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Making Music as Home-Making: Bosnian Refugee Music and Collaboration in Post-Yugoslav Slovenia*

Glasbeno ustvarjanje kot ustvarjanje doma: bosanska begunska glasba in sodelovanje v postjugoslovanski Sloveniji**

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Članek raziskuje izbrane glasbene prakse bosanskih beguncev v postjugoslovanski Sloveniji sredi 1990. let z namenom izboljšanja razumevanja glasbe v prehodnih in negotovih okoliščinah. Zasleduje vpliv skupne jugoslovanske preteklosti na popularizacijo *sevdalinke* v Sloveniji ter prizadevanja begunskih in lokalnih glasbenikov pri ustvarjanju doma po razpadu Jugoslavije.

This article explores some of the musical practices of Bosnian refugees in post-Yugoslav Slovenia in the mid-1990s and aims to improve understandings of music in transit and in precarious times. In particular, the article traces the effects of common Yugoslav history on the popularisation of *Sevdalinka* in Slovenia and the efforts of refugee and local musicians to make a new home together after the breakup of Yugoslavia.

1. Introduction

Where migration and making music are concerned, anthropological, sociological, and ethnomusicological studies have mostly focused on artistic practices and musical expressions of recognised settled migrant and diasporic communities.¹ And while there is an established narrow field of scientific interest in refugee music-making in ethnomusicology and anthropology,² it has been persuasively argued that analysis of artistic practices in the context of temporary migrations as well as musical forms created in a dialogue between local agents and temporary migrants remains lacking.³ Furthermore, the research on music-making in the context of migration adopts the supposition that cultural production of temporary migrants, i.e. those who expect to stay in one country for a limited period of time, is characterised by relatively limited interaction with the local milieu, which hinders the establishment of a market for their artistic creativity.⁴

Many aspects of the lives of refugees, who are the main concern of this article, are only temporary. Besides, their living conditions are often precarious, i.e. marked by various forms of insecurity (e.g. regarding income, residence, schooling etc.) and subjected to accelerated uncertainty concerning the future of their personal and communal lives. This precariousness renders their possibilities of implementing personal agency unstable; it also negatively impacts people's general futures when they have little say in how

1 Evrim Hikmet Ögüt, "Transit Migration: An Unnoticed Area in Ethnomusicology," *Urban People* 17, no. 2 (2015): 269; Tina K. Ramnarine, ed., *Musical Performance in the Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Florian Scheduling and Erik Levi, eds., *Music and Displacement: Diasporas, Mobilities and Dislocations in Europe and Beyond* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2010); Thomas Turino, "Introduction: Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities," in *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, eds. Thomas Turino and James Lea (Warren, Mich: Harmonic Park Press, 2004).

2 John Baily, "Music and Refugee Lives: Afghans in Eastern Iran and California," *Forced Migration* December (1999): 1013; Keila Diehl, *Echoes from Dharamsala: Music in the Life of a Tibetan Refugee Community* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002); Barbara Franz, "Immigrant Youth, Hip Hop and Feminist Pedagogy: Outlines of an Alternative Integration Policy in Vienna, Austria," *International Studies Perspectives* 13, no. 3 (2012): 270–88; Dimitrije Golemović, "Tradicionalna narodna pesma kao simbol novog kulturnog identiteta. (Na primeru prakse jugoslovenskih ratnih izbeglica)," *Novi zvuk – internacionalni časopis za muziku* 19 (2002): 57–65; Adelaida Reyes, *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free: Music and the Vietnamese Refugee* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Ögüt, "Transit Migration," 269–282; Albinca Pešek, "Music as a Tool to Help Refugee Children and Their Mothers: The Slovenian Case," in *War, Exile, Everyday Life: Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Maja Povrzanović (Zagreb: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996); Svanibor Pettan, "Making the Refugee Experience Different: 'Azra' and the Bosnians in Norway," in *War, Exile, Everyday Life: Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Maja Povrzanović (Zagreb: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996).

3 Ögüt, "Transit Migration," 269–282.

4 Ibid.

their situation may change either locally or internationally, though this considerably impacts their prospects both in the present and future. This article aims to explore the refugees' music-making in these precarious circumstances in order to challenge certain assumptions concerning the limited scope of the connection between the refugees' music production and the local audiences and performers.

It must, however, be noted that this case study deals with the specific case of Bosnian refugee musicians in Slovenia in the mid-1990s. Their exile is particular insofar as refugees from a former Yugoslav republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina (B-H) settled in another former Yugoslav republic, Slovenia. Before the tragic breakup of Yugoslavia, Bosnian refugees and their Slovenian "hosts" shared Yugoslav citizenship and the ideology of "brotherhood and unity". In many ways the two factors succeeded in bringing a diverse population closer together. The local, regional and national (musical) traditions of these populations were often very dissimilar. But to our discussion it is even more relevant, that a degree of shared taste for popular music was established in the Yugoslav space, one which cultural activists and musicians actively preserved (and created anew) after the Yugoslav breakup to form a common musical universe.

Our ethnographic examination focuses on this specific post-Yugoslav context of music-making in exile, particularly on the relationship between Bosnian refugee musicians in the bands Vali, Dertum and Nešto između and their collaborators in Slovenia, who – as we will illustrate – were also dealing with their own specific type of precariousness and transit. It also appears that they shared a positive sense of Yugoslavia's cultural un-uniformity, which turned out to be an important factor shaping their cooperation and the development of post-Yugoslav shared space. Their cooperation affected a popularisation of Bosnian refugee bands and the musical genre of *Sevdalinka* in the independent Slovenia. Based on interviews with performers, supporters and fans,⁵ this article examines the conditions, which resulted in a stronger than usual cooperation between refugees and locals.

Following a short introduction of the refugee bands, we will outline the wider socio-economic contexts of their emergence highlighting the invaluable contributions of certain local organisations and individuals (mostly activist, but also social workers), who encouraged the refugees' activities and proved vital in generating the acknowledgment of their cultural production.⁶ Being that we addressed the supportive organisational background and local collaborators of the other two bands, Dertum and Nešto između, elsewhere,⁷ we will turn our focus on the collaboration between Vali and Slovenian artist,

5 The research on which this article is based has been detailed elsewhere (see Miha Kozorog and Alenka Bartulović, "The Sevdalinka in Exile, Revisited: Young Bosnian Refugees' Music-making in Ljubljana in 1990s (A Note on Applied Ethnomusicology)," *Narodna umjetnost* 52, no. 1 (2015): 121–142; Alenka Bartulović and Miha Kozorog, "Gender and Music-making in Exile: Female Bosnian Refugee Musicians in Slovenia," *Dve domovini: razprave o izseljenstvu* no 46 (2017): 39–55). In brief, data collection primarily comprised interviews with musicians, singers, audience and supporters of the bands, supplemented with the research using secondary sources and personal memories of both authors, who were in different ways involved in and/or affected by the Bosnian music-making in the 1990s. The core part of the research we carried out between 2014 and 2016 and additionally in 2018/2019.

6 Kozorog and Bartulović, "The Sevdalinka in Exile," 121–142.

7 Miha Kozorog, "Doubly Excluded, Doubly Included, 'Something in-between': A Bosnian Refugee Band and Alternative Youth Culture in Slovenia," in *Sounds of Attraction: Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav Popular Music*, eds. Miha Kozorog and Rajko Muršič (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2017), 73–97.

Vlado Kreslin, which considerably contributed to the popularisation of *Sevdalinka* in Slovenia, paying particular attention to Kreslin's motives and impetus for his decision to collaborate. In conclusion, we will argue that musical dialogues between Bosnian and Slovenian musicians were not solely the result of humanitarian aid and solidarity in times of crisis, but that they were also a part of a dynamic process of making a home in precarious circumstances as well as a result of shared feelings and needs for emplacement after the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

2. In pursuit of a new home: Vali, Dertum and Nešto između

Even though their statuses on the Slovene music scene in the mid-1990s were quite different, the bands Dertum and Vali shared a few key features; both played songs from the repertoire of Bosnian *Sevdalinks* and were involved with established cultural organisations in Ljubljana. Vali began their musical career under the patronage of the refugee project *Cultural Weekend for Children from Bosnia and Herzegovina*, which took place at the Vodnik Manor House [Vodnikova domačija] cultural centre in Ljubljana. Dertum, having formed spontaneously in the room 135 C of a refugee centre in Ljubljana, relied on the logistics of the KUD France Prešeren youth cultural centre, initially as a part of its *Exiles* project, a programme for empowering refugees. Though both bands were included in cultural institutions in Slovenia, there was a key difference between them; the *Cultural Weekend* project was organised by the refugees themselves (helped substantially by Majda Lenič, the director of the cultural centre, and by humanitarian organisations financially supporting their activities) whereas the *Exiles* project was initiated and managed by the youth cultural centre. The two cultural centres were also themselves substantially different from each other; the Vodnik Manor House focused on "high culture", predominantly literature, while KUD France Prešeren was oriented towards the production of "alternative culture". In 1990s Slovenia, this distinction between "underground/alternative" and "mainstream/high" was an important factor in the shaping of young people's cultural identities and it had a profound influence on the two bands' music and careers. Dertum, adapting traditional music in the genres of rock and jazz, gradually attained cult status on the Slovenian "underground" scene, while Vali, adapting traditional music for dynamic choir singing, performed at "mainstream" cultural venues and, in one important chapter of its career, worked with one of Slovenia's most popular pop-rock musicians, Vlado Kreslin.

Both Dertum and Vali performed traditional songs from various Yugoslav regions with particular emphasis on *Sevdalinks*, songs popular in B-H.⁸ The latter in many ways came to represent (young) Bosnian refugee musicians in Slovenia. In contrast, Nešto između opted for the punk rock genre. This band was not based in Ljubljana, but was formed at a refugee centre housed in former army barracks at the edge of the town of Ilirska Bistrica. It remained largely unknown in Ljubljana (and wider Slovenia), yet it grew renowned on the local alternative scene. Not only did the band

8 For detailed description of the bands see also Kozorog and Bartulović, "The Sevdalinka in Exile," 121–142; Kozorog, "Doubly Excluded," 73–97.

write original songs, thus inevitably distancing itself from the *Sevdalinka* tradition, at one performance the singer even ironically commented on Dertum's popularity on the Slovene underground scene,⁹ thus problematizing the ethnicisation of refugees' musical activities. Most Nešto između band members shared their refugee experience with other Bosnians in exile,¹⁰ particularly those at refugee centres. This was clearly reflected in their songs about living conditions at the refugee centre in Ilirska Bistrica, where some of them lived. Their lyrics portray the life of refugee youth as marked with waiting, anxiety, lack of intimacy, and pervasive boredom.¹¹ One particularly bleak song, entitled Peggy's Farm, paints the refugee centre as a farm and refugees as livestock.¹² In sum, band members struggled with passing their days, months, and years, stuck in place with limited possibilities to effect a change. However, like Dertum, the members of Nešto između managed to find a place in an alternative cultural milieu, namely, at the MKNŽ youth cultural centre in Ilirska Bistrica.

The refugee musicians of the three bands called for a safe space or a "cool ground."¹³ By building connections with cultural venues and organisations in Slovenia, they all succeeded in making "new homes" for themselves in Slovenia, thereby transcending the confines of refugee centres as well as escaping isolation and boredom in everyday life. When referring to home, anthropologists speak in terms of a de-essentialised notion of home, unburdened by the territorialised as well as oppressive ideologies of home as tied to nationalism and the sedentary point of view.¹⁴ Home is not necessarily a place, it is, as Ghassan Hage frames it,¹⁵ a social realm of security, familiarity, community that guarantees the "sense of possibility", which is bound with the opportunities for change and dreaming. Our interlocutors' often nostalgic recollection of their refugee years confirm that; in spite of Slovenian official exclusivist migratory policies and the absence of real stability during the refugee years, they managed to generate a sense of belonging to Slovenian society, mostly in relation to cultural venues, and youth and other cultural scenes. By performing music, they were involved in co-creating spaces of relative security, which enabled them to undertake projects aimed at forging a new, possibly better future.¹⁶

9 Kozorog, "Doubly Excluded," 79.

10 We are conscious of the fact that Bosnian refugees encountered very varied living conditions in Slovenia. It is however obvious that they shared some common aspects of their individual living conditions, e.g. the possibility for children and the youth to enrol in school programmes, the possibility of working etc., which affected the everyday life of many refugees.

11 See Bartulović and Kozorog, "Gender and Music-making," 39–55.

12 Kozorog, "Doubly Excluded," 81.

13 Cool ground denotes primary concern of the displaced people in Northeast Africa, studied by David Turton, but it is a useful conceptual tool for explaining a globally shared need of the refugees to find a secure place in order to work towards a better future. David Turton, "Migrants and Refugees: a Mursi Case Study," in *In Search of the Cool Ground: War, Fight and Homecoming in Northeast Africa*, ed. Tim Allen (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), 1–22.

14 Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving, "Introduction: Towards an Anthropology of Violence, Hope and the Movement of People," in *Struggles for Home: Violence, Hope and the Movement of People*, ed. Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving (New York, Oxford: Berghahn 2009), 1–23.

15 Ghassan Hage, "At Home in the Entrails of the West: Multiculturalism, 'Ethnic Food', and Migrant Home-building," in *Home/World: Space, Community and Marginality in Sydney's West*, eds. Helen Grace, Ghassan Hage, Leslie Johnson, Julie Langsworth, and Michael Symonds (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1997), 99–153.

16 See Stef Jansen, "Troubled Locations: Return, the Life Course and Transformations of Home in Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Struggles for Home: Violence, Hope and the Movement of People*, eds. Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving (New York, Oxford: Berghahn 2009), 43–64; Turton, "Migrants and Refugees," 1–22.

The following vignettes illustrate two young musicians' everyday life in exile and so elucidate their need and search for alternative home environments. Farah Tahirbegović was a singer in Vali (before founding Dertum), then a singer and founder of Dertum, and a mentor at a literary workshop for Bosnian refugee children at the Vodnik Manor House. In her memoirs, she indicates that her music-making and other artistic activities were kindled by the monotony and precariousness of her everyday life in exile. Namely, in 1993 – two years before the formation of Dertum – Farah published a book of short stories, entitled *Pismo roditeljima* [*A Letter to My Parents*] as part of the collection of works titled Exile ABC, initiated by few Bosnian writers and their Slovenian colleagues in Ljubljana. With its small format and soft covers, this collection was designed for “people on the move.” As the editors put it, their aim was to re-connect Bosnian refugees with Bosnian literature and their home country, since most of them were forced to leave their personal libraries behind in war-torn B-H. The collection also published selected writings of the most talented young writers, with Farah considered as part of the “promising youth” of Bosnian literature. Her book is a recollection of memories of her childhood and her last days in B-H as well as a diary reflecting war, exile, and a yearning for normal life. Part of her writing leaves an impression of prevalent repetitive activities and social alienation of a young refugee, focused on passing an overabundance of time while simultaneously seeking to create a “home” in the sense of security, familiarity, and community.

Ljubljana, the 3rd of December '93

Another Friday in Ljubljana. [...] I stumble through the snow [...]. I walk up and down Čopova street, I stare at window displays, count shoes from the left side and the right side of the showroom. [...] I go down to the Three Bridges and turn towards the Old Town. The cafés are full. [...] Automatically, panicked, with insanely obstinacy I look for, have been for a year, a familiar face. I want so bad to greet someone on the street. I'm purposefully disregarding that it's 2.30 PM on a Friday. Everyone is rushing home, family lunch, white tablecloth, tableware, and hot soup. [...] I completed the circle along Ljubljanska, I'm back at the Three Bridges. [...] [Then suddenly] someone caught me by the hand. [...] My Maja [the piano teacher at Vodnik Manor House, also a refugee]. [...] My warm haven on the cold Ljubljana streets. [...] “Come on little girl, to the Vodnik Manor House, you have time.”¹⁷

Venues, like the Vodnik Manor House, open to refugees and their cultural activities, gave them hope and a “sense of possibility,” which was crucial in their struggle to make a home.¹⁸ The song by Nešto između, titled Ulice Ilirske Bistrice [The Streets of Ilirska Bistrica] communicates similar feelings framing a young refugee's everyday isolation and a sudden ensuing change of mood and gratitude following acceptance at a local cultural venue and from the acknowledgment of unity with the people there. The song is about a young refugee's walk through the streets of Ilirska Bistrica: “[The locals] pass me by, no one notices me, on the streets I leave no trace.” However, at night the town becomes a warmer place, because of the venue – MKNŽ. The song describes the punks

¹⁷ Farah Tahirbegović, *Pismo roditeljima* (Ljubljana: Vodnikova domačija, 1993), 30–32.

¹⁸ Hage, “At Home in the Entrails of the West,” 99–153.

from the refugee centre joining the walking community (the lyrics dubbing them “eternal walkers”, because they would visit the venue regularly) and crossing the town to be part of the MKNŽ community. In interviews, the band members recalling their stay in this town said that they had more in common with people involved with the cultural activities in MKNŽ than with other refugees; this was due to inter-generational conflicts and life-styles miss-understandings at the refugee centre.¹⁹ The said youth centre thereby functions as their true “new home”, because they found it outside the refugee centre and the streets of Ilirska Bistrica.

Therefore, for some young refugees musical and artistic creativity were crucial in the process of home-making. However, this is not specific to them. As Stef Jansen and Staffan Löfving note, “moving people and non-moving people” may share many predicaments.²⁰ In this regard, it seems that forming musical dialogues with refugees also worked as a process of making a home for some Slovenes. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the country in which they were born and raised and which was rapidly vanishing before their eyes, they were also faced with feeling of loss and uncertainty. They, in a very broad sense like the refugees, were stuck in the precarious condition between a secure past and an uncertain and unpredictable future. Hence, though refugee musicians and their Slovenian counterparts and audiences had very different experiences of exile, home, Slovenia, the broader world etc., they nevertheless had certain feelings in common. We may therefore consider feelings of anxiety and entrapment in the state of “in-betweenness” as common to a wider scope of the population (not only to young Bosnian refugees) in post-Yugoslav space-time. We may also consider that some of them expressed these feelings through shared musical events and activities.

3. In pursuit of an (imagined) continuity

Many authors writing on the humanitarian aid for Bosnian refugees emphasised the importance of cultural activities organised for children and youth, sometimes by the refugees themselves.²¹ While some organisations included young refugees in their cultural production because of solidarity, some activists in these organisations interspersed the general necessity for helping others with other motives. A motive, significant especially on the alternative youth scene was an “oppositional stance towards conformism in society”,²² particularly nationalism, which flourished in Slovenia after Yugoslavia broke apart. Many also actively fought against exclusivist policies of the newly formed independent state striving for a re-invention of Slovenian national identity, which was framed in terms of “exiting ‘the Balkans’ and entering ‘Europe.’” As Sabina Mihelj argues, the “Europeanness

19 Kozorog, “Doubly Excluded,” 83; see also Bartulović and Kozorog, “Gender and Music-making,” 39–55.

20 Jansen and Löfving, “Introduction: Towards an Anthropology of Violence, Hope and the Movement of People,” 13.

21 Vesna Andree Zaimović, “Bosnian Traditional Urban Song ‘On the Sunny Side of the Alps’: From the Expression of Nostalgia to a New Ethnic Music in Slovene Culture,” in *Music and Minorities*, eds. Svanibor Pettan, Adelaida Reyes and Maša Komavec (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2001), 111–120; Hazemina Đonlić and Vesna Črnivec, *Deset let samote: Izkušnje bosansko-hercegovskih begunk in beguncev v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Kulturni vikend, 2003); Natalija Vrečer, *Integracija kot človekova pravica: Prisilni priseljenci iz Bosne in Hercegovine v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana, ZRC SAZU, Andragoški center Slovenije, 2007); Kozorog, “Doubly Excluded,” 73–97.

22 Kozorog, “Doubly Excluded,” 85.

of Slovenia was literally negotiated through Bosnian refugees: if Slovenia was to prove its Europeaness, Bosnians had to be kept out of sight and remain complete strangers.”²³ Nonetheless, many Slovenians found it hard to forget Yugoslavia and treat Bosnians as strangers, and some activists on the alternative scene expressed this stance openly.²⁴

Let us consider this defiance of the call for erasing Yugoslav legacy through the lens of the case of collaboration between Vali and Vlado Kreslin. This case clearly illustrates the urge of some people to engage in the making of a common future for post-Yugoslav space. Vali's leader Vesna Andree Zaimović, herself a refugee, who directed the band towards performing *Sevdalinkas*,²⁵ studied ethnomusicology. In her ethnomusicological exploration of the role of *Sevdalinka* on the “sunny side of the Alps” in the mid-1990s, she argued that during the war in B-H many so-called “cultural immigrants” found a temporary home in Slovenia, choosing it also because of its geographical position. “Slovenia was perceived as peaceful and economically stable yet located close enough to home to make contact relatively easy.”²⁶ It may have been even more crucial that most of those who came to Slovenia already had relatives, friends, colleagues, business partners etc. there, which eased the building of solidarity networks.²⁷ These connections enabled those whom Andree Zaimović calls “cultural immigrants”, i.e. people with higher education, often intellectuals, teachers, and artists, to find supporters in Slovenia and start launching educational and cultural projects for young refugees. This is how the *Cultural Weekend for Children from Bosnia and Herzegovina* started, as did Vali within its auspices.

Such projects functioned with financial support. In Slovenia, the Open Society Institute was one of the leading supporters of activities of/for Bosnian refugees, including the *Cultural Weekend*. Another organisation, Društvo za prostovoljno delo Most [Association for voluntary work Bridge], which was part of the Slovenian branch of the Service Civil International, founded in 1991, also played an important part in providing financial support. In 1993, the latter started recruiting volunteers to work with the Bosnian refugees through organising excursions and musical activities for children and youth.²⁸ In this context, the leader of this organisation Eva Strmljan Kreslin initiated the first meeting between her husband Vlado Kreslin and Vali. However, as she later recalls, the original initiator of the idea (or wish) to collaborate with Kreslin was Vesna Andree Zaimović. Kreslin visited one of the band's regular Saturday rehearsals and decided to collaborate with the band.

Vlado Kreslin claims that he had previously engaged in humanitarian work and had frequently performed at fund-raising events. However, his decision to collaborate with Vali was (also) rooted elsewhere. In our interview, conducted in 2016, he began his account of his motivation concerning collaboration with Vali back in the 1970s, before most of Vali's members were even born.

23 Sabina Mihelj, “Negotiating European Identity at the Periphery: ‘Slovenian nation’, ‘Bosnian refugees’ and ‘Illegal Migration,’” in *Media Cultures in a Changing Europe*, eds. Ib Bondebjerg and Peter Golding (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2003), 172.

24 Kozorog, “Doubly Excluded.”

25 Kozorog and Bartulović, “The Sevdalinka in Exile.”

26 Andree Zaimović, “Bosnian Traditional,” 112.

27 Ibid.

28 Đonlić and Črnivec, *Deset let samote*, 46–47.

*I was lucky because I served in the Yugoslav army in Banja Luka [in B-H]... While I was there, I went to the army band's audition. They were all old soldiers. They saw through me right away... And started playing the songs I should supposedly sing along [...] They said, "common' Slovenian, sing..." and played Šaban Šaulić [a Serbian folk singer]. But I didn't have a clue. I didn't know any of the songs they were playing back then. We were just standing there and I don't know what they were thinking, but it was obvious that I would not be accepted to the band. There were Croats, Serbs, Bosnians... so a Slovenian as a singer? No way. Well, OK, this hall was 50 meters long and I started making my way towards the exit and then... That was, I think, the first and the last time I actually did something good for myself: I turned around, went back and said: "Could you give me a guitar?" I took it and played the two greatest hits of that summer. One was Darling, I Love You More than Ever [singing]... and another one, I don't remember. Maybe Love Hurts or something. And they liked it. They said: "We will call you!" They called me for an event on the 22nd of November. They said: "Singer, come here. Do you know that foreign music was never performed at this venue? Why do you sing these American songs?" But in the end they allowed us to play Tom Jones, later even The Doors. But the band thus needed two singers, I sang these songs, one Montenegrin guy sang *sevdah* [*Sevdalinkas*]. Oh my god! And some Serbian songs and similar things... And he was often accompanied by this accordion player. He was an absolute genius [...] Once he said to me: "I have never heard the songs you are singing, but I like it." And I replied: "I have never heard yours, but I liked them too." [Laughing.] This is when I got hooked on *sevdah* and the sound of accordion [...] It wowed me instantly and I was sold.²⁹*

The story of Kreslin's first encounter with *Sevdalinka* highlights that musical worlds of former Yugoslavians, coming from different republics, regions and social backgrounds, were – especially where traditional music is concerned – quite diverse and that Slovenians perceived Bosnian *Sevdalinkas* as odd. We have elsewhere highlighted that many Slovenians regarded *Sevdalinkas* not merely as belonging to a different culture, but to the culture of semi-rural Others,³⁰ who came to Slovenia as economic migrants during the Yugoslav successful years. Therefore, in many ways *Sevdalinka* was regarded as music of migrants who, as one of our interlocutors put it, worked "on scaffolding". The genre was described more as "whimpering" than anything else, and it is therefore not surprising that *Sevdalinka* in Slovenia mostly resided in secluded and encapsulated diasporic communities, far from the general public.

Unlike the diasporic Bosnian community in Yugoslav Slovenia, the musical activity of Bosnian refugees was much more "outward-directed".³¹ If nothing else, this may have been due to their youth. Yet, aside from wanting to present their music to wider audiences and be part of the musical and cultural scene in Slovenia, there was also a

29 Vlado Kreslin, in discussion with the author, 2016.

30 Alenka Bartulović, "From Brothers to Others? Changing Images of Bosnian Muslims in (post-)Yugoslav Slovenia," in *Central Europe and Bosnian Muslims: Relations and Representations*, ed. František Šitek (forthcoming).

31 Su de San Zheng, "Music and Migration: Chinese American Traditional Music in New York City," *The World of Music* 32 No. 3 (1990): 48–67.

wider receptiveness towards their cultural production in the post-Yugoslav Slovenia in comparison to Yugoslav Slovenia. As already mentioned, underground culture and youth activists, but also other cultural venues/organisations, openly supported refugees' rights and Bosnian cultural production, which strongly contributed to removing the stigma from the *Sevdalinka* and elevate its previously low-status in Slovenia. However Kreslin was also an important agent in this process of popularization of *Sevdalinka* in post-Yugoslav Slovenia. As a musician, observing the distinctions between traditional genres in Yugoslavia since the 1970s,³² he adopted certain *Sevdalinks* into his own musical universe as the sounds of his wider Yugoslav home. This was an important factor in his agreeing to collaborate with Vali. Rather than some abstract notions of humanitarianism, it was the music itself that swayed him to spend his free weekends to rehearse with Vali, because it stimulated fond memories of his time in the Yugoslav army. In the interview, he remembered walking to the Vodnik Manor House for the first time, already partly convinced that he would help the band in some way at least, because he liked the enthusiasm of young people. Yet, when he realised that "it was *that* music," the music that enchanted him long ago, he accepted the invitation to work with the band.

This collaboration resulted in a CD, which includes three *Sevdalinks* performed and recorded by Vlado Kreslin and Vali. They first promoted it on 19 March 1997 at Mladinsko gledališče [Mladinsko Theatre] in Ljubljana. As Kreslin recalls, many people, who did not know *Sevdalinka* before, were surprised by the power of this music, and the album became an instant hit. The news about Kreslin's new project travelled fast: he remembers that a few people, who missed the launch, contacted him the next day eager to purchase the CD and even offered "crazy sums of money for three songs."³³ In a way, this was a typical story about an established musician lending visibility to marginal music and musicians. A part of the musical audience in Slovenia, quite obviously Kreslin's fans, were enchanted by this, once disreputable (or simply unknown), type of music. A review of Kreslin's huge summer concert at the Križanke cultural venue in 1996, for example, touted the performance of the three *Sevdalinks* as "perhaps the most beautiful part of the concert."³⁴ Vesna Andree Zaimović writes that one of the songs was number two on the Slovenian national radio's charts, which, according to her, clearly "shows how much the involvement of this [Bosnian] national icon contributed to breaking down the prejudice towards the culture of B-H."³⁵

Aside from the huge benefit of Kreslin's popularity, the process of the popularisation of *Sevdalinka* also benefited from a genuine interest in Yugoslav legacy on the part of the general public. It seems that in many ways such songs advanced a re-connection to the abruptly lost Yugoslav multicultural space. The political promotion of cultural purity was often unproductive, pushing many to turn even more to ex-Yugoslav

32 Their profession makes musicians and composers more open to learning about traditional musical genres than the general public. For example, trumpet player Peter Ugrin also performed the Bosnian song Emina and published it on his record *Samo muzika* in 1979.

33 The CD was not for sale, since it was published as part of the pan-European humanitarian campaign All Different - All Equal. Partially, it was also financed by the Slovene Government Office for the Youth [Urad za mladino].

34 Blaž Kutin, "Bila je res edna luštna noč," *Dnevnik*, August 26, 1996.

35 Andree Zaimović, "Bosnian Traditional," 116.

cultural production. The music of the refugees that re-invented the traditional genre served as an excellent opportunity for this. Kreslin remembers that he encountered rare criticisms for his involvement with Bosnian refugees during the time of Slovenian independence. For instance, at one of these rare instances the most renowned Slovenian far-right national politician gave him a “friendly” warning that he might lose his Slovenian fans, if he continued to perform non-Slovenian music. Kreslin replied that he was always a risk-taker.

When we came to the Gorenjska region, people were shocked: “What kind of instrument is that?”, if I exaggerate a bit. I was always interested in doing something new... I did not want to do only what they [audience] expected from me. Besides, these [Sevdalinka] songs... they are so deep... I mean, I adored singing them... I was crying most of the time. And then, also, I looked at the children [young singers, members of Vali], who were there.

In sum, Kreslin’s performing with Vali was a humanitarian undertaking, i.e. he felt the need to do something for young refugees in Slovenia, yet it was largely motivated by his personal musical taste and enjoyment of the *Sevdalinka*. By singing *Sevdalinkas*, he brought his personal sense of Yugoslavia back to life. *Sevdalinka* was part of his musical passion, which is evident also from his further collaborations with Damir Imamović and Davorin Popović, both performers of the genre. Moreover, after the breakup of Yugoslavia, he kept many friendships across Yugoslav space alive through music. In this way, he was nurturing continuity of his (former) Yugoslav home. Like some youth activists in the 1990s, who engaged themselves as supporters of the refugees’ cultural production,³⁶ Kreslin was not prepared to shrink the realm of what he once called home. Through cooperation with Vali, he in fact fought the erasure of his own personal memories, prospects and imaginings of the future after the Yugoslav dissolution. As the analysis of this case reveals, in order to understand musical cooperation in exile, we must go beyond simplified ideas of humanitarianism and scrutinize the role of individuals and their personal motivations for making music with (and not for) refugees. The case also demonstrates that in precarious times some refugee musicians and local musicians in Slovenia, like Vesna Andree Zaimović and Vlado Kreslin, shared an interest in the specific cultural form of *Sevdalinka*, which provided common ground for collaborative music-making, which in turn enabled them to imagine continuity between the past and the future.

4. In pursuit of discussion

In his comparative study of Afghan music in two different refugee settlements, namely Pakistan and California, John Baily exposes a number of variables that affect music cultures in migration situations. In particular, he highlights the importance of “geographical

³⁶ Kozorog, “Doubly Excluded.”

distance between countries of origin and settlement; cultural similarity in terms of language, religion and other attributes; and prospect for the future in terms of security, employment and eventual integration in the host society.”³⁷ In our case one of these variables, geographical and cultural distance, is an ambiguous factor, because refugees migrated to the country with which they until very recently shared the same state, but which was nevertheless culturally different. Yet, as the state was breaking apart, the prospect for the future was not only precarious for the refugees (although especially for them), but also for other people in the transforming Yugoslav space.

Our goal was to study particularities of three different bands, all formed by refugee musicians and all working with local musicians and cultural and youth activists in Slovenia. We traced their common aspirations for rebuilding their home as a social realm of security, familiarity and community that guarantees the “sense of possibility”³⁸ in the new, post-Yugoslav reality. As Bosnian and Slovenian musicians collaboratively co-created this “new home”, they built on what they shared, which was the memory and sense of Yugoslavia. This was the precondition for the (un-expected) popularisation of Bosnian *Sevdalinka* in 1990s Slovenia.

In comparing the musical production of the Bosnian diaspora, formed during the Yugoslav era, with that of the Bosnian refugees that came to Slovenia because of the war in B-H, we were able to observe an interesting difference in and transformation of local attitudes towards this genre of Bosnian traditional music.³⁹ In Yugoslav Slovenia, the imaginary of Bosnians had a significant impact on their music-making. In Yugoslav Slovenia Bosnian voluntary economic migrants were predominantly perceived as uneducated manual workers and un-modernised semi-rural Others. As such, they were subjects to many, often well-hidden discriminatory practices.⁴⁰ Thus, it is not surprising that their music was “inward-directed”⁴¹ and intended solely for the members of the Bosnian community. Furthermore, they already lived in their own homeland – Yugoslavia – and did not feel the need to form a continuous cultural dialogue with the local, majority culture. On the other hand, and ironically, in the 1990s, despite the rise of Slovenian nationalism and nationalistic politics, Bosnian refugees’ cultural production suffered less discrimination. Their refugee status and bloody war in B-H obliged many to solidarity, including the newly independent Slovenian state, whose humanitarian policy in certain ways reflected the focus of Slovenia to meet the criteria for membership in the European Union. However, this article points at Slovenians whose experience of living in the multicultural Yugoslav state engendered genuine feelings of solidarity, but also concerns for the future of the post-Yugoslav space. To these Slovenians, the refugees’ *Sevdalinka* provided a sense of continuity of a country that was already gone, whose (multi-)cultural traces and achievements they could not simply forget and leave to the past. For many, *Sevdalinka* was indeed

37 John Baily, “So Near, So Far: Kabul’s Music in Exile,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 14, no. 2 (2005): 213.

38 Hage, “At Home in the Entrails of the West,” 99–153.

39 See also Zheng, “Music and migration,” 48–67.

40 See for example Bartulović, “From Brothers to Others,” Špela Kalčič, “Changing Contexts and Redefinitions of Identity among Bosniaks in Slovenia,” *Balkanologie IX*, no. 1-2 (2005): 149–171; Silva Mežnarič, *Bosanci: a kuda idu Slovenci nedeljom?* (Ljubljana: Krt, 1986).

41 Zheng, “Music and migration.”

something new, but it symbolized something very positive, namely, the old country's cultural diversity. As one of the commentators noted, *Sevdalinka* was "strange and new to us, but only at the first glance". In these circumstances, refugees were encouraged to share their music with the wider local audience.

Moreover, in Slovenia, under these circumstances, i.e. in the precarious transition of the post-Yugoslav space, traditional music of Yugoslavia engendered aspirations for continuation of Yugoslavian cultural space into the future. In this respect, the refugees' collaboration with local musicians and activists in Slovenia in the music-making activities worked as a process of home-making, because they were both faced with new and unstable circumstances, which they did not want to accept passively. As a result they both strove for a different sense of community together.⁴² As sociable youth, the members of the three bands were not merely seeking the safety of shelter, but a social atmosphere, which would allow them to form creative imaginings of new possibilities. This search for possibilities, as well as need to re-build a safe space in the new circumstances of the Yugoslav fall, was shared by young refugee musicians and their Slovenian counterparts.

This attitude was revealed in the case of cooperation between Vali and Vlado Kreslin. A crucial part of Kreslin's motivation to collaborate with the group lied in his experiences of Yugoslavia and its musical cultures. Interestingly, *Sevdalinka* evoked much stronger memories in Kreslin than in the members of Vali, since many of these young refugees were only introduced to the genre in exile.⁴³ However, both viewed *Sevdalinka* as a means of remaking their home during the post-Yugoslav transition.

Some authors have argued that uncertainty "discourages migrants from creating permanent relationships" with local communities and "developing expectations from the circumstances that surround them."⁴⁴ Our case study demonstrates the opposite, namely, that an absence of stability gave rise to the possibility for new solidarities. One could even argue that by building a musical social milieu in Slovenia, the refugees were sprouting roots fully intending to stay in the new social environment, therefore coining their own sense of stability. Sharing the post-Yugoslav atmosphere of uncertainty facilitated the need for Slovenians and refugees to manage concerns about the future creatively and together. However, being that the practices of cooperation between Bosnian refugees and Slovenians differ from other cases treating musical production in precarious situations, we propose additional variables be added to Baily's proposition. Bosnian music making during the 1990s attests to the importance of political changes – in this particular case the Yugoslav dissolution – as well as to the importance of political agency. In addition, the role of individual artists and collectives, who are able to establish a dialogue between migrants and local musicians, artists, intellectuals, activists, venues, and cultural scenes is another crucial dimension in understanding music-making in precarious settings. As we demonstrated, in the case of Bosnian exile in post-Yugoslav Slovenia the precarious condition did not hinder the establishment of a market for specific, migration-related art. Cultural exchange and

42 Jansen and Löfving, "Introduction: Towards an Anthropology of Violence, Hope and the Movement of People," 17.

43 Kozorog and Bartulović, "The Sevdalinka in Exile," 121–142.

44 Ög üt, "Transit Migration," 237.

multiple relations between locals and refugees flourished in certain Slovenian venues marked by the struggle to construct an alternative future through the collaborative musical production,⁴⁵ which challenged the dominant politics and discourses striving to disavow the multicultural Yugoslav legacy.

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45 See also Frances R. Aparicio and Cándida F. Jáquez, eds., *Musical Migrations: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

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POVZETEK

Raziskovanje glasbenega delovanja v kontekstu migracij se v antropoloških, socioloških in etnomuzikoloških analizah osredinja zlasti na umetniške prakse in glasbeno izraznost ustaljenih priseljenskih ali diasporskih skupnosti. Še vedno pa je relativno malo poglobljenih analiz ustvarjanja glasbe v prekarnih okoliščinah begunstva kot tudi glasbenih sodelovanj, ki nastajajo v dialogu med lokalnim akterji in začasnimi migranti oziroma begunci. Dosedanje raziskave o ustvarjanju glasbe v begunstvu slonijo na domnevi, da kulturno produkcijo beguncev zaznamuje relativno omejena interakcija z lokalnim miljejem. Skozi raziskavo begunskega glasbenega delovanja v Sloveniji pričujoči članek preizprašuje določene predpostavke, predvsem pa postavlja pod vprašaj odsotnost stikov in povezav med glasbeno produkcijo beguncev in lokalnimi občinstvi in ustvarjalci.

Etnografska študija analizira specifičnosti postjugoslovanskega konteksta ustvarjanja glasbe v begunstvu, pri čemer sledi povezavam med bosansko-hercegovskimi glasbeniki – begunci, ki so delovali v skupinah Vali, Dertum in Nešto između, ter njihovimi podporniki in sodelavci iz Slovenije. Po kratki predstavitvi bosansko-hercegovskih begunskih skupin raziskava oriše širši socialnoekonomski kontekst njihovega nastanka, prikaže prizadevanja

nekaterih lokalnih organizacij in posameznikov, ki so spodbujali begunske glasbene aktivnosti, in ki so se izkazali za ključne pri zagotavljanju prepoznavnosti njihove kulturne produkcije. Posebna pozornost je namenjena sodelovanju med skupino Vali in slovenskim glasbenikom Vladom Kreslinom, ki je odločilno prispeval k popularizaciji – v Sloveniji manj priljubljenega – glasbenega žanra – sevdalinke. Raziskava razkriva, kako so sevdalinke, skupaj s skupnim glasbenim udejstvovanjem, prispevale k ponovnem povezovanju in obnavljanju abruptno prekinjene jugoslovanske multikulturalnosti. Povezovanje beguncev z lokalnimi glasbeniki in aktivisti je med drugim prispevalo tudi k procesu ustvarjanja novih domov, saj so se oboji srečali z negotovostjo, ki je niso sprejemali pasivno, temveč so v novih okoliščinah, tudi s pomočjo glasbe, uspeli vzpostaviti občutek skupnosti in pripadnosti. Članek zasleduje skupne aspiracije po konstruiranju novega doma, ki je viden kot družbeni prostor varnosti, domačnosti in skupnosti, predvsem pa kot prostor, ki zagotavlja priložnosti v novi post-jugoslovanski realnosti. V procesu soustvarjanja novega doma je pomembno vlogo odigrala prav skupna, sicer heterogena izkušnja jugoslovanske preteklosti, ki pa je bila prav tako ključen dejavnik pri (nepričakovani) popularizaciji sevdalinke v devetdesetih letih 20. stoletja v Sloveniji.