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LOCAL MUSIC FROM THE WORLD OR A WORLD MUSIC FROM THE LOCAL? A BOSNIAN POPULAR MUSIC AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE AT HOME AND ABROAD

Domaća muzika iz svijeta ili svjetska muzika iz domaće? Popularna bosanska muzika i njen značaj u zemlji i inostranstvu

Abstract:

Critiques of the World Music industry of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have tended to focus on the institutions invested in the reproduction and dissemination of popular and traditional non-Western musics to new audiences, while neglecting the experiences and motives of individual actors participating in the process. This article draws on my own experience as a participant in the recording of a CD by North-Eastern Bosnian izvorna muzika ensemble Kalesijski Zvuci in 1991, and its release by the London-based company Globestyle Records, to consider the role of contingency, technology and individual interpretation in shaping the procedures by which a local music is selected, recorded and presented to a global public. It further looks at the afterlife of this and other recordings by the group circulating via traditional media and the internet to examine how its listeners at home and abroad variously use it to acquire social or cultural capital, negotiate their identities as global subjectivities, or maintain affective connections with family and homeland.

Where in the World?

The phrase 'local music from the world' stands at the head of this essay for a number of reasons, which expand from the purely personal and reflexive to the more general, and which will focus on a recording made for a British record company in the early 1990s¹. Although I am unable to recall when or where I first heard this phrase – and uncertainty of memory will colour the narrative that follows – I have always found it an attractive reminder that musics, most often encountered on recordings, via broadcast or the Internet, are rooted in place, and in the warp and weft of human lives.

Second, *Local Music* was the title of the first recording that I made as a musician after joining the London-based group *3 Mustaphas 3* in the early 1980s, and it is a phrase that reflects the philosophy behind the World Music label *Globestyle Records*,

¹ Kalesijski Zvuci. 1992. *Bosnian Breakdown: The Unpronounceable Beat of Sarajevo*. London. Globestyle CDORB 074.

which released both that recording and the one on which this piece centres. Without my personal connection to the label as an artist and as a colleague, it seems unlikely that recording would ever have taken place and been released.

Third, I want to approach this recording as an example of what happens when an intensely local music, with powerful emotional connections to place and the culture of place, is encountered by strangers, adapted and reinterpreted for a new audience. This has led me to consider certain questions about worlds: the world it came from, and the world it travelled to – a journey from the Bosnian village to the cosmopolitan imaginary of the World Music consumer. And finally, the very different understanding of the Bosnian people who occupy the world of the vast, networked, geographical and social space of those who stem from the area, migrant and non-migrant alike, who consider their homeland to be the local and intimate space of the village, the hamlet, and the household. 'Local', of course, is a slippery term, especially in relation to the global outlook sometimes presumed central to the entire World Music project (Fairley 2001: 273). Here, at least at the outset, I use it to describe the narrow geographical origin of *izvorna muzika*, its lyrical preoccupations, and ultimately the way that it acts dynamically, to connect members of the far-flung Bosnian diaspora with their homeland.

The relationship between the 'World Music' industry, as it emerged in the early 1980s, and the musics that it mediates has been a subject of much scholarly enquiry, often deeply tinged with suspicion of the motives or *bona fides* of those involved. Over the last thirty or so years a number of basic positions have been asserted. One might be best described as 'high-minded', exemplified by Peter Fletcher's decision to give precedence to the 'classical' musics of Asia and the Middle East, and especially those which have generated their own analytical discourse and theories, and enjoy 'subtle vocabularies [...] that give meaning to life-renewing ceremonies', unlike 'discos and raves' (2001: 694). Another is to accept the advantages that the ethnomusicologist can reap from such documentation of the 'postmodern encounter with world music' as the popular handbook, the *Rough Guide to World Music*, while regretting the 'crass journalism' that apparently infests its discourse, despite the best efforts of ethnomusicologists to combat it. (Bohlman 2002: 44). The most severe critique paints the phenomenon as a crudely capitalist and neo-colonial strategy, directed by multinational record companies for the sake of profit alone. This might be dubbed the Charles Keil approach, given his description of the activity as 'a disaster and a crime' (1994:301). This position is not entirely false, even though few of those holding such a view would go as far as to accompany him in rejecting the very idea of releasing music on record, no matter who the audience might be. In brief, although there has been some acknowledgement that a good deal of the initial impulse for those linked with an inchoate 'World Music' movement is the fruit of the interest and fondness of individuals, most analysis has focused on the role of the institutions involved in the reproduction and dissemination of non-Western popular musics outside their usual (or

initial) sphere of production and consumption. In this focus on the wood, the individual trees, I suggest, are sometimes lost sight of.

Often, this stems from a simple lack of willingness to engage in detail with the contingencies around the hard work of recording, publication and creation. For instance, Frith (2000: 307) approvingly quotes Timothy Taylor's earlier admonition of the *Rough Guide to World Music's* omission of Cantopop, while failing to note its prominent place in the second edition, published the year before his comment, and in preparation for a good deal longer. A little later he notes the 'coming together of academic and commercial concerns' implied by the list of contributors. While undoubtedly accurate as far as it stands, this formulation either passes over those who belong to neither group, or superbly awards a motley collection of musicians, fans, DJs, and other practitioners executive membership in the commercial enterprises which provide them with, at best, pocket change and a handful of cultural capital. In short, he evinces little sympathy for the effort required to assemble a team of people with both the knowledge and authorial skills in order to produce such a book, or of the complexity of their histories and motivations. Similarly, although Philip Bohlman's seeming disappointment that the *Rough Guides* concern themselves 'far more with facilitating encounter with world music than world music itself' is unsurprising given his preoccupation with musical ontologies, he appears not to appreciate that these words summarise, rather accurately, the explicit brief given to the authors by the publisher. Indeed, the project began because the owner of the company, a keen music-lover, felt an acute need for such a guidebook.

Naturally enough, the mirror image of such an apparent lack of comprehension is frequently displayed by the other party to the dispute. Indeed, sometimes these two groups appear to be talking past one another, consciously or not: reviewing Bohlman's *Cambridge History of World Music* one of the *Rough Guide's* editors, Simon Broughton, bemoans its failure to mention that book at all (Broughton 2014). At the same time he regrets the lack of attention given to the styles of music that he favours, while failing to spot the connection between the book's mention of Herder (which he singles out as a frustrating example of abstruse and unhelpful content) and the state policies that gave rise to the massed choral and orchestral folk ensembles in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe that he attacks the *Cambridge History* for failing to cover. Despite this mutual suspicion, however, both sides will generally agree that they share a common belief that contact with music lying outside the confines of one's own cultural heritage is ultimately a positive factor, and that music can be a path to understanding and respecting the cultural heritage of others. And both will probably agree that their

individual journey began with a more or less uninformed emotional response to an aural experience².

Few would claim, however, that the path by which *any* music becomes enshrined as a World Music is uncomplicated or free of assumptions, misunderstanding and misrepresentation. As Steven Feld observes, the commodification of music and its subjection to monopoly capitalism 'promotes musical tokenism', and far too frequently the result is that a nation, or a conglomerate of nations, is represented by a single exponent of a single sub-genre (Feld 1994:319). Feld was writing, or rather speaking, before the domestication of the CD copier made the technology of practically infinite reproduction widely available, and before the rapid growth of the interwoven routes of circulation that the internet has created. These routes both sustain and are sustained by the complex patterns of relationships created by the phenomena of global movement, displacement and diaspora, and to a great extent they have shifted control of the sounds in circulation towards the listener. Yet his observation holds true, in one important sense: control of the filters that strain and separate the musical content that circulates on the internet and between individuals may have moved more towards its consumers, and to a lesser extent, the musicians themselves, but the filtering still takes place, and still relies on the privilege and power conferred by money, knowledge, and access to technology.

The tale of the rising interest of Western consumers in 'non-Western' musics, and the coalescence of the idea of World Music as an phenomenon shaped to appeal to those consumers has been often told, although rarely twice in the same way (cf. Anderson 2000 and Fairley 2001). It was not long before the initial practice, by which companies licensed existing recordings of popular musics produced for local markets in Africa, Latin America, South Asia and elsewhere, gave way to especially arranged recording sessions. For these, the group was either travelled to a studio in London or other major city, or the record company took field trips to record the music in its home country (Cottrell 2010: 59-60)³. This permitted more control over the technical characteristics of the sound, the balance of instruments, acoustic space, frequency range, length of tracks, remix capabilities, etc. and allowed the product to be tailored to the taste or assumed taste of its intended, international, audience. It thus produced a kind of hot-housed hybridity, in which musicians of widely varied geographical, ethnic and cultural backgrounds were brought together, facilitated (or controlled) by representatives of the world's recording industries. It also cleared a space in which the music could be

2 I believe this remains true even in the case of researchers and entrepreneurs who deal with the music of their own culture, whether it is the currency of a different milieu or social class, or whether they are, so to speak, born into it themselves.

3 This pattern of recording should be differentiated from that in which e.g. francophone West African musicians travelled to Paris to record material for listeners at home or in the diaspora. In those cases the sonic qualities aspired to were those appealing to national, local or translocal tastes, rather than international ones.

reinterpreted by its new audience in the light of their own preoccupations. I shall return to this subject later, but for now it will be useful to bear in mind that these preoccupations might be political, say in terms of an identification with the post-colonial liberation movements of third-world countries; spiritual, as when the carefully arranged repertoire of the Bulgarian women's choral ensembles were perceived as the expression of an innate and instinctive peasant mysticism (Buchanan 1997); or painting music as universally comprehensible, embodying an idealised vision of common humanity transcending political, ethnic and geographical frontiers. As Bob White has noted (2012: 190), the latter discourse has been widely adopted by actors, including musicians and singers, in the World Music economy. This assumption of a shared, transcendent and pre-lexical communicative understanding has frequently led meanings unintended by the creators of the music at home being read into it by its listeners abroad. As I shall show later, the *Globestyle* release was no exception.

To sum up, the music that was originally dealt with under the heading of World Music has undoubtedly been fetishised and exoticised, not least in order to help its consumers to construct a self-image as sophisticated, tolerant, adventurous and cosmopolitan activists in a global context. Naturally enough, I somewhat uncomfortably recognise my younger self as one of the consumers in this portrait, but I also became a participant myself, in a small way, in the process by which local musics become World Music. Discussing this process, Martin Stokes has observed that the 1980s' somewhat utopian view of musical globalisation as a breaking down of barriers was succeeded by versions of the more cynical interpretations given above. Accepting that the reduction of 'rich musical traditions to mute tokens of otherness, to be noticed administratively or exploited commercially, but not engaged in meaningful, or lasting, dialogue' has been a reality, he nevertheless recognises more positive aspects of the World Music phenomenon. His statement that 'connections have been made, ideas exchanged, pleasures gained, and everyday music making in local contexts changed in fundamental ways' respects the lived experience of those entangled in that process, musicians, intermediaries and listeners alike (Stokes 2012:113).

Here, then, I would like to explore some of the issues that have arisen from my own engagement in the process by which a specific musical culture is approached, interpreted, and presented as representative of a nation, or a people. This exploration will centre around the key issues of understanding, misunderstanding, and mediation. Following Stokes, I hope that I will be able to demonstrate both the good faith on all sides implicit in this project, not least my naïve but well-intentioned belief at the time that this music deserved a wider audience, to whom I could help deliver it. Yet it may also serve as an illustration of the dangers of the musical tokenism that both Feld and Stokes identify, the accidents by which a single CD becomes globally accepted as a reliable instantiation of a coherent yet highly various musical practice, and the unintended consequences that flow from that. And not least, my own failures to

comprehend the complexity of the musical culture I was so blithely handling, or foresee how it would be reshaped and interpreted by its new foreign audience.

A Trip to the Country

The group which recorded the CD is named *Kalesijski Zvuci* ('Kalesija Sounds'), and the music in question is the so-called *Izvorna Muzika* of the Posavina, Podrinje and Spreča Valley of North-Eastern Bosnia, whose fundamental social, musical and lyrical characteristics have been described by Djedović (2012), Panić-Kašanski (2006), and Talam (2015). It occupies a musical eco-system which extends to and is largely supported by a diaspora population located as close at hand as neighbouring Croatia and Serbia, and as far afield as the United States and Australia. Its early and rapid growth as a relatively new form of popular music was closely linked to technological developments in the form of broadcast radio, the vinyl record, the cassette tape, and later the CD, video-cassette and DVD. My own first encounter with it, in the mid-1980s, was suitably enough through the medium of cassette. This was bought almost by chance, from a small shop in Geneva which catered for Yugoslav '*gastarbeiters*', the labour force which had underpinned the economies of a number of central European nations since the 1960s, and which had absorbed the surplus unskilled labour, predominantly from rural areas, of the Yugoslav republics. Although my interest in the music of the Balkans in general had been sparked early in the 1970s by hearing a BBC radio programme devoted to Albanian music, circumstance had led me to concentrate on the music of Yugoslavia, and as a professional performer my fundamental purpose was to add more tunes to my repertoire. In the process I had become acquainted with a good number of musical styles of that nation, and the cassette initially attracted my interest owing to the unfamiliarity of the ensemble that was pictured on the cover, a pair of violinists and a long-necked lute, which I was later to learn was called a *šargija*. I was both startled and fascinated at first hearing, and attracted by the energy and the strangeness of the music. My efforts to learn more about it, however, were fruitless; it was not mentioned in any of the writings about music that I was familiar with.

Indeed, as I was to discover, there was very little information available about it at all. It is very likely only the fact that shortly afterwards I was commissioned to write the chapters on the music of the Balkans for the *Rough Guide to World Music* itself, not least because the editor and I had a friend in common, that brought me face-to-face with the music and its performers. This is certainly an example of contingency and happenstance, one that makes me dubious that the conscious discrimination Taylor implies is responsible for the book's content and its lacunae actually exists in any meaningful way. (It was only afterwards that the publishers asked me to copy-edit, salvage, and in the most desperate cases entirely rewrite other authors' submissions for the publication: an experience that only reinforces my view).

Being acutely aware that, despite my best efforts, I lacked a great deal of knowledge about a good deal of the music from the area, and working from the assumption that the best way to find out about music was to learn how to play it, and to talk to the people who made it and listened to it, I set out on a trip from the Slovenian Alps to the Black Sea, carrying an accordion with me. It was while interviewing the *sazlija* and luthier Himzo Tulić in Zvornik that I learned that the market town of Kalesija was a major centre for this type of music and the following day found me on a bus, accompanied by a relative of friends with whom I was staying, in a village on the western bank of the Drina. The bus stopped near the centre of town, where a line of taxis waited beside the stalls of a street market. Among them was one selling cassette tapes of a wide range of music, including a recent concert combining Muslim religious song and examples of the urban song-form of *sevdalinka*⁴, illustrating some of the changes in the negotiation of ethnic and religious identities occurring at the time⁵. This, along with other styles of music available on the same stall, included folk-pop songs (*novokomponovana narodna muzika*) and *sevdalinke* performed by small orchestras of factory-made instruments, which represented the negotiation of national and global identities, as opposed to the local concerns of *izvorna* music. The latter repertoire could be easily be found on sale throughout the then republic and nation, while then as now the more localised forms of music were on sale only locally or, significantly, at areas of transition and movement such as transport nodes, border-crossing zones, or stores abroad catering for the diaspora. It made commercial sense for these stores (such as that in Switzerland mentioned above) to carry as wide a range of a stock as possible, given that its potential consumers did not necessarily share a single geographical origin, musical taste, or even language.

My companion was, in fact, little more knowledgeable about the music and its performers than was I, so he simply asked a taxi-driver if he knew of any musicians in the locality. He motioned us into his vehicle, and drove us out of town and down a country road, finally dropping us at a house where we were greeted by a rather puzzled woman, to whom he explained our mission. This was the home of Ramo Salkić, the violinist of *Kalesijski Zvuci*, who arrived shortly afterwards from working in the fields, driving a tractor. I introduced myself, and we spoke for some time. Perhaps he was puzzled by my interest in his music but he nonetheless phoned his comrade Hasan Požegić, the singer and *šargija* player, who soon arrived; they played and sang for me. I took a few notes about the instruments and playing techniques, took a couple of photographs (fig. 1), they gave me a copy of their latest cassette, *Ako voliš mene*⁶, and I

4 *Zetra '90: veče ilahija i kasida*. [1990]. Sarajevo: Gazi Husref-Begova Medresa/Radio Sarajevo, Marketing.

5 See Laušević (1996) for an account of the part played by concerts of *qasida* and *ilahiya* in the emergence and development of a 'symbolic world' based on Muslim national imagery and its eventual replacement by a cultural policy emphasising a secular and multi-ethnic basis for the Bosnian state.

6 *Kalesijski Zvuci*. 1990. *Ako želiš mene*. Sarajevo: Diskoton.

took my leave. This, the combination of my curiosity about an acoustic and aesthetic phenomenon – sound as embodied in a specific musical practice, and my encounter with Bosnian sociability and hospitality was the beginning of my still incomplete researches into the significance of Bosnian *izvorna muzika* as a global and transnational phenomenon.

Even at this time a number of things were clear; although neither Hasan nor Ramo employed sophisticated language in talking about their work, both had a strong idiomatic command of their instruments, and could talk with some clarity about general and technical aspects of the music. Both were familiar as listeners and performers with a number of musical genres, both rural and urban, and Hasan in particular was an experienced performer of the urban *sevdalinka* song form. They carefully distinguished a number of subgenres of *izvorna muzika* characterised by variations in tempo, metre, rhythm and melodic content. Most strikingly, both underlined the practice of treating the interval of a major or minor second as a consonance as a crucial and characteristic factor of the style (often referred to as singing *na glas*). Ramo in particular emphasised the primacy of this vertical interval as an essential part of the idiom, as may be seen from the notes I took at the time (fig. 2). This texture was not derived from simple heterophony, with these intervals arising from discrepancies in the simultaneous performance of two or more variants of a single melodic line. Instead, they created a polyphonic texture constructed of two closely entwined but independent melodic processes, both instrumentally and vocally. Their articulate description of the instrumental and vocal techniques they used to obtain the musical results they desired conclusively counters a common, if uninformed criticism of the genre: that it is crude and uncultured, and the result of technical inadequacy on the part of singers and instrumentalists. They furthermore made it clear that they were interested in extending the technical resources of the music by introducing harmonic and rhythmic innovations, without losing sight of the traditional melodic and structural aspects of the music. The inclusion of accordionist Jusuf Osmanović, who had previously collaborated with Hasan, had led the group to develop a harmonic language which adapted the triad to the untempered pitch structure of the melody, while avoiding the outright adoption of a tonal system. The development of this language still needs serious investigation, but it might be tentatively suggested that the emphasis on quartal harmonies on the *šargija* and the juxtaposition of chords that cannot be related to a single key centre (for instance, on their songs *Kada Ramo guda lom zagudi*, or *Oho ho što je lijepo*) reflect a compositional and performance practice that prioritises the modal basis of the singing style above the introduction of a functional tonality. This is particularly evident in the left-hand patterns of Ramo's style of accordion performance, in which the instrument's pre-existing spatial organisation of the left-hand chord and bass buttons, derived from simple diatonic functional harmonic patterns, was repurposed to reflect the prominence of the interval of the second as a consonance, for example by superimposing an F minor triad above a B♭ bass note at a cadential point.

It might be noted that the group's accordionist, Jusuf Osmanović, whose technically more assured style is influenced by the harmonic developments undergone by Bosnian urban music during the twentieth century (Karača Beljak 2005), also avoided forcing the harmony into a tonal straitjacket.

It was this coherent but adventurously modernist approach to a music with traditional roots that suggested to me that I could interest my contacts at *Globestyle* records in recording and releasing a CD by *Kalesijski Zvuci*. It seemed to me that the musicians' success in combining tradition and modernity, the energy of their performances, and the great sonic beauty of this unfamiliar music would make the group a possible addition to the *Globestyle* catalogue. The faintly quixotic approach taken by that label, which as a subsidiary of a highly successful mother company, Ace Records, was shielded to a certain extent from the rigours of the market, left its directors perhaps more receptive to undertaking such a project than other, larger concerns. In any event, my proposal was accepted, and early in 1991 we began making preparations to travel to Bosnia and record. In the following section, I shall describe how these ideas and our aspirations were carried out in practice.

A Trip to the City

It was the encounter of a traditional music with modernity, rather than an ethnographic record of a disappearing form that was of interest to *Globestyle*. Although our understanding of the music and its ecology were necessarily incomplete, and coloured by our own experiences as musicians, our perception of *izvorna muzika* as a modern, healthy, lively and creative musical genre was, I believe, essentially accurate. It was this perception that led us to hope that it would be possible to record the musicians using the full facilities of the contemporary studio, without destroying the aesthetically pleasing aspects of their sound, and respecting their autonomy as creative artists. We also wanted the music to be perceived by its intended listeners, the consumers of World Music audience, as having a 'contemporary' sound. Among other things, this meant ensuring that Senad Mesić, the drummer whom they used in live performance, although not in their previous recordings, would be present at the session. For similar reasons, we also planned to add an electric bass player in order to anchor the rhythm and harmonic implications of the songs. This was probably the most extreme intervention; even now the incorporation of a bass player by *izvorne* groups is uncommon. These considerations made it inevitable that recording would be to multi-track tape in a studio, rather than live and direct to stereo – a process that had been used on other *Globestyle* recordings. The multi-tracking process produces a master tape in which each instrumental and vocal part is recorded on a separate channel. As a result the options for control over timbre, volume, acoustic space and other aspects of the final sound, or mix, committed to record are extremely wide, while extra parts may be overdubbed subsequently if necessary. This contrasted to the usual practice for this

music at the time, by which bands were recorded as if in live performance, without overdubs, and with a minimum of post-production (interview with Miloš Asentić, Derventa, November 2014). We did, nonetheless, hope to produce a 'natural' sound through the artifice of recording, giving the impression that all the musicians were playing together, although some would in fact be recorded at different times – and as it transpired, in different spaces. Furthermore, as a general practice we would avoid dictating the shape of the songs or the style of performance, with each song being recorded in a single take, rather than the final product being edited together from multiple takes. In this way we hoped to produce a final release which was the product of a collaborative and collective effort, as any overdubs or post-production techniques would thus be responsive to the decisions taken by the members of *Kalesijski Zvuci* during their performance.

Although this method of recording popular music was by then a standard and familiar studio practice, it was not without its critics. Paul Théberge, one of the first to engage with it in his study of multi-track recording as rationalisation, written a few years before this recording took place, claims that the breakdown in temporal simultaneity of performance created by the practice of overdubbing the process a mere 'simulation' of collective activity, in which the individual contribution is paramount (Théberge 1989: 105). Nonetheless, I argue that in this case, as in many others, the understanding of the process of studio recording shared by the band, engineer, producer and other musicians involved permitted the development of a mutual trust, and was a truly collective activity. In particular, in overdubbing, musicians are necessarily required to take account of the original tracks' groove, harmonic direction, and the complex micro-rhythmic rubato-like ebb and flow that musicians working in western popular music traditions loosely refer to as 'phrasing'. Conversely, the musician recording the original track is expected to play coherently and consistently, in order to produce a reliable framework for the contributions of those overdubbing. In this way, Théberge's 'individual contribution' is subordinated to a collective whole, and that the single musical/temporal experience that he identifies as the end product is created by the performers' ability to conceptualise their work and their collaboration as extending through time, and often through space. The ideal, which we as individuals interacting with the Bosnian musicians were hoping for, was the production of a collaborative work suited to the World Music market, in which musicians ultimately retained the moral ownership of their work. Furthermore it would be one which faithfully represented this musical culture to non-Bosnian audience. And we believed that this could best be done through the studio-based recording process set out above – essentially, the practice that we ourselves followed as professional musicians working in a studio.

These considerations led us to book a studio recommended by Mirza, a young Sarajevan who was at that time living and working in London. He agreed to act as interpreter and intermediary, organise a studio, drive us to the village and back, and as

the budget was very small, we also stayed at his parents flat in Sarajevo. Mirza was a musician himself, and the studio that he found, located in Ilidža near Sarajevo, although small, was a purpose-built space used for recording acoustic and electronic instruments. Its clients were usually pop and rock musicians, or composers of background music for commercials, and it was well equipped with an up-to-date mixing desk and multi-track tape machine, and more than adequate microphones, signal processors and other ancillary gear. The owner and engineer, Neno Jeleč, was also capable and experienced, although the studio did not normally record folk musicians, and he had never encountered an *izvorna* group. However, it lacked one vital facility: a drum booth.

The process of multi-track recording demands that each track should be as 'clean' as possible, that is, free of extraneous noise or 'spill', the sound of another instrument. There are multiple reasons why this is undesirable, but it affects timbre, the options for placing instruments and vocals on a stereo stage, the relative balance of volumes between vocals, lead and accompanying instruments, and the options for overdubs and 'patching' imperfections in an otherwise satisfactory take. The last was of the least importance in our case, as the 'live in the studio' nature of the band's performance meant that we were not planning to replace vocal or instrumental parts. However, despite our best efforts with baffles, blankets, screens, and the placement of microphones and musicians, the drums were audible and sometimes obtrusive, on the vocal and instrumental tracks. This did not affect the quality of the performance – most songs were recorded in a single take, and band produced a varied repertoire, ranging from the more 'traditional' sound of two violins and šargija to a more 'modern' recension of the Kalesija sound, bolstered by accordion, electric guitar and drum-kit. Ironically, our desire to provide the highest possible technical facilities, and to produce the most flexible multi-track recording, that created the greatest technical problem in the form of spill. Postponing dealing with that problem until our return to London, we overdubbed some electric bass parts, played by Neno, on a few tracks, and then relaxed by travelling to Donji Rainci to see the band perform to an enthusiastic local audience at the last Bajram celebrations before the war. At the time, I felt that this had enhanced our understanding of the music's power to reconcile tradition and the modern world. Even now, I would not entirely dismiss the idea; however, it is certain that I had only begun to appreciate the complexity of the music's relationship to its audience, and its part in the Bosnian village's encounter with modernity.

The next phase of the project was carried out in London, where the decisions were taken on how the music was to be presented to its new public. The priority was dealing with the problem of spill. The technique we used was selective equalisation, by which the volume of certain frequency bands, in which the drum parts were prominent, were cut using electronic processing. This reduced the intrusive sound of the drums on the vocal and violin parts, rectifying to a degree the problems mentioned above, and allowing greater flexibility in the mix. Mirza overdubbed more electric bass parts, and

I added a keyboard part to support a brief pastoral melody that Hasan had improvised on the *frula* as an introduction to the song *Frula svira, kosu kujem*. The harmonic language that I chose to apply was largely derived from Filip Kutev's arrangements of Bulgarian folk music, and was quite alien to the popular tradition of Kalesija and its surroundings. Effectively, we had taken Hasan's intended invocation of dawn in the countryside, while a reaper sharpened his scythe in preparation for the day's harvesting, and embedded it in the field of World Music through a musical discourse that had previously been established - the 'mystical' sound of Bulgarian women's choirs. The countryside thus remained present in a musical representation, but the balance had shifted, from an appeal to the familiar, shared everyday experience of a rural Bosnian listener, to an evocation of a mysterious, generalised Nature as understood by the new Western audience. This, naturally enough, is my present interpretation - none of these ideas were consciously in our minds at the time. From the vantage point of a quarter-century later, however, it appears a typical example of the negotiations and unconscious adaptations made to 'naturalise' a cultural product in order to render it comprehensible to its new, unfamiliar audience.

Once the content and the sonic character of the recording had been settled, the next task was to settle on the material and conceptual framework through which the recording would be presented to its new public. In keeping with our ideas about hybrid nature of the music, growing out of an encounter between the traditional and the modern, the cover bore a photograph of Hasan and Ramo, clad in jeans and traditional waistcoats, and holding their instruments; the back was a picture of two solidly-built houses in the village of Donji Rainci, photographed from the other side of a ploughed field, and with a modern tractor in shot (fig. 3). Unfortunately, the name of the band was given incorrectly on the cover as *Kalesijski Svuci*, owing to the designer's unfamiliarity with the Bosnian language, although it is correct elsewhere on cover and insert. Even the title chosen for the record, *Bosnian Breakdown*, gained a terrible resonance with the outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; it had been intended as a reference to *Boscastle Breakdown*, an influential recording of traditional British folk music released in the 1970s, where the 'breakdown' is a type of dance. The subtitle referred sardonically to the vogue for both producers and consumers to treat musical genres as standing in for the political and military struggles of third-world liberation movements. Specifically, this referred to a popular compilation of South African *mbaqanga* and *maskanda*, *The Indestructible Beat of Soweto*, which had co-opted the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa as a sales pitch. *The Unpronounceable Beat of Sarajevo* was thus both a reflective comment on the World Music industry itself, and a wry acknowledgement of the difficulty that Ben had encountered in trying to speak Bosnian.

My task was to write the sleevenotes. It felt important that the music was not presented as an endangered survival from the ancient, pre-historical past, but instead as a living and thriving music that resulted from an encounter and engagement with

modernity. As these notes have now been ably translated into Bosnian by Fadil Hujdurović (2012), the reader may judge for him or herself how well I succeeded.

For some idea of how the recording was received by listeners, we shall need to turn to the published reviews.

Here is a wild mix of Turkish, Gypsy, shepherd, and polka music with violin, accordion, and folk guitar. An electric bass and drum kit update adds to the off-kilter feel of traditional festival songs with roots in an ancient civilization.

(Origin uncertain)

Faster than a Turkish squaredance. More powerful than a gypsy polka. Able to defeat totalitarianism in a single Bosnian hoedown. It's the Svuci-men, of course, purveyors of the meanest post-traditionalist thrash this side of zydeco. Armed with fiddle, vernacular guitar (*sargija*) and electric bass, the most popular band of the Balkans' latest most-troubled locality transforms diverse urban, rural, and ethnic sources into a feverish dance beat chimera, whose mercurial east-west mood swings reflect a sad history of superpower tug-of-war. Fraught with exhilarating dissonance, discordant vocal harmonies and furiously sawing fiddles, this irresistible music stokes a fire of unbelievable antiquity.'

Bob Tarte, *The Beat* (no date)

A similar approach was taken by *Rolling Stone* magazine:

It is hard to reconcile the frenzied pretzel [complex] rhythms and vivacious melodies of this record...with the death...and devastated social order of Bosnia....It is even harder to believe that a people who find such joy and commonality in singing...have been left to the cold mercy of guns...⁷
(12/29/94-1/12/95, p.174)

As these reviews suggest, my attempts to explain something of the meaning and context of the music presented had been either rejected, or glossed in terms of the understanding of a generalised exotic, primal and oriental Balkans. This remains the case when the intention was to cast the music itself as mounting a form of resistance to war and violence. This is aligned to a certain widespread discourse about World Music as an expression of common humanity and an expression of progressive politics, where the political stance of the musicians is assumed to mirror that of the listener.

Parallel to this strategy is the reviewers' invocation of American musics that are assumed to occupy a common ground with which the audience is familiar: (Polish or Texas Mexican) polka, (francophone Cajun) zydeco, and (Western plains) square dance.

⁷ Quoted at <http://www.oldies.com/product-view/36277N.html> Accessed 30 April 2015.

It is worth noting that these are all musics of immigrant or rural subcultures within the US, each of which plays a role in the mythopoesis of the American nation. In other words, for these reviewers the music of *Kalesijski Zvuci* is naturalised as that of a 'familiar other', becoming on one hand a proof of universal humanity, while on the other it retains an irreducible core of exoticism (invoked by identifying traits of passion, exhilaration, and the transformation of ancient roots and traditions, a conceptual framework no less central to the discourse of World Music than its *bien-pensant* politics). At the same time it disengages from the political situation and the violence of the wars of the 1990s, and from their international ramifications. The presence of what Vesna Goldsworthy refers to as the 'well known tropes of Balkan representation', whereby the Balkans are defined 'not by identity traits of their own but by their position on the fault line, their fate determined by their explosive "in-betweenness"', is unmistakable, even in an attenuated form (2002: 25).

It has been harder to track the CD's reception among the general public, but the author of a letter to the British music magazine *Songlines* made a point which I feel gave away more than he intended: he complained that 'we' had been told that this music represented the real music of Bosnia, yet a Bosnian friend had informed him that this was the music of primitive, country people – those who were responsible for the war, no less. This mistaken description, while reflecting the surprisingly hostile attitude to the music endemic in certain strata of the Bosnian urban population, places the British listener squarely among those who consume the music of the 'other' partly in order to situate themselves in an (enviable) social position. These claims to occult knowledge and understanding expressed through consumption rest on what Timothy Taylor has identified as 'global and informational capital [...] that stands in for real knowledge of the world (2012: 182). The importance to the letter-writer of this outgrowth of Bourdieu's (2010) concept of cultural capital explains the anguish of his complaint. In his mind all the capital he had hoped to accrue through his purchase of the CD had vanished like fairy gold, and in attempting to demonstrate his multi-cultural, liberal and cosmopolitan credentials, he had unknowingly allied himself with the forces of destruction, slaughter and genocide. Or so he believed; I hope that the letter I wrote in response succeeded in convincing him that responsibility for the war lay in quite another direction.

We can see, then, that the generally positive response to the music of *Kalesijski Zvuci*, although primarily aural and sensual, was mediated through the set of cultural assumptions available to its listeners. But I would now like to turn to a brief consideration of what meanings the music might hold for its original audience, the people of North-Eastern Bosnia, and how it operates through global networks that link them through time and space to express a complex web of kinship, good-neighbourliness, and deeply-rooted cultural practices.

Global Excursions

It is not my purpose here to enter more closely into an exploration of the historical roots of the music, which have been examined elsewhere (notably, in Golemović 1987). It should however be noted that since its emergence and increasing popularity from the 1960s onwards, it has been entangled with movement, modernity, and the availability of mass communications. This popularity was coterminous with and closely linked to the electrification of the villages in this part of the country, the flow of remittances to the country sent by workers employed abroad, and the beginnings of a new consumer society. Radio broadcasts, followed by the production of vinyl discs, and later audio cassettes, allowed the music to circulate not only at home, but abroad as well. (Hamzić 2013: 132-134; Djedović 2012). Indeed, as I have mentioned, my own first encounter with the music of the Posavina and Podrinje was only possible due to its circulation abroad to a nostalgic *gastarbeiter* public. Here, then, I shall examine a single aspect of the many possible ways in which the music might be understood by its creators and its public, and I consider that this understanding centres on the way in which the musicians and their songs invoke for their listeners a sense of place. Side-by-side with more generalised, even comic, portrayals of rural life, events and relationships we find lists of specific, named places and locations. It is my contention that this encoding of precise places of memory allows members of the Bosnian diaspora from North-Eastern Bosnia to exercise their sentimental attachment to a home; they act as powerful signifiers of a community to which they remain attached, though far removed in time and space. This diaspora is distinguished by its historical, geographic, class and ethnic diversity, and a reluctance to coalesce around a single national or ethno-religious identity (Valenta & Ramet 2011). Instead, the patterns of identification for the self and others found among members of the diaspora are often trans-local rather than transnational. Furthermore, its global dimensions mean that its patterns of communication and circulation, and the emotional transactions associated with them, are figured through music: horizontally, among the divergent locations of settlement, as well as vertically, between these and the homeland.

Here I draw on Hariz Halilovich's understanding of *zavičaj*, or local homeland in the sense of a 'shared placed-based local identity', which 'constitutes the most powerful point of reference for their sense of belonging' in the imaginaries of Bosnians, migrant and non-migrant alike. In his view, it is this sense of *zavičaj* that crucially permits migrants and non-migrants alike to resist the centralising forces which aim to subsume these local identities into greater national, nationalist or ethno-religious ones; it is the persistence of this claim on the local homeland in other locations that has allowed them to maintain their own ontological security in far-flung locations (Halilovich 2013: 46-47). The cultural importance of this shared local intimacy is reflected in the most literal way by the self-naming strategies of the bands who perform the music. A striking

example is that of the group *Zvuci Zavičaja* (Sounds of Home), but the presence of signifiers of locality in the names of groups is extremely common: *Sprečanski Talasi*, *Trebavski Zvuci*, *Derventski Biseri*, *Kalesijski Slavuji*, *Dobojski Dukati*, and of course *Kalesijski Zvuci* themselves are among those have chosen to make their place of origin explicit. Here, too, I believe that the low social status of the genre (Hamzić 2013: 138) paradoxically plays a part in promoting solidarity and the construction of the common sense of emotional belonging which Halilovich identifies. Thus, the part played by the circulation of *izvorna* music in promoting attachment to *zavičaj* is strengthened by and coincides with Michael Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy as a shared mode of understanding, calling on 'those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality' (Herzfeld 2005: 3). The embarrassment that Hamzić observes being expressed by the music's fans and aficionados is thus transformed into a positive means of reproducing the intimacy and warmth of family, village and small town relationships through the medium of a shared musical understanding. In her study of a mixed Catholic and Muslim village in Central Bosnia, Tone Bringa suggests that small communities tend to resist pressures from outside. The villagers perform their ethno-religious identities at the level of the local settlement and regard the competing strains of these identities at global and national level as the product of undifferentiated, official and educated authorities which may be unsympathetic or even opposed to local expressions (Bringa 1995: 198-199). This does not, of course, mean that they are immune to the external forces which seek to mobilise them in line with nationalist or global aspirations. It does, however, seem, that the strength of attachment to *zavičaj* as expressed through local music is enough to resist dissolution by such forces, and allow pre-war social relations on that level of intimacy to be reproduced rather than destroyed. In order to demonstrate how a single song recorded by *Kalesijski Zvuci* themselves in 1982, *Selo moje maleno* (My Little Village), has been used by discussants on the internet, migrant and non-migrants from North-Eastern Bosnia, to express their attachment to homeland and tradition.

The 'little village' in question is Donji Rainci, and the opening couplet of the song fixes it geographically between two prominent peaks: 'My little village, a song of love, above you Konjuh and Majeveca show blue', while the refrain lists the neighbourhoods within the village ('Herići, Puzići, Zates and Čanići, little Požegići...'). This invocation of the specific would appear to limit its appeal to locals of the village and its immediate neighbourhood alone. Indeed, a video of the song which has been uploaded to YouTube shows the band walking in an upland meadow, while commenters quote the refrain, or claim that 'this is the finest melody from my part of the world (*Ovo je najbolji melos sa mojih krajeva*)⁸. It seems, however, that the force of nostalgia and attachment to an idea of *zavičaj* can render the song, whose overt lyrical content is linked to a very specific

⁸ <https://youtu.be/DB8r3Dd6oGg>

place, available to express a more generalised longing for home: the force of nostalgic sentiment transcends the particularity of the lyrics. A couple of versions of the song uploaded to YouTube, probably the most effective contemporary means by which long-distance connections between various diasporic locations and the homeland are maintained through the sharing of musical instantiations of place, demonstrate this. The soundtrack of one appears to be a live version by *Kalesijski Zvuci* themselves⁹, another, with slightly different verses but the same refrain is credited to *Edo i Raspjevane Meraklije*, a group from the Podrinje¹⁰. Both these, which are accompanied by slideshows of village scenes, were uploaded, in 2011 and 2013 respectively, by an account named *Brezovaca1*, who uses them to express powerfully emotional feelings towards ‘Brezovača, Smajlovići, Mrgan and Čatići – my home, my *zavičaj*’ (moj kraj, moj zavičaj), and to convey greetings (*selam*) to all ‘my Brezovača folk’ (sve moje Brezovčane). The *mesna zajednica* (a local administrative unit) of Brezovača and its three hamlets is at least 60 kilometres away from Donji Rainci, whose neighbourhoods are so carefully enumerated in the song, and further still from the home of the *Meraklije*. The formal characteristics of the music have shifted too: on the original recording the accordion is added to violin, and the guitar takes the place of the *šargija*; both instruments impose tempered pitch and an *ad hoc* triadic but non-tonal harmony. This has been further adapted in the later version by *Raspjevane Meraklije*, which avoids both the piquant harmony on the flattened leading note which is a marked feature of the original, and reduces the idiosyncratic timing of the instrumental segments to a regular metric pattern. It is not possible to say with any certainty whether these differences should be ascribed to historical developments in the sound of this rapidly changing music, to the specific aesthetic of the musicians, or to other factors, as yet unexplored. The specific style of *na glas* two-voice singing, a fingerprint of the music and the feature to which the musicians continually draw attention when discussing their work, remains a touchstone of the style. It appears that it is the vital core, sufficient to stir memories of the *zavičaj*, which here expands to represent the wider community of those who perform, listen and dance to this music, in which the family, hamlet and village are embedded.

The people of North-Eastern Bosnia, many living far from their homes, who listen to this music over internet radio, in bars or clubs, or in their cars, who follow and eagerly comment on YouTube uploads, use these sounds to connect themselves with the landscapes of their childhood and adulthood, the scents, tastes and touch of the *zavičaj*, and the warmth of the familial and friendship relationships that typify the village or small towns of the region. Whether the focus of their nostalgia is tactile and sensual, or imaginative and affective, whether it aspires to recover what has been lost, or to recover *from* that loss – to adopt Svetlana Boym’s terminology (2001),

9 https://youtu.be/tXvgAW_91cU

10 <https://youtu.be/l-usbNlleOA>

whether it is recreative or reflective – there remains a certain irreducible disconnect of understanding between those in whom the music awakens memory and a sense of attachment to home, and those, the World Music listeners, for whom it is ultimately the music of an other. The music, especially one that is so intimately linked to place and time through memory and experience, can never carry the same emotional resonance or affective weight to me or another non-Bosnian listener as it does to someone whose encounters with it are refracted through memory.

In Place of a Conclusion

I have shown that the music played by *Kalesijski Zvuci* unavoidably carries utterly different meanings for its two audiences. At the time of writing, despite the existence of an extensive and local recording industry, and the massive popularity of the music among its fans and aficionados, *Kalesijski Zvuci* remain the only one of hundreds of groups from North-Eastern Bosnia to have entered into the body of World Music. This has awarded them a particular visibility abroad, not necessarily replicated at home. The opaque algorithms of internet search engines, favouring the English language, and the ubiquity of internet traders featuring the products of well-known record labels, mean that *Kalesijski Zvuci* have been easier for the non-Bosnian to stumble upon than than any of the other groups. The 'tokenism' that Feld decries has, at least, benefited the members of the group to the extent that they have been the subject of a Turkish documentary film, and appeared on stage with Goran Bregović and the Croatian star Severina. It was mere chance that led me to this band – what if the taxi-driver had taken us to meet a member of *Kalesijski Slavuji*, an equally skilled but older and more 'traditionally' oriented group? Would they have been *izvorna* music's representative in the field of World Music? Would their purely acoustic, more demanding sound have been regretfully turned down by Globestyle as not suiting their plans, or the profile of their label? One might have expected the modernised Bosnian urban song form of *sevdalinka*, immensely popular throughout the country, to have been the country's first representative on the World Music scene, rather than a rural group. Without my intervention on behalf of *izvorna muzika* that might have been the case, although even the next recording to appear, on the Smithsonian Folkways label, was an ethnographic survey curated by ethnomusicologist Ankica Petrović, which as its title suggests concentrated on music thought to be moribund, or under threat of extinction¹¹. Would *sevdalinke* have made earlier and greater inroads on the world market? In the event, this was not to happen until after the war, in the shape of the neo-traditionalist *Mostar Sevdah Reunion*, and even the subsequent Novi Sevdah movement has had little impact outside the area. The greatest question, of course, is what might have happened if war had not broken out; the effects of the human and material devastation that it unleashed,

11 *Bosnia: Echoes from an Endangered World*.1993. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

the terrifying derailment of human lives, and its effect on foreign perceptions of Bosnia and Herzegovina are still present two decades on. These are questions that cannot be answered with any certainty.

To conclude, I will consider a song, *Dok u stroju mirno stojim*, which was recorded by Globestyle, although it did not make it onto the final release. I believe that it illustrates how incomprehension can eventually lead to a richer understanding of the complexity of meanings encompassed by the *izvorna muzika* of Kalesija and its hinterland. I misheard or misunderstood the title as *Kad u struji mirno* (tj. *spokojno*) *stojim*; in place of the actual meaning 'As I stand at attention (*mirno stojim*) on parade', I interpreted it as 'As I stand quietly (*mirno*) in the current (*struja*)', I thus, bizarrely, formed a picture of an angler up to his waist in a river, thus entirely missing the point of a song referring to the universally shared experience of Yugoslav males from the 1950s to early 1990s: that of performing military service at a location far from home. For many young men, especially those from a rural background, this rite of passage was their first experience away from home, and perhaps their first encounter with homesickness and nostalgic longing for *zavičaj*, family and the familiar. So central was this experience that it was often literally and permanently inscribed on the body of the recruit, in the form of bunkhouse tattoos giving the place and date of service. The decision to omit this song from the final release may have been because its musical characteristics – waltz-time, almost Viennese harmonic structure – failed to denote the exotic and foreign sufficiently for our purposes. Or it may have been an aesthetic choice, or perhaps a pragmatic choice masquerading as an aesthetic one – I can no longer be sure. In any case, the decision to pass over a song from a village, which crystallises the pervasive subjects of separation, loss, nostalgia and community, central to the concerns of the diasporic subject, was taken in the metropole by people who could not grasp its significance.

This does provide another angle on a fundamental question which has been lurking, if not overtly asked, throughout this essay: who has the right to represent Bosnia and its people musically? It's quite clear that from the point of view of the British consumer and his Bosnian friend, the performers of *Bosanska izvorna muzika* do not enjoy that right. It may even be the case that its native audience would agree with them, feeling that *sevdalinke* (or perhaps rock, or rap) should have that honour¹². It is also clear that many of the distinguished scholars quoted at the opening of this paper would question whether I had the right to do so, as a mediator and interpreter of something that, as I have just explained, I did not entirely understand. It should be equally clear that I believe this musical genre to be a form of great importance to be a vitally

12 Svanibor Pettan observed in his study of a music-based social project in Norway, involving the collaboration of Bosnian refugees and Norwegians, that the Bosnians avoided presenting 'rural music' to their Norwegian counterparts. Their arguments were that the refugee audience would not enjoy it, and that it was unsuited to 'portraying Bosnians to Norwegians as "fellow Europeans"'. (Pettan 2010: 183).

important component of the way in which a subset of Bosnianness is constructed, and as such it can and should speak for the people who play and sing it, listen to and dance to it, and for their cultural values and their moral universe. Bosnian identities are complex and multi-layered, and have been both enriched and further complicated by the transnational and translocal encounters engendered by the movements of its population before, during and after the war. Admittedly, this music's ties to specific geographical locations, and the exclusive bonds that it fosters between migrants and non-migrants from the small towns and villages of north-eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina preclude it from being a method by which Bosnian nationhood might be constructed. It remains, however, a powerful and effective resource for its performers and listeners, one which allows them to position themselves within the multiple frames of Bosnian identities, and to maintain familial, neighbourly and community bonds by drawing on a common heritage which resists the political and historical forces striving for division. As such, I believe that *izvorna muzika* remains a compelling advocate for the intricate mosaic of Bosnian culture, and one that speaks eloquently for its people.

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