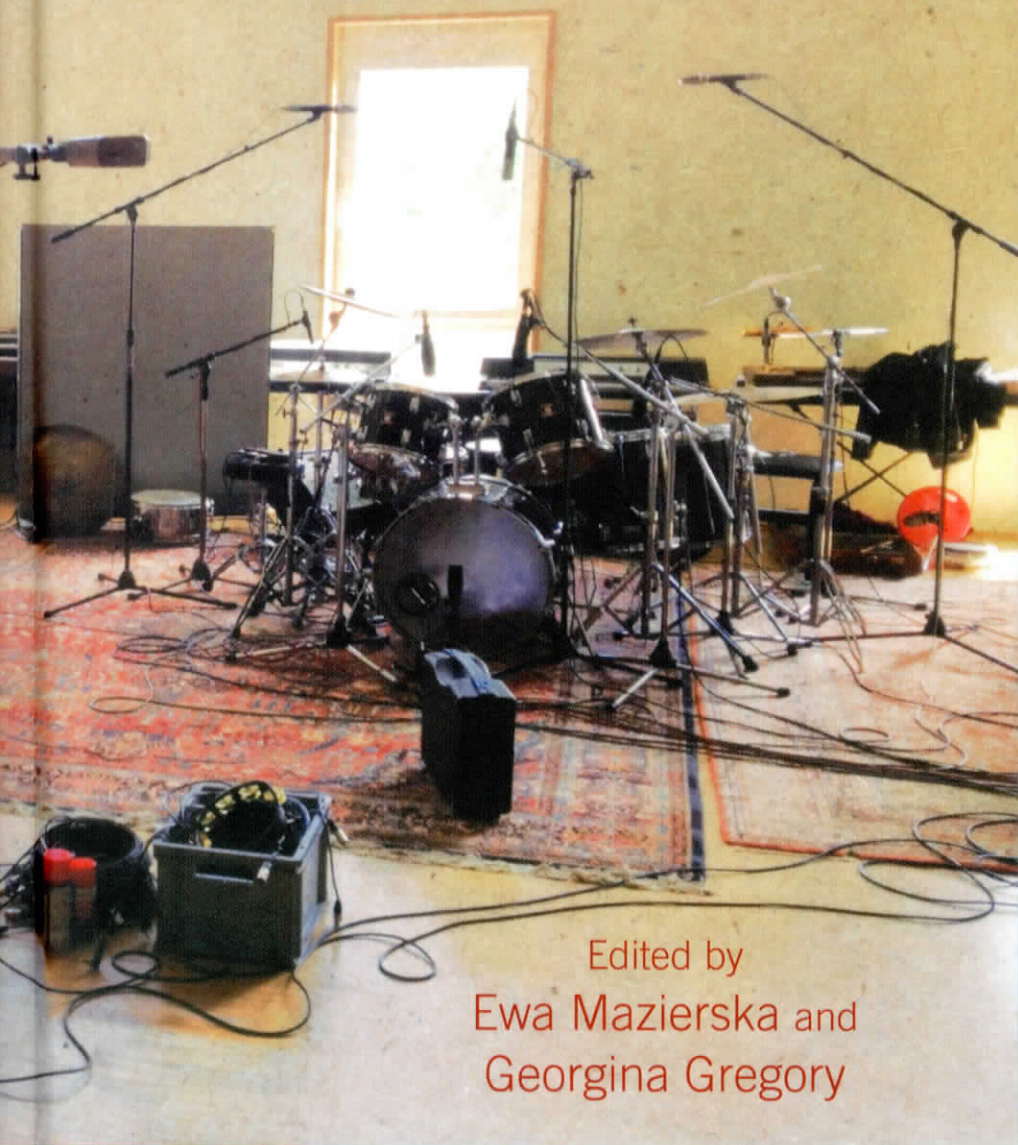
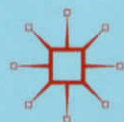


# Relocating Popular Music



Edited by  
Ewa Mazierska and  
Georgina Gregory

Pop Music, Culture and Identity



*Pop Music, Culture and Identity*

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Edited by

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# 4

## Recycled Music for Banal Nation: The Case of Serbia 1999–2010

*Srdan Atanasovski*

In this chapter I address the ways in which popular music genres have been recycled in the Serbian post-socialist political landscape. Specifically, I analyse how Western-styled music production was relocated, both spatially and temporally, from being a vehicle of purported 'freedom of expression' in socialist Yugoslavia, to operating as a mechanism of Serbian banal nationalism. During the 1990s, Serbian nationalism emerged as an antagonistic force playing a crucial and dominant role in the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and aiming to retain control of vast swathes of land which were (in Serbian nationalistic discourse) perceived as parts of Serbian national territory. The aggressiveness of Serbian nationalism was reflected in various popular music genres, not least in the infamous turbo-folk. Thus, it is important to trace the mechanisms whereby certain products of popular music, through processes of spatiotemporal relocation, were employed in order to banalise the 'hot' Serbian nationalism, and represent it in a different, Westernised light. I will show how the pop and rock music became engrafted into seemingly innocuous representations of Serbian patriotism, or 'civic nationalism', through widely accepted practices which were even perceived as 'above the political' in the everyday jargon.

Michael Billig (1995) defined banal nationalism as nationalism which is reproduced in everyday, seemingly banal and innocuous situations, thus becoming the omnipresent doxa and discourse that we use in order to make sense of our everyday lives. Through its banality, nationalism is transformed into 'patriotism', stripped of its negative connotations and recognised as something positive. However, Billig positions his analysis of banal nationalism in contrast to what he terms 'hot nationalism' – nationalism which is violent, out of control and, importantly, which happens outside the Western, civilised world.

Between banal and hot nationalism there is a clear colonial link: nationalism, in its 'positive', banal form, appears as something which is inherently Western, produced and originally practised in the civilised realm of Western countries, whereas hot, violent nationalism thrives on the edges of our civilisation. Drawing on this perspective of Billig's research,<sup>1</sup> I will explore how state apparatus deals with situations of thriving 'hot nationalism'. I argue that banalisation is a dynamic process, a mechanism through which the state strives to reaffirm its own political authority and reducing nationalism to what is seen as a mere demonstration of patriotism. In this regard, the banalisation of nationalism is also a colonial phenomenon, a process through which the societies which perceive themselves as the colonial 'Other' struggle to emulate the political models of the Western world.

I take example of post-Dayton Serbia<sup>2</sup> and two state campaigns which were conducted between 1999 and 2010: the first one concerns organising popular music events in public spaces during the NATO bombing in 1999, and the other is the media and television campaign of rebuilding the Avala TV Tower, destroyed in the NATO bombing of 2005. Both these situations can be described as 'hot nationalism'. In the first example, during the final phase of Milošević's regime in Serbia, the country was ostracised by most of the international community, while its administration was involved into forcible displacement and other ethnically inspired crimes in the territory of its former autonomous province of Kosovo.<sup>3</sup> In the second case, passionate nationalistic discourse was not only present through dealing with the traumatic legacy of NATO bombing, but also in connection with the open issue of Kosovo's secession, which was interpreted as an onslaught on the Serbian nation *in toto*.

In my analysis I look into the ways that the nationalistic project and nation-state intertwine. Modern nationalism, based on the doctrine of sovereignty and the idea of statehood is deeply ingrained in every political project presenting itself as national (Yack 2012: 136). However, practices of nationalism are continuously being formed and exercised in-between state and private realms, and 'national identity' incorporates both a sense of belonging to the nation and a sense of loyalty to the nation-state. Through my examples of the use of Western-styled popular music genres in state campaigns in Serbia, I show how state apparatus finds ways to appropriate sentiments provoked by the 'hot nationalism' (produced in the private realm of 'national belonging') through such mechanisms as banalisation, to solidify the attachment of the individuals to the nation-state.

In the first part of this chapter I review discourses of nationalism in Serbian popular music in both Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav contexts. I also consider music's positioning within Yugoslav and Serbian state apparatus, in particular to point out purported 'Eastern' and 'Western' allegiances of certain genres of Serbian popular music. This is of importance as most of the music which was used in the campaigns analysed was originally produced in a different context, and continues to carry existing meanings and connotations. I will then analyse two named campaigns showing how mechanisms of banalisation were employed by recycling existing music. In my conclusion I will point to similarities between these projects, notwithstanding their ostensibly different political contexts.

### **Serbian popular music between the East and the West**

Both of the projects that I examine resorted to 'recycled music' and it is important to understand how the decisions what to recycle were made and the symbolic legacy of the music which became part of these campaigns. Serbian national identity has been riven with different interpretations of notions of 'West' and 'East', a dichotomy constantly used in the labelling of popular music genres. These labels, part of the mechanisms of manipulating identities, were used as mechanisms of governing, as a technology of power. From its inception in the early nineteenth century, the intellectual elite defined Serbia's identity as non-Ottoman/non-Eastern, in an effort to vindicate its territorial enlargement at the expense of the empire in decline. This was especially visible in the attitudes of various composers and ethnomusicologists who strove to purify Serbian music by eliminating what they perceived as Ottoman elements. However, in the context of Yugoslavia, throughout the twentieth-century, Serbian identity was also defined as non-Western, which in this instance was defined as 'traditional', pro-Russian, Byzantine, and Orthodox Christian. This became especially obvious in the 1990s, during the breakup of Yugoslavia, which was portrayed as the 'dungeon of the Serbian nation', and Western powers were seen to be allying with the other sides in the conflict (Croats, Bosniaks, Kosovars, etc.).

The creation of socialist Yugoslavia after the Second World War entailed a significant curbing of the particular nationalisms of 'Yugoslav nations', including Serbian, and their subordination to Yugoslav patriotism which was reformulated through the Communist Part of Yugoslavia's ideology of 'brotherhood and unity' (Calic 2010: 180–183). After the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavia increasingly



tried to portray itself as a state where socialism had a more human face and one more open to the influences from the West, including its popular music, which was by far more captivating than the Soviet-modelled mass songs (Doknić 2013: 271–279; Marković 1996; Vučetić 2006, 2012). Thus, while central government tried to curb perceived outbursts of particular nationalism within Yugoslavia, it fostered Western-influenced popular music, first in the form of jazz and Italian pop and afterwards global rock and roll. Already in 1948 the Communist Party's attitude towards jazz (which was ostracised throughout the Soviet political sphere of influence) became increasingly lenient, and in 1954 US diplomats noted that 'surprisingly large space is awarded to American jazz music' on the Yugoslav radio programmes (Marković 1996: 475, Vučetić 2006: 174–176). During the 1950s and 1960s a vast numbers of songs performed by Yugoslav singers were translated and adapted from Italian. Examples include *Nogometna utakmica* by Beti Jurković, released by the Zagreb production company Jugoton in 1963, just a year after the original Italian version *La partita di pallone* (composed by Edoardo Vianello and performed by the celebrated Rita Pavone). Songs in similar fashion were widely arranged by Yugoslav composers and made popular through a system of pop-music festivals modelled on Sanremo, including ones in Opatija, Split, Belgrade, and Sarajevo. From the mid-1960s, rock and roll started to dominate the Yugoslav music scene, replacing both jazz and Sanremo festival-inspired popular music, although it was sometimes perceived as subverting the socialist regime, primarily because its promotion of sexual freedom went against the regime's strict moral values, Yugoslav rock and roll was benefiting from state financial and logistical support throughout the 1970s and 1980s. YU grupa presents a paradigmatic example, as one of the pioneering Yugoslav rock bands, formed in the autumn of 1969 (Ivačković 2013: 162). Although promoting a music genre perceived as Western, YU grupa integrated into the ideological apparatus of the socialist Yugoslavia (for example, holding annual celebration concerts for the Republic Day on 29 of November, symbolically the most important holiday of the new regime) and by combining rock and folk music elements. The latter became known as 'shepherds' rock' ('pastirski rok'), or 'folklore YU rock' (Đorđević 2002: 120) and was largely responsible for the wide popularity of rock music in Yugoslavia, seemingly cutting through the class barriers. It helped the Yugoslav state create the unique image of a socialist state open to foreign influences and participation in global popular and consumer culture and one which awards its citizens with a latitude of 'freedom of expression'. Although *de facto* part of the state system, rock musicians still relied on semi-staged scandals, playing

with the social taboos and even provoking some local censorship incidents (Arnautović 2012: 161). In this way they were able to present themselves as the harbingers of new freedom in Yugoslav society. The rock culture which developed in Yugoslavia can in general be regarded as an example of 'colonial mimicry' (Bhabha 1994: 85), where this society, which stood on the edge of the socialist realm of the Eastern Europe, tried to participate in what was perceived as the free and civilized world of the West, producing music which was 'almost the same, but not quite'.

At the same time these, Western-styled popular music genres had to compete in the market with so-called 'newly composed folk music' (Rasmussen 2012). This was inspired by folk music (primarily of Serbia and Bosnia), but the genre also relied on newly composed tunes, arrangements drawing on pop-music models, as well as on 'stardom effect' (Gledhill 1991) and the huge popularity of the leading performers. Primarily characteristic of the Serbian scene where it quickly became the most profitable music genre (Arnautović 2012: 183), it was repeatedly decried in public discourse, both by intellectuals and party officials as backward and 'Eastern'. Moreover, it was associated with the extensive migration from rural to urban areas, as part of the great socialist project of industrialisation and hence was subjected to rampant stigmatisation and discrimination (Kos 1972). Some of the best-selling singles in former Yugoslavia's popular music history were created by performers such as Tomislav (Toma) Zdravković, who built his reputation on being a true melancholic bohemian of Serbian kafanas, and Zilha Bajraktarević (known as Silvana Armenulić), who shocked the public with highly sexualised appearances in the media. The 1980s saw a significant wave of Serbian nationalistic revivalism, as the intellectual elite was frustrated by the implementation of the 1974 constitution. This gave enhanced rights to the autonomous provinces within Serbia, Vojvodina and Kosovo (officially 'Kosovo i Metohija'), the latter populated by the Albanian majority who supposedly started terrorising the Serbian minority (Sundhaussen 2007: 379). Metanarratives of Serbian greatness such as the Kosovo myth, were resurrected via reference to medieval Serbian history and First World War narratives, where the Serbian nation was victimised, decimated, but finally victorious in combat. Unlike Yugoslav rock and roll, the newly composed folk music embraced this nationalistic turn. This was achieved by incorporating First World War regalia into its visual representations and by drawing on certain songs thematically connected to these national narratives. A striking example was Predrag Živković

Tozovac's single *Jeremija* (1972), which controversially draw on narratives of a victorious Serbian army in the First World War. Tozovac posed on the sleeve in the pre-war uniform of the Kingdom of Serbia holding a rifle, and for the reissue, in a semi-comic twist he even mounted a heavy artillery gun. Some of the most poignant examples are songs and compilations produced in connection with the six hundredth anniversary of the battle of Kosovo Field, in 1989, which opportunely coincided with the new rise of Serbian nationalism, for which the narrative of this medieval battle has served as one of the cornerstone myths. The celebration again strengthened this link between newly composed folk music and Serbian nationalism. This is primarily reflected in the immense popularity of the song *Vidovdan* ('St. Vitus' Day'), performed by Gordana Lazarević and composed by Milutin Popović Zahar, which became constant fixture of every social gathering, ranging from political rally to wedding celebrations. The poignant verses of the song create a sense of timelessness and speak of the protagonist's primordial connection with the land of Kosovo, as a core part of the Serbian national territory ('As the eternal flame in our hearts / The truth of the Kosovo Battle remains / Wherever I go I come back to you / Who could steal Kosovo from my soul'). Thus, newly composed folk music, as the music genre which supposedly resisted the 'Westernisation' of Yugoslavia, simultaneously evolved into the vehicle of increasingly 'hot' Serbian nationalism.

With the escalation of violence in Yugoslav territories during the early 1990s, and increasingly belligerent Serbian nationalism, perception of Serbia as belonging to the 'Eastern' realm was particularly accentuated. In the transformations which took place following a deepening economic crisis, the production of folk music was handed over to newly founded private market-orientated TV and production companies. The Serbian popular music scene witnessed an aggressive burgeoning of 'turbo-folk' music, a genre emanating from newly composed folk music. Producers openly pursued popularity and profit by drawing on music patterns found in the popular genres across the Balkans and the Near East and ones characteristic of Western dance-pop, as well as sex-and-violence and glittering media representations. Songs by dance-pop performer Ivan Gavrilović are often regarded as the aesthetic manifestos of the new genre: *200 na sat* ('200 km per hour'), *Motori* ('Motorcycles') and *Hoću s tobom da đuskam* ('I want to dance with you') extol dangerous and sexually charged night-life behaviour. Importantly, turbo-folk embraced female star singers launching their careers as singers of newly composed folk music and

introducing a genre of singing perceived as intrinsically folkloric and 'Eastern'. An example of this new blend is the song *Crveno* ('Red') performed by Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović, where the singer pairs her well-known singing style with its harsh timbre and wide vibrato with verses alluding to her precarious life style ('Go with me through the red light / What is hers will be mine / Tie your eyes and do not brake'). The song video accompanying the song also featured a highly stylised sexual performance.

The lack of the public support for the music industry had a devastating effect on rock music production, which was unsustainable in the fragile market. As the musicians could not secure their incomes in the new economic system, the market share of the genres which were perceived as the Western-influenced dwindled. Turbo-folk was vehemently deprecated by intellectuals, on similar grounds as newly composed folk music, with the strong accentuation 'Eastern' sound, often referred to as the 'Tehranisation' of Serbian (folk) music (Atanasovski 2012; Kupres 2004). A number of intellectuals and musicians, correlated the rise of turbo-folk with the nationalistic ethos of the belligerent Milošević regime. Certain musicians associated with this genre (such as Mirko Pajčin, known as 'Baja Mali Knindža') openly engaged in the conflict, advocating the Serbian cause through blatant nationalistic lyrics. Pajčin openly sympathised with Serbian paramilitary commanders in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, expressing his nationalist and xenophobic attitudes towards Croats and Bosniaks. Moreover he supported the far-right Serbian Radical Party, whose political programme based on the irredentist project of so-called 'Greater Serbia', glorified its controversial leader Vojislav Šešelj. Although Pajčin's stereotypically folkloric music style may seem prosaic, the appeal of his songs is mostly produced by poignant verses which speak of Serbian racial supremacy and historical victimhood ('Ever since God created humans / always others come to judge us / always someone bothers the Serbs'), often directly insulting or threatening members of other national communities (Longinović 2001: 639). Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović herself became representative of these connections when she married Željko Ražnatović Arkan, one of the main leaders of Serbian paramilitary troops active in the war in Croatia and Bosnia. Some scholars argued that Milošević's regime itself produced or supported the rise of turbo-folk in order to destroy the cultural alternatives to the Serbian nationalistic project (Gordy 1999; Kronja 2000). However, no proof of explicit state involvement in the rise of turbo-folk can be found, and the process can be explained solely through the effects of economic crises

and the imposition of the market economy (Đurković 2001). Thus, the loss of cultural alternatives described by Gordy was a product of major social and economic crises which mostly affected Western-influenced music genres, incapable of sustaining their activities without the governmental support they enjoyed in socialist Yugoslavia. I would argue that the radical nationalistic examples of turbo-folk, although representative of the ideological system which imposed itself as dominant in contemporary Serbian society, cannot be regarded as a state project, but more as instances of 'hot nationalism' operating outside the state apparatus.

### **'The Song Has Kept Us': public concert during the NATO bombing**

The NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia began on 24 of March 1999, just a month after unsuccessful negotiations held in Rambouillet, where the government of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia<sup>4</sup> could not agree with representatives of the Kosovo Albanians and the international community, as it did not accept the NATO presence in Kosovo or the possibility of holding an independence referendum after three years. NATO unilaterally decided to bomb Yugoslavia in order to curtail its military and policing capacities. While the campaign wrought havoc on Kosovo, both because of intensive NATO bombardment and because of intensified ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Serbian forces, the mood in the capital of Belgrade was quite different. The citizens' daily lives were disrupted with frequent emergency notices and schools were closed. A major source of traumatising was the sonic experience of the campaign. In the transfigured *soundscape* of the city relentless sirens announced imminent danger followed by the sound of heavy bombardment of military facilities and headquarters, political and government buildings in the city centre and on its outskirts.<sup>5</sup> The NATO forces would occasionally employ so-called 'sound bombs', a sonic effect of high-volume and deep-frequency caused by low-flying jets breaking the sound barrier. Responding to this *sonic terror* (Goodman 2010) the government deployed strategies to mobilise the citizens of Belgrade which were equally centred on the sound and sonic experience. Namely, the government organised public concerts of popular music in the open spaces in most of the cities of Serbia proper. The first concert was organised by Belgrade city council, on Sunday 28 March, just four days after the bombing started. Surprisingly, it was concentrated solely on rock music, featuring the groups Električni

orgazam, Deca loših muzičara, Bajaga i Instruktori and YU grupa, as well as musicians such as Dejan Cukić and Rambo Amadeus. The musical style of these groups ranged from pop/rock to funk and (post-)punk rock, most of which had gained popularity in socialist Yugoslavia. Being quite immune to the rise of Serbian nationalism, these musicians were often connected to the common cultural identity of former Yugoslavia which permeated its rock scene. Previously mentioned YU grupa had the longest career so far, and the one most clearly connected with the former Yugoslav identity. The second generation of Yugoslav rock was characterised by a mollified sound, often aligned with seemingly depoliticised pop music. Such were Bajaga i Instruktori, whose popularity was particularly urban and Belgrade-based, as well as relying on the charisma of their lead singer, Momčilo Bajagić Bajaga, who was particularly masterful in interpreting emotionally charged rock ballads (Ivačković 2013: 328–337). However, among the performers present at the 28 March concert, Električni orgazam was also a prime representative of the third generation of Yugoslav rock, which accrued their popularity in the late 1980s. Renouncing any folk conceptions of 'shepherds' rock', they built their image on an aggressive rock sound and often politically engaged verses criticising contemporary Yugoslav society. Openly dissident, they became part of mainstream Yugoslav rock, illustrating the purported openness of this state-socialist society (Arnautović 2012: 163). Thus, the 28 March concert in Belgrade can be interpreted as an event where the full kaleidoscope of Yugoslav rock was relocated in its time, space, and meaning: the songs performed were mostly at least a decade old, and originally representative of the pro-Western values of Yugoslav socialist society. Here they were performed in an entirely new context, in a novel state whose governing apparatus reckoned with their accrued popularity and utilised them to banalise a highly charged political situation. This concert, which proved to be only the first in a series of daily organised events, was especially memorable because of its intense affective atmosphere in which musicians played despite air raid warnings. As a truly surprising event, the concert articulated the feelings of fear of both performers and the audience at the gathering thereby transforming them into a form of therapeutic defiance (Grujičić 1999).

The government pushed forward the idea of organising public concerts throughout the NATO campaign on a daily basis. Besides the daytime concerts organised in the centre of Belgrade by the city council under the slogan *The Song Has Kept Us*, the two ruling parties staged night-time concerts on two important Belgrade bridges, purportedly to

serve as a living shield dispelling the danger of their destruction. The exclusively rock music character of the concerts did not last, but neither was a certain musical selection maintained. As the programme slid into musical mainstream and mishmash, including turbo-folk performers, most of the musicians invited by the government to perform felt forced to comply (Mira Škorić statement in Kupres 2004). While public support for the initiative started to dwindle, which was reflected in the numbers of visitors which seemed to wane from day to day, the organisers tried to gather as large an audience as possible by bringing pop rock stars Zdravko Čolić and Đorđe Balašević to play on the 11 April, Easter day. Somewhat similar to Momčilo Bajagić, Zdravko Čolić and Đorđe Balašević rose to great popularity in 1970s and 1980s respectively, positioning themselves as seemingly apolitical figures and appealing to a wide audience. The emblematic songs which were repeated through these concerts were published on a CD featuring the target logo that became an emblem of this campaign of supposed popular resistance. Published by anonymous ad hoc 'Target rekords', the CD was widely sold on the streets during the concerts and reflected their repertoire. Again, one notes the dominant presence of former Yugoslavian rock music, either left unchanged or adapted for this special purpose. The meaning of old Yugoslav rock, which was perceived as cosmopolitan, was here relocated into processes of banalisation of the Serbian nationalistic cause. The songs featuring by then the futile messages of Yugoslav identity, as the one built on youthful energy and cosmopolitan values (which was very much in dispute with the turbo-folk genre), such as *Igra roken rol cela Jugoslavija* ('The whole of Yugoslavia is dancing to rock and roll music') played by the Električni orgazam, dominate the compilation, which attracted their wide popularity. Some songs accrued different meaning in a changed context: the song *Avionu slomiću ti krila* ('Airplane, I'll break your wings') by former Yugoslav rock band Riblja čorba originally features a love theme (in which the 'breaking of the wings' of the passenger jet was used to express the protagonist's desire to be with his loved one). However the song's meaning was reinscribed via allusions to the shooting down of enemy planes, regularly reported in the media and widely celebrated. A special place was awarded to the song *Ringišpil* ('Carousel') by Đorđe Balašević, who wrote new war-themed lyrics to this popular love song from 1991. The original song, written in a formulaic and dreary singer-songwriter style, was structured as a call to a former lover to reappear and 'add some colour'. Balašević's interventions were mostly concentrated on the opening two stanzas, which set the melancholic mood in which 'it's all the same' to

the protagonist. Indeed, Balašević uses the song's exaggerated melancholia to depict the imminent danger of the war as a mere nuisance and comparable to rain, thus using a love ballad as an instrument to dilute the seriousness of the precarious political situation. Specially produced songs with banal, patriotic verses were also added to this compilation, such as *Ja volim svoju zemlju* ('I love my country'), produced by City Records and featuring an array of pop and folk singers, and *Samo sloga Srbina spasava* ('Only unity saves the Serbs'), featuring Riblja čorba and rock musicians Bajaga and Dejan Cukić. It is evident that this repertoire conforms to the idea of 'banal nationalism'. Moreover, its banality is seen as kind of therapeutic vehicle which transforms the trauma of sound and fear provoked by the NATO bombing into complacency and stupor.

Đorđe Balašević, *Ringišpil*, first two stanzas, original version (1991) and war-time version (1999)

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It's raining this morning since four or five, the sky decided to flood the world over the city for days more of the same scenery.	They're beating this morning since four or five, NATO decided to change the world over the city for days fly of the same rockets.
Pouring rain, but that's his thing, hey, it's all same to me, flat like the north of the Banat, more or less, both with and without rain.	Pouring NATO, but that's his thing hey, it's all same to me flat like the north of the Banat, there'll be war, so be it, we end up same.

---

### 'Let's Raise the Tower at the Avala'

After the fall of Milošević's regime in 2000, Serbian citizens were strongly divided between the poles of the nationalistic and pro-Western/pro-European cause, with the rift between generations being particularly pronounced. One could argue that the rift between supporters of Milošević's regime on the one hand, and its opponents on the other, was so wide that the integrity of the nation was brought to question. Members of these two poles defined themselves and allied to specific causes not only by using specific political rhetoric, but also by using patterns of cultural consumption to identify themselves. In the late 1990s, rock music was clearly associated with resistance



against Milošević's regime, with examples of outspoken criticism present in the works of some of the rock musicians (Mijatović 2008). Music also occupied a prominent place in the anti-Milošević street protests, where some rock musicians and performers took part in the rallies and recorded songs with political and satirical verses. From the point of view of members of Milošević's opposition, it was regarded as natural and expected that rock musicians, who were pro-Western cosmopolites, unlike the turbo-folk performers, were among those who opposed Milošević's regime and the nationalistic and aggressive militant culture it represented. The ethos of rock music, as original, individual, and, last but not the least, pro-Western, was opposed to folk music on a political as well as on an aesthetic level. Folk singers purportedly continued with the 'Tehranisation' of Serbian music and, as individuals, they were either seemingly apolitical, connected to the ruling parties of the Milošević regime (such as Zorica Brunclik, prominent member of Yugoslav Left), or involved with famous nationalistic figures (such as Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović). The rock musicians, such as Rambo Amadeus, Darkwood Dub, and Eyesburn (Mijatović 2008), not only gave their support to the anti-Milošević movement, but also used their music aesthetic to back the protests. Particularly prominent was Dragoljub Đuričić, reputedly one of the leading rock drummers of former Yugoslavia (formerly working with YU grupa, Leb i Sol, Kerber, and as a member Zdravko Čolić's and Đorđe Balašević's bands), who embarked with projects in progressive rock based solely on percussion instruments. Playing portable drums in a percussion ensemble with his associates, Đuričić gained recognition by actually leading the street protest marches.

I would argue that the purpose of the project of rebuilding the Avala TV Tower was to answer the challenges of homogenising a divided nation by restoring the authority of the state. It also helped to banalise the new wave of Serbian nationalism stemming from dissatisfaction with the Kosovo secession, which led to the fall of Milošević. In this process, relocating the rock music – and more so, the musicians themselves – from an anti-Milošević position to seemingly legitimising the rejuvenated Serbian state – proved to be one of the crucial mechanisms. The Avala TV Tower was originally constructed between 1961 and 1965 and was the tallest structure in the Balkans, located on the outskirts of Belgrade. It was destroyed on 29 April 1999 during the NATO bombardment of Serbia. The campaign to re-erect the tower, which commenced in 2004, was permeated with the ethos of repulsion and repudiation

towards the NATO bombardment, and the very act of rebuilding was to symbolise an annulment of the consequences of the action, the most serious being the secession of Kosovo. Importantly, the campaign was launched following violent unrest in Kosovo in March 2004, when many Serbian landmarks and buildings were torn down and part of Serbian population left the province, contributing to the anxiety of the remaining population and to the overall discontent of nationalists in Belgrade.

Although heavy financial and logistical support came from the state government, the funding mechanisms of the project tended to produce a semblance of private or non-governmental initiative. Radio Television of Serbia broadcast a series of live TV shows featuring SMS donations from the audience, and citizens were invited to help the project, fostering a feeling of solidarity towards a 'people's' cause. The restoration of the Avala TV Tower was imbued with emotional significance for many Belgrade citizens who were used to seeing this prominent structure in their everyday life as part of the healing process after the traumatic experience of NATO bombing. The reconstruction of Avala TV Tower is significant as it claimed to symbolically overwrite the effects and memory of NATO bombing, thereby restoring the unity of the state territory and reconstituting Serbian 'homeland' as an organic whole. This strategy of erasing history was prominent in the city mayor's opening speech, where he noted that it is as if the tower was shrouded in mist for all these years, and only now could be seen clearly again. The tower symbolically and physically represented the organic unity of Serbian national territory, as (almost) all the parts can be thence seen in clear weather, as emphasised in the speech of one of the members of the cabinet on the same occasion.

Musical products incorporated into the project included a prominent musical video regularly featured on Radio Television of Serbia, a CD issued by national broadcasting agency (PGP RTS), as well as performances at the opening which was broadcast live from the scene. The release of another CD was planned, for which there was to be a poetry competition for schools and prominent musical stars were to write the music for selected verses, but the project was never completed. Music videos used in the fund-raising campaign give the first significant clue to how different social groups, defined in terms of musical and political preferences and lifestyle, were encouraged to participate in the project. The music video *Avalski toranj* ('Avala TV Tower') used to promote the rebuilding of Avala TV Tower, produced by RTS, features Bora Đorđević

and Dragoljub Đuričić, both open critics of the Milošević's regime in the 1990s. Also present, was a younger star Željko Joksimović who owes most of his fame to the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest and is perceived as an apolitical person. The music video bears an uncanny resemblance to the concerts organised during the bombing, as the location where the video was filmed is the ruins of the former TV tower emphasising the circumstances and aftermath of the NATO campaign (see Figure 3.1). The music composed by Kornelije Kovač, a well-known pop and rock composer, fuses important features of rock, thus appealing to the urban young and middle-aged population (Cvetičanin 2007; Dragičević-Šešić 1994). The lyrics were written by Ljubivoje Ršumović, a famous children's poet, again perceived as an apolitical person. However, as can be concluded through an analysis of its rhetoric, the verses are far from apolitical even though they cling to a banal, ambivalent blend of commonplace tropes:

The godless devils have managed  
to separate us from the world.  
They destroyed the three-legged tower,  
Belgrade remained without its flag.  
[...]  
We want a life without barriers  
and the life wants us to be free!  
This lightning rod over Belgrade  
Defends us from the world's loneliness

While the first stanza clearly refers to the NATO bombing, and mobilises negative emotions connected to this event, the third stanza portrays the Serbian nation as a modern state integrated within the international community. The trope of a 'life without barriers' is also a clear reference to anti-Milošević rhetoric used in 2000. The song featured clear, stereotypical, one might say vacuous references to rock music, such as the prominent role of the electric guitar and strong drum beats, which was also supported by the visual and performative level in the music video. These features, once a cachet of free expression, were here relocated into the new ideological system of post-Milošević Serbia, where rebuilding projects such as this one were not seen as overtly nationalistic, but as depoliticised or simply 'patriotic' (Figure 4.1).

The CD that accompanied the project and the fund-raising campaign was made to appeal to the widest possible audience, but again in a way



Figure 4.1 Cover of the CD *Avalaski toranj* (Avala tower), 2006

to reflect the odium towards folk music. The compilation was made from popular songs by musicians who agreed to join the fund-raising campaign, some of them appearing as performers on the previously discussed single which also figures as the title number on this CD. Musicians listed on this compilation again present a blend of well-known artists who were either apolitical or had openly allied with the anti-Milošević cause (in this respect, an important addition to Đorđević and Đuričić is the name of Đorđe Balašević). Interestingly, a number of performers connect this CD with the one issued by Target Rekords during the bombing. By analysing the songs, it can be concluded that mainstream rock performers make up most of the artists, but the songs 15 chosen from their repertoire to be included in the compilation

were closer to pop music in style, appealing to wider audiences and not only to rock music lovers. In this way, the symbolic capital of rock music, as the 'Western' genre, rebellious, original and individualised, was preserved, while the compilation, at the same time could please the widest possible audience. As the March 1999 concert in Belgrade shows, rock music was relocated and recontextualised as an instrument of banal Serbian nationalism, supporting seemingly innocuous rebuilding projects, which nevertheless had a strong territorial agenda. In this example through the processes of relocation the impact and aesthetic consequences were much stronger. The banalisation of the nation entailed the banalisation of the rock music itself, which was further accentuated with additions of songs performed by pop musicians from the pre-rock era as well as children's pop songs.

## **Conclusion**

In his study, Billig scrutinised the case of Western, first world countries, which do not usually feature in studies of nationalism. However, studying popular music as the instrument of banalisation implies that there is something intrinsically 'Western' in nationalism as the dominant governing ideology of the globalised world. Not only did the modern ideology of the nationalism originally develop in the advanced countries of the West, but also the 'progressive' and desirable forms of nationalism, are continuously perceived as something that should be modelled on successful Western nations, emulating their cultural patterns. In order to impose their authority, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Republic of Serbia recycled almost exclusively Western-styled popular music which was originally perceived as non- or even anti-nationalistic, transmitting the modernising values of the Western world. Western-influenced popular music was relocated from its original context and ascribed with new meanings of banal patriotism. Relocated into the newly formulated state campaigns, it was used in order to mollify the 'hot' nationalistic practices and to attract a wider audience consisting of all generations. It seems like, while all hot nationalisms are hot in their own way, the only way to create banal nationalism is by adopting and recycling products of popular culture in general, and music in particular, by which a nation-state can become widely recognised as Western, modern, and progressive.

The two campaigns described in this chapter bear many resemblances: a CD was produced saturated with recycled Western-styled popular music; an emblematic music video was specifically produced and

continually screened on state television; an array of rock and 16 pop rock musicians was mobilised in a seemingly unproblematic cause. The importance of the banality of everyday experience is affirmed in both cases: the two campaigns were both in a way a response to the disruption of the everyday experience of the population, either by the 'sonic war' of NATO in Belgrade, or by the pronounced absence of the TV tower that the citizens of the capital were used of seeing in the landscape. In both cases, campaigns struggled to make changes in the realm of everyday, either by staging a public concert as a counterweight to the sonic war, or by restoring the all too familiar vista. As dictionaries do not define banal simply as mundane, unmarked, but specifically insist on the quality of lacking originality and the complete absence of novelty and freshness, these examples also show that banal nationalism is similarly not something which just happens every day or which has lost all immediate appeal.<sup>6</sup> For practices of banal nationalism to function and truly serve their purpose of reaffirming nation-state authority, they have to be based on cultural practices which themselves lack originality, which are recycled relics of popular practices or products which have either lost or changed their original purpose. The Western-styled popular music used in this state campaign has thus not only lost its originality, but has itself become banalised as a part of the state apparatus, and its original meaning as a type of music which allows 'freedom of expression' has been lost through the described processes of relocation and its submission to the state apparatus. The genres such as rock and roll, which had previously served as markers of individual freedom, have now been relocated into the new political post-socialist context of the Serbian nation-state struggling to affirm its authority. Even more specifically, they were relocated onto the very sights of national traumatic experiences – the urban spaces as the potential targets of NATO bombing and the devastated ruins of sites which had been bombed – and used to banalise these very sites and the sonic and visual trauma connected to them.<sup>7</sup> Finally, by relocating these popular music genres from their original context into new spatiotemporal realities, they not only lost part of their aesthetic appeal, but they also become divested of their political purpose.

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## Notes

1. The importance of Billing's contribution notwithstanding, in recent years scholars have been re-evaluating the impact of his approach on nationalism studies. Craig Calhoun (2014) rightfully concludes that the applications of Billing's banal nationalism were mostly about retracing the steps of Billing's research and providing an array of case studies reaffirming his argument, rather than dealing with the important consequences of his conclusions. Calhoun notices that by merely describing how 'the world of nations' is reaffirmed through banal practices, not only do we fail to come closer to the answer to how it got formed in the first place, but we can even become complicit in its making. The issue was also addressed by Rhys Jones and Peter Merriman, who note that Billing's account also implies a 'separation between the banal and hot processes that reproduce nationalism' (Jones and Merriman 2009: 165), and try to put emphasis on the notion of everyday nationalism, whereas certain practices can be interpreted both as 'banal' and 'hot', depending on the wider social and discursive context.
2. The Dayton Agreement signed in November 1995 (Slobodan Milošević being one of the signatories) brought the end to the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, several months after fighting in Croatia also ended. In the following year, Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (consisting of Serbia and Montenegro) recognised the sovereignty of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Using the term 'post-Dayton Serbia' I wish to emphasise that silent disavowal of its role in these conflicts (and in encouragement of the belligerent Serbian nationalism in general) is one of the constants in Serbian state politics from the Dayton Agreement to this day, and that it runs through both the Milošević and post-Milošević periods.
3. Cf. Appeal Judgement Summary for Šainović et al., International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (2014) [http://www.icty.org/x/cases/milutinovic/acjug/en/140123\\_summary.pdf](http://www.icty.org/x/cases/milutinovic/acjug/en/140123_summary.pdf).
4. Quite different from the communist Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, founded in 1992, consisted only of Serbia and Montenegro, the republics which did not choose to leave the combined Yugoslav state (unlike Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia). In this period, its government was strongly associated with Milošević's regime. He acted as the federation's president between 1997 and 2000. In 2003, this polity changed its name to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro and finally ceased to exist with secession of Montenegro in 2006.
5. This is not to claim that there were no casualties, and NATO's official naming of these with the term 'collateral damage' was received with indignation. Particularly exposed by media was the death of three-year-old Milica Rakić who was killed by shrapnel during the bombing of a military facility in the outskirts of Belgrade and the most notorious was the death of 16 workers at Radio Television of Serbia when its building was bombed on 23 April. The director of television, Dragoljub Milanović, was later convicted for not evacuating people from the building, and the families of the victims expressed their belief that they served as victims to bring international attention to unjustified targets in the NATO bombing campaign (Vasić 2012). During the bombing (and afterwards) Belgrade residents remained largely oblivious to the simultaneous crimes of government forces in Kosovo.

6. The etymology of banal provides an equally useful tale: stemming from the mid-eighteenth century, it was originally related to feudal service and meant what was 'compulsory' and hence 'common to all' (Hoad 1996). Not surprisingly, banal nationalistic practices serve the purpose of inscribing the compulsory 'national identity' onto the population of the state, reaffirming the authority of the nation-state and enabling the governing of the population.
7. The analysis of the campaigns also provides us with an important insight pertaining to the ways in which Serbian nationalism deals with recent conflicts. Namely, both campaigns were directly aimed at hiding the belligerent nature of Serbian nationalism and the wry picture of the 1999 conflict can be construed as a part of the banalised narrative advocated by the Serbian state. It excludes the insight into the reasons which led to the NATO bombing and information on the actions of Serbian troops towards the Albanian population in Kosovo. Not only was this the case in 1999, but it continues to be so even in the present day, when the everyday landscape of Belgrade with its flagship Avala TV Tower was restored.

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