

United in *Sevdalinka*?

Affective Aspirations for the Yugoslav Space

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Introduction

Despite the considerable body of literature on the political process of “making and breaking” Yugoslavia (see Wachtel 1998; Allcock 2000; Jezernik 2018; Erdei et al. 2019), little consideration is given to the affective encounters in the construction and de-construction of future (political) scenarios in the Yugoslav space. Therefore, this article¹ examines the role of music in the process of “collective becoming” and the imaginations of political communities and futures in two periods of intensive social transformation in Southeastern Europe, namely, in the first decades of the Yugoslav post-imperial existence, during the South-Slavic unification at the beginning of the 20th century and in the aftermath of the Yugoslav dissolution in the 1990s. By investigating the affective potential of a specific musical genre, *sevdalinka*, which in different ways managed to organize “conventions about what might be hoped for, explicitly or secretly” (Duschinsky and Wilson 2015, 179), I seek to show how the sound affect related to this specific genre unfolds in spatiotemporality. I will trace the specific tensions evident in the affective working of *sevdalinka* in the Yugoslav space during the “historical ruptures.” I engage with affect as both a cultural value that structures communities politically and as an experience—an intensity that can activate memory and hope as a resource for re-imagining political life and alternative futures. I place particular emphasis on affect as a boundary-making

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tool that introduces specific types of temporal, sometimes even enduring, hierarchies in the (post-)Yugoslav space.

Sevdalinka is a traditional music genre that gradually developed during the Ottoman era in parts of the Balkan Peninsula (see Karača Beljak 2005; Hajdarpašić 2008; Pennanen 2010; Samson 2013; Toska 2015; Imamović 2016). Often characterized by the Turkish-derived vocabulary that usually praises the melancholy of love, loss, and sorrow, the *sevdah*, or yearning for love, after which the genre is named, has several meanings, including love, passion, melancholy, intense longing, and black bile. While these feelings dominate, the songs are also associated with other emotional states, namely *ćejf* and *merak*, which stand for good mood, enjoyment, and pleasure.² As “a form of aesthetic expectation with porous boundaries allowing complex audience identifications” (Berlant 2008a, 4), this genre has been “stretched” and constantly redefined since its appearance in the Ottoman Balkans (see Samson 2013, 298).³ *Sevdalinka* retained almost impossible contradictions. While it is all about yearning and nostalgia, it actually “reaches backward and forward” (Jansen 2019). Thus, it has the potential to express not only longing, loss, and disappointment but also aspirations, ambitions, and (political) desires. As a genre of affective intensities, it has been an important battlefield for ideological conflicts and contradictory interpretations in recent decades, especially, but not exclusively, in war-torn Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With the genre’s relative success on the international world music scene and a complex heritagization process that includes efforts to declare the *sevdalinka*

2 So, while *sevdalinka* songs are not “unambiguously melancholic” (Pennanen 2010, 79), they are nevertheless still associated with longing, unattainability, yearning, but also pleasurable melancholy.

3 It must be noted that there are different definitions and understandings of the genre, and the use of the term *sevdalinka* is nowadays much more permissive. For more on the use and transformation of the genre from intimate song accompanied by *saz* (long-neck lute played in the areas of former Ottoman Empire, popular also among people in Bosnia and Herzegovina) to a sound associated with an accordion-based ensemble and beyond, see Samson 2013.

intangible cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina,⁴ political projects in the post-Yugoslav space have often reflected various readings of the genre. Through diverse actors and especially after the bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia, it was variously proclaimed as Bosniak (i.e., ethnonational), Bosnian-Herzegovinian (i.e., national), and regional heritage (i.e., a common heritage of the larger Balkan region) (see Kozorog and Bartulović 2016, 169–170). This perception was especially cultivated from the 19th century onwards when *sevdalinka* was slowly redefined as a distinct South Slavic genre and as a hybrid product of entanglements of deep Slavic sentimentality or melancholy and oriental erotic charge (Hajdarpašić 2008, 726; Kadragić 1933, 6). It was already evident in the 1930s that *sevdalinka* merged and harbored various influences (Turkish, Slavic, Arabic, Persian, Sephardic). Its hybrid nature was even more convenient for appropriation in different political registers.

Sevdalinka's affective capacity already served some Yugoslav thinkers at the beginning of the 20th century when it proved to be an essential part of the political discourse of Yugoslavism. The substantial first part of this article is devoted to a review of the work on *sevdalinka* by Vladimir Dvorniković, who discussed the genre's affective potential as early as the 1920s. While Dvorniković promoted *sevdalinka*'s affect as a cultural value, he was able to contribute to the distinct but enduring "affective cartography" in which *sevdalinka* functioned as a marker of soulfulness and a metaphor for Yugoslav (internally fragmented) identity, which—nonetheless—contains the promise of a somehow turbulent, yet shared, common Yugoslav future. Despite the tragic end of the political dream of Dvorniković and many other Yugoslavs, I argue that the *sevdalinka*-related affect retained the ability to point to alternative futures even in a completely different temporal context, namely during the painful dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Therefore, the second part of the article follows the practices of listening to *sevdalinka* songs and offers an ethnographic account

4 In 2017, Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted a nomination for *sevdalinka* to be inscribed in UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage. The outcome of the nomination is still pending.

of the young audience's musical experiences in post-Yugoslav Slovenia in the 1990s. It focuses on the transformation of listening experiences, on "affective atmospheres" (Brennan 2004), and traces the connections created by the "pleasurable melancholy" of *sevdalinka* in the aftermath of socialist Yugoslavia. It points to affect as an intense experience that connects former Yugoslav brothers and sisters beyond imposed national borders of the newly founded states of former Yugoslavia. It also shows how this affect is generated from existing social and historically anchored meanings. This part of the article—which builds upon interviews conducted with fans of one of the most famous refugee musical groups in Slovenia, known as Dertum⁵—investigates how intimacy (see Berlant 1998) operates in the context of musical innovation in independent Slovenia. It also shows that the power of *sevdalinka* in Slovenia is embedded in the atmosphere of uncertainties of Slovenian independence, as well as in the personal crises of youth that generated sentimental worlds and, in many ways, enabled "musical bonding" (Guilbault 2017). This specific kind of attachment emerging through enjoyment in music and sentimentality (see Stokes 2010) in many respects reflected the need to understand, or at least in some way experience, the Yugoslav legacy after the country's bloody collapse as part of the process of navigating the future—something that at least part of the Slovenian public considered impossible without the (former) Yugoslav (Br)Others.

Affective Cartography of the Yugoslav Periphery: Dvorniković's *Sevdalinka* and Visions of an Anti-imperialist Future

Several scholarly works exposed the fact that the inhabitants of the Yugoslav space at the beginning of the 20th century imagined their political unity along

5 Although part of the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted between 2014 and 2016 in cooperation with Miha Kozorog, most of the ethnographic material included in this article is the result of individual ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2018 and 2020.

very different lines (see Wachtel 1998; Longinović 2000, 622; Jezernik 2018). Music was an important element in these projections (see Longinović 2000, 622–623). In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, born in 1918 from the ashes of World War I, *sevdalinka* appeared as a decisive building block of the new Yugoslavism in the writings of one of the most productive scholars and publicists of the interwar period, philosopher, psychologist, and short-term professor at the University of Zagreb, Vladimir Dvorniković (1888–1956) (cf. Osolnik 1995, 73). As Edin Hajdarpašić notes, he “found his intellectual calling in the burgeoning field of psychology and his political inspiration in the Yugoslav movement that sought to unite all South Slavs in one state” (2008, 726). Dvorniković was born in Croatia, in a small town near the Slovenian border (Severin na Kupi, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), studied in Vienna (where, according to some sources, he even attended Freud’s lectures), and worked in various corners of Yugoslavia. During World War I, Dvorniković was deported to Bihać in Bosnia and Herzegovina because of his pro-Yugoslav orientation. However, he was not a stranger to Bosnia, as he had lived in Sarajevo as a child. In interwar Yugoslavia, his career was often interrupted, and he was regularly forced to move between the cities of the emerging state. After teaching at Bosnian grammar schools (Sarajevo, Bihać), he almost reached the position of full professor of philosophy at the University of Zagreb. But because of his political advocacy of “integral Yugoslavism,” promoted by the Serbian royal dynasty, Dvorniković was forced into retirement in 1926, after which he moved to Belgrade and continued his work mostly without institutional support. Furthermore, due to his political stance, he was considered unworthy of public and scholarly attention (see Osolnik 1995; Longinović 2000).⁶

6 As Osolnik claims, there is only one comprehensive scholarly study of Dvorniković’s work, a book by Croatian philosopher Branko Despot, entitled *Filozofiranje Vladimira Dvornikovića* (The Philosophizing of Vladimir Dvorniković, 1975). Indifference toward his work was obvious, for example, Osolnik discovered that, in 50 years, Dvorniković’s most known tome *Karakterologija Jugoslovena* (The Characterology of the Yugoslavs) was never borrowed from one of the main Slovenian libraries. Hence he had to “cut many pages in order to read it” (1995, 74).

Thus, until nowadays, he has remained a relatively unknown figure in the highly nationalized context of the independent states of former Yugoslavia. The rare scholars who have noticed his contribution are often highly critical of his ambitious work. In general, they problematize Dvorniković's racism⁷ and specific version of Yugoslavism (see Wachtel 1998; Longinović 2000) and claim that Dvorniković was unoriginal.⁸ Without denying some of the problematic aspects of his writings, my aim here is to foreground the value and importance of Dvorniković's work for the "theory of affect" (see Ahmed 2004; Clough and Halley 2007; Mazzarella 2009; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Massumi 2015). I also aim to re-evaluate the narrow interpretations of his attitudes toward *sevdalinka*, which are often reduced to an expression of "collective suffering" and self-victimization of Yugoslavs (see Longinović 2000). Most of all, it is important to highlight how the "peculiar historical fusion" of Ottoman and Slavic influences reflected in *sevdalinka* enabled Dvorniković to "recast the 'native and foreigner dichotomy'" on the Yugoslav territory (see Hajdarpašić 2008, 727), narrow the gap between Muslims and other nations, and reconcile the past with the Yugoslav future.

In addition to publishing in 1939 one of the most elaborated works on the "ethnopsychology" of the newly founded nation, Dvorniković became one of the most prominent writers on *sevdalinka* between the two world wars. Comprising more than a thousand pages and an impressive bibliography that reflected

7 It should be noted that Dvorniković's concept of race is complex and refers to the cultural rather than racial unity of Yugoslavs. According to Longinović, his Yugoslavism was based on the concept of race "as a common historical destiny" (2000, 625). Although inspired to some extent by the intellectual racism of his time, he rejected racial hierarchies and relied on the concept of the Dinaric type in response to ideas about Northern racial supremacy and Nazism. For a discussion of Dvorniković's ideas about race, see Bartulović 2022.

8 For example, Andrew Baruch Wachtel argues, "Although his thousand-page tome pretends to originality, it is, in fact, nothing more than an amplification of Cvijić's theses. Still, it is valuable as a eulogy for an encyclopedia of interwar unitarist anthropological and cultural Yugoslav mythology" (1998, 93). In fact, this is an extremely inaccurate reading of Dvorniković's work that denies the critical stances of Dvorniković toward Jovan Cvijić. It is important to emphasize that there are some rare opposing evaluations of Dvorniković's contributions (see Osolnik 1995, 75).

the period in which it was written, his book *Karakterologija Jugoslovena* (The Characterology of the Yugoslavs) contained a long chapter on the “national melos,” which allegedly reflected the common “national psyche” and “collective temperament” (2000 (1939), 358) of Yugoslavs, mirroring “the whole symphony of the soul” (2000 (1939), 357).⁹ However, most of his views on *sevdalinka* were summarized in his short book, *Psiha jugoslovenske melanholije* (Psyche of Yugoslav Melancholy), published as early as 1925. Influenced by the then-popular theories of “racial types,” characterology, and German romantic philosophy, Dvorniković searched for the true national character in the musical expressions of the Yugoslavs. Similarly, as in countless European nation-building projects, he sensed, “A nation with this kind of song and such an emotionally deep soul [...] must also have some kind of cultural future” (1925, 63).

In his interpretations, the primary musical genre that can truly explain the main Yugoslav characterological trait—melancholy, has been produced in the Yugoslav-Ottoman convergence—and thus in the area under the oriental influence for centuries.¹⁰ Dvorniković writes that this specific Slavic musical genre—*sevdalinka*—represents the essence of “our unhappy melancholy and nostalgia” (1925, 5). A special kind of tormented soul is a prerequisite to genuinely experiencing this melancholic song, which “demands one to become sad to become happy; it demands crying to sing” (1925, 15). As Longinović (2000, 628) notes, Dvorniković describes *sevdalinka* as a collective “unburdening” of the Yugoslav soul. Yet, in these songs sung on the European periphery, the pain becomes pleasure; people’s intention to get rid of the pain leads to even more pain, which becomes pleasurable pain. Dvorniković writes that this song torments the listener with its caresses (1925, 16) and provokes the body to react. Despite the general investment in this music as a potential binding force of the

9 All the translations of non-English sources are mine.

10 As Risto Pekka Pennanen notes, Dvorniković’s ideas about *sevdalinka* as a melancholic genre could be interpreted as an appropriation of Orientalist discourses since “the melancholic airs of the East were a common notion in musical scholarship until the First World War, and in travel writing up to the Second World War and even later” (2010, 77).

Yugoslavs and the return to the pre-imperialist medieval South-Slavic Golden Age (see also Pennanen 2010, 83), in his opinion, this melancholic affect was still reserved for the people with an “inner ear.”

Although Dvorniković thus uses the genre as the central building block of Yugoslav identity and the common Yugoslav future, he succeeds, at least in his early works, in presenting it—unintentionally—as a boundary-making mechanism that keeps the imperial legacies alive. For he emphasizes the persistence of the boundary between the two territories controlled by two dominant empires—the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian—which influenced the emotional worlds, creativity, and mentality of their inhabitants. Already in the first paragraph, he notes that there is a character difference between “Eastern” and “Western” Slavs: “Towards the East, this Yugoslav [melancholic] sentiment becomes heavier and darker, while in the West and North it is thinner and paler” (1925, 5).¹¹ In this respect, his thinking resonates with the dominant center-periphery model of the geography of the “emotional excess” (see Karush 2012), which also enabled internal othering in South-Eastern Europe and beyond.¹²

The Balkans have been shaped as Europe’s internal Other (see Jezernik 2004; Petrović 2009; Todorova 2009) and regarded as an important in-between place, a space of uninhibited pleasures and affective subjects with the ability to express raw emotions and a particular kind of soulfulness (Matošević and Škokić 2014, 61; see also van de Port 1999). Often positive connotations are woven into this aspect of Balkanism, presenting it as a territory containing something vital that the West has lost (see Živković 2011, 66). In the prevailing scheme, the excess of sentimentality and melancholy was attributed to the “true

11 Dvorniković ascribes this to the process of the Orientalization of the already orientally inclined Slavs, which had become severely melancholic during the Byzantine and Ottoman reigns (1925, 40–41).

12 The concept of “nesting orientalism” has often been applied to understand internal Othering in the territory of former Yugoslavia (see Bakić-Hayden 1995). Despite some problematic aspects and, most of all, the absence of supporting ethnography that would justify a linear axis of Orientalizing one’s own neighbors, the concept has avoided almost any criticism. For a close analysis of the concept, see Baskar 2010.

core of the Balkans,” portrayed as a feeling-filled, though economically stagnant and irrational, part of the peripheral world. Therefore, like the European South (Gray 2013, 107), insiders and outsiders see the Balkans as a European “bank of spirit.” Accepting its own “soulfulness” is one of the numerous ways of responding to the Balkanistic stigma (Živković 2011, 67), which already burdened the area before Dvorniković’s era. Thus, unsurprisingly, he repeats these attitudes, juxtaposes them with his personal experiences, and enhances the existing affective cartographies. However, he does this with a specific goal, thus describing the “aesthetic of emotional excess” (see Karush 2012) as a particularly sweet curse. This curse provides essential fuel for the common Yugoslav, anti-imperial future. Interestingly and paradoxically, Dvorniković’s affective reactions to *sevdalinka* prompted him to choose a song that belonged to the legacy of the imperial Ottoman past.¹³

The particularities of the song required not only the “right ear”—a culturally-tuned capacity to listen and hear the music and be affected by the song—but also a so-called genre-normative listening situation. The fact is that the space in which one listens to music also conditions the genres and their reception (Stockfelt 2006). So he identified certain places that enabled so-called “adequate listening” of *sevdalinka*.¹⁴ Thus, he noted that *sevdalinka* demands and creates a specific kind of “affective atmosphere” (Brennan 2004) and has its place in a “sooty tavern” (*mehana*) and not in the chic salons that were introduced in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the imperial Austro-Hungarian rule (see also Talam and Paćuka 2018).¹⁵ Anti-imperialist attitudes were, therefore, mainly directed against the Austro-Hungarian reign, which promoted various musical genres

13 Dvorniković’s attitudes toward the Ottoman heritage and legacy were extremely ambivalent (see Hajdarpasić 2008), it seems that he reconsidered the importance of the Ottoman imperial legacy precisely because of his affective experiences and his new interpretation that pointed to similarities between South-Slavs and Ottomans.

14 Ola Stockfelt writes that “adequate listening” is always “in the broadest sense ideological” (2006, 92).

15 In 1878, Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia in keeping with the agreement of the Congress of Berlin.

and tastes. Different aesthetics testified, according to Dvorniković's ambitions, that the empire had no political future in the Balkans.¹⁶ Although the author embraced the idea that *sevđalinka* is a hybrid genre, he nevertheless argued that it is—at least in its “original and raw form”—not suitable for “export” (2000, 377–378). In many aspects, the particular limited self-balkanization evident in his approach to *sevđalinka* had contradictory effects; they also unintentionally enhanced the boundaries between the Yugoslav “soulful” Southeast and “soulless” Northwest.

Sevđalinka in the Yugoslav Northwest

In Dvorniković's persistent affective cartography, the sweet pleasure of pain was thus ascribed to the real heart of the Balkans (Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and southern Serbia). Hence, parts of the Yugoslav national body apparently did not have the (same) capacity to experience the genre and let the song adequately affect them. *Sevđalinka*, therefore, functioned as a mechanism for fostering affective bonding for a select part of Yugoslavs. Dvorniković did not “deny the existence of differences among the people inhabiting Yugoslavia.” Instead, he claimed that “these differences are contingent and temporary and that they mask a deeper and more profound racial unity” (Wachtel 1998, 93). In *The Characterology of the Yugoslavs*, he worked harder to connect Yugoslavs divided by former imperial borders. According to him, the affect produced by the song could be an answer to the burning Yugoslav problems. *Sevđalinka* had the potential to eventually seduce

16 Dvorniković writes that the Austrian government despised the sound of Bosnian music and considered it “Bosnian howling.” According to him, the rulers even forbade the performance of the songs and avoided places where music was played (2000, 378). In fact, there are some sources that confirm his claims, for example, Saks writes that some visitors argued that it is not possible to hear “lovable melodies” in Bosnia and that a particular technique of nasal singing is omnipresent, stating that “people would rather run away from this singing than search for it.” It seemed that this singing originated not only from the wrong part of the world but also from the parts of bodies that are not designed to produce pleasant sounds, as he writes, the songs “originate from neck, not chest” (Saks 1889, 51).

all peoples of Slavic background to “fall into it,” or fall into a common (political) dream, but also to reconcile imperial legacies with the Yugoslav future.¹⁷ Overwhelmed by excitement, Dvorniković testified with his own example:

When I walked through Sarajevo’s *čaršija*¹⁸ as a child, I often listened to the endlessly extended tones heard from afar, which resembled more the sound of howling wolves than singing—these are the same songs that are being sung nowadays, although well combed and decorated in salons and studios of Belgrade’s radio stations [...] Admittedly, as a grammar school student, I felt that these songs seemed a bit creepy, especially those from the real “sooty taverns” [*čadavih mehana*]. They gave me chills, and as a boy, I was disgusted when their doors suddenly opened, and a drunken porter stumbled outside, red faces with burning eyes peeping from the smoky atmosphere [...] These people seemed wild, dreadful, mad ... But after becoming an adult, my relationship with this type of song and folk music in general changed fundamentally. After a long “incubation,” “infection” broke out. Although my ancestors were not Bosnian, *bacillus bosnensis* entered my blood. From the bottom of my soul, somewhere from its most atavistic depths, a string emerged that vibrated upon hearing the most primitive song of the porters. I suddenly discovered that this is not “howling” or wailing but that this mode of singing hides very profound and complicated melodic lines [...] I felt that these were not “primitive” but, in fact, extremely “heavy songs” [...] In my twenties, I discovered two musical personalities inside me: the first one, schooled in western singing lessons, concerts, and operas, and the second one, which not only listened to the voices from a sooty tavern but trembled when faced with the opening tones of the *sevdalije* [*sevdalinka* performers] [...] Two worlds collided inside me: the Slavic East and the European West [...] and I know that a

17 In the big part of former Yugoslavia there is an expression *pasti u sevdah* (“fall into *sevdah*”), which means that the subject is pulled into a specific, often melancholic emotional state.

18 Ottoman-era market district.

lot of our people experienced the same [...] The Bosnian song sobbed and moaned from the depth, flowed through the veins and nerves, and brought blood into the heart. It also had something of a physiological elementality in it. (2000 (1939), 376–377)

By articulating a subjective experience as a sincere confession, Dvorniković testified to the power of *sevdalinka*. The change in his listening abilities, in which *sevdalinka* underwent a radical transformation from a non-human sound to a deeply emotionally-charged song, also testified to his rejection of his “enlightened” educated musical tastes, which he began to see as an imposed imperial legacy of the “civilized West.” But not everyone was blessed with this melancholic “contagion” as he concluded, many people could not be affected by the song (at least not in the same way), despite their prolonged exposure to the sound of the common Yugoslav future, as he noted with disappointment:¹⁹

There are Yugoslavs, especially from the northwestern parts, who simply cannot stand this song. It drives them into an unpleasant, depressive state of mind, or they find it—boring. They do not know “what to do with it,” and they run away from it in horror [...] In Bosnia, there were many new officials, not only Austrians, but also our people, who lived in Bosnia for thirty years, but because they came too late (after a certain age), they could not let themselves be “infected” by the song. (Dvorniković 2000, 378)

19 Longinović writes that *sevdalinka* for Dvorniković was mostly connected with manhood (2000, 625), which might be an echo of the scholarly legacy of the former anthropological interpretation of *sevdalinka* as a prime stage for the expression of the intensity of the “Yugoslav variant of machismo” (Simić 1969). However, I argue that Dvorniković’s affective description of the genre offers a more complex picture and testifies to the profound impact of *sevdalinka*. The genre seduced him to feel an attachment to different places in Yugoslavia and, through affective power, raised questions about self-identification and the Yugoslav future. The change in his musical taste also made a promise for the new state.

In particular, he regretted that some of the officials of the Austro-Hungarian empire serving in Bosnia, who originated from Slovenian Styria, despised *sevdalinka* in the same way as the Austrians (Dvorniković 2000, 378).²⁰ According to him, this was a reflection of different political aspirations and an expression of nostalgia for imperial rule.²¹

After World War II and the establishment of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, Dvorniković's ideas of Yugoslavism built up through musical sentimentalism deemed unsuitable for the new ideology. His "'integralist' theory was seen as unitarian and reactionary" (Longinović 2000, 632). Moreover, his attitude toward the Ottoman legacy, which was perceived as regressive, conservative, and non-modern in the new atheist state that extolled socialist modernization, did not fit with the socialist aspirations for the Yugoslav future.

Therefore, the theories of the South Slavic melancholy were replaced by "socialist narratives stressing class struggle, industrial progress, and the 'brotherhood and unity' of Yugoslav peoples" (Hajdarpašić 2008, 727). In the new ideological imagination of brotherhood and unity amongst different Yugoslav nations and nationalities, it became commonplace to divide the Yugoslavs' national traditions and to present Yugoslavia as a state blessed with multiculturalism and enriching cultural traditions.²² *Sevdalinka* has been associated mainly with Bosnia and Herzegovina and especially—but not exclusively—with Bosnian Muslims. In this process of the ethnicization of music,

20 The dominant cluster of images of Slovenians in the former Yugoslav space often depicts Slovenians as a nation closer to Germans than other Yugoslavs. Because of their geographical vicinity to the West, Slovenians were considered more economically successful, rational, but also "heartless." Rigidity was also ascribed to Slovenian music and art. This othering of the more economically successful nations is often explained as a reaction to or compensation for feelings of inferiority (see Živković 2011, 60).

21 Austronostalgia—was relatively subtle in the first years after the dissolution of the empire, but it became more pronounced in the late 1990s in the context of uncertainties of the period of Yugoslav wars and the economic and political unrest (see Bartulović 2018; Baskar 2007; Rexhepi 2018).

22 At the same time, fears that folk songs could act as separatist instruments increased political control over folkloric performances, which were financially supported with the aim of promoting multiculturalism, brotherhood and unity, and Yugoslav folklore (Longinović 2000, 633; see also Hofman 2012).

the idea that some people just do not have the “right” ear or soul to perform or hear the true essence of *sevdalinka* and to be seduced by it became even more evident. As Marko Živković remarks, the ideas about the gradation of sadness perceived as “soulfulness” persisted and became even louder than in the days of Dvorniković. We can even observe a kind of “ethnicization” of affect: “Slovenes had merry polkas, Macedonians painfully sad, slow, slow laments. As folk sociology had it, the merrier the music—the ‘shallower’ the soul [...]” (Živković 2011, 57). Both the audience and the performers on the northwest-southeast diagonal claimed that as a specific genre, *sevdalinka* not only demands training, which, with the rise of the music industry and “professionalization” of music, was available and necessary during the Yugoslav socialist era but, above all—as singer Emina Zečaj explained in one of her interviews with ethnomusicologist Amra Toska, who shared this with me—*honest heart, sincerity, and soulfulness* (2017, 10 April). So a real *sevdalinka* performer can only be a person with real or even tragic life experience²³ who can transform their feelings and pass them on to the audience (see also Samson 2013, 300). The genre was described as a pure “expression of the soul,” which was in many ways territorialized, essentially unlearnable and, therefore, exclusive. Sentimentalism, embedded in the musical genre, thus guaranteed public intimacy—again only—just to a limited cross-section of Yugoslavs. According to Simić, “to fall into *sevdah*, an ecstatic trance-like state with erotic overtones,” which he simply read as a “display of machismo,” was “a prime example of the depth and intensity of the Bosnian temperament” (1969, 93). He also noted that—at least at the time of his fieldwork in Yugoslavia—it was a widespread phenomenon in Montenegro and Serbia, possibly also in Macedonia, and “to a lesser degree in Croatia” (Simić 1969, 92).²⁴ Slovenia was excluded from this circle of *sevdah* ecstasy and the essentialization

23 These ideas are, of course, not specific. The same focus on life experiences, multiple forms of suffering, and endured hardship are crucial for the successful and affective performances of *tango* (see Asaba 2019), *fado* (Gray 2013), *Turkish pop* (Stokes 2010), etc.

24 It is important to note that Simić’s (1969) definitions of *sevdalinka* are very open and flexible.

of the true Yugoslav soul. Despite numerous attempts to reintroduce various traditional musical genres throughout the Yugoslav region (also through different interpretations and appropriations),²⁵ *sevdalinka* did not experience the same popularity throughout the Yugoslav territory. It especially remained popular in the republics once part of the Ottoman Empire. Although the genre was systematically cultivated and adapted to the new taste in parts of socialist Yugoslavia from the 1950s onwards (see Kozorog and Bartulović 2016), with some notable exceptions, its fame and appeal did not spread with the same intensity in the northwestern part of the country (see Bartulović 2016; Ceribašić et al. 2019).²⁶

The idea that Slovenians are more resistant to the call of “Bosnian melancholy” with a distinctly oriental feel was reflected in the relative unpopularity in Slovenia of Yugoslav *sevdalinka* stars. They performed in the Slovenian territory only sporadically and mostly for members of the Yugoslav National Army or for large communities of workers from the other republics of the common state who found (temporary) homes in the Yugoslav northwest. The rare news reports about the concerts of the *sevdalinka* celebrities on Slovenian territory are boring descriptions without any traces of affective reactions to the music.

In our earlier work (Bartulović and Kozorog 2019, 163), we have already pointed out that the musical worlds of the former Yugoslavs, coming from different republics, regions, and social backgrounds, were very different—especially as far as traditional music was concerned. We have also shown that Slovenians often perceived Bosnian *sevdalinka* as odd and “not merely as belonging

25 A special role was played here by the cultural and artistic associations (*kulturno umjetničko društvo, KUD*), which operated throughout Yugoslavia with the intention of promoting brotherhood and unity through song and dance.

26 Naila Ceribašić et al. (2019) give a detailed overview of the attitude toward *sevdalinka* in Croatia. Although *sevdalinka* was much more popular in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the authors testify that the genre was also an important part of the Croatian musical culture and cultural imaginary. Croatia had also played a significant role in the distribution of *sevdalinka* through the music record industry, which began already in the first decade of the 20th century and culminated with the Zagreb-based record label Jugoton.

to a different culture, but to the culture of the semi-rural Others, who came to Slovenia as economic migrants during the successful Yugoslav years” (see also Bartulović 2021). Therefore, both *sevdalinka* and the so-called newly-composed folk music were considered the music of working-class migrants. Unsurprisingly, in Slovenia, they were primarily found in isolated diasporic communities, far from the general public (see Bartulović and Kozorog 2019). The affectivity of traditional and folk music, combined with its cultural connotations, produced more distance between Yugoslav brothers than feelings of Yugoslav commonality. As they remembered, for the “unaccustomed ear,” the music provoked “suffering,” but not pleasurable suffering. The enjoyment of *sevdalinka*, of sentimentalism and the inexplicable ecstasy, seemed exotic; but above all, the melancholic song indicated that we, as Yugoslavs, “were so different.” As one of the fans of the band that I address in the following section admitted in an interview, he believed that he would never be able to listen to these songs, let alone enjoy them: *At that time, I could not imagine that I would ever fall as much as my neighbors [from former Yugoslavia]. For me at that time, it was a strange sound, [...] I am not sure what happened to me in the 1990s, but something obviously did* (J. M., 2019, July 11).²⁷ It seems that the “*sevdah* infection” described by Dvorniković slowly started to spread to the northwestern parts of the soon-to-be former Yugoslavia. The country’s dissolution and the wars provoked a rupture that allowed feelings of self-estrangement or defamiliarization and made the new *sevdalinka* audience “capable of a new kind of recognition, interest, and analysis” (Flatley 2008, 80).

27 A similar attitude could be observed in Serbia in the 1990s when people suddenly admitted that they no longer despise turbo-folk and folk as much as in the decades before (Tanja Petrović, 2020, June 3).

The Era of Emotional Excess in Slovenia: Building an Affective Community in the Aftermath of Yugoslavia's Dissolution

The change in attitudes towards *sevdalinka* in the northwestern parts of Yugoslavia was already noticeable in the late 1970s when the political atmosphere in the country revealed many internal conflicts, different nationally driven political aspirations, and various imagined visions of the Yugoslav future. The emergence of nationalism demonstrated that brotherhood and unity had an uncertain perspective. However, the tense political atmosphere, marked by fear and skepticism, also encouraged the birth of the Balkan Sevdah Band, later Azra, in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. The band successfully merged rock and traditional music from the southeastern parts of the common state and was responsible for bringing *sevdalinka* closer to the Yugoslav rock audience (see also Živković 2011). However, the actual popularization of *sevdalinka* in Slovenia coincided with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the new sentimentality inscribed into those painful years. The sounds of the genre of melancholia affected a segment of the Slovenian public only in the early 1990s when around 30,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina found temporary protection from the raging war in Slovenia. In this painful era, *sevdalinka* slowly transformed its status for Slovenian listeners, mainly with the help of refugee bands. I argue that this process of genre transformation and the feelings attached to it cannot be understood without acknowledging the context of the Yugoslav dissolution. It seems that “ugly feelings” (Ngai 2005) enabled *sevdalinka* to truly flourish amongst Slovenia's youth.

As we have argued elsewhere (Bartulović and Kozorog 2019), musical dialogues between refugee music groups and the audience were a form of home-making both for refugees who were driven from their homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and for many Slovenians who had vivid memories of the Yugoslav community and tried to maintain some form of continuity during the turbulent years. As I mentioned earlier, I am focusing here specifically on the younger audience, who were in their late teens in the first half of the 1990s, and vaguely remembered Yugoslavia as a pleasant background for their childhood

memories.²⁸ Older fans of the refugee music group Dertum²⁹ were often able to rationalize their attachments to *sevdalinka* and combine the genre with their personal experiences of life in Yugoslavia. In contrast, among the younger generations, “musical bonding” (see Guilbault 2017) became a crucial part of their identity in formation, which developed precisely through enjoyment, shared vulnerability, and affective sociality.

Since concerts and public performances are spaces that invite people to emotionally engage and participate, I would like to turn my attention to the event that most clearly testifies to different investments into the affective potential of *sevdalinka* in Slovenia. When they talked about their experience of listening to *sevdalinka* at Dertum’s concerts, most fans especially remembered the refugee group’s first public performance, often referred to as the “unforgettable” or “legendary concert,” at the alternative youth cultural center KUD France Prešeren in Ljubljana in 1995.³⁰ The recordings were later published on a CD, which is still regularly played in a few cafés in Ljubljana and Sarajevo. Fans who attended the concert often recollected the event with tears in their eyes, while those who could not attend described their absence as one of “the greatest regrets” in their lives.³¹ Most of them preferred to listen to the band’s first

28 It is usually argued that the younger generations and their sentimentalism toward Yugoslavia or the past is just a fad. Many have already questioned the relevance of this distinction “between lived and non-lived experience of the Yugoslav past” for the affectivity of music to bring new communities into being and navigate future aspirations (Hofman 2015, 160).

29 The band was spontaneously formed in the room of a refugee center in Ljubljana and performed traditional songs from various Yugoslav regions with a special focus on *sevdalinka*. However, they successfully adapted traditional music to the genres of rock and jazz. With their unique approach to *sevdalinka* they gradually attained cult status in the Slovenian “underground” scene and attracted a number of fans who, like the band members, were in their teens in the 1990s.

30 Although some of the fans testified that their concerts were always special, in this segment, I am focusing on the experiences of this particular concert, which proved to be extremely affective, not only because it was the first but also because of the recordings that enabled the further “transmission of the affect” (Brennan 2004).

31 Of course, the same musical moments can often point to different feelings and sensations among the listeners (see Gray 2013), but here I am particularly interested in the shared memories and the affective attunement.

CD rather than their second, musically advanced and more polished album, recorded in 1998. Live recordings, they claim, were more affective in evoking memories of an era and part of their youth and, therefore, clearly testify to an atmosphere that could not be reproduced. For many, there was something unique about that moment when intimate feelings found a kind of resonance in the emotional worlds of others. This event, similar to other concerts, not only allowed but actively encouraged sentimentalism after the bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia. As a fan of the band argued, the intense feelings that the music and emerging community provoked at this special moment were ambivalent and difficult to articulate. The affects were rationalized and translated into words more than two decades after the legendary concert. He was confused in many ways about the power of his ambivalent feelings (see Ngai 2005, 14) toward the Yugoslav space. In fact, he was certain that the separation between positive and negative affects did not do justice to his emotional reactions (see Cvetkovich 2012, 6). Precisely the oscillation between pleasure and pain, between happiness and sadness, brought him closer to the others and enabled an affective attunement:

I felt a euphoria caused by the crowd—with the shouting of friends, with the support for the band, because we knew all the band members. And also, a kind of excitement [...] I felt a feeling of a powerful connection, euphoria, but also a kind of melancholy, which came more from the music itself than from the lyrics. I could have laughed. I could have cried. I could have screamed. I felt physically like embracing the whole wide world. (P. P., 2019, July 8)

As Denise Gill notes, “in melancholy—and in loss, suffering, pain, separation, joy, and ecstasy—our bodily boundaries are made porous and opened to others,” for “tears are an invitation to intimacy” (2017, 148). Similar euphoric outbursts of mixed emotions dominate the recordings. Thus, the waves of clapping, gasping, and screaming with excitement and ecstasy are audible on the live album. Yet, the accompanying singing of the audience can hardly be heard—unsurprisingly, since most people at the concert were

hearing the songs for the first time and even struggled to understand the lyrics. The majority of the young audience came to the concert because they were friends with some of the band members and wanted to support them in their first big stage performance, *it felt important and seemed right to be there* (P. P., 2019, July 8). Most had no significant or strong connection to the former Yugoslav territory.³² As one of the band's singers recalls, they were mostly *real Slovenians, more supporters than fans, who followed us wherever we played* (M. Dž., 2014, February 2). Their younger audience also lacked knowledge of Yugoslav musical traditions in many ways. However, most were more familiar with pop-rock groups from the other Yugoslav republics, including the aforementioned *Azra*. Nevertheless, they were surprised by the “power” of *sevda-linka* and openly admitted that listening to Dertum was, in many ways, an affective learning experience, part of the vital process of “broadening musical horizons.” In fans’ opinions, the band managed to present the musical tradition of the former Yugoslav area in a way that, as one fan recalls, *touched you in the right place* (J. M., 2019, July 11).³³

Moreover, sociality provided a decisive motivation to discover the “lost” multicultural traditions of their former homeland. Collective listening was privileged and more affective. Dertum’s music offered the perfect setting for musical bonding that transcended national and cultural boundaries, which at the time were aggressively enforced by the discourse of nationalism and separation. The enjoyment, filled with inexplicable sadness, enabled self-reflection. As one interlocutor claimed: *Through these repetitions, you hear the music many times, and you become aware that this is part of your cultural pool* (P. P., 2019, July 8). The affective intensities of the performance of *sevda-linka* and other traditional songs from the former Yugoslav territories were not fully colonized by

32 Of course, there were some exceptions. For example, part of the audience consisted of Bosnian refugees and people whose parents originated from the former Yugoslav territory.

33 The specific reinterpretations of traditional genres were decisive for the euphoria that many felt at their concerts, as *this could be another boring traditional song, but it was not* (P. P., 2019, July 8). The music was transformed to suit the taste of the young Yugoslav rock generation.

the official discourse at the time. And while many fans claimed that they were quite apolitical at the time, later, it was precisely the experience of particular affective atmospheres that gained political significance (see also Hofman 2015, 151). Fans of Dertum began to reflect official interpretations of the (Yugoslav) past through their experiences of affective sociality:

We had this awareness that we as a nation [...] were doing something that is perhaps not best for us because in the past [in Yugoslavia], there was much more connection between different cultures, and this is something much closer to younger people than sealing themselves off from others. At least in my circle of friends, this was the case. My intimate feeling was that we had been manipulated with simple nonsense [...] When I listened to this argument, I did not know any regions and even fewer people. But I was aware that Yugoslavia was very diverse geographically and culturally and that we are throwing that away because of some really far-fetched arguments. It may be that our fascination for music was shaped by our conviction that we do not want to part from all these really good things, and it was good that we experienced them, at least in music and in friendships. (P. P., 2019, July 8)

To describe the promising echoes of the past as a possibility for future openness towards Others does not necessarily mean that these attitudes can be described as a clear expression of Yugonostalgia. As Ana Hofman (2015) notes, this interpretative framework blurs and simplifies many aspects of the post-Yugoslav musical world. My interlocutors never used the concept to describe their own feelings and experiences. Although they did not claim any first-hand or “real” knowledge about life in Yugoslavia and demanded a return to the Yugoslav past, the affectivity of the music generated a discourse of curiosity that challenged the official narratives of the nation-state and raised countless questions. The majority admitted that they were too young to know what Yugoslavia was and how it functioned. Importantly, their thoughts about Yugoslavia’s past were accompanied by pervasive doubts. However, these uncertainties and lack of knowledge made it easier for *sevdalinka* to seduce them. Therefore, “public

intimacy” in this case did not emerge from rational decisions or political goals. Instead, it emerged “out of the affective reaction” (see Guilbault 2017, 101) to the music, the performers, the affective atmosphere, the historical moment, and especially from unexpected musical attunement, which not only created new social connections but also provoked a renewed confrontation with the official political discourses and imposed versions of the Slovenian future. As in other post-Yugoslav contexts, it became clear that “non-reflexive ‘mere enjoyment’ in music [...] can be very much a politically engaged pleasurable experience of sociality, which goes beyond prescribed ideological patterns and politics of belonging” (Hofman 2015, 156).

Conclusion

Dertum began to play in exile due to the specific precarious living conditions. Still, in many respects, their music awakened the need to reconnect with the “lost” Yugoslav multicultural connections in Slovenia, which, as already mentioned, the young audience did not have the opportunity to experience for themselves. Motivated by an inexplicable feeling of loss, listening to Dertum was seen as the last chance to be part of a parting world that praised brotherhood and unity. While the band’s fans usually considered themselves apolitical, it was apparent that mixed feelings enabled them to gain oppositional agency, express their vulnerability through “musical bonding,” and reassess the official narratives of the past, present, and future of the Slovenian nation-state. Moreover, participation in an “affective community” restored a sense of stability. As one interlocutor remarked:

The music made you happy [...] it brought back something you had lost at that very moment. Without it, we would have been robbed much more [...] This conceptual understanding of sevdah came much later ... the awareness that this is a form of nostalgia, melancholy, yearning, sadness. At that time, this was more a form of unification and a process of exploring the cultural world, a

world connected to the world that was falling apart. It acted as a kind of dock to which one could tie oneself so as not to lose yourself and something valuable that floated away. (P. P., 2019, July 8)

Although strange and at first even funny to some people, *sevdalinka* created an “affective scene of identification amongst strangers” (Berlant 2008a, vi). The power of Dertum’s performances was decisive in the process of shaping the listeners’ social imaginaries about the anticipated future. Sociality and sentimental worlds emerging through enjoyment in music managed to convey a sense of togetherness, intimacy, and hope, despite or perhaps because of the calls for fragmentation, exclusion, and separation that dominated newly independent Slovenia. Lauren Berlant sees public intimacy as aspirational; it is “an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way” (1998, 281). In many ways, it is a “promise of happiness” nourished by particular forms of relationships. The intimacy thus built worlds, and Dertum’s *sevdalinka* guaranteed intimate feelings of happiness in sadness but also promised a kind of eternity of something that was evidently disappearing forever. *Bacillus bosnensis*, diagnosed by Dvorniković already at the beginning of the 20th century, inhabited the body of Slovenian youth and shaped them as individuals and as political beings. As one interlocutor confessed, the genre reflected an affective economy of care: *Through music, I began to care about the world. It was not only about me; it was about ... refugees, who also became my friends, my other friends, all of us* (J. M., 2019, July 11).

Jonathan Flatley claims that melancholy can function “as the very mechanism through which one may be interested in the world” (2008, 1), and it can be an affective political resource (Cvetkovich 2012, 109). Embracing sentimentalism can be a way back to contact with lost spatiotemporalities. It can also lead people to rethink their relationship with the world around them, as in the case of *sevdalinka* in Slovenia. Renewed investment in *sevdalinka* produced pleasurable melancholy, which enabled Slovenian youth to take care of their future in a more pleasant way. But, as Berlant argues, this is always possible

only by the “body’s active presence to the intensities of the present” (2008b, 845–846) in the critical historical moment when the past and the promoted vision of the future were brought into severe tensions. Similar tensions characterized this region during the founding of the first Yugoslav state, and, as the writings of Dvorniković confirm, they were also addressed by the affective power of music.

Nonetheless, these two analyzed cases also point to differences in community building through affect, which additionally brings to the fore some tensions that become apparent in the theorization of affect. Therefore, the article also points to the need to be especially tentative about the affective components of auditory experiences in specific spatiotemporal contexts. It highlights the functioning and understanding of affect in two different, though not mutually exclusive, ways: as a “cultural value” that structures communities politically and as an intensity. Although Dvorniković’s political goals were clear from the beginning of the 20th century, his understanding of affect as a cultural value contributed to the structuring of the boundaries and power relations, also making some nations “more” Yugoslav than others. He also confirmed that the affect associated with *sevdalinka* was outside his will or that of other political subjects, as made clear by his own intense experiences. It seems that even calculated imaginings of the future are sutured with affect as an intensity.

On the other hand, the politicization of *sevdalinka* amongst Dertum’s audience can be understood as an unintended “side effect” of affective sociality. Still, we can also observe that articulating the affective capacity of the genre made it into a “cultural value.” *Sevdalinka* and “soulful listening” created the intimate musical language that drew a boundary between those who “understand” and those who “do not understand”—not only the music and the emotions associated with the melancholy but also the importance of preserving commonality or multiculturalism even after the country’s dissolution. With this shift, *sevdalinka* also contributed, at least partially, to rewriting existing affective cartographies in the post-Yugoslav space. Nevertheless, both cases testify to *sevdalinka*’s affective power to generate personal and societal transformation,

which led to complex processes of “collective becoming” and created an intimacy that opened horizons of possibilities. For many, *sevdalinka* was a hopeful genre. For a few, it was a revolutionary song. *Sevdalinka*’s “boundless intensity” (Dvorniković 2000 (1939)) thus not only explains how people reacted to social changes and coped with the fears of “in-betweenness” on the European periphery but also encapsulates the genre’s manifold entanglements with turbulent historical moments.

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