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HOW BALKAN ROCK WENT WEST

Political Implications of an Ethno-Wave

TITO'S SOCIALISTIC ROCK'N'ROLL

The term Balkan Rock[1] was originally applied to the once flourishing Yugo Rock. Considering the fact that communist regimes regarded Anglo-American popular music as a 'carrier of Western values', and consequently as a direct attack on Marxist ideology (see Pilkington 1994; Rauhut 1996: 239–240), at first glance the existence of a lively pop music scene in the former Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) might seem paradoxical. However, if we take into account the historical development and the specifics of the political system of the now disintegrated country, the positive attitude towards this musical genre and Western popular culture in general becomes comprehensible.

After the political breakaway from Moscow in 1948 (see Fritzler 1993: 38–40), the former Yugoslavia embarked on what it called its 'self-determining way into socialism'. The main pillars of this doctrine were the adoption of certain features of the market economy (the Economic Reform of 1965), the system of socialistic self-government (installed after the change of the constitution in 1968), and the leading role within the Non-Aligned Nations. In practice, this meant that the country, situated between the two current dominant political systems, was a kind of West of the East, where market-oriented production conditions coincided with socialistic ideology, and the neo-Stalinist roots of the communist regime were covered with a coat of pseudo-democratic pseudo-liberalism (see Tomc 1985: 13).

Hence, on the one hand (except for sporadic cycles of tighter Party control), in Yugoslavia a specific 'repressive-tolerant' (see Tomc 1985) political climate dominated, which proved to be favourable for the re-contextualisation of western musical genres. Especially during the 1960s, as the economy boomed, the borders towards the West were opened, and

1 In the West, this musical genre is also known under the terms 'Balkan Beat' or 'Balkan Jazz'.

the political atmosphere was rather relaxed, the country experienced a wide-ranging adoption of the western lifestyle. The media broadcasted a considerable amount of rock and pop music, the record industry issued licensed hits by western stars, and from the middle of the decade onwards, even big names such as *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, *Jethro Tull*, *Osibisa*, Frank Zappa, Ike and Tina Turner, and *The Rolling Stones* occasionally toured the country.

Parallel to this development, a growing number of domestic rock and pop groups emerged[2], which worked under rather favourable conditions. The media were open to their music, the record industry promoted these musical genres and live events attracted a mass public, so that by the mid 1970s, especially in big cities, there prevailed a "nearly authentic rock and pop climate" (Tuksar 1978: 10)[3]. Also, musically, the groups gradually turned away from copying foreign role models and gave a genuine imprint on what used to be one of the most vibrant musical scenes in continental Europe (see Ramet 1994; Janjatović 1998).

On the other hand, for a number of reasons, popular music also enjoyed considerable political support: Rock'n'Roll and its derivatives acted as an optimistic sound of modernisation, accompanying the accelerated industrialisation and urbanisation of the country. The growing consumption of popular culture served as a proof of the success of the economic policies of that period. Furthermore, the adoption of certain aspects of the western lifestyle signalled the basic difference between socialistic self-government and what used to be the actual existing socialism of the Eastern Bloc countries (see Mastnak 1987: 41–43).

YUGO ROCK – A HYBRID MUSICAL GENRE FROM THE BOSNIAN CAPITAL SARAJEVO

Another political reason for the promotion of the Western popular culture was the attempt to diminish the existing cultural differences between the various ethnic groups. In practice, the (cultural) diversity of what used to be called 'the nations and nationalities of the Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia' was never standardised, and accordingly there were also

2 A reliable overview of the most important ones has been published by Petar Janjatović (Janjatović 1998).

3 Translated from Serbo-Croatian by the author.

significant differences between the scenes in the individual republics[4]. But there were also a number of unifying elements which made popular music genres trans-national: The commercially-oriented music industry[5] operated in a state-wide domestic market; well-known singers and groups toured the whole country; musicians from all parts of Yugoslavia took part in the numerous music festivals and competitions; the 'nationally' structured media also broadcasted popular music emissions from other republics, etc. And last but not least, there was Yugo Rock, which carried away fans across the whole country.

The cradle of Yugo Rock was the Bosnian capital Sarajevo. Due to its multicultural social structure, before the civil war between 1992 and 1995, Sarajevo was often referred to as a 'miniature Yugoslavia', or even as a holographic replica of the Balkans itself. It was a lively, tolerant, and inspiring urban centre, in which Serbian, Croatian, and Muslim traditions merged in a creative atmosphere of intense cultural exchange, and local musical idioms amalgamated with international pop music into a new hybrid genre (see NN 1991–92).

Though one of the first groups that combined rock music with ethno-sounds must have been the Serbian band *Smak* [Destruction] with its hit single *Ulazak u harem* [Entrance to the Harem; 1975], the official founder of Yugo Rock is generally considered to be *Bijelo dugme* [White Button] from Sarajevo. A previous member of *Smak* played in this group (see Janjatović 1998: 166), which was formed in the beginning of the 1970s and mingled hard rock riffs with regional folk songs. Also, the texts transmitted issues that were perceived as a direct reflection of the 'Bosnian mentality', so that their songs could be regarded as a kind of 'Balkan Country Rock' (Tomc 1998: 41).

Furthermore, *Bijelo dugme* was the first Yugoslav band to draw some 10 000 fans to its concerts. The mass adoration it caused, called

4 In Macedonia and Montenegro, rock music was cultivated rather sporadically. Croatia, on the other hand, maintained a highly developed music industry, and from this republic came the most sophisticated products of the ex-Yugoslav pop music. The trademarks of the Rock-oriented scene of the Serbian capital Belgrade were *Disciplina kičme* [The Discipline of the Backbone] and *Ekaterina velika* [Katharina the Great]. The alternative scene from Ljubljana (Slovenia) became known predominantly through the politically-engaged punk and the scandal group *Laibach,* etc.

5 Contrary to other socialistic countries, the Yugoslav record industry was never centralised. Next to the Serbian and Croatian majors Jugoton, Suzy, Discos and RTV Beograd, there were also a number of smaller producers competing for the market. From the 1980s onwards, there even existed some independent labels.

'Dugmemania', was the subject of several controversies, some of which were partly politically motivated. In spite of that, *Bijelo dugme* was marketed on a big scale by the music industry, which discovered a major source of income in the domestic Rock 'n' Roll scene (see Janjatović 1998: 31–33).

During the 1980s, an important representative of this musical genre was the group *Plavi orkestar* [The Blue Orchestra], which was also from Sarajevo. Due to numerous references to traditional music their re-launch of Yugo Rock has been described as 'Balkan folklorism', 'new primitivism', and 'newly composed Pop Rock' respectively (see Gračanin 1985: 47). "We are folk musicians", the group explained in an interview. "We glorify the folk and the folk culture. We are paying taxes to our tradition. All original ideas are home-made" (quoted after Gračanin 1987: 44)[6]. Comparable to *Bijelo dugme*, the members of this band, nicknamed the 'Balkan Beatles', were also celebrated stars in the whole country, regardless of the ethnic or cultural background of their fans (see Virant 1998: 25).

DISINTEGRATION OF THE MUSIC SCENE AND THE INTEGRATIVE POWER OF YUGO ROCK

As severe tensions between different national and ethnic groups increased from the mid-1980s onwards, as with other aspects of life, the individual music scenes started to close themselves into republican or ethnical borders (see Dragičević-Šešić 1997: 130). Festivals and competitions with participants from all the republics lost their importance or were abolished (see Janjatović 1998). The media concentrated on broadcasting 'national' productions or international pop music; once 'Yugoslav' stars, these celebrated musicians could only perform in their own cultural milieus; the record industry did not sign artists from 'other' republics, and the public also predominantly appreciated artists who were considered to be 'theirs'[7].

Musicians reacted to this situation in different ways. Some of them went abroad, robbed of their financial basis and disgusted by the political

6 Translated from Slovenian by the author.

7 There were even some cases of 'musical cleansing'. Thus for instance in Croatia during the early 1990s, everything that sounded 'Serbian' was undesirable (see Pieper 1999: 101). Another example is the *sevdalinka,* a Bosnian urban love song, which was traditionally performed and listened to by all three ethnic groups, the Serbs, the Croats, and the Muslims. Under the tense political conditions, however, the *sevdalinka* was appropriated by the Muslims as the musical symbol of their cultural identity, and was consequently banned from the musical repertoire of other ethnic groups (see Pieper 1999).

situation or fearing the threatening war. Some stayed and let themselves be used for political purposes, and while some heated up the emotional outbursts of ethnical intolerance or were even engaged in the spreading of war propaganda (see Pešić and Rosandić 1997: 220), others played at anti-war demonstrations.

Among those whom the nationalist warlords could not recruit for their political goals was the group *Bijelo dugme*. This band propagated a kind of 'Yugoslav nationalism' and recorded, among other songs, the Yugoslav national anthem. It warned of the escalation of ethnic conflicts and tried, such as with the song *Pljuni i zapjevaj, moja Jugoslavijo* [Spit and sing, my Yugoslavia] to prevent civil war (see Tomc 1998: 41). In this title, issued in 1986, the group appealed for peace with the following words: "Get up and sing, my Yugoslavia. Who does not listen to the song, will hear the thunder".

Also in the same year, the group *Plavi orkestar* issued a similarly conceptualised LP. The title *Smrt fašizmu – svobodo narodu* [Death to Fascism – Freedom for the People] is a partisan salute, and the song *Nemoj biti fašista* [You are not supposed to become a fascist] refers to the Second World War. On the surface, this title is a love song about a girl who has surrendered to the charm of a 'blond son of Hitler': This is a hint to the fact that during World War II a part of the Bosnian Muslims sympathised with the Germans (see Glenny 1993: 215). But the refrain, with its clear anti-nationalist message "You are not supposed to become a fascist, dear, because otherwise I am going to kill you", does not recount events long past, but points to the growing nationalist tendencies of that time.

YUGO ROCK IN EXILE

The civil wars in Slovenia (1991), Croatia (1991–1992), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), and Serbia (1999) left approximately 350 000 citizens dead and forced some 3 500 000 people to flee the country. Further, with the disintegration of the federation and the declaration of the former republics Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia as independent states, not only did Yugoslavia as a governmental unit cease to exist but also its name. Thus, Yugo Rock became metaphorically as well as de facto deprived of its original territorial anchorage and found a new home in diaspora.

This was especially the case in big European cities (London, Amsterdam, Vienna, or Berlin) with large immigrant communities from all parts of ex-Yugoslavia. In Berlin, the first venue to host Yugo Rock was the *Arcanoa Bar*, where from 1993 on, anti-nationalistic oriented young emigrants

congregated in order to listen to music from their country of origin. "Music from the former Yugoslavia is still holding the young generation from the Balkans together", noted a report on the Berlin Yugo Rock scene. "It is Rock against the nationalism of the warlords and separators" (Hoffmann and Rossig 1997: 125).

What was unthinkable in the country at war was practiced on a daily basis in the *Arcanoa Bar*: A harmonious social life beyond the religious or ethnic barriers that had fuelled the armed conflict between what had previously been considered 'brother nations'. Yugo Rock was the emotional tie of this community, although this label no longer covered a specific musical genre as *Bijelo dugme* and *Plavi orkestar* understood it, but encompassed music production from former Yugoslavia in general. As the following statements by three young refugees from different former republics show, most songs were known to everyone, and they presented a shared source of nostalgia, comfort and remembrance:

> Tatjana: Now in Berlin I am listening to more Yugoslav music as I did before, because at that time it was not so important to me. Since in the past the Yugoslav one was always there and easy to acquire, I preferred to listen to international pop music. The music from Western Europe and the US was interesting among others also because it was very hard to get hold of records and cassettes. That was attractive. And today it is the other way round. Here I listen almost exclusively to Yugoslav Rock and Punk music. I love to listen to this music. This music gives me a certain feeling. The language, the mentality – I can understand it better. I miss it. That is home sickness.
>
> Mario: The Yugoslav music is for me a connection between myself and my friends, some of whom died in the war. The music serves as a connection between the homeland, my city and my friends. My friends are now all over the place.
>
> Akisa: Also I myself listened at the beginning to a lot of Yugoslav music. This was for me a connection between the past and the presence. It was like living in the past.
>
> (quoted after Hoffmann and Rossig 1997: 132–133).

GORAN BREGOVIĆ – THE MUSICAL AMBASSADOR OF THE BALKANS

Another contribution towards the popularisation of the 'Balkan sound' was made by musicians in (temporary) exile, in particular by Goran Bregović, the former bandleader of the Yugo Rock group *Bijelo dugme*. In the West, Bregović first raised awareness with the music for the films of his compatriot Emir Kusturica (*Time of the Gypsies*, *Arizona Dream* and *Underground*). Later, he toured with his *Wedding and Funeral Band*, consisting of a symphony orchestra, a male choir, four vocal soloists, and a Roma brass band. Furthermore, he also wrote music for the theatre and for a number of stage spectacles. The show entitled *Goran Bregovic's Karmen with a Happy End*[8] became especially popular. Recalling Bizet's *Carmen,* it deals with the life of the Roma in the suburbs of big cities.

In addition to the high professional level of his musicianship, the mystery of Bregović's success can be traced to two variables that are closely connected with the image of the Balkans. The first one refers to the extensive use of folk music traditions of the whole Balkan Peninsula with their rich cultural overlapping. The second one may be found on a rather abstract level, and implies the collision of harsh contradictions that have often been considered as typical for this region. Goran Bregović explained:

> I think that we are a bit more snivelling than other Europeans. And I think that we are sometimes over-emotional. We tend to move in extremes only: Either there is too much joy or too many tears, but nothing in between. (quoted after Buhre: 2005)[9]

The same contrasts can be found also in his music. Here, impressive brass band sound and thick string arrangements alternate with soft shepherd flute and delicate violin solos, and the traditional Bulgarian vocal polyphony mixes with hard drums and rocking guitar sounds. This melange of pathos, bordering on 'kitsch', evokes associations with the Balkans as topos also in those for whom this term does not signify an actual region, but calls up just a mental representation:

8 The inconsistency in the use of the diacritical signs is due to the fact that sources from different languages were used. The determining factor for the respective abandonment of diacritical signs is the spelling of the original source.

9 Translated from German by the author.

> Too many reports on the crisis did let us forget what the Balkans can also stand for: For an authentic life that got lost in Western Europe. The new work of the former rock star Bregovic is exactly in this sense Balkan at its best[10]. It is a record for any moment of life because any moment of life has been captured on it. Every gloomy emotion finds its musical expression here; every single manifestation of joy finds its adequate realisation. (Ein Kunde 2002)[11]

THE 'SANDI LOPIČIĆ ORKESTAR'

Since the end of the wars, Bregović has lived partly in Paris, but he prefers to work in Belgrade, so that he cannot be considered as a representative of the Balkan diaspora in a strict sense. But there are also a number of groups which were formed in Western Europe and which are permanently stationed there. One of the most prolific is the *Sandy Lopičić orkestar* [Sandi Lopičić Orchestra] from Graz. Lopičić, an offspring of the older generation of Bosnian 'guest workers', spent his childhood in Esslingen and studied piano in Sarajevo and at the Jazz Department of the Art University in Graz. After finishing his studies, he was employed as the music director at the Theatre in Graz. Among his productions was *Black Rider*, an adaptation by Tom Waits of the story of the *Freischütz*, which he located musically in the Balkans.

The music of this theatre performances became so popular, that in 1998 Lopičić expanded his small theatre ensemble into a full *orkestar* playing Balkan jazz. This musical body unifies predominantly professional musicians, who were mostly studying jazz or classical music at academy level. A number of the members originate from the succession states of the former Yugoslavia, and are well-informed about the music traditions of those regions and the bordering Balkan countries. This also accounts for the characteristic sound of the three female singers, which has often been compared with the *Bulgarian Mysterious Voices*. The specific flavour of this orchestra is further due to the use of instruments such as the barrel organ, the violin, and accordion, which are unusual for a Big Band formation.

The repertoire of the *Sandi Lopičić orkestar* consists of traditional songs in new arrangements and original pieces. Their compositions are mostly constructed as a "cocktail of cultural approaches" (Duric 2002: 27) from the whole Balkan Peninsula, with a sophisticated, jazzy touch. Another characteristic is the "wild blend of reflexiveness, bubbling of joy, sadness and

10 The quotation refers to the CD *Tales and Songs from Weddings and Funerals*.

11 Translated from German by the author.

power" (Duric 2002)[12], that is the collision of emotional extremes, which have already been identified in the case of Goran Bregović as 'typical of the Balkans'. Furthermore, the titles of their CDs *Border Confusion* and *Balkea* may be associated with the political situation in the former Yugoslavia. "We do not massacre each other", explained one of the singers, "instead, we create out of our cultures" (quoted after Balkan Fever 2004).

BALKAN ROCK LEGENDS AND THE NEW IMMIGRANT'S MOVEMENT

Though most reports on the *Sandi Lopičić orkestar* emphasise the fact that its three charismatic singers stem from different republics of former Yugoslavia[13] (see Wolfen 2005), the group refuses to be considered as a "symbol for the peaceful, anti-nationalistic ex-Yugoslavia" nor as an "ex-Yugoslav reconciliation band" (Rath 2001)[14]. The *Balkan Rock Legends* from Amsterdam, on the contrary, referred explicitly to these issues:

> The music and the band are legendary, not only by name but per definition as they are a living reminiscence of a certain kind of music and of a country that does not exist anymore, a country destroyed by politics, its name erased and its history thrown into the garbage bin of the times gone by. (Balkan Rock Legends)[15]

The band *Balkan Rock Legends* was formed in 2002 by three students of the *Muziek Conservatorium* in Amsterdam who all originated from ex-Yugoslavia. They were a cover band, exclusively playing Yugo Rock – and actually what they considered to have been 'urban ex-Yugoslav pop rock music'. Consequently they also invited for their concerts members of (still existing or already disintegrated) cult groups from former Yugoslavia.

The public of the *Balkan Rock Legends* concerts consisted mainly of immigrants, some of whom were prepared to come all the way from Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, and France to hear them play in the Amsterdam *Paradiso* club. As described by one concert-goer, on the

12 Translated from German by the author.

13 Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia.

14 Translated from German by the author.

15 Originally in English.

one hand, the musical events with this group were emotionally loaded with positive feelings:

> Who wouldn't enjoy hearing the songs whose lines one knows by heart and can recite even if awoken in the middle of the night? And on top of that, it was just so refreshing to be surrounded by people who speak (one of) your language(s), so an almost unimaginable thought occurred to me during the concert: I am here in a huge crowd of people and I like it. (Balkan Rock Legends)[16]

But on the other hand, according to the same concert-goer, the "positive human energy crammed in one place" (Balkan Rock Legends)[17] also evoked the contemplation of one's own situation of being an immigrant:

> We are the most complex people in the world. History has not played a joke on anyone as she has on us. Until a day ago we were what we would rather forget today. But we have not become something else. We stopped midway, startled. We cannot go on. We have been dislodged, without being accepted, like a channel separated from its mother river by a torrent, without a course or an estuary, too unsubstantial to become a lake, too sizeable to be absorbed by soil. Vaguely ashamed of our ancestry, feeling guilty for being outcasts, we never look back, but have nothing to look forward to, we hold time, fearing resolutions. Detested by both our kinfolk and the immigrants, we defend ourselves using pride and hatred. We wanted to preserve ourselves, but became so lost we did not even know who we were anymore. Unfortunately, we came to love this blind alley and do not want to leave. And everything has to be paid for, including this love. (Balkan Rock Legends)[18]

Balkan Rock Legends were also actively involved in an art movement called *New Immigrants*. This network, unifying artists from different disciplines (literature, painting, music, film),[19] was founded in 2004, as protagonists

16 Originally in English.

17 Originally in English.

18 Originally in English.

19 In Paris there is also a comparable organisation called K-R-U-G, which is devoted to the fostering of alternative culture (music, painting, graphic, theatre, photography, film) from former Yugoslavia. K-R-U-G also organised a concert of the *Balkan Rock Legends* in Paris (see Balkan Rock Legends).

from various European cities gathered in Amsterdam at a concert of this group. The aim of the initiative was "to connect and consolidate individual and group creative efforts of intellectual and artistic talent who, following the Balkan wars, were left scattered and stratified around in immigration" (*Balkan Rock Legends*). Thus in the *New Immigrants Movement*, "an important role is played by the work based on the experiences and problems related to immigration and the authors who, in their social and aesthetic approach, combine their cultural background with the culture they currently live and work in" (*Balkan Rock Legends*)[20].

»THERE IS A SECRET BOND ...«

Balkan Rock Legends habitually opened their concerts with the line "There is a secret bond", which was taken from a hit by *Bijelo dugme*. Further 'secret bonds' are woven by the increasing number of concerts the remaining 'Rock legends' are giving in the successor states of former Yugoslavia as well as in countries with strong immigrant communities (Western Europe, United States, Canada, Australia). Among the most popular is Zdravko Čolić, born in 1951. Čolić sang with the rock groups *Ambasadori* [Ambassadors] and *Korni grupa* [Korni group], interpreted pop songs and disco hits, and embarked during the 1990s on the 'ethno-wave'. He worked with almost all prominent Yugoslav musicians and also cooperated with Goran Bregović, who wrote a number of songs for Čolić. By Yugoslav standards, his career was exceptional: in 1973, he represented the country at the *Eurovision Song Contest* in Luxemburg[21]; his singles and LPs (including numerous reprints) used to sell between 300 000 and 700 000 copies, and in 1978 at one of his concerts, some 60 000 people participated, which made it one of the biggest events in Yugoslav music history (see Janjatović 1998: 46–47).

Being on the scene for more than 35 years, his voice was firmly imprinted in the memory of generations of fans, not always free from nostalgic feelings of a youth gone by. Sometimes, as in the case of a message that a fan signed as Dijana posted on the official web site of Zdravko Čolić, these recollections include also the painful experience of being away from what used to be home:

20 Originally in English.

21 During the Cold War, Yugoslavia was the only East European country that participated in the *Eurovision Song Contest.*

> I have adored Cola[22] since I was a kid and I grew up with him […]. I even wanted to marry him, but the plan did not work out! Now I am 36 years old, I have lived in London for 15 years, and one evening on YouTube I watched your old recording, Cola […]. And I cried for my childhood, for my home town, for all, this place still means to me […], all of it was destroyed by the war […]. I asked my sister to buy your hits, and that is what is going to be played in my car […]. The worst thing is that my husband is British and he cannot understand what Cola means to me […]. Thanks for everything, Zdravko, you were and still remain someone special in my heart! PS: Do you have any plans for a concert in London? (quoted after Čolić)[23]

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES AND DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS

Of increasing importance in weaving 'secret bonds' is having the Internet. Most of the numerous websites on particular stars, groups, or Yugo Rock in general are simple fan pages, set up by engaged individuals presenting information, reporting on musical preferences, and exchanging personal experiences. Though the notes published do not necessarily convey a message of great significance, they stimulate the feeling of belonging. Hence, members of these virtual communities may live in different cultural surroundings and social conditions, but they have one thing in common: The love for a certain kind of music and/or the adoration of an idol that they want to share with like-minded people.

Some websites are in Serbo-Croatian or the other languages spoken in former Yugoslavia, some in English, and some multilingual in order to allow for the participation of those fans who do not necessary speak the mother tongue of their parents, or who were born into multicultural families. Thus, for instance, a homepage called Balkan Media, set up presumably by two ex-patriots, reads as follows:

> We have created this website for al the people from the ex-yugoslavian country's who are Living outsite there homecountry so that they still have a conection with there homeland […] You can email us in the

22 Cola (Čola) is the nickname of Čolović.

23 Translated from Serbo-Croatian by the author.

folowing language's Slovenian, Croation, Bosnian, English, German and Dutch.[24]

Some websites present themselves quite professionally, though they are run on a non-commercial basis. Worth mentioning is Galerija muzičkih tekstova [The Galerie of Musical Lyrics], which includes the original lyrics of some 25 000 songs from former Yugoslavia[25] and which also offers free music for downloading. It is operated by nine volunteers who administer a database fed by fans and financed by advertising. If we are to believe the webmasters, this site is visited by 23 000 users a day, mainly from Bosnia, Croatia, the United States, Serbia and Sweden (see Galerija).

At balkanmedia.com (the term 'Balkanmedia' in different spelling variations is a frequently chosen name for websites dealing with popular culture from former Yugoslavia), we find an online store, permanently based in the German town of Mannheim. This retailer, promoting himself as "the oldest Internet shop of the Balkans", has operated for twelve years, and sells traditional and popular music from former Yugoslavia, as well as films, documentaries, and once popular television broadcasts, predominantly from Serbia. The store operates on a multi-lingual basis (Serbo-Croatian, German and English), delivers its products around the world, and accepts a number of different currencies, including also the Chinese Yuan (see Balkanmedia).

Another example of the digital distribution of the 'Balkan sound' is the television station Balkan Media TV. It was established in October 2005 and can be received via satellite as well as via Internet. In its own words, "Balkanmedia aims to realise a programming that will be 'above political and national' problems of the Balkan area" (Internet goes TV 2007). Or better, its apolitical programming follows an explicit pacifist goal: "If there is any political statement to be looked for in this very apolitical matter, we would like to submit this one: 'We would like to contribute that our children do not appear as dead bodies on CNN again'" (Balkanmedia)[26]. The programme of the Balkan Media TV is mainly devoted to video clips by groups from former Yugoslavia. However, this medium is greatly contested by its viewers: While some find it 'cool' to have also a music station 'from the Balkans', others argue that Balkan Media TV is 'a Yugo-nostalgic project'. Some viewers further criticise that it is 'patriotic kitsch', or that its

24 The text and its errors are quoted directly form the website.

25 There are also some websites that translate the lyrics into different languages.

26 Originally in English.

programmes are heavily commercial; or even that music from other Balkan countries is being ignored.

SOCIAL AND MUSICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

In the same sense that the Balkan wave functions as a rather open musical system, absorbing different influences and allowing individual interpretations, its social connotations are also rather flexible and subject to change. A good example is the transformation of the events that started off as Yugo Rock evenings for young refugees in the aforementioned Arcanoa Bar in Berlin. Over the course of time, these gatherings became known as Balkan Beats Parties and later as the BalkanBeats Culture Recycling Project, and they also started to attract an international audience. In order to cope with the enthusiasm of a rapidly growing public, the Balkan parties have taken place in the Berlin Mud Club or in the *Kulturbrauerei* since 2001, enjoying extensive coverage by Radio MultiKulti Berlin and some print media (see BalkanBeats).

With mottos such as *Rock the Balkans* or *We belong to Tito, Tito belongs to us*, settled somewhere in the twilight zone between irony and nostalgia, three DJs from former Yugoslavia draw the public to the dance floor. They also organise concerts with live acts, mostly from their country of origin. Further activities have included the release by the newly founded Eastblock label (see Eastblock) of the CD *BalkanBeats*, featuring stars (such as Goran Bregović or Boban Marković) and newcomers to the scene (such as *Magnifico & Turbolentza* from Slovenia, *Besh O Drom* from Hungary, and *Sania & Balkanika* from Serbia). The DJ team has also toured Germany, the states of former Yugoslavia, and the United States.

In comparison to the early 1990s, the repertoire, which was initially devoted to Yugo Rock (especially to hard rock standards, punk, industrial and new wave from former Yugoslavia), was enlarged by ethno-sounds from this region first and then by a broad spectrum of music from other socialistic countries. The function of these parties has gradually changed: If they originally served as a kind of "survival training for refugees" (BalkanBeats)[27], the growing participation of an international public has changed the character of these events and their value as entertainment has now started to prevail.

27 Translated from German by the author.

ROMANTICISING THE BALKAN SOUND

As these examples show, the message of Balkan Rock can be interpreted in a number of different ways. If for the emigrants from former Yugoslavia this genre can represent the musical memory of their lost country, for Western recipients the same music may have a totally different meaning. "It's a pleasure for all the people coming out of Yugoslavia" (BalkanBeats), remarked a German participant of the BalkanBeats parties. And: "For the diverse Eastern European communities in Germany's capital city, the music of their youth binds them together […]. For the Germans who populate club nights like BalkanBeats, the music is an escape into something both familiar and exotic" (BalkanBeats)[28].

By emphasizing issues such as 'adventure' and 'exotic', the appreciation of Balkan Rock recalls former patterns of reception of the Balkans. Remember historical travel reports, Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Karl May's novel *In the Gorges of the Balkans,* or the cult film *Murder in the Orient Express*. According to Maria Todorova, in these works the Balkans was constructed as an "exotic and imaginary sphere – a place for legends, fairy tales and wonders" and as such offered alternatives to the "prosaic and profane world of the West" (Todorova 1999: 31). Moreover, it served as a "projection surface for revolutionary yearnings of the Western Europe" (Wagner 2003: 21) in terms of a utopia or even of a "symbol of freedom" (Todorova 1999: 31).

Thus on the one hand, the romantic glorification of the Balkans can be understood as a radical critique directed against the self-image of the "European Europeans" (Todorova 1999: 267), who are supposed to symbolise "cleanness, order, self-control, strength of the character, feeling for the law, justice and efficient administration", and are therefore believed to stand on a "culturally higher level" (Todorova 1999: 175–176) than the so-called Balkanites. But on the other hand, the same centuries-old struggle for values also accounts for the "demonisation" (Todorova 1999: 31) of this region: As the Dionysian counter-pole of Europe, presenting itself as Apollonian, the Balkans stands for the "forbidden, erotic, female" respectively for the "dark side of the collective Europe", and serves consequently as the "trash can for negative characteristics" (Todorova 1999: 31, 85, 267).

28 Originally in English.

RE-EVALUATING THE TERM 'BALKAN'

Yet according to Malcolm Chapman,

> romanticism is […] primarily a re-evaluative process. […] Romanticism is a re-evaluation, in the centre, of peripheral issues. The motivation for the re-evaluation is that those in the centre, who carry it out, benefit from it. […] If moral and political conditions in the centre are appropriate, this transported peripheral feature can be turned, at the centre, into a fashionable and glamorous rarity. (Chapman 1994: 41)

Correspondingly, in the framework discussed, one part of the re-evaluation resulted in the commercialisation of the Balkan sound. A further push towards the wide dissemination of this musical genre has come from the *Eurovision Song Contests* in these past years, which ha also made it popular with a largely international audience.

By establishing Balkan Rock as a firm marketing category, the musical expression of a marginal diaspora started to loose its initial objectives. What used to be local or regional became transregional or even transnational. The understanding of a geographically determined place gave way to the perception of a socially constructed space (see Stokes 1993: 3), which as a consequence led to a re-evaluation of the term 'Balkans' itself. The often discriminatively used expression mutated into a positively connoted metaphor, which no longer refers to a certain region, stigmatised by continuous political crisis, war, and ethnic cleansing, but to a very sensitive 'emotional territory', which lies according to Goran Bregović somewhere between Istanbul and Budapest (quoted after Lehman 2004: 11).

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