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Eckehard Pistrick

## Spatial Detachment – Emotional Detachment

Delocalizing and Instrumentalizing Local Musical Practice in the Communist Regimes of Southeastern Europe<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Cultural traditions in their local understanding are bound to particular places and to a particular social setting, possessing generally a high degree of interaction. The exercise of political power and the commercialization of traditional music have fundamentally shaken this interactive relation between sound, space and social action. Local identities and histories became confronted with constructed national identities and a homogenized national history. Musical practice witnessed a process of uprooting, the division of performers from their audience related to an emotional reconfiguration. The emotionally and spatially-bound cultural practice became redefined in terms of a static “cultural object” whose aesthetic properties were highlighted over its dynamic functional and interactional character. This progression from local tradition towards national folklore had many implications and was often accompanied or accelerated by state-directed audiovisual media. The symbolic distancing of musical practice from its origin had undeniable socio-political implications. Especially in the communist regimes of Southeastern Europe this act was interpreted as a logical parallel movement to the break with the ill-famed past in other spheres of the society. After the fall of the communist regimes cultural practice was re-appropriated and re-contextualized on an impressive scale by local actors. The return of the Local was guided by wider (cultural) politics of regionalization and re-traditionalization and the needs of a world-wide music market with a growing interest in what was called “authentic” and “rooted” musical practice. At the same time the brand “Balkan music” emerged, depicting an apolitical “emotional territory” which stood in sharp contrast to the image of the Balkans in the Western mediascape.

### Sound and space

This article aims at providing some general reflections on the multiple ways space and sound interacted during the communist period in Southeastern Europe and how these links became reactivated and highlighted in the post-communist era. This involves certain strategies and politics of space and time which detach musical objects from its place of origin, allowing its use as “cultural objects”, suitable for the transmission of ideological messages.

Places are not only physical settings to which sentiments and sounds are attached, “places are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions”.<sup>2</sup> The meanings attached to a place should therefore be treated as socially constructed, contested and dynamic.

Places maintain multiple links with sounds. Each performance is intrinsically linked to a certain social and spatial context. It is music which allows us also to locate and relocate ourselves. It informs our sense of place and identity. Stokes states that “the musical event [...] evokes and organizes collective memories and presents experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity, unmatched by any other social activity”.<sup>3</sup> He also argues for considering the relation between space and sound a dynamic interplay: Through music the hierarchies of place are negotiated and transformed. But in a same way places constructed

<sup>1</sup> A draft of this paper was originally presented at the International Seminar “Territoire, pouvoirs et identités dans les Balkans contemporains” organized by the Université de Provence, MMSH, the French School of Athens at the Fondation Montalembert, Rhodes 13-20 September 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Rodman, Margaret C. (1992): Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality. In: American Anthropologist 94, p. 641.

<sup>3</sup> Stokes, Martin (1994): Introduction. In: Martin Stokes (ed.): Ethnicity, Identity and Music. The Musical Construction of Place. Oxford: Berg, p. 3.

through music involve notions of difference and social boundaries. Erlmann argues even for the existence of a so-called “practiced place”,<sup>4</sup> a space defined more by musical practices and networks of interactions than by its mere physical traits. Sound possesses the power to construct and reconstruct physical or virtual places. Places on the other hand have the potential to generate sounds and to make sounds meaningful. The links between space and sound are so tight that certain musicologists have even argued for a common discipline – a “*géographie musicale*” or a “*géo-musicologie*”<sup>5</sup>, which unites both dimensions. Jérôme Cler for example, witnessed in the Western Taurus mountains of Turkey that certain musical genres maintain a primordial relation to the place where they are created and performed: he speaks about a “*coherence entre les lieux, les affects, les forms*”<sup>6</sup> with a deeply local significance.

Sound and space can also maintain a fictive-imaginative relation. This is particularly valid for diaspora musicians who reconstruct their homelands through sounds, which refer to particular places and memories.<sup>7</sup>

### **The period of socialism: strategies of uprooting and disappropriation**

Cultural traditions in their local understanding are bound to particular places and to a particular social setting, possessing generally a high degree of interaction. The exercise of political power, but also the diverse commercialization strategies of the cultural industry, particularly since the 1990s, has shaken fundamentally this interactive relation between sound, space and social action. Local identities and histories became confronted with constructed national identities and a homogenized national history. Sounds became incorporated into a wider trans-national musical market and were successively transformed into brands such as “Gypsy music” or “Balkan music”. Musical practice witnessed a process of uprooting, the division of performers from their audience related to an emotional reconfiguration. The emotionally and spatially-bound cultural practice became redefined in terms of a static “cultural object” whose aesthetic properties were highlighted over its dynamic functional and interactional character.

Parallel with the creation of cooperatives in communist countries and with the land disappropriation campaigns in the 1950s, local cultural facts became controlled by the state and its wide-ranging system of cultural houses. In Bulgaria the pre-existing system of *čitalište* (cultural houses) became reactivated and diversified its activities in communist times. The centers had to fulfill a function of “cultural education”. The directives were dictated by a party congress of culture which was organized each four years.<sup>8</sup> Feasts and rituals were organized by the members of the cultural houses and modified in their nature in order to fit the political guidelines of the party. In the 1950s, government-sponsored *kolektivi*, collectives of folk music were also formed. In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the organization of folklore activities was building, like in the Bulgarian case, on pre-World War II institutions: the “Festival for Croatian Folk culture” e.g. was continued under the name “International Folklore Fair” which was held since 1965 in Zagreb.<sup>9</sup> In the whole of

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<sup>4</sup> Erlmann, Veit (1998): How Beautiful is Small? Music, Globalization and the Aesthetics of the Local. In: Yearbook for Traditional Music 30, p. 12–21.

<sup>5</sup> Cler, Jérôme (1999): Paysages musicaux – une approche musicologique. In: Ktema 24, p. 259–267.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>7</sup> See Sugarman, Jane (1999): Imagining the Homeland: Poetry, Songs, and the Discourses of Albanian Nationalism. In: Ethnomusicology 43 (3), p. 419–458; Le Menestrel, Sara; Jacques, Henry (2010): ‘Sing Us Back Home’: Music, Place, and the Production of Locality in Post-Katrina New Orleans. In: Popular Music and Society 33 (2), p. 179–202.

<sup>8</sup> Bochev, Sandrine (2003): Pratiques festives anciennes – nouvelles organisations. In: Balkanologie 7 (2), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Rihtman-Augustin, Dunja (1992): Von der Marginalisierung zur Manipulation – Die Volkskultur in Kroatien in unserer Zeit. In: Roth, Klaus (ed.): Die Volkskultur Südosteuropas in der Moderne. Munich: SOG, p. 288.

Yugoslavia the local cultural organization was consigned to cultural centers – *kulturni centri*, cultural-artistic societies – KUDs – *Kulturno umetnička društva*, which organized the so-called “village gatherings” (*susreti sela*). These activities represented a backbone of the cultural life, particularly in the rural areas of Southeastern Serbia during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>10</sup> In Albania, the structure of the collectives, created between 1948 and 1955, served as a model for the organization of local cultural groups, which performed at official occasions such as the birthday of the party leader, the first of May, the inauguration of monuments, or at the National Folklore Festival in Gjirokastra, established in 1968.

## Festival culture

It is not by chance that every country of the Communist bloc in Southeastern Europe organized its own national folk festival. Staging local culture was not only an attempt to control history and traditions. Through its centralized character such festivals were also instruments for controlling space and regional diversity. It was on the festival stage, where the progression from local tradition towards national folklore should ideally take place. The transition from tradition towards folklore (understood as decontextualized tradition), aimed at the creation of a new folklore – in Bulgaria called *narodna dusha* (in folk spirit), in Albania *folklori i ri* (New Folklore). Such a modified, spatially and emotionally detached folklore was ideally serving and representing the new regimes, heralding in the cultural sector a new model of society. Such a cultural object allowed similarly also for an understanding of local cultural practice in national terms.<sup>11</sup>

The cultural fact of polyphony in Albania for example, which possesses a wide regional variety according to the different *krahinë* (regions), became therefore interpreted in terms of an ethno-geography, backed by constructed historical continuities:

*“L’extension de la polyphonie, sous telle ou telle forme, correspond plus ou moins aux zones où avait été réalisé le passage de la culture illyrienne à la culture nationale albanaise, précisément dans les régions où vit aujourd’hui le peuple albanais et où sa langue est parlée.”<sup>12</sup>*

Such national interpretation of local musical practice aimed at proving the “autochthonous character”<sup>13</sup> of cultural facts. This national interpretation also included the categorical denial of foreign influences. The drone voice in polyphonic songs, whose very name *iso* already points on the “ison” of Byzantine church music, was considered an internal invention of Albanian culture:

*“...le bourdon n’est pas un élément qui fut introduit dans le chant polyphonique albanais de manière mécanique de l’étranger, ni même de la culture byzantine, mais le résultat logique de l’évolution des facteurs internes de cette culture.”<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Hofman, Ana (2010): *Staging Socialist Femininity. Gender Politics and Folklore Performance in Serbia*. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>11</sup> See Kaneff, Deema (2004): *Who Owns the Past? The Politics of Time in a ‘Model’ Bulgarian Village*. Oxford: Berghahn.

<sup>12</sup> “The extension of the polyphony, in this or that form, corresponds more or less to the areas in which the transition from Illyrian culture to an Albanian national culture took place, precisely in those regions where today are living Albanians or where the Albanian language is spoken.” (my translation). Kruta, Benjamin (1985): *La polyphonie, héritage culturel ancien du peuple albanais*. In : ASSH (ed.): *Problèmes de la formation du peuple albanais, de sa langue et de sa culture*. Tirana: Ed. 8 Nëntori, p. 292.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>14</sup> “...The drone is not an element which was introduced into the polyphonic Albanian song in a mechanical way from the outside, or even by the Byzantine culture, but it was a logical result of the evolution of internal factors within that culture.” Ibid., p. 303.

This shifting from the local towards a national-ideological meaning was often accompanied or accelerated by state-directed audiovisual media. Cultural policy-makers and researchers such as Alfred Uçi, former director of the Albanian Folklore Institute, were conscious about the influential role of media in broadening the “territories” in which folk culture was created and lived.

“Radio, film, television etc. have brought songs, dances and regional music (*muzika krahinore*) to the attention of the whole nation and have started the development of vital exchange of regional, zonal or local folkloric creations, which did not have such a tight communication between each other in the past.”<sup>15</sup>

A specific local singing style, for example, like the style of Himara with a fourth tremolo voice, originally restricted to a small geographic area at the Albanian coast, could become promoted and widespread through the festival culture in the entire Southwestern part of Albania. Paradoxically, the stage served also as a way to conserve local musical practices. The style of the village of Lapardha and the song “*Janinë ç’i panë syte*” (Janinë what have your eyes seen) for example, was discovered by musicologists while preparing the 1978 edition of the Albanian National Folklore Festival in Gjirokastra. Once put on the stage, the song had an immediate success and was subsequently imitated by a wide range of polyphonic groups. The festival therefore actively contributed to the dissemination of local meaningful musical practice on an abstract “national” level. This exchange was favored also by the creation of professional state-sponsored folklore ensembles. In Bulgaria one of the most famous ensembles was the orchestra of Radio Sofia, founded in 1951, which gathered musicians and singers from all parts of the country. Instead of village music they played a new ‘westernized’ form of Bulgarian folk music.

The symbolic distancing of musical practice from its origin had undeniable socio-political implications. Especially in the communist regimes of Southeastern Europe this act was interpreted as a logical parallel movement to the break with the ill-famed past in other spheres of the society. The professionalization and the staging of musical practice were seen as a complimentary endeavor to the establishment of the collectives and the engagement for gender equality. The hegemony of urban aesthetics in communist regimes became imposed on rural practices in order to “educate”, “discipline” and “refine the peasants”.<sup>16</sup> The dynamics of instrumentalizing local cultural practice in terms of a “cultural objectification”,<sup>17</sup> through detaching it emotionally in space and time, happened in favor of an imposed “modernity”. These steps also aimed at reducing the individual contribution or specifically local in musical practice in favor of folklore as “art, which is created and lived by a large mass of people, who express their collective aspiration, psychology and ideals.”<sup>18</sup> Folklore was idealized as collective anonymous creation, reflecting the soul of the people, a timeless and spaceless mirror of the ideal socialist society.

The way of bringing local practice on the national stage – basically a process of de-contextualization and uprooting – can be examined at the example of the National Folklore Festival Gjirokastra: In a first phase of around nine months, meetings in villages and working centers were organized with the aim of a massive participation of singers, dancers

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<sup>15</sup> Uçi, Alfred (2007): *Estetika e Folklorit* [The Aesthetics of Folklore]. Tirana: Academy of Sciences Publishing House, p. 366.

<sup>16</sup> See Silverman, Carol (1992): *Peasants, Ethnicity, and Ideology in Bulgaria*. In: Roth, Klaus (ed.): *Die Volkskultur Südosteuropas in der Moderne*. Munich: SOG, p. 295–308.

<sup>17</sup> Handler, Richard (1988): *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*. New Directions in Anthropological Writing. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

<sup>18</sup> Uçi, p. 176.



and instrumentalists. In 1983, 70.000 musicians participated in this first phase. In a second three month phase, a competition, based on the 26 administrative units of Albania, was held. This phase included the formation and selection of suitable musicians by a scientific jury, headed by specialists of the Institute for Folk Culture. The final outcome was the competition at the festival of Gjirokastra in which the 26 administrative units were represented by 26 groups, containing around 2.000 participants.<sup>19</sup>

Two contradictory ideas were embedded in these contexts: the conservation of the “authenticity” of folklore and the “evolution” of folklore parallel with the development of the new socialist order. According to Uçi, the massive participation at folklore festivals in communism has shown that “folklore is not any more a movement of analphabets and people from the village, but the creation of educated and school-attending masses”.<sup>20</sup> Indeed among the festival participants in 1973, 1978 and 1983 18% had finished elementary school, 60% secondary school and 20% grammar school.<sup>21</sup>

Progress was not only measured in terms of how much folklore became refined and cultivated, it was also measured in terms of its successful modification, meaning the partly or complete recreation of texts and the imposition of arrangements.

“‘Decomposed’ repertoires and genres ‘which are connected with the past and which had ritual-magic or practice-utilitarian purposes’ [...] and which have not anymore any kind of social or cultural basis for such functions were reactivated in the folkloric life of our society with a simple esthetic-artistic function.”<sup>22</sup>

Let us pass from the macro-perspective to the micro-perspective, which is probably even more important for any research aiming at finding out about the effects of state-imposed folklore politics. As a representative example, the case of the South Albanian male folklore group of Zagoria (*Grupi karakteristik i Zagorisë*) will be described.

The group was formed in 1968 for the first festival in Gjirokastra out of 12-16 singers from different villages of the region, which formed one cooperative. The main part of the group nevertheless came from Lliar, the seat of the cooperative. Although the group continued to sing in terms of social interaction at improvised settings such as local weddings or feasts, for the festival the group formalized a largely political repertoire which was considered as outstanding “for its high ideological level, a stressed class-fighting character and a proletarian identification with the party”.<sup>23</sup> In 1968 the group participated with a song on the treaty of Warsaw, in 1973 with the “Song for the 4<sup>th</sup> plenum of the Central Committee of the People’s Republic of Albania” and in 1978 with another political satirical song entitled *Katër llafë për pesë pika* (Four words on five points).<sup>24</sup> These new songs texts were modeled after traditional models by the Gjirokastra-based poet Jorgo Telo.

Another example is the historical song *Vezerit van’ e i thane*, whose roots reach back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which was sung up to the 1920s by the singer Aleks Shabani from Lliar and which in popular tradition was referred to as *këngë e Aleks Shabanit*. In communist times this song became factually disappropriated – it was not anymore considered as the creative property of a talented regional singer but the melodic basis of this song was taken and re-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 356–358.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>23</sup> Jani, Alqi (1980): Grupi polifonik i Zagorisë. In: Albanian Academy of Sciences IKP (ed.): Probleme të Zhvillimit të Folklorit Bashkëkohor, Simpozium Festival Folklorik Kombëtare 28-29 Qershor 1979 [Problems of the evolution of contemporary folklore, Symposium of the National Folklore Festival 28-29 June 1979]. Tirana: Albanian Academy of Sciences, p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

arranged with a newly created text honoring the omnipresent party. The song was entitled *Parti mal me strall* (The Party made of firestone) and became one of the sonic trademarks of the ensemble from Zagoria.

The results of the cultural policy of folklorization were ambivalent and wide-ranging. This policy left its marks on the local village level, on the space of origin, as the study of Hofman on the institutionalization of village feasts in Southeastern Serbia has shown.<sup>25</sup> The imposition of ideas of gender equality for example questioned traditional norms of rural society. Female singers were able to experience “emancipation” but only at the surface of gender relations, “without penetrating into the private sphere and inter-family relations”.<sup>26</sup> Practitioners of local cultural life contradict the assumption that communist cultural life and all its state-sponsored manifestations represented artificial and imposed forms of communities’ activities. On the contrary, they illuminate a significant role of these events in the everyday life of the villagers, as a specific revitalization of the former communal ritual activities. Beside that, communist times are associated in the Southeast Serbian case with particular social qualities such as socializing (*druženje*), helping (*pomaganje*) and togetherness (*zajedništvo*).<sup>27</sup> The study of Hofman, as in a similar vein Kaneffs’ study about the politics of time in a Bulgarian village,<sup>28</sup> reminds us that a univocal negative view on communist folklore practices, particularly seen from an outsider perspective is problematic and that giving place to the narratives of the people and their situational influenced experiences of the past should be our priority.

### **The period of post-socialism: the re-appropriation of sound and space**

The two decades after the fall of the communist regimes have seen particularly in local historiography – under the influence of migration movements and new cultural politics – the revaluation of the local and the “lost origin”. This tendency can be interpreted as a way of re-appropriating and re-contextualizing cultural practice after its de-appropriation. Metaphorically culture, as well as the collectivized lands, were restituted to/retaken by its producers/owners.

One example for such a return to space, linked with a deeply felt nostalgia is the Albanian light music singer Poni. She was born in Vlora, South Albania, the main urban center of the Labëria region, where a vivid tradition of multipart singing prevails. Since the beginning of her career she presented herself as being tied to this local musical tradition, music business used to refer to her as a “*vajza 100 karat labe*” (a girl 100 Karat Labe). Locality was used as a common reference point in most of her video clips: she directs to the vanishing pastoralism, to her place of birth, historical monuments, and the shores of the Vjosa river, where she used to play as a child – all these places speak in the one or the other way about revaluating and re-appropriating local space in a post-communist context.

Her recent video clip links migration (Al. *kurbet*) with spatial belonging. “*Kurbeti moj nëna ime*” (Migration my mother), shot in the ancient ruins of Butrinti (itself an identity-generating place for Albanians), reflects on space in times of displacement.<sup>29</sup> In an interview the singer declared:

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<sup>25</sup> Hofman.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Kaneff.

<sup>29</sup> Poni (2011): *Kurbeti moj nëna ime* [Migration my mother]. Videoclip. MAX Production. Online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYJZjbbUyzM>, last access 30.09.2012.

“This song is the *mall* (longing) of a son who directs to his mother and informs her how painful it is to remain far away from home. It is a song directed to the migrants and which closes with a happy end – their return to Albania.”<sup>30</sup>

The most powerful and popular song dedicated to her place of origin is *Labëria, my Labëria* (Labëria, my Labëria).<sup>31</sup> Here she refers to a mythicized locality and her idealized “roots”, melting with local pride and spatial nostalgia. Labëria as her place of origin is venerated in terms of a personalized goddess. At the same time this emphasized local reference guarantees for the authenticity of her musical product – directed to a taste public which, like her, identifies spatial belonging as the source for pride and creativity. The monotonously repeated refrain “*Labëri, moj Labëri*” makes almost forgotten that uncontrolled local sounds and local identifications were considered as potentially suspicious for more than forty years.

### *Labëri moj Labëri*

*labëri ta thura këngën  
moj e shtrejnta labëri  
tek ty lindem dhe u rritem  
te kujtoj me dhemcuri*

*labëri o vend i bukur  
andej ngaj jam edhe vetë  
me kuroren përmbi kokë  
duke shkuar si një princesh*

*labëri moj e vërtet  
per ty do këndoj nje jet  
dhe pa zë, sikur të mbes  
do këndoj gjer sa të vdes*

*e labëri moj labëri  
s'ka si ti moj, s'ka si ti  
kush te thotë moj je e ashpër  
je e larë me flori.*

### *Labëria my Labëria*

Labëria I put together this song  
oh priceless Labëria  
where we were born and grew up  
I think of you with pain

Labëria oh beautiful place  
the place where I am also from  
with the crown above your head  
you walk like a princess

oh true Labëria  
I will sing a lifetime for you  
even if I am left without voice  
I will sing until my death

hey Labëria, oh Labëria  
there is no one like you  
no one will ever say that you are rough  
as you are washed with gold.

In the whole of post-communist Southeastern Europe such tendencies for (re)linking musical practice to local space can be observed. Entire musical repertoires became exclusively associated with one particular cultural space: one prominent example is the urban repertoire of *sevdalinke* songs. Before World War II such songs were performed in a vast geographical area covering the coffeehouses of Bosnian-Herzegovinian towns as well as major cities as Belgrade, Zagreb, Budapest, Zombor (Sombor), Újvidék (Novi Sad), Vienna, Prague, and even Salonika and the USA.<sup>32</sup> In the post-Yugoslav world *sevdah*-songs became appropriated by and associated with the newly created Federal Democratic Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. A formerly transnational musical practice became “spaced” and institutionalized in the *Institut Sevdaha* of the Omer Pobrić Foundation in Mulići, close to Visoko. The revival of *sevdah*-music coincided with giving it an unambiguous „home-space“. One of the most famous groups called itself “Mostar Sevdah Reunion” for two reasons: the ensemble was founded in Mostar, but Mostar seemed to be also a powerful metaphor for an

<sup>30</sup> Muhameti, Olsa (2010): Interview with Poni. In: Info-Kult (351), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> Poni (2009): Labëri moj Labëri [Labëria my Labëria]. Videoclip. Super Sonic Production. Online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7yb65jdYpU>, last access 30.09.2012.

<sup>32</sup> Pennanen, Risto Pekka (2007): Recording Bosnia’s musical heritage: From the Austro-Hungarian Era to World War II. In: Bosnia Report (55/56, January-July). Online at [http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report\\_format.cfm?articleid=3187&reportid=173](http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleid=3187&reportid=173), last access 09.11.2012.



ethnic co-existence, which abruptly ended with the Yugoslav wars. For music critic Ognjen Tvrtković *Sevdalinka* songs are cultural identifiers of a distinct Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity:

„The recent war has completely overshadowed the very rich and unique cultural tradition of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the cultural heritage of this country, a special place belongs to the traditional Bosnian music form ‘Sevdah’.”<sup>33</sup>

While the revival of the Local, inscribed into wider (cultural) politics of regionalization and re-traditionalization, reached its height, musicologists could witness at the same time the raise of a transnational Balkan music in which the notion of the Balkans gained a new positive meaning beyond crises, wars and ethnical cleanings as an “emotional territory”.<sup>34</sup> To create the brand “Balkan music” several features of what Todorova calls “Balkanism”<sup>35</sup> were selectively employed in order to construct an “Other Europe”, a world of excessive emotionality, freedom, spirituality, characterized by an in-between position between Orient and Occident. Its aim was to produce the fiction of a homogenous, “natural” space, sharing similar cultural features, referring to a common cultural heritage. Musical practice in this area was described as genuine, “authentic”, spontaneous, and guided by emotions.

This notion of the Balkans responded to the needs of a world-wide musical market with a growing interest in what was called “authentic” and “rooted” performances. “Balkan music” in this sense became successfully propagated as a subgenre, inscribed into a wider current of world music. The label “ethnic music” became considered not as a juxtaposed, but as an integral part of “world music”. Important in this context is to mention that this development was not exclusively guided by exterior market forces or by the Western concept of the “Balkan Other”: on the contrary, this development was largely supported by local musicians who adopted the notion “Balkan” for their own agendas. As Čolović<sup>36</sup> has demonstrated, Serbian musicians for example used the term “Balkan” to differentiate their music from hybrid forms, arguing that their sounds were ancient, authentic and rooted in nature, representing a unique blend between the spiritual and the secular. Their music was primarily authentic because of their presumed music-historical age, and as their sounds were dating far more back in time than sounds of other musical cultures, this made them competitive on the international music market: “Every song by the Teofilović brothers is older than the most recent world empire”, reads the preface of the album “*Čuvari sna*” (Guardians of a Dream).<sup>37</sup>

This idea of a unified Balkan music, which in reality was nothing more than a commercial label, was heralded by the most commercially successful artists such as Goran Bregović and by audiovisual media. The realm of music seemed to be the right arena in which a politically correct multiculturalism could be exemplified, representing Southeastern Europe as „a region whose cultural tradition, most notably musical, is entirely focused on interfusion and

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<sup>33</sup> Trtkovic, Ognjen. History of Sevdah, In: Official Website of the Mostar Sevdah Reunion. Online at <http://www.mostar-sevdahreunion.com/sevdah.html>, last access 09.11.2012.

<sup>34</sup> Barber-Kersovan, Alenka (2010): Rock den Balkan! Die musikalische Rekonstruktion des Balkans als emotionales Territorium. In: *Populärmusikforschung* 34, p. 75–96.

<sup>35</sup> Todorova, Maria (2009): *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>36</sup> Čolović, Ivan (2004): The Balkans in a Narrative about World Music in Serbia. In: *New Sound* 24, Online at [http://www.newsound.org.rs/clanci\\_eng/7Colovic.pdf](http://www.newsound.org.rs/clanci_eng/7Colovic.pdf), last access 08.11.2012.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

collaboration of the various people who live there”,<sup>38</sup> transcending the boundaries of the present nation-states, languages and confessions.

Since 2005 the Sofia-based *Balkanika Music Television* transmits this message as a platform for commercial pop, rock, ethno and retro music from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro and Turkey.<sup>39</sup> Its ultimate aim is to create a common taste public for a homogenized Balkan music.

In contrast to this Ethnic/Balkan music claiming for authenticity, other musical repertoires such as *turbo-folk* (in Serbia), *manele* (in Romania), *chalgă* (in Bulgaria) or *tallava* (in Kosovo) fluctuated between retrospective Oriental associations and utopist, fictive images of a Golden West. One may speak in this case of a heterotopic situation, or as Foucault describes it, to “live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.”<sup>40</sup> Other researchers like Stoichiță have argued – in the case of *manele* – that music is experienced by the locals as having an agency of its own and do not necessarily refer to spatial and social dichotomies.<sup>41</sup> Music allows for the formulation of alternative notions of space, time and sociality. Music-making eventually serves the detachment from real time and real space, aiming at constructing and finding the “Social and Spatial Other”, an experience which lies beyond the mere interaction between listeners and musicians. This technique of social and spatial escapism is described by Stoichiță in reference to Gell<sup>42</sup> as “enchantment”.

In conclusion we might argue that the re-identification with space in the post-communist period took place following two antithetic directions: on the one hand the Local became linked to musical practice as an authentication strategy in a competitive music market. On the other hand a larger territorial-cultural brand was promoted: “Balkan music”, involving diverse re-contextualization processes and a shifting from the primarily geographically determined notion of “space” in favor of the socially constructed “place”.<sup>43</sup> The creation of “Balkan music” can eventually be interpreted in two different ways: in one way it is inscribed into the commodification and homogenization of local musical practice, reducing more and more the significance of space for musical creation, favoring instead a virtual spatiality. In another way, the label can be seen also as an identity-preserving act, attempting to “translate” local, socially encoded sounds into more widely accessible sounds within the context of an accelerating musical globalization.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> See Balkanika TV. Online at <http://www.balkanika.tv>, last access 08.11.2012.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, Michel (1967): Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias. Lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Publ. in: *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité* (October 1984). Transl. by Jay Miskowiec. Online at <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>, last access 09.11.2012.

<sup>41</sup> Stoichiță, Victor A. (forthcoming): The Squire in the helicopter – On parody in Romanian popular music. In: *Yearbook of the New Europe College* (Bucharest), p. 14. Online at [http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/69/01/58/PDF/Stoichita\\_Squire-in-helicopter.pdf](http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/69/01/58/PDF/Stoichita_Squire-in-helicopter.pdf), last access 08.11.2012.

<sup>42</sup> Gell, Alfred (1992): *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology*. In: Coote, Jeremy and Anthony Shelton (eds.): *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 40–63.

<sup>43</sup> Barber-Kersovan.

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