

Article

Yugonostalgia as a Kind of Love: Politics of Emotional Reconciliations through Yugoslav Popular Music

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Abstract: In the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars, listening to Yugoslav popular music has often been seen as a choice charged with political meaning, as a symptom of Yugonostalgia and as a statement against the nationalistic discourses of the post-Yugoslav states. In this article, I will show how the seemingly neutral concept of love is embedded in the music and memory practices in the post-Yugoslav context. In dealing with the issue of love, I draw on the research regarding emotions as social, cultural, and performative categories. The research included the analysis of the interconnectedness of the discourses on love and the discourse on Yugoslavia (promoted by both the performers and the audience). In addition to the striking intertwinement of the two, the actual term love was quite often used when describing the general relation to Yugoslavia, or its music in particular, or the relation of the people from the former country. Pointing to the multifarious meanings and usages of the concept of love as understood in the post-Yugoslav music space, I will argue that Yugonostalgia can be understood as a kind of love. As such, Yugonostalgia can be used for commercial purposes and be a means for the commodification of feelings and memories.

Keywords: Yugonostalgia; post-Yugoslav music; the concept of love; commodification of feelings and memories

1. Introduction

More than two decades after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, remembering the country could still be extremely emotional for former Yugoslavs. Even public events related to Yugoslavia almost regularly become sites of memories. In this article, I will point to the ways in which the relation to Yugoslavia appears to be deeply intertwined with the concept of love. Arguing that Yugonostalgia can be understood as a kind of love, i.e., analyzed as an ideology of love, I want to show that it can be a means for a commodification of feelings and memories and thus can be used for commercial purposes. In that process, it becomes neutralized and naturalized in a similar fashion as the concept of romantic love—the concept is taken for granted and sometimes approached uncritically.

The case studies will be from post-Yugoslav popular music culture, and this choice is not accidental. In fact, popular music was one of the most important products of the cultural politics of socialist Yugoslavia (Vuletic 2011). The breakup of Yugoslavia was violent and it left the former country's music market in utter disarray: not only were the institutions destroyed or non-functional, but also the musical preferences of the public changed due to the rising belligerent nationalisms (Baker 2010). However, the wars did not make the music practices disappear. Less than a decade after the breakup of Yugoslavia, some of the popular music stars from its former republics began giving concerts in new post-Yugoslav spaces, provoking divergent receptions, being, on the one hand, provocative events, whereas, on the other, events that produced nostalgic recollections of the past (Petrov 2016). Given the context, in the aftermath of Yugoslav wars, it can be said that listening to Yugoslav popular music has been often seen as a choice charged with political meaning, as a symptom of nostalgia for the lost homeland, and as a statement against the politics of the post-Yugoslav states.

Whilst Yugoslavia has ceased to exist, and often labelled as “departed” (Perković 2011) and “late” (Velikonja 2015, pp. 366–98), popular culture is often seen as its cultural legacy and something that is still present and rather ‘alive’. Furthermore, the experience of being Yugoslav is still felt by many, and Yugoslav popular music especially demonstrates the ongoing currency of the continuity of Yugoslav popular cultures and markets. Hence, certain public figures, groups, even songs, remained powerful Yugoslav symbols even after the country’s dissolution. From this perspective, it can be pointed out that one can hardly ‘just’ enjoy listening to the music from the Yugoslav era, without being aware of the political implications of that act.

This article analyses Yugonostalgia and explains that its ideation in relation to music has an emotional effect and produces an ideology of love. It argues that this is achieved through the market forces that support this music and the modes of identification used by musicians. The analysis begins with an explanation of the historical background, continues with the problematization of the concept of Yugonostalgia and then elaborates on how it is applied to music. In conducting the analysis of Yugonostalgia as an emotional ideology, and an ideology of love specifically, I will point to two separate levels of producing the ideology: the level of the market and media, which is grounded in the discourses and practices of the musicians involved, and the level of the audience, i.e., the reception of the market. I will focus on showing how Yugonostalgia is intertwined with the reconciliation process, the process itself being deeply imbued in the concept of love that is furthermore used in the market. I will deal with two rather different examples: the first one refers to the perception of Yugoslavia and its public figures as an emotional heritage and homeland, and the other with an explicit usage of the ideology of love for positioning in the new post-Yugoslav market.

2. Historical Background

The idea of Yugoslavia emerged and developed as the concept of the movement of Illyrians in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) appeared after the peace conference in Versailles after WWI, when the new borders of European countries were drawn, particularly after the fall of defeated Austro-Hungarian Empire. Some of its parts (of contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia) were incorporated in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. FPRY (Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia) appeared immediately after WWII and from this state developed SFRY (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia).

Founded in the aftermath of the World War II, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia encompassed six republics (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia) and two so-called autonomous provinces (Vojvodina and Kosovo). The crucial event in Yugoslav history after the war was its split with the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites in 1948 when the Communist Information Bureau expelled Yugoslavia from its ranks and withdrew all economic and technical aid after Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito refused to submit to Soviet political domination. Soon afterwards, the ruling Yugoslav party abandoned a Soviet-style cultural politics that had condemned popular music as a cultural, political, and social threat from the West, and in so doing opened Yugoslavia to Western cultural influences, as it sought economic and political support from the West. While Yugoslavia was perceived as a solid, modern, and progressive country in the 1950s and the 1960s, the state became more and more decentralized in the 1970s, leading to serious economic and political problems in the following decade. The 1974 constitution, in which the aforementioned autonomous provinces within Serbian borders were defined and by which the Yugoslav republics gained more freedom, marked the progression towards decentralization and the beginning of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the 1980s, after Tito’s death, a severe economic crisis shattered the socialist system in Yugoslavia and nationalist tendencies became evident. Political tensions escalated and eventually led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia during the wars between 1991 and 1995.¹

¹ For an overview of the development of the Yugoslav idea, see, for instances Štiks (2016).

After World War II, the ideals upon which the new Yugoslav society rested were the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*), the cult of labor and the legacy of the Partisan struggle, which were practiced and enacted as daily rituals, connected to the idea of creating a ‘new man’, a young person who creates, propagates and embodies the ideas of the new socialist state in his daily life (Dobrivojević 2010). There were divergent ways of producing a collective identity that would epitomize the values of the described ideology, among which popular culture (and particularly music) was highly relevant. Yugoslav popular music was thus a result of divergent influences present in the cultural politics in socialist Yugoslavia. Being shaped according to certain Western standards and models, but, at the same time, expected to be a ‘typical’ Yugoslav product, popular music in this country had different stages in its development and incorporated many influences: the Soviet, the Italian, the American, and the Mexican ones, to mention some of them (Vuletic 2008; Vuletic 2011; Petrov 2015a). After the split with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia was more open to the West than the other socialist countries, which was known as the process of ‘Westernisation’ and ‘Americanisation’ (Vučetić 2012).

The search for a kind of music that would be recognized as the ‘typical’ Yugoslav sound characterized the entire Yugoslav era. Yugoslav music typically changed in accordance with tendencies of the Western music industry. In the 1950s, Yugoslav popular music was characterized by imitations and adaptations of Western popular musical genres (such as Italian *canzone*, French *chanson*, and German *Schlager*); in the 1960s rock and roll dominated; in the 1970s disco influenced many pop musicians’ styles and repertoire, while the 1980s brought new wave currents. The umbrella term “Yugoslav popular music” in fact entailed different musical genres and visual styles, depending on current trends in the international pop and rock industry. By the beginning of 1970, the entire Yugoslav music market was divided between pop, rock and roll, and folk music industries, whereas the 1980s brought a new tendency: the folk-influenced hard rock sound and the pop-influenced folk sound (Vidić Rasmussen 1996).

Together with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the whole music market disintegrated as well, thus creating a tension between newly formed national music identities that were being made through the prism of ‘otherness’—the prism that has been discursively evident in the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Baker 2010, p. 175). During the 1990s, there were numerous politics shaping the musical practices in post-Yugoslav divided territories. For instance, certain genres were connected to the official nationalist politics, whereas others were commonly regarded as supposedly neutral. Furthermore, some of the music activities of performers coming from war-affected areas (Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) to Serbia (and vice versa), were sometimes seen as provocative. However, they eventually led to a blurring of newly made ‘borders’ between national music practices and markets (Petrov 2015b). Also, due to their ethnical background or places of origin, certain musicians were involved in politics of language that was one of the crucial means of construction of the national identities during and after the dissolution of Yugoslavia (cf. Baker 2012). I will elaborate on these issues later in the text when discussing specific cases.

3. Yugonostalgia

Even though Yugonostalgia share some similarities with other nostalgias worldwide, especially those in former socialist countries (cf. Bach 2002), the specificity of the Yugoslav case of nostalgia is to be found in the political post-war context in which it has appeared. After the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the situation in former Yugoslav republics was difficult, in some parts due to the international sanctions and isolation, while in others due to the war conflicts. This resulted, in addition to the loss of human lives, in enormous brain drain, which eventually led to a change of profile of former Yugoslavia as well as Yugoslav diaspora. Post-Yugoslav social, political and cultural spaces were firstly characteristic by the avoidance of the socialist past. However, Yugonostalgia, broadly defined as “nostalgia for Yugoslavia” and a sense of loss for the lost “golden age” (Palmberger 2008), has appeared a decade after the dissolution of the country. After a decade of historical revisionism, and especially due

to the emerging age of new technologies and the Internet, numerous discussions on the remembrance of Yugoslavia appeared, both in concrete material spaces (such as, for instance, concert venues), and in virtual spaces (such as those related to certain YouTube links showing videos from the Yugoslav era, as well as many Facebook pages and groups). Reading the situation from the perspective of a post-conflict Yugoslav context, it is relevant to highlight that these spaces, especially the virtual ones, can be seen as the platforms for reconciliation after the wars in a new context in which former Yugoslavs, sometimes immigrants from different parts of former Yugoslavia, communicate with each other in a more relaxed fashion than it has been possible in their countries of origin.

In certain sociological studies, it is argued that the phenomenon seems to be a feature of the less developed post-Yugoslav countries, such as Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, i.e., those that have not yet become members of the European Union (Spasić 2012, p. 142). Hence, Yugonostalgia is sometimes labeled as a passive and regressive phenomenon, characteristic for those who have not yet adapted to the changing times and the transition to the capitalist system, which means that it is opposed to the supposedly progressive post-Yugoslav capitalist societies, and thus often commercialized (Volčič 2007, 2009). However, there is an extensive research debating the emancipatory potentials of Yugonostalgia which are recognized in the opposition towards nationalist paradigms in post-Yugoslav societies (Hofman 2015; Petrov 2016; Petrović 2007, 2012). Furthermore, there is research debating the construal of nostalgia as an emotion and an ideology in the context of retro culture (Velikonja 2012).

Drawing on the concept developed by Svetlana Boym, nostalgia for the Yugoslav past appears to be more often than not of the reflexive kind, not the restorative one. The ways people remember Yugoslavia and discuss it can be inventive and active, sometimes ironic, just as Boym's reflexive nostalgia. Defining it, Boym says: "This de-familiarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between the past, present and future" (Boym 2001, pp. 50–51). Yugonostalgia does not necessarily entail a pro or contra socialist or a pro or contra Yugoslav ideology, connected to the experience of living in Yugoslavia, but rather it can be manifested as a reflexive recollection of one's own past, youth, love, etc.

Furthermore, one of the issues I address is how we theorize about supposedly private and genuine emotions and how those emotions intersect the politics of public discourses. Analyzing this issue, I want to contribute to the discussion about nostalgia focused on the question of "why people care about small things, things that do not 'really matter'" (Bonnett 2016, p. 8) and to the discussion about how politics reuses the past and present in current pop culture practices, thus becoming a sort of "nostalgic commodity" (Ibid., p. 26). From that perspective, I pose a question about how come that a seemingly banal repackaging of the past within the post-Yugoslav music market triggers supposedly genuine emotions. In my approach to nostalgia generally, and Yugonostalgia particularly, I aim to develop a more nuanced theoretical profile, critically debating with the positions promoted in the mentioned literature. Rather than discussing if nostalgia is of a passive or emancipatory nature, I will elaborate on numerous implications of the practices that are today possible due to the nostalgic culture.

4. Yugonostalgia, Love, and Music

Drawing on the research that deals with the ideology of love (for instance, see Ben Ze'ev and Goussinsky 2008), I analyzed the interconnectedness of the discourses on love and the discourse on Yugoslavia (promoted by both the performers and the audience) (see also Petrov 2017a). In addition to the striking intertwinement of the two, the actual term love was quite often used when describing the relation to Yugoslavia in general, or its music in particular, or the relation of the people from the former country.

In dealing with the issue of love, I draw on the research of emotions as social, cultural, and performative categories, and especially on Sara Ahmed's theory of cultural politics of emotions. The question that I address here is how can we theorize about supposedly private and genuine emotions? Do our emotions belong to us, or are they also a part of the commercial needs of the

post-Yugoslav music market? Or, more broadly, how is the concept of love (and the actual word) imbued in music practices? As Ahmed puts it, the emotions both generate their objects and repeat past associations. Ahmed explicates how “the loop of the performative works powerfully, since in reading the other as being disgusting, for example, the subject is filled up with disgust, as a sign of the truth of the reading” (Ahmed 2004, p. 13). I am particularly influenced by her concepts of emotional communities and “sociality” of emotions (Ahmed 2010). By asking what emotions can do (and not what they are), I construe emotion as a potential that is realized within the members of a community, as a shared “object” (Ibid., pp. 21–49). From that context, I will point here to the emotional performatives realized through the usage of the concept of love, which is furthermore perpetuated in virtual discursive contexts.

Additionally, addressing love as a political concept can challenge conventional conceptions that separate the logic of political interests from our affective lives and oppose political reason to the passions. As Michale Hardt points out, a political concept of love would have to deploy at once reason and passion. Also, love is a motor of both transformation and duration or continuity. We lose ourselves in love and open the possibility of a new world, but at the same time, love constitutes powerful bonds that last (Hardt 2011, p. 676). From this perspective, I argue that love is a very powerful political force.

It is relevant to point out the fact that the concepts of nostalgia and love have been interconnected from the beginning of the actual phenomenon of nostalgia. In fact, at the time when nostalgia was construed as an illness, other symptomatic terms existed. As Cassin points out, the term ‘nostalgia’ was almost eclipsed by ‘philopatridomania’ (the madness of love for one’s homeland), which was put forward by Johannes Hofer, (the author of the famous dissertation on nostalgia in which the concept was defined as an illness), and by ‘pathopatridalgia’ (the suffering from the desire-passion for one’s homeland). Going through the etymological genesis of the concept of nostalgia, Cassin states that returning and love have been always connected (Cassin 2016, p. 6). My argument is in line with Cassin’s claim about the interconnectedness between love and nostalgia. If nostalgia was seen as a condition in which a person can suffer because of the loss of home—the suffering often being characteristic by the desire to return to one’s homeland that was even described as madness of love for the homeland—then Yugonostalgia appears to be a similar kind of contemporary post-socialist condition in which one can be madly in love with their homeland. However, the ‘cure’ that was prescribed for nostalgia—the return home—cannot be used in the case of Yugonostalgia, since Yugoslavia no longer exists. Hence, the desire to return home is instead realized in loving what has left of Yugoslavia: the culture, the music, the people.

The commercialization of the concept of love is a rather common feature in post-Yugoslav popular culture. To mention some of the examples, there were *I love YU* souvenirs sold in the main shopping district of Belgrade in the 2000s, and the formulation “I love YU” is sometimes used in the Internet spaces created in the diaspora, such as *I love YU* of former Yugoslavs in Italy, or *Yugoslavia, naša domovina* (Yugoslavia, our homeland) in Germany that has a heart with the Yugoslav flag as its cover photo.² There are also copious examples of Internet spaces that provide platforms for producing post-Yugoslav collectivities based on spontaneous memories triggered by certain links with Yugoslav songs, films, commercials, and similar. The comments made on these links point to the politics of remembrance of Yugoslav popular culture. Insight into the web communities shows that there could be some political implications of the enjoyment since the actual links are used to engage in the construction of multifarious emotional reactions concerning the sentimental remembrance of the past. Thus, the conceptual framework of the discourse on love (towards the culture, the country, and the people in general) and its role in re-narrativisation/embodying of the past as a kind of Yugonostalgic narrative can be used to show the ways in which these collectivities have been made. The Yugonostalgic narrative

² Facebook group *I love YU*. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/349675945173606/> (accessed on 10 June 2018). Facebook group *Yugoslavija, naša domovina*. Available online: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=785260771571025&id=540664986030606 (accessed on 10 June 2018).

is often characterized by the promulgation of a love discourse and extremely affective reactions; ignorance about the war; and clearly expressed enjoyment in certain products.

In my analyses the discourses on love and Yugonostalgia intersect in the following contexts:

1. The context of the reconciliation of the peoples in the territory of former Yugoslavia. Loving the music from the past could often imply loving the Yugoslav past itself, or the people who used to be your compatriots and are now your enemies (Petrović 2013). In that context, love is intertwined with the process of reconciliation after the wars. In 2015, Goran Bregović, a famous Yugoslav musician, stated that “We are together because we sing certain songs together, not as Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and Muslims, but as us who sing those songs together [even] after everything [that has happened]” (N. A. 2014). Similar statements were commonly made by members of the audience that I interviewed at the concerts in Belgrade in 2000s and 2010s, and on YouTube links, especially those with Yugoslav popular music. Other copious examples are provided at the concerts of former Yugoslav stars who put more emphasis on the concept of love, some of them even explained that they were bringing a message of peace, love, and forgiveness (Petrov 2015b).
2. Romancing (the concept of) nostalgia, i.e., neutralizing the process of reconciliation and promoting the concept of romantic love. Another way to deal with the Yugoslav past is to romance Yugonostalgia, which means to put it in the context of romantic love or the universal love between people. This was easily done simply with choosing to make a concert on Valentine’s Day or the International Women’s Day so that the historical context was thus neutralized and the romantic package helped certain singers come back after the wars smoothly. Those singers also chose to promulgate the discourse about love but without any historical reference (Petrov 2016).
3. The context of neutrality and universality (of the love and connection among people) in the act of listening to music. Certain people in the audience, on different occasions, mentioned the music as a ‘universal’ category, together with the idea of ‘universal’ love that transcends meanings attached to the Yugoslav past.

As mentioned in the introduction, in this article I will focus on the first issue, showing how Yugonostalgia is intertwined with the reconciliation process.

4.1. *Yugonostalgia and the Emotional Heritage/Homeland*

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, all of its republics became independent states. That means that some people finally got their own country, while others, on the contrary, lost theirs.³

Unlike some other manifestations of nostalgia, which one could argue are utopian imaginaries of a loss of something that has never existed, in the case of Yugonostalgia, the object of nostalgia, the country, did exist, no matter how one remembers it. It is most certainly a place that many people now feel as their own personal loss. Two representative examples regarding the politics of loss (both public and private ones) will be singled out here, namely the reactions of the virtual audience regarding the deaths of two famous Yugoslav musicians: Kemal Monteno and Vlada Divljan, who both passed away in 2015. Even though the thesis that Yugoslav (popular) culture outlived the country in which it had been made (and has had a new post-Yugoslav life) is not new⁴, one specific perspective has recently appeared. When famous Yugoslav public figures pass away, they are being transformed into mythic figures, embodying the symbolism for the whole of Yugoslavia. In addition, their music more often

³ A comment on a song about Yugoslavia made after the dissolution of the last Yugoslav state, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJmwig0D3iiI&index=3&list=PLPDa5vm7IDncQ68lYm3wc3PwHn18zbiP> (accessed on 2 July 2016).

⁴ The existence of a post-Yugoslav space after Yugoslavia is evident due to the same past, same or similar languages, shared popular culture, as well as new small, and thus necessarily connected markets. The idea about the unique post-Yugoslav space drew the attention of many authors. One of the most well-known ideas is the one about the existence of Yugosphere, specific post-Yugoslav cultural and economic connections in the territory of Yugoslavia after the breakup of the country. The term was coined by British journalist Tim Judah (Judah 2009).

provokes memories, as well as discussions on Yugoslavia. The phenomenon itself is again nothing new and unseen (since it regularly happens to stars anywhere in the world), but in a territory that suffered from great losses of lives and had witnessed intense immigration during and after the dissolution of the country, it seems to have an intense emotional potential, since the stars tend to become triggers for dealing with the troubled past (Stevanović 2013). Furthermore, in the cases of the mentioned singers (Monteno and Divljan), it is relevant to mention that they as public figures and the genres they performed were not politically controversial during the war and thus stayed simply symptomatic representatives, even victims, of Yugoslavia and its dissolution.

The reactions on the internet were not only spontaneous but were also provoked by the discourses in media, the discourse that was overwhelmingly nostalgic in all former Yugoslav republics. When Kemal Monteno, a pop singer from Sarajevo, passed away, a Croatian historian wrote an article entitled “Adio Kemo. A singer who sung about suffering and gave us hope and bravery” (Markovina 2015), in which he stressed that the singer helped “us” overcome difficult situations in the past and showed “us” how to survive. In a similar fashion, the death of Vlada Divljan, a representative of the Yugoslav new wave from Belgrade, provoked writing in the press about “our cultural space” and the fact that “we love the same people, the same music, and we speak the same language” (Gligorijević 2015).

Even though obituaries are always written in affirmative tone, the symptomatic moment is to be found in the presentation of those public figures as “Yugoslavs” and their work as Yugoslav “heritage” that is given to “us”, the category “us” being blurred, since it is not quite clear which community the label refers to. Are those people (hidden by the name “we”) former (or simply) Yugoslavs, are they the people who experienced the war, or just people who listen to the same music and share similar cultural values? As reactions of the virtual audience testify, usually all of the mentioned is possible. Sometimes, “we” just “sing together after all”, as stressed by Bregović, but that does not mean that “we” are capable of understanding what that act of singing means to the current post-Yugoslav cultural space. As Martin Pogačar observes, the internet offers conditions for “enhanced immediacy of remembering” (Pogačar 2016, pp. 105–6), where people can quickly and easily share and reconstruct collective memories. Arguably, the internet and social media have proved to be the best platforms for former Yugoslavs, many displaced since the 1990s, to re-connect and communicate in a more relaxed fashion. Thus, this understanding of the collectivity that is labelled as “us” is also one of the most common reactions of the audience—the audience itself is formed due to their cultural belonging to the same past, and, as it seems, the present.

Many texts about Monteno and Divljan passing away address the issue of their music as *heritage*, and, furthermore, provoke abundant discussions in the comments, most of them about Yugoslavia, its popular culture and the consequences of its dissolution. One of them, written after Kemal Monteno’s death (Samardžić 2015) provoked comments about the connection between the singer, his music and Yugoslavia, and clearly addresses the regrets about the fact that the country does not exist anymore. Additionally, the music itself is presented as being of crucial importance for (post)Yugoslav culture.⁵ It is pointed out that Monteno is “a person whose death made the entire Yugoslavia cry”. In a comment entitled “Everything was music” it is stated:

When people like him leave, people who gave warmth to the whole Balkan region and found values in that region, then we clearly see how the breakup of Yugoslavia was a stupid and criminal act.⁶

An almost identical connection between a musician and the *good old times* is common in the comments concerning the articles about Divljan’s passing away:

⁵ However, there are a few examples of opposite discourses. Unlike Monteno, the comments regarding Divljan’s death sometimes bring up the question of how good his music was and if he truly was as important as it has been claimed. See, for instance, Vuinac (2016).

⁶ Comments available on: <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/spektar/zivot-i-stil/U-amanet-ostavio-divnu-muziku.lt.html> (accessed on 1 March 2015).

We are crying for Vlada, for the country we lost, the city and the youth we lost.

He is a symbol of everything we have loved.⁷

It is important to notice that there are divergent terms used for labelling the territory of socialist Yugoslavia: the Balkans, the region, old Yugoslavia. However, just “Yugoslavia” is also a rather common term, which shows that the virtual discussion among the people somewhat brought Yugoslavia into life again, since the ignorance of the word itself was characteristic of the politics of memory in recent decades. Both Kemal Monteno, as a musician who is unequivocally marked as “a Sarajevo musician” (with all concomitant meanings Sarajevo has had in Yugoslavia, in the war and after it, especially regarding the famous Sarajevo popular music scene from the 1970s and 1980s) and Vlada Divljan, one of the key figures for the Yugoslav new wave scene in the 1980s and a musician who was a part of the diaspora (having lived in Australia from 1991 and Austria from 1999) were adequate for inscription of the transnational and trans-temporal values in the narratives on their lives.⁸ In both cases, not only the discourses in the comments but also the ones in media generally, were characterized by a relaxed use of the term Yugoslavia, when marking the space in which the musicians lived and worked, even though there were other labels as well, as mentioned. However, in the virtual space of the comments, there is one symptomatic lamenting regarding the loss of a vague past, marked as “our youth”, “our past”, and “our love”.

However, it would be misleading to generalize and conclude that there are no other discourses apart from the one on the love towards the Yugoslav culture and the regret about the end of Yugoslavia. The discourse on the war, the national separation and even hate, is also possible to locate.⁹ Thus, in the world of these virtual post-Yugoslavs, there are also reminders that the divided territory of former Yugoslavia is real and it corresponds to the symbolic boundaries among the people. It is especially relevant in this context to pose the question: how is it possible that there are certain Yugoslav public figures that increasingly become mythic, overcoming their functions as musicians, and growing into the symbols of the whole era? There is one symptomatic comment on the issue:

Someone from the past life appeared, came from hell, grey, skinny, but alive. To show us that there is worse, but that it can be survived. That was a ray of light and hope that gave us strength.¹⁰

Drawing on such statements, could we perhaps pose the question: does Yugoslav popular culture appear to be something from our past lives, not to remind us that it could be worse but that it used to be better? Copious statements regarding Monteno and Divljan confirm such a claim. On the occasion of Vlada Divljan’s birth anniversary, 10 May 2015, Radio B92 broadcasted a three-hour show called “The Day of Vlada Divljan”, which was announced as a “show about the legend of Yugoslav music”. Social networks were full of posts expressing in abundance regrets about his death and the times that passed, which led the speakers on the show to stress that this phenomenon can be seen as a “collective mourning over our own destiny”. Furthermore, it can be asked whether, in fear that there is no hope

⁷ The comment concerning the article “Zbogom, večni dečake. Poslednji dani Vlade Divljana”, *Blic Online*. Available online: <http://www.blic.rs/Kultura/Vesti/540056/ZBOGOM-VECNI-DECACE-Poslednji-dani-Vlade-Divljana> (accessed on 3 May 2015).

⁸ It is not surprising that Yugoslav artists and popular public figures who emigrated during the 1990s have become symbols of Yugoslavia. By moving to another country, they were marked as being above the current nationalistic tendencies when the country was disintegrating. One of the most extreme cases is Džoni Štulić. Born in Skopje, Macedonia, having the family background in Zadar, Croatia, he lived in Zagreb for the most part of his life, and finally left the country in the 1990s, not accepting the post-Yugoslav situation. Namely, living in exile, he refused to come and perform in Croatia, he did not get the Croatian, Serbian nor Macedonian passport. Thus, this musician has always been “a Yugoslav artist and a symbol of an epoch” (Perica 2012, p. 218).

⁹ For instance, an article dealing with Momčilo Bajagić Bajaga’s shock regarding Divljan’s death provoked the reactions about Bajaga’s performances during the war. “Kolege šokirane Divljanovom smrću: Bio je moj dobar prijatelj i divan čovjek”, *Večernji list* 5.3. 2015.

¹⁰ The comment refers to the moment when Monteno came from war-affected Sarajevo to Zagreb (Markovina 2015).

for a better time to come, perhaps listening to music from the past helps to construct a memory of the past that might not be real, therefore representing pure escapism? Are these virtual Yugoslavs pure escapists? Or have they just found each other again in a joined, virtual, possibly imaginary community responding individualistically to dominant narratives? Another example will provide a different perspective on the issue. Namely, there are also members of the virtual audience to whom the promotion of the ideology of love is not so easy.

4.2. *Yugonostalgia as a "Love Scam"*

Even though republican markets in Yugoslavia functioned independently, inter-republican ties were essential for the success of major artists. This has been a pattern replicated in the post-Yugoslav time in the form of artists returning to the concert stages of their political adversaries (Baker 2006). Furthermore, it seems that the post-Yugoslav market lacks the organization and interconnectedness, so that the musicians have been trying to draw attention to themselves and to make a sense of continuity with the previous Yugoslav market using various strategies, the reference to Yugoslavia being one of them. Thus, one of the currents of Yugonostalgia tends to commercialize the current Yugonostalgic cultures in post-Yugoslav spaces. There are even songs that are named 'Yugoslavia' in which the actual word stands for a metaphor of lost love. It is rather clear that we are here dealing with a specific manifestation of Yugonostalgia and specifically the manipulation of it, the one that is used with the aim to address nostalgic people and to intrigue the audience (Petrov 2017b). This kind of an obvious commercial usage of Yugonostalgia, which has obviously somewhat become a brand that can sell a music product, can also be labeled as a phenomenon that Mitja Velikonja calls neo-nostalgia, a nostalgic practice that plays with stereotypes of socialist Yugoslavia, but does not (necessarily) correlate with actual reactions of the audience (Velikonja 2015).

A crucial indication that the mentioned phenomenon of the commercial usage of Yugoslavia has become a trend can be found in the fact that recently many famous Yugoslav stars, who also have rather developed and important careers in the post-Yugoslav age, chose to make references to Yugoslavia, i.e., to declare themselves (implicitly or explicitly) as Yugoslavs or Yugonostalgics. Some of them comment on the loss of home after the wars¹¹; others on the contrary claim to be at home in every part of former Yugoslav territory.¹²

I will here elaborate on a recent example of a singer who is recognized as one of the legends of Yugoslav culture—Lepa Brena. Her political potential was constructed in the after-war public sphere due to her national and social background and her official label as a typical Yugoslav star, even a symbol of the socialist era. She was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina, her repertoire is based on so-called newly composed folk music (marked as undesirable in Croatia after the breakdown of Yugoslavia, cf. Baker 2006, 2007, 2010), and she also sang songs related to Yugoslavia (which was commonly done by numerous musicians during the Yugoslav period). In addition to the aforementioned point, Lepa Brena's public figure was compromised during the early stages of the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina, when she appeared dressed in military uniform (which she later claimed to be a 'safari suit') in the company of Bosnian Serb soldiers, supporting the military forces of so-called Republika Srpska, one of the entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thus causing strong negative reactions outside Serbia.¹³ In addition to the aforementioned point, most of the opposition against her, especially in Croatia, can also be seen as connected with specific politics of genre, i.e., with public disapproval of the act

¹¹ For instance, Goran Bregović in a documentary movie, see *Bijelo Dugme Box Set Deluxe*, available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ldo8mkiVOQw> (accessed on 1 June 2018).

¹² For instance, Zdravko Čolić in the 2018 interview in the show *Portrait* on Croatian Music Channel.

¹³ For a discussion on the topic in the newspaper discourses, see, for instance, "Lepa Brena u Brčkom 1994. godine", *Otisak.ba*, http://www.otisak.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9190:lepa-brena-u-brckom-1994godine-foto&catid=31:bih&Itemid=46 (accessed on 10 September 2018).

of listening to (Serbian) folk music, and with the politics of sentiments attached to her music and its association with Yugoslavia.

Lepa Brena's public figure has already been discussed and shown to be a means for an "emotional continuity of the past that derives predominantly from the sentimental attachments to her music" (Hofman 2012, p. 22). I here draw on the research in which Lepa Brena's public appearances were analyzed as "strategies of navigation through intersected discourses of the Yugoslav past, conflict, reconciliation, Europeanization, debates on nationalism, balkanism, multiculturalism, and its perception by her audience and wider public" (Ibid., p. 22). In her analysis of Brena's public figure in the 2000s, in which personal accounts are seen as a part of the strategies of self-positioning the singer used strategically "in accordance with the current social expectations and norms" (Ibid., p. 22), Hofman pointed to the fact that the association of Lepa Brena with Yugoslavia is more than explicit. Brena represented a Yugoslav mainstream culture policy project and was the greatest Yugoslav and the first great Balkan star. However, as the research showed at that point, Brena did not want to refer to Yugoslavia. Hofman shows how during the promotion of the ex-YU 2009 tour and concerts in Ljubljana, Sarajevo, and Zagreb (but also in Sofia, Timisoara, and Tirana), Brena even tried to "escape her image of the Yugoslav star and rarely expressed any kind of longing for the past" (Ibid., p. 24). She tried to avoid conversations about socialism and not use terms such as socialist or Yugoslav. As Hofman explicates, Brena was "particularly careful not to give any reason for her statements to be interpreted as Yugonostalgic and also tried to distance herself from expressing any political or engaged stance, particularly explicit patriotism or nationalism" (Ibid.), which was not an easy task since she had songs with explicit Yugoslav and socialist content. However, she managed to claim in the interviews that even her song entitled *Jugoslovenka* (Yugoslavian woman) was just a "love song", not a patriotic one (Ibid., p. 25).

It is highly intriguing and relevant to point out the singer's recent transformation. In 2017 and 2018, she embarked on a new project—releasing a new album, a documentary movie, and a post-Yugoslav concert tour. All of these would not have been that unusual nor relevant for the topic of Yugonostalgia had she not decided to make the project explicitly pro-Yugoslav. She achieved that through her selection of new songs, her image and the visual solutions for the videos, as well as the discourse that she started to promote, all of which was engaged in the context of retro culture and the reconciliation paradigm after the wars and, moreover, the promotion of nothing less than the core ideology of Yugoslav socialism: the ideology of "brotherhood and unity".

In order to contextualize the strategies the singer has been using, it is necessary to have in mind the core characteristics of socialist Yugoslavia. As already mentioned, this ideology was founded on the presumption that all the nations living in Yugoslavia, including national minorities, are equal groups coexisting in the federation, promoting their similarities, but also their differences, and having the right to declare themselves as Yugoslavs. The official language of Yugoslavia was Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian. It was the language spoken in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, except for the Macedonian language spoken in Macedonia and Slovenian in Slovenia. The language was in fact standardized in the nineteenth century, even before the establishment of so-called first Yugoslavia, i.e., The Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Differences between the Serbian and the Croatian standard always existed and the language also includes several dialects. Since the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the language issue has become deeply politicized and the former unique language has undergone new standardization processes (based on ethnical and political grounds) including labeling new languages from what used to be simple variations of one language. Thus, nowadays, the official language in Serbia is Serbian, whereas in Croatia it's Croatian; Bosnian is singled out as officially the third language spoken in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in addition to Serbian and Croatian); there is also an ongoing process of creating a Montenegrin standard in Montenegro (cf. Busch and Kelly-Holmes 2004; Bugarski and Hawkesworth 2006).

I will not go into the debate over the question whether there is only one language with different dialects and varieties in different parts of former Yugoslavia, or if there are several languages that used

to be labelled as Serbo-Croatian. However, the dialect issue is relevant in order to understand the language politics that Lepa Brena is playing with here. Namely, a basic distinction among the dialects is in the reflex of the Common Slavic vowel *jat*, usually transcribed as **ě*. Depending on the reflex, the dialects are divided into Ikavian, Ekavian, and Ijekavian, which reflects *jat* being /i/, /e/, and /ije/ or /je/, respectively. The long and short *jat* is reflected as a long or short */i/ and /e/ in Ikavian and Ekavian, but Ijekavian dialects introduce an *ije/je* alternation to retain a distinction. Standard Croatian and Bosnian are based on Ijekavian, whereas Serbian uses both Ekavian and Ijekavian forms (Ijekavian for Bosnian Serbs, Ekavian for most of Serbia).

From this perspective, it is clear that, in conflicted post-Yugoslav societies, the fact that a speaker's ethnical background could be identified just by the dialect that they use, can be troublesome. To put it bluntly, it is not unimportant if you say the word 'sing' as 'peva' (Ekavian) or 'pjeva' (Ijekavian). I will now point to the latest Lepa Brena's song entitled *Zar je važno da l' se peva ili pjeva?* (Does it matter if you (say, comm. A.P.) peva or pjeva?).¹⁴ Indeed, the answer is: yes, it really does matter, because behind the difference in what seems to be a simple language choice or a word-play lie serious politics of national identity in post-Yugoslav spaces. Hence, the singer's cover song (which is also the cover of her ongoing concert tour), is unequivocally a political statement: the statement of a promulgation of the language of the peoples of former Yugoslav republics as being one. In other words, the song's message is: it does not matter which dialect you speak; we understand each other since we speak the same language. Having the historical circumstances in mind, the song can be interpreted as provocative, because the difference in how the words are pronounced could, in fact, be of the highest importance for somebody during and after the war.

In addition, despite having a clear political message, the song is in fact allegedly just a love song. Certain parts could be understood as an emotional message given by a woman to someone she loved. For instance, the song goes: 'don't let people steal you from me; don't let bad people change us'. However, the lyrics further say that 'many years have passed, we should let it go, and let us love each other', which is the title of Brena's greatest hit, as well as the title of her movie series from the 1980s. In this recontextualized sense, it can be seen as a message of reconciliation, of peace and love after the wars. The following refrain can support such claims:

If we used to be
The same passion, the same desire
Is it really difficult to love one another
At least as friends
(Ako smo nekad bili
Isti nemir, ista želja
Zar je teško da se voli
Barem kao prijatelja)

If we used to be
The same love, the same soul
Does it matter if we say peva or pjeva
When I am dying without you
(Ako smo nekad bili
jedna ljubav, duša jedna
zar je važno da l' se peva ili pjeva
kad umirem što te nema)

¹⁴ Lepa Brena's song *Zar je važno da l se peva ili pjeva*, available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy2idL0aqFU> (accessed on 10 August 2018).

Additionally, the video was filmed in Belgrade (Serbia), Zagreb (Croatia), and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), which further highlights Brena's strategies for promoting her new political message—the message of love among the people in the territory of former Yugoslavia.

Another example of using the ideology of love is provided in the three-part documentary series on Lepa Brena, which premiered on the Serbian Prva Tv in January 2018. It opens with a famous video of the mentioned song *Jugoslovenka*, which in fact represents the context of the Yugoslav story: the singer's background from a 'typical Yugoslav' family, the living standard, and the perks of everyday life. Not only does she use the strategies of a typical Yugonostalgic discourse—by sentimentally remembering that every family back then had a car, and her family had a 'Stojadin', just like everyone else, and of course went to the Croatian coast by that car every summer—but she also explicitly claims: 'We were one common Yugoslav family'. The plot is further developed on the soundtrack of the song *Jugoslavijo* (or *Od Vardara pa do Triglava*), the unofficial anthem of socialist Yugoslavia. With that song in the background, the narrator contextualizes the actual message of the song, which is the description of the Yugoslav culture: mentioning the most important institutions, such as the famous Belgrade film festival BITEF, the Non-alignment movement, as well as Josip Broz Tito's death. All of these are set in the context in which the singer begins her career in the early 1980s.

The pro-Yugoslav atmosphere of the movie is also supported by the appearance of Brena's coworkers from different parts of former Yugoslavia. In addition to her closest collaborators (such as the members of the group she performed with, as well as the directors of her movies, and many people from Serbia), her colleagues from Croatia appear as well. Among the most important of them include Vlado Kalember, one of the singers who participated in the song *Jugoslovenka*, as well as those whom Brena did not directly work with, such as Kićo Slabinac and Tereza Kesovija. The actual use of the word Yugoslavia is not rare in the movie, both in Brena's discourse and those who speak about her. Furthermore, the social context is interestingly depicted: in addition to mentioning the most important moments from the history of socialist Yugoslavia, such as Tito's death, there is also a narrative on the social transformation that was happening in the country after World War Two, namely, the migration from the country to cities and the urbanization process. By commenting on the urbanization and Brena's first hit *Čačak*, *Čačak* the discourse on mixing the pop and folk genres is introduced and it is implied that Brena's music influenced a process of emancipation of the working class. This is further supported by a scene from the movie *Nema problema* (No Problem) in which Brena's appearance is presented as the workers' choice.

The second sequel of the three-part documentary opens with another symptomatic song: *Živela Jugoslavija*. One of Brena's coworkers points out how the song was sung in all parts of Yugoslavia, 'always, in all the concerts', and how it was particularly important. Brena also stresses how this song 'belongs to this country'. The Yugonostalgic atmosphere is again highlighted with both songs about Yugoslavia. In fact, both songs are especially commented upon by numerous speakers. In that context, the singer also concludes that she 'felt good' in Yugoslavia, which was the country that was 'the ancestor of the European Union'. In the final part of the series, in which there were mostly pieces of information from her private life, the concluding lines include a reference to Yugoslavia, namely, it is stated how 'Someone has said that Brena is the last Yugoslav'. Furthermore, Brena's image as the "last Yugoslav" has explicitly been used during the concert tours in the diaspora, where she regularly sings her song *Yugoslav Woman*, while putting the Yugoslav flag on the stage. The "spreading of love and brotherhood and unity" is regularly commented upon in media.¹⁵

Apart from numerous affirmative comments regarding her new song which in fact clearly promotes Yugoslavism, there is one indicative critical statement precisely about the singer's manipulation of the concept of love. Namely, I will here single out one indicative remark: the song was marked as no less

¹⁵ <https://www.blic.rs/zabava/spektakl-u-americi-lepa-brena-zapocela-turneju-a-onda-zapevala-jugoslovenku-video/c475z6e>, https://www.kurir.rs/stars/3031301/video-lepa-brena-siri-bratstvo-i-jedinstvo-folk-diva-na-turneji-po-americi-rasirila-zastavu-sfrj-i-zapevala-jugoslovenku?ref=related_box.

than a “love scam”. It is stated that the song is “a love scam (podvala o ljubavi) made by those in love with former Yugoslavia”. Moreover, not only is it labeled “a scam about love”, but that love is also equated with the love among the Yugoslavs. Hence, “the scam about brotherhood and unity” is here seen as a scam about love. Namely, the discussion goes on to point out the context of language politics I previously addressed, by emphasizing the fact that “where you say pjeva you could never say peva, and where you say peva you could never say pjeva” (tamo gdje se pjeva nikada se nije pevalo kao ni tamo gdje se peva nikada se nije pjevalo) (user sinsal, 2.12.2017).

However, such an interpretation is rather isolated. The majority of the comments completely reflect the discourse the singer wanted to promote, namely, the discourse on Yugoslavia and Yugoslav people as the discourse on love. Even though there is no explicit reference to Yugoslavia in this alleged love song, the message of love is clearly understood, since the comments do explicitly refer to it. In other words, what is not said in the actual song (but just implied), is unequivocally verbalized in the comments. The song was in fact rewritten by the virtual audience, revealing its true meaning. Hence, it is said “that the people in Yugoslavia should love each other, at least as old friends”; furthermore, it is pointed out that Yugoslavia “was a country of love”, “a country in which we loved each other”. Also, using the discourse of nostalgia, it is stated, “Once upon a time, there was a country in which it really did not matter if you say peva or pjeva”; “We used to be one soul, one love, truly”; “Let’s love each other, that is the right message”; “Long live Yugoslavia”,¹⁶ and similar. The term love is abundantly used and regularly connected to Yugoslavia. It is indicative to notice that the comment about “the love scam” is mostly ignored, and most certainly isolated. Slightly different insight is provided in the comments on the diaspora tours with the Yugoslav flag. It is pointed out that “it is not all right to show the flag with a red star to the descendants of those who left the country because of that symbol” (user neverovatno, 16.4.2018). Also, there were comments referring to “the trend” about “being together after all and being nostalgic and loving towards each other and Yugoslavia” (Breadmaker, 16.4.2018).

In other words, “the love scam” created by Brena’s song is completely successful, almost without exceptions. Most of the virtual audience did not find it problematic that the singer is playing with the contested past, trying to reposition herself as a Yugoslav through the usage of the concept of love, utterly ignoring the fact that her song is not in accordance with actual historical context, in which the referred politics of language could, in fact, be of the utmost importance. Based on the presumption that love is neutral and spontaneous, the ideology becomes a vehicle for multiple reuses, in this case, by a singer who tends to reposition herself in the post-Yugoslav market as a genuine Yugoslav star.

5. Conclusions: All We Have Left Is the Music?

Virtual Yugoslavs appear regularly in the comments on links with any Yugoslav related content. They often promote the Yugoslav idea by pointing to the music as the *heritage*, or, as many of my interviewees put it: “All we have left is the music”. In addition, (the love towards) the music is further connected with the ideology of Yugoslavism, sometimes the actual core ideology of ‘brotherhood and unity’, and sometimes the music is generally connected with the relations among the people from former Yugoslavia. Some would also say that “Some people live in nostalgia and others in a non-existing country”¹⁷, which implies the dissatisfaction with the impression that the present is overwhelmingly turned to past experiences, not to future ones.

Keeping in mind the political context, the supposedly simple enjoyment in the music, in fact, brings to the engagement of the production of multifarious emotional reactions concerning the remembrance of the past. The case studies I elaborated on here lead to the conclusion that emotions

¹⁶ Most of the participants in the discussions used their real names, so I will not mention them here.

¹⁷ A comment concerning Đorđe Balašević’s song about Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, in which the breakup of Yugoslavia is addressed in a clearly expressed nostalgic tone, especially the fact that former Yugoslav citizens are now foreigners to each other despite the fact that they speak the same or similar languages and share the same culture. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Ams9rG9NGI> (accessed on 2 July 2016).

seem to be a part of politics public figures sometimes use, but they also indicate the commercial needs of the post-Yugoslav music market. As I have shown in the first example, the emotional reactions are easily triggered by the media discourses, and also collectively constructed in virtual spaces. Furthermore, those practices are used for repositioning strategies in the post-Yugoslav market, as shown in the second case study.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that Yugonostalgia should not be seen only as a transparent pro or contra socialist or pro or contra Yugoslav ideology, connected to the experience of living in Yugoslavia, but rather it is often an ideology that is not easy to locate—the ideology of supposedly neutral love, transnational universal bonds between people, the ideology of nostalgia, understood as a general “yearning for yesterday”, (Davis 1979), or the ideology of enjoyment and music-loving, and so on. Further research should problematize how certain phenomena are Yugoslavia related and just how much it could simply be a symptom of the global cultural trends, such as the love market that is always founded in the processes of commodification of supposedly genuine reactions. Also, it is indicative to notice that the farther the post-Yugoslav space goes from the end of Yugoslavia, the more the Yugoslav culture is being used and repacked for further commercial exploitation. As Reynolds puts it, “Instead of being the threshold to the future, the first ten years of the twenty-first century turned out to be the ‘Re’ decade” (Reynolds 2011, p. xi) since even new music often draws heavily on the past. If “there has never been a society in human history so obsessed with the cultural artefacts of its own past” (Reynolds 2011, p. xiii), how specific is the post-Yugoslav case? It is indeed specific due to the fact that the end of Yugoslavia included traumatic war experiences and commercial re-use of the past is a phenomenon that one could not easily expect in early post-Yugoslav years. Reynolds also interestingly poses the question of what happens if we run out of the past (Ibid., p. xiv), and how nostalgia has been produced as “one of the great pop emotions” (Ibid., p. xxiii). Being one of those pop emotions, Yugonostalgia appears to be a means for current politics of emotions in post-Yugoslav spaces to further promote the idea that the music and musicians seem to be one of the most important legacies of socialist Yugoslavia.

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