the volume *Knjiga prva u kojoj su različne ženske pjesme* (Book with Various Female Poems) edited by Vuk Karadžić, an author of Serbian modern orthography and editor of many works of folk art for the first time in 1841. In the introduction he clarifies why he divided Serbian folk poetry into epic and lyric poetry, and how so-called lyric poetry, which involved mostly the topics of erotic love, life cycle rituals and family relations, was also named as „ženska“, as it was in reality performed mostly by women, at typically women’s places of socialising, work, and other rituals (see Karadžić 1987). Interestingly, many of these „lyric“ poems are nowadays considered to be jewels of Serbian national poetry, studied in the school textbooks, and as a part of folklorist studies .

Originally, Silvana's song was written by Toma Zdravković, already mentioned here, an example of *male picaro* in NCFM scene, who testified himself that he willingly gave this song to Silvana, since he believed her when she claimed that this song is about her life and that she was the one who should perform it (Luković 1989: 211). This interesting switch from the "male performance" to a "female one" contributed to the creation of one of the most famous legends in the history of commercial music in former Yugoslavia. In the early seventies, Radio Televizija Beograd (Belgrade Radio Television) launched a commercial entertainment TV-show called "Ljubav na seoski način"(Love in the Village Way), which treated the gender stereotypes and romantic clichés, located in a Serbian village, in a comical way, based on local humor. The show, however, contained a number of musical interludes, with scenes in kafanas, in which popular singers from the Yugoslav popular music life performed in the roles of kafana singers, performing their own songs from their official repertoires.⁸⁷In one of the episodes, there is a kafana scene in which Silvana Armenulić in person performs the song "Šta će mi život bez tebe dragi (Why to live without you, darling)", while one of the male characters, Gvozden, suffers because of the crisis in his marriage, and a memory of his old love. The song is performed by a woman, but Gvozden, being at the moment of his deepest emotional crisis, completely identifies with the atmosphere, lyrics and performance of the song, singing together with her. In that scene, we can witness the process in which the quality of the identification with a particular stage identity, gendered as female, moves from a female character to a male one. However, we should bear in mind that this moment is exactly the moment of *crisis*, an incident, which explicates the radicalized "other side" of characters in the TV shows, but cannot be "normalized", i.e. set as the norm. However, it is still shown to the TV audiences, so that the audiences still can have a brief glimpse of a controversial and double gendered position of their heroes. This moment of signification is relevant for the observation of the character and nature of NCFM genre in the media space, and the characterization of female stage identities within NCFM genre conventions.

Silvana's stage identity was that of a woman caught between two worlds: traditional and

⁸⁷ Musical interludes, showing the ambient of musical performances in kafana, represented a particular genre convention of Yugoslav cinema in general, especially in the seventies and eighties. Little to no work was done so far on this topic. However, as already mentioned, I argue in this thesis that the motifs of filming a female singer performing in kafana, inserted to the films of the late socialist Yugoslavia, played a great role in the development of the female turbo-folk star image in the nineties, and since. The *feminization* of kafanas would have a lot to do with the development of turbo-folk stage identity as a contemporary variation of the "non-epic, domestic and womanly gendered" aspects of communication cherished in NCFM, originated from the ritual "female gendered" communication from the folk heritage, and, as it will be shown later, *radicalized* within turbo-folk scene.

modern, emancipated and constrained, mainstream and marginalized, at the same time. Her premature death in a car accident at age of 37, has added to the construction of the legend of a sensual, gorgeous, unhappy woman, whose melancholic experience of love epitomizes the curse of an emancipated woman, or a woman who managed to fulfill her dreams from the imaginary of “Madam Bovary clichés”, but still, experienced the deepest sadness and loneliness, which is coming from the “cursed”, “woman’s nature” to give and expect in return too much. Silvana’s sexual appeal has been constructed as almost mythical imaginary place in the history of popular culture in former Yugoslavia. “Who is singing this song? O, this is the voice of the late Silvana. O gosh, she was such a gorgeous woman! What a marvelous song!” - that is the comment that can be often heard about Silvana Armenulić in Serbian cafes, families, busses, whenever a song of hers is on the radio, even now. Somehow, the manifestation of the main topos of unrequited love of Silvana’s stage identity would be: a successful, but unfortunate woman, whose successful, but romantically tragic bit of emancipation has brought her back to the suffering of the traditionally given nature of her sex, accommodated in the larger community she was coming from. The topoi that could be identified in her performances are: unreturned love, dialogue with a mother, or other member of the community and social success coupled with a lack of happiness in her private life.

In comparison with each other, it seems that Lepa Lukić and Silvana were constructing their own images and public status through certain gender-mediated position of respectability. In the context of the NCFM imaginary, Lepa’s career introduced a model of womanhood with the androgynous capability of survival, and Silvana “created” a woman who transgressed the boundaries between a traditional and modern, and then experienced a backlash to the traditional concept of “women’s experience”. Both of their stage identities paved the way for future “formula” of respectability for turbo-folk female stars, although the horizon of the ideological settings through which turbo-folk stars were gaining their recognition appeared to be a sort of counter-revolution in relation to the ideological framework of Lepa and Silvana’s time. It seemed that both of the characters epitomized by them, unwillingly signified that they “knew their place”. Lepa showed this by negotiating her own gender identity through the insistence on “narod” (folk) as her guarantee, and Silvana by admitting her vulnerability even a priori, through her sad songs of a betrayed woman, and her actual, unexpected, tragic death. They both symbolized *more* than an “average woman”, in a way, they were “typical”, but still

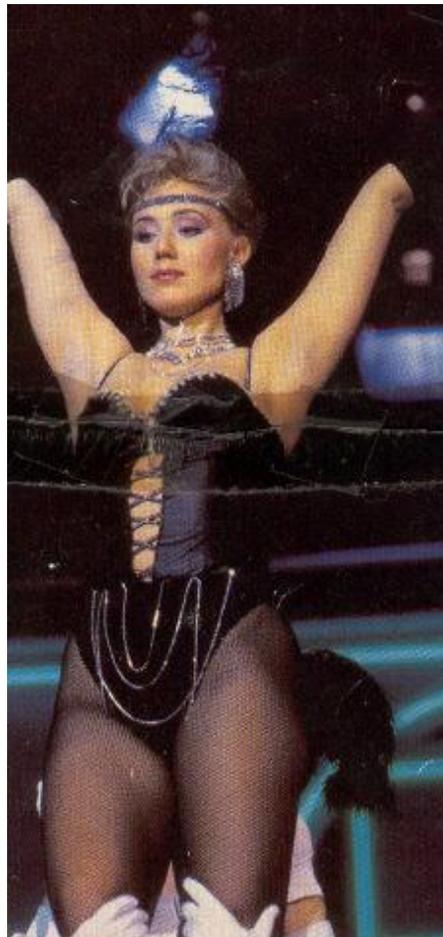
“extraordinary”. In order to be available for the identification with the audiences, music or film stars are always expected to be, on the one hand, recognized as personalities coming from average social layers, and on the one hand, admired as individuals who have achieved “something more” in their lives (see Dyer 1998: 43). But did they show that they could be the “ultimate woman”, a woman who can perform as such, who has something new to offer, independently from the singing business? It seems that the full actualization of stage identities in NCFM came with another young singer in the early eighties – Lepa Brena.

3.5. Lepa Brena: The Picture Says more than a Thousand Words

The status and the nature of kafanas, and accordingly, the status of kafana singers, was gradually changing over time. Early NCFM singers started singing in small, cheap kafanas, visited mostly by blue-collar workers and bohemians. Later on, with the emergence of NCFM, popular and recognized singers were performing in a small number of respectable, kafanas and restaurant halls of hotels in Belgrade, Sarajevo and some other cities in Yugoslavia.⁸⁸ In the early eighties, when the performance of a successful female kafana singer was at its peak, it moved to some more classy types of kafanas: to hotels and expensive restaurants. Given that, we can try to highlight a few significant moments in the career of Lepa Brena, the biggest Yugoslav female star of the eighties, and most probably the first (and perhaps the last) Yugoslav multimedia female star . She joined the proficient, high-quality band, called “Slatki greh” (Sweet Sin), which performed at restaurants, hotels, and similar spaces, when she was at the age of eighteen. The front man of the band, the ambitious young musician Saša Popović, recognized the performing potential in Brena's open representations of female sexuality on the stage, so that the band, under his leadership, successfully combined quality stage entertainment, improved by rock and pop elements, with the exposure of a young, healthy-looking woman, coming from the working class background of a Bosnian province town, presenting an image that communicated very well with the semi-hidden expectations of majority of the audiences (Slobin 2001: 135-136;

⁸⁸ According to Luković, and the interview with a few Belgrade citizens who attended night life in Belgrade in the sixties and seventies, the prominent Belgrade kafana with NCFM music were: Pod lipom, Sunce, Košutnjak, Madera, Hotel Bristol (some of them already mentioned), and a few others . According to the respondents, these two cities, together with Novi Sad and Niš were the most important generator of NCFM life performances in all periods.

Šešić 1994: 137-159). Gradually, Brena and the band were becoming an attraction themselves, not any more just for working class audience, but, on the contrary, for rich and powerful men, directors of big companies, politicians, high state officials, and the similar.⁸⁹ Accordingly, they were performing their kafana program at exclusive places, such as the Vojvodina Hotel in Zrenjanin. Brena was known as the “long-legged”, tall blond woman, wearing extremely short skirts or shorts, and interacting with the audience (picture 1). Her success and communication skills could not pass unnoticed: after just a few years, she became a popular TV and radio star, creating an image which brought her thousands of fans.



(Picture 1: Lepa Brena)⁹⁰

⁸⁹ The following data was gained through the interviews with the 6 of informants above the age of 45, who testified that they personally watched Brena’s performances in various occasions in restaurants in Zrenjanin and Novi Sad. Also see an interview with Saša Popović (Stamatović 2006), as well as the articles about Brena and interviews with her (for example, see Minić 1984; *Radio TV Revija* 1984; *Rock* 1983; Stojmenov 1984).

⁹⁰ The source for this picture is the website page: http://www.yu-estrada.com/slike/lepa_brena/9.html.

The great success of Lepa Brena, her move from a position of an entertainer for restaurant guests to the big stadium concert star, in all countries of the Balkans, was accompanied with a similar kind of success of some other NCFM stars: Vesna Zmijanac, Zorica Brunclik, Vera Matović, Nada Topcagić, and others⁹¹. All of them appeared in the roles of kafana singers in the movies from the eighties, especially in very commercial comedies, like *Žikina dinastija*, *Kamiondžije ponovo voze* and *Tesna koža* and the like. The cinematic convention of incorporation of the scenes with kafana performances, and the famous actual singers in the roles of singers in the films, contributed to the verification of kafana, as a birth-place of the career of NCFM singer. Still, in the case of most of these singers, NCFM with its kafana heritage, was promoted as just one of the genres in former Yugoslavia, as popular, but a less valuable, purely commercial music genre for wide audiences (Dragičević-Šešić 1994: 32; *Kultura* 1970: 103; Radojević 2001: 11; Gordy 2001: 36-37; Gordy 1999: 112; Vidić-Rasmussen 2002: 184-189). Lepa Brena was the one who drastically pushed these boundaries between genres, and obtained bigger media attention for the music she and her band were producing. She was the first kafana singer who became an absolute media phenomenon in former Yugoslavia in the mid-eighties (Dragičević-Šešić 1994).

Lepa Brena, with no doubt, was a bridge between some older, conventional modes of NCFM image production, through the old topoi of NCFM, and later turbo-folk female performances which were coming in the nineties. Milena Dragičević-Šešić analyzed the characteristics of Brena's (self)creation in her book *Neo-folk kultura* (Dragičević-Šešić 1994). As she points out, Brena was not afraid of changing her fictive images: each of her performances was a small sketch, with a new costume, and new protagonists. In a word, Brena's way of performing music was offering *more* for wide circles of consumers than most of her colleagues (Dragičević-Šešić 1994: 160-180). At this point I would argue that she offered a shocking and provocative play with her sexuality, and readiness to show her body to the TV audience, to the extent that was pretty common for kafana performance, but very “scandalous” for TV conventions at the time. It was on that controversial risky basis that her popularity emerged.

In addition, this is the point where my interpretation confronts that of Dragičević-Šešić.

⁹¹ During the eighties, *Radio TV Revija* was the magazine which followed the career of all these NCFM singers, publishing music charts and regular critical articles on new albums of popular NCFM singers, mostly by Dušan M. Jovanović.

While Šešić considers Brena's style to be innocent, childish and close to a fairy tale look, I would rather say that Brena and other creators of all her images, at considerable risk, played with the incorporation of the elements of typical kafana erotic, humorous, and often vulgar play between female singer and kafana spectators (guests). In kafana imaginary, the audiences are at the same time-guests, which means they are allowed to have a sort of active participation in the performance. That is the point in which the Bakhtinian concept of carnival as an erasure of the hierarchies can contribute to a better understanding of NCFM and turbo-folk performances. According to Bakhtin, the old cultural form of carnival, known from ancient period, which survived till contemporary times through arts and visual performances, was a form of festivity in which there were no boundaries between the performers and the audiences (Bakhtin 1984). Additionally, it is also possible to discuss the way in which kafana/concert singer mirrors the audiences/guests self-projection, or in other words, mirrors the fantasies of the audiences in general. Despite the fact that Dragičević-Šešić did not recognize the highly sexualized component of Lepa Brena's performance, she couldn't be more right when she wrote that Brena is the "picture of us", "our youth, beauty, joy, our success, glory, achievements", where the words "us" and "our" relate to all of those who could be identified with the role of the audience at the time (Dragičević-Šešić 1994: 176-177). What Šešić did not understand at the time was that this "projection" is a construction of our *sexualized self*, a dark and mysterious materialization and embodiment of "our" fantasies of a definite, commodifiable body available for the gaze of the spectator, sometimes even available to touch. Following the postulations of Valerie Walkerdine, we could conclude that class stratification has its role in these mechanisms of "commodification" (see Walkerdine 1996). Lepa Brena was persistently constructed as an image through the media as a "fresh", "fleshy" young woman, a provincial girl, vivid and "unspoiled" Bosnian, but still quite provocative and often lascivious. It was obvious that she was "created" for the fantasies of men who came from the higher social positions but who were still obsessed with the fantasy of village female beauty.

So as not to be accused of over-intellectualizing Lepa Brena's stage identity, I should clarify certain details. First, Lepa Brena's performance originated from the scenery and imaginary of the Balkans kafanas, and it should be understood that the kafana style of interaction between guests and singers can hardly be read as an act of "childish innocence". In that respect, Dragičević-Šešić failed to see that Brena's performance simulated kafana singer performance,

and consequently, relied on her open sexual appeal. The female subject position represented by Brena was getting highly eroticized through her play with the audience and their erotic fantasies. For example, one of the main “show effects” on Brena's concerts was her sitting on the shoulders of the leader of her band, Saša Popović, and singing in that position, while Popović was playing the accordion. This scene also created the effect of a carnivalist grotesqueness and frivolity, as Brena appeared as a tall and big woman with high heels and Popović as a short and skinny man, with big glasses, performing a confused, comical, intellectual looking, school boy. Such effects were, in principle, common scenes from kafanas, wedding parties, and other burlesques-like situations.⁹² In Brena's case, it just moved to the stages in big concert halls and stadiums, as well as TV studios. The carnivalistic, obscene scenes she performed in her kafana days got transformed into more glamorous visual elements of performances, but, still epitomizing the bodily coded communication of NCFM, deriving from the old topoi of visualization of kafana performances, which inevitably led to the feminization of the NCFM music performances. The lyrics of many of her songs referred to the same lascivious erotic motifs which could have been heard in kafana, for example:

Si, Cile, si,	Yes, Cile, yes
Ma štrpni me za uvce	Bite my ear
U šaš, ovde žbun,	In the grass, in the bush
Si Cile si,	Yes, Cile, yes,
Ma nek mi srce kucne	Let my heart beat
U grm, pa na drum,	In the bush, on the road,
Jer prosto žudim	I simply desire
Da izludim	To be out of my mind
Da me štipneš da me gricneš	I want you to pinch me, to bite me
Cile, Cile,	Cile, Cile,
Zagrljaju moj	You my dear embracement. ⁹³
	(1983)

⁹² Many of the informants confirmed the anecdote famous in the very early eighties, that Brena gave performances in Hotel Vojvodina in Zrenjanin, and other places in Novi Sad, which were designed as semi-private parties for the directors of big companies and other state enterprises of the time, including the scene in which Brena would mount the shoulders of men from the audience interested in this act, and they enjoyed the pleasure of carrying her around on their shoulders while she was singing. The scene was remade often at her concerts after she had become widely popular, when the leader of the band was carrying her on his shoulders. In one of her movies, “Hajde da se volimo (Let us Love each Other) II”, there is a scene in which Brena, who plays herself in the movie, as a popular singer on her tour, is asked by her friends to act as an ordinary kafana singer, to pretend to be one of them, in order to solve a problematic situation and “please” a locally powerful man. Brena gladly accepts to fulfill the task and does it with a lot of joy, which interestingly proves that NCFM aesthetics did not aim to deny that kafana lascivious and controversial entertainment was part of its roots.

⁹³ Author of the music: Kornelije Kovač; author of the lyrics: Marina Tucaković.

Nevertheless, if we get back to Dragičević Šešić's remark that Brena's performances were girlish, and adored by children, we have to admit that Brena was indeed widely popular among children, especially small girls, which indicates that, in a way, her image played with the idea of innocence, just that it wasn't a "sexual innocence", as one might wrongly conclude. It was more of a disguised type of political innocence, or political conformism, which still contained a particular message of identity politics. Brena's performances gave the impression of innocence in an ideological sense, a sort of cheerful and carefree worldview which insisted on practices of love, sex, partying and the like as the highest purpose of life, unlike many of her colleagues who sang about dark and pessimistic feelings, nostalgia, and the like. In her further career, Brena introduced some other, more "serious" songs in her repertoire, adding the elements of pathos and suffering in her performances. Interestingly, even this music strategy was a great success – it turned out that it was very effective to present a glamorous blond star in a gorgeous expensive dress singing about an unrequited love – it was a striking contrast to her earlier songs. In a way, this element of glamorous, porn-star-looking-woman who suffers because of love, also anticipated the future image of sexy female turbo-folk stars from the nineties, containing striking contrasts between some culturally coded signifiers. The latter produced a contradiction between their aggressive oversexualized image, and the almost self-denying masochistic hopeless love expressed in the lyrics of their songs, expressed without an ironic distance.

The image of a gorgeous, superior looking woman, which was constructed somewhere between the look of a fairy tale lady and the cartoon super hero Modesty Blaze, was also deployed in Brena's video performances in her films "Hajde da se volimo (Let us Love Each Other) I-III", especially in her video for the song "Jugoslovenka (A Yugoslav Woman)". The latter was perhaps the most direct example of the merging of the signifiers of female sexuality and the glorification of a national (in this case, Yugoslav) identity. Besides, Lepa Brena, three popular male singers from three different parts of the country in this song, also recognized as very attractive by the presents three men in a dialogue with a beautiful blond woman, participated in performing this song, with the task to praise natural physical beauty of the female character in the song. In the chorus, the girl responds explaining her natural beauty by its connection with the natural resources of Yugoslavia, with an ecstatic last verse "I am a Yugoslav woman". The richness, the beauty, the power of the girl and the country are inseparable in the erotic feelings of those who desire her(them). The central scene of the song, in which Brena

shows her whole body in shorts and tiny top, lying on a boat in an erotic pose, somewhere on the magic Adriatic sea, while the Yugoslav flag waves next to her, suggests that Eros for one's country should be seen as comparable to Eros for a sexualized, fantastic female body.⁹⁴

Brena's performances included a wide range of elements of irony – many of her sketches were parodic plays with gender, and particularly with sexual stereotypes, intersected with stereotypes of the „maleness“ of men from various regions and various ethnic backgrounds, which all ended up in some kind of peaceful, coexisting resolution of all antagonisms, in which good sexual relations were the solution to everything. This is similar to Bakhtinian understanding of substantial status quo that always re-emerges after the carnivalesque types of social phenomena, once the game is over. Brena had numerous songs dedicated to an imaginary man, coming from various ethnic backgrounds: Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosnian, Hungarian, always mentioning a lot of various colorful identities.⁹⁵ What strikingly distinguished turbo-folk performances from the nineties from Lepa Brena's was a lack of irony in the nineties-style representing masculinity and femininity on the stage, as I will discuss in Chapter 6. The idea of signifying the main cultural codes of heteronormativity, i.e. politics of belonging and sexuality, was renegotiated in the performances from the nineties. The subject epitomized by turbo-folk singers was constructed as taking the role that they had been given in the world without an ironic distance, as it will be clear from the further course of this dissertation. The outlining topos of Brena's career is closest to the emblematic constructions of turbo-folk concepts and singers in the nineties: it is rather the intersection of strategies that promote the idea of healthy, young, sexualized and potent female body and strategies of promoting national (Yugoslav) ideology using the banal everyday anecdotic language. Although her stage identity was different than those of turbo-folk stars from the nineties, as already mentioned, the role of visual performance in her career anticipated the emblematic significance of visual images in the stage performances of the turbo-folk singers in the nineties. In other words, she paved the way for the singers in the nineties who were more important as symbols of a “right woman” than as music performers.

⁹⁴ See this video at the webaddress: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiYwkdLYdfg>

⁹⁵ Lepa Brena's ironic and comical songs about the characters of „lovers“ who come from various backgrounds can be found on www.youtube.com, as well as the footage from her concerts in many towns of former Yugoslavia or, for example, spectacular concert in Sofia in 1990.

3.6. Conclusion

Finally, a few concluding remarks are to be outlined after the observation of *topoi* (common themes) of heteronormativity performed through the stage identities of NCFM female singers, the women's stage identities that preceded the emergence of turbo-folk scene singers in the nineties. As outlined in the beginning, the NCFM genre emerged with the development of radio and television, as well as the record industry, and from the beginning was classified by intellectuals as a "common people" phenomenon, more social than musical. This genre (or musical orientation) was a market-based production, which supported itself and had its growing audiences which were not easy to classify or research. It has been labeled as an entertainment of a "low taste", for it mostly communicated the themes, motifs and style of performances associated with a traditional, "rural" or "provincial", lower or city migrant based organization of life. The elements of "low", "obscene", "indecent", "undignified", have often been associated with the role of women in its production, especially as NCFM had a lot to do with the institution of kafana, which was a place of a highly gendered division of labor. The institution of the female kafana singer (pevačica) proved to be a structural constituent of the development of this musical style because of the role of performative and visual effects and the role of the audiences in the kafana, which contributed to the further developments of certain emblematic constructions in the performances of turbo-folk singers. The concept of the female kafana singer corresponds with the future developments of visual-performative eroticization of the role of a female singer, and the range of topics and models available for projections onto imagined women's identities. The development of the stage identities of NCFM female singers is also interrelated with the efforts of the performers to construct their public images as "the respectable one", and to present themselves as professionals, family women, wise women, successful but unhappy, fashionable but properly coded, and the like. As was discussed above, the mediated stage identities of NCFM singers were constructed so as to reclaim their belonging to the community values of the context they were in. In spite of the various subject positions or stage identities they occupied, and renegotiation of the boundaries conventionally set for women's position (see Gal and Kligman 2000a), the common images of women mediated through their lyrics, visual images and

their exposure through the media as stars, maintained the archetypical function of NCFM, which was reestablishing the loyalty of an individual to the collective beliefs (to a family or some larger groups). The code of “respectability” of the NCFM singer was mostly oriented toward both exploiting and negotiating the stereotypes of a country woman, provincial woman, a woman who is singing in a kafana. However, the developments of such codes in the nineties brought about some structural changes in the understanding of the moral and social frames of “being respectable”, especially in gender terms, so that the exploitation of common representations of women from low social positions, or images of appropriately gendered women’s subject positions, diverged from the previous associations of a *respectable woman*. This renegotiation of the image has a lot to do with the structural developments of the media codes through which the stage identities were communicated, developments in the media technologies, and differently coded visual images displayed in videos in combination with the impact of various fashion designs and references to social and cultural contexts. The following chapters will discuss further insights about which topoi of “respectable heteronormativity within a community”, embedded in a particular historical social and cultural conflict and taken as a system of reinforcing communication within the community, was adopted by the turbo-folk singers and renegotiated in the nineties and later on.

CHAPTER 4

Cultural Icons of the 1990s: The Appearance of “Turbo-Folk Women”

4.1. The Post-Yugoslav Music Market

In the previous chapter I showed how the performance conventions of NCFM, the genre predecessor of turbo-folk, were intertwined with the way intellectuals and music editors viewed the idea of the popular, commercial music market, and the profile of the audiences. As I explained, NCFM music was seen as an “authentic” and “unique” music genre of ordinary peoples of Yugoslavia, who were mostly caught between the rural and urban economy of life. The music editors, sociologists and musicologists identified at the time that one of the key values represented through NCFM performances was a sentimental notion of belonging to the community. As most songs dealt with the theme of romantic love, or family love, the idea of the heteronormativity of an individual and the community was a leading theme convention of NCFM production. The role of women singers was remarkable and symbolically loaded, as their performances embodied the intersection of gender and cultural collectivity. As it will be shown in the following chapters, women’s performances in turbo-folk were embedded in a similar ideological framework.

In most former republics of Yugoslavia the period after the break-up of Yugoslavia was dominated by another concept of community – ethno-national unity. Similarly, the Serbian music market became articulated through new political social and cultural paradigms, interrelated with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the following part, I will discuss the cultural changes that followed the physical disintegration of Yugoslavia. In order to explain the break-up of Yugoslavia as a process which was gradually taking place in the eighties, after the death of President Tito, and resulted in a violent outburst of ethno-nationalisms in the early nineties, will discuss several important landmarks of this process and their implications.

4.1.1. The Dissolution of Yugoslav Political and Cultural Space

In principle, it is not easy to pinpoint the beginning of the road to the final dissolution of Yugoslavia. Accordingly, it is not an easy task to answer whether, and to what extent, the cultural dissolution of Yugoslav geopolitical space followed the political and military conflicts that emerged in the end of 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. There are at least several ways to identify the landmarks of the end of unique political space, the determination of which would be useful for discussion of cultural and historical circumstances of post-Yugoslav production of popular culture. I will give a few schematic notes on the break-up of Yugoslavia here as a substitution for a lengthy discussion on the history of the decline of “Yugoslav myths” and the rise of nationalist practices all over the territory of Yugoslavia, out of which the Serbian has been considered to be the most destructive. These political circumstances shaped the break-up of the Yugoslav cultural space into small ethno-national cultural spaces. Such a break-up helped turbo-folk to acquire the role of “authentic” Serbian folk music entertainment (see Đurković 2002).

First, it is possible to claim that the political, administrative and cultural break-up of former Yugoslavia started soon after the death of Josip Broz Tito, the life-time president of Yugoslavia, who turned out to be an incontestable symbol of Yugoslavia. Tito, the president and commander of military forces of Yugoslavia, who died in 1980s, at the age of 88, gained much of his undisputable fame during World War II, while he was acting as a partisan army commander. He emerged towards the end of the armed conflicts on Yugoslav territory as an absolute commander of the communist oriented partisan Yugoslav army that was to grow into the Yugoslav National Army after World War II (see Pavlowitch 1992; Ridley 1994). Even before the end of the war, at the famous Communist Party Congress in the small Bosnian town of Jajce, on 29th of November 1943, Tito was elected as the lifetime president of the Republic of Yugoslavia, an one-party-dominated state, the administrative and ideological foundations of which were outlined officially on that day. Tito held the position of the president of Yugoslavia for almost 40 years despite the fact that certain liberal, or sometimes pro-nationalist forces within or outside the country made attempts to introduce or at least initiate some political oppositional

orientations that would have inevitably resulted in questioning of his untouchable presidential position (see Pavlowitch 1992; Ramet 2005).

One of the main discourses launched by Tito's propaganda services emphasized that he had originated from a working class social position, had been a metal worker before World War II, and especially, that he was a great supporter and admirer of workers and peasants, always oriented toward their needs, listening to their voices and identifying himself with their interests. In contrast, the other moments in his biography contradicted that image, such as him being an army officer of the Austro-Hungarian Army during the First World War, or his close friendships with royal dictators from numerous African and Asian countries, as well as the well-protected, luxurious, tsar-like lifestyle he practiced while being at the position of the president in his lifetime. However, these controversies did not affect his public image of the widely respected and loved man in the country settled predominantly by the economically poor, and poorly educated population, mostly based on agricultural and heavy-industrial production as sources of income.⁹⁶ Moreover, even these details were widely exploited in picturing Tito as a hard working and noble man, respected all over the world, who needed all this attention and luxury in order to be able to represent the Yugoslav working class as well as possible all over the world, and the Yugoslav people as a community of happy and just people.

After Tito's death, a whole range of practices, not only in terms of state administration, but also in the sphere of cultural and symbolic production, were undertaken by his followers, in order to reinforce and maintain the notion of omnipotent presence of Tito's ideas: the mentioning of Tito's name was a must in all sorts of political, cultural, educational, sport, business and other manifestations or achievements, even in scientific and academic publications (Jović 2009). The overall message generated by such practices was summed up in the slogan: *I posle Tita-Tito* (After Tito, Tito). The mediated meaning of these words would be that Yugoslavia and the ideological imperatives of "brotherhood and unity" and the self-governing state system would continue to live on, despite the fact that a key leadership figure had disappeared from the social and political stage. However, a number of severe structural discrepancies and open social and interethnic conflicts emerged soon after Tito's death: open ethnic conflicts in Kosovo, a cultural anti-Yugoslav revolution in Slovenia, political and cultural pro-nationalist tendencies in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia, and the similar (see Dragnich 1998: 81-100). On the other hand, the

⁹⁶ See more about Yugoslav political and economic settings in: Popović 1968.

economic and administrative crisis in the state became strong enough to provoke questioning of the normative ideological premises of the communist foundations of Yugoslavia (Jović 2009; Ramet 2005). The period of the eighties brought the re-birth of anticommunist tendencies coupled with pro-nationalist movements all over Central, Eastern and Southern Europe⁹⁷. In such a situation, the Yugoslav government that consisted of eight presidents, each of them coming from one of the Yugoslav republics (or the autonomous regions) separately was heavily subject to various hegemonic and separatist discourses which reproduced interethnic antagonisms in Yugoslav political establishment and everyday life. In actual sense, there was no formal tool of unity, since Tito as a president and a guarantee of a successful and powerful one-party government had vanished from the Yugoslav scene, in spite of an agenda of the official state politics to keep the image of his symbolic presence.⁹⁸

Second, many commentators and researchers have identified and informally “verified” particular moments that may have initiated the end of the state of Yugoslavia in a political and symbolic sense, such as the 14th congress of Communist Council of Yugoslavia (Savez Komunista Jugoslavije), held on January 20-22 in 1990, at which an open and definite disagreement between Slovenian and Croatian deputies, on the one hand and Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian and Montenegrin deputies on the other hand, emerged. (Jović 2009: 349-351). This event could be historically taken as the end of the political consensus and one-party system of state rule. However, Yugoslavia, in a formal sense was not terminated at that moment – on the contrary, ruled by an authoritarian politician coming from Serbia, Slobodan Milošević, the state called Yugoslavia, constituted of Serbia and Montenegro, existed for more than ten years after that moment, and accommodated the principle of one-party-ruling system, in spite of formally inaugurated political pluralism, in new circumstances, supported by a strong Serbian ethno-nationalist state ideology (see Dragnich 1998). Other political analysts and activists often re-invoked a famous political rally held in Kosovo, at a historically significant former battlefield

⁹⁷ For instance, in Central and South-Eastern Europe, besides the tensions in Yugoslavia, strong nationalist sentiments followed the aspiration of Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Slovakian, Romanian and Bulgarian people towards final liberation from Soviet political influence.

⁹⁸ After Tito’s death, there was a number of rituals which maintained his symbolic presence in everyday life of Yugoslav people. For instance, famous ritual called “Titova štafeta”, which meant a public celebration of Tito’s birthday, was performed even after Tito’s death, for ten more years. In addition, all public celebrations, and official events, primarily school events, referred to the great legacy of Tito’s ideas, and unquestionable authority of the Communist party.

called Gazimestan⁹⁹, in 1989, organized by Milošević's supporters, which was to demonstrate a new spirit of Serbian political elite, determined to overtake a ruling position in the region of former Yugoslavia, and "to protect Serbian people". On that occasion, much footage of the rally was used in order to show how hegemonic and oppressive Milošević's political discourse had been, even before the period when actual severe war crimes took place in former Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁰

Third, in a technical sense, it is reasonable to claim that the beginning of open military conflicts proved to be a real manifestation of the end of Yugoslavia, since it marked, in institutional terms, the end of unique Yugoslav space, meaning the cessation of the existence of unique army formations and unique system of command over the entire territory of Yugoslavia. In general, the written sources refer mostly to the summer of 1991, when, initially, armed conflicts took place in Slovenia, and soon after that, in Croatia (Ramet 2005: 62-65). Nevertheless, in the period of separation, there were quite a few attempts in the media in Serbia, Montenegro and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to present Slovenian separations as something which would not harm the unity of the rest of Yugoslavia, since, according to these claims, Slovenia had always been its "estranged part". While Slovenian politicians, and cultural elites channeled Slovenia into political and administrative independence, the centre of Yugoslav state ideology, Belgrade, influenced by Serbian political representatives, did not seem to show publically much interest in Slovenian separation. Daily political life in the capital city was overwhelmed by diminishing and mocking comments, speeches, articles by Serbian intellectuals, journalists and other public figures, standing for the opinion that, actually, Yugoslavia did not need Slovenia at all, predicting that Slovenia would not survive as a separate country, and that separation would in any case be a "cardinal mistake" for the Slovenian people. One of the most telling examples of the mainstream public opinion in Serbia, reinforced by ruling elites, was a satirical poem by a famous Yugoslav rock-singer and a proclaimed Serbian nationalist, Bora Đorđević, which enlisted, in a mocking and rather insulting way, why the Slovenian people should be "allowed" to separate from the rest of Yugoslavia. The poem was distributed among people through seemingly informal channels, i.e. friends and co-workers were passing this to

⁹⁹ Famous battle at Gazimestan field in 1389, between Serbian and Ottoman armies, was one of the most popular myths of Serbian greatness evoked in Serbian nationalist narratives in the end of the 1990s. It was also very often employed by Milošević and other Serbian right-wing politicians as a proof of Serbian ultimate right over Kosovo, which therefore was often proclaimed to be the Serbian "sacred land" (see Anzulović 1999: 114-118).

¹⁰⁰ The excerpts from this famous political gathering were even used in the trial against Milošević for war crimes in the Hague Tribunal.

each other, Bora Đorđević also kept reading it at his public poetry readings, so that within a few days it was known to anyone in Serbia, who was interested in current political life. This is one of the illustration of a developed wave of cultural production from the beginning of the nineties, which cherished the topic of Serbian “just causes” and fair-play political attitudes toward the “other Yugoslav republics”, while the “others” were pictured as unjust, frustrated, greedy, unwise, inferior and ungrateful:

Hoće da se otcepe bečki kočijaši,
pa neka se otcepe kada nisu naši,
...pa veselo jodlujte i igrajte šotu,
ne treba mi ništa vaše u životu,

The “Vienna horsemen” want to separate from us,
Let them do it, they are not ours,
...You can sing cheerfully and dance “šota”¹⁰¹,
I don’t need anything from you in my lifetime.

(excerpt from the poem “Hoće da se
otcepe/They Want to Get Separated”-
by Bora Đorđević)

It should be added, regardless of the emergence of armed conflicts between Slovenia’s newly founded army troops and the Yugoslav National Army, it seemed that Slovenia had been treated as “the other” and “foreign” within Yugoslavia for a long while before its real separation took place, so that for the most of public opinion, it did not cause a very big turmoil to see Slovenia outside the political and cultural space of Yugoslavia. In his parodic song “Soliter” (Skyscraper), launched in 1990, in which he mockingly comments on the controversial status of Yugoslavia and internal problems, the famous Yugoslav pop-musician Đorđe Balašević portrays Slovenia as an entity of odd and arrogant people who do not like to “socialize much” with the other nationalities in Yugoslavia, as the latter appear to be “too southern-positioned” in relation to Slovenia. The song pictures each of the republics (and autonomous regions) as a “floor” in the skyscraper which is a metaphor for the Yugoslav state. The Slovenian “floor” is, for example, described in the following way:

A na šestome spratu,
Neki skupovi tužni,
Ti se ne družite s nama,
Mi smo previše južni,
I kad pomislim malo,

On the sixth floor,
Some sad meetings are taking place,
Those people don’t socialize with us,
,
Cause we are too Southern,

¹⁰¹ Šota is a traditional dance of Albanian ethnic population from Kosovo. In this song, this term is used as an offensive allusion to the support of Slovenian leadership to the Kosovo Albanian movement for separation from Serbia in the eighties.

Njima nije baš stalo,
Za naš soliter”

And, to think reasonably,
They don't really care much,
For our skyscraper.

(excerpt from the song “Soliter-Skycraper”
– by Đorđe
Balašević)

More to the point, the author “marked “ Slovenians as a group opposed and estranged not only in relations to Serbians, but to a large part of the population, since, geographically speaking, all the other republics in former Yugoslavia were positioned as “Southern” in relation to Slovenia. However, Balašević used a play of words to suggest a two-fold meaning. Being “Southern”, at the moment, meant to be a supporter of the particular, pro-Serbian politics which argued against separatist movements in Yugoslavia and promoted the idea of a centralized state, while the discourses which promoted Slovenian separation mostly argued for “coming closer to the Western and Northern type of society”, opposed to the Eastern and Southern regions considered to be backward and non-democratic (see Bakić-Hayden 1995; Vidić-Rasmussen 1996). This song, by and large, just reflected a symbolic binary opposition, which, at the time, was already omnipresent in Yugoslav public space. In the same period, Balašević, known for his comedic stand-up performances at his concerts, always loaded with some current political meanings, also performed an insulting poem on Slovenian separation, following Dorđević’s example, addressing “Slovenian brothers” such as:

Shvatam vas, sve su to geni
Mame vas habsburški kavezi
.... Neko je rođen da šeni
Na nama svako učari.
I vi ste tako odlučili
Laku noć braco smučari
Dobro ste mi se smučili
Želim vam mir i spokojstvo
I slavu vašoj zastavi
Bilo je zadovoljstvo
Jeb’o nas ko nas sastavi

I understand you, it’s in your genes,
You are seduced by Habsburgh cages
...some people are born to be slaves
Everybody exploits us
It’s your decision
Good night, our ski brothers
I am sick and tired of you
I wish you peace
And glory to your flag
Pleasure is ours,
Screw the one who ever put us together!

Apart from the mocking and extremely insulting tone, it is evident that both Dorđević’s and Balašević’s poems stood for the perspective of “letting” or “allowing” Slovenians to separate from the rest of Yugoslav state, picturing this “divorce” as beneficial for the rest of Yugoslavia, especially for Serbia, since the “behavior and mentality” of Slovenian people were considered to

be significantly “other” , “strange”, “anti-Yugoslav”, “unnatural” to the other nationalities in Yugoslavia. Considering that the actual conflicts in Slovenia between Slovenian territorial troops and Yugoslav army troops lasted only for a few days, during which Yugoslav troops were gradually leaving the territory of Slovenia without any larger military operation (especially compared to the severe war that began in Croatia some months after that), it follows that the point of view of these two performers mediated some political decisions of the governing elites of Yugoslavia, masked under a veil of spontaneous and uncontrolled political events. Therefore, the politics of representation of Slovenian separation in popular culture in pro-Serbian oriented city centers, was interestingly embedded into the dominant political and administrative trends of actual political decisions, as a sort of unofficial mediation of the actual political decisions.

These ways of identifying the break-up of the Yugoslav state have been introduced here so as to provide a hint of the political and cultural atmosphere within which the popular culture production, associated with the genre roughly called turbo-folk, emerged. I listed some political and cultural landmarks of the late eighties and early nineties, so that the reader could perceive the picture of the beginning of dissolution of one bigger cultural space into a group of separate countries as a multilayered set of events, discourses and practices, which involved not only the pieces of communist narratives from the Tito period, but also the projections of various interests and long-term collective nationalist frustrations. These events were accompanied by heavy administrative gaps in the state governance and fueled by the imbalance between hegemonic political aspirations of Serbian elites and the opposite political and economic interests of the elites of other republics, primarily those of Slovenia and Croatia. Moreover, the dissolution of Yugoslav political space caused the dissolution of Yugoslav cultural space and resulted in visible changes in the organization of ethno-national music markets all over former Yugoslavia.

4.1.2. Post-Yugoslav Music Production

Translated into popular culture terms, the break-up of Yugoslavia caused visible changes in the modes of production and consumption of popular culture on its entire territory. In the period till the end of the 1980s the production of Yugoslav popular music was controlled by big music production companies (Jugoton, PGP RTS, Diskoton, and a few others, see Luković 1989;

Vidić-Rasmussen 1995) which, over the time, developed a serious market-based principle of production: a successful song, or an album, if well-accepted by the audience, would make a performer in question a serious, nation-wide star, selling hundreds of thousands of records. All these music companies operated on a Yugoslav level: the entire Yugoslavia represented a unique market space.¹⁰² Accordingly, local editors of radio stations and the managers of “cultural centres” - music halls, big concert theatres, and the like – often operated according to the principle of market-based demands, though not exclusively. In other words, a band with a well-known, popular song, which occupied a high position on the prestigious top-ten charts in magazines such as *Džuboks*, or *Rock*, were invited to give concerts anywhere in former Yugoslavia, regardless of the ethnic or regional origin of its members.¹⁰³ The main concern of the pop-music managers was to offer a desirable product within the cultural programs of their radio stations, or concert halls, still however, following their own notion of the quality and novelty of the performance. From time to time, they would face severe criticism from the Communist Party censorship body, the “Centralni komitet” (The Central Committee of Communist Party), or CK, for releasing a song or promoting an album of a singer with a “problematic reputation”.¹⁰⁴ The state bodies, of course, often found lyrics with curses or with cynical and overly-pessimistic statements about the social reality, potentially subversive, even in cases where song or a performer themselves enjoyed wide popularity all over the country (Luković 1989: 224). In such cases, the organizers or editors of such products would face a serious dilemma: whether to promote the item or performer in question and face a possibility of losing their job, or to cancel the collaboration with the performer (or band) in question and take the risk of losing listeners. Many times, the organizers of such events or the editors of radio and TV shows faced the risk of jeopardizing their careers for the sake of following the principles of

¹⁰² Still, certain qualifications should be made regarding this claim. In terms of demographic structure and administrative and political settings, the dominant language of former Yugoslavia was Croato-Serbian, or Serbo-Croatian, so that the musicians who sang in Slovenian, Macedonian, or some other language could not count on the same extent of records sold, or such a wide market as their colleagues who performed in Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian. Still, in the eighties, there were a few highly popular new wave bands from Slovenia who were well accepted all over the country, such as “Laibach”, “Videosex”, and a few successful rock bands singing in Macedonian, for instance “Leb i sol” and “Mizar”.

¹⁰³ These remarks are made on the basis of interviews I did with six former editors of music programs at Belgrade and Sarajevo radio stations who were involved in the organization of big rock and pop music concerts in these two cities in the eighties.

¹⁰⁴ According to the testimony of a group of former employees of the “Omladinski program (Youth Program)” on Program II of Radio Sarajevo, certain songs of authors or bands who criticised particular phenomena in the society, or simply used some underground language, such as “Azra”, “Zabranjeno pušenje”, or “Riblja čorba” were often excerpted from broadcasting, due to the wish of the Communist party officials.

musical market demands, simply musical taste, or just seeking out inventive, new music talents. Such cases were not rare in the rock music scene, particularly given the “unruly” appearance and the performance of the musicians and the lyrics of their songs.¹⁰⁵ The unique Yugoslav pop and rock music market was created through the tension between the state injunctions imposing certain ideological criteria on show business products and the initiative, creativity, and the courage of the individual performers, managers and music editors (see Ramet 2005; Janjatović 2007; Glavan and Vrdoljak 1981).

In the period of socialist Yugoslavia, genre diversification was interconnected with the markers of taste and social status. Newly composed folk music (NCFM), mostly attracted fans from Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Macedonia who were believed to come predominantly (but not exclusively) from working class and peasant background. It seems that the image of working class background and lifestyle was perceived to be common denominator for identifying the nature of the NCFM market (see *Kultura* 1970; Dragičević-Šešić 1994). Still, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that was not the only way to deconstruct the identities of NCFM fans. Ljerka Vidić-Rasmussen points out that the mapping of the epicenters of the consumption of NCFM, indicated some at the time “hidden” regional and geopolitical dichotomies based on the imaginary East/West divide, i.e divides between two cultural spheres: one which was considered to be “Eastern”, “Oriental”, and encompassed Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Montenegro, and the other, “Western”, European, including Croatian and Slovenian market. (Vidić-Rasmussen 1996)

Consequently, the overall principle of the marketing music culture(s) depended on the particular dynamics between the state ideological machinery and the interests of music and media companies. In spite of variations, the entire territory of Yugoslavia was treated potentially as one united market.¹⁰⁶ The same principle operated in other fields of cultural production,

¹⁰⁵ Goran Bregović, the leader of the most celebrated Yugoslav rock bands of all times, “Bijelo dugme”, witnessed about the situation when his band was invited, among many other bands, to play at the concert attended by Tito, the president of Yugoslavia. According to his words, his band started playing, but after a few moments they were removed from the stage, as in somebody’s opinion, they were too noisy (Luković1989: 310-311).

¹⁰⁶ The case of Newly Composed Folk Music is slightly different. Although NCFM records were available all over the country, it was obvious to music editors and managers that the media coverage of this genre was unequally strong (see: “Nova narodna muzika”). In addition there have been several scandals in the eighties regarding the selection of the participants at the “Splitski festival”, probably the most prestigious pop-music festival in the eighties held in Split (Croatia). The centre to these scandals was the fact that two popular NCFM performers at the time, Miroslav Ilić and Lepa Brena were refused participation in the festival. Since neither of them was of Croatian origin,

exchange of cultural goods and other types of representation. For instance, the TV and printed media production tended rather towards homogenisation of cultural space than towards diversification. The big publishing houses¹⁰⁷, film companies, film and music festivals, performances and other cultural events were mostly planned so as to recruit audiences or consumers from all over the country.¹⁰⁸ The disintegration of Yugoslavia introduced some significant changes in the practices and discourses of cultural production in general. However, the problems of the market's decrease in size were not the only issues that introduced new agendas, questions and dilemmas in this field. The violent break-up of former Yugoslavia brought up new and challenging moments that demanded quite a thorough re-thinking of the relationship between cultural production and political, social and economic processes.

Around 1990 the collaboration between all sorts of cultural institutions was gradually weakening, falling apart, mostly in terms of relations between Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro on one side, and Croatia and Slovenia on the other. The most noticeable examples of the disturbances and interethnic antagonisms were coming through the very contents and events of popular culture and entertainment. For instance, the famous fight before the (unperformed) football match between Dinamo (Zagreb) and Crvena Zvezda (Beograd) that took place on May 13 in 1990 was the most explicit sign of overt and deep antagonism between two big centres, Belgrade and Zagreb, clearly based in interethnic intolerance (on football fans and nationalism see Čolović 2000b: 373-398). In addition, this event was a symbolic landmark of the complete collapse of the tools of civil society, as it also showed the signs of an ultimate citizens' disobedience to the state institutions as such (police, Yugoslav government and the like), regardless of ethnic identity of either the policemen, or the football fans. In a word, according to many commentators and journalists, the cancelling of the football match proved the inability of the Yugoslav state apparatus to prevent nationalist, anti-Yugoslav tensions from both

the scandal received a particular interethnic dimension, which implied that NCFM was not sophisticated enough and not accepted in Croatia enough to be promoted through a prestigious Croatian media event.

¹⁰⁷ Publishing houses from big cities in Yugoslavia included BIGZ, *Prosveta*, *Nolit*, *Mladost*, *Svjetlost*, "Veselin Masleša", *Matica Hrvatska*, *Matica Srpska*, *Srpska Književna Zadruga*, to name some of them.

¹⁰⁸ The first significant manifestations of insurmountable political conflicts in the sphere of cultural events appeared in the mid-eighties when Slovenian journals such as *Mladina* and some alternative publications started promoting the idea of separation from Yugoslavia. The other famous example of such a conflict was the ban Yugoslav authorities put on a cultural festival which was supposed to be held in Ljubljana, in 1985. It had been preceded by derogative articles in pro-Yugoslav oriented press, which claimed that the festival was a sort of gay-dominated event and accused the organizers of the festival that of inviting the entire homosexual community in the world to come and "invade" Ljubljana with their "bad influence".

Croatian and Serbian sides.

Another example of breaking the Yugoslav myth of “brotherhood and unity” among the peoples of Yugoslavia in the field of pop-culture are incidents from some rock and pop music concerts. For example, the performance of the Belgrade rock band “Piloti” in Split in the summer of 1990 was interrupted by the loud disapproval of some members of the audience and the physical assault on the singer of the band. Interestingly, such assaults were read by journalists from Belgrade journals as “nationalist extremism”, however, these were always considered to be acts of some minor groups and not some mainstream opinion in society. Still, the field of popular culture had proved to be fertile ground for the explication of serious political demands and markers of overall social changes.

Despite such incidents (out of which some took place in the eighties, and the others in 1990-1991), popular culture of former Yugoslavia still unified Yugoslav cultural space until the very beginnings of the wars conflicts. The popular music pop-band from Croatia, “Magazin” was still giving successful concerts in 1990 all over Serbia, and distinguished Croatian pop singer, Tereza Kesovija, gave a successful concert on March 8, 1990 in Belgrade. More or less successfully, the biggest pop and rock music stars from Serbia, Bajaga and Đorđe Balašević, were performing concerts in Croatia and Bosnia too at the end of the eighties and in 1990. In 1990, one of the biggest Croatian singers in the past twenty years, Doris Dragović, released the song “Jugoslaveni (Yugoslavs)”, with lyrics that celebrated patriotic feelings for Yugoslavia, with clear declaration of belonging to one, original identity, a Yugoslav one.¹⁰⁹

A number of examples could be presented here so as to explicate the fact that popular music production was still transcending the ethnic and political tensions between various parts of Yugoslavia till the very last moment. It seemed that show-business market demands were still prevailing over some extreme outburst of interethnic antagonisms, still channeled and interpreted through the incidents by some “minor”, “odd” and “frustrated” members or groups of Albanians, Croatian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian, or members of other nationalities. However, such practices were at work till the actual beginning of armed combat. This new situation, almost mechanically broke the usual and regular business connections among music production companies, managers, composers, writers, performers, TV and radio editors, and the

¹⁰⁹ See the video of the song “Yugoslaveni(Yugoslavs) by Croatian singer Doris Dragović at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PG7Wwwqz4g>

like Kronja 2001; (Mitrović 2008; Milojević 2009).

In the very beginning, the breakages in collaboration were purely mechanical, but over time, they gradually became more based in actual and painful personal hostilities, fuelled by personal traumas of people from show business. Namely, many of them, especially those who stayed in Croatia or Bosnia during the war, experienced the war traumas first hand. Here we could list a number of examples. For instance, Tereza Kesovija, who previously was famous for her Yugoslav and international career, during the war lost her house in Dubrovnik, which was heavily damaged by the troops of Yugoslav Army. After that she openly started denouncing Yugoslav Army aggression against Croatia on TV and in the foreign media. Likewise, two close business associates who had worked together for years, Neda Ukraden, a pop singer who chose to live in Belgrade after the war broke out, and Đorđe Novković, the famous song writer from Zagreb, who wrote almost all Ukraden's songs before the war, cut off collaboration for good (*Serbian Planet* 2003) Many famous musicians on all sides took part in performing ethnically specific patriotic songs, designated for special holidays or released at the moments of big national crisis. A number of Croatian singers performed songs with "patriotic" content, or at least with single lines related to the war, or the loss of somebody who died in the war. Not rarely, such lyrics contained words of open hatred toward "četniks", or "Serbs" perceived as murderers and invaders.¹¹⁰ A Similar trend was developing on the Serbian side in the songs of entertainers specialized in performances in Srpska Krajina (part of Croatia held by Serbs in the period 1991-1995), or Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who developed a strong market of pirate-distributed cassettes and CDs, sold successfully abroad among Serbian diasporas as well. Because of this, after the war, some of them received a lot of negative feedback from audiences from the other newly formed states, and lost a great deal of their popularity in other former republics of Yugoslavia.

Nevertheless, as mentioned in Chapter 1, this dissertation does not aim at investigating the music genres which generated overt and unmediated nationalist messages and expressions of

¹¹⁰ The most famous example on Croatian side is the career of Mark Perković Tompson, a performer who incorporated verbal and visual elements of Croatian nationalist symbols and anti-Serbian discourses in his performances in a most assertive manner, recruiting, in this way, groups of Croatian extreme nationalist and among them, even the militant sub-cultures such as skinheads, racist-oriented groups, and the like. The most extensive studies on Thompson's career and his place in Croatian public life by now has been done by Catherine Baker who has researched the relationship between popular music and Croatian national(ist) discourses in her dissertation entitled „Popular music and narratives of identity in Croatia”, UCL, 2008.

direct interethnic hatred and discrimination on any of the sides in the wars in former Yugoslavia¹¹¹. Such discourses and show business practices were mostly consumed in particular communities, usually those ones with the most direct vested interest in fuelling separatist tensions. In that respect, this production was mostly distributed in informal, often illegal ways, especially compared to the mainstream music production, which was able to gain some broader, national significance within each of the newly formed countries. In particular this was the case with Serbian “patriotic” production, since Serbian mainstream show business industry in the nineties was constructing the illusion that “Serbia is not really involved in the war”, promoting images of oversexualised women’s bodies and lascivious, “light”, and conformist contents in the lyrics (see Kronja 2001; Gordy 1999).

As I outlined in previous chapters, my intention is to contribute to the scholarship focused on exploring the practices of national identification “hidden” in the vernacular, in the practices of the popular and the everyday (see Edensor, 2007; Billig 1995; Dyer 1998). By employing such an approach, I want to bring into focus the practices that reinforce what Billig calls “banal nationalism”, the ways of reifying nationalism or national identity of a community embedded in seemingly banal and everyday leisure pursuits and habits, metaphorically described by the “unwaved flag”, which easily “gets unfolded” and activated at the first moment of crisis (Billig 1995: 11). The fact that such an approach is rarely pursued in studies of the nationalisms in former Yugoslavia (especially in Serbia), was one of the primary motivation for initiating this research and bringing it into connection with the representation of gender dynamics in Serbian popular culture, as a type of semiotic field which is often experienced as benign, and purely commodified for a leisure pursuit.

When speaking of the socialist period (1945-1991), my informants expressed a common opinion that there were three main zones strategically relevant for understanding of the united Yugoslav music market, and it was mostly about three capitals of former Yugoslav republics: Belgrade (Serbia), Zagreb (Croatia), and Sarajevo (Bosnia). This was not only because of the

¹¹¹ The most famous such example on the Serbian side is a singer called Baja Mali Knindža, who produced number of albums with extremely nationalist militant songs (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDNXve2vd4Q>). There was a whole pirate market of this pro-nationalist kind of production distributed and consumed in Srpska Krajina (part of Croatia held by Serbs in the period 1991-1995, and Republika Srpska, part of Bosnia which is nowadays kept and governed by Bosnian Serbs, and Serbian diasporas abroad). The production of this “genre” was never broadly represented on big Serbian TV stations, however, its singers, mostly men, were often promoted through prestigious talk shows in Serbia, where they could advertize their performances in various clubs in former Yugoslavia and abroad.

size of these cities, but for that fact that often one same group of managers and producers operated in all these three centres, regardless of the ethnic origin of either performers or the members of their teams. In addition, Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia together meant a rather unique cultural sphere, as the language that operated in this area was officially treated as one language, which certainly contributed to the easier consumption of pop culture products.

However, certain stratification was developed not only along regional and ethnic demarcation lines, but also along genre-related preferences, which also reflected social differentiation in matters of taste and lifestyles of the population of former Yugoslavia. A whole range of writings and research pointed out that the emergence of NCFM reflected the cultural, educational and habitual differences all over Yugoslavia, and allowed certain populist penetration of so-called common, commercial folk music into the everyday life of the people (Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Đurković 2002; Gordy 1999, Iordanova 2001, Vidić-Rasmussen 1996). Two moments, the break up of former Yugoslavia and the changes in the hierarchies of genres, are two factors that were conflated, and influenced the fact that the production, consumption and marketing of popular music were subject to visible changes in the beginning of the nineties.

Primarily, instead of having an option of promoting, releasing and organizing songs of the most popular performers from all over Yugoslavia, many music editors, managers and owners of radio and TV stations, came to the conclusion to deal only with songs from the newly founded nation-state they happened to end up in. It was a new political and cultural division and new TV and press propaganda that made it unpopular for performers to give concerts in an “enemy’s country”, as well as unpopular for consumers to enjoy the music coming from the now “hated territories”. It is very difficult to estimate to what extent the politicians directly reinforced this censorship, especially in Serbia¹¹². Of course, not all radio and TV stations followed this rule, however, it can certainly be concluded that mainstream culture in most of the former republics of Yugoslavia, particularly Serbia and Croatia, started a project of re-creation, launching their domestic, national music markets, created out of local resources and made available for common people on a mass scale (Đurković 2004; Mitrović 2008). If we compare

¹¹² The interview with Saša Popović, the manager of „Zam production“ (*Ilustrovana politika*, 2004) reveals that many managers and producers in Serbia simply „used“ the moment of lack of popular entertainers and commercial music in the beginning of the nineties, and launched the production they were involved in as a new mainstream in Serbian media space, counting on the possibility to earn a profit out of producing a cheap and easily consumable entertainment. They got necessary support from local politicians and administrators. However it is difficult to say whether the profit dictated the decision of the corrupt politicians, or the music managers were „guided“ to work on the spreading of a new style of production.

thus pop culture politics with the politics of production of culture in socialist Yugoslavia, at first glance it seems that these two mechanisms were similar. In both cases, political acceptability supported by consumers who demand cheap entertainment resulted in a music market acceptable for both the authorities and the majority of consumers. However, as far as Serbia was concerned, a lot of debates emerged about the extent to which these two factors were manipulated and abused by authorities and people who created cultural politics in Serbia. These debates were mostly triggered by the emergence in Serbia in the 1990s of what was, according to many, a forceful and imposed-from-above expansion of so-called *turbo-folk music*, deriving from NCFM, but modernized in terms of its technical features (Gordy, 1999; Kronja 2001;). Many academic authors found the expansion of this particular genre strongly dependent on the desire of particular power centers in Serbia to offer a “cheap, down-to-earth entertainment” for common people, which contributed to a collective mental escape and denial of the horrible war conflicts that were happening in Croatia and Bosnia in the period 1991-1995. (Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001; Mitorović 2008). Others, on the contrary, criticized predominantly the chaotic unregulated economic situation in Serbia which allowed politically connected businessmen to earn a lot of money by selling low-taste pop products without any censorship, enormously decreasing the previous standards and requirements of production (Đurković 2002; Radojević 2001).

There were a few landmarks of the beginning of the “rule” of this music genre/scene/ideology, or as I called it earlier, “conceptual category” in Serbian public life. Soon after the beginnings of the political tensions between Serbia on the one side, and Croatia and Slovenia on the other, a few new radio stations appeared, broadcasting exclusively so-called folk music (*narodnjake*). Simultaneously, that folk music sound was becoming a mixture of folk and pop styles. It was obvious that the commercial, but rather marginal and undervalued music folk style was passing through a genre transformation, becoming more acceptable as a social mainstream and setting music conventions, social and cultural standards. Radio “Bubamara” was one of the first such stations. It was followed by “Pink Radio”, “Radio S” and “YU radio”, but also many others in smaller towns in Serbia. From 1990-1992, disk jockeys in popular Belgrade youth clubs started playing this music often, which represented a transgression in relation to what was “appropriate” disco music in the period before the nineties, when hardly any “domestic” music (from Yugoslavia) could have been heard in disco clubs. One of the most popular disco-clubs, *Bonafides*, was particularly popular among the young people between the

ages of 15 and 25, but the other big disco-clubs also preferred this new version of “folk music”, as it was popular, commercial, and suitable for disco dancing as well as for the traditional *kolo* dancing. Zorana, a bank clerk from a suburb of Belgrade who was a high school student at the period 1992-1993 says:

Every Saturday me and my mates hung out in Bonafides. We knew the music was trashy and sleazy, and we never wanted to say that it was “our lifestyle” or something...However, it was really cool at that time to go to such places, since the atmosphere was great, the best looking people were going there, everybody was talking about such places...After couple of months I got so used to that atmosphere and turbo-folk songs, I was bored going anywhere else, where the sound was not so strong, or people were not so cheerful. If I wanted to have fun and dance all night I was not going to other places” (Zorana, female, age 37).

In other words, this music was appealing for the youth coming from various social and educational backgrounds: “urban” and “rural”, both highly and poorly educated. It seemed that, all of a sudden, the usual style segregations between those who preferred what was perceived as urban and rural music, were for a while abandoned. This situation contributed to a general notion of social and cultural unity, i.e the creation of a new, national pop-culture mainstream. Marko, a football trainer from Novi Sad, who was at a similar age during this period, points out:

The beginning of the nineties was the time when, for the first time, I was not ashamed to say I was listening to Toma Zdravković, Lepa Lukić, Sinan Sakić and other singers that were popular in my family...before that, I was usually hiding it, and pretending I liked “U2”, “Električni Orgazam”, or so...For the first time, I felt comfortable saying to a girl I just had met that I liked to party in the clubs with folk music” (Marko, a male football trainer from Novi Sad, age of 34)

As of 1990, graduation parties of high-school youths began to be organized exclusively with turbo-folk music. According to the memories of many of my informants, photos from the parties, and the profile of the bands that played at graduation parties, most of the students listened to this music.

1991 was also significant as the year when new young turbo-folk stars got the opportunity to give some big concerts in open air Belgrade concert venue. Džej Ramadanovski, a young Roma singer, known as a local boy from an “unsafe” city neighborhood and holder of a criminal record, became an idol for many young people in Serbia, in 1991 and 1992. His appearance and huge music success was refreshing for the audience, which was used to some pretty clear distinctions between what they perceived as “cool” music, and cheap, tasteless commercial music. Džej’s wide popularity among high school students could be described as

young people's desire to keep up with the latest fashion. Dejan, a pharmacist from Belgrade and former basketball player, explained:

I believe we all were a bit fed up with the "expectation" of listening to something foreign, something punk, or funky, or the depressing, already dried-out music of Yugoslav rock bands, with their dark and cheesy image of cool guys... Personally, I felt delighted to be able to enjoy something different, simple and ridiculous, such as music performed by Džej, Keba or Dragana Mirković in clubs in the middle of the city...It was the music that had been previously performed at country wedding parties, and other rural folk parties in the eighties in Serbia and Bosnia, while, in the nineties, it got modernised. Before Džej, I used to listen to it in some rare occasions when I was drunk, or very excited and the like, but after Džej, it became widespread...I think many people in Serbia really needed it at the moment when it appeared. For me, it was a means of stress-elimination". (Dejan, male, age 35).

Following what Edensor says in his accounts of "popular nationalism", we could say that the first turbo-folk performances represented in the media and at concerts, were a kind of re-invention of marginalized, "unofficial", "exotic" cultural forms, that had been suppressed at the time of the building of a "decent" national identity and got re-activated, brought to the centre at a time of re-definition of communal identity (see Edensor 2007). Džej's was the image of an anti-hero, a former "bad boy" from the streets of Belgrade with lots of life experience, who managed to end up with such a bad life but still became "somebody" in his life.¹¹³ The lyrics, the melodic line, the ideas and symbols in the lyrics as well as in videos for these songs, expressed a philosophy of the "simple life", similar to the one already described in association with NCFM (see Chapter 3), but modernized by particular sound and visual effects and supported by much assertive media coverage and marketing impact (the element of production, mockingly named "turbo" style, by the rock musician Rambo Amadeus). Džej combined folk and gipsy melodies with an urban arrangements and visual images.

¹¹³ There is an analogy with the rap and hip-hop concept of music entertainment and lifestyle, where images of experienced, tough guys from urban gettos who went through many hardships in life, saw the „other side of the law“, and managed to gain some respect, prevailed over other social identities (see Rose 1994). Such heroic icons have always constructed an element of ethic ambivalence: on the one hand, they could have an affirmative social impact on the youth, since big hip-hop stars sometimes in their interviews publically declare their negative attitude toward their sins from youth, appealing to the youngsters that drugs, violence and promiscuity are destructive forces (for instance the famous hip-hoper Fifty Cent has done this, in spite of his own criminal past). However, on the other hand, they inevitably have promoted an aura of rebel and code of „street justice“, crime and violence, since the concept of their social success was still connected with the unruly, delinquent sociopathology, dangerous living against social rules, so still promoting an idea of illegal strategies of survival and upward social mobility. On the one hand, hip-hop appears as a significant symbolism of empowerment of the black youth culture (see Kitwana 2002). On the other, overemphasised images of masculinity, violence and force, which accompany the symbolism of black empowerment, are connected with sexism, violence against women and homophobia (see hooks 2003; Powell and Williams 2006) Namely abusive gender relations have often been in the center of debates on the social values promoted by the hip-hop scene. For more see the documentary on gender politics and sexism in hip-hop music, *Hip-hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* by Byron Hart (2006).

A similar thing happened with another young singer, Ivan Gavrilović, who fostered the image of a street boy, singing with some features of “folk” style, produced by typical folk instruments, but still dancing in a techno style, supported by a techno arrangement of the sound.¹¹⁴ The third big star of the early nineties was Dragana Mirković, who started her career very early, in the late eighties, strictly as a folk singer, but quickly switched her style into something more hybridized, more connected with so-called urban music, creating an original, aggressive disco-like sound which still clearly kept the elements of folk music from the eighties. These singers set the changes of musical criteria for massive transgression of already existing genre boundaries in the production of popular music in former Yugoslavia, and images of the performers. However, transgression in music conventions opened up the space for the transgressions in visual conventions in representation.

In 1993, the first private TV station in Serbia, Palma TV was established. It was mostly a musical TV station playing turbo-folk hits apparently without a strict editing policy: many videos were made by very simple and cheap production means, depicting mostly female singers dressed in very short skirts and very minimalist tops in provocative postures. One of the main agendas in this context was the commodification of female bodies, represented through dance troops or female models performing in videos, so that gradually it became apparent that the performance of the sexualized and objectified female body now had to be a constituent part of any commercially successful turbo-folk production. Apparently, the quality of the music itself was not an issue: young female bodies were the most powerful “argument” for releasing these videos. Although some male stars, as already mentioned, started the turbo-folk era, it seems that the “turbo” mode of production of music, entertainment and visual and audio pleasure, privileged female performers over males. The phenomenon of male stars initiating the “turbo-folk symbolic space” can be explained if we consider the predominant markers of symbolic values of the turbo-folk scene. Despite the fact that Džej Ramadanovski and Ivan Gavrilović were male singers, they promoted and established a particular aesthetics of gender relations and female bodies that later was followed by their female colleagues. Both of them sang about instant, joyful and carnal love, and their videos usually contained images of provocative, half-nude female bodies who at the same time danced in a way similar to the style of female dancers in the hip-

¹¹⁴ See one of the first performances of Ivan Gavrilović at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bja1LTwpPk>

hop music scene in the USA¹¹⁵. However, soon after this initial breakthrough, the development of various private TV stations and private production houses (“ZAM produkcija”, “TV Palma”, “TV Pink”), which were exclusively profit-based, started prioritizing female singers under the condition that they look exactly like the female models from the turbo-folk videos of their male colleagues.

The main innovation in their performances, lyrics and music arrangements was the apparent releasing of certain aesthetic and ideological worldview that had been previously suppressed, expressed in a rather metaphorical way, or intertwined with oaths of love and dedications. These new stars openly produced songs that mostly celebrated just frenetic disco-club dancing. Instead of a western disco style, which had been the foundation of the mainstream disco club culture in the Yugoslav period, the music promoted elements of folk music as the new fashionable disco style. The implications of this innovation were enormous: it was becoming clear that the firm boundaries between various groups of music audiences in Serbia, were being openly challenged, in particular the old hierarchical division between the “rural” and the “urban”. The youth could enjoy an energetic disco beat that was shaped not just in accordance with the latest western commercial styles, but was also influenced and dominated by something which previously was known as Serbian (newly-composed) folk music. It seemed to become a moment of carnival, all-inclusive, temporary erasure of class, status, taste and other differentiations within the Serbian cultural space. New images of women, strikingly similar to female nudity in low-budget pornographic movies (shown late at night on Palma TV channel at the time for free), came as a sort of new paradigm of the political, social and cultural context produced in the early nineties.

The most common explanation sees turbo-folk as a genre deriving from newly composed folk music, produced in the former Yugoslavia in the sixties, and gradually developed over the seventies and eighties (see Chapter 2 and 3). The usual way of looking at it focuses on the technical modernization of the sound of newly-composed folk music (NCFM). The rock musician Rambo Amadeus, who mockingly launched the term “turbo-folk”, implicitly assumed that the whole emergence of turbo-folk should be perceived as a marker of a “new time”, in which the various centers of economic and political power could perform any kind of aesthetic

¹¹⁵ For instance, see the examples of the Džej’s songs:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_BhhBRKQPc&feature=related and
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNeycPQyggM>

intervention through private media production, without any significant impact of some assumed, nationally sanctioned “state cultural policy” (see Chapter 2). In other words, that should mean that, in the post-Yugoslav context, the old genre boundaries and aesthetic standards, which were still at least partially maintained by the editorial politics of music shows, festival, radio stations and the like in the period of former Yugoslavia, seized to exist.¹¹⁶ These boundaries were abruptly dismissed, providing not only a new interesting Serbian “cultural revolution”, but also promoting an original, oxymoronic possibility of combining genre elements which had been unmatched in the past.¹¹⁷ At this point, this example confirms what Edensor calls a reinvention of “popular and vernacular cultural forms” and practices of abandoned and marginalized traditions of myths and symbols of particular social groups, previously suppressed by the processes of building of an “official” national culture, and then “revamped” in newly formed, particular circumstances, as a counter-movement in relation to the “high” or elite cultural forms (Edensor 2007: 10-11). As mentioned before, it is important to bear in mind that the term and concept of turbo-folk should not be reduced to the meaning of a mere “genre”, “style”, nor even music or a cultural period. It is more a cultural redefinition that took place in popular music production, embedded in ongoing social processes. This change which dismantled and reassembled certain conventions of cultural productions in former Yugoslavia, was aligned with the general atmosphere of the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties – the atmosphere of disintegration of the existing political and cultural structures, the breakdown of the massive apparatus of state socialism in the broader regional context, and the reintegration of these broken elements into some new, for most people unpredictable forms.

The music genre that prevailed in Serbia after 1991 has been quite frequently compared and observed in relation to other cultural phenomena that appeared all over the world around the same time, especially those detected in some other contexts in the nineties. A range of authors, journalists, scholars and musicians in Serbia started a discussion on so-called turbo-folk as a music heavily influenced by “detrimental” influences from the East, more precisely from particular “Eastern countries”(see Chapter 2). One of the main claims developed by these voices

¹¹⁶ It meant that there were separate music shows and festivals for folk and pop-rock music performers. For instance the TV music show *Ritam srca* was reserved for rock music, while *Folk Parada* showed only popular performances of NCFM.

¹¹⁷ This was not the case only in Serbia, but in other former republics of Yugoslavia as well (Baker 2008; Slobin, 1996; Rasmussen 1995). However, Serbia was the most extreme example of this hybridization, as it widely opened the media space to private exclusively commercial TV and radio stations, allowing the production of any kind of music products that could bring money to its producers (see Đurković 2002).

pointed at certain tendencies in melodic structure of turbo-folk song, which incorporated elements of what was considered to be “oriental”, eastern melodic patterns. Most of these influences were associated with Turkish or “oriental” cultural circles, partly Greek, Iranian, Arabic and the like. Interestingly, most of the commentators on this topic never provided any argument as to why precisely they associated certain melodic lines from turbo-folk songs with Turkish or Iranian or any of what is usually called “Oriental” cultural heritage (see Chapter 2). For instance, it was not clear why there was such widespread popular opinion that turbo-folk was influenced by Turkish or Iranian culture or tradition (and not Iraqi or some other “Eastern” culture).¹¹⁸ Still, in colloquial manner of speaking, the typical sound of turbo-folk has mostly been put in the context of so-called *turcizam*,¹¹⁹ the expression deployed in a pejorative sense.¹²⁰ On the other hand, the performers themselves would often “admit” while giving statements for the media that their songs were “influenced” or “borrowed” from the repertoires of Greek or Turkish popular performers. Given the results of research throughout the production in the nineties, and after 2000, we could say that there have been controversies of authorship of particular songs, as many Serbian performers did not want to acknowledge that many of their songs were mere rearrangements of Greek or Turkish pop songs, with the lyrics in Serbian.¹²¹ The political and cultural isolation of Serbia and Montenegro (embedded officially in the state of Yugoslavia during the nineties) fuelled these practices, since international agencies for the

¹¹⁸ It was commonly popular to call turbo-folk style a “Teheran (Iranian) style” among the music audiences who did not approve turbo-folk, so that TV show hosts, such as Milovan Ilić Minimaks in his popular show *Minimaksovizija* on the TV *Politika*, would often ask turbo-folk singers about their reactions to this “categorization”. The singers themselves would usually deny their relationship to these “oriental” influences, calling themselves “singers for the folk (*narod*)”.

¹¹⁹ The word *turcizam* comes from *srbistika* (scholarship on Serbian language) and means a word in the Serbian language which was historically formed under the influence of Turkish, such as: *avlija*, *kapija*, etc. It is often used in everyday language in Serbia for description of various cultural phenomena. Although it does not have any negative connotations in the scholarship on Serbian language, in its colloquial use it is often used in derogative sense, indicating something which is not “authentic”, “Serbian”, but “undesirable”, “impure” and “low”.

¹²⁰ This set of cultural practices and “othering” of particular communities, or lifestyles, can be viewed as a part of “orientalism”, the concept articulated by Edward Said in his famous book *Orientalism* (1979), as well as discussed by Maria Todorova in her work of the reinvention of “the Balkans” and “balkanism” (1997). Similar concepts can be found in Goldsworthy (1998). A number of authors also dealt with the examples of “orientalization” applied to former Yugoslavia, especially in the cases of sort of “orientalization” and recent “symbolic geography” of political and cultural hierarchies (see Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Helms 2008). See also Chapter 2.

¹²¹ The most famous example of public “embarrassment” of the musicians who had not previously acknowledged that their most popular song was “taken” from the Greek popular music scene was the case of the band “Osvajači”. The members of the band were invited to the popular show “Minimaksovizija” (2000) and were openly asked whether the song in question was their original song. After they gave a positive answer, the production team played in the studio in a direct broadcast the CD of a Greek singer singing the same song, after what the members of the band remained speechless.

protection of authorship and copyright had little jurisdiction with regard to the state of Yugoslavia, since the state was officially under political, economic, cultural and sport sanctions in relation by the members of United Nations, in accordance with the decision of The Security Council of United Nations, passed on May 30 1992, which remained in force for years

Hence, we should take into consideration that, first, much of turbo-folk production has been heavily influenced by contemporary production of popular music in Greece and Turkey, and second, many of the commentators described the production of that music as “oriental”, “Turkish”, Islamic and the like in a pejorative sense. If we put aside the analysis of particular discourses on this topic for a moment, and look at the actual modes of production of turbo-folk, and its origin in terms of music technology, melody and singing style, we can still say that there was a slight inclination by the first turbo-folk producers to make their products sound like music coming from the East (the RAI music tradition, for instance), and imitate, or give the effect of imitating music coming from Eastern or Southern parts of Europe, as well as the Middle East. One of the first big turbo-folk stars, Dragana Mirković, started her career in the late eighties working with the band called “Južni vetar” (“Southern Wind”), whose name implicated the clear intention of producing music labeled as being “from the South”, which was believed to be very much influenced by Arabic, Turkish and other oriental motifs. This production started as a marginalized sub-genre of NCFM in terms of media impact in the late eighties, but even in that period, it created a significant underground scene, with big concerts in smaller towns of Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia, and quite prolific production of records and cassettes.¹²² It was the period of widespread use of synthesizers, programmed to simulate the sounds of the *šargije*, *zurle*, and other instruments typical of the parts of the Middle East. In addition, the singing style incorporated a specific type of singing, *pevanje sa trilerima*, which meant singing with a vibrato effect and distinct nasal sounds.¹²³ The question of the ethnic identity of the performers was also quite confusing, as the band mostly collaborated with singers of Bosnian Muslim, Serbian Muslim, Serbian, Bosnian Serbian and Roma origin. The music was widely consumed in Serbia,

¹²² The most popular performers who belonged to „Juzni vetar“ production in the eighties, were Šemsa Suljaković, Šeki Turković, Mile Kitić, Sinan Sakić and Dragana Mirković in her early period. Their popularity is significant even nowadays. However, it is interesting that, according to all my informants, the songs of these performers were distributed through all sorts of informal ways, and were widely consumed even in the period when literally no TV center or popular magazine would publicize any news on them, interview or advertisement, treating their performances as pulp entertainment of „shund“, and „aesthetically invalid“ production.

¹²³ See examples of „Juzni vetar“ performances on the examples of Šemsa Suljaković and Sinan Sakić at : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2l54HVMks8g> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgT7orJuDkk>

Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia, and above all Serbian and Bosnian diasporas, although it was hardly visible in the state media, being considered as a music of “no artistic quality”(see Vidić-Rasmussen 1996). After the beginning of the nineties, some of the singers from that band continued their careers in a similar manner as before without many innovations in their performances (e.g. Sinan Sakić, Šemsa Suljaković, Mile Kitić, Šeki Turković). On the other hand, another group of young singers from “Južni vetar” circles adjusted their performances to the new situation – a situation where a fusion of folk and pop music was coming to the existence - and practically founded, or at least partially created the modern folk music genre, turbo-folk. It is possible to say the “Južni vetar” production anticipated some of the main technical characteristics of turbo-folk: loud, electronic music arrangements combined with traditional instruments and very simple lyrics based on very basic everyday language. For this reason, some of the biggest turbo-folk stars from the nineties started their early career in “Južni vetar”. The technical distinction between turbo-folk and “Južni vetar” was grounded in turbo-folk’s greater use of pop-rock and rap sounds and coreography which was missing from “Južni vetar’s” style. Otherwise, it can be said also that the principle of “Južni vetar” production, based on a semi-legal market and with little to no support of any formal editorial policy, resembled very much of what was later formed in the nineties as turbo-folk.

One of the most outstanding examples of former members of “Južni vetar” was the career of Dragana Mirković. She started her performances around 1985, represented as a nice modest young girl from a small remote Serbian village, singing popular folk songs, and performing in the style of “Južni vetar”. However, since the beginning of her career, she showed her aspiration to incorporate the motifs of the urban youth lifestyle in her performances.¹²⁴ The lyrics of her songs sometimes contained the motifs of land, woods and other typical village landscapes, but gradually also began including words like “city”, “modern”, and the like. In the beginning of the nineties, her performances were enriched with a strong beat produced by synthesizers, and accompanied with professional dancers that clearly imitated world dance groups, mostly typical for rap dancers of the nineties (such as Mc Hammer, and others). Speaking of the deliberate homage to oriental instruments and music motifs, we cannot overlook Lepa Brena, the folk singer from Bosnia discussed in Chapter 3. Although the peak of Brena’s career was over by the

¹²⁴ See early videos and songs of Dragana Mirković at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNPqxwdFQEO> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHsXRMnMgIM>

beginning of the nineties, her music also combined the sound of some oriental instruments and the rock music marker, synthesizers. Brena's performances did lack a strong, rap-like beat. However when she appeared on the show business scene, the music of her band was recognised as a fusion of rock, western-influenced music, and some Serbian/Bosnian folk music (*Rock* 1983:7). According to a musician from Sarajevo, with whom I spoke about the popular music scene in that city in the eighties, Lepa Brena and her band were recognized musically by both folk and rock professional musicians in Bosnia, since she was considered to be a part of a modernized pop-rock oriented production, which brought many innovations to the popular music scene at the time, first and foremost the successful bridging of the gap between "rural" and "urban" audiences in Yugoslavia.

4.1.3. Emergence of Turbo-Folk and its Foreign Counterparts

Turbo-folk music has also been related to the lyrics and audio and visual conventions of two American music scenes: hip-hop and country music. In general, this field of analysis has been marginal to the general view of turbo-folk as "peasant", "eastern", "oriental" or "Turkish" music which stressed the pejorative connotations of this genre. People who considered turbo-folk as made according to some western patterns of popular culture have mostly come from the circles of musicians and producers involved in turbo-folk show business, predominantly for the "westernness" of turbo-folk in an apologetic way. However, the fact is that there is a reasonable ground for making some theoretically valuable comparisons between turbo-folk and these two musical scenes. The awareness of such analogies contributes to the understanding of certain ideological, social and political aspect of turbo-folk production, and particularly, visual, audio and verbal conventions that have been conceived around this genre.

The turbo-folk scene of the nineties incorporated a range of music, fashion and design styles, as well as content with implicit ideological layers, structured in accordance with new social hierarchies. The new social developments "prescribed" renegotiated images of social success, new images of masculinity and femininity, and a reworked concept of power relations. The old, socialist narratives of gradual upward social mobility entailed gaining a university degree, steady job, being married with children and settling in a modest, modern-equipped

apartment. The post-socialist social trends deconstructed such myths: the media, newspapers, TV and radio shows started favoring images of quick social success, young men with a lot of money of unknown origin, with expensive cars and young, half-naked, “dressed-to-kill” girls around them as status symbols. The main question is what were the methods of “promotion” of such images? Popular culture made a big contribution to the creation of such cultural changes. The media, popular shows and magazines promoted heavily the new desirable types of clothing, dating, and the like, representing visually and verbally new patterns of masculinity and femininity. Rapidly, the TV shows and video spots started producing very sexual, pornographic images of female singers, turbo-folk stars, and their male partners (either in video spots or in real life), who promoted the look of macho, strong and dangerous guys. Mostly, video spots from that period, almost without exception, showed a model of a desired, irresistible man, as a cool and merciless criminal, a “bad guy” or even mafia member, with dark suits and surrounded by bodyguards. Interestingly, most female turbo-folk-stars, at the same time, in their real life, were dating the same type of “tough guys” from criminal Belgrade gangs, usually openly known to the police as criminals.¹²⁵ With little divergence, the gender dynamics that prevailed in the popular images pursued the following scheme: sexy, highly eroticized woman belonging to the fascinating but cruel, rich man who was clearly connected to violence, death and power.

A lot of visual and verbal references indicated that such iconographies strikingly resembled of the videos of American rap and hip-hop stars. The images of luxury and pornographic treatment of female bodies, promoted as a convention of turbo-folk spots, are comparable to the conventions of American hip-hop black music stars. There have been many controversies about the moral issues and values represented in rap and hip-hop music spots. In the first place there

¹²⁵ In spite of the delicate nature of mentioning such coupling, many of which were semi-hidden from the public, but still known to police and other circles of social and political power, and the possible negative consequences of bringing this „inofficial knowledge“ to the framework of a scholarly work, I will still mention several examples. The fact that common knowledge of this type of gender relations in Serbia, and the perception of these relations by the informants, matters for my thesis as an integral part of the construction of images or „stage identities“ of the stars in question for the recipients. Among the examples were the relationship between Ceca Ražnatović and her late husband Željko Ražnatović Arkan, assassinated in 2000, but also her earlier relationship with a leader of the „Voždovac gang“, who was assassinated in the early nineties. Then there was the relationship between Jelena Karleuša and Čanda, a well known criminal assassinated in 2000, and the marriage between Goca Božinovska and Zoran Šijan, a leader of the „Surčin clan“, ambushed and killed in the center of Belgrade in 1999. Many other names of female singers were informally put into connection with other criminals and controversial politicians in Serbia, such as Dragana Mirković, Jami Milenković, and others. The female singers mostly did not deny these relationships, but, on the contrary, often commented on them, admitting their close relations to these men, while for instance, Ceca Ražnatović and Goca Božinovska often discussed at length in TV shows their relations with their late husbands, picturing their marriages as „happy“, and „full of love“.

were the problems of violence and sexist approaches to women in this production. I meant offensive lyrics insulting women, degrading pornographic images of women in videos and abusive behaviour toward women performed in the videos and in the lyrics (listed in the documentary *Hip-hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* by Byron Hart (2006)). Like Serbian female stars' boyfriends, American rap and hip-hop male stars, who perform in their own spots, were similarly connected to gangs and criminal way of life – in reality, at least before they started their music careers. In addition, images of female bodies from rap and hip-hop music videos resemble the images of female bodies from turbo-folk spots. In both images women are often represented through sexualized, almost pornographic bodies, focused exclusively on their attraction to men and ability to please them. Perhaps we can conclude that using similar visual style of performances indicated a similar attitude toward the issues of crime, violence or body.¹²⁶

These elements also lead us to an additional conclusion: there was a strong tendency within turbo-folk production to incorporate and manipulate the elements of subcultures, minority identities, and in general, the motifs of the lower-class-boy or girl who achieves great fortune and power (Kitwana 2002). Similarly, black rappers and hip-hoppers create an analogous controversial message: they often symbolically represent the success story of black minors, coming from ghettos and economically very disadvantaged and marginal areas. Their videos often celebrate violence, arms and abuse of women (see hooks 2003; Powell and Williams 2006). While Serbian videos follow this line to a certain point, there is a point of difference between these two contexts: while rap and hip-hop music have remained just one of the possible music genres/scenes within Anglo-American music production, referring to particular subcultures, turbo-folk prevailed as a dominant genre in the nineties, and continued to dominate the popular culture production in Serbia in general even afterwards. The ideals of violence and porn-culture, inspired by stereotypes of lower class fantasies of success, easily became a universal success story for the whole society, strongly connected with the idea of “proper Serbianess”. In contrast, hip-hop in the US is strongly associated with a particular forms of identity politics, which are, on a symbolic level, rarely understood as mainstream popular culture, in spite of the millions of dollars earned by hip-hop industry. How the “success story” in Serbia was connected with the issues of national membership, will be explained a bit later.

¹²⁶ See the most telling analysis of hip-hop promoted gender analysis in the documentary *Hip-hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* by Byron Hart (2006).

Country music

The emergence of American country music almost coincided with the predecessor of turbo-folk, i.e. NCFM. The birth of both country music and NCFM took place in the sixties and both appeared as reaction to the processes of political and cultural liberalization that started spreading all around the globe at the time (see Hill 2002; Tichi 1996) . In Serbia, according to musicians and music editors, NCFM appeared as a result of the intention to create a commercialized, widely available mode of folk music that would appeal to the taste and sensibility of ordinary people, which in practice meant mostly working class and rural social layers. Similarly, country music in the USA is a genre that was developing simultaneously with political turmoil, as a counter to the development of second wave feminism, anti-war movement, and other revolutionary ideas. To a great extent, country music appeared as a counterpunch to the ideas of sexual and women's liberation, like a new genre which would popularize traditional ideas of the life of common people, such as family issues, marriage, abandoned women, and the like, speaking of their problems from the perspective of "common people", in their own voice, and not in the language of intellectuals or middle class liberals.

Country music has been known as a genre widely popular among the white working class and rural population in certain parts of the USA, although its contemporary forms affect much broader social layers. While big cities' university populations widely celebrated the hippie movement, free love, and women's emancipation, country music was launching new female stars, gorgeous blonds who were singing touching and sentimental songs, and macho-looking male stars with guitars. Over the years, country music has passed through many transformations. A number of outstanding female careers have been created within this genre. Some of them were not only singers, but also very productive song writers, and many of them also played the guitar or other instruments on stage (e.g. Dolly Parton, Loretta Lynn, Tanya Tucker). Over the years, country music became modernized, original acoustic guitars banjos and other stringed instruments were replaced with electrical devices, while some performers even achieved global success (such as Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton, Keith Urban, Shania Twain, and others). Recent developments even incorporated some experimental projects such as that of famous lesbian rock singer and song writer K.D Lang.

Most of the commentators use the social motivation for producing this music as a ground for comparison between turbo-folk and country music production. The politics of identity and the cultural history of music production play a huge role in explaining the analogies between these two phenomena. “Singing for the common people” and “producing music for the folk”, are the most common arguments for the apologetic attitude to NCFM, and, later, to turbo-folk. The idea of simple judgments, simple vocabulary and real life stories, appeared as a special, new quality of these modes of production of popular culture. When asked about the nature of her performance, and confronted with the judgments of her style as worthless and profane, Lepa Brena answered that what she was doing was an art of the common people, similar to the work of Dolly Parton, and the like. The argument of similarity with country music was mostly used in order to support the claim of “westernness”, “normality” or even the “quality” of turbo-folk music. The most common arguments could have been summed up in this way: if American culture can produce such a music genre as country music, which derives from American rural tradition and the so-called redneck lifestyle, why would we in this region not have a common people’s music, which is made for the simple folks.

One of the main reasons why Dolly Parton was mostly used as an example (and not for, instance, Johnny Cash) was her sex, and open sexuality that was also an important part of her performance. The NCFM and turbo-folk scenes were overwhelmed by new modes of eroticism on the stages, which played with the ideologies of late-socialist and post-socialist public morality conventions. As one of the most common negative remarks on this scene was that of obscenity and vulgar appearances of female stars, the argument that Americans cherish a similar music scene and similar codes of femininity, was obviously believed to be strong enough to provide a valid and respectable status for NCFM and turbo-folk.

The way femininity is coded in country music conventions is a basis for the multi-layered comparison between the ideological subtext of this genre and its Serbian counterpart. Most of the female appearances on the stage in country music signal a contradictory combination of feminine fragility and almost masculine, enduring persistence. Moreover, the visual style of these stars signifies straightforward and unambiguous hetero-normative sexual appeal. The lyrics of the songs mostly depict the destiny of a strong but highly male-dependent woman who is always aware of the necessity of a male presence in her life, including a traditional, family framework of existence. The personal strength and open sexual provocation of female subjectivity in this sense

are subject to the overall imperative of a monogamous, traditional union between males and females. Such an expectation brings many masochistic and over-sentimental tones to the lyrics and performances of these songs, and that also makes a strong similarity between country and turbo-folk music.

Still, there have been a few quite significant differences between the ways women have been represented in country music, and in the turbo-folk scene in Serbia. At first glance, they seem to be rather technical, however, they still reflect significant differences between the two social contexts and different signification of the female performances in these two productions. I will mention one of them, which seems to be one of the crucial differences, reflecting a relevant difference in terms of public images of these women. Namely, almost all of the distinguished female country stars played some instrument, and many of them were song writers. This characteristic indicates that women in country music do often appear as agents, producing their own style, and suggesting some sort of control of their images, gained through training, expertise and skills. On the contrary, turbo-folk stars in Serbia are, with a few exceptions that have emerged only recently, almost absolutely unrelated to any of musical skills, except for singing, and especially, they don't appear as authors of their music. This significant difference still speaks for itself. There is a big question whether a woman who could play or write her own music could be perceived in the audiences' imagination as a woman who is purely an object of desire, completely subordinated to the symbol of man. The turbo-folk scene in Serbia is obviously not meant to produce images of female artists or musicians or active pursuers of some particular skills. It is rather meant to produce images and fantasies of "women" as such. In other words, I would say, the turbo-folk scene relies on the moment of displaying women for a male gaze much more than of moments of showing women's skills or creativity.

Another important point of difference between women in country music and turbo-folk is also a difference in positioning of the female subject in the lyrics, i.e. the way in which a woman's life is understood in relation to social expectations described in the song. The women's voices in country songs often describe hard and unfair conditions of life, problems of domestic violence, alcoholism, problems within the family, marriage other issues. These problems are often depicted as "unsolvable" and "eternal", as Hill suggests (Hill 2002). However, they still represent in a very serious tone the hard life of women in lower social layers, rural areas, poor surroundings, and the like (for instance, songs by Loretta Lynn and Tanya Tucker). In contrast,

almost none of turbo-folk songs deals with the issues of domestic violence or gender abuse in a serious way (some of them are mocking these problems, but always with lascivious subtext). Turbo-folk lyrics are in general focused on depicting male-female relations, and often refer to the situations without any social and cultural contextualization, except that they refer to the belonging to a “higher community”, to something which is “ours”, “real” and “proper”, and sets up particular gender relations. This subtle and hidden way of cultural homogenization will be discussed in Chapter 5 and 6.

To sum up, in spite of some similarities in representation and ideological setting between performances of women in American country music and Serbian turbo-folk, the images of women in country music are more oriented towards representing women’s everyday life, and not a glamorous life-style as with turbo-folk performers. In other words, while both genres are oriented toward entertainment for “ordinary people”, country music depicts scenes from ordinary life and gender roles within them, while turbo-folk strives to represent a glamorous upper life style and the picture of upward social mobility, money and quick success as the key parameter of gender relations. Another problem emerges with the parallel between hip-hop and turbo-folk. While hip-hop also promotes sexualized women’s images, similar to turbo-folk, hip-hop is also often interpreted as a particular expression of the American black community and its empowerment. In contrast, turbo-folk was never identified with a particular identity politics, except with the idea of ethno-national community, through the constructions of the myth of turbo-folk as “authentic Serbian music”. These insights suggest that, in spite of similarities with other music phenomena worldwide, turbo-folk should be observed in its social and cultural context, by exploring ways to which turbo-folk reinforces this context.

4.2. Women’s Visibility and the Emergence of the Turbo-Folk Scene

In the previous section I described the political and musical context of the emergence of turbo-folk scene. It is important to view turbo-folk performances as a form of commodified market products, shaped within the historical context of the break-up of former Yugoslavia. Therefore, women’s stage identities should be analyzed always as both signification of historical

paradigms and the commodity products subject to musical and media discourses and practices, as well as economic circumstances. One of the sub-questions of this dissertation is about the similarities and differences between female visibility in the nineties (and later on) and female visibility in show business in the eighties (and earlier). The following part of the chapter will unpack the characteristics of first turbo-folk stars. However, before that it will re-open the discussion on emblematic aspects of women's performances from the Yugoslav period, which influenced the image of turbo-folk singers from the nineties. Most important of them is an image of *kafana* singer that was central to almost all women's participation in NCFM genre in Yugoslavia.

4.2.1. Early Modes of Transition from kafana Singer to Music Icon

At the very beginning, it is very reasonable to assume that turbo-folk female images did not appear “out of nowhere”, extracted from any tradition or regional or global context of popular culture. There could be, at least, two directions from which to view the “patterns” of females becoming turbo-folk stars. The first includes the life-stories of young, sexy girls from modest backgrounds with no education, becoming Yugoslav stars, performing so-called folk music, for the “common people”. The second is from the perspective of common narratives of the industry of female pop icons worldwide. My focus will be on the first direction of research, given the importance of particular locally-shaped political and cultural conditions that influenced the decisive changes in popular culture in Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe in the late eighties and early nineties.

The previous chapter discussed models of female music icons from the eighties and earlier. Ex-Yugoslav stars, coming from folk, pop and rock backgrounds, enjoyed some moments of fame and significant opportunities for earning good money, given that they had access to a market of more than 20 million people. Their public image was reinforced through TV shows, widely circulated rock, pop and other popular journals, and big concerts all over Yugoslavia. At the first glance, it seems that their way of becoming pop-culture icons was glorious, compared to the careers of post-Yugoslav pop-stars, predominantly because the latter had to deal with much

smaller national markets, at least in the period of the nineties. However, unlike the pop-stars from the nineties, the music performers, and figures of show-business in the sixties, seventies and eighties from all genres were much more subjected to criticism by various individuals and groups, through the media and other formal and informal modes, as well as purely musicological criticism. Yugoslav popular music production enjoyed smaller liberties in terms of their positions within purely commercialized music market, than the post-Yugoslav. The boundaries of proscribed ideological positions, as well as the issues of *public morality*, and the need to have more or less clear boundaries between various music genres, still channeled the careers of ex-Yugoslav singers and musicians in a way that limited their pure talent, and capability of surviving in show business. More to the point, in Yugoslavia there never were any systematic or thoroughly applied legal regulations that proscribed, sanctioned, and prohibited certain genres and songs, or officially banned any particular performer or band (see Vidić-Rasmussen 2004; Luković 1989; *Kultura* 1970). It would be more accurate if we recognize that music companies and radio stations in the socialist state had their own systems of complying, avoiding, or dealing with the “expectations” of official discourses related to mainstream notions of what was acceptable. As Vidić-Rasmussen points out, commenting on the status specifically of NCFM, which could apply to all other genres, “Because of pressures stemming from both the recognition of lax legal controls over the industry and the paternalistic stance by institutions of culture, the companies adopted some forms of self-regulative behavior” (Vidić-Rasmussen 2004: 83). In other words, it meant, for instance, that radio-stations were “free” to make their own play lists. As Rasmussen also says, the regulating system was less proscribing and more punitive. It was common practice that editors of some radio stations would be suspended or even fired after releasing a particular, “potentially subversive” song, although the song had never officially been banned (as discussed in Chapter 3). In a word, the regulative system was rigid about certain issues, yet changeable, sometimes negotiable, and the people who directly worked in the media had to have a highly developed notion of political “acceptability”, and to negotiate their own notion of the limits of their job, in order to be able to introduce new styles and singers and keep their positions at the same time.

I have already commented in Chapter 3 on the image of female “pop-culture heros”, especially in the seventies and eighties and especially in relation to Lepa Brena’s success story, as well as the significance of her groundbreaking career, which reflected and motivated many

changes in popular culture conventions and attitudes up to that point. Nevertheless, we will still have to refer to the “phenomenon of Lepa Brena” as well as the public representation of her life story, career, and innovation in the creation of her image of femininity, which was produced at a moment of transition between the “old” modes of femininities in popular culture, and the new ones, born in the nineties. As we have seen, Lepa Brena’s stage appearance epitomized the first ultimate and glamorous pop-culture female *picaro*, in Yugoslavia, who undoubtedly made her way from being poor, uneducated, and socially unprivileged, to being a top national star, rich, adored, and imitated by the others, studied in academic research, and turned into a multimedia star, despite the controversial nature of her performances, and her rough challenging of public and private sense of morality at the time.

Before I focus on the female stars in the nineties, I will revisit briefly the stage character of Lepa Brena, in order to underline the changes in performing femininities by the singers who followed up her performances. The strategies of performing a female star such as initiated by Lepa Brena were not exclusively local specific. In mid eighties, when Lepa Brena reached the peak of her popularity, a number of openly sexualized female images figured at world stages: Madonna, Extra Nena, Sabrina, Samantha Fox and the others. All of them used the advantages of visualizations of popular music performances in order to “sell” their songs with the help of videos or live concert performances showing them as sex-appealing models. Lepa Brena herself referred to foreign pop and rock performers as her personal idols (*Rock* 1983). The concept of the open visibility of female body designed to be desired in accordance with heteronormative codes, previously known in kafana spaces, had a lot to do with the redefinition of genre boundaries that happened in the Yugoslav show business. However, the period of Lepa Brena’s domination over large parts of Yugoslavia was a period which still tolerated the variety of genres and concepts.¹²⁷ The final radicalization of the concept of the popular and something “wanted by the folks (narod)”, constructed in accordance with the heteronormative codes of communication was not fully inaugurated before the beginning of the nineties, when the break up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the processes of ethno-national homogenizations of various entities in this region, came into existence.

¹²⁷ Lepa Brena and “Slatki greh” competed twice at the national competition for the selection of Yugoslav representative in Eurosong competition, the international musical competition that has always been highly regarded and evaluated in the region of former Yugoslavia. Both times, their performance was rated poorly by the selection committee, in spite of the fact that those days were the days of absolute media and commercial success of Lepa Brena and her band.

As pointed out above, Lepa Brena initiated a certain “revisionist” attitude toward folk music production. In particular, she moved the boundaries of allegedly “appropriate” female conduct on the stage and opened up the possibility for the “low” type of entertainment to become a mainstream entertainment. However, we still cannot say that Lepa Brena herself belongs to the *turbo-folk* group of female singers. In the first place, Brena used to be a huge Yugoslav music star, which significantly delineates the nature of her performative strategies and textual meanings from the profile of a turbo-folk singer, the latter being bound to the period of re-emergence of ethno-national cultural and political entities in the region of former Yugoslavia. The ideological messages of Brena’s career were more a matter of fiction, i.e. her performing identity was more focused on creating a stage show, a subject who suggests the extent of an unreachable, and unreadable mysterious existence. Her stage name (Lepa Brena), was different than her real, personal name (Fahreta Jahić), and her whole performance was created in a way that allowed the audience to feel a mysterious gap between what Lepa Brena was while performing and what she might have been in her personal life. Brena was there to be a possible object of fantasies of the whole audience, so that it was understood that too many details from her personal life could have interfered with audiences’ romanticized picture of her. ¹²⁸For example, the romantic relationships of Fahreta Jahić were pretty much hidden from the public over the years, up to the point when she announced her engagement with the tennis player, Slobodan Živojinović, in 1990. In other words, in the people’s imagination, Brena, as a huge star, was supposed to be “available” for her admirers, and it was clear that her romantic involvements would not contribute to the greatness of her name. In that respect, as I will show later, Brena’s production was much more similar to some global show business strategies, than the turbo-folk marketing machinery. She herself often quoted western pop-rock stars as her direct inspirations (see her interview at *Rock*, 1983), while on the other hand, it was written about her in edited volumes of music trends worldwide, such as *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World’s Peoples* by Jeff Todd Titon (2001).

In a word, Lepa Brena, like a number of her colleagues at the end of the eighties, based her success on attractive looks, and glamorous performances, but still worked a lot on building

¹²⁸Unlike the private life of the stars nowadays, Brena’s private and especially romantic life was predominantly a subject of guessing and rumors among her fans. However, the press never published anything spectacular on her life before her marriage, apart from some vague indications that she was living in the same house with the leader of her band, Saša Popović. This secretfull media image fuelled the audience’s fantasy that stage character called Lepa Brena might have been available (see Walkerdine 1996).

an authentic, recognizable, music stage identity for herself, something that would make her distinct in relation to the others. Many of them had been building their careers for years, singing for radio, TV, concerts and wedding parties, so that each of them was striving to produce a “hit” that would attract more attention than the others’ songs. Many of them, unfortunately were aware that the genre of NCFM, so closely connected to the kafana context, marked as the entertainment for working class and rural population, could not guarantee their absolute popularity, especially among the youth in the cities, high schools and such, who traditionally tended to absorb “foreign” music and rock and pop domestic music. In one of her interviews, one of the big NCFM stars said “One day my daughter was going to a party and took some records with her. I asked her: and where are your mum’s records? She came back and took one of my records from the house with her. Later, when I stepped outside, I found my record left aside at the door entrance” (*Radio-TV Revija* 1986). NCFM was often denigrated amongst city youth as something “backward” and “not cool” (Dragičević-Šešić 1994). Brena’s success was unique, the result of a risky hybridization of pop-rock and folk genres. At the end of the eighties, NCFM music stars still could not count on being taken as mainstream models of identification of the majority of female population in Serbia (Luković 1989; Gordy 1999; Šešić 1994). Brena was the only example of the transition of such a female image and this is why I revoke her career in this chapter. However, as it will be seen in the following section, turbo-folk female images incorporated many different elements of displaying gender identities that differed from Brena’s performance, especially in terms of the relations between private and public life of performers.

4.2.2. Beginning of the “Turbo-folk Era”: New Femininities at Work

The beginning of the nineties produced some new principles of music production, and especially in terms of representation of femininity on the stage. The first new stars of the nineties clearly derived from NCFM tradition, as they started at the end of the eighties as a part of the regular NCFM industry. But from the end of the eighties through the mid-nineties they built images that were significantly different. The novelties could have been observed in two dimensions: in the way they constructed their images as performers and the female subject positions they constructed through the lyrics of their songs. As mentioned before, these two

aspects are in general the field within which I analyze so-called women's stage identities in this dissertation.

The successful female turbo-folk singers from the nineties also insisted on the mergence of pop-rock and folk styles. However, the extent of appeal to the "urban" youth was much stronger than before. While Brena's style still preserved a lot of reminder of "rural" iconographies in its core, the stars of the nineties tried hard to erase any type of ruralness from their visual images. The new type of femininity drastically introduced a more aggressive look: leather clothes, a lot of metal jewelry and accessories, keeping open sexuality on display, and above all, clearly showing that they represented an image of a *city girl*, with all the associated romanticized images of city vices. At the same time, they introduced new type of dancing: their performances included *dance groups* as a back-up for their singing, which completed the images of city life in terms of scenery and iconography. The music arrangements were drastically modernized, but at the same time, they kept the folk themes (as well as the manner of singing), which were associated with the same construction of rural cultural context. The most accomplished star of this first phase of the *turbo-folk* era, was Dragana Mirković. Her performance showed a tendency to pursue a city youth style of dressing, talking, dancing, and the like. She herself came from a very small village but worked hard on her "city image". The music of her songs was a combination of folk sounds, often called "oriental", "Turkish", and "eastern" (reference) but still very popular in Serbia, and electronic arrangement of that music with a strong beat. Before her ground-breaking experiments on the music market, that "oriental" music style was not welcome on TV, or in video spots as it was considered to be of low taste. However, embedded in Dragana Mirković's performance, this heavy folk music, sung in a folk style, but rearranged in a western, dance style of performance, over night became the most widespread music for parties, disco-clubs and excursions, among the city youth in Serbia. One of my respondents explained:

The cassettes of Dragana Mirković were a must on excursions in the third and fourth grade of my high school in the nineties. Now I think it is not that we particularly loved that music, but the melody and the lyrics were so simple, it was so easy to remember them, we all could sing together and enjoy it. I think we were happy to abandon complicated and depressing western rock melodies, since we usually knew how to sing only their refrains, and nothing else. (Neda, a female pharmacist from Belgrade, age 33).

Dragana Mirković's career included various aspects of public performances, concerts, video spots, production of music cassettes, production of her songs in English, and even two

movies with her as a protagonist. She was a pioneering figure in turbo-folk business in many respects. Although she did not fall for the trend of eroticizing her body to the extent that became “normal” among the singers who came after her, she still outlined certain conventions of turbo-folk female singing that would be followed later on the stage, in videos, and on talk shows. In the first place – she worked hard to present this music style as a form of urban culture. She heavily promoted two types of images. The first was that of a girl in tight jeans, fashionable blazers, and a haircut which suggested a “girl next-door”. She mostly used this image when participating in talk shows or in her less ambitious and less expensive videos. The other image was a glamorous one, with elements of kitsch. She appeared in glamorous gowns, with visual effects suggesting the image of a goddess but one who suffers some ritual pain and tragedy. This glamorous image was mostly incorporated into the lyrics, which, in a very simplified way and with a lot of ultimate pathos, treated the problem of tragic and unrequited love, with a lot of elements of masochistic sentimentality. For example:

Otkada te nema, ne miriše cveće,
Sve ljubavi žive, samo moja neće.
Umirem, umirem majko,
Ne budi me,
Šta će mi ovo proleće
Kad on ne ljubi me.

Since you have left, the flowers don't smell
All other loves are alive, except for mine.
I am dying, I am dying, mother,
Don't wake me up,
What good is this spring,
When he does not kiss me.

(1992)

In a way, in her videos and songs Dragana Mirković was often performing the characters in her videos, in this case mostly tragic, and cursed heroines. However, unlike Brena, whose stage sketches were meant to be funny and burlesque, Dragana's visual production tended to create a universe of glamorous women's suffering, supported by kitschy images and heavily inspired by the work of foreign music stars. In terms of bodily presentations, Dragana's performances were highly influenced by Madonna and other MTV products. It is important to emphasize that Dragana's career set up a certain framework for female participation in turbo-folk show-business. Some of its features were:

- 1) the female subject as ultimately focused on her own suffering because of a man, or her subordination to him, i.e, ultimate compliance to heteronormative gender pattern.
- 2) female sexuality constructed as “urban”, associated with the culture of night life and disco clubs
- 3) musical expression with a strong dance beat, combined with ethno-folk elements,

recognizable among audiences from NCFM music, influenced by western popular music, especially western TV video production

4) singing style with *vibrato* vocal effects, so-called *trileri*, typical of the NCFM genre, and very similar to the manner of rustic and imprecise alive *kafana* singing.

The fact is, however, that Dragana and her production team did not push so much for a complete sexualization, fetishization or commodification of her image that would show her as a porn star model. Dragana Mirković still cherished the image of a big music star with a huge fandom a bit of a glamorous pop queen whose sex appeal was sold to the masses in “controllable” doses. Her popularity was more based in spectacular concerts and large sales of audio tapes and less in her promotion as a “femme fatal” seducer and jet-set beauty. Dragana was still more of a singer and less of a model and she avoided public political statements. She was very often publicly in the presence of the most influential politicians at the time but never really showed any particular political orientation.¹²⁹ Dragana was still hiding her private life from the public, which simply did not know much of her affairs or political preferences, except that she was for a while the girlfriend of a famous music manager, Raka Marić. So far there has not been any academic study or even a paper on her career, although she was a real founder of the stage identity of the female turbo-folk singer, and an example of female stage performer in the nineties in Serbia, in spite of the fact that she did not turn out to be the most controversial or most exposed example of these stage identities.

Another two singers who started their careers in the beginning of the nineties also comply to this framework, to a certain extent. Mira Škorić, promoted from the very beginning as a “rival”, or “enemy “ of Dragana Mirković, signified, a more aggressive version of sexualized body than the latter. Unlike Dragana, who, in real interviews and public statements usually, represented herself as “a simple, common girl”, Mira Škorić received a lot of public attention as a controversial, dark, vamp female *estrada* figure, who walked around the city with guns, drove very fast cars, and verbally attacked other performers in public. Her image also incorporated rock style, and her look was androgynous and tough. In her videos she also very often wore chains,

¹²⁹ A famous example is an episode of the popular show “Minimaxovizija“ from 1995, in which she participated together with one of the most engaged and most extreme right wing politicians of the nineties, Vojislav Šešelj, who was giving very harsh and insulting statements in relation to Croats and other non-Serbs. Dragana, however, denied any political attitude in this show.

and crucifixes, going even for hard-rock, or “heavy metal” performance iconography.¹³⁰ She epitomized an attractive but also unpredictable and possibly violent female sexuality, capable even of a corporal punishment of her unfaithful male lovers, or her female rivals. Mira’s videos also emphasized her sexy image. The songs were in a way distinct from Dragana's songs: their lyrics promoted an active attitude toward life, but at the same time indicated a controversial, aggressive, sadomasochistic female sexuality, ready for violence and physical destruction. For example, one of Mira Škorić’s most famous songs, celebrates the motif of murdering a woman’s unfaithful lover and his mistress, who happens to be the woman’s best friend. The lyrics describe hard feelings, and a woman craving for a violent revenge:

Nema više oprostaja
ni za njega ni za nju
zgresili su, spavali su
na mom jastuku

There is no more forgiveness
For him or her,
They have sinned
They slept together on my pillow.

Ja sam njemu srce dala
nju sam svojom sestrom zvala
resila sam i ne bezim
oboje cu da odlezim

I gave him my heart,
I regarded her as my sister,
I have decided and will not give up,
I will serve my time for killing them both.

Na godinu ili deset
ako treba i pedeset
al' cu ipak posle svega
da odlezim nju i njega

One year or ten,
If necessary even fifty,
But after everything
I will still serve my time for killing her and him

(2000)

The previous turbo-folk star, Dragana Mirković, added some new elements to the strategies of representation of female bodies on the stage, but still was flirting with the stereotypes of alleged rural simplicity, innocence, and the like, although it was not visible through her dress. On the other hand, Mira Škorić was rather a performer who celebrated the image of urban “bad girl” openly to such an extent, making clear after her performances that it was in a way impossible for a “folk singer”, to play on the card of “innocence”, and “naturalness”, pictured in the middle of some idyllic, village landscape. Within a few years, Mira Škorić became the other, “dark version” of Dragana Mirković’s image. On the stage, Dragana promoted herself as a tragic and glamorous suffering heroine. On the other hand, Mira promoted rather the image of a female villain, a lady who is a “trouble-maker” herself. Perhaps for this

¹³⁰ See examples of her videos from the nineties at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5q4-sVIYrg> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZNVCK5fn1o>

reason she was popular but never became an ultimate national star. Her anti-feminine sexuality was a phenomenon in itself, however. It was too particular to be seen as acceptable or typical by a nationwide audience. As one of my informants said, "Mira was perhaps more typical of the general atmosphere of the nineties than any other female singer: however, she looked more like an active bully, and less like a total victim, so that she was not "digestible" enough for us. However, her songs were highly popular among women, more popular than she as a person used to be. My girlfriend could not stand her, but liked some of her songs" (Ivica, a male taxi driver, age 29).

The third example of early turbo-folk female icon and stage-constructed femininity is Svetlana "Ceca" Veličković, later Ražnatović, who also started her career in the late 1980s. Unlike the other two, Ceca has kept the image and the status of a big star up to the present (2009). As already mentioned, Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović has been labeled the "biggest turbo-folk star", "most popular Serbian music star", "most popular Serbian brand", and has "received" other flattering titles, although she was often called, at the same time a "mafia chick", woman of a "low morality", and so on. These labels were given by journalists (both from print and electronic media), TV reporters, music producers, and, often, audience members themselves. Regarding her latest achievements, it should be mentioned that Ceca Ražnatović gave a record breaking open-air concert on June 17th 2006, attended reportedly, by 100.000 people (*Kurir* 2006). The peak of her presence in the media took place in the late nineties and right after 2001, the periods in which she was a guest in every popular and prestigious music show on Pink television, BK television, Palma TV, TV Politike and others, usually in a some special episode, which undoubtedly indicated the significance of her appearance as that of someone who is *above* the other stars. There will be some more discussion on the cultural and ideological connotations of the figure of Ceca Ražnatović in Chapters 5 and 6. Here I would like to point out a few moments of Ceca's contribution to the phenomenon of the early construction of stage identities of female performers.

Ceca's career started very early, more precisely when she was 14. By the age of 18, she was already a famous singer, which was marked by a big celebration on her 18th birthday. The party was attended by many show business celebrities and local politicians. At a very young age, Ceca's reputation as a star was slightly different from those of Dragana or Mira. Unlike the latter two, who usually let the audience see some glimpses of their nude bodies, and who put a much

more emphasize on their costumes, Ceca's first magazine photo sessions and videos explicitly emphasized her superior, young and very sexualized body, often photographed in swimming suits or in erotic pieces of clothes. Her postures, and the way she moved in her videos created an open call for a direct and unmasked visual erotic enjoyment.¹³¹ While Dragana worked hard to create an image of a good and sweet “urban” young woman, and Mira worked on the image of a “bad girl”, it seemed that Ceca's performance was meant just to provoke a gaze as such and just to emphasize the impressive attributes of female sexual appeal in a heteronormative world: her big breasts, her other bodily curves, and feminine lips and eyes. Ceca openly acted much more as a photo model than a singer. A number of newspapers articles wrote about her as young, sexy and beautiful so it seemed that her whole career, from the very beginning, rested almost completely on her (over) sexualized image and little to nothing on her vocal performance (for example: Gajer 1991; Ilić 1991).

It is extremely important to notice a significant development in terms of communication between a popular singer (pevačica), and the audience, that Ceca pursued, compared to Dragana Mirković, or Lepa Brena. In Ceca's case, the image difference between her image as a fictional, stage character, and her character in reality, was significantly diminished. Unlike Brena, or Dragana, she was not “playing” certain characters in her stage performance, and there were no sketches, or dance performances. Ceca did not play on this identity illusion”. Her stage performances bluntly offered “her in person”, which means, the visual perception of her was a source of pleasure in communication with a “real Ceca”, the same person who was giving interviews, who released almost naked photos of herself, and who was indeed Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović, in a word, a subject in the biographical sense.

But here we do not deal only with the eroticization of the stage performance of Svetlana Ražnatović; we also face the process that I would call the *biographization* of a performer. Ceca's private life became a stage story in itself. It was known that she dated so-called “tough guys”, in other words, members of criminal gangs, and suspicious businessmen, so that, in the imagination of the recipients, Ceca's dramatic lyrics and the pathos in them was widely perceived as her own actual experience. When she released the song “Kukavica”(Coward), it was clear that, as of that point, Ceca had broken some conventions of the construction of stage illusions: that song created

¹³¹ An example of this image is the cover of the *Radio TV Revija* (Jul 26, 1991), containing the provocative photo of very young Ceca in swimming suit.

multiple sets of suggestions, or to use Stuart Hall's term, the song encoded several layers of communication channel (Hall 1980). We can mention just some of them: first, the word *kukavica*, had multiple meanings. The word “kukavica”, in the meaning of “coward”, can be directed at an unfaithful male subject, as mentioned in the lyrics, who has no moral strength to face the consequence of his adultery. Further, the word *kukavica*, also means a bird which usually signifies an expression of sorrow, silent and hidden, as an expression of ultimate despair, but also a ritual mourning over someone's death. And finally, the direct, unmediated, sharp and painfully naturalistic lyrics, completely deprived of euphemisms, signified the beginning of Ceca's cult status as a personification of a tragic “bad woman”, who was chosen to be a lifetime victim of a man who is even more *desirable* than her, at the same time both a *villain and a weak creature*. Her lyrics make it clear:

Zagrli me,
Samo jednom čovek budi ne laži me,
Ako odeš nikad više ne traži me,
Samo napred, ne muči se, ne gledaj me,
Ja odavno slutim sve
Kukavica,
Nisam znala da si takva kukavica,
Sa mnom spavas druga ti je nesanica
Bojis se da priznaš to,
Kukavica, ti si samo jedna više kukavica,
Misliš da sam ona ista devojčica,
Kuju laže bilo ko

Hold me,
Be a man, don't lie to me,
If you leave, don't ever come back to look for me
Go ahead, don't torture yourself, don't look at me,
I've known all this for a while
Coward,
I did not know you were such a coward,
You sleep with me, but the other keep you awake,
You are afraid to admit it
Coward, you are just another coward,
You think I am that same little girl I used to be,
Who can be lied to by anyone.¹³²

(1993)

This song indicates a sharp, disillusioned and sarcastic worldview, a version of a female “experience”, which states that “all men are cheaters and cowards”, and that women are the ones who “know everything”, and don't believe in these lies. However, there are interesting possibilities of interpretation of this song. While participating in the documentary “Sav taj folk”, Milena Dragičević-Šešić, a media theoretician, called this song “emancipatory”, and “progressive”, since it speaks about a girl who is leaving her unfaithful boyfriend. “Hence”, Šešić concludes, “we cannot say that this song promotes some patriarchal women's role. On the contrary, it reflects a woman's brave and progressive attitude”. It seems that Dragičević Šešić fails to do a close reading of these lyrics, the technique of text interpretation developed in literary theory. The female subject who speaks in this song is actually a subject who is setting

¹³² Author of the music: Aleksandar Radulović; author of the lyrics: Marina Tucaković.

free her male significant other, *letting him go*, and at the same not giving herself any viable option of existence. She is giving him freedom, with a bitter and self-erasing conclusion that there are *only cowards* around. The fact that she has grown up, hasn't brought her anything good in her life, except that now she is aware of the ugliness of this world. This grown woman no longer now has a bright view on the possibility of having an honest and fair relationship with men, as men are apparently liars and cowards by definition. In such a light, Ceca's song does not look as emancipatory as Šešić claimed. Moreover, it gives an essentializing picture of gender relations, which openly speaks of women's suffering, but, at the same time, suggests that such a destiny is inevitable for a woman, as this is how the gender dynamics is conducted anyway.

Such a view of women and men is actually a double-bind, a sort of cultural, social and political dead-end. On the one hand, it seemingly crosses over the boundaries of a conventional patriarchal women's locatedness within a marriage, relationship, or family, as it openly addresses “real” difficulties of women's life, with some naturalistic, blunt details. On the other hand, this viewpoint shows women's bad luck as given by nature, something that is unchangeable, giving woman only the position of victim, as men are born bad and abusive, and women have to learn how to live with that, with a bitter melancholy, as they have no other option.

At some point when this song, “Kukavica” was recorded and released, it became clear that Ceca's life itself would be her main stage career, or at least, the audience would be made to believe this. Her lyrics writer, Marina Tucaković, mentioned many times that “whatever she wrote for Ceca, was a success with the audience”. Therefore, Ceca was not perceived as a regular, professional singer who was expected to have a hit song, in order to be popular on the top-ten charts. For years, Ceca was perceived as someone who was telling an authentic story of herself, *something great as such* – a woman with a cursed, glamorous but tragic, shiny and miserable destiny - a Serbian heroine of transitional times. Out of 62 participants in my research who were asked to give their opinion in their capacity as listeners, 54 of them named Ceca as the most remarkable female figure of turbo-folk scene since the beginning of the nineties. Even those of them who expressed strong disapproval of turbo-folk music production in general paid tribute to Ceca's ability to impose herself as the ultimate and superior media personality, whose glory prevailed over other celebrities in the Serbian context. On the other hand, we have to take into consideration that Ceca's success was 1) the trend-setter in many aspects of the development of female stage character, i.e singer in Serbia. 2) an indicator of viable modes of production of

femininity, supported and sanctioned by particular social, cultural political and economic circumstances.

4.3. Conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter was to introduce the context in which new paradigms of femininity were created within the public space of popular music production after the break-up of Yugoslavia. It is important to point out that the break-up of Yugoslavia resulted in some structural changes of the principles of production, marketing and consumption of popular music. As the concepts of state, statehood, and nationhood (as main principals of the communal organisation in the region of former Yugoslavia), changed after 1991, mainstream popular music production also became subject to many modifications, and transformations. The new paradigms of femininity became not only a reflection of the post-socialist renegotiations of popular culture, genres and the like. They also became one of the marketing, ideological, and constitutive parts of production of popular music in Serbia, as they proved to be one of the main commodities that could be produced, sold and reproduced on the popular music market, as a significant economic branch in post-socialist Serbia, which is aligned with general positioning of women's resources on labour and political market in post-socialist countries.

In terms of ideological contextualisation of turbo-folk gender constructions, women's symbolic resources reproduced through the pop-music market are a commodity shaped by a combination of particular socio-political contextualisation of the concept of nation(s) or community, and the demands of post-Yugoslav forms of market economies in Serbia. While previous chapters showed that while, in theory, the representation, marketisation and economic manipulation of female bodies/images/subject positions came into the front line of the public sphere during periods of dramatic social change, this chapter showed the main trajectories of how the development of certain music genres intertwined with the development of post-Yugoslav paradigms of femininity in popular culture.

After explaining briefly the local political, social and cultural circumstances of the emergence of turbo-folk and its implications, I have tried to show the lines of the transformation of the dominant role model of popular music female star from the late eighties until the

beginning of the nineties turbo-folk era, using some of the most outstanding examples. A few points emerged: in the period before the break-up of Yugoslavia, the most popular female stars, epitomized by Lepa Brena and others who originated as kafana singers, worked hard to create a fictional, fairy tale stage image. Their stage characters, which were a materialization of the popular image of the star as a mysterious woman was a stage identity that incorporated very few details from the star's "real biography", or lifestyle (see Dyer 1998). In other words, as Luković points out, entertainers were still under the close watch of the "higher" forces in the state apparatus, and often sanctioned by them for the reasons of public morality (Luković 1989). However, the renegotiation of this situation started already with the enterprise of "urbanization" of the music performances within NCFM. The further modernization of NCFM, which resulted in the emergence of the production of the *turbo-folk* genre, style, concept and above all stars however, did not mean the introduction of cultural plurality in the context of popular culture. It rather meant an erasure of the plurality of cultural identities, breaking with the concept of "village culture", or a village-to-city transitional culture, which suggested a marginalized, "innocent" character with a strong tendency for creating an all-Serbian ethno-national "stage", with women who would appeal to everybody's gaze and collective social fantasies of an objectified and desirable woman.

The turbo-folk era has brought a sort of radicalization of the position of performer and their performances, and what they represent in the social context. The core turbo-folk stars, such as Ceca Ražnatović, worked toward erasure of the line between what the spectators perceive as their stage character and their real lives, as they worked on the biographization of their performances. A singer was no longer a performer, entertainer, or pop-celebrity but had become a wizard, an all-mighty character, somebody who represents herself on the stage, her own world-view, without the idea of performing, or creating fictional characters. On the one hand, the biographies of entertainers were becoming de-mystified, damasked and the stars were becoming proud of coming from the "root of the bottom", as the rural/urban conflict took on a different form in the beginning of the nineties compared to the Yugoslav period. This means that due to the rapid ethno-nationalisation of each of the former republics of Yugoslavia, the old antagonisms between the rural and urban became marginalized by the problems of ethno-national

conflict between various territories and communities.¹³³. On the other hand, women's stage identities were not any more just associated with the subject position of an entertainer, or just a woman who had found her "respectable place" in society. They were constructed as social heroes, winners, successful and rich men and women, whose singing career was just a reflection of being successfully gendered in a newly re-constructed society, a new "imagined" community. Discussing the phenomenon of stardom, Dyer argues that we should think "in terms of the relationships...between stars and specific instabilities, ambiguities and contradictions in culture", by relating the concept of stardom to the Weberian concept of political charisma, according to which "the charismatic appeal is effective especially when the social order is uncertain, unstable and ambiguous and when the charismatic figure or group offers a value, order or stability to counterpoise it" (Dyer 1998: 30-31; see Weber 1968).. Similarly, in Yugoslavia and later Serbia, the popular music stars epitomized some sort of "solution", or articulation of the actual cultural conflicts and social frustrations. The stars were no longer lonely picaresque figures coming to the capital city, conquering the space, implicitly representing marginalized, provincial folks who "made it in the city". They emerged as representing themselves as totally and ultimately urbanized, since they were not just "adjusting" to the city imaginary, but, on the contrary, were re-writing the city imaginary, transforming it into an abstract, all-inclusive, all community space, which no longer fell into the dichotomy of rural/urban, but into other dichotomies, such as individual/community, national/international, Eastern/Western, heteronormative/non-normative, Yugoslav/non-Yugoslav, Serbian/non-Serbian, and the like. Such a move in the construction of music stars images has been connected to the need to merge the demands of a market economy and political and cultural "appropriateness".

The "urbanization" of the performers' images helped the unification of the Serbian popular culture mainstream, enabled turbo-folk stars to verify their status as popular culture stars and national heroines, "mothers of the nation", the "queens" of the social elite. In addition, "biographisation" means that they have lost the mechanism of *stage irony*, and the element of distance as in the performances of Lepa Brena (as described in Chapter 3). The lack of irony in their performing strategies coincided with the general image of these stars as rich and influential,

¹³³ The rural /urban conflict in the nineties in Serbia did not disappear but took on a different shape. In terms of popular culture and representation, in sphere of popular music and cinema, it seems that the concept of the rural was not represented as inferior any more (which used to be the case in Yugoslav period), but rather it was incorporated into a big homogenizing narrative of national unity, usually situated symbolically in the scenery of the capital.

adding to the overall notion of their stage identities as pictures of women's social success. Both of these processes reified the politicization of women's stage identities or a "mainstreaming of women" in popular music production. A woman on the stage, who claims to *represent herself, her real life* (biographization) and who tends to show herself as a city girl, who dominates the space of the capital (urbanization completed), gains an unwritten legitimacy of promoting herself as an all-inclusive, woman's role model, who does her femininity, or gender, in a socially desirable way in a particular community. By doing this, women's stage identities are contributing to what Edensor calls the construction of "the matrix of national identity", since they are participating in the informal, everyday reproduction of ordinary signifiers and reminders of nation. There are, however, still relevant, for they are spread through the powerful mass media, consumed on a daily basis by the vast majority of people in the community. Hence, "biographisation" and "urbanization" were two initial, umbrella processes in performative strategies of turbo-folk that enabled the construction of "turbo-folk-informed" stage identities in Serbian popular culture. Furthermore, as the next two chapters will show, heteronormative subject positions were portrayed by most of the famous Serbian female turbo-folk stars, and the topoi, or repetitive forms of such performances, reinforced heteronormative communication with the community at the moment when the overall notion of national groupings became dominant over appeals for identification with other types of community. According to Edensor, what is usually missing from academia and established theories on nationalism is a taking account of the performative dimensions of the everyday and a "sense of the unspectacular, contemporary production of national identity through popular culture and in everyday life" (Edensor 1998: 12). Since this thesis is attempting to outline a framework for exploring the relationship between individuals and the community within popular culture, and popular articulation of women's identities, I will observe how the performances of heteronormativity on women's part encode the patterns of such relationship.

CHAPTER 5

Music Performances and Heteronormativity: Turbo-Folk as a One-Woman-Story

I discussed in Chapter 4 the early manifestations and challenges of the turbo-folk construction of femininity. In this chapter I will focus more intensely on the core of the social constructedness of turbo-folk femininities or stage identities in Serbian popular culture. I will predominantly examine a token example of one character of this scene: Svetlana “Ceca” Ražnatović. Ceca is a popular performer who became a Lolita-like starlet. She has been a controversial figure due to her involvement with various criminals from the Belgrade underground and especially her marriage to Željko Ražnatović Arkan, a war commander accused of war crimes in the Yugoslav wars. He was an influential and controversial public figure because of his connections with political elites as much as with Serbian criminal circles. During the nineties he was considered to be a boss of Belgrade criminal gangs. Arkan also had political ambitions, so that he also founded the political party called Stranka Srpskog Jedinstva (The Serbian Unity Party). As will be discussed later, his image as a powerful man and his power in the real Serbian context has a lot to do with the construction of Ceca’s image of a glamorous woman loyal to a powerful man with the reputation of the “community boss”, or a “real Serbian hero” (see *Glas Javnosti* 2000).

The public image of Ceca’s life is that of a woman who gained her power by replicating and utilizing the hegemonic, heteronormative cultural codes in the Serbian context. These codes have been intertwined with narratives of communal ethno-national identity since the nineties. Her life narrative seems to materialize what often can be seen in turbo-folk verbal and visual stage performances: violence, sado-masochistic poetics, an assertive confirmation of particular communal identities, values, and hierarchies, and compulsory hierarchical gender relations. My analysis of the construction and self-construction of Ceca’s femininity shows in a most vigorous way how femininity which has been produced and constructed by discourses and practices of

racism and sexism continue to (re)enforce hegemonic relations of heteronormative power despite the additional cultural and sub-cultural influences and despite the changing political climate. The objective of this chapter, as well as of the whole thesis, is to unpack this phenomenon and show how particular conventions of the turbo-folk genre depict various symbols of national identity and compulsory heterosexuality in the context of Serbia.

In this chapter, I will deal with the phenomenon of the totalitarian structures within the sphere of turbo-folk as a (re)enforcement of social homogeneity. Commenting on the work of Marina Tucaković, a famous lyrics-writer who wrote a number of songs for Ceca and other singers, the popular performer Džej Ramadanovski said, “It is not that anyone can get a good song from Marina just like that; to get it from her, one has to have quite a personal ‘story’ behind them” (*Sav taj folk*, October 2004). That is why, as Džej concludes, only Ceca and a few other singers can get good songs from Marina. Knowing Ceca’s personal history, we can conclude that such a biography ought to contain a range of controversies. Marina Tucaković herself gave a number of statements in which she underlined Ceca’s personal charisma, which clearly indicated that some singers are believed to be more successful in the business than others. Within professional music circles, the public image of a singer is meant to be a “guarantee” of the successful placement of a song. The participants interviewed for this research often expressed the opinion that the public belief in Ceca’s personal strength prevails over the admiration for other singers. In this chapter I will analyze a few examples of Ceca’s visual and verbal self-presentations and the mechanisms encoded in these performances. I argue that despite the fact that Ceca’s stage identity seemingly epitomizes a contemporary, emancipated glamorous woman with a certain power, it is still a transmitter of heteronormative power relations.

5.1. Ceca as Community Role Model

In this chapter my method relies on a semiotic approach to the analysis of cultural phenomena. It deals more with the denotation of particular cultural codes involved in Ceca’s performances, contextualized within ongoing social processes, than with a direct ethnographic approach to data (see van Zoonen 1994). In that respect, I will use the two key conceptual terms – heteronormativity and community – in the analysis of turbo-folk performances. As explained in

Chapter 1, community is understood as a “symbolically constructed system of values, norms, and moral codes which provides a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its members” (Cohen 1995). The type of community which became the most influential unifying principle in the post-Yugoslav period in public space in Serbia is the Serbian ethno-national community. In addition, I define heteronormativity as a set of norms imposed on an individual by the community based on heterosexual exclusivity.

The connection between various songs and cultural codes inscribed in Ceca’s performances, on the one hand, and the concepts of the community and heteronormativity, on the other, is not directly readable, like in the cases of non-mainstream patriotic popular music production (see Chapter 4). However, this connection is readable from the interpretation of particular signs and codes of communal belonging and the heteronormative images of gender relations conveyed in Ceca’s videos and lyrics. These codes were shaped by the existing hegemonic power relations in Serbian social context at the time: the context of hegemonic nationalist discourses and practices associated with the hierarchical construction of womanhood and manhood in public and private space. As I will show, various images from Ceca’s videos have particular cultural connotations. For instance, images of a young and vigorous woman’s body filmed in a recognizable landscape or interior correspond with the general notion of turbo-folk singers as “genuine”, “Serbian” women, represented on TV as domestic popular culture heroines, reflected the frantic social desire for the “authentic” Serbian cultural space in 1990 and 1991¹³⁴. In other videos, the construction of manipulative gender relations through the paradigms of social power and material goods and the many signifiers that appear within these images evoke the dominant values of repressive social reality at the time, also embedded in the narratives of the “real” defenders of the Serbian community and a “real” man and woman in these circumstances.

As Theresa de Lauretis points out, gender is a (self)representation – it (re)produces itself through the institutions of media, education, art and popular culture. Popular culture not only constructs but also reproduces gender as a social reality through its representation, as popular culture emerges within the set of complicated political and social preferences and always within

¹³⁴ These images were also in a striking opposition to typical fashionable appearances of pop and rock female singers from the Yugoslav period (for example, Zana Nimani, Doris Dragović, Slađana Milošević, Anja Rupel). The first turbo-folk singers performed women who could be seen at the most ordinary types of parties and celebrations, typical girls from the neighborhood who just sing in order to “entertain the folk”.

a given context (de Lauretis 1987). The studies of women's stage identities in popular performances are an important part of the self-(re)construction of popular culture forms in the context of the socio-political culture within which these images are reproduced. My analysis deals with the ways in which gender reproduces itself in a given context and how national unity reinforces itself through popular culture. The examples I present will be analyzed in reference to the commodification/objectification of women's stage identities and heteronormativity of women's performances in social context. These two aspects of the discursive analytical approach to the visual and verbal performance of Ceca's image will guide us to a better understanding of the (self)construction of Ceca's personal story and her iconic status in Serbian public life. Consequently, this approach will reveal the connections between the images of heteronormativity in Serbian culture and the project of nationalism that has been ongoing in Serbia since the eighties, and particularly, early nineties. Ceca's career can be observed as a sort of development trajectory, so that we can examine the way in which certain cultural significations in Ceca's performances have been transforming over the years. My adoption of this diachronic approach was inspired partially by the research of Žarana Papić, the Serbian sociologist and feminist author who examined Ceca's bodily performances as a signifier of the relationship between her career and the rise of nationalism in Serbia. My research employs the diachronic approach in order to reflect on the social and historical contextualisation of engendered nationalist processes in Serbia. Unlike Papić's work, my research deals not only with the representation of Ceca's body, but also with the representation of heteronormative gender relations implied in her videos and songs lyrics.

The first set of examples that I am introducing comes from the early years of Ceca's career – the years in which she seemed to be just one of the new, young, good looking faces expected to “last” for a couple of years and then give way to another group of younger and more provocative new-comers on the popular music scene. One of Ceca's early interviews, published in the popular magazine *Radio-TV Revija* in 1991, indicates just that. Ceca's answers to the typical questions mostly reflect the typical answers of a young starlet from that period. She is interested in entertaining the folk. She is romantic and interested in an ordinary love relationship. In general, her answers tend to position her as an “ordinary” girl who comes from a province and who is courageous and interested in success, yet she still strives to keep the image of a simple, next-door girl (Ilić 1991: 16-17). This issue of the magazine also features Ceca on its cover.

More precisely, it is a photo of Ceca in a swimming suit standing on a luxurious yacht. At first sight, the cover itself does not seem to show anything new – it was a fairly common practice at that time for magazines to show almost-nude images of young, attractive women. However, in this case there was one curiosity. At that time, magazine covers usually presented images of young actresses, models, or winners of beauty contests, that is, girls whose bodies were the primary tools of their performance and either openly or secretly their main *purpose* for the eyes of the audience. These pictures usually revealed highly attractive and sexualized images of female bodies. Singers, artists or well-known actors were not depicted in such a position very often. This would indicate that the cover sent a strong message to the audience – Ceca’s primary tool for her success was her young and vigorous body.

This cover, undoubtedly, contributed to the commodification of the representation of Ceca’s life and her subject position as much as the vivid media coverage of the celebration of Ceca’s eighteenth birthday which took place in the same year (*Ceca Music* 2008). While the cover of the magazine emphasized Ceca’s superior sex-appeal, the public celebration of her eighteenth birthday also promoted an image of Ceca as the personification of *youth*: a desirable and well-known young, beautiful girl who had an advantage in relation to others since her beauty and young age were her tremendous social capital. She was popular but her time was still “to come”.

5.2. Hetero-Pathos and the Commodification of Youth and Beauty

Beauty and youth, as two main aspects of Ceca’s “commodifying value” on the imagined gendered market in Serbia, were two main axes of the representative practices that produced Ceca’s image in two early videos of her songs. The lyrics of these songs fully supported this image. The first one, called “Miki”, depicts a young girl as the subject of a nice, wild, innocent young love and highlights some lascivious and ambiguous words and expressions, which retrospectively, describe her first love experience:

Onoga dana kad smo se sreli,
Beše nam jasno ljubav smo hteli,
I nikog nismo videli mi,
Samo smo bili, samo smo bili, ja i ti

The day we met
we understood we wanted love,
And we saw nothing but us,
There were only me and you

Zvao si me Mala Liki,
A ja tebe samo Miki,
Brojali smo poljupce,
U minutu sto, sto sto,
To, Miki, to,
To Miki, to

You called me “little Liki”
And I called you just “Miki”,
We counted our kisses,
A hundred of them per minute,
Do it, Miki, do it
Do it, Miki, do it!

Naide tako to ludo doba,
Kada se želi ljubav do groba,
Naidu tako godine lude,
Kad usne žele, kad usne žele da ljube

There comes a crazy age
When one wants to try loving till death
There comes such an age
When the lips want nothing but to kiss¹³⁵
(1990)

In this excerpt of the song, which contains cheerful and even humorous tones, the female subject is clearly portrayed as a heroine of a love story who is extremely young, who loves with all her heart or who is not even “young” but “little ”(little Liki). We cannot fully imagine how young the girl from the song was when she was kissing her lover. Therefore, the young singer Ceca, who had just turned 18 in real life at that point, was singing about a character that was supposedly even younger than she. Such a representation gives the strong impression of her youth as intertwined with the fantasies of an exciting, “immature” encounter with love and sexual life. This imagery contributed to the popularity and effective video presentation of this song. On the other hand, if we pay attention to the culmination of the song or the final moment of the refrain in which the female subject is practically screaming in exaltation “do it!”, there is the strong suggestion of sexual fulfillment or a performance of a sexual act, which is blurred and challenged by the previous line in which the female subject “talks” about kisses. This opens up a space for a twofold reading of the discursive meaning of the refrain, which includes both “innocent” and “lascivious” connotations.

However, what is unambiguously outlined is the visual image presented in the video made for this song. The video suggests a poetics of *sexual commodification* as the main principle of the performance and verbal and visual production. Produced in 1991, this video replicates some worldwide, well-known trends in producing videos of female performers, although, it came a bit later in relation to worldwide trends of pop-production. In other words, watching Ceca’s

¹³⁵ Author of music: D. Ivanković; author of lyrics: S. Spasić

video, the viewers must realize that it quite similarly follows Madonna's performance in her video "Like a Virgin", in which Madonna also displayed herself on the deck of a boat.¹³⁶ This video also follows quite closely other popular performances from the period of the 1980s such as those of Sabina, Sandra, Samantha Fox and other sexy show business performers. These starlets' popularity was based on stunning photo spreads in popular youth magazines and provocative videos in which the singers were dressed in swimming suits and posing on popular beaches. In this way, the career of a singer is transformed into the career of a model. Ceca's "Miki" video was not aligned with the trendy production that dominated in the beginning of the nineties, represented by Madonna's provocative videos such as "Vogue", "Justify my Love" or "Express Yourself," or by the British music band "Eurythmics", not to mention the glamorous and epic videos of some other highly popular British or American performers and bands, e.g. "November Rain" by "Guns'n'Roses" or Sinead O'Connor's "Nothing Compares to You". These videos were like small films, done with quality visual technology and expensive scenery.¹³⁷ Ceca's visual production can be contextualized within the aesthetics of the mid-eighties, the production of cheerful, carefree and highly eroticized images of female bodies accompanied by signifiers of overemphasized girlish femininity: high heels, big earrings, big hair, big smiles and lots of cleavage.¹³⁸

The first shot of Ceca's video displays a romantic picture of a sunset, then the recognizable landscape of Usće, a popular spot in the city of Belgrade where the River Sava flows into the Danube River. At the same time, the viewer sees Ceca dressed up in high heels and big earrings, sitting in a casual yet very camera-aware manner on a bench. At the same time, Ceca's image suggests that of a city girl, but also a girl who is still "simple" and oriented enough toward the male gaze, designed so as to please the male audience. Her appearance as well as her outfit are strikingly lacking in any detail or allusion of any kind that might signify her belonging to a city sub-culture or any particular identity. There is no additional content that might denote Ceca as somebody who is anything more than a good-looking young girl dressed in an outfit typical for a first date with a male companion. Further on, the video contains longer and shorter shots of Ceca sitting in a sexy posture in the same outfit on the front of a boat, looking at a

¹³⁶ See Madonna's video for the song "Like a virgin" at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJ1Q_cZTYGI

¹³⁷ For instance see the video for the songs "November Rain" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bwu7ixmQk0c&feature=fvst> and "Vogue" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQDFEv72e3U>

¹³⁸ See the official video for Ceca's song "To, Miki, to" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ssRUBFLMKo>

camera which is fixed on the back side of the boat. The boat moves across the Danube and Sava at the place of their confluence. Even the familiarity of the location (the wild and beautiful trees along the banks of these two rivers and the contours of the Belgrade fortress) alludes to the warm and sweet familiarity of the whole scene. In various sequences of the video, Ceca's top is shown in such a position that it reveals her shoulders and almost uncovers her breast. In other sequences, she wears her top "properly", while some shots show her adjusting it into proper position, suggesting her erotic play with the camera and the spectators. While singing the refrain, especially the part in which she utters those ambiguous verses "Do it, Miki, do it", Ceca is making innocent and half-confused facial expressions, suggesting a young and inexperienced femininity.

In this video, the director does not express any wish to narrate or suggest any cultural contextualisation, except to display a young, healthy-looking girl singing about a first love and a first sexual encounter. Her face with a big smile and reddish, protruding cheek-bones and vivid smiling eyes are there to signify the young singer as an ordinary, simple, beautiful girl from next-door. The lyrics also seem very loosely connected with this visual representation. The only relevant detail is the fact that the lyrics and the melody suggest a cheerful, careless tone, which justifies the constant smile on Ceca's face. The absence of any other scenery or protagonists in this video clearly marks the purpose of this video, which is to provide the spectator with a pleasurable view of a female body, reworked in a way that clearly commodifies Ceca's look in accordance to the mainstream trends of femininity. While this video provides a voyeuristic pleasure, it is still hard to speak about the calculated play in the video that would count as voyeuristic pleasure of the audience, such as play with the narcissistic or fetishistic connotations of the messages encoded in the text. In order to observe the beginning of this tendency, I will examine another video of Ceca's, "Pustite me da ga vidim" (Let me see him), which was made in the same period and with very similar iconography and scenery.

However, the tone and connections between the lyrics and the image are different.¹³⁹ In the video made for this song, Ceca is dressed in a way which is amazingly similar to her previous appearance: tight trousers and top, high heels and big earrings. However, there is a crucial difference. This time, her outfit is much more glamorous. Her top is actually a corset and her white shoes and gold earrings suggest that the tone of her message is much more serious,

¹³⁹ See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2ss32Zk3Nk>

glamorous and filled with other types of feelings. This time, Ceca also wears fashionable sunglasses, which cover her sad eyes. Her slow walk down a countryside road also suggests a serious and glamorous tone of grief. The lyrics of the song are about an unfortunate love – a great absolute first love in which the woman suffers over losing her lover. There is a sharp contrast between the way Ceca is dressed and the scenery around her. Her appearance in white high heels and fashionable clothes on a village road and in the countryside landscape creates an impression of her as standing out in the simple and wild landscape.

The picture of a glamorous woman who suffers despite her glamorous, kitschy and wealthy look underlines the romantic and sentimental picture of suffering for love. This type of suffering is known from the genre of love romances and trivial literature and described and mocked in the novel *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert.¹⁴⁰ The heroine of the novel, inspired by the popular romances she has read, is convinced that suffering is much more noble and pleasant if it takes place in some “rich and glamorous interior with glamour and fortune, rather than in some simple, poor conditions” (Flaubert 1995). Such a fetishistic, pleasurable, self-imposed grief caused by unrequited love set the foundation for two basic principles of Ceca’s credo of performance and her public image. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on a woman who is outstandingly beautiful, accomplishing all stereotypes of heteronormative conventions. Each appearance is calculated to underline her eroticized, almost pornographic femininity. On the other hand, starting from this video, all video production strove to construct an image similar to Ceca’s masochistic femininity as that of a glamorous, rich, powerful woman or an extraordinary heroine who is subject to an eternal unfortunate love for a merciless man who does not deserve her but whom she cannot resist. In addition, this figure of a merciless man is a personification of the unwritten rules of belonging to a community and its hierarchical gender settings. In a way, this situation can be understood as an evolution of the previous patterns conceived in the period of NCFM, according to which there were prescribed gender roles calculated in order to preserve the concepts of male-dominated marriage and a family subject to the expectations of a larger community. The period of the nineties brought about the

¹⁴⁰ *Madame Bovary* by the French novelist, Gustave Flaubert, is one of the landmarks of 19th century European literature. One of the main novelties of this book is that it ironically treats the problems of taste as a marker of class, i.e. in an artistic sense it treats the topic of cultural capital, expressed much later in philosophical terms in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1992). In addition, *Madam Bovary* is a book about gender dimension of developing certain taste through the consumption of products of popular literature and especially, developing a sentimental, uncritical attitude toward the representation of love, gender relations, social status, and the like.

radicalization of this concept. A woman must stay by her merciless male lover, no matter how cruel or abusive he is or even if he was involved in serious social delinquency or crime. In this way, the communal unity was indirectly imposed over any other principle of legal or social norms, which in a given context can become a vehicle for Billig's "banal nationalism" (Billig 1995), or Edensor's dynamics of everyday nationalist confirmation (Edensor 2002).

Seemingly, from the perspective of 1991, these conventions did not look tremendously different from MTV video productions. The videos of Madonna, Cher or Shania Twain similarly worked on building the voyeuristic communicative channel between a fetishised female body and a gendered spectator. The narcissism of heteronormativity prevailed in Ceca's videos in a more or less clear and straightforward manner. However, her further locatedness within relations of power in her public visibility and her "acted" performances in her videos took a different course in the years to come. The commodification of Ceca's womanhood or femininity acquired additional elements that were conditioned and constructed in accordance with the ongoing social and historical circumstances, intertwined with the need for particular gender representations in the media.

Other singers exploited similar conventions of representation. Mira Škorić, Dragana Mirković, Jasna Milenković "Jami" i Snežana Babić "Sneki" were the most exposed examples in the turbo-folk scene in the early nineties.¹⁴¹ Half-naked and erotically coded female bodies were at the center of their videos, accompanied by very low-tech scenery and very simple melodic lines and lyrics. At that point, male models were still absent from the picture, although the merciless male figure was already present in the lyrics. Short skirts, long and sexy legs, heavy make-up, bare shoulders and half-exposed breasts were the fetishised signifiers that were "common place" for these videos. They were not equally exposed in each case but still omnipresent as the main code of communication with audiences.

5.3. The Fetishization of Sexual Difference

Before I begin the discussion about which way and why the media construction of Ceca's

¹⁴¹ See the examples of the videos of Jasna Milenković Jami at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoiU6i9P96M> and of Snežana Babić Sneki at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PZyYvIf5SI>

image was interrelated with the “nationalization” of gender relations in Serbia since the nineties, I will make a few theoretical remarks on the representation of femininity. First, I will draw attention to the concept of difference and its representation as Luce Irigaray has outlined in *The Sex Which is Not One* (Irigaray 1985). One of her main postulates is that the concept of woman has been clearly interrelated with the phenomenon of representational fetishism. She says that *being a woman* in the Western tradition actually represents the relation of difference or the state of being excluded from the centers of power in Western culture. Thus, the power of hegemonic masculinity situates the woman as the *negative other* in relation to the subject of masculinity. Moreover, Irigaray establishes that sexuality, cultural representation and politics are intertwined; similarly, language and *text* are gendered and sexualized. Drawing on these premises, Irigaray emphasizes that women’s experiences and the feminine as such, are distinct from the masculine and presuppose a challenge to the dominant patriarchal order. Representation of woman is the representation of something that is different from male subjectivity. The feminine itself means a representation of *diference*, plurality and autoeroticism. What is significant is that which is expressed through the channels of communication. According to Irigaray, woman can be represented only through male dominated language and only through/for male eyes (Irigaray 1985). I introduce these theoretical views here in order to discuss further the conventions of commodification and fetishistic play that underlie the representation of femininity in Ceca’s videos. This insight allows me to show how Ceca’s performances correspond with the idea of representational difference or that of being excluded from the dominant order and why, in the end, such a phenomenon does not challenge the patriarchal order but rather remains located within it.

Drawing on Irigaray’s theories, Sheila Whiteley argues that women’s images in popular culture representations are embedded in stereotypes of femininity that are the negations of the stereotypes of masculinity:

That these stereotypical representations originate in the myths constructed by men about women accounts for the dichotomous pairing of active/passive, positive/negative that traditionally frames the fundamental couple, man/woman. Within popular music then, the assumption that opposites attract provides both an explicit and implicit understanding of what is both absent and present ... As such stereotypes do not only situate the body as the seat of subjectivity, they equally situate it as the target of power and social control (Whiteley 2005: 122).

After thus conceptualizing the problem of representation of stereotypes in popular

culture, Whiteley discusses the way the British pop singer Annie Lenox subverts the traditional codes of femininity. In the case of Lenox, it seems clear that the performer is playing with the elements of masculine/feminine/androgynous signifiers, turning them into quite different symbols: this is a woman with short orange hair, manly clothes, bright red lipstick, and an air of sexual ambiguity.

However, it is hard to say whether the performances of female turbo-folk stars can be read with the help of the same tools. The difference, apparently, can be deconstructed (and reconstructed) through representation in two ways, as a subversion of the male/female hierarchy and as a reinforcement of this hierarchical binary opposition. Ceca also plays with the femininity experienced as a difference, but in a way that does not subvert gender stereotypes but rather underlines the male-dominated gender dichotomy.

Bearing these insights in mind, I will discuss Ceca's visual/verbal/musical expressions, briefly comparing them not only to those of Annie Lenox but also to one of Madonna's most controversial videos, "Justify my Love."¹⁴² Sheila Whiteley also analyzes this video. On the one hand, she argues, the images of Madonna certainly play with the stereotypes of femininity, the instrumentalization of women's bodies, the titillation of the male-defined gaze of the viewer and, most importantly, the exploitation of images of female sexual subordination. On the other hand, the very composition, contextualization, and representation of quite unconventional, hybrid and transgressive gender images, according to Whiteley, challenges the traditional division of gender roles and the traditional notion of femininity as it is represented in the media or popular culture. In Whiteley's words:

At the same time, the 'use' of pornography cannot be separated from its history of female suppression. The images are questionable and, for many feminists, objectionable in their association with sexuality and power. However, as suggested earlier, any interpretation of Madonna rests upon an acceptance or a denial of her sense of irony. If butch women and feminine men have attracted hostility because of the rigidity of gender definitions, then the video at least challenges sexual repression and, at the same time, forces the viewer to struggle over meaning" (Whiteley 2005: 149).

This "struggle over meaning", "irony" and "distance" in relation to the content could be interpreted as useful in deconstructing the notorious objectification of the female body. For this reason the case of Madonna, and one of the interpretations of her videos was mentioned here¹⁴³.

¹⁴² See Madonna's video for the song "Justify my love"(1990) at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wclK2zYOJo4>

¹⁴³ There is a number of interpretations of Madonna's songs and videos, for example see: Vernalis 1998; Kaplan 1993; Sexton 1993; Fiske 1989).

Since Madonna's videos mostly played on erotic provocation and identity politics, we can use the experience of "reading" her videos in order to discuss the presence of "liberating" elements of turbo-folk performances. Moving to the case of Ceca, I will examine how Ceca's performances employ a similar representational commodification, autoeroticism, and the images of male/female hierarchical relations. It is not important only that these elements appeared. The *ways* in which they were employed is also significant.

Here, I will analyze briefly two of Ceca's notable videos/songs which were made in different years, but which are, however interconnected on several levels. These examples indicate a conscious intention on the part of the authors of these videos to maintain a continuity of contextual meaning. The first one was released in 1995 shortly after Ceca and Željko Ražnatović "Arkan" announced their engagement. At that point, Arkan was already known worldwide as the leader of a paramilitary unit accused of brutal war crimes in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁴⁴ Publicly, Arkan appeared as a successful and rich businessman, a politician, the former leader of the football fans' club of the "Crvena zvezda" team, a family man, the owner of many business enterprises, real estate and sports associations, the leader of a right-wing political party, and the respectable commander of Serbian paramilitary troops engaged in the wars in former Yugoslavia. However, he was also known for being a former criminal who was arrested many times and sentenced for armed robberies in Western Europe and wanted by Interpol. After the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, as already mentioned, Arkan was considered to be a Serbian underground boss, a man with a big illegal influence and well-connected to the ruling state and nationalist elites, including the police, in addition to being responsible for many war crimes in former Yugoslavia, especially in Croatia and Bosnia.

Arkan himself fueled his own image as a dangerous, cruel and powerful man, a real Serb

¹⁴⁴ Many facts from the biography of Željko Ražnatović Arkan are known to the public thanks to the number of articles about him in printed form or on the internet (see more about him at: <http://www.kevo.com/profile/arkan>). Still, many periods of his life appear to be highly controversial. For most of the Serbian public, the facts are mediated through beliefs, rumors and unofficial accounts. He was assassinated before a major political change took place in Serbia and, therefore, was never forced to answer to a legal body either in Serbia or abroad for his criminal offences in the nineties. The public in Serbia also never learned who officially organized his murder or whether he was to be officially extradited to stand trial for war crimes in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. In nationalist circles in Serbia, he was considered to be a hero and a savior of Serbs outside Serbia. The more liberal and anti-war- oriented population saw him as a criminal and a warlord who abused his power and position in the war, leading "dirty" military actions for Serbian military elites that violated human rights and managed to become extremely rich and powerful in the process. However, Ceca's image is tightly related to his image as a controversial, violent, omnipotent, masculine figure that is at the same time believed to be a villain and a man to be obeyed, provoking both fear and secret admiration for his power. His marriage to one of the most desired women in Serbia symbolically contributed to his image of the "boss" of the Serbian community.

nationalist, and a patriarchal husband and father. He claimed to be a “real Serbian man”. His marriage to a young, sexy, “porn-like” and “obedient” public figure such as Ceca, who still seemed to be unreachable in the fantasy of many men and women, helped solidify that special image for him.¹⁴⁵ Although Ceca was very popular already before her marriage to Arkan, there were a lot of indicators that after the exclusive and sensational news about their engagement Ceca’s status in the public space was dramatically elevated even further. Regardless of much speculation about a possible romantic relationship between Ceca and Arkan even before that moment, the official announcement of the engagement highlighted two new aspects of Ceca’s status. First, it meant that as of that moment she was not available anymore as a young, desirable woman on the marriage market. What is more, she was to become the wife of an extremely influential man who seemed to be totally above the law. Second, it also meant that she was to become a woman with both a glamorous and dark destiny, a woman who belonged to someone burdened with a heavy and controversial past, marked not only by accusations of war crimes and criminal activities but also by several previous marriages and nine children as a result of these marriages. Ceca, who was 21 at the time, thus married a man who was twice her age, a symbol of masculine, patriarchal, unlimited power. He was a personification of the traditional model of a superior warrior-lover-father, whose significant other is more of a “conquest” for him than a partner. Taking all of these “pros” and “cons” into account, Ceca’s image as a turbo-folk beauty was renegotiated in her performances, her videos, the lyrics of her songs and her public statements.

The iconography and scenery of their wedding presented them as a “properly” gendered and community-coded Serbian celebrity couple.¹⁴⁶ The first part of the wedding was performed in Ceca’s home village with all the traditional customs of a Serbian countryside wedding celebration, reflecting a strong wish to be associated with village folk customs and practices. The main part of the celebration took the place in the luxurious Hotel Intercontinental in Belgrade

¹⁴⁵ Arkan himself used the power of the media to deliberately support his public image as a frightening war commander. It was known that he sometimes even posed for foreign photographers who were taking pictures on the battlefields in Bosnia, for instance. There is a famous photo of him and his soldiers taken during the fighting in Croatia in 1991 showing Arkan holding a small live tiger, the mascot of his paramilitary troops, the “Serbian Volunteer Guard,” nicknamed “Tigrovi” (Tigers). Photo by Ron Haviv: <http://www.photoarts.com/haviv/bosnia/image/arkan.jpeg>)

¹⁴⁶ The footage of the most interesting parts of Ceca and Arkan’s wedding, commented on by the famous journalist M.M Minimaks, and their appearance on the show “Maxovizija” on TV Pink in 1995 can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxHY6w4HNjU&feature=related>

with royal-like glamour. In the first part of the wedding, Arkan appeared dressed in a Montenegrin national folk costume, while during the church ceremony he was dressed in the uniform of a Serbian officer from World War One. In this way he underlined not only his Serbian and Montenegrin origin but he also paid tribute to this notion by putting strong emphasis on the historical ideas of military traditions of both of these national histories. These symbols also signified his claim to the *right to representing* both Serbia and Montenegro. This meant the unity of state parts, since Serbia and Montenegro were two parts of the official state of Yugoslavia at that moment. After the wedding and despite her youth, Ceca was mostly represented as an experienced, mature woman who had a significant “story” behind her according to her fellow singer Džej Ramadanovski. This new aura of hers, with the help of the media, contributed to her image as a strong woman who suffers because of a man. The song writers who worked for Ceca exploited this image, as was evident in songs like “Idi dok si mlad” (Go while you are still young) from 1995.

The lyrics of this song are followed and supported by the narrative sequences of the video. In brief, the video tells the story of a rich girl who meets a poor but handsome guy, takes him under her protection, and obtains many goods for him. However, after a while he chases other women and leaves her, which leads her to follow him and witness his moral and material fall. The song in itself shows a bitter, disappointed view of gender relations:

Idi dok si mlad,
Dok imaš vremena za more promena,
Za let i za pad,
Za sutra ili sad, ma idi dok si mlad.
Noćas kada gosti odu,
odlazi puštam te,
dajem ti blagoslov i slobodu,
Jer pukli smo, zar ne?

Go while you are still young,
You still have plenty of time for regret,
For the flight and for the fall,
For tomorrow or for the present
Go while you are still young.
Tonight when our guests are gone,
You just leave, I am letting you go,
I am giving you blessings and freedom,
Since we're finished, aren't we?

Idi gde hoćeš,
Ljubi sve živo,
Ali ipak drži bar neki nivo,
Ne igraj žmurke, ma nismo deca,
Ja više nemam nijednog keca
u rukavu.

Go anywhere you want, and kiss around,
Still, take care of your reputation,
Don't play games with me, we are not children,
I don't know any tricks anymore.

Tako ti je to,
Od klinca napraviš princa za kajanje,
Iz voza ispadneš,

It's always like that:
You take a kid, make him a prince, and then regret,
You fall out of train,

Ostaneš čak i bez mesta za stajanje,
Poljubimo se ko odrasli,
Jer jasno nam je sve,
Pokidaj lance dok nismo srasli,
Jer pukli smo zar ne?

You lose your even a standing place,
Let us kiss now like adults,
Cause we understand everything,
Break these chains before they are too strong,
As we're finished, aren't we?¹⁴⁷

(1995)

My brief analysis of this song and video aims to show how Ceca's alleged challenge to the patriarchal order actually reinforces it despite all the representational distinctiveness and innovative elements of her videos or lyrics.

The first sequence of the video shows Ceca as a young, spoiled, rich woman sitting in the back seat of a Rolls Royce and travelling through a mountainous landscape. Shortly thereafter, a young, good-looking, wild-looking young man, a worker from the woods, appears on the road with an axe. Ceca stops the car and the young man with the axe joins her. She gives him a lift and takes him first to a hairdresser then to an exclusive shopping center. The viewer can clearly see how the savage-looking, long-haired and poor-looking guy turns into a tidy, dressed up guy in a fancy jacket, a real playboy in the style of the 1990s. During all these scenes, the viewer can see actual shops from the Sava Centar complex, which was known to be the most expensive shopping center in Belgrade in the nineties. The culmination of this ritual purchasing, through which the viewer can see how Ceca is "buying" herself a handsome guy, is the moment when Ceca gives the young man an expensive watch as the final touch of her work on his metamorphosis. This act compels him to kiss her hand, an act of ultimate obedience to Ceca as his mistress.. After receiving this gift, the man admits his final subordination to the woman, who at the moment of getting her hand kissed moves back with the expression of absolute enjoyment and satisfaction. This scene relates to a type of fetishism, almost a sado-masochistic poetics of visual representation, despite the fact that everything looks quite innocent. The sexual subtext of this scene, the problem of gender and sexual inversion, autoeroticism at play and narcissist pleasure in one's own power appears as a renegotiation of the stereotypical picture of the patriarchal, masculine dominated power relations. Instead of a rich, older man who buys the attention of a young beautiful girl, the viewer sees a young, rich woman who does the same with a young man of her age. According to this scenario, it appears as though money can *change* the rules of gender behavior. It appears as though a woman can buy male obedience if she is powerful and rich. At this moment, the whole situation appears idyllic so that the viewers cannot

¹⁴⁷ Author of the music: Aleksandar Milić Mili; author of the lyrics: Marina Tucaković

help thinking that this should be the beginning of a movie romance, a bit “inverted”, but still, conditioned by gender hierarchies.

However, it will turn out that this inversion is just a play or a simulation of something that is just an illusion in the male/female world. Namely, immediately after this scene, the narration skips a certain period in the life of these two young people and the viewer sees them at a snobbish party quarrelling, after which the young man courts another woman who is strikingly similar to Ceca (in the video she is played by Ceca’s own sister). The final sequence shows a young man with prostitutes in the street giving a look of final misery, but still looking for other “cheap” women. He appears to have gone back to the street from which he originally came (in the video, the streets, being a dangerous space correspond with the woods from which he originally came). The very last shot shows Ceca passing by in car in a similar manner as in the first sequence of the video. This time she looks ruined and tired, and does not wait to pick up the guy. On the contrary, the car quickly passes and splashes water from the road right into the face of the young ‘sinner.’ This last glimpse of Ceca shows her giving a bossy sign to her driver to drive away.

The very last scene of Ceca moving away after witnessing the complete fall of her lover shows the ambiguity of the sado-masochistic subtext of the whole narration which combines with a similar message in the lyrics. The ironic expression of her face in a way undermines the bitter message inscribed in the narrative sequences of this video. At one moment, it seems that Ceca is leaving proud of herself as the unfaithful man watches her in regret. In a way, this scene can be compared to the last sequence of Madonna’s video “Justify my Love”, in which Madonna is laughing at camera, which relativizes the serious tone of the scenes of sex shown in the video before that last scene. However, Ceca’s video, in general, tends to communicate a different type of message. Unlike Madonna, Ceca is not leaving the place with a smile but with a sarcastic, melancholic expression on her face which reveals a feeling of skepticism. Completed with the bitter lyrics of the song which tells a whole saga about men, women, love and money, it insists on a bitter *collision* between the sexes and the complete inability of a woman to keep her lover even when it looks as though she completely owns him. In a way, it essentializes the difference between men and women, a woman in love and a man in love.

The lyrics of the song express a similar skepticism towards the possibility of male/female companionship. The woman’s subject is “giving permission” to her lover to leave.

The reason, apparently, is not the disappearance of love feelings, or a particular other woman, or the like. The reason, according to the lyrics, is just the fact that her lover is a *man*, who can be just any cute young kid (“*klinac*”, as it is said in the song). Being a man, he cannot stay by one woman, no matter how idyllic the love between the two of them might be. As the woman’s voice in the song says, once she, or any other woman, makes a prince of him, and gives him everything, he will look for other women – this is unchangeable. She can just admit that she has “played all her cards” and that her female power is completely exhausted, compared to the manly predator’s instinct for falling for more and more women.

This message corresponds fully with the lyrics of the song “Kukavica” (Coward). In that song, there is a beautiful and desirable woman who seems to have everything in her life. Yet, she is lonely and melancholic as the men who attract her are by definition cruel and unfaithful and treat her like replaceable goods. At the same time, this also undermines any hope for the changeability of women’s locatedness within hegemonic power relations. In the end of the video, Ceca is leaving the scene in the same manner that she appeared, lonely and without a smile. The glamour is gone and her power and influence have all disappeared. This ending signifies that gender hierarchies are dominant over all other types of stratification. Men are cruel and destructive everywhere, but women have to put up with them in a masochistic manner again and again. Women are disillusioned in Ceca’s song; however, there is absolutely no platform for an escape from such a position. Ceca’s bitter “victory” over this one unfaithful man does not bring satisfaction as, at the same time, the video conveys a dark and masochistic point of view on manhood as such and women’s position in relation to it.

A number of Ceca’s songs from the nineties follow this pattern – lyrics presenting a gorgeous, glamorous and unhappy woman and videos containing innovative and, for Serbian or ex-Yugoslav societies, often courageous visual effects. For example, in one of her videos Ceca performs right next to a real tiger – the official mascot of Arkan’s paramilitary troops. On another occasion, Ceca sing a song about Jesus on stage while a burning cross is installed right behind her.

The process of masculinization of the bodies of the models who appear in her videos developed in a very significant way. The authors of her videos often “inserted” famous men as “actors” in her videos, which additionally contributed to the denotative processes of reading her videos. For example, the main male model for her video for the song “Prodji sa mnom kroz

crveno” (Cross Against the Red (Light) with Me) was a popular football player, a member of the club Obilić which was owned by Arkan. In the video, he showed his half-naked body and acted in provocative scenes with a female model in a pool. In another video, one of Arkan’s sons from a previous marriage, who at the time was 13 years old, appeared made up as a male model. This performance was a clear allusion to his juvenile masculinity. These examples show that Ceca’s real life husband was conspicuously present, not only as a powerful man to whom everyone attributed her success but also as a part of the textual meanings of her stage identity. He was visible even throughout her performances and significantly interfered with the production of Ceca’s career. In this set of signifiers, Ceca was not only Arkan’s wife but also simply a part of his *nest* of belongings to the extent that spectators could hardly forget that she actually belonged to him, represented him and owed her success to him. It appeared as though the peak of her career was practically created by him or people influenced by him. In the period of their marriage (1995-2000), Ceca was practically the number one celebrity in Serbia, not only in terms of the number of fans or visitors to her concerts but also in terms of occupying the top position of popular music charts and receiving awards at festivals, television competitions and the like. Since the process of selection at such competitions was mostly closed to the public, the audience’s perception of Ceca’s popularity could undoubtedly have been accompanied by a sense of her untouchable and exceptional status. Since she was married to one of the most powerful men in Serbia at the time, who was known (or at least believed) to use violent and criminal methods in social interactions, it was understandable that people easily coupled in their minds her public life with this image of her husband.

The informants in this research, without exception, confirmed that they believed that the extent of her visibility in the media and her dominant position in Serbian popular culture in the period of her marriage with Arkan was due to his enormous power and people’s fear of his power. Their frequent joint appearances in public on TV talk shows as well as her own appearances underlined the image of her perfectly tuned and sound married life. “Arkan is a gentle, good husband” was a sentence that Ceca repeated many times in public and, as of this writing, she has not changed this manner of speaking about her husband. However, most of my informants expressed their firm belief that Ceca herself possessed a stage identity which was “suitable” for the taste of people in these region, something unrelated to Arkan’s power. In other words, Arkan’s influence was not the only thing which brought Ceca into the focus of such large

media attention. Rather, a whole set of political and gender themes and emblematic elements constructed around her stage identity and her entire cultural capital brought about the construction of her image. As one of my informants said:

Ceca has got ‘something’ [...]. I don’t know what it is, but this attractive look and rusty voice, full of suffering in her songs, put together with her life [...] this is something that cannot be overlooked [...]. Folks here are used to suffering, and they admire when somebody talks about it all the time [...] especially when that person is rich and powerful [...] it seems, everybody likes to look and listen to a gorgeous woman suffering (Milica, a female bank clerk from Belgrade, 29).

Indeed, Ceca’s main songs and videos insist on an image of a gorgeous but miserable woman, obsessed with cruel and irresistible men or cruel and unchangeable gender roles. This brings me to the analysis of Ceca’s second ambitious video, the one made for the song “Dokaz” (Evidence), which has an intertextual connection with the video for “Go While You are Still Young”. This video, as well as the lyrics of the song, was one of the most intriguing musical products made in Serbia in the nineties. This is partly due to the bizarre and dark context of its production and release and the events that followed. The first appearance of the video took place a few days prior to New Year’s Day, 2000. It was an absolute hit on all popular music TV stations for several weeks. Just a couple of weeks after the New Year Arkan was shot and killed while he was spending his afternoon in the lounge of the Intercontinental Hotel in Belgrade. Immediately after this, the video of “Dokaz” was taken off the broadcasting of any TV station program in Serbia. Although the song could be heard on some radio stations and very often in clubs and at parties performed by local bands as well as by Ceca herself at her own concerts, the video has never been shown since in public in Serbia.¹⁴⁸

The video, made by the most popular video director of the nineties, Dejan Milićević, was a conscious reminiscence and a continuation of the narrative of the video of “Go While You are Still Young” (hereafter GWYASY). The main male character of the video for “Evidence” is played by the same male model who appeared in the previous video. The character played by Ceca is apparently the same woman who performed in GWYASY. In the beginning of the spot the viewer sees the final scene from the GWYASY spot. As I mentioned before, Ceca passes by her unfaithful partner after witnessing his moral degradation and leaves him with prostitutes. The new video, viewers are told, takes place five years later. Hence, the viewers are viewing at that

¹⁴⁸ The video is available at www.youtube.com, see it at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZbRMhQiLxg>

moment a sort of new short “film”. The music in the video is very rhythmical and monumental and contains a strong crescendo. It also signifies the beginning of a new plot – this time instead of the light pop sound of GWYASY, we hear a heavy sound of trumpets (trube) and drums. At the moment of the release the video, these instruments absolutely dominated in Serbian turbo-folk production and were widely promoted as a genuine, original folk sound, suggesting an image of national authenticity and hard life experiences.¹⁴⁹

The first scene of the new video shows Ceca’s unfaithful partner as older with a bit less hair, changed but still stunningly handsome, coming to her door again with a smile full of regret. Ceca opens the door with a cold facial expression. For a second, it looks as though no reconciliation is possible, but in the next scene a small girl’s face appears behind Ceca. From that moment the viewer understands that this will be the reunion of a family. In the next sequences, the viewer sees the three of them enjoying family time, and it appears to be the picture of perfect happiness. However, the lyrics of the song describe a different family situation, i.e the couple relationship:

Imaš ruke kao sveštenik,
a srce bez milosti,
tvoja ruka zna da miluje,
al ne zna da oprostí,

Your hands are like a priest’s,
But your heart is merciless,
Your hand knows how to caress,
But does not know how to forgive

Imaš lice kao anđeo,
A krv ti je nečista,
Krevet ti na cveće miriše,
A duša na zgarišta.

You have got a face like an angel,
But your blood is polluted,
Your bed has a scent like flowers,
But your soul smells like burnt houses,

Dokaz, daću ti živi dokaz,
Kad dvoje ljubav ubiju,
Samo jedno kaznu snosi.

Evidence, I will give you living evidence,
That when two people kill their love,
Only one pays for it.

Dokaz, daću ti živi dokaz,
Kada ti budu javili,
Da voda nešto nosi.

Evidence, I am the living evidence,
When the others come to report to you,
There is something flowing in the water.¹⁵⁰

(2000)

While Ceca’s voice sings these words in the background, the story on the screen shows

¹⁴⁹ As of the beginning of the nineties, the trumpets orchestras (“trubači”) have been promoted as players of the “authentic Serbian music sound”, in the country and abroad and this status remained largely to date. Their status was established by the film *Underground* (1991) by Emir Kusturica together with the film soundtrack by Goran Bregović. See more about the symbolic status of “trubači” and the Guča festival in Serbia in: Lukić-Krstanović 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Author of music: Aleksandar Milić Mili; author of lyrics: Marina Tucaković

the man, the former sinner, now as the father of the family. In another scene set at his place of work, he is flirting with another woman. It is immediately clear that he is continuing with his adulterous habits even in this new life. In another scene, he has telephone sex with another woman whom he later, after getting drunk, is seen kissing. In the end, they are seen making out even where he works. For a moment, the viewers must be aware of the fact that the woman's face is hidden. In these situations, it is impossible to say whether it is always the same woman or whether there are more than one. However, the point is still clear. The rest of the plot depicts stereotypical gender relations, as shown many times in the popular culture in the Balkans. There is a husband who is a gentle father to his child, but he is an abusive and unfaithful husband who is addicted to alcohol and sulking in his misery. Ceca is shown as a wife who keeps forgiving and rescuing him, picking him up from the street whenever he is totally out of control. Finally, she catches him on the spot. She catches a glimpse of him on a security camera while he is making love to his mistress. After this, Ceca performs her final revenge, which is rather different from the "revenge".

While Ceca is approaching the room in which she is going to confront her husband and his lover, the pictures of the former romantic love from the previous video are shown. This gesture of the director, in a way, seems to be unnecessary since the viewers already know that these two videos are connected. However, it is obvious that Milićević, the director who was known for his tendency for over-glamorous and spectacular images of his clients, could not resist glamorous over-stylization in this scene of fearful pathos to create a moment of suspense that troubles the viewers. In these few seconds, it becomes clear that some tragedy is about to happen. After these threatening words:

Evidence, I will give you living evidence,
That when the people kill their love,
Only one pays for it.

Evidence, I am the living evidence,
When the others come to report to you,
That there is something flowing in the water

it is clear that Ceca's character is ready to do something evil, but the key moment of suspense is left unanswered: to whom. This is the key moment for the analysis of the connection of gender and violence in Ceca's song. After she opens the door, she raises the gun and utters

“*Kurvo!*” (Whore!) - a word that cannot be heard but can clearly be read from her lips. After this the viewer immediately understands that she chose to kill the woman, the female rival. In the next moment, the viewer can see the police around and Ceca accusing her husband who is being taken away as a criminal in a police car. Here, the video ends.

It is important to outline several possible readings of this song and the video. In a way, it seems that both of them contain some foundations in the poetics of violence, abuse, aggression and, above all, sadistic and masochistic feelings between a man and a woman. There seems to be a need to put up with suffering, to punish and to cause destruction and self-destruction. Still, combined as they happen to be, the lyrics and the video create a fearful effect for this story of crime, passion, murder, a cursed family and the problem of male and female/gender relations. One level of interpretation rests on an elaboration of the male/female dynamics of power relations. There is a marriage which represents the countless attempts of a wife to keep the illusion of a monogamous relationship alive. There is the presence of a child which provides the notion of family life and fuels the illusion of the necessity of a happy family life. Then, there is adultery connected with alcoholism and violence and a final act of murder as the outcome of the corrupted and manipulative and abusive division of gender roles within the marriage and family. However, the analysis can be significantly improved if it is taken into account that the video was released at the moment of Ceca’s most widespread presence in the media. It was also created by the most successful video director and songwriter from the turbo-folk scene at that time. This fact contributed to the audiences’ expectations based on the gender stereotype which represents Ceca and her fictitious love story as *given*, essential, paradigmatic and everlasting, tragic and heavily connected with the social and cultural trends of gender representations in Serbia at the time. While the narrative of the first video (GWYASY) corresponds in a way with the early stages of rapid social turmoil - the time when the rich in Serbia were still just becoming rich and still in the process of occupying positions of suspiciously founded power - the “Evidence” video relates to the period when the rich were already heavily loaded with money and corrupted power and had unlimited access to decision-making about other people’s lives.

In the “Evidence” video, Ceca’s cold and emotionless facial expressions signify a woman who has passed through unspeakable experiences as a female and as a human being in corrupt and severe times. She clearly represents a rich and powerful woman who has everything except a peaceful life and a person to love her. The scenery and her outfit in this video show the world the

new political and financial elite of Serbian society – glamorous apartments and offices, SUVs, drunk and unruly entertainment on river-dock bars (*splavovi*)¹⁵¹ with half-naked women and finally – the most disturbing for the viewer – a world in which people are being monitored, controlled by security cameras and in which human life can be easily taken and the facts distorted without punishment. In sum, Ceca and her partner are represented as a couple in the contemporary social, political, material and national context. The references to Ceca’s power in her real life included some very striking details. For instance, the white fur coat that Ceca wears in one of the sequences proved to be the same one she wore in real life, even immediately after the moment of Arkan’s assassination when she was caught by TV cameras standing in front of the hospital.

The character of the man depicted by the lyrics and shown in the video was presented as somebody whose cruelty is so generic, essential and in-born. With the use of highly metaphorical language, manhood in this song is (again) represented as violent but superior. Ceca’s video and song suggest that there is no reformation. Men are born cruel, unfaithful and bad. They are unchangeable. Women have to put up with this as it is their fate to suffer in this heterosexual distribution of power. Women also have to put up with their female rivals, “bad girls” and “whores” who enjoy adultery and who are their enemies too. The distribution of “unwritten justice” in this song and video clip reinforce such a belief in an interesting way, pointing out this hierarchical, insurmountable gap between men and women, on the one hand, and the misogyny of one woman towards another on the other hand. In the video, Ceca chooses to terminate the life of another woman with no regret, with a smile and with horrible, almost ritual words of execution. This suggests that the victim has got what she deserved. On the scale of hierarchical relations a woman’s life is less valuable: as an enemy, she is of a minor importance. That’s why she is practically faceless in this video. She is just a nameless body of a sinful, “other woman”. The main enemy, the superior bearer of evil, gets a different, more subtle type of punishment. His life is spared. His destiny will be difficult since he goes to prison where he will symbolically pay for his sins of manhood. Still, his situation suggests the possibility of continuation. In an obscure and twisted way, it suggests that there is an eternal struggle between the sexes. The only way out of the unequal heterosexual distribution of power is destruction, violence and crime.

¹⁵¹ *Splavovi* are a type of riverboat-cafe and restaurant which are very popular in Belgrade for unruly turbo-folk parties. They are also known for the criminal behavior of many of their regulars.

It should be underlined that the woman protagonist from Ceca's video has no tools to deconstruct or leave the patterns of heterosexist ideology except the pure abuse of power, which proves to be possible only thanks to her social position and material fortune. A powerful, influential, rich woman can "put away" her unfaithful husband. Ceca's lyrics and videos speak to *all women*, but they obviously speak on behalf of *rich women* in Serbia. This is noticeable in most of her lyrics, videos and other types of representations. This representation pictures gender troubles which are very locally specific. They clearly refer to the world of the rich and powerful strata. However, the gender narratives they represent are suggested as naturally given and unchangeable. Instead of challenging traditional understandings of gender roles, Ceca's lyrics and videos reaffirm them.

This analysis of Ceca's career seeks to engage with the dominant representational discourses and practices, motifs, cultural codes and denotative potentials of her public performances, resting on the fact that she has been publicly visible and represented more than any other turbo-folk star since 1991. Ceca's videos, lyrics, public statements and concerts set the trends of the turbo-folk female performances in a particular way. Even today, most of turbo-folk women performers, tend to imitate her rather than to challenge her way of doing a career or to comment on her methods of achieving success¹⁵². Television reporters praised her to the extent that exceeded the usual practices of media representation of pop-stars in the Serbian context, which means they pronounced her "the biggest star in Serbia".¹⁵³

Here I have briefly reviewed the examples of Ceca's early works and then addressed her mature production divided into two periods: first, when she was at the very beginning of her career, and the second, in which she had just married Arkan, the boss of the Serbian underground, and third, the phase in which her image of a "real Serbian woman" was already strong enough to be considered as dominant in Serbian public life. This was partly to trace the line of development but also, much more to the point, to expose the common ideological,

¹⁵² For example, see Ceca's participation in the talk show "Svet uspešnih (World of the Successful)" with her fellow performers Nada Obrić and Mira Škorić on BN television at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNjG9pLaKec> (2006), or her participation in "Maksimalno opušteno" (2009) on TV DM SAT with a famous male turbo-folk singer, Aca Lukas, at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmptBnMPzV8&feature=related>.

¹⁵³ Even today, in spite all controversies around her, TV reporters still behave in the same manner, whenever she participates in a TV show. See examples of TV reporters' appraisal of Ceca in TV show "Ćaskanje (Chatting)" on SOS TV channel at : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=warhtcMkCk8&feature=related> (2009) and in "Jutarnji program (Morning Program)" on Radio Television Serbia (2008) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vy0azqsJeI&feature=related>

gendered matrix that unifies these seemingly different modes of representation (one which displays just female youth and bodies, and the other two, which deal with gender roles).

This unifying mechanism of gender representation, which runs through all these modes, contains, in the first place, an emphasis on women's bodies taken as a (self)eroticization. It is also constructed for the male gaze with an emphasis on the "authenticity" of the female bodies, coming from a specific community context. Later on, there is a strong accent on the relationship between female beauty, caught within destructive but unchangeable hierarchical gender relations or, as Theresa de Lauretis would put it, by the heterosexual contract which surpasses the signifiers of class and material wealth (de Lauretis 1987). And finally, the ultimate manifestation of this mechanism underlines the essential nature of the male/female heterosexual binary opposition. It emphasizes a strong gender hierarchies and sends a clear message that only pure material destruction or physical removal can disrupt social, cultural and psychological structures.

In other words, the first phase of those early forms of objectification of the female body and the commercialization of female public performance in general, exemplified by the first two videos, "To, Miki" (Do it, Miki) and "Pustite me da ga vidim" (Let Me See Him), constructed the heteronormative (auto)eroticization through the image of a "ordinary" young, healthy female body that comes from the transitional correlative line between rural and city culture. This phase also underlined the practices of pure sexualization and autoeroticism as the main purposes of the video and lyrics production of the early nineties. The second phase, represented by the video "Go While You are Still Young," reinforces hierarchical gender relations despite the fact that class relations allow for an inversion of gender roles and stress an assumed "determinism" of patriarchal inequality and male promiscuity. The stereotypical narcissism of heteronormative signifiers of the male and female is described as given and unchangeable. And finally, the "mature" phase of Ceca's lyrics and music production show representational particularities that speak of femininity and masculinity as eternal, antagonistic poles and their interrelations as a cruel game with love, violence, deceit, destruction, murder, crime and punishment. Men are born bad and unfaithful, and women can deal with that only if their feminine roles include the capability of sadomasochistic game and act of violence.

5.4. Conclusion: Heteronormative Paradigms of Women's Performances

Have Ceca's performances presented some form of social critique, breaking taboos, or has she just reinforced mainstream notions of hierarchical power relations, both in the sphere of gender and cultural/social politics in general? This crucial question, asked in the beginning of this thesis, will reintroduce the need to cite part of Hill's work on country music in the USA (see the discussion on Hill's article in Chapter 3). As mentioned earlier, according to Hill, country can hardly be studied as "youth culture" as it has a tendency to present a "static," "fatalistic" attitude towards life, grounded in the notion of "tradition" and "continuity", devotion to the roots and the community, as value in itself. As Hill states, such an attitude toward core values contradict to the youth movements' tendencies for change. Using this premise, it explains why some sub-genres of country music, together with their audiences, are so often associated with racism, xenophobia and/or nationalism (Hill 2002: 161-190). Similarly, we could ask whether Ceca's style of performances call for change in gender hierarchies, or do they suggest that the division of gender roles is determined and unchangeable, rooted in tradition and continuity?

I would argue that Ceca's performances are in a way comparable to Madonna's strategy of shocking the audience by presenting something which has not been seen before in a given context. However, it would be difficult to claim that Ceca's visual and verbal expressions tend to bring any novelty to the perception of basic heteronormative hierarchies. Starting with her initial works, a woman's place in this world is portrayed as mostly oriented towards giving voyeuristic pleasure for the male gaze and also offers an obsessive look into her grief from unrequited love. The shocking moments of her later works do not really stem from a desire to renegotiate (or reconceptualize) the notion of female/male inequality. The eternal lack of understanding between sexes is still there, underlined and enhanced, however heavily intertwined with issues of class and other types of hegemonic relations. Women can only differentiate among themselves in terms of social position, but they are still losers. Ceca's whole career promotes this idea. More to the point, women are still publicly seen as constructed *for* the male subject and in relation to male subjectivity.

This blatant essentialization of gender hierarchies relates to the overall gender codification that has been dominant in Serbia since the beginning of the nineties in all aspects of

social, cultural, political, and economic everyday life and cultural representation. Female Turbo-folk stars are, almost without exception, a commercial and commodified part of the Serbian cultural market. Their main mode of public visibility is to produce the image of socially desirable, “marketable” women within the community and to promote such an image as that of the essentially correct and unquestionable femininity. In order to be consumable, they have to present an image which will always follow both the taste of the majority of the audience and offer an element of provocation which will make their own product more consumable within a certain type of given aesthetics.

Referring to the arguments presented in the Chapters 3 and 4, I would like to return to Čolović’s argument that the NCFM genre was employed in the strengthening of communal identity, depicting a theme of an individual’s belonging to the community. Similarly Ceca’s performances, considered to be a top media product of the turbo/folk scene, undergird this ideological message. Inevitably, there are significant alterations in the technology of the production of the text, its mediation and interrelated meanings. The NCFM genre was developed in the period of Yugoslavia when the official state ideology imposed Yugoslav identity as an umbrella communal identity. The expression of regional and ethno-national identities were sanctioned and often regulated by state ideological tools, censorship and auto-censorship. Turbo-folk performances are conceptually situated in the nineties, the period of strong ethno-national homogenisation in many spheres of public and private life. Commercial music production, drawing on the representation of “properly gendered women,” mostly communicated a strong notion of belonging to a national context as the only right one. The topos of a properly-gendered woman, who symbolically exists only through her strong bond to a man and family, has often been the subject of pro-nationalist popular literature and films. Subsequently, this problem has been treated often in the writings of feminist scholarship on the relationship between gender and nation and the representation of women and nationalism (see Ivanović 2002 ; Iordanova 2001) The image of a woman who masochistically enjoys abusive relationships with merciless men, performed by a woman married to a war commander in her real life, encodes a message of female subordination to hegemonic, heteronormative standards of the community, in this case, the national community.

Regarding turbo-folk production and womanhood represented here, the provocation is always calculated so that it does not renegotiate or challenge the crucial aspects of domesticated,

hierarchical gender relations, especially in relation to the level of verbal, visual or off-stage performance. I chose to analyze these particular videos of Ceca in order to show how the elements of suspense, shock and sadomasochistic pleasure serve to preserve the ideas of an essential difference between women and men and the general inability of women to get outside such relations, except through pure physical destruction.

There has been considerable scholarly debate on whether there is a political platform in Madonna's videos and songs. As mentioned before, many authors have expressed the opinion that Madonna's performances in a way exploit the stereotypes of sexism, subordination of women and racism (see Whiteley 2005; 2000). However, according to many others, Madonna can be seen as a subversive performer who undermines gender, race, sexual and other hierarchies by representing them in her videos, especially those in from the nineties.¹⁵⁴ I question how subversive Madonna's work is considering that she continues to change her image from one video to the next, decreasing the subversiveness of her (assumed) political platform or claims to sexual freedom. It also seems that such a megastar of global music production cannot be entirely subversive, since she appears to be too playful with various identity politics represented in her videos.

The question can also be raised as to how Ceca and the turbo-folk concept of production differs from what Madonna does in her career, since it seems that in both cases the ultimate goal is to make money. Still, I argue that there is a difference between the ideological subtexts of Ceca's and Madonna's performances. There are two aspects in relation to which I would draw this differentiation and argue that Ceca's mode of show business performance, followed by most of less prominent (or less marketed) turbo-folk performers, differs from the key features of the most famous global pop stars' representational strategies. One of them is the content and the insistence on portraying heteronormative, monogamous aspects of female sexuality in the videos. The other is the contextualization of Ceca's images, explicated in her public statements, intertextual aspects of her iconography and the entire system of signifiers displayed within and around her on stage and off stage performances. In other words, unlike with pop-culture figures such as Madonna, Ceca's public image is calculated so as to establish her as a prominent representative of the Serbian community, i.e. her identification of Serbianhood has been

¹⁵⁴ Beside "Justify my Love", Madonna's videos "Express Yourself", "Vogue", "Like a Virgin", and "Erotica" have often be discussed, and sometimes even condemned in conservative circles, including one of her early and most controversial videos, "Like a Prayer" (1989).

cherished as a particular value and grounds for the legitimization of her excellence as a celebrity. The “Serbianness” in Ceca’s lyrics and songs is emblematic. It is rarely openly stated, but it is present through the intertextual connections between various signifiers from Ceca’s videos and lyrics and the political and social context of their production.

These intertextual connections between heteronormative messages in Ceca’s performances and the Serbian social context are expressed through a set of various codes represented in her performances. Many signifiers, such as those related to the images of her body, the scenery of her videos, or powerful images of gender abuses in her videos are interconnected with the overall tendencies of politicization of gender hierarchies in Serbian society at the time. In the mature period of Ceca’s performances, it had a lot to do with Ceca’s image of a significant woman, wife and mother, married to a powerful and dangerous man in her real life.

My main concern in this chapter was to explore whether these images of womanhood or male/female relations bring about some idea of change, or at least an idea of subversion of dominant notions of male and female gender roles. My conclusion is that Ceca’s performance, in spite of some atypical elements of narrative in her videos and lyrics, still just reinforces the dominant social understanding of the economy of gender relations. In that respect, Ceca does not fall into the category of female musicians who plead for some “change” with regard to the issue that they represent. In contrast, the dominant ideology of Ceca’s videos promotes manipulative gender relations as the only possible mode of interaction in this context, and matters of pure power and force as the only weapons with which one might dominate within the male/female binary opposition. This ideological frame perfectly fits the overall public ideological construction of the most visible division of gender roles in Serbian society fuelled by the public narratives of “proper” heterosexual conduct of a real Serbian man or a real Serbian woman. A woman or man who does not fit such a role division, in this context, is pushed to the margin of mainstream cultural space.

In this chapter, using the example of Ceca, I discussed the principle of heteronormative male/female binary opposition as employed in the performances. The next chapter deals with the symbolic constructions of sexuality and nation and the way they were depicted in turbo-folk performances. These key issues will rest on the representation of the body and the use of signifiers of the nation. In the final part of the thesis, I will focus more on the questions of irony

and the issue of subversiveness in the singers' performances, in order to explore how turbo-folk performances relate to the politics of mainstream or marginal identities in the society and their representations.

CHAPTER 6

Women Who “Know Their Place”: Nation, Sexuality and the Lack of Irony

In this chapter I will explore some examples related to the key issues discussed in previous chapters, focusing on more concrete details of the representations of community and heteronormativity through signifiers of nation and sexuality. Compared to the women’s stage identities discussed earlier, these examples embody the “mature” manifestation of visual and verbal representations constitutive to turbo-folk performances. In the previous chapter I dealt with the representation of gender dynamics as a bearer of heteronormativity in the videos of Ceca Ražnatović, the biggest turbo-folk star since the emergence of this genre. Using the example of the most glamorous and popular female turbo-folk singer, I examined particular constructions of gender relations in order to show what kind of gender dynamics was promoted throughout the turbo-folk scene. Her work and career have been exemplary and, therefore, the focus of much research. As many participants in this research confirmed, Ceca represents the paradigm of the ideological, political and habitual platform of the turbo-folk mode of femininity; i.e. to put it more simply, she is believed to be the most successful female turbo-folk star who has taken such a career path.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, the musicians included in this research (some of whom worked with Ceca) also mostly expressed the opinion that she is the one who has reached the highest extent of popularity in Serbia, compared to the careers of all female music stars in the Serbia in last twenty years.¹⁵⁶ In addition, Ceca’s appearances in the media have always been given the highest priority. Whenever she has appeared in any TV show (shown on TV Pink, Palma, TV Politika, BK TV or others), she has been given one of several titles such as “the biggest music star”, “one of the biggest Serbian brands”, and “the most beautiful singer” and very often her fellow performers themselves publicly pay tribute to her in a similar manner,

¹⁵⁵ By saying this, I refer to the image of female turbo-folk singer as a glamorous “babe” connected with rich men, above all, criminal bosses and politicians

¹⁵⁶ This conclusion is based on the interviews I did with twelve musicians who played folk, turbo-folk and pop music or who worked on its production as members of various “supporting bands” in the period 2004-2005.

giving her numerous compliments.¹⁵⁷

The problems of representation of heteronormativity are strictly rooted in the problems of representing sexuality and its direct connection with social prestige and the representation of the attributes of nation. The predominant theme of the previous chapter was the analysis of Ceca's performances in her videos, intertwined with the picture of her "real life" as a tragic and glamorous famous woman, constructed through her relations with a controversial, and dangerous publically known man. This was the most infamous among the visible examples of the construction of classed and gendered heteronormed "stage identities" in show business in Serbia. However, this type of representation, which rested mostly on the signifiers of higher social positions as a legitimization of Ceca's femininity, was not the only one through which Ceca performed her locatedness within the heteronormative understanding of binary oppositions in the community. The other two sets of representational practices were also visible in the performances of heteronormative maintenance of community. Most turbo-folk singers strategically worked on two ways of the appropriation of the signifiers of social and cultural power (social and cultural capital in Bourdieu's terms). One way was the fetishization of bodily markers of femininity. The other way was the fetishization of the nation and the national iconography and system of symbols in their performances, public statements and other public appearances in media. Besides heteronormative gender relations, described in the previous chapter, these two sets of representations were constitutive of the construction of women's subjects in turbo-folk performances as "respectable" for the community. Due to the powerful media exploitation of these representations, these images of women have become more culturally widespread than they usually would have been.

6.1. Fetish, Body, Nation

Here I will look into how heteronormativity is intertwined with the symbols of body and

¹⁵⁷ My experience of watching numerous TV musical shows and talk shows (Maksovizija, Minimaksovizija, the Grand Show, the Bravo Show, Svet plus, Magazin IN, Nedeljno popodne, Sav taj Pink, Sav taj Folk, Novogodisnji show programi Cece Raznatovic 2005, 2006, 2007, etc.) in the period between 1995-2007 (with certain pauses) has given me the impression that Ceca's public appearances have always been followed with great attention. Journalists have been particularly praising of her and always reserved an exclusive space for her on their shows (see examples of such admiration in Chapter 5)

nationhood and their representations. As mentioned before, the intersection of social status and sexuality has been introduced here in order to grasp the dynamics of the representational strategies through which female turbo-folk performers created their subject positions. Heteronormativity presumes the idea of *respectable heterosexuality*. This term implies a *classed* sexuality which is respectable in a given context. As I already stated, the founding image of turbo-folk femininity is connected to the issue of upward social mobility and the acquired status of being a highly regarded, rich and respected woman who is involved in *romanticised* and romantically stigmatized relations with a man. The “respectability” that I discuss here is a renegotiated meaning of the middle-class ideal of femininity outlined in the already mentioned work of Beverley Skeggs (Skeggs 1996). In this case, “respectable” means “properly gendered” in a given social and political context, and it deviates greatly from the known concept of “respectable” femininity imposed as an ideal on working class women. In the case of Serbian turbo-folk femininities, respectability is represented by an aggressive, assertive, and manipulative female subject as a desirable social model. In my research the idea of high-classed respectability does not involve a middle-class image of respectability, as in Skeggs’ conception. Stage identities of turbo-folk stars rest on the combination of glamorous high class luxury and criminal background of the people coming from the margins. The aesthetic and ethical pattern involved in this concept incorporates the sentimental concept of love and suffering as well as crime, passion, and violence.

The roots of such gender identity construction can be traced to the overall social and political turmoil in Serbian society in the early nineties. While we cannot speak about a typically classed society in the Yugoslav period (at least not in the sense of the western capitalist societies), we still could speak about various social layers in that period (see Chapter 3). In the post-Yugoslav period, period of the emergence of Serbian ethno-nationalism, the concept of social stratification changed. Occupational stratification, the layer of intelligentsia, and administrative elites lost their position in the social hierarchies, since they lost their good salaries, social privileges and subsequently, most of their previous visibility. Instead, the concept of social respectability became a matter of informal power of particular political and criminal groups, which enabled members of such alliances to acquire enormous social influence and material goods. The only social visibility that mattered became the visibility of extremely rich social groups and individuals, who promoted a luxurious lifestyle as the only image of a

successful life story. Such a concept was aligned with the idea of ethno-national homogenization. It made easy for ruling circles to promote the rich and powerful (connected with the war machinery) as models of national heroes, a new social elite, and the ones who are “right”. Accordingly, gender dynamics and the paradigm of “properly” gendered men and women was shaped by current social streamings. A man of respect drives an expensive car, carries a gun, has a luxurious house, and does a dangerous job, while a representative woman wears expensive dresses and jewelry, does not do any work, and suffers in her luxurious surroundings. As mentioned earlier, this paradigm was first conceptualized in the late stages of romanticism in European literature, mocked in the novel *Madam Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, and, nowadays, often exploited in so-called TV genres of “telenovelas”, TV soap-operas produced all over the world. In order to achieve such an image in their performances, turbo-folk stars have been confronted with the question of their own sexuality and particular constructions of it. The main tools for rewriting their identity are their own bodies and the discourse of the sexualization of bodily sites. Through reworking their own bodies, turbo-folk women indicate to which class position they strive to belong.

The manifestations and constructions of bodily relations are constituent of any idea of class positioning of an individual. In *Distinctions*, Bourdieu writes:

Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body [...]. It follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste which it manifests in several ways. It does this first in the seemingly most natural features of the body, the dimensions (volume, height, weight) and shapes (round or square, stiff or supple, straight or curved) of its visible forms, which express in countless ways a whole relation to the body, i.e., a way of treating it, caring for it, feeding it, maintaining it, which reveals the deepest disposition of the habitus (Bourdieu 1992: 190).

The problem of body as a signifier of social status leads to the question of the audiences in popular culture and the direct reception of certain female bodies as more “respectable” than others. A prominent theoretician of popular music, Keith Negus, points out that “for a song to be fully realized, for it to have any social meaning, then its production has to be connected to consumption, to an audience for a song” (Negus 1996: 134). Negus argues that the relationship with the audience is an important part of what he calls the articulation of cultural meaning. Following his views, we can say that the construction of bodies, visual experiences, and other cultural meanings related to those who produce these songs are articulated through similar processes. Turbo-folk star performances construct female bodies for someone’s gaze in order to

a) please the popular taste of the majority of the audiences and b) still impose the need to perceive turbo-folk femininities as an accomplishment that is something “higher” than habitus of a most of consumers, something *to be desired*. In this case, the desire to achieve of something “higher” is connected with the phenomenon of designating a particular type of sexuality for a viewer or a listener. According to the music theoretician Sheila Whiteley, “sexual pleasuring is displayed for a viewer, implying the knowledge is to be secured through pleasurable looking” (Whiteley 2005: 270). In the previous chapter I analyzed the aspects of Ceca’s performances grounded in her mere posing for the camera and looking into it. Here I will examine the strategic understanding of the representation of female bodies that supports essential notions of “women’s nature”.

The problem of the *fetish* and *fetishization*, taken as theoretical tools, can contribute to the analysis of how music performers exploit signifiers in their verbal or visual representations. The concept of fetish encompasses various aspects of human interrelatedness such as certain objects, ideas, relationships, and feelings. Originally, it was introduced to scholarly language through religious studies, anthropology, African studies and similar studies which dealt with the beliefs and practices of certain polytheistic communities. However, it seems that most influential, contemporary meanings of this term derive from the theoretical works of Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. Freudian studies, rooted in a theory of male fear of female castration, conceptualized the fetish as an irrational connection between a subject and a particular object of perception, as a sort of place of relief from anxiety (see Freud 1953). The ideas of sexual pleasure and eroticism, as well as sexual fetishism, have emerged as a part of the psychoanalytical approach to film studies, theater, visual performances, literature and other related fields. On the other hand, Marx used the term in order to criticize the obsession with material goods in the capitalist world and the desire for the possession of commodities. “Commodity fetishism” was coined as one of the key terms of Marxist and neo-Marxist criticism of consumer society (see Marx 1992; Baudrillard 1981).

The contemporary concept of the fetish has merged these two meanings. One refers to its irrational, religious, and worshipping dimensions; while the other refers to its material side and the presence of an item which is to be worshipped and, often, possessed (see Steele 1996: 3-10; Apter and Pietz 1993: 1-9; Krips 1999: 6-9). In contemporary cultural studies, a meaningful connection has been made between commodity fetishism, eroticism, identity politics and the

analysis of various cultural phenomena, arts, political discourses, gender relations, political economies and sexual politics. It is fruitful to study how economic developments of consumer societies and the historical and political circumstances are interconnected with worshipping particular objects, commodities, leisure items and cherishing particular meanings constructed about these items or relations. In my work, I use the term “fetish” in the meaning which stems more from the criticism of consumer society and the anthropological works on commodity fetishism than from a purely psychoanalytical field, which is more a metaphor than a philosophical term. Here, I employ the term “fetish” to examine particular signs, symbols and subject positions that appear in the visual and verbal turbo-folk performances that I analyze. These signs, symbols and positions have been constructed in accordance to collective, local historical experiences. They have a particular status as local signifiers of power that construct particular identity politics, are sometimes not understandable to people outside the community, and only make sense in the local social, political and historical circumstances within which they have been produced. As I will show later, this pseudo-magical meaning often comes out of some suppressed, informal and unwritten social experiences, which means that the mere mention of particular visual or verbal forms associated with such experiences would signify a power position and celebrate the outburst of some previously suppressed identity positions. “Fetishism is not only ‘about’ sexuality; it is also very much about power and perception” (Steele 1996: 5). In addition, I draw on a multifaceted approach to the politics of fetishism pursued by Anne McClintock, who writes

Fetishes may not always be disruptive or transgressive and can be mobilized for a variety of political ends – some progressive, some subversive, some deeply reactionary [...]. Rather than marshaling these differences under the reductive sign of the phallus, we might do better to open them to different genealogies [...]. Different patterns of consumption or forms of violent political closure may effectively contain the disruptive or undecidable power of the fetish (McClintock 1995: 202).

I use the term “fetishization” or “commodity fetishization” to describe the mechanism of highlighting certain items and symbols already culturally coded as signifiers of social power and placing them in such a way so that this power reconstructs, socially reifies, and legitimizes itself and the whole performance.

The way Ceca Ražnatović and other turbo-folk singers have aspired to their gender position in their performances or pursued particular gender representations indicates that there has been a strong tendency to position their “stage identities” within the network of ongoing

dominant discourses on communal identities, i.e. collective or in this case national identities. The period which is discussed here (the beginning of the nineties and later on) is a period of intensive (re)definition of the social, political and cultural discursive space in Serbia. This period marked the beginning of the construction of a uniform cultural space. That space was simultaneously all-inclusive for the individuals who came from one particular ethno-national background or the individuals who embraced this identity, and it was exclusive for those who did not fit into the framework or who claimed to be something different.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, in order to understand the discourses and practices around visual and verbal performances of turbo-folk singers, I will examine some key concepts that are useful for understanding the way gender and nation-making mutually construct each other and support each other's main premises.

According to most prominent feminist works on this topic, there are several levels on which the women's subject positions within the dominant and preferred nationalist or nation-making discourses can be observed. To begin with, women are seen as the symbolic and real revitalizing force of the nation as the reproducers of the population of the nation-state. Hence, they are the force which (re)builds the vital population of the nation. They mother and take care of the children, and through the institution of heterosexual marriage, support men as warriors and guardians of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1995, Ranchod-Nilson and Tétreault 2000; Verdery 1991). Subsequently, women are also constructed as bound to the symbolic values of national belonging. The whole concept of nation is imagined and constructed by language through the metaphor of motherhood or a mother who has "given birth to her children" while the children are naturally expected to protect and die for it. The third dimension of this relationship is closely related to material and symbolic violence – the discourse of rape which has a twofold dimension. The first is the real, factual rape that happened during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Rape became an expression of the interethnic hatred of the males of one ethnic group toward the women associated with another ethnic group of males. Accordingly, it was understood as the attempt of symbolically conquering, punishing and destroying the honor and vital forces of the "other", i.e. the enemy. The second aspect is the relationship between the *metaphor of rape* and the discourses of victimization of a particular group or national entity. This metaphor was used by the members of particular groups in order to mobilize their own members

¹⁵⁸ The problems related to the (re)definitions of national identities after the break-up of Yugoslavia, particularly in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, are at the focus of the works of many intellectuals such as: Bogosavljević 2000; Carmichael 2002; Milosavljević 2000; Pavković 1995; Pešić 2002; Popov 2000; Woodward 1995).

in the struggle against the enemy. Women are instrumentalized as a site through which the men of one group dominate and humiliate the men of another group (Bracewell 1993; Helms 2008, Saifert 1994, Slapšak 2000; Žarkov 2007). And finally, women can be observed as active political activists in relation to the ongoing nation-building project. They can be observed as active participants in spreading the nationalist discourses and practices through various types of political activism - among which sometimes even feminist activism can be found (see Bannerji 2000; Abu-Lughod 1990). Women were also active in women's anti-war activism, which has been, in case of former Yugoslavia, usually oriented against nationalist discourses.¹⁵⁹ However, women can indirectly participate in the construction of the cultural projects of communal homogenization without being a member of a political organization or sometimes even without a clear political agenda or by being an activist at all. Here, I will discuss the construction of women turbo-folk stars' participation in nationalism which happens as a part of their strategies to position themselves as celebrities and respectable woman in Serbian public life in the post-Socialist period.

Most of the participants I talked to perceived Ceca's image in the late nineties as an image of a "queen" or an "influential" woman who is to be respected and admired despite all these political and sometimes even criminal controversies that colored her biography. Some of them also expressed a deep outrage regarding her marriage with Arkan, her connection with the Serbian underworld and other militant circles in Serbia in addition to the many dark and bizarre details from her biography. It is not possible to answer whether the participants consciously perceived her public image as a figure of the "mother of the nation" or as a symbol of a "paradigm" of Serbian woman of the nineties, mother or a wife. As I already mentioned, many of the participants expressed their opinion that the music that they listen to does not really shape their notion of their national identity. In addition, I also already claimed that the assumed meanings generated by popular cultural production for the audience is mediated through printed and electronic media and are never identical to the meanings produced by the audience as an actual message. These resulting messages are the outcome of that communication channel (see Hall 1996). It is understandable that in the case of communication between the popular music

¹⁵⁹A famous anti-war activist organisation "Women in Black", together with the organization "Dokumentacioni Centar ratovi 1991-1999 –INDOK (Documentation Center Wars 1991-1999) centre, led by Drinka Gojković, collected and published relevant data and other material on this issue, for example the compilations *Women for Peace*, testimonies of the Yugoslav wars by women in the period 1993-2002, and the magazine *Women Against War*, published in the period 1994-1995 by "Women in Black")

performances and the audience which consume such performances, I cannot talk about a direct relationship between certain images, symbols, performative strategies and the like and the particular meanings produced by the audiences in a given context. However, it is possible to identify the audience's interaction with, or at least the audience's exposure, to certain aspects of symbolic capital generated by these performances, which are identifiable as a part of the strategic work of turbo-folk stars for acquiring the position of social respectability, i.e. the cultural capital which enables popular culture stars to acquire not only the position of a commercially successful performer, but also of socially respectable public figures. Given that these signifiers are culturally coded as symbols of certain communal homogenization or strengthening of the nation-building project, I assume that the performances of turbo-folk stars and the social, cultural and economic capital they strive to acquire have been strategically rooted in their self-representation which reproduces the discourses of belonging to Serbian ethno-national identity.

On the one hand, despite the fact that the predominant aspiration of these stars might be economic success and public respectability, the strategies of most successful turbo-folk stars have been often informed by the instrumentalization of the signifiers of nationalist projects. Namely, they have increased their own chances of gaining success and power by reproducing the discourses of nationalism or gender roles that fueled the dominant nationalist-informed understanding of women's positions in the society, in a way which is inherent to the political status of popular culture production in the society. Speaking of the case of Ceca, her image as an "omnipotent" mother and a wife, married to a Serbian war commander and a woman "perfectly happy with her husband and children"¹⁶⁰ was not the only utilization of her image as a "genuine" Serbian woman.

Almost every scholar or journalist who wrote a piece on her career emphasized her close connection to the extreme right-wing political circles in Serbia. Her marriage to a war commander of Serbian paramilitary troops who was involved in the war in Bosnia and Croatia and her active participation in his political party "Stranka Srpskog Jedinstva (Serbian Unity Party)", or SSJ, was just the beginning of her identification with the extreme right-wing. Towards the end of the nineties, Ceca started giving public statements that indicated her tendency to position herself as a woman who is "above" the rest of the population in terms of her

¹⁶⁰ During her marriage with Arkan, she was asked about her personal marriage situation in practically every talk show that she participated in, to which she would always reply that she feels perfectly and totally happy since she is nurtured, loved and protected.

symbolic “value” in relation to an ideally imagined national collective, essentially making her a sort of national and political heroine. In the spring of 1999 during the NATO bombings and a few days after the beginning of air-raids, Ceca, who came with her husband and children to participate in the rally against the bombings, gave the euphoric statement for the cameras of Pink television, “We will win, I love my Serbs, I am with them [...]!” Then, it was clear that she identified her whole audience and all of her fans as “Serbs”. The discourse she constructed at the same time glorified the nation of Serbs but also placed her in an “above” position “above”. She presented herself as a woman who was naturally given as superior and who mercifully spread her love to her “Serbs” or to her fandom.

Her self-exposure was not supposed to challenge patriarchal discourse but, on the contrary, to reinforce it. After the death of her husband, Ceca continued emphasizing her devotion to the Serbian nation. She talked about herself as someone who is the embodiment of Serbian ideals and referred to her audiences with the expression “moji Srbi” (my Serbs) or the “Serbian nation”. She made very few references to the non-Serbian people who had listened to her music for years and who were still consuming her music in huge amounts.

Publicly, Ceca is a popular culture icon who still insists on defining her audience as the “Serbian nation”. This demonstrates a complete identification of her show-business career with the entertainment and representation of just one ethno-national group. In relation to these statements, her concerts in Serbia and other Serbian-populated areas would usually appear to be a mass confirmation of “Serbian ethno-national identity”. When asked about her participation in the political meetings of the SSJ in the period after her husband’s death, Ceca answered that she took part there due to her respect for the memory of her late husband, Željko Ražnatović Arkan.¹⁶¹ Her “political statements” always contained either some reference to Arkan or some reference to herself as one who is in a way “above” the population of Serbs. However, her passivity that is present in her performance as the “mother of Serbs” suggests that she has performed this position of “dignity” and “class ” purely as a reference to the position of one man who is actually superior (in this case Arkan).

On the basis of all this, one would expect that this popular culture activism must have been judged negatively by the non-Serbian population in former Yugoslavia. However, Ceca’s songs have proved to be extremely popular in Slovenia, Bosnia and Croatia and not only on

¹⁶¹ Ceca spoke particularly about this on the show “Sav taj folk” (October and November 2004).

pirate markets but even in legal CD shops, and in the last several years, particularly through websites and internet piracy. While state media in Croatia claim openly, even nowadays, that Ceca and the other “turbo-folk singers from Serbia” will not have access to broadcasting, Ceca’s songs have been widely listened to at clubs and private parties in Croatia since mid-nineties. There has even been speculation that she might give a concert in Zagreb due to the huge interest of Croatian audience.¹⁶² In the context of the newly formed Croatian state, such admiration of an “officially undesirable” type of entertainment could be understood as a sort of grotesque rebellious attitude of Croatian youth toward the official culture. However, Ceca’s admirers in Croatia and Bosnia do not appear to be the people who are prone to contesting ethno-national discourses in their own countries. As the research done in the summer 2006 indicated, they mostly belong to the social strata which widely approved of ethno-national hegemonies in their respective countries¹⁶³

Many of Ceca’s own public behaviors deepened this controversial relationship between her and her fandom from non-Serbian parts of the former Yugoslavia. At the beginning of her spectacular concert on June 19, 2006 in Belgrade, she greeted the audience with the following words: “Good evening Serbia. Also, good evening to all of you who have arrived from the other republics”. By using the expression “other republics”, Ceca publicly denied the entire development of historical events since the beginning of the nineties. She essentially denied the existence of these “other republics” of former Yugoslavia as official states, which put her in the context of the failed agenda of nationalist right-wing discourses in Serbia. On the other hand, her speech implied that she was fully aware that her audience did not only contain Serbs. In other words, she did address them and acknowledge their existence but did not want to allow them the right to any representational particularity, i.e. the *right to statehood*. Thus, she accepts them, but she just does not want to acknowledge their “newly acquired identity” as an existing one.

¹⁶² TV NOVA, one of the private commercial TV stations in Croatia, attempted to air an interview made with Ceca, due to her huge popularity in Croatia in the recent period, while most of Croatian media houses and establishments rejected any possibility that Ceca should appear in Croatian official media space (see: <http://www.index.hr/xmag/clanak/novo-dno-nove-tv-vlahov-ugostio-cecu/246097.aspx>). The broadcasting of the interview was cancelled in the last moment due to many anonymous threats to TV Nova. The main arguments of “respectable” Croatian media against showing Ceca on Croatian TV were 1) she was the widow of a man who massacred and robbed Croats in the early nineties and 2) Ceca’s fans in Croatia are the “most primitive social layers”, which makes an additional reason not to admit her to the Croatian media space. On the other hand, TV NOVA argued that their only interest to make the interview was to increase the rating of TV NOVA and please audiences, since, according to them, the interview would have achieved enormous popularity.

¹⁶³ On ethno-nationalism in Croatia expressed through the consumption of popular music see also Baker 2008.

Further, in addition to “greeting Serbs” at her concert, she addressed the “girls” in the audience and asked them, “Have you been in love?”, “Have you suffered?”, “This song is only for women?” and “Women, let’s sing!”. With her comments Ceca simultaneously constructed the audience through two types of identity: Serbianness, appealing to their dignity and their “sacred connection to her”, and “womanhood” or rather girlhood - suggesting women’s essentially unchangeable and vulnerable position in gender relations. As we have seen, Ceca’s representational tactics are based on gendering the subjectivity of a Serbian woman as simply a position of suffering with no hope for a change. Her songs portray women who commit suicide, women who suffer nervous breakdowns, women who suffer domestic violence and women who perform social mimicry and pretend that they are happy while they are actually suffering. Her construction of a (Serbian) woman from the “upper class”, who got there due to her beauty and quickly gained fortune through her man, pays the price by being constantly wounded through her gender position.

Furthermore, there are a number of other illustrative examples of the fascinating intersections of the representations of class and sexuality, displayed through discursive constructions of body either through visual or verbal means. The intersection of class position and sexuality builds the foundation for identifying the criterion of respectability or the ideal *position to aspire to* and the positions these women subjects tend to occupy, appropriate and turn into the constitutive part of their subjectivities. For these women represented on the stage and through show business mechanisms, the register of respectability has blossomed through the appropriately combined representation of the “right” sexual and gender identity (heteronormative) and the “right” ethno-centric or national identity.

I have already mentioned the research and analysis of Žarana Papić, the Serbian sociologist and feminist, who analyzed visual examples of Ceca’s videos over time, and suggested that the discourses of homogenization and essentialization emerging from the discourses of the “oneness” and “uniqueness” of the nation were comparable to the way Ceca turned her own body image into more and more minimalist expression – not only by slimming diets but also by particular types of surgeries and, moreover, her dress and hair style. Papić also identified the discourse or hidden agenda of “westernness” and the compliance with “high fashion” trends as the constitutive elements of respectability of Ceca’s work on herself. According to Papić, in the periods of the strongest political isolation of the country, Ceca’s

videos displayed her body in the dresses of the most prestigious and most stylish world designers from the west. In a way, this kind of interpretation would suggest that this ability to display the admiration of the western world should signify a position of respectability or class and (inter)national recognition of the social positions that Ceca represented at the time.¹⁶⁴

However, I would also take it a step further. It is important to underline that what turbo-folk performers usually try to achieve with all these bodily interventions is not just to become a sexual fetish. There is usually an attempt at more than just sexual appeal. Without more, these performers would not differ much from porn stars. However, their stage identities by definition are attempts to achieve a more self-imposing communication with the audiences, and this aspiration is worked out through their bodies too. Ceca has been a performer whose breasts with silicone implants gradually became a symbol not only of sexual attraction but also of a personified picture of motherly femininity - loyal to the patriarchal notion of family and subjected to that basic function (picture 2). At various moments in her career, the volume and shape of her breasts changed, and at certain points they became almost giant. These new breasts exceeded the pure “titillating” erotic function of their fetishization, especially when she started appearing in public with these new breasts and accompanied by her children. Ceca’s breasts at a certain point started to indicate an almighty motherly figure – a symbol of fertility. The video made for the song “Neodoljiv-neumoljiv” (The Irresistible and Merciless), in which Ceca, clearly pregnant, dances in a sexy-looking dress, represented her through the combination of symbols of sexuality and motherhood.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ These remarks are based on a series of lectures by Žarana Papić given in 2000 as a part of the course entitled “Telo (na) vlasti”/“Body of (at) Power”, as a part of the Alternative Academic Educational Network (AAEN) and her article “Europe After 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascistization of Civil Society and Body in Serbia” in Griffin Gabrielle, ed., 2002. *Thinking Differently*. London: Sage.

¹⁶⁵ This video can be viewed on the website: http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Ceca%2C+Neodoljiv-neumoljiv&search_type=



(Picture 2: Ceca Ražnatović)¹⁶⁶

The performative power of female breasts is also part of the discussion of the symbolic representations of patriarchy and heteronormativity of the community. Heteronormativity, conveyed through the mechanisms of patriarchy, works in a hidden and multilayered way through the accomplishments of plastic surgery. The enlargement of breasts has become a convention related to the female performers from a particular public scene, not only as a matter of the latest commodity fashion but also as signifiers of particular power relations between the ideals of community and womanhood. For female performers, it is not enough to be desired as sex objects. Their bodies signify other messages, too. A woman singer in turbo-folk performances is never just a woman dressed-to-kill. She is always represented as a woman who

¹⁶⁶ The source for this picture is the website page: <http://www.allstarpics.net/0593540/010495091/ceca-pic.html>. As mentioned in Chapter 1, all pictures displayed in this dissertation are used strictly for academic, non-commercial purposes, and I do not claim any authorship of them.

might be “valuable for the community”. This admiration, however, often comes with the notion of something grotesque, unusual and exaggerated, which provokes both respect and discomfort for the viewer.

The cultural context of these performative aspects of female bodies is not just a matter of a fleeting fashion context. The roots of this symbolic play are grounded in a historically and culturally constructed and contextualized perception, interpretation and evaluation of the female body and its material, cultural and symbolic significance for the community in which it exists. In her remarkable essay “Breasted experience” (Young 1998: 125), Iris Marion Young explains the implications of the view of women’s breasts as a fetish, produced as such by “this culture” which is, according to her, patriarchal and male-dominated.

In this patriarchal culture, focused to the extreme on breasts, a woman, especially in those adolescent years but also through the rest of her life, often feels herself judged and evaluated according to the size and contours of her breasts, and indeed she often is. For her and for others, her breasts are the daily visible and tangible signifier of her womanliness, and her experience is as variable as the size and the shape of breasts themselves. A woman’s chest, much more than a man’s, is in question in this society, up for judgment, and whatever the verdict, she has not escaped the condition of being problematic (Young 1998: 125).

In other words, there is a cultural obsession with the form of female breasts that look strong, powerful and to a great extent estranged in relation to the rest of the female body in question. However, as Young also realized, psychoanalytical tools must be combined with broader cultural analysis. Namely, the sexual power of the fetish in this case is intertwined with a culturally coded obsession with reproduction. The more controversial and questionable the issue is, the greater power is invested in people’s interaction with it. Breasts are the signifiers of female sexuality and, at the same time, something that is usually constructed as a territory that does not belong to a woman but rather is an object of male desire or an entity that belongs to others: to a woman’s lover, to her child, to a viewer and to the broader community as well. I would even mention the commodity fetishization of female breast nowadays as they have become part of material culture which represents the site of value judgments, exchange, communication and other economic and social relations. As Lury points out, women are “the objects of consumer culture at least as much as its subjects (Lury 1996: 143).

However, what is most controversial about the construction of female breasts as a fetish that positions woman a certain way in society is how motherhood and sexuality in general meet

each other within this cultural and political paradigm.¹⁶⁷. As Young argues, “Breasts are a scandal because they shatter the border between motherhood and sexuality” (Young 1998: 133). The word “scandal” in the sense Young uses it must be taken here in its ambivalent meaning, because a “scandal” and “ambiguity” are things which are needed by turbo-folk singers in order to construct their successful communication with a community. I will use the example of Ceca’s public image in order to discuss this problem. The enlargement of Ceca’s breasts came simultaneously with her marriage to Arkan. At that time she became a mother and changed her communication with her audiences. Starting from her image as a sex symbol, Ceca rebuilt herself into a hybrid, sexualized mother - a product which communicates with the audiences no matter whether they are men, women or children. As of that time, Ceca started addressing her audiences with “Good evening, Serbia” and from the superior position of an omnipotent wife/mother and, later, widow. The female body here was a place in which paradigms of motherhood and sexuality meet, which inevitably leads to both discomfort and admiration for the object in the eyes of the viewer. Nevertheless, the moment of cultural “discomfort”, contributes to a large extent to the construction of respect and admiration for a superior female body that suggests not only superiority of sexual functions but primarily signifies the superiority of female reproductive functions.

All contemporary feminist readings of signifiers of nationhood point to the symbolic value of the construction of women’s gender identities as strategically important for the reproduction and guardianship of the nation. “Women especially are often required to carry this ‘burden of representation’, as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity’s identity and honor, both personally and collectively [...]. A figure of a woman, often a mother, symbolizes in many cultures the spirit of the collectivity, whether it is Mother Russia, Mother Ireland or Mother India” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 45). A “real woman” in such an imaginary is a giant, fertile, hyperbolically reworked and at the same time aggressive and submissive, potentially strange to the patriarchy and still a constitutive part of it. Women’s positioning within patriarchy and the community is never deprived of its hidden suppressed controversies but still

¹⁶⁷Young claims that this is rather a relation of dichotomy or division between good/bad, pure/impure. “The separation of motherhood and sexuality, thus, instantiates the culture’s denial of the body and the consignment of fleshy desires to fearful temptations [...]. By separating motherhood and sexuality men/husbands do not have to perceive themselves as sharing sexuality with their children [...]. The separation between motherhood and sexuality within a woman’s own existence seems to ensure her dependence on the man for pleasure (Young 1998:131-132). According to this position, the foundation of patriarchy lies on the border between motherhood and sexuality.

represents its most powerful tools.

As mentioned above, the fetishization of popular culture contents is not only motivated by irrational worshipping; it often incorporates the elements of *commodity fetishization* of particular fashion details, pieces of clothing, bodily parts, material items and styles that belong to various cultural groups. As Valerie Steele suggests in her book *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power*, fetishization serves to fulfill sexual fantasy, but it is still interconnected with the discourses of power which often occupy the space of economic and political power. As she writes, "Objects are revealed as provocations to desire and possession. The objectified female anatomy is sexually domesticated through sartorial masquerades, just as the household fetishes of cars, TVs and swimming pools are shown to be sites of displayed lack, dream surrogates for better values" (Steele 1996: 2).

The phenomenon of enlarged breasts proved to be rooted in the performances of many turbo-folk singers. By no means do I want to imply here that each particular performance of bodily intervention, or masquerade in the case of each particular singer, portrays the identical tendency or inclination in relation to the impact on the audience. On the contrary, many participants, especially the female ones, pointed out that there are nuances and differences in how they read the bodily or fashion language of the particular performers. However, most of them agreed that interventions of enlarging particular body parts of these women (such as breasts, bottom, lips or doing liposuction or removing) have already become a "conventional" step in the career of turbo-folk singer.

The phenomenon of the relationship between the representation of female sexual and reproductive functions, on the one hand, and the collective fantasies and ongoing communal narratives, on the other hand, is a topic that has received a lot of attention from anthropological, historical and sociological scholarship in general - especially those which have dealt with the problems of the construction of national identity or nation-states and the positioning of gender constructions or roles, as some authors would put it, within it (Abu-Lughod 1990; Lilly and Irvine 2002; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997; Verdery 1994; Žarkov 2007). These authors predominantly position their scholarly work as feminist-informed revisions of influential theories on nationalism and the concept of nation which can be found in the works of Anderson(1991), Bauer (2000), Brubaker(1996), Hobsbawm (1992), Smith(1998), and others. The basis of their accounts of the necessity of merging gender studies with the studies of

nationalism can be synthesized in a formulation of Tamar Mayer who points out that "[...] control over access to the benefits of belonging to the nation is virtually always gendered: that through control over reproduction, sexuality and means of representation the authority to define the nation lies mainly with men" (Mayer 2000: 2).

In other words, the ideological apparatuses of nation-building reinforce the political instrumentalisation and symbolic objectification of women. Women are visible in nationalist contexts through debates about motherhood, family, the sexual division of labour and the victimization of the female body, as well as by violation of the female body as the representative of the enemy in war conflicts (see e.g. Bracewell 1993; Helms 2003; Iveković 1993; Kašić 2000; Žarkov 2007).¹⁶⁸ In addition, there is scholarship that observes women's active or semi-active contributions to the contemporary processes of national homogenization worldwide. These works mostly explicate the controversial nature of women's aspirations connected with nation, given that such enterprises mostly work for the dominance of male hegemonic patterns of governing society, both on the social and symbolic levels (see Blom 2000, Patterjee, 1989, Kašić 2000, Carol and Irvine 2003, West 1997). Symbols of reproduction and sexuality viewed in the connection with symbols of collectivism and national identity in the women's performances indicate the participation of such performances in what Nira Yuval-Davis names a project of constructing collectivity.

6.2. Sexing the Church, Sexing the Military

Besides Ceca, many other turbo-folk stars have contributed to the above described constitution of women's subject positions, either through the lyrics of their songs or the visual representations in their videos or their appearances in the media (the public statements or interviews they gave for printed media and popular TV talk shows). I will mostly focus on the lyrics and video products, given that these two forms of representations are most frequently and repetitively represented in the media and, therefore, most available for consumers. There are a number of examples of songs with lyrics in which the female subject "proves" her sexual

¹⁶⁸ As Wendy Bracewell points out, women are central to those issues, but their needs and desires are not (Bracewell 1996: 31).

“rightness” or “adequateness” by underlining how her sexual, reproductive or sometimes purely eroticized bodily attributes or other bodily signifiers are symbols of ethno-national belonging to Serbian or (rarely) a regional “Serb-acceptable” place. In addition, we should mention that such a combination has always been seen as a matter of the particular gender, social and sometimes even political prestige of the female subject in question. However, this connection is multi-layered. Sometimes it does function as a simple connection between the signifiers of a highly heteronormed, sexualized female body and the signifiers of Serbian or Orthodox religious identity. However, sometimes this ethno-national identity is not just Serbian, but it refers also to a “Balkan identity” or “oriental identity”, incorporating many variants of that style and adjusting them to the local understanding of the ethno-national amalgam that is acceptable as “domestic” for the most consumers in question. The roots of such practices should be looked for in what Ljerka Vidić-Rasmussen calls the ethno-regional division that was reinforced by the appearance of NCFM, which was a constitutive part of the Yugoslav cultural division into two regional blocks: “western-oriented” and “eastern-oriented”, as it was already discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. While one block, the “western”, corresponded with Croatian and Slovenian geopolitical space, the “eastern” one covered Bosnian, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Serbian space. This conceptual division has played a significant role later ever since. In addition, I can improve Rasmussen’s scheme and claim that the Bulgarian, Albanian, Turkish, Greek and even Algerian or sometimes Israeli cultural contexts are being associated with this geopolitical/cultural/representational “Eastern” code nowadays. All that became interpreted as close to “turbo-folk style” in media discourses, audiences’ preferences and production practices.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, very often in turbo-folk songs, a female singer underlined her “genuine” gender identity or the “right” type of femininity by employing signifiers which were commonly accepted as local, “appropriate” and even patriotic despite the fact that they were clearly “borrowed” from a context which was not strictly “Serbian” in the geographical or ethno-national sense. However, these signifiers were related to Serbian identity through some regional, cultural and geopolitical similarities. For example, in the very beginning of her career, the

¹⁶⁹ There have been a lot of polemics and disputes in the media, and even in academic works, about whether these “Eastern” influences should be taken as something derogative and invasive in relation to “indigenous Serbian culture”. Some musicologists, particularly Zoran Hristić, criticised this “Eastern” influence as a derogative expression of low taste while the group of intellectuals gathered around the *Prelom* magazine (Branilav Dimitrijević, Dejan Sretenović, and others, tended to describe turbo-folk as a local expression of post-modern musical global trends (see Dimitrijević 2001). This debate was already discussed in Chapter 2

popular singer Seka Aleksić released the song called “Balkan”. The lyrics of this song described the lifestyle values of a particular “Balkan” men and women, based on similarity in habits, life values, leisure activities, etc.

In 1997 the popular female singer Jami (Jasna Milenković) released the catchy and provocative song entitled "Čokolada (Chocolate)", which became a hit song. The lyrics are as follows:

Reci cu ti nesto sasvim lično,
Nisi nikad čuo ništa tome slično
Reci cu ti slatke reči te,
otkačene i bezobrazne.

I'll tell you something very personal,
You have never heard anything like this before,
I'll tell you sweet words,
Crazy and dirty.

Jer mi smo ista generacija,
i pesma nam je inspiracija
iste želje ista nacija,
to je dobra kombinacija.

'Cause we are the same generation,
And song is our inspiration,
Same wishes same nation,
It is a good combination.¹⁷⁰

(1993)

The lyrics represent a subtle and concise example of the idea of a "happy" and "appropriate" merging of sexual, cultural, and political identities. The appropriate "combination" of the heteronormative identity of these two people would result in a desirable type of heterosexual merging. At the beginning the female subject announces to her "male" companion that what she has to tell is very personal and completely new, introducing the element of a strong, erotic excitement in their imagined dialogue. In the next sentence she produces the argument of "sameness". Their age, their cultural interests and their national identity are a guarantee for the success of their coupling. At this point, the language of the song fetishises "sameness". This mention of belonging to the same communal identity clearly celebrates homogeneity as the "right" model of heterosexual interaction, in which the personal is apparently constructed and shaped by the public. The song was shown numerous times on popular TV and radio shows and requested for several years by audiences in many disco-clubs where Jami had her performances.

Similar strategies were to be observed in the performances of the singers who constructed their public images through connections with the signifiers of Serbian Orthodox religion. On many TV shows, women singers discussed their loyalty to the tradition of celebrating *slava*, a form of Serbian Orthodox religious holiday that is connected to the cult of patriarchal family

¹⁷⁰ Author of music: A. Radulović; author of lyrics: Marina Tucaković

values (see Kalezić 1989). Celebrating slava had a controversial status in the socialist period of Yugoslavia as it was often treated as an "anti-revolutionary", "anti-communist" tradition. This practice not only related to Orthodox Serbian religious identity, but it was also usually understood as paying tribute to a separatist Serbian national identity, and criticized often by high state officials. Due to the stigma attached to it by the Yugoslav communist state, many citizens loyal to the Yugoslav authorities gave up this custom, while members of the Communist party were particularly obliged not to practice it in their homes. With the decline in the Communist party power and the socialist state in the late eighties, as some older interviewees I talked to pointed out, many families started celebrating slava and all other Serbian Orthodox practices. This was understood as an ultimate confirmation of Serbian and Orthodox religious identity, a form of cultural practice that (re)confirmed or (re)constructed the separatist identity of Serbianhood. Understandably, Serbian Orthodox religious practice has become a "rich" resource for the instrumentalisation of various symbols and iconography which ensure identification with Serbian ethnicity for the individuals who appropriate such symbols. The items close to the shape of Serbian Orthodox crucifix became an unavoidable part of the outfit of female turbo-folk stars in the nineties, who started wearing them with a gold or silver chain around their neck.



(Picture 3: Dragana Mirković)¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹The source for this picture is the website page: http://www.yu-estrada.com/slike/dragana_mirkovic/68.html .

The statements of these stars who spoke about their dedication to the practices of the Orthodox Serbian Church was usually combined with declarations of their appreciation for family life, child bearing, loyalty to their boyfriend or husband and married and settled family life (see *Internet novine serbske* 2009). According to them, it is understood that they are willing to participate in as hard-working and humble wives and mothers, who love cooking, the up-bringing of children and supporting their man. Such statements have usually been supported by the claims of the singers that their own families have always been "patriarchal" and "religious", cherishing very strong, "strict" and "patriarchal" up-bringing.¹⁷² The adjective "patriarchal" was always used in its highly positive meaning in these contexts.

The motifs of Serbian Orthodox religious iconography have often been deployed as a site of eroticization, fetishization and emphasis on a particular "rightness" of the female subject who describes her unfortunate love in her song. The introduction of Orthodox iconography, both on the visual and verbal level, has had powerful influence on the representation of rich and glamorous women of the upper class. She is noble and unhappy in her love and she is asking for a mystic comfort and protection from the Heaven. The song "Manastirska vrata" (Monastery Door) by Mira Skorić begins with these verses:

Otvoriše se manastirska vrata
Za mene stale kazaljke sata
U drhtavoj ruci drzim sveću
Opet se molim za njegovu sreću.

The monastery door is opening,
For me the hands of time have stopped,
I am holding a candle in my shaking hand,
Again I am praying for his happiness.

Kraj oltara stoji ikona sveta,
Kraj mene moja sudbina kleta,
O majko božja, anđeli s neba,
Što mu kraj mene ta druga treba."

There is a holy icon next to the altar,
And my bad faith is there next to me,
Oh, Holy Mother, angels from the heaven,
Why does he need that other woman,
when he has me?

(1993)

The whole scene portrays the subject position of a woman who is highly socially positioned and who is gendered in the "right" way, which legitimizes her sentimental reflection on the relationship between the pathos-loaded ecstasies of a prayer and desperation over a merciless man who is unfaithful to her. Each particular item depicted in her description acquires

¹⁷² For instance, a number of singers, such as Goca Božinovska, Seka Aleksić, Viki Miljković, gave many interviews in which they talked about their up-bringing and family values they have adopted.

the status of a fetish item, something which underlines the mystical and “tragic” character of the scene without any rational motivation which might place them in a narrative sequence. These items are. a candle, door, the Mother of God, angels, and the like. To reiterate, according to the existing works on fetish and fetishism (Apter and Pietz 1993, Steele 1996), contemporary ideas of fetishism conceive the concept of irrational worshipping as an item or a concept that includes not only sacred worshipping but also the idea of possessing the worshipped item and transforming it into something that can be owned, collected, manifested and handled. This is why fetish items are often related to fashion and the latest development in identity politics. On this occasion, I will not speak about commodity fetishism. I would rather speak of fetishism that draws on a *tabooed experience of the world*, something that produces eroticized pleasure for the viewer, reader or listener because its contents were subjected to a tradition of marginalization and even suppression by the political leadership of the community. These items such as candles, monastery doors, the Holy Mother, icons and others do not just invoke the mystical tradition of Christianity. They also carry a meaning as forbidden, suppressed, tabooed items of an identity that was politically suppressed in the period of communism and cherished in the late phase of communism as a signifier of newly born Serbian national identity.

In the nineties, when the song “Monastery door” came into existence, playing with the iconography of Orthodox Christianity in popular culture involved a remarkable shift in the locatedness of actual political and symbolic power. While in the period of state socialism religious practices were an indicator of “backwardness” and “politically oppositional behavior”, in the period after socialism, religious practices, being strongly colored by a particular ethno-national identification, have become a new way of declaring and appropriating a position of new social respectability and, above all, new forms of social, symbolic and cultural power. This position of power was also firmly associated with the idea of particular national identification, breaking the taboo of worshipping a particular separatist ethno-national identity which used to be publicly considered to be odd, “unnatural” and politically undesirable (Mylonas 2003). Hence, playing with these attributes in the media in the transitional period of the late eighties and early nineties had a particular aura of the semi-forbidden as new and not-yet-allowed, exciting experiences, which could have easily been associated with allusions to controversial sexuality or

mystical eroticism and employed in the popular culture industry.¹⁷³

In the case of turbo-folk singers, especially in the early nineties, performances like those of Mira Škorić indicated newly constructed popular culture production as well as the position of emerging power. This power is an embodiment of dominant discourses of cultural and gender appropriate, “right” identity. These performances actually began to occupy the space that used to be a part of the social and political taboo in the past. Since the beginning of the nineties, it has become a place of free, unhindered play. Still, this play has rather become a means for demonstrating an upper class mainstream image of female subjects and the performer in question than any type of political challenge to the Serbian social and cultural mainstream.

There are a number of other examples of this relationship between motifs of ecstatic erotic love and similar ecstatic evocations of Serbian national or Serbian Orthodox belonging in direct or implicit ways. Most participants in this research confirmed that they have rarely paid attention to the full meaning of the lyrics in the way scholars usually do. Rather they pointed out that while listening to turbo-folk performances they first reacted to one particular word, sentence, theme or motif from the song which strongly corresponded with their current emotional state or reminds them of some significant moment from their personal life or identification with some theme.

Drawing on this, I can assume that turbo-folk stars and their songwriters largely counted on the phenomenon of audiences’ identification whenever they launched an effective refrain with a geopolitical term as its “main theme”. In 1994, in the middle of inter-ethnic war in Bosnia among Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, Vesna Zmijanac performed a hit with the title “Idem preko zemlje Srbije (I Am Going across the Land of Serbia)”. The lyrics describe an enormous faith in a particular charismatic unnamed man. The song was accompanied by another one, entitled “Rat i brat (War and a Brother)”. The video, music arrangement and the outfit of the performer present an image of her as a powerful androgynous figure who firmly marches across space followed by a whole “army” of dancers. This “military” style of performing with the performer dressed in black polyvinyl again suggests that the whole performance portrays the close intersection between sexual power and dominance, an almost militant determinacy and

¹⁷³ The connection between political worshiping of a leader and erotic allusions was apparent in the early periods of post-Yugoslav hysteria. It was seen many times on TV newsreels in the early rallies that female supporters of Milošević carried his photos around publically kissing his image, uttering frenetically : “I love him! I am in love with him”. According to the press from that period, the situation was not much different in the other former republics of Yugoslavia from that time, in relation to their own political leaders.

geopolitically “right” direction of the subject’s love and political feelings.¹⁷⁴

In addition to this group of examples, Ceca Ražnatović’ s song “Kad bi bio ranjen” (If You Were Wounded) should be mentioned as a particular contribution to the topoi of the merging of sexual feelings and motifs of patriotism. Although there is no open mention of the nation or the ethno-national, the lyrics themselves portray the state of love as the state of a soldier’s loyalty to a commander.

Pre bih ove svoje ruke željne svega vezala u čvor,
Nego da ih grli ljubi neki drugi draži muški stvor,
Pred vratima spavala ko pas
Kroz vekove gorela zbog nas.

I would rather tie my troubled hands into a knot
Than let another man hug and kiss them,
I would rather sleep in front of your door as a dog
And through centuries I would burn for us.

Kad bi bio ranjen, krvi bih ti dala
Oba svoja oka kad bi bio slep,
Al uzalud, bez duše si lep

If you were wounded, I would give you my blood,
If you were blind, I would give you my eyes,
But it’s all pointless, you are handsome but
heartless.¹⁷⁵

(1996)

Here, the scenes of self-torture are a metaphor for subordination as a proof of love. While I identify the S/M subtext of these pictures, I must also acknowledge how the lyrics put this master/slave relationship into the context of armed combat and an epic patriarchal pattern of a soldier’s love for his commander, which often incorporates the eroticization of worshipping a leader. The fetishization of power and dominance, coupled with the eroticization of particular motifs or relationships, is connected to the glorification of a communal identity and the essentialization of an individual’s relationship with authority. In this case there is a war-associated type of authority which is apparently applicable to various national contexts and not only to Serbia. The whole concept of such a performance of gender identity seems to be a self-representation of the female subject as a figure of a woman who “knows her place” and who positions herself as loyal to her man or to “her folks”, such as family or nation, and to epic patterns of hierarchies in society, which is, in the given context, the situation of belonging to the ethno-national community.

However, the fetishization of the nation is often confronted with many controversial anti-essentialising tendencies that are inevitably part and parcel of nationalist projects. The music and visual arrangements of these performances have often unintentionally revealed a confusion in

¹⁷⁴ See the video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uktINEXz5Co>.

¹⁷⁵ Author of the music: Aleksandar Milić Mili; author of the lyrics: Marina Tucaković

the sense of mixing “officially” unmatched parts of Serbian cultural heritage (see Jordanova 2001). The music that has appeared was clearly composed using the sounds from Turkish and Greek pop music. On the one hand, these songs are perceived as national-specific, regionally exclusive, sometimes openly engaged in the glorification of a certain regional, local identity. On the other hand, this performance of nationalism cannot be reduced only to a Serbian ethno/national entity or taken as a fixed sign or nominal value. It has to be revisited and observed as an example of a deeply conditioned and contextual discursive construction. In other words, many songs have been denoted in a particular semantic key which refers to nationalism, although in literal sense and observed outside the context, they hardly contain any chauvinist or discriminatory messages. The eroticization of the image of the performers contributes to political passions that reinforce the identity that is being provoked by the song. An example of such performance is the song *Vidovdan*, which was released in the nineties. This deeply sensual song is filled with the desire for merging with a beloved land. It is performed by the attractive blond woman singer Gordana Lazarević. This song draws on such a mixing of nationalist feelings and erotic titillation. It contains references to nostalgic and gentle feelings related to the historical evocation of Kosovo.

In general, many of the songs from the nineties allude to “patriotic” or even “combat” symbols. However, there is never a clear reference to the name of the “nation”. This is most probably the reason why some of the songs that could be recognized as nationalist in Serbia have also become popular in other places in the region, despite sour political relations. Certain songs get their contextual meaning indirectly through their use at political rallies. For example, in the period of Milošević’s rule, Zorica Brunclik released the song “I posle svega, ja volim njega” (After All This, I Still Love Him). The song literary contains love lyrics about woman’s adoration for a man. However, it was used at some political meetings of the members of Milosević party. There, it was indirectly used to eroticise Milosević and his authority, on the one hand, and to “rightly” gender the erotic and social potential of the female subject in question. According several of my interviewees, Zorica Brunclik was not so popular in the nineties, but her political connections enabled her to “impose” herself as a media supported figure.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Zorica Brunclik, who was a popular NCFM singer in the seventies and eighties, was still present in the media even in the period of the turbo-folk era, since she joined the party called “Udružena jugoslovenska levica” – JUL (the United Yugoslav Left) headed by Mirjana Marković and the wife of Slobodan Milošević, and became a member

Interestingly, despite the fact that they were aware of this in the nineties, none of the participants considered it to be an “unusual” practice. One interviewee commented, “Well, it’s always like that, you have to have somebody to promote you [...] that’s why she entered the JUL party, she wanted to secure her place in the media and the like, it’s a common thing here [...]”.

However, Zorica Brunclik also performed another striking example of the merging of the identity of a turbo-folk singer and the eroticization of the nation. Being a prominent member of JUL, the party founded and led by Mira Marković (Milošević’s wife), Zorica Brunclik had a range of liberties available for her in show business in the nineties. In 1999, she gave a successful and fully-attended concert at the Sava Center, which was at that point the biggest and most prestigious concert hall in Serbia. There was a common belief that popular and politically accepted performers could afford to make more “experimental” steps in the public, which would inaugurate them as “prominent” figures in public life. In other words, these performers could experiment in the public with their performances, images and the like, since they had powerful protectors behind them and did not depend solely on market-based demands.¹⁷⁷ Despite her modest and conventional appearances in the eighties, Zorica Brunclik started taking some liberties and positioned herself as a “queen” to the audience. She had a tendency to construct these audiences not only as her fans but also as her “narod” (the folk, nation), presenting herself as a national heroine.

The ultimate legitimization of her position would be accomplished by gaining “national recognition”. At her major and most spectacular concert in the late nineties, Zorica Brunclik addressed the audience with the words “Dobro ti večer, narode moj” (Good evening, my people (my nation)). Her rhetoric was strikingly similar to the usual way that populist Serbian political leaders addressed their audience. At one point in her concert, Zorica Brunclik flaunted a particularly “symbolic” outfit. She was dressed in a pair of jeans and a Serbian national folk dress. Interestingly, it was male folk dress. The whole phenomenon could have been read as an ironic, parodic play with gender and national narratives. However, Brunclik’s whole performing concept seemed to be far from that. In general, her songs did not insinuate that they should be

of the party leadership. It was widely believed that she owed her media success in the nineties to the fact that through her connections with the JUL she was profoundly privileged compared to most of singers.

¹⁷⁷ A similar opinion was expressed by my informants in relation to two famous singers who often participated in musical events that were part of the political campaigns of the SPS (Socialist Party of Serbia) and JUL parties: Merima Njegomir and Extra Nena. Both of these singers enjoyed large amounts of space in terms of participation in all sorts of musical events and TV shows. They often performed on their own shows and participated in the most expensive and most representative cultural events organized by these two parties.

taken in any other way but straightforwardly. There was no hint of subversive political messages, musical parody or the like. Rather, they mostly contained the same heteronormative patterns of describing the relations between men and women without questioning any political or gender structure.¹⁷⁸ Any attempt to explain her performance of the role of a man/woman (at the same time) who is taking the mask of the leader can be interpreted as similar to the tendency of most performers who were favored by production houses and political structures to impose themselves as not only an entertainer but also as something “higher” than that and “bigger” than the audiences at the same time. This image of higher social positioning comes through Brunclik’s own rewriting of her identity and adds the signifiers of the authority of maleness and the authority of a voice who speaks to her/his nation. Gender and nation signifiers are utilized for this particular performance with the intention to shape the picture of a “desirable” model of social and cultural respectability.

6.3. Carnival, Irony, Parody: Subversion or not?

Accordingly, I would claim that many of female turbo-folk performers, incorporated various grotesque and exaggerated elements and distorted classical ideals of female beauty and appearance. Brunclik’s combination of a pair of jeans with a male folk dress is not an isolated case. Women turbo-folk singers, without exception, appear publicly in dresses resembling those from pornography, constructing their eroticized look. Also almost without exception, these appearances are coupled with the results of plastic surgery, which are done to overemphasize the common signifiers of female sexual appeal: breasts, lips, other facial parts, a thin torso, and the back side of the body. These features have very often been constructed so that they have overdone forms that correspond with a common sense or realistic representation, appearing as estranged, oversized parts of the body. A number of articles from Serbian tabloids have even listed the plastic surgeries that popular women’s singers have had done. These lists were typically followed by the popular singers speaking openly about the surgeries they have had on

¹⁷⁸ Zorica Brunclik’s songs with lyrics can be found on the website: <http://tekstovi.net/2,169,0.html>.

talk shows, in interviews and even in documentaries.¹⁷⁹ Through these public performances I have identified many elements of representation that seem as if they could have an ironic intention or a parodic reading of particular lyrics, videos or even public statements.¹⁸⁰ For instance, I can identify elements of the carnivalesque worldview, to use the Bakhtinian term, in all sorts of grotesque presentations of body, love and hate and in other types of exaggeration, verbal descriptions and metaphoric language. The same situation applies to the visual representations of humans, interiors and exteriors. The question is, however, does the presence of some carnivalist elements necessarily open up the possibility for parodic effects, or does it necessarily imply some politically liberating character of the performance?

My observations here can also be examined against the notion of parody indirectly introduced in Mikhail Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and His World* (year). In this book, Bakhtin mostly analyses Rabelais' novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, among some works. Bakhtin refers to the spatio/temporal articulation of a male's body as closely related to the parodic representation of heroic masculinity, regarding the motifs of grotesque exaggeration in eating, drinking and sexual functions in Rabelais's novel:

The sexual series occupies an enormous place in the novel. It appears in a wide variety of forms: from sheer obscenity to subtly coded ambiguity, from the bawdy joke and anecdote to medical and naturalistic discourses on sexual potency, male semen, sexual reproductive processes, marriage and the significance of the origin of the genders (Bakhtin 1984:190).

However, Bakhtinian parody is a structural principle of the organization of the text. It has the clear function of representing the body as opposed to its conventional representations in literature, art and everyday speech. Hence, in the case of Rabelais, the parody is a way of contesting the existing representational conventions. It is an artistic device. It becomes an almost new language (re)constructed through the novel, especially through the elements of the obscene, grotesque and vulgar, and is used in the criticism of the of high-class, elite language and elite social practices. Through humor and exaggeration and blurring the division between "high" and

¹⁷⁹ For instance, see *Kurir* 2007, or *Svet* 2008.

¹⁸⁰ There have been quite a few works done on the relationship between fetishism, irony and feminism, such as "Fetishism and Its Ironies" and "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand" by Naomi Schor or "Lesbian fetishism?" by Elizabeth Grosz. However, I will not draw directly on them in this thesis, nor on the contemporary body theories since I would like to stay focused on anthropological and cultural criticism of constructing particular items as marketed commodities, informed by particular political and historical circumstances, and to develop a larger social perspective on the turbo-folk scene. I am fully aware that the concept of fetish is always closely connected with emotional and affective dimensions of the subject-object relations.

“low” in representation, the author reveals his negative attitude toward elitist hierarchical discourses and their position of power in society, institutions, culture, politics, arts and everyday speech. This similarly applies to the concept of carnival as a structural principle of representational organization in a novel, which is also relevant for understanding Rabelais’s novel. As Bakhtin notes, “All were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age” (1984: 219).

Rabelais’s representational strategies in his novel are focused on undermining the language itself through the parodic treatment of language and representational mechanisms. Turbo-folk performances contain certain elements of what Bakhtin sees as a parodic attitude toward the body. Some examples are the crossing of boundaries of taste, class, cultural divisions and genres in addition to the exaggeration of signifiers of sexuality, reproductive functions, heterosexuality and very often the erasure of the boundaries of class stratifications. In addition, there is also often an erasure of the boundaries between genres - the urban and rural and very often between the “high” and “low”.¹⁸¹ However, it is very difficult to find the principle of parodic intentions in turbo-folk performances. It is very difficult to situate turbo-folk parodic dialogue in any place. It seems that the parodic intention of exaggeration in turbo-folk performances go in all directions and create many meanings. However, it is not clear who are the “official” or “institutional” elite - against which these meanings could be directed. It is questionable whether we can really talk about any political or social subversion that comes out of these carnivalist and parodic representations of the body, gender relations, female subjectivities and such. That parody that challenges representational conventions is subversive only under the condition that it is understood as a parody by a vast majority of the audiences.¹⁸²

It is not that turbo-folk performances are not carnivalesque enough in the Bakhtinian sense. I argue rather that merely the presence of carnival and carnivalism does not necessarily

¹⁸¹ In that respect, the representational politics of turbo-folk falls under the Bakhtinian understanding of the twist of parodic representation. It converts and distorts some preconceptions about genre divisions and divisions between “high” and “low” culture (Bakhtin 1984: 218).

¹⁸² As I already mentioned, especially in Chapter 2, the first manifestations of turbo-folk production in the very beginning of the nineties were considered to be transgressing in terms of genre compared to the earlier strict divisions between music styles or genres that, according to many authors, were a characteristic of Yugoslavia (Čolović 1985; Đurković 2002; Gordy 1999; Kronja 2001). Still, it seemed that there was not much genuine novelty regarding the deployment of female bodies. Their deployment was not intended to be ironic, as Papić claims, but aligned with the commodity fetishization trends.

imply that there is political subversion. Many scholars have argued that the Bakhtinian concept of carnival includes per se the idea of political subversion and resistance to the dominant, monolithic political structure. Therefore, according to them, carnival as such implies that there is some kind of rebellion against existing social and political norms.¹⁸³ However, other authors have also pointed out that representational subversion of the existing order does not necessarily correspond with subversion in actual political life and social order, since the traditional concept of carnival is politically very ambiguous. Bakhtin himself writes:

[...] There is no pure abstract negation in the popular-festive system of images; it tends to embrace both poles of becoming in their contradiction and unity. The one who is trashed or slaughtered is decorated. The beating itself has a gay character; it is introduced and concluded with laughter” (Bakhtin 1984: 203)
 [...] Therefore, all the episodes are ambivalent: destruction and uncrowning are related to birth and renewal. The death of the old is linked with regeneration; all the images are connected with the contradictory oneness of the dying and reborn world [...] But even in its narrow sense carnival is far from being a simple phenomenon with only one meaning” (Bakhtin 1984: 217-218).

Reading Bakhtin, I conclude that old carnivalist cultural and popular festive forms were often tolerated and cherished by sovereigns over the centuries because of their ambiguity. They were not really seen as a direct political threat but continued to exist independently. They moved from urban spaces to private family occasions, continuing to live symbolically through some forms and rituals (Bakhtin 1984: 219). Carnival might host a potential for social change but not necessarily. Politically, it might be subversive only in the context where “low” culture was suppressed by “elite” culture and authoritarian institutions.

This warning is useful for my discussion, as it leads us to the conclusion that, similarly, transgressing turbo-folk performances - although they had caused a small revolution in the understanding of genres in the period of Yugoslavia - might not necessarily imply any kind of subversion in terms of identity politics in the post-Yugoslav context. On the contrary, they might just be a temporary imitation of free play, without being rooted in actual political agency in society. There are many examples that support this interpretation. For instance, at the same time as his troops were conducting military actions and real and actual violence, Arkan, their

¹⁸³ For instance, see Holquist’s view of the subversive potential of carnival (Holquist 1984: xix). In addition, many feminist authors understand the Bakhtinian ideas of dialogism, polyphony and carnival as indisputable tools for the criticism of male-dominated hierarchies in society (see Bauer 1991). However, some others have claimed that Bakhtin himself never really developed any connection between his understanding of battlefield in terms of language and literature and the battlefield in the political life of social reality, so that the whole analogy is rather overestimated (see Pearce 1994).

commander, and one of the most powerful men in the Balkans at the time, had a habit of participating on popular talk shows, joking with turbo-folk singers and other entertainers. He often let the other participants tease him, and performed a role of a confused and ordinary man, who can be an object of jokes or mockery. What Bakhtin identified as a carnivalistic experience of the external world and carnivalistic mode of representation is the process of distorting conventions as such, transgressing boundaries and "uncrowning, travesty, trashing".

Carnivalistic disorder, however, according to Bakhtin, implies that hierarchies are *temporarily* suspended during the period of festive celebration which includes all types of obscenities and inappropriate behavior of the participants. Carnival allows "[...] permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times" (Bakhtin 1984: 10). However, Bakhtin also states, "We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture" (Bakhtin 1984: 11). It is not that carnival cannot be taken as politically subversive at all. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that frivolous, festive carnivalistic behavior itself does not usually open up a clear and non-ambiguous space for political change. Therefore, it contains the possibility for various cultural expressions, even for masked forms of violence.¹⁸⁴ Drawing on these features, there are plenty of reasons to say that the genre of turbo-folk fulfills to a certain extent the role of a *carnevalistic genre* in Serbian (and Balkan, as well as ex-Yugoslav) popular culture production. This means that it contains in itself ambiguous representational strategies and meanings. However, it does not strive for a clear identity politics or subversion of social hierarchies.

Similarly, regarding *irony* and especially *parody*, not all play with signifiers create ironic or parodic meanings. Irony in general is understood as a gap between what is conventionally said, expected or employed and what is the interpretation or perception of the representation. It is deeply conditional, dependent on the context and on the mode of encoding the message and the conditions of the decoding the message. In her book *Irony's Edge: The politics of Irony*, Linda

¹⁸⁴ Here, I would like to draw attention to the fact that, for instance, Stalin was a huge admirer of the genre of musicals that were known for burlesque and vivid imaginaries. In the famous documentary "The Pervert's Guide to Cinema" (2006) by Sophie Fiennes, Slavoj Žižek discusses the relationship between actual violence and the humor and carnivalist behavior in the musical *Ivan Grozni*, which was known to be one of Stalin's favorite plays. Although during the same period Stalin performed thousands of political murders in reality in his own country. The point is that representational transgression of hierarchies and the humor that emerges from such performances do not necessarily bring about liberating and constructive effects in actual political life.

Hutcheon claims that she is mostly interested in “scenes of irony”, the way that irony operates in a particular context and how it produces effect, if any. She writes that she is not so interested in answering what irony is, i.e. giving it a definition. It is not a question about whether someone in the audience will read some performance as ironic. The question is whether there is a community of audience members, a particular critical mass of people, who will read the message in a particularly ironic way (Hutcheon 1994: 11). Likewise, in the political sense, the fact that a group of intellectuals decodes the message in a certain way does not necessarily imply that the majority of the audience, those who are the main consumers of the product, also understand the contents of popular culture in this particular way. Referring to most commercial products of popular culture, which are sold in broad social circles, it is important to take into account how socially widespread a particular political interpretation of the product can be. In general and in practice, irony often means generating a meaning which is different from what was literary said/performed/represented. However, as Hall argues, the practice of decoding the message never completely matches the process of encoding. According to Hall, the interests of production industries, the mutual language of understanding and the interests and investments of the recipients are all at stake (Hall 1980). The media is one of the main factors in the process of decoding messages. For most of the audience, the media is the connection between the represented and the everyday with the actual issues that are of relevance and interest for most consumers.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines parody in the following way: “A composition [...] in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as they appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects; an imitation of a work more or less modeled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect” (Second edition, XI, 247). However, putting a subject in a ridiculous context, does not necessarily imply negation, criticism or subversion, especially in a contemporary context in which “ridiculous” in representation implies various meanings. It is important to bear in mind that not all types of parody are the same and that not all types of parody are critical of the object to which they refer. While discussing parody in arts and literature, Ruzkiewicz writes, “Yet not all alien worlds are hostile, nor all parodies critical or risible. The uninstructed nature of imitative literature encourages free and inventive explorations of form and subject matter that sometimes - even ordinarily - result in criticism and humor. But

these are aspects of parody, not definitions of it” (Ruszkiewicz 1979: 694).

Something similar can be said about parodic elements related to popular culture forms. Is the exaggeration or the over-stylisation of particular styles or forms always a criticism of these forms? In the case of the performances of turbo-folk stars, I would ask the same question and identify the pattern of exaggeration or over-glamourisation, which are associated with pornography, sado/masochistic or gothic elements of cultural inheritance as important parts of show business strategies. Certain types of parody or ironic treatment of language or worldviews play with the conventions of representation and refer to the language of representation itself without particular references to political engagements. Others attempt at achieving parody and even social critique of other referential systems, i.e. what is signified, particular institutions, cultural practices and discourses, daily politics, and the like. In any sense, irony as an aspect of representation is often the basis for parodic meaning. Irony is a particular signifying strategy or “scene” as Hutcheon would say, while parody is rather a genre determination. However, irony also includes the performers’ awareness of the double-bind of his/her performance. If there is the presence of politically motivated or decoded irony in these performances, there is also the presence of a politically-colored parody or of a parody that aims to negate or undermine the subject which is parodied. If not, then the parody strives to play temporarily with the elements of representation and to temporarily erase hierarchical boundaries, perpetuating and reinforcing the forms which are the object of parody.

From this perspective, the ironic play in turbo-folk performances in them is not read as socially subversive. The informants who were asked whether they could identify any ironic intentions in turbo-folk performances as such mostly answered that they were often fascinated by the grotesqueness and travesty of the performances of particular singers, but that they never took them as some source of social or cultural irony, or at least as intentionally parodic moves. When asked about Brunlik’s performance, for example, none of them expressed the opinion that she might have wanted to consciously create political parody. At first, they claimed that neither the performers nor their target groups meant to or were expected to participate in a subversive project:

The extent of their crazy performances is unbelievable, but I think that they mean it honestly [...] I don’t think these singers are aware of what they are doing [...] They are doing all that just because it is glamorous and eye-catching. They don’t think about any of the deep meanings of their messages” (Svetlana, a 22-year old female shop assistant from Belgrade).

The aim of the singers and producers of that music is, most probably, to make something that is cheap, easily available, but also very colorful and noticeable [...]. It makes you enjoy it for a moment, and the next moment you can throw it away, so that you can come tomorrow and buy a new, cheap and easy thing of the same kind [...](Marijana, 36-year-old female elementary school teacher from a small town in Serbia).

I don't particularly like some big thinking about the music I listen to [...] It is important for me that something is touching me in my heart, that it makes me cheerful and relaxed, so that I am not looking for anything deep in what I am listening to, or so [...] I think turbo-folk music is not made for big thinkers. It is made for the common people to relax with it and forget their life troubles while listening to it or dancing in some club [...](Mihailo, 30-year-old taxi driver from Belgrade).

The famous photographer and video director who directed some of the most glamorous videos in the nineties and later, Dejan Milićević, stated in the documentary “Sav taj folk”: “They (turbo-folk stars) wanted me to arrange something glamorous, something kitschy for them in these videos [...] That was the concept of mine, to show the glamour, something shiny, that was the primary goal while making these videos [...]”. In the same documentary another stylist, who had a critical view of turbo-folk visual performances, commented on the lack of awareness of the audiences (and performers as well) of the “contextual meaning” of the particular fashion elements or dressing codes that they have exploited, alluding to the complete inability of the mass audience to recognize some elements of the so-called sub-cultural performances that were “borrowed” from other contexts. This is how a stylist commented on the appearance of Nino, a popular turbo-folk male singer from the mid-nineties (in the same documentary): “For example, the women are going crazy about a guy, not noticing that he is dressed like a gay man from a suburb of San Francisco”. From this, it can be concluded that the lack of a shared “code” between the audiences and performers through a knowledge of so-called “sub-cultural” identities worldwide have enabled turbo-folk stars to incorporate various visual elements in their performances, which are hard to imagine that could be combined together in some other contexts. These performers do not draw on some deeper political or communicational encoded messages since, apparently, only a few people can really grasp the origin of the signifiers that they add to their image. In the end, pure play with elements of fashion, over-stylization, exaggeration and glamour per se is what matters.

Likewise, performers like Zorica Brunclik often deny that they have any intention to use “complicated” or ambiguous messages that could be read from their performances. “I am a singer for the folk, my duty is to entertain people, to give them what they want” was a usual

sentence that could be heard from the performers of this genre on numerous TV shows and in interviews. Brunclik, in her interviews in popular magazines and on TV shows, often mentioned that her main intention is to be interesting and attractive to young audiences and to combine traditional elements with “modern” music expressions. Given this point of view, I would argue that the main purpose of the performances like Brunclik’s has been to indicate in a glamorous way that her way of music performance contains something all-inclusive that is acceptable to traditional, modern and local but also western-influenced taste. Brunclik’s stage performances contained a double, contradictory tendency: to please the audience but also to impose a particular ideological framework. Performers such as Brunclik aspired to balance between the goal to satisfy broad audiences’ ideas of a cheap and accessible entertainment (to make as much money as possible) and to impose on the audience the image of herself as a national icon (to gain a position of gendered image of respectability in the spirit of the nineties). This concept of “national stardom” exceeds the scope of show business and pleads for the wider and supreme position of national and cultural, habitual and political respectability.

Likewise, during the period of this research, I almost never observed a turbo-folk performer, male or female, who declared any kind of ironic or parodic intention – or any intention to subvert the social or political order or regime which was in power at the time. There are a few performers that have flirted with the codes of minority identities, especially from the sphere of queer, gay or lesbian culture, which can be taken as a sort of exception from the rule, but only conditionally. The interesting examples are the performances of Jelena Karleuša, a female singer who first appeared in 1995 and has remained popular to date. While performing all the features of a typical stage identity of a turbo-folk singer from the nineties (such as dating mafia guys, marrying a rich and suspicious businessmen, divorcing him after a few months and singing songs about the typical life of Belgrade “sponzoruša” (sponsored girl) Karleuša’s performances contained rich elements of play with transexuality and androgyny. Dressed and made up so that she imitated the look of male transvestites, she often performed on the stage or in videos surrounded by either male gay-marked or transvestite bodies.¹⁸⁵ Karleuša was one of the rare voices among turbo-folk performers who uttered publicly that homosexuals should have

¹⁸⁵ See an example of at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XGrxLCBZoQ>

the right to be equal citizens in Serbian society.¹⁸⁶ The gay-identified informants that I spoke to confirmed that they highly appreciated her public contribution to gay visibility, even though it was put in the form of entertainment and not in some more official public debate. Karleuša's statements as well as many of her videos were highly regarded among the part of the gay population who frequents gay night clubs in Serbia and prefers turbo-folk music and foreign techno and pop music, particularly males. Nevertheless, Karleuša herself has never been regarded as particularly subversive in the eyes of "straight identified" audiences. In the words of Igor, "She is just another *sponzoruša*, she is just flirting with that gay thing, as it looks cool nowadays [...] but she is like the other turbo-folk birds [...] looking for rich guys [...] showing off with her money [...] she is not better than that" (Igor, a 26-year-old student from Novi Sad). It is true that despite her declared sympathy for the gay community, Karleuša has expressed her dedication to traditional family values many times, presenting herself as a typical wife who likes to cook and is loyal to her man. After marrying and divorcing a rich guy from a controversial business family, she married a football player from Serbia. This is again a "typical" move for a "typical turbo-folk diva".¹⁸⁷

Another famous performer who has been recognized as popular in the gay community in Serbia is Seka Aleksić, who released the famous song "Sviđa mi se tvoja devojka" (I fancy your girlfriend). The song openly deals with the topic of lesbian erotic desire.¹⁸⁸ However, the content of the lyrics still remains on the level of titillation. The song represents Belgrade night clubs life, famous for free behavior of girlfriends who often engage in homoerotic behavior among themselves, although they are not lesbians. The song itself has been very popular among the gay clubbing community. However, Seka herself has invested a lot of effort in denying that possibility that she might be gay or bisexual-oriented. In numerous interviews, she expressed the firm attitude that, yes, she is aware that she has got a lot of gay fans, but she has nothing to do with that and does not think that her song is a lesbian song. She insists that she loves her

¹⁸⁶ Karleuša expressed her support on a TV show called "Piramida" on TV Pink (November 30, 2008). She said that if her hairdresser, her stylist and make-up expert are gay, it means that gay people are around us, so we have to get used to the fact that they are citizens like anybody else. See the footage of this public statement at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ha5k-jHxcPY>

¹⁸⁷ See more about Karleuša's statements on her dedication to patriarchal family values at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhbJ4RZkD38>, and http://www.ceca-raznatovic.com/public_html/SAM/karicikarleusa.htm

¹⁸⁸ See the video and song at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1h_4jvG6aw

boyfriend and likes to cook for him.¹⁸⁹

These cases create a general pattern for the relationship between turbo-folk performances and the subversion of culturally given role models. This contradiction between particular aspects of their performances and other aspects of their public images negates a broader understanding of their performances as socially subversive. It seems that their occasional “flirting” with marginalized identities mostly stems from their desire to look “glamorous”, “exaggerated” and “exclusive”, although the main source of their income and their main audiences come from very straight-identified, ethnocentric-oriented and traditional circles, mostly based in ex-Yugoslav diasporas.¹⁹⁰

6.4. Shock-Therapies, Performing on the Border: Radicalization of Heteronormativity within the Community

Instead of subversion, I would rather argue that in the latest period of turbo-folk production a few turbo-folk singers, who have already reached a high status in this genre, started performing a sort of *radicalisation of performance* of certain themes or topoi. In other words, what some authors tend to call subversion (Dimitrijević 2001), I would rather call a radical and naturalistic representation, especially in the sphere of visual performances. Singers such as Jelena Karleuša and Seka Aleksić have performed good examples of this latest aesthetics. What I have outlined in relation to these performances (such as the songs about love, betrayal, sex, money, broken marriages, abandoned children and the like) has become openly, bluntly and radically exposed in the songs and videos of these singers. It is not about the subversion of the earlier nineties-type performances, identifiable in the careers of Ceca Ražnatović, Dragana Mirković or Jasna Milenković Jami (see Chapter 4) which depend on the images of assertive, male-dependant femininity. It is more about developing a more radicalized verbal and visual language related to previously defined themes and core values. There is a use of more direct

¹⁸⁹ See an example of Seka Aleksić’s statements on her gender and sexual identities in : *Svet* 2009, <http://www.naslovi.net/2009-08-04/svet/seka-aleksic-na-crnogorskom-primorju-prosetala-novog-decka/1265512>

¹⁹⁰ The TV show “Svet plus” was broadcast on the channel Politika in 2003 and 2004.

vocabulary and directly defined situations within which an individual might confirm a relationship with the community. I would classify many of the latest songs and videos of Jelena Karleuša, Seka Aleksić, Viki Miljković, Mina Kostić and a few others as examples of such socio-cultural discourses. Many of their songs are not really subversive of hegemonic heteronormativity in society. They more likely reveal the “awful truth”, which seems to prevent a space for an alternative path. Rather, this approach gives “permission” to the imaginary audiences of women to manipulate the world they are in and to use others in the same way that they are used by the rich and powerful. Karleuša’s song “Kazino (Casino)” released in 2007 is an extremely interesting example of such *radicalization*. The lyrics of the song are as follows:

Kao Monte Karlo sija Montenegro,
 Brod u marini,
 Sediš sam za rulet stolom
 A u ruci ti suvi martini,
 I moje srce na sto palo je,
 crveni žeton, to zna krupije,
 a ja već sada znam da znam,
 Da takvog videla nisam.
 Seksipilan, i tako atraktivan, i tako elegantan,
 Plave krvi, visoke strane škole,
 šarmantan i galantan,
 Crni smoking, I like the way you’re talking, I like
 the way you’re smoking
 Neodoljiv, k’o 007, pa mislim dok ga gledam:

Montenegro is shining like Monte Carlo,
 A boat in the marina,
 You are sitting alone at a roulette table,
 Holding dry martini in your hand.
 My heart fell on the table, too,
 Red token, the *croupier* knows it,
 And I know even now that I have never seen such a
 guy before,
 Sexy, so attractive, so elegant,
 Royal blood, great schools abroad,
 Charming and gallant,
 Black tuxedo, I like the way you’re talking, I like
 the way you’re smoking,
 Irresistible, like 007, so I am thinking while I am
 watching him:

Napravi mi sina,
 Pod svetlima kazina,
 Biće dete sreće, svi će da ga vide
 svi će da mu zavide.

Make me pregnant with a -son,
 Under the casino lights,
 He will be a lucky child,
 Everybody will see him,
 Everybody will envy him.

Napravi mi sina,
 Pod svetlima kazina,
 Biće milioner, biće smrt za žene,
 Kao ti za mene.

Make me pregnant with a son,
 Under the casino lights,
 He will be a millionaire,
 He will be fatal for women,
 Like you are for me.¹⁹¹

(2007)

The crucial part of the lyrics is the main verse in the refrain. “Napravi mi sina” (Make Me Pregnant with a Baby Son) addresses and celebrates the core of the manipulative male/female

¹⁹¹ Author of the music: N. Shemer; authors of the lyrics: Marina Tucaković i Lj. Jorgovanović

relationship so bluntly and so radically that it can be easily read as a strong social cynicism by sexual minority groups and adopted as the inversion of romantic heterosexual narratives. While attending gay night clubs in Belgrade and Novi Sad, I saw in person how gay male visitors and drag queens were absolutely delighted by this song, dancing and singing to its lyrics with utmost delight. However, I will try to explain why I would not classify this song as “ironic” or “subversive” in relation to heteronormative paradigms in Serbian society. The song was spectacularly released and performed on Pink television on the show “Grand Show”. Afterwards, it was shown many times on various TV channels and played in every club that hosts turbo-folk in Belgrade, Novi Sad or Niš. Interestingly, I have never found any evidence that mainstream audiences, TV journalists or any of the non-gay informants I talked to have ever commented on this song as subversive or ironic. TV journalists praised the song as a new “great hit” by Karleuša. Her music is often requested in clubs. I would argue that this song is an example of one of the latest turbo-folk strategies. There is now a sort of evolutionary stage which may be called a kind of “turbo-turbo-folk” phase. In this phase, performers still preserve the main topoi of heteronormative settings of communication between an individual and community, just adjusted to the contemporary life circumstances.

The location represented in Karleuša’s song is the seaside in Montenegro. This location is not Serbian soil, but it is a place where the elite and rich people from all over the region *come by* for a vacation. Hence, it is a place where a girl from the region has the best chances to meet a “prince”. There is a foreign-looking boat in a marina (like the famous mythic Monte Carlo setting, known as a place of casinos and entertainment for the rich). After this introduction the viewer realizes that in the middle of this glamour there is a man standing alone. The glamour of the casino is very important to make clear that the initial intention of the female narrator is to be among rich men. The casino is the place where you can see extremely rich people, not just upper middle-class, well-to-do men, but men with the kind of money which does not come from ordinary everyday work. The casino which is on a boat that is from abroad must be, according to the logic of the women who looks for rich men, the best place for picking up men.

It is important to understand that in performances like this the image of a performer who sings the song matters a lot. It is understandable that the audiences already *know what to expect* as a worldview from a performer such as Karleuša, and from the narrating subject of the song: glamour and money are pre-conditions for selecting men and rich is “sexy”, “desirable” and

“normal”. In other words, after the first two lines, the listener can be sure that the singing subject is a *sponzoruša* and that the listener is being invited to identify with her point of view. After the situation of “waelth” is introduced – the precondition for any encounter to follow – the subject continues to present the other characteristics of the man of her dreams: elegant, generous, highly educated, well-mannered and good-looking. There is also a little twist. Instead of addressing the usual appeal to such a man to make her his girlfriend or lover, the female subject in the song is begging man to impregnate her, asking, “I want to conceive a male child with you, while making love in the casino!” A close reading of the content of the lyrics will help reveal why, from her point of view, she cries such a thing. In an implicit way, the song conveys that a rich and educated man with good manners is a real exception in relation to her previous experiences. When she says that Montenegro is “shining like Monte Carlo”, it implies that the “Montenegro scene” is still just a small, local copy of Monte Carlo and that the “best things” are available only “in passing-by”. The female subject claims that she has never met a man who – aside from having money – has got a good pedigree, education or good manners. In a cynical way, this is also very telling about the “offer of local men” from the surroundings, which are apparently not rich *and* good-mannered. In addition, the man is a foreigner from “the West”. In the eyes of this woman, he fulfills the myth of the James Bond cult, as a perfect man, hero, lover and gentleman. This line is sung in English, which has almost never appeared in any of the turbo-folk lyrics before. Finally, in the refrain, she screams, “I want a baby boy from you!” Everything comes together: the usual topoi of heteronormativity and the urge for the (re)establishment of traditional patriarchal notions of community. This time, however, there are new circumstances and a new context. The woman understands that this is a man’s world. The best she can achieve is to bring to the world a new baby boy, who will be a lucky child (at this point the listener understands that she is not lucky and she believes that she is not lucky), rich and adorable, with such a perfect genetic code. He will be a real man, as in this world only a rich and lucky man can be a really happy individual.

This song also bridges very traditional, local folk superstitions, i.e. belief in the magic meaning of certain actions (like being impregnated by a rich man in a casino) and a very modern awareness of the global-local economic, national, regional and gender hierarchies. However, in this song, there is a shocking dismissal of any possibility for women’s empowerment, except through reproducing heteronormativity. Being a woman – according to the logic of this song –

means that in order to find her way in this world her ultimate goal must be to recreate the perfect man, as only a perfect man can be free and powerful in this world. Apparently, according to the experience of the *sponzoruša*, local resources for such “male excellence” have been exhausted so that a mysterious, irresistible stranger, resembling James Bond has to be involved in the story. The community blood is to be refreshed by something that cannot be found among local men. A woman is also believed to gain something for herself (style, class, manners, good luck) through a lucky baby son, such as an assumed certain meaning in the community she is coming from.

By no means would I call this song, or any other performed by Jelena Karleuša or performers mentioned here - a feminist one. Despite the fact that most of these songs reveal in a certain way the “awful truth” about women’s subordination in the patriarchal setting in the local context, they usually do not present any alternative except mere strategies of manipulation of hierarchical male/female relations. By doing so, they reproduce heteronormative hegemonic relations. Songs such as “Casino” are a contemporary picture of the radicalization of such strategies. They are the radicalisation of the language of a dialogue between an individual and a collective. In the sixties and seventies, the desirable pattern was a love between two young people from the same village (and an illegitimate child would be unthinkable). In the nineties it was important to be the woman of a real man, a man who carried a gun for his nation or his neighborhood. Finally in the period after 2000, I would argue that there have many adaptations of these previous patterns, such as even the acceptability of an illegitimate child from the stranger as long as this child will be rich and powerful and have a father of “noble blood”. However, it also means that the concept of the “community” or the “collective” has been slightly renegotiated in relation to the nineties and earlier periods. Still, the relationships between gender and nation and sexuality and nation have not been changed, either in the popular culture imaginary or in the discourses that they have been intertwined with.

The most contemporary understanding of the community, depicted by these forms of turbo-folk genres, allows all sorts of open incorporations and interaction with the “foreign elements” that come from “the West”. Hence, the use of a foreign language and celebrating foreign masculinity, appears perfectly natural, as long as it is “our”, local way of doing it. The locality in itself and local strategies of doing gender hierarchies prevail nowadays in turbo-folk performances.

Glamour, the grotesque and the aesthetics of exaggeration in performing heterosexuality

that are involved in its production have been the reasons why particular groups from the gay population in Serbia and in other parts of the region identify themselves as fans of turbo-folk. Several informants who identified themselves as being gay said they loved Jelena Karleuša, Seka Aleksić and Ceca Ražnatović because their clothing, hairstyles and glamorous lyrics full of pathos offer them much more inspiration for their transgender interplay than performers from any other genre. A young gay man who occasionally performs in gay clubs (and sometimes even straight clubs) in Serbia as a transvestite singing turbo-folk songs and dancing explained to me why, in his opinion, turbo-folk is so popular among many gay men. "Of course I know it is kitsch, these ridiculous songs, and this stuff, but what else is there for me? I know who these women are, but they have the best stylists and fashion designers in the country, the best make up. They have the best show-business production here. I am an entertainer. I have to learn from the best in my work [...]. This is the only scene in Serbia which produces videos in which you can see "trandže" and really shiny, amusing female looks [...].¹⁹² Some of these singers are even good girlfriends of mine. We sometimes meet over coffee and gossip." A few other gay men I have talked to simply explained to me that they liked to dance to the music of these singers. "I really believe that many of these songs are made by gay people. If it is not so, why would they be so popular at gay places in Serbia?" is the reply I got from a 22-year-old regular guest of a gay night club in Belgrade.

A 36-year-old woman who identified as lesbian from Novi Sad also confirmed that she enjoys attending clubs with turbo-folk music, although this is definitely not the type of music she would call "her style". According to her, gay clubs in Serbia are mostly intended for male gay audiences who are the most loyal customers. Many of these customers also like turbo-folk music. Therefore, lesbians have to conform to the taste of the majority. As this woman pointed out, turbo-folk still contains some potential for transformation and for masquerade of one's identity. This is why it is so popular among gay people in Serbia, especially given that many of them have lived most of their lives in fear of being "outed" in some unfriendly surrounding. The other interviews I did with people who identified themselves as gay likewise revealed many contradictions. For instance, six out of the nine clubbers that I interviewed in Novi Sad declared that they "end up" listening to turbo-folk songs almost every weekend, although they would

¹⁹² "Trandža" is an expression used in the Serbian gay community that comes from the word "transvestites" and usually refers to male transvestites.

never politically - or in terms of taste - identify with turbo-folk music. A 28-year-old female informant said, “Come on, this is not the music that I was brought up with. My preferences now are techno music and electronic pop, and earlier it was some of the old rock things, such as Sting, Ekatarina Velika or Haustor, [...] I have nothing to say about Karleuša or Ceca, I am off limits for them [...] However, I always stop by at clubs with such music, since many of my friends hang out there. They simply like sleazy places, because we call these places sleazy. They are more relaxed there [...] it is a simple thing”. Finally, one of the eldest clubbers (age 44) that I met in a gay club in Belgrade told me:

It is amazing what kind of music is available for gay people today. When I was very young, in the eighties, we had some bands that we understood as ours, like alternative, which sang about the topics close to our interests and were dressed in a way that imitated foreign gay clubbing culture, such as Idoli, Laki Pingvini and others [...] These bands were popular, but of course, they were not treated as mainstream. It was understood that if you listen to their songs, you are a bit “different”, a bit “*tetka*”¹⁹³ [...]. But nowadays, here in Serbia, most of the very young gay people have accepted pure commercial mainstream [music], sung by “sponsored” girls who look for rich husbands, as simply there is no real gay alternative to this in Serbia. Everything has been sucked in, occupied by turbo-folk, Grand Show, Ceca, Jeca, Dara Bubamara and the others who take after them [...]. If you ask me, I think this is ridiculous, but I guess [...] each time has its own madness.

To conclude this part, I would like to argue that it is very disputable to claim that turbo-folk performances contain a meaningful platform for social criticism or political subversion. As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, subversion in this case might have rested on the presence of irony or parody (as a broader genre articulation of ironic meaning), introducing new, socially heated and controversial issues. By political subversion, I do not mean only subversion in relation to state governments or state ideological apparatuses. I also mean subversion in terms of the negotiation of identity politics, hierarchical relations between mainstream identities in society and marginalized identities. However, there are problems in viewing turbo-folk performances as subversive. First, in terms of irony, these performances are mostly lacking in what Hutcheon calls a “scene of irony”, i.e., the community which is able, interested, and invested in decoding meanings as ironic. Most of the interviews that I did showed that people like a particular word, expression or scene that appear in their head triggered by some refrain in turbo-folk lyrics. None of them reported that they saw some particular lyrics or visual performance as really motivating in terms of the content, metaphors, ideology, etc. Even if such

¹⁹³ “Tetka”, which literary means “aunt” in Serbian, is also a word which in this use means a feminized type of gay man. Sometimes it is also used to indicate gay men in general.

an example appeared now and then, it was usually not received well. In other words, turbo-folk production has never had the reputation of demanding “deep thinking” or offering anything really “challenging”. Rather, it is described as “fast music, good for dancing” or producing a sad, melancholic atmosphere that reminds a listener of some special past experiences.

Second, the similar can be said about the question whether there is parody in turbo-folk performances, in terms of political or any kind of social subversion. Certain parodic intentions, in terms of distortion of representational conventions do appear in turbo-folk, such as the representation of exaggeration, travesty or glamour typical for western drag queen culture. This can all be analyzed with the Bakhtinian concept of the carnival. However, these parodic intentions, in the given context, do not fall under the category of *subversive, undermining parody* - parody which is critical of its object of criticism. It is not only that the audiences do not see subversion of the turbo-folk conventions, but it also seems that the performers themselves do not have any intention to mock or diminish the contents or forms they represent. In such a setting, parody has a new, authentic relationship to its object and underlines its main meanings. Parodic elements appear more like an updated, “catchy”, fashionable addition that refreshes the original turbo-folk representational and ideological settings.

6.5. Conclusion

The spirit of a community, party entertainment and mandatory heterosexuality is what prevails in the construction of turbo-folk culture and in the ways that gender is constructed within the turbo-folk imaginary. The communal spirit also incorporates elements of many identities. However, the reproduction of heteronormativity as the main principle for an individual’s place in relation to the community remains. Employment of the fetishised signifiers of nation or sexuality serves this purpose. Elements of the other identity politics also might be present in some of these performances. However, they are usually exploited for the purposes of (re)enforcing heteronormativity, and the reproduction of the community. An important part of these orientations are the stage identities of women performers who successfully “play” with various representations of social images, however, always making sure that they publicly “stick” to the “right” image of a wife (or a faithful girlfriend) who spends time with her male partner,

cooks for him, gets along perfectly with him, prepares to have children and lives a family life. This is, presumably, the lifestyle which would be approved (and envied) by the majority of their fans.

Namely, turbo-folk performances (i.e. verbal or visual accounts of the issues of body, sexuality, national narratives, and other identity questions) do not really contain elements of clear social critique, as there were not enough signs for the audiences to read a subversive political message behind their performances, nor are there indicators that the performers themselves have such a concept of playing with political reality. However, we can still speak of particular social and political implications of their performances, since they do deal with the fetishization of certain aspects of sexuality and the symbols of nation. Here, I wish to underline the presence of images of women who aspire to “higher class” subject positions by merging eroticism and collective, national identity. By doing so, they create an image of women who “know their place” - women who are “respectable” according to the current ideological settings of the community, which means successful within the class position they are expected to occupy as popular singers.

CONCLUSION

During my research and the completion of this dissertation, I faced many challenges. I combined various theoretical concepts, examined different intellectual and geopolitical contexts and used several research methods that are grounded in various disciplines. Many difficulties stemmed from the fact that I dealt with a complex cultural and social phenomenon, and whole range of political, historical, cultural and economic variables, which interact in this phenomenon. This complexity made it very difficult for me to decide which parts of the non-show business context I would include as relevant in my research and which to omit and leave to future researchers. A lot of interesting examples remained unmentioned, and many intriguing questions were left as pure hypotheses or assumptions in my field notes. As a final solution to this complexity I had to accept the notion that popular music studies are “a game without frontiers.” Many dynamic sets of human practices and tastes can be examined within this discipline. Moreover, toward the very end of my project I realized that due to the fluid nature of the subjects involved, popular music studies correspond with the unpredictability of people’s everyday lives much better than many other seemingly more empirical disciplines and methodologies. While researching the relationship between the popular music genre (or scene) named turbo-folk, gender and nationalism in Serbia in the post-Yugoslav period, I constantly questioned and rethought my methods and research questions as well as the applicability of my theoretical postulations. My permanent awareness of the possibility of theoretical misguidance forced me to look for a balance between using data from local settings and theoretical concepts created for large, global commodity markets. It is important to reconstruct and improve this relational model in every new research project which brings together local experiences and theories created for larger geopolitical contexts.

My research was designed as a response to the general opinion that turbo-folk is a “low-style”, “nationalist” and “sexist” product of popular culture, aimed at pleasing broad audiences in Serbia. This general notion usually manifests through two types of opinions. One positions

turbo-folk as a product invented by the Milošević's regime, which is viewed as imposed on the audiences from above. This perspective constructs turbo-folk as detrimental to Serbian culture and, above all, discriminatory towards minority identities. The other position, although it does not deny the elements of bad taste, nationalism and sexism in turbo-folk, explains turbo-folk as an authentic, local musical expression of global popular culture trends. This perspective constructs turbo-folk as a "real expression of the tastes of the audiences" in Serbia and, subsequently, understands it to be open to various forms of identity politics. Having started with these openly critical and affirmative statements, I investigated the theoretical foundations of both of these attitudes, in the light of anthropological, cultural and linguistic analysis.

My main objective was not to answer directly whether turbo-folk is inherently a sexist, nationalist and/or culturally oppressive popular product, as it is considered by many intellectuals, journalists and musicians (as described in Chapter 2). The images of sexism and nationalism in turbo-folk are contextual manifestations of the historically and socially shaped genre conventions. My aim was rather to trace the interrelatedness between popular music genre conventions and the social context within which they emerge, and the way in which gender representations are employed in the reinforcement of this relationship that plays a role not only in turbo-folk, but also in popular culture worldwide. An investigation of this relationship can be successful only if the historical developments of particular themes, motifs or performances are taken into account. For this reason I examined the continuity between newly composed folk music (NCFM) - the predecessor of turbo-folk - and the turbo-folk scene itself and explored the genre conventions of women's representations in NCFM. Nationalism in the nineties, manifested as turbo-folk representational genre conventions, was pre-conceived by NCFM conventional representations of the imagined community (village, town, region, country, etc) as the main value of each individual.

In order to understand the general position of the motifs of sexism and nationalism in turbo-folk and popular music in general, I analyzed them through theoretical terms of the constructions of nationalism and gender in popular culture. That is, I focused on the examination of how gender patterns (such as sexuality, male/female binary oppositions and the symbols of nation) came to be employed as signifiers of nationalism, sexism and other paradigms of hierarchical power relations. I established that the main structural convention of NCFM was the representation of the subordination of individual lives to the community, which was represented

through the paradigm of heteronormativity. Constructions of women's *stage identities* in NCFM were signifiers of heteronormativity; the main ideological framework for individuals within the community. The idea of belonging to an imagined community, inherent to NCFM performances in Yugoslav period, was transformed to ethno-nationalism in the turbo-folk scene in post-Yugoslav period, since "ethno-nation" substituted all other representations of "community." In other words, in order to examine the nature and function of gender and nationalist imaginary in the turbo-folk performances, I explored the representations of women as the most visible images of heteronormativity. In this thesis, I explored the subtle ways in which the women's "stage identities" and the concept of heteronormativity were constructed and played a role in maintaining the hidden nationalist messages of turbo-folk performances.

This study strives to engage in scholarly debates in several ways. First, it contributes to the research on phenomena of contemporary European nationalisms that emerged in the period after the Cold War, often embedded in everyday, seemingly politically neutral practices. So far, studies on ethno-nationalisms in former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe have mostly dealt with the representations of dramatic, official events and manifestations, and official media texts, interpreted in unambiguous ways and perceived as having directly "led" to violent and destructive behaviors. Considering other studies of violent nationalisms in former Yugoslavia, this research is an examination of an unexplored angle of ethno-national paradigms in the post-Yugoslav period. I analyzed the ways it was embedded in various everyday practices and performances of popular culture. Nationalism, similarly to the ideologies of statehood and citizenship is the matter of verbal and visual representation, negotiated and communicated to the recipients through their everyday consumption of marketed products.

This approach also opens up the possibility of reconnecting studies on social and political realms of Eastern Europe with those of other geopolitical contexts in the world. The employment of Michael Billig's idea of "banal nationalism" suggests that masked, hardly visible practices of preserving and maintaining national homogeneity participate in every contemporary formation of nation-state or any community based on the concept of ethno-nationalism. Given that popular music production nowadays is a global phenomenon that spreads rapidly through powerful technologies and communicational channels (TV and radio, Internet and satellite technologies), studies of commercial popular music unpack the connection between consumers' everyday practices of leisure and entertainment and their notion of belonging, grouping and cultural

identification. This complex relationship cannot be studied as a mere causal link, which would reveal some predictable outcome. The processes of cultural homogenization might have an outcome that does not fully correspond with the intentions of the political establishments, they are not always translatable into the language of official politics. This is one of the reasons why turbo-folk cannot be reduced to the political aspirations of Milošević's regime. As it was shown in my thesis, each particular factor such as gender, the representation of women, sexuality and religious symbols must be studied in their complex interrelatedness with other cultural and social issues and, in particular, in relation to conventional practices of a given musical genre. Thinking of the wars of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, the discussion on nationalism as a gender construct in popular culture might challenge numerous attempts to define ex-Yugoslav nationalisms as in-born, long-term hatreds which initiated all other events that followed.

Subsequently, my approach employs a revision of Anderson's *imagined community*; through which he links the notion of national belonging to the spread of literacy and print culture which flows from the top down in a society (Anderson 1983). As Edensor points out, national belonging is often reproduced through unspectacular and everyday practices, leisure, entertainment and, especially, popular culture. Nationalism should be studied as a particular genre of visual or verbal representation which can be found in many various contexts, rather than some assumed endemic cultural specificity of a particularly wild or exotic surrounding. An ethno-national community is always mediated through a system of signs and symbols that are employed in justification of particular social organization which keeps individuals together.

The significance of studies on genres such as turbo-folk and its role in community building exceeds the borders of Eastern Europe, since any popular music market is inevitably interconnected with social, economic, cultural and other contexts from which their audiences come. It is important to study the concept of national homogeneity as mediated through the conventions of particular genres in the case of Serbian and former Yugoslav nationalism(s). This approach shows how nationalism often acts as an ideological justification of interests of powerful economic and political agents. In any geopolitical context, the thematic conventions of commercial, marketable genres are historically developed with the subtext of particular social or political meanings. Nationalism is communicated to the members of a community, through various verbal and visual languages. Popular culture analysts should research particular paradigms and patterns of encoding and decoding messages of entertainment products, as well as

the political constraints and empowerment that emerge through the production and consumption of popular culture.

An important aspect of my work was theorizing women's "stage identities" or the representation of stardom within the turbo-folk scene as a reproduction of community as heteronormative. In former Yugoslavia, music scenes which target smaller groups of audiences have often promoted an alternative, non-heteronormative image of womanhood¹⁹⁴. However, here I dealt purposefully with a mainstream music genre that tended to construct socially "desirable" gender dynamics. I introduced the problem of representation of gender and nation in turbo-folk through testing whether the women singers' stage identities in turbo-folk performances have challenged and/or reaffirmed heteronormativity as the main vehicle of communal or ethno-national belonging. My method of combining textual and visual analysis of women's performances in turbo-folk with ethnographic research is an engagement with the scholarship of the representation of women in the popular music industry.

A great body of the literature deals with the empowering images of women within rock, pop or punk (such as those of Madonna, Janis Joplin, Annie Lennox, Sinead O'Connor and others). Even with regard to the most commercial, globally-consumed pop genres, the authors predominantly analyzed women icons' performances as the authentic expression of women's agency. Many of the studies argue that women's stage performances should be interpretable for everybody as a part of women's increasing visibility, which are celebrations of the liberation of their sexuality and freedom of life choices. Regardless of the fact that some music genres might be considered "conservative," or "traditional", such as country in the USA or "sexist" like hip-hop, the appearances of women singers within music scenes is usually seen as an empowering aspect of women's visibility in public space. So far, in popular music studies, there has not been enough focus on more ambiguous modes of production of women's images, which make women visible, but at the same time may reinforce a heterosexual hegemonic economy of social relations in historically and locally specific ways. My conclusion is that women's performances in turbo-folk, as they had derived from NCFM and the promotion of the concept of community as a main value, reconstructed elements of "banal nationalism" as a genre convention. In other words,

¹⁹⁴ Here I refer to the examples of Yugoslav female pop singers from the eighties, such as Slađana Milošević (Serbia), or Anja Rupel (Slovenia), who performed images of female liberation, sexual emancipation, and the like. However, here I also include some very recent images of women performers, embedded in small and non-commercial music scenes, such as Lollobrigida's and LeZbor (Croatia), or E-Play (Serbia).

ethno-nationalism in turbo-folk is exercised through representations of women as the most visible bearers of heteronormativity. My thesis suggests that the concept of women's stardom should be employed when to understand the potential of popular culture to accommodate various cultural and political projects, not only in the context of Eastern European societies, but in much larger context.

Popular culture and popular music nowadays have an increasing potential to construct the cultural homogeneity of the audiences. However, this homogeneity cannot be studied as a self-understood condition which emerges automatically through the act of consumption. The homogenization of the cultural space could come through various sets of emblematic practices, significations and cultural expectations. My study of building a particular cultural space through constructions of women singers' "stage identities," could be a methodological model for the studies of popular music in relation to gender and communal homogenization. In addition, the concepts that I have used can be a platform for the exploration of social and cultural aspects of popular cultural forms from Eastern Europe and beyond. In particular, this method contributes to the analysis of cultural stereotypes of the rural/urban, East/West division or issues around the "orientalization" and the "Balkanization" of particular geopolitical contexts. Analysis of popular culture forms often reveals how controversial a project of national or cultural homogenization or, moreover, of a nation-state, can be. As the reception of Ceca's career has shown, the representations of national idolatry include many elements that contradict each other and result in an amalgam of paradoxically contrasted discourses. As it was shown on the example of Ceca's performances, turbo-folk performances which address the audiences as a homogenous ethno-national heterosexual community, could also be consumed by the communities that fall outside of this collective framework. It does not mean that turbo-folk represents these non-Serbian, non-heterosexual forms of identity – however it participates in various, politically controversial commodity exchanges on cultural and historical market. Therefore, popular music studies appear as a disciplinary field within which official views on many controversial political phenomena can be challenged, such as complicated conflicts between ethnic groups with similarities in cultural heritage (for example Israeli/Palestinian, Greek/Turkish and Serbian/Bosnian). Analogous theoretical frameworks can be applied to the numerous phenomena of popular music production far beyond the borders of European contexts, which target wide audiences within a particular community and, subsequently, interact with mainstream notions of the communal

homogeneity. Accordingly, this approach would contribute to the unpacking and questioning of politically conformist systems of representation in popular music in various geopolitical contexts.

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