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Popular Music and the Subaltern Internationale: The Case of Serbian "Turbo-folk"

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Abstract

Drawing from different academic disciplines, this article addresses a mainstream genre of popular music in post-Yugoslav Serbia as a mirror of the neocolonial processes of "thirdworldization" of small cultures which share a marginal position in the globalized world order. This once despised form of popular entertainment has been acknowledged as a complex cultural phenomenon, deeply connected to the questions of cultural and political legitimacy. I trace its historic roots in socialist Yugoslavia connecting it with the processes of modernization and post-World War II social transformations of the country. I discuss the rise of "turbo-folk" in Serbia in the context of the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the genre's controversial role both in Serbia and in other former Yugoslav republics. I look at the association of turbo-folk with the global processes of "thirdworldization" and concepts of crypto-colonialism and self-colonization. Finally, I discuss "turbo-folk" as a tool for cultural legitimization of the new political and economic elites of post-socialist Serbia in analogy with similar cultural forms which emerge throughout the global post-socialist "South".

Keywords: turbo-folk, Serbia, Yugoslavia, transition, thirdworldization, crypto-colonialism, self-colonization, legitimacy

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1. Introduction

Drawing from different academic disciplines (sociology, anthropology, ethnology, history, media and gender studies, musicology, art theory, literary and urban studies) this article addresses a mainstream genre of popular music in post-Yugoslav Serbia as a mirror of the neocolonial processes of "thirdworldization" of small cultures which share a marginal position in the globalized world order. This once despised form of popular entertainment has been acknowledged as complex cultural phenomenon, deeply connected to the questions of political legitimacy in post-socialist contexts. Nevertheless, what makes "turbo-folk" such an intriguing object of study, among other things, is its absence from the maps of official academic "geography": "turbo-folk" has no academic history, theory, curricula, conservatories, institutes and archives, museum exhibits or public collections. Although recognized as a highly influential and most widespread cultural model in Serbia, it is persistently kept at the fringes of academic concerns. All academic discussions of "turbo-folk" come from commentators who are outside observers of the phenomenon who have no part or interest in the production, distribution, and consumption of this music. This suggests that turbo-folk claims a specific role and importance in the Serbian society, as a symptom of its sharpest social divisions and most visible paradoxes. The hyper-production of discourses and narratives of identity and difference built around the question of what turbo-folk might be (Šentevska, 2014) indicates its "true" purpose: in this grey zone of the production of knowledge, it serves as ideological shorthand in the processes of social re-structuring and re-stratification in changing economic and political circumstances, playing an active role in their politicization.

2. Folk music, modernization and non-aligned Yugoslavia

In the postwar socialist Yugoslavia of the 1950s, two groups of phenomena had a major impact on the relationship between society and tradition. On the one hand, with industrialization in full swing, many, predominantly young, people from the rural parts of the country moved to the cities to work or study. They subscribed to a

culturally dominant trend of rapid urbanization, predicated on the necessity of erasing all traces of rural origin. Their efforts were reinforced by the official ideology and agenda of development that, at the time, did not rely on agriculture. On the other hand, political centralism favored a unification of national and regional traits: the devaluing of local traditions manifested itself in an overwhelming sense of shame over "primitivism" associated with a rural past. Folklore and other expressions of folk-life were even labeled as reactionary and banned from cultural programs as incompatible with (or even detrimental to) economic development. In turn, the 1960s saw a democratization of social life, resulting in new attitudes towards folk traditions, aided by the Yugoslav version of market economy, self-management system, and decentralization of political and social power (Rihtman-Auguštin, 1978, pp.164–66). As a consequence, the adaptation of folklore for contemporary use became a particular line of production in the tourism and entertainment industries in a country which was widely opening to influences from both sides of the "Iron Curtain" and building up a global presence through its involvement in setting up the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM).(@)

Serbian folk singer Lepa Lukić's 1964 trademark record Od izvora dva putića [Two Paths from the Well] marked a symbolic beginning of the new era of commercial expansion of so-called "newly composed folk music" (novokomponovana narodna muzika [NCFM]). Nevertheless, NCFM could not be included in the Yugoslav concept of socialist culture, which stood for accessibility, humanist principles, and, above all, artistic value. The ideology of progress, imposed upon the revolutionary peasantry (which "evolved" into the working class), required modern cultural institutions. In 1955, around forty percent of Yugoslavia's working population were peasants and industrial workers (Milić, 1978, p.111), metaphorically described by the Croatian publicist Veselko Tenžera as "centaurs of the Yugoslav economy" (p.129). The traditional peasantry and the emerging industrial class were expected not only to depart from their traditional ways and embrace modern(ized) and urban(ized) modes of cultural consumption, but also to develop appreciation for artistic value. In this kind of cultural consumption, the rural and semi-rural "masses" most visibly failed to meet the guidelines of socialist

cultural policies. As a result, newspaper stories like the 1962 Borba's report on the Serbian village of Kusadak, whose inhabitants allegedly preferred jazz to folk music, remained in the sphere of media curiosities (Janjetović, 2011, p.76). The commercial success and social significance of NCFM in both rural and urban contexts became the most striking symptom of this political failure.

In the Yugoslav context, dominant cultural authorities (including the Adornian critics of mass culture) labeled the NCFM as "fake folklore," or, rather, "fakelore" (Anastasijević, 1988, p.151), as good-for-nothing kitsch or schund. Among other things, this assessment brought about anti-schund legal acts that prescribed special tax rates for the products of the NCFM industry (Hofman, 2013). Such lofty efforts included occasional commissions of new folk songs from respectable professional composers. However, the audiences greatly disliked this "NCFM for string and other orchestras" to the point of canceling radio subscriptions en masse (Luković, 1989, p.70). Official "discrimination" against NCFM performers and allegations of bad taste did not considerably affect the affluence of the workers in the NCFM industry, who typically had low levels of education but earnings much higher than those of university-degree holders. From the viewpoint of dominant social and cultural values, this affluence was thus highly problematic: along with star football players, NCFM celebrities became the prime targets of public grumbles over social inequality.

For example, of the 729 records released in Yugoslavia in 1972, 427 featured NCFM performers (Gavarić, 1973, p.155). The popularity of NCFM was perceived as the "most characteristic feature of the musical taste of the general public in Yugoslavia" (Kos, 1972, p.62). Novokomponovana kultura or "neo-folk culture" was highly influential, probably the prevailing cultural model in postwar Yugoslavia. However, during the socialist period, after 1969 when the Third Program of Radio Belgrade hosted a panel on the "new folk music," (Lukić et al., 1970) few authors contributed to the academic debate on the subject. In 1983, when Branimir Stojković analyzed the representations of mass culture in the influential youth journal Student, he noted a total absence of NCFM from that picture. For this journal, NCFM "does not even possess a negative relevance, namely, as music, it simply does not exist" (Stojković,

1985, p.144). Describing NCFM lovers as members of "informal groups marked by interest in music," some academics even argued that they were "subcultural" (Kronja, 1999), which contradicted other academics' observations that NCFM fans (with their modest outfits and ordinary language) were fairly indistinguishable from "ordinary people" (Dragićević-Šešić, 1994, p.45). Thus, in spite of being the prevailing form of mass culture, NCFM remained firmly on the margins of academic interests: in Yugoslavia, this music had a "past," but not a "history" (Vidić-Rasmussen, 2002, pp.3–4).

In any event, the observers of the phenomenon typically distanced themselves from the core audiences of NCFM, adopting the position of outsiders with no active participation in its consumption. The last decade of socialist Yugoslavia saw the rise of the undisputable NCFM star of the 1980s, Lepa Brena (a.k.a. Fahreta Jahić), who brought together urban and rural audiences, and unstoppably crossed the borders between the Yugoslav republics. In her own way, she sustained the country's dominant political concept of "brotherhood and unity" in the feeble federation of Yugoslav republics, which made her career seem largely a state-sponsored project. However, even the audiences at her concerts, when interviewed, expressed discomfort about being seen as the "core audience of NCFM" (Dragićević-Šešić, 1994, pp.137–180).

3. "Turbo-folk", the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the post-socialist controversies

The post-socialist evolution of NCFM into the so-called turbo-folk genre was marked by arbitrary blends of the local folkloric and global pop music idioms in the new transitional economy and new contexts of deregulated media industries and markets. However, turbo-folk's commercial success and overwhelming presence in the media landscape of Serbia lead (downwards) by former communist apparatchik Slobodan Milošević had not considerably changed the already familiar accusations of inauthenticity and pretense. The term turbo-folk comes from the early stages of the career of the Belgrade-based conceptual pop artist Rambo Amadeus (a.k.a. Antonije Pušić)(#). In spite of its wide adoption and circulation, the term turbo-folk has not been undisputed. The indisputable turbo-

folk diva Svetlana Ceca Ražnatović claims: "If someone could explain to me what turbo-folk is, then I would be able to say why I am its leading exponent. . . Turbo-folk doesn't exist. Somebody invented this word and everybody accepted it. I sing modern folk, modernized folk music" (as cited in Pettan, 2007, p.383).

As noted by Eric Gordy (1999) and many other observers of the phenomenon, turbo-folk glitter served an additional ideological purpose in the transitional and war-torn 1990s: lifestyles of the new criminalized elites became "normal" and acceptable, i.e. legitimate, when rendered in glamorous and romantic hues. In this context, the only visibility deemed socially relevant is the visibility of extremely rich social groups, beneficiaries of war profits and the new capitalist economy. The heavy media exposure of turbo-folk in the 1990s provoked numerous commentators to label this phenomenon as camouflage of the harsh social reality in Serbia (which included UN economic sanctions, armed conflicts with neighboring countries of the former Yugoslavia, and economic downfall) by means of the "pink" imagery of compulsive entertainment. Turbo-folk, the "soundtrack" of Milošević's regime, was accordingly understood as music for gangsters, who made their fortune through war profiteering. In various scholarly interpretations, turbo-folk became the music of Serbia's isolation, a sexy accompaniment to Serbian porn nationalism or Balkan hardcore, a catalyst for pro-Fascist sentiments, even music of ethnic cleansing. Moreover, turbo-folk aided in redefining and homogenizing the Serbian national identity, and in denying war trauma in other parts of former Yugoslavia. Even international admirers of turbo-folk, like the cyberpunk author Bruce Sterling, mainly praised its "loving relationship between music and terrorism" (Sterling, 2003).

At the first anti-war concerts in Serbia, rock musicians expressed their resentment of Milošević's war-mongering politics with the message "nećemo da pobedi narodna muzika" [we don't want folk music to prevail]. Eventually, this oversimplified formula (rock good, turbo-folk bad) proved to be rather misleading, as proponents of the same musical genre, more often than not, adopted ideologically opposite positions.

The early years of the twenty-first century saw Serbia confronting the grave consequences of the political, social, and post-war legacy of the Milošević era, which made transforming the country's economy, institutions, and systems of value difficult. The 1990s privileged elites smoothly blended with the new economic and political oligarchies from the post-Milošević governments, while the turbo-folk stars remained firmly entrenched on the front pages.

In the post-Yugoslav context, turbo-folk operates as "a conceptual category which aggregates connotations of banality, foreignness, violence and kitsch in order to provide a critical apparatus with a ready-made strategy of distancing" (Baker, 2007, p.139); in other words, "turbo-folk" is always appreciated and enjoyed by the "others". In the public debates in Serbia, "turbo-folk" serves mainly as an "ideological label" (Đurković, 2002, p.280). Rightwing critics claim that turbo-folk undermined the Serbian identity in times of national crisis, while leftwing critics blame turbo-folk for boosting nationalism at the time when it should have been suppressed. Moreover, the misunderstanding and denigrating turbo-folk in the public discourse actually reflects the country's key political problem: Serbia's liberal elites are "chained to false stereotypes" and incapable of communicating with the major part of the population that they aspire to lead (Ćirjaković, 2004, p.34). Cultural theorist Branislav Dimitrijević (2001) further argues that turbo-folk was the only victim of the anti-Milošević uprising in 2000: the purpose of this "sacrifice" was to camouflage the effective ideological and pragmatic continuity between the old and the new governments.

4. The "Turbo-folk Internationale" between crypto-colonialism and self-colonization

Studying ordinary citizens' perceptions of the social structure in Serbia, sociologist Ivana Spasić concludes that a legitimate upper class is missing from this picture. What is described as an elite—more precisely, a "quasi" or "pseudo" elite—is essentially illegitimate (Spasić, 2006, pp.162–163). Pierre Bourdieu's research on this topic in France assumed that stable, class-differentiated publics already existed, socialized into certain patterns of recognition of the entitlements of others. However, "this

assumption is clearly wrong for East European socialist societies, in which a situation of stably socialized groups orienting to a more or less secure set of values was precisely what the political authorities had hoped to achieve but did not" (Verdery, 1991, p.18). In Bourdieu's description of French society, social groups occupying the lower strata aspire to climb the social ladder or at least present themselves as already occupying a higher position than they actually do. However, they do not attempt to change the "architecture" of the ladder. In Serbia, according to Spasić, the biggest problem is the ladder itself (165). This implicit lack of consensus on what constitutes legitimacy and, consequently, elite culture means that high culture does not necessarily claim the status of legitimate culture (Cvetičanin, 2012, p.55).

In the particular context of the multicultural and socialist Yugoslavia, the evolution from NCFM to turbo-folk faced two major complications: first, transformation of the political and economic systems through imported models (termed "transition"); and, second, differences in reception, acceptance, and ensuing commercial success in culturally distinct parts of the country, which, in the meantime, violently fell apart. In the "Western" areas, where turbo-folk lacked a proper foothold, media visibility, and mainstream audience, it was perceived as something alien, unwanted and deeply disturbing, as it failed to meet the "European" standards of legitimate culture. Sharing a history as subjects of the Habsburg Empire, these areas adopted an inherited consensus on the norms and standards of legitimate culture from the imperial center. In contrast, in the "Eastern" areas, where turbo-folk found a proper foothold, media visibility, and mainstream audience, it became a cultural issue. Its folkloric background and strong ties with the rituals of both the pre-modern era (rural weddings and holidays) and contemporary leisure, made it a hugely popular, commercially successful, and, statistically speaking, dominant cultural model. Sharing a history of Ottoman imperial rule, these areas lacked an inherited consensus on the norms and standards of legitimate culture: Western models adopted from the imperial center did not always meet with universal acceptance, as they sometimes clashed with existing cultural practices and preferences. It is precisely the grassroots character, the un-European origin, and the failure to conform to

Western standards of legitimate culture that have made turbo-folk such a contested and controversial cultural product in the eyes of the gatekeepers.

Michael Herzfeld associated Balkan countries with crypto-colonialism, which he describes as "the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence" (2002, pp.900-901). He ascribes to these countries aggressive national cultures fashioned to suit foreign models and considers them to be living paradoxes: they are nominally independent, but their independence comes at the cost of sometimes humiliating forms of effective dependence. They play certain roles in global politics, but not of their own choosing. Herzfeld applies this term to Greece, but shows that it can extend to Thailand and many other countries around the world, including the former Yugoslavia. In the postcolonial world, crypto-colonies cannot persuasively lay claim to economic or cultural reparations: they must continue to struggle with a future of uncertainty. In his text "The Self-Colonizing Metaphor", Alexander Kiossev attempts to undermine the traditional dichotomy of the rubric of colonial development, the simplistic opposition between colonizers and colonized, by employing the terms "self-colonization" and "self-colonizing social imagination" to outline a whole range of "various subspecies" in-between, such as internal colonialisms, crypto-nationalisms, and interiorized colonial hegemonies without domination. The "self-colonizing metaphor" applies to small nations, particularly in the Balkan post-Ottoman nation-states, which have succumbed to the cultural power of Europe and the West without ever being invaded or turned into actual colonies. As extra-colonial peripheries, they never experienced major colonial conflicts or the basic techniques of colonial rule. Nonetheless, they did recognize foreign cultural supremacy, and voluntarily absorbed the values and ideas of colonial Europe, which began to play the role of the Big Other. In their never-ending pursuit of recognition by Europe, they engendered two equally problematic doctrines: first, Westernization or Europeanization, which assumes that historical temporality is a competition, a running distance, where "enlightened" sprinting can compensate for civilizational

"backwardness"; and, second, nativism, involving a search for and/or invention of the lost authentic essence of an idealized nation. As Kiossev notes in his text "The Self-Colonizing Cultures," local elites upheld both doctrines, striving to turn themselves and their compatriots into modern Europeans, which required a policy of systematic importation of models and institutions from the colonial center. Along with absorbing European ideas, patterns, and stereotypes, however, they also absorbed vague, parodic self-images—embarrassing imagery that they internalized precisely because it originated at the colonial center, the source of recognition and authority. The result was a controversial nation-building process, whereby borrowing models went hand in hand with resisting them. Kiossev describes the relationship between high/official culture and local, everyday life and culture in self-colonized communities as a constant clash between the reservoir of borrowed and idealized Western patterns, and previously existent practices and institutions—viewed as non-European, barbaric, Oriental, substandard, and mimicking European trends through superfluous knockoffs. In turn, the "masses" contested the paragons of high culture as a contrivance of a handful of idealistic Westernizers, setting up their own channels of Europeanization: they bypassed the elites who suffered the paradox of inherent illegitimacy. Kiossev argues that self-colonizing metaphors claim only restricted historic validity, relating them to developments taking place over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, for in the aftermath of World War II and the decolonization processes, self-colonization underwent a substantial change.

The repertoire of world imagination was globalized and mediatized through new technologies, and this is precisely where "turbo-folk" enters the picture. During the post-socialist period in the Balkans, turbo-folk and other similar music genres across the Balkans (Archer, 2014; Šentevska, 2015) found themselves torn between the aggressive crypto-colonial national cultures emulating foreign models and the new local neoliberal economies marked by "massive economic dependence," to return to Herzfeld's observation. In this crypto-colonial context, turbo-folk is a mirror of globalization, a mishmash of musical styles (from rock and disco, EDM and hip-hop, to "world music" coming from diverse corners

of the globe) that "colonized" the music known in Yugoslavia as NCFM. Ulf Hannerz (1989) critiques the widespread view that the global flow of American popular culture from center to periphery results in the homogenization of culture. He suggests that, rather than obliterating cultural difference, global popular culture provides yet another resource through which people on the periphery can draw on local cultural forms and put them in dialogue. The resulting hybrid or creole forms (turbo-folk included) integrate the global and the local. These new forms give people the means to confront modernity on their own terms.

As a "mirror," turbo-folk reflects not only the globalization and transculturation of a particular genre of popular music, but the overall media infrastructure surrounding its production, distribution, and consumption. The transformations that shaped turbo-folk into the musical genre we know today— transformations in the media system (television, radio, press), in record companies, touring management, and the advertising of music products—have their roots in broader transformations of the global economy, politics, and media industries. They can be linked to the deregulation of the European media systems in the 1980s, Murdoch-style tabloidization of the British press, introduction of satellite TV, and popularization of VCRs and, later, YouTube and Facebook, all of which entered the world of turbo-folk through a process resembling colonization—a deliberate, consensual, taken-for-granted, and strictly one-way practice of importing technologies, aesthetics, and know-how. Ziauddin Sardar describes this process in the following terms: "One doesn't see an Indian Michael Jackson, a Chinese Madonna, a Malaysian Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Moroccan Julia Roberts, Filipino 'New Kids on the Block,' a Brazilian Shakespeare, an Egyptian Barbara Cartland, a Tanzanian Cheers, a Nigerian Dallas, a Chilean Wheel of Fortune, or Chinese opera, Urdu poetry, Egyptian drama, etc. on the global stage" (1998, p.22).

Turbo-folk may also symptomize the thirdworldization of post-socialist Eastern Europe, its reality of destruction through development. The new political and economic orientation of East European elites gave Western capital the opportunity to gain control over the former socialist economies, which forced them into

a dependency similar to that previously imposed on Third World countries by institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Steven Sampson described four types of new elites emerging in the post-post-socialism (PPS) period: a local political class, a comprador bourgeoisie of business people or NGO project staff (Euro-elites), a domestic business elite, and in areas of conflict, warlords and mafia chieftains (Sampson, 2002). Uroš Čvoro (2014, p.4) describes "transition" as "an official buzz word used to describe the shift into neoliberal capitalism, privatisation, growing inequality between systemic poverty and new wealth, mass unemployment, and the rapid dismantling of established social safety nets." According to this author, discussing "turbo-folk" illuminates "the way in which the working class, or 'the people', no longer exist in the Balkans, despite the ongoing existence of its (very loud and very popular) music".

In Serbia, members of the highest echelons of the political leadership of the country (regardless of their political affiliations) find it not only appropriate, but also advantageous to perform "turbo-folk" hits in public($) or attend "turbo-folk" concerts, for that matter. This can only mean that legitimization of once despised forms of popular culture (by political and intellectual elites alike) goes hand in hand with political legitimization and mass support at the elections.

"Turbo-folk" also symbolizes the cultural mindset of the winners in the catch-up game of development. Interestingly, Svetlana Ražnatović Ceca (widow of the war criminal cum gangster Željko Ražnatović/Arkan and one of the wealthiest figures in Serbian show business), is perceived as someone who gives voice to the losers of the transition: the Balkan "subalterns" who may be able to speak but whose voices cannot be heard in the public realm. When she discusses "turbo-folk" stars' as "mothers of the nation" and "queens of the social elite" Marija Grujić (2012, pp.138–139) primarily refers to Ceca and her fascinating upward social mobility. Known as "Madonna from the village of Žitorađa" (central Serbia), according to Zoran Ćirjaković Ceca has been "turned into a she-monster, big and threatening enough to conceal the subalternity of

her audiences, millions of poor and humiliated men" (Ćirjaković, 2013). As argued by this author, Ceca's voice has helped these jobless workers, and all others without a secure place in the new post-socialist economy, to deal with the painful and often traumatic acceptance of the neoliberal agenda. In this reading of "turbo-folk", which draws on Dilip Gaonkar's concept of "alternative modernities" (2001) and Dipesh Chakrabarti's concept of the "provincialization of Europe," (2007) the fear of turbo-folk is a fear of the subaltern, semi-rural population, visible in many developing countries where modernization has arrived "belatedly." These peripheral societies tend to identify folk culture with the pre-modern, so culture plays an important role in obscuring the mechanisms of domination. The defamation of "turbo-folk" is a rhetorical device used when members of the bourgeoisie strive to protect their existing privileges or claim new ones: raising the voice against "turbo-folk" demonstrates power over those whose voice cannot be heard. Ćirjaković argues that "turbo-folk" demonstrates with its very existence that their subalternity is at the same time inevitable and deserved. For nationalists and liberals alike, "turbo-folk" represents both a symptom of Asian influenza and a road block to modernization.

However, the "turbo-folk" phenomenon seems to have stretched far beyond the borders of the imaginary and real Balkans. Musical genres similar to "turbo-folk" have emerged whenever an opening has appeared for some form of market-driven music industry that can cater directly to the tastes of the "masses" and exploit the local music idioms. Writing of Turkey, Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robins (1995) have referred to the appearance of such cultural forms as the "return of the repressed," that is, the return to public culture of those elements which state policies have deliberately suppressed. As Ćirjaković (2004) notes, from Casablanca to Jakarta and from Tirana to Tijuana, virtually all so-called third-world countries have developed some variant of "turbo-folk" in the context of modernization, the migration from the country to the city, and the disappearance of traditional value systems and lifestyles. This global "Internationale" includes such diverse musical styles as the Algerian raï, Israeli mizrahi, Turkish arabesk, Indonesian dangdut, Indian bhangra, or Mexican narcocorrido. What these styles have in common, in addition to serving as major forces of legitimization for

the dominant ideologies and contemporary forms of neocolonialism, are the more or less emphasized associations with vulgar consumerism, fascination with Western lifestyles of luxury, and obsession with youth, sex appeal, narcotics, and alcohol. For instance, the consumption of whiskey, so typical in "turbo-folk" music videos, is possibly "one of the most important traces that the British Empire left in the Balkans—and in the Orient—as a remembrance of its previous influence" (Kurkela, 2007, p.168). Like Indian cricket, turbo-folk might be considered a "site for the examination of how locality emerges in a globalizing world" (Appadurai, 1996, p.18), or how (neo)colonial processes take vernacular forms and underwrite contemporary politics and global developments. For instance, the cultural phenomenon of hip-hop may also be giving voice to the "subalterns" of the world, albeit with a different pitch. While hip-hop cultivates both awareness of its origins in the ghetto of the South Bronx and pride of its global reach, turbo-folk musical styles, and their accompanying cultural system of production, consumption, and overall reception, typically manifest only as the vernacular and the local. Nevertheless, putting this "Turbo-folk Internationale" into a global perspective could illuminate the complex dynamics of consensual transfers of ideology and know-how between the West and "the Rest".

5. Conclusion

The field of popular culture in its 'post-socialist' discursive framework is all too often excluded from academic considerations, in spite of its power and efficiency in forging, adopting and disseminating the ideological stereotypes underlying the deep social divisions and ethnic conflicts. Due to their overwhelming presence in the everyday life and media landscapes, the rise of "turbo-folk" in Serbia and its counterparts in the neighbouring countries may be observed as striking symptoms of the new social dynamics of political legitimacy, economic and cultural transformations. What is especially interesting in the heated debates surrounding the "turbo-folk" phenomenon is that it is perceived (from different perspectives) as giving voice to both the winners and the losers of the post-socialist transitions.

This discussion of the cultural reception of "turbo-folk" in the post-socialist and post-Yugoslav contexts describes a quest for legitimacy of an ambivalent and contested, yet largely dominant cultural paradigm. "Turbo-folk's" success story proclaims the complete turn that the conceptions of "high" and "low", "elite" and "popular", "legitimate" and "merely tolerated" cultural models and forms underwent in the post-socialist period. This complete turn, in fact, means that in the Balkans the concept of legitimate, "pure" national culture (official high culture shaped according to the standards of the modernizing European West) gave way to the formerly "illegitimate" (unofficial), hybrid forms of transnational Balkan popular culture, embraced and promoted by the new political, economic and cultural elites as the new dominant (legitimate) culture. Is this process leading the Balkans further away from the proclaimed internalization of "European" values and standards? Or is it drawing the region (Serbia included) closer to the core of the contemporary transformations of the globalized "world culture" and neo-colonial forms of domination? These are open questions for debate, but this paper suggests affirmative answers to both concerns.

End Notes

(@) - The Non-Aligned Movement was founded and held its first conference in Belgrade (capital of Yugoslavia and Serbia) in 1961, under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito (Yugoslavia), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), and Sukarno (Indonesia). After the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the post-Yugoslav states have lost interest in active membership in the NAM movement. Among them Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina currently have observer status in the NAM.

(#) - Equally known for his musical experiments and verbal theatrics, Rambo Amadeus allegedly uttered the term within a barrage of parodic references to neo-folk culture during a concert in 1989.

($) - Ivica Dačić, currently President of the Serbian parliament and ex-Prime Minister, was especially prominent in that respect in the capacity of Minister of Foreign Affairs (2014-2020).

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