

The Blue (White and Red) Orchestra: a soundtrack for the country that never was

Dalibor Mišina*

Department of Sociology, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON, Canada

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The aim of the paper is to go beyond the commonly accepted view of Sarajevo's *Plavi orkestar* (The Blue Orchestra) as the 1980s "teen pop-rock sensation" and illuminate the less conspicuous, but nevertheless crucial, political dimension of the band's music and visual aesthetics. This will be done by discussing several "pieces of the puzzle" essential to understanding the background to and motivations behind *Plavi orkestar*'s political engagement in the second half of the 1980s: (1) the "Sarajevo factor;" (2) the Sarajevo Pop-rock School and the *New Primitives* "poetics of the local;" (3) the generational Yugoslavism; (4) the *New Partisans* "poetics of the patriotic;" and (5) the post-*New Partisans* "hippie ethos." The concluding section of the paper will reflect on *Plavi orkestar*'s resurgence in 1998 and explore the question of the band's continuing resonance within the post-Yugoslav and post-socialist contexts. An argument underlying the discussion of all of these elements is that *Plavi orkestar*'s Yugoslavism of the 1980s is best understood as a soundtrack for the country that never was (i.e. a popular-cultural expression of what, from the viewpoint of a particular generational cohort and its location in the "Yugoslav socialist universe," the community they thought of as their own ought to have been but never really was), and that the current value of this soundtrack lies in offering not only a particular window into the pre-post-socialist past but also in being a symbolic referent for a certain kind of retrospective utopia that gauges the realities of the post-socialist – that is, neo-liberal capitalist – present and, in so doing, figures as a "normative compass" for the life of dignified existence.

Keywords: *Plavi orkestar*; Yugoslavia; Sarajevo; socialism; Sarajevo Pop-rock School; *New Primitives*; *New Partisans*; revolutionary Yugoslavism

Introduction

In the popular-cultural memory of former Yugoslavia, Sarajevo's *Plavi orkestar* (The Blue Orchestra) is remembered as the pop-rock band responsible for the mid-1980s Yugoslav version of "Beatlemania." The band's meteoric rise to fame and popular-cultural prominence in 1985 was a "perfect storm" of youthfulness, good looks, and catchy love-themed songs that swept over an army of devoted fans who embraced *Plavi orkestar*'s music as an articulation and distillation of their teenage preoccupations with affections, infatuations, and inevitable – but somewhat uncomfortable – transitions into adulthood. Indeed, some of the most popular songs from the first two albums – "Suada," "Good

*Email: dmisina@lakeheadu.ca

Bye Teens,” “Bolje biti pijan nego star” (Better to be drunk than old), “Sava tiho teče” (The Sava flows quietly) – zeroed in on all these themes and quickly established themselves as veritable emotional diaries of a generation. A very particular kind of emotional-generational sentiment(ality) exuding *Plavi orkestar*’s music aesthetic fast became the bedrock of the band’s image as, essentially, a “high school ensemble” of “decent and polite young men every mother would wish for her daughter.” Some 30 years on, this aura of affability remains very much intact and continues to inform *Plavi orkestar*’s public perception, reception, and esteem.

The aim of the paper is to go beyond this commonly accepted view of *Plavi orkestar* and illuminate the less conspicuous, but nevertheless crucial, political dimension of the band’s music and visual aesthetics. In other words, it is to demonstrate that there is more to *Plavi orkestar* than meets the eye, as it were, and to make the case that the full appreciation of the band’s significance requires a corrective – or an addendum – to the popular-cultural memory of former Yugoslavia. This will be done by discussing several “pieces of the puzzle” essential to understanding the background to and motivations behind *Plavi orkestar*’s political engagement in the second half of the 1980s: (1) the “Sarajevo factor;” (2) the Sarajevo Pop-rock School and the *New Primitives* “poetics of the local;” (3) the generational Yugoslavism; (4) the *New Partisans* “poetics of the patriotic;” and (5) the post-*New Partisans* “hippie ethos.” The concluding section of the paper will reflect on *Plavi orkestar*’s resurgence in 1998 and explore the question of the band’s continuing resonance within the post-Yugoslav and post-socialist contexts. An argument underlying the discussion of all of these elements is that *Plavi orkestar*’s Yugoslavism of the 1980s is best understood as a soundtrack for the country that never was (i.e. a popular-cultural expression of what, from the viewpoint of a particular generational cohort and its location in the “Yugoslav socialist universe,” the community they thought of as their own ought to have been but never really was), and that the current value of this soundtrack lies in offering not only a particular window into the pre-post-socialist past but also in being a symbolic referent for a certain kind of “retrospective utopia” (Velikonja 2009) that gauges the realities of the post-socialist – that is, neo-liberal capitalist – present and, in so doing, figures as a “normative compass” for the life of dignified existence.

The unearthing of the political dimension of *Plavi orkestar*’s music and visual aesthetic is grounded in mapping out what Raymond Williams refers to as “structures of feeling” – that is, “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically different from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period” (1977, 131). In other words, it is based on the premise that *Plavi orkestar*’s popular-cultural output is a reflection of the unique structuring of the band members’ thoughts about and experiences of themselves, their generation and its relationship to society, and that getting a handle on the former requires coming to terms with the latter. Put simply, to appreciate the political side of *Plavi orkestar*, one has to understand the intellectual and artistic impulses of those in charge of the band’s creative output, which in turn requires an understanding of the uniquely relevant socio-cultural and socio-political moments and realities of the day that came to shape these impulses as particular kinds of “creative triggers.” In this sense, the charting of pertinent structures of feeling has an objective of providing “maps of intelligibility” that render the particular aspect of *Plavi orkestar*’s artistic output decipherable.

In piecing together the maps of intelligibility by way of “popular-cultural archaeology” as its principal method of discovery, the paper embraces a decidedly non-polemical and non-evaluative stance. Put differently, illuminating the political dimension of *Plavi orkestar*’s music and visual aesthetics does not aim to create a jumping-off point for the parsing of scholarly debates and arguments regarding the causes, courses, and consequences of

socio-cultural and socio-political moments and realities of 1980s Yugoslavia (such as the political and economic crises, the rise of nationalism, the proliferation of cultural pan-Yugoslavism¹), or to engage in an *ex post facto* assessment of the categorical distinctions of *Plavi orkestar*'s "cognitive universe" (such as the normative dichotomy between "good" Yugoslavism and "bad" ethnonationalism, the "Sarajevo-centered" understanding of national culture and its policies²). The aim, rather, is more elemental – to dig out, dust off, and bring to light essential pieces of the structures-of-feeling puzzle so as to decipher how and why the members of *Plavi orkestar* understood themselves and their world the way they did at the time, and how and why this understanding got translated into a particular kind of music and visual aesthetic that still resonates with the band's audiences.

Once pieced together, the structures-of-feeling puzzle reveals a "conceptual triad" that renders the politicization of *Plavi orkestar*'s music intelligible. Its first element, *utopian imaginary*, speaks to the motivational ideal behind the band's cultural *praxis*. Its essence is a belief in the possibility of transcending – or going beyond – the present, so that the present, by revolutionizing itself, can finally become its real, genuine self. In the context of *Plavi orkestar*'s cultural *praxis*, "going beyond" was cast not as an alternative, qualitatively different, type of social order external to the framework of the Yugoslav socialist community, but as the full unfolding of everything that the Yugoslav socialist community was believed to be capable of becoming. The second element, *critical engagement*, was premised on a sentiment that the ideal to be realized was entrapped in the chokehold of obstructing socio-cultural and socio-political realities of the day, and that engaging – and resolving – these constructively would free the ideal to materialize into reality. In practical terms, this meant confronting what was taken for the principal obstruction standing in the way of the "promise" of a Yugoslav socialist community – ethnonationalism. The third element, *political strategy*, was informed by an understanding of rock music as the "pulse of the present" (Wicke 1987, 80) capable of illuminating the nature of social life, and communicating values of potentially transformative impact on the fabric of society. Specifically, this meant framing *Plavi orkestar*'s political message in the language of opposition, resistance, and struggle, premised on the clear distinction between the forces of "right" and "wrong," and the perception of incompatible zero-sum interests, relations, and outcomes.

Regardless of how one thinks of them today, the sentiments, feelings, and understandings underlying the conceptual triad were, at the time, the prime motivators for *Plavi orkestar*'s music and visual aesthetic of "revolutionary Yugoslavism." To understand their genesis, we need to zero in on the structures-of-feeling puzzle and consider each of its pieces.

The "Sarajevo factor"

In many important respects, the "philosophy" of the music aesthetic of *Plavi orkestar* is rooted in the socio-cultural spirit of Sarajevo – the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the band's place of birth. Established in 1461 as an administrative center of the Ottoman Empire's Bosnia Province, the city's socio-cultural formation grew out of the confluence of the civilizational traditions of the East and the West, the encounters of diverse spiritual forces and religious communities, and the convergence of people's multiple ethnic, cultural, and national distinctions. Together, the *mélange* of the richly diverse but ultimately complementary historical influences and concrete realities of daily life gave the city a unique spirit of intermingled "mysticism and magic of the Orient, gentlemanliness and aesthetic of the West, the Slavic feel of cheerfulness, and the temperament of the South"³ (Lošić in Stevanović 1990, 49). Its practical essence was informed by the attitudes

of openness, acceptance and tolerance, and the practices of pragmatic accommodation and balanced and harmonious coexistence. These constituted the very foundation of Sarajevo's *mentalité* and, more broadly, the *Weltanschauung* of its peoples.

Despite its unique spirit, however, the socio-cultural *milieu* of Sarajevo was, for all practical purposes, the great unknown in the socio-cultural fabric of Yugoslav society. While, as the two principal socio-cultural centers, Belgrade and Zagreb had their "cultural stamps" firmly imprinted in just about any region of the country, Sarajevo's image was that of a "dark vilayet"⁴ – a place that, save a few notable exceptions, never offered much that was culturally significant. If Sarajevo was known to the "outside world" it was primarily through, as Todorović (1985, 26) puts it, "the jokes about Mujo and Haso, the aroma of *ćevapi*,⁵ and the sound of *Bijelo dugme*."⁶ These stood for the general socio-cultural markers of Sarajevo's relationship to the rest of the country, or—perhaps more accurately—of the country's relationship to, and perception of, Sarajevo.

At the root of the city's cultural invisibility was a center/periphery relationship between Sarajevo and the country's principal cultural metropolises, the source of which was the cultural-inferiority complex ingrained in the collective mind of the local cultural authorities. Simply put, Sarajevo was different from other major urban cultural centers of Yugoslavia, and that difference did not sit well with the city's cultural scene and its understanding of what true/genuine culture was supposed to be. By the cultural parameters of Zagreb and Belgrade, Sarajevo's cultural offerings were perceived as insufficiently sophisticated and as lacking the luster of "veritable culture." In other words, they were seen as "primitive" and, therefore, as something to be either hidden from Yugoslav cultural eyes or respecified so as to conform to the officially accepted and recognized cultural mold (on the "problem" of local linguistic realities, see Zildžo in unsigned 1990, 24). The consequence of cultural "purges" within the Sarajevo *milieu* was a cultural "double life" that relegated the authentic in the local socio-cultural universe to the sphere of "dark peripherality" and elevated the inauthentic to the realm of "illuminating grotesque." Its ultimate message was that the way one is was not the way one ought to be, and that, in order to change, one needs to alter who (and where) one is. Hence the (self-)perception of Sarajevo as a place that, because of its "cultural peculiarity," could not offer anything substantial to the wider cultural community, and whose contributions were therefore possible only in the form of either ironed-out cultural ruggedness or sympathetically inconsequential pseudo-culture.

The force awakens: Sarajevo Pop-rock school, *New Primitives*, and *Plavi orkestar*

In the popular-cultural sense, the deperipheralization of Sarajevo is tied to the phenomenon commonly referred to as the Sarajevo Pop-rock School. This is an umbrella term used to denote the early 1960s-early 1990s period and refer to the process of gradual musical and popular-cultural fermentation that would – with the Yugoslav breakthrough of *Bijelo dugme* in 1975, and then the rise of *New Primitives* in the mid-1980s – make Sarajevo one of the most important, if not the most important, popular-cultural centers of Yugoslavia. Although a lot has been written about the history and place of the Sarajevo Pop-rock School within the city's cultural *milieu*, its overall significance rests in the fact that, within some 30 years, three generations of Sarajevo musicians were able to channel and articulate a unique and distinctly Sarajevan popular-cultural expression, and imprint that expression into the Yugoslav popular-cultural consciousness as something inalienable and inseparable from the overall cultural fabric of the country. As Želimir Altarac Čičak, one of the chroniclers and protagonists of the Sarajevo Pop-rock School, puts it:

The phenomenon of Sarajevo pop-rock scene, or pop-rock school, will be remembered in the music annals for the fact that, in the past three decades, its best pupils and “golden representatives” were able to express through their songs the unique Sarajevo spirit of diverse – tightly knit and intertwined throughout centuries – cultures and traditions. It is because of the fact that this *mélange* of cultural traditions served as the well of artistic inspiration that the rock culture of the city has its own specific music expression, documented in the songs that, in many cases, have become a timeless part of the music anthology of this region. (2015)

The ultimate accomplishment of the Sarajevo Pop-rock School, thus, rests in the creation of a distinct “cultural stamp” that would brand Sarajevo as a place of popular-cultural authenticity and transform the city into a distinct cultural center on par with other cultural metropolises of Yugoslavia.⁷

The golden age of the Sarajevo Pop-rock School (and the apex of the city’s cultural awakening and full-blown deperipheralization) is associated with the third generation of its “pupils” and “disciples” – that is, the cohort of musicians and artists born in the early to mid-1960s and gaining prominence on Sarajevo’s popular-cultural scene in the early to mid-1980s. Specifically, it is tied to the early 1980s rise of *New Primitives* – a local popular-cultural and music movement formed by a cohort of mostly Koševo⁸-based young Sarajevans (see Mišina 2013). Tapping into the city’s broader “cultural renaissance,” fermenting since the mid-1970s, *New Primitives* created a popular-cultural expression that radically altered Sarajevo’s profile and changed irreversibly the city’s socio-cultural regard for itself and its socio-cultural relationship to the rest of the country. Using Sarajevo’s *mentalité* and the *Weltanschauung* of its peoples as its focal artistic springboard, the movement unashamedly revealed the essence of the city’s true spirit and soul to the rest of Yugoslavia, and – crafting a very distinct “poetics of the local” – effectively transformed Sarajevo’s linguistic, cultural, and sociographic peculiarities from a source of discomfort and shame into a source of pride and affirmation of local individual and collective identities. Grounded in the ethos of “not running away from oneself,” the *New Primitives*’ distinct socio-cultural *praxis* culminated in the forging of Sarajevo’s autochthon – more complex and, at the same time, more expressive – cultural identity as a meaningful and now inalienable “brick in Yugoslavia’s cultural wall” (see Sidran in Joković 1986, 38).

Although usually not associated with *New Primitives*, *Plavi orkestar* was, in fact, part of the movement and one of the early adopters of its poetics of the local: along with *Muharem i Anjur* and the principal proponents of “new primitivism,” *Zabranjeno pušenje* (No Smoking) and *Elvis J. Kurtovich & His Meteors*, the band performed at the grand unofficial promotion of *New Primitives*, organized on 8 March 1983 (for Elvis J. Kurtović’s recollections of the event, see Jalovčić 1990; see also Lalović 1984); as well, *Plavi orkestar* shared the *New Primitives*’ attitude that “new primitivism” was fundamentally about revitalizing the existing, but hitherto “unknown,” socio-cultural mentality of Sarajevo’s locale (which was *de facto* its living tradition), making it the focal point of popular-cultural expression of a new generation of Sarajevo youth, and, in so doing, validating it as a “new tradition”⁹ (i.e. a new wave of accepting the traditional local mentality as the authentic mentality of one particular *milieu*). Thus, from the very beginning, *Plavi orkestar*’s particular music aesthetic was firmly anchored in the *New Primitives*’ axiomatic principles of “artistic localism” and “geo-emotional realism,” which were embraced as the starting- and end-point of the band’s artistic expression. While at the time of its big Yugoslav breakthrough in 1985 *Plavi orkestar* was not necessarily seen as part of the *New Primitives* movement (primarily because of its “teen pop-rock” image), the band never really shied away, or strayed, from its autochthonous Sarajevo cultural roots. Through all of its evolution and maturation, the music of *Plavi orkestar* remained firmly grounded in the *New Primitives*’ ethos of

“not running away from oneself” and its “categorical imperative” of valuing local authenticity as the only viable foundation for genuine artistic expression.

The last Yugoslav generation

An important aspect of *New Primitives*' popular-cultural poetics of the local was Yugoslavist sensibilities of a generational cohort – referred to as the “last Yugoslav generation” (Volcic 2007) – the members of *Plavi orkestar* belonged to. According to Volcic (2007, 71):

The generation born in Yugoslavia from the beginning of the 1960s to the middle of the 1970s, in the so-called era of Tito, has specific characteristics. This generation grew up in socialist Yugoslavia of the 1980s and associates those days with brotherhood and unity, multiculturalism, multilingualism, and common supranational Yugoslav culture. [The] Yugoslavia of the 1980s for this generation was a place of freedom, good life, creative education, travel, and a high standard of living.

Yugoslavism, in this context, was an expression of particular generational socio-cultural experiences, manifested first and foremost as an emotional attitude toward socialist Yugoslavia as a specific type of cultural rather than, strictly speaking, political community. As such, the last Yugoslav generation's Yugoslavist sensibilities were ultimately a matter of a deeply ingrained *feeling* – rooted in the values of revolutionary anti-fascism, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism – rather than of a commitment to official politics of the day.

The genesis of the Yugoslavist feeling can, to a considerable degree, be attributed to the educational experiences of the members of the last Yugoslav generation – much of which was centered on fostering the values of partisan heroism and the principle of brotherhood-and-unity (*bratstvo-jedinstvo*) of all Yugoslav nations, and casting nationalism as a retrograde force responsible for the partitioning of Yugoslavia during World War II and for much of the brotherly bloodbath that followed. In this context, “to identify as a Yugoslav was to condemn the forces that betrayed the memory of the war and to identify with the efforts of the Partisans to create a progressive, socialist society” (Sekulic, Massey, and Hodson 1994, 85). In addition to education, the daily experiences of living in an urban environment also played an important part in cultivating Yugoslavist sensibilities, since it was taken as axiomatic that living in a city meant living amid – and relishing – difference and diversity in all of their forms and manifestations. This, in turn, translated into a categorical distinction between “urban” and “non-urban” as – to paraphrase Nele Karajlić (the front man of the *New Primitives* band *Zabranjeno pušenje*) – the distinction of “philosophy rather than geography” that demarcated social values integral to one's way of life. From the viewpoint of the *New Primitives* generational cohort, to be “urban” thus meant adhering to the value of cosmopolitan openness as a “normative compass” for city living; in a broader sense, it implied a normative preference for a progressive and “worldly” Yugoslav community as – in the socialist parlance of the day – “a society in the measure of man” (*društvo po mjeri čovjeka*). The final factor contributing to the genesis of the Yugoslavist feeling was daily experiences of (being part of) a pan-Yugoslav cultural space. Simply put, the members of the last Yugoslav generation grew up with cultural offerings from all parts of the country and, thus, with an outlook that all of them – be they sport, music, films, TV shows, books, magazines, consumer products, etc. – were “their own” and, as such, integral to their cultural *Weltanschauung*. In cultural terms, therefore, embracing Yugoslavist sensibilities was an affirmation of a cultural imagination grounded in the value of multiculturalism, and complementary to the value of cosmopolitanism.

Ultimately, in the context of Yugoslavism of *Plavi orkestar*'s generation, Yugoslavia figured as a socio-cultural metaphor for an open, modern, progressive, and multicultural society rooted in partisan revolutionary ideals. As such, it was a normative referent for gauging realities of one's daily life and for safeguarding them against "pollutants" of any kind. The generational commitment to Yugoslavism was thus a commitment to the values fundamental to, and in line with, "civilizational standards" of what was considered "normal life." As Karajlić puts it:

During the years of my youth, ... the feeling of Yugoslavism was more a matter of aesthetics, good taste, being in style, rather than a matter of national belonging. Yugoslavism was equated with everything that was considered modern, progressive, youthful, and beautiful – jeans from Trieste, records from London, books by Hesse and Marquez, summer vacation at the Adriatic coast, winter vacation at Jahorina,¹⁰ girls from the other side of the street. (2014, 37)

At the same time, the Yugoslavism of the last Yugoslav generation was also a "rebel yell" against everything "uncivilized" and antithetical to the values of "normal" existence. In particular, it was a call to arms against the rising tide of ethnonationalism that was – because of its parochialism and advocacy of the dissolution of multicultural/multinational bonds – seen as the force of destructive de-Yugoslavization of the existing socio-cultural space. This was particularly so in the places such as Sarajevo, which had an aura of being a "metaphysical congregation of the local Balkan collective destinies, traditions, cultures, emotions, and mentalities" (Sidran in Joković 1986, 38), and which was regarded by much of its residents as not only the "beat of the Yugoslav pulse"¹¹ but also as the last line of defense against the onslaught of ethnonationalism. The depth of this sentiment was perhaps best conveyed by Saša Lošić's poignant comment on the eve of ethnonationalist dissolution of Yugoslavia: "I don't have a spare homeland. I cannot all of a sudden become a Bosnian. Without my Yugoslavia I am nothing – only a Sarajevan!" (in Rizinger 2016).

Plavi orkestar and the New Partisans

Inasmuch as the *New Primitives*' poetics of the local was at the root of *Plavi orkestar*'s music aesthetics, the band's rise to socio-cultural and, to an extent, political prominence was closely tied to another Sarajevo-born music movement – *New Partisans*. Emerging in the mid-1980s as a response to ethnonationalization of Yugoslavia's socio-cultural space and its politicization along the lines of increasingly virulent xenophobic rhetoric(s), *New Partisans*, through its particular "poetics of the patriotic," offered an unabashed advocacy of "militant Yugoslavism" in the context of which a "Yugocentric" preoccupation with forging the mechanism of socio-cultural resistance to political, cultural, and moral-ethical de-Yugoslavization of the Yugoslav socialist community came to be the crux of the movement's overall philosophy and *praxis*. The movement's Sarajevan roots are not coincidental and have to do with Sarajevo's avowed Yugoslavism and the city's status of being an exemplar of harmonious multicultural and multinational coexistence.¹² Figuring as a Yugoslav city *par excellence* meant that any fluctuation (be it positive or negative) in the nature of Yugoslavia's socio-cultural arrangement was first sensed within Sarajevo's socio-cultural *milieu*, primarily through the ways ordinary people responded to the changes in the nature of their "immediate multicultural relations" and the ways in which cultural communities cohabiting in the city changed their disposition toward one another. In turn, these "microseismic intercultural tremors" would almost immediately trigger defense mechanisms for staving off any real or perceived danger to the city's (and, by implication, Yugoslavia's) multicultural and multinational harmony. Given this, it is then no surprise that, in the climate of increasing de-Yugoslavization of both local and national socio-cultural space,

Sarajevo's musicians were the first to respond with "new Partisanism" as a cultural strategy for countering the dangers of the growing xenophobia in the country.

New Partisans' militant Yugoslavism had three distinct, but interrelated, aspects: socio-political, socio-cultural, and moral-ethical. The first was advocated by *Bijelo dugme's* Goran Bregović through the concept of "Yugoslav idea of a somewhat different type," while the latter was promoted by *Merlin's* Dino Dervišhalidović through the concept of "all of Yugoslavia, one big courtyard" (*cijela Juga jedna avlija*). The movement's socio-cultural aspect was embodied in the music and visual aesthetic of *Plavi orkestar*, and promoted through the concept of "revolutionary Yugoslavism." Its focal point was to advocate and reinforce the values of the "revolutionary cultural spirit" of the World War II partisan liberation struggle as indispensable for combating the xenophobic tendencies in the country. This was grounded in the belief that the most troublesome aspect of increasing division and tearing of Yugoslavia's socio-cultural fabric was the destruction of the country's cultural platform and the rise of virulently chauvinistic cultural expressions fundamentally antithetical to the original cultural spirit of Yugoslav society as a multicultural and multinational socialist community. Correspondingly, what was required to confront the forces of socio-cultural de-Yugoslavization was a re-animation of the Yugoslav multicultural spirit and advocacy of an inclusivist form of cultural experience through the revival of the most exemplary qualities of the partisan revolutionary tradition.

Revolutionary Yugoslavism

Plavi orkestar's foray into revolutionary Yugoslavism had its most immediate genesis in Saša Lošić's experiences while doing his military service, where he was, as he puts it, under the "exalting suffering" of cathartic quality that was to provide the spark for the songs that appeared on the band's 1985 debut album, *Soldatski bal* (Soldiers' Ball). The other defining moment was the rise of ethnonationalism and the increasingly tense socio-political climate in the country, perceived by Lošić and the people of his generation as a direct negation of the established socio-cultural tradition of Yugoslav society. Combined, the two moments triggered an "emotional-intellectual defense mechanism" with the Yugoslavist orientation as an appropriate – and perhaps only possible – response to the reality faced. According to Lošić,

we have turned to Yugoslavism because of all these vampiric situations ... which are tearing down the cognitive frame of reference ... to an entire generation not used to living with the burden of, for example, taking apart your most banal phrase[:] "how are you, where are you, why are you." Our wish is to return to the times when you wouldn't be burdened with the possibility of finding out hidden allusions in your each and every word. (in Palameta 1985, 13)

At stake in *Plavi orkestar* taking up Yugoslavism was a struggle for "mental sanity" of an entire generation of Yugoslavs whose socio-cultural and political views were qualitatively different from the ones they were witnessing, and who – at least from Lošić's viewpoint – needed some sort of an "intellectual mechanism" against an assault mustered by the "alien" ethnonationalist forces. To resist these, the only viable strategy was to counter-attack with a "return to tradition" and a forceful advocacy of Yugoslavism as the only possible and viable social, political, and cultural option for the society in crisis. As Lošić puts it,

it is our wish that the true values, which started fading because of some idiotic events, resurface at the forefront. We wish, for example, to re-instill in youth a minimal respect for the legacy of the anti-fascist struggle. (in Ivačković 1985, 32)

When you see all that madness, all that spitting at the sacred symbols, you realize that you ought to have a minimum respect toward them. Because, if we forget them, I am not sure who will remember them. (in Palameta 1985, 13)

Rather than being an unconscious reflex to what they lived through, therefore, Lošić's and *Plavi orkestar*'s revolutionary Yugoslavism was a consciously chosen and carefully planned cultural platform through which they communicated with their audience and anyone interested in what they had to say.

Crucial in *Plavi orkestar*'s conceptualization of revolutionary Yugoslavism was the collaboration with Malcolm Muharem – the band's manager and Lošić's "intellectual co-conspirator." Referring to the approach as a "Bosnian artistic experiment," Muharem posits the artistic strategy of an "idealization of tradition" as the definit(iv)e foundation for *Plavi orkestar*'s preoccupations with Yugoslavism:

Our position is that only that which is based on traditions can exist. [O]ur attitude is that given the historical moment our milieu and our society are at, a return to [revolutionary] traditions and their reexamination are the necessary means of gaining ground under our feet. ... Idealization of tradition is romanticism of a sort that, in a situation when everything is in crisis and when people are struggling to survive, becomes a necessity. ... [R]ecalling tradition ... is not an industry of oblivion; it is rather, I would say, an industry of remembrance. Remembrance is offered as the power to work things out within ourselves. (Muharem in Vukmir and Wruss 1985, 23)

In the context of the strategy employed, a recollection of the past is thus not a hermetic self-contained process but, rather, a strategic means of reflecting upon the present. Its ultimate value is the elucidation of the past's absence in the present and, in a sense, a confrontation with the present that denies the past the dignity of existence. From Muharem's viewpoint, as a form of cultural interventionism *Plavi orkestar*'s revolutionary Yugoslavism is "not a glorification of the things passed but an identification with the resistance" (in Bašić and Maleš 1987, 23).

In a broader sense, *Plavi orkestar*'s revolutionary Yugoslavism had two objectives: to insert the missing "cultural bloodline" into the socio-cultural tissue of the Yugoslav society in crisis, and to revolt against the elitist concept of culture fundamental to Yugoslav society. The first objective was based in Lošić's argument that "the cultural platform of Yugoslavia is definitely dead and [that] the culture today consists of life alone" (in Bašić and Maleš 1987, 23), and that, therefore, the present moment no longer had a particular "cultural aesthetic" as the foundation for "real life." For Lošić, this was deeply problematic because it was at the root of the "cultural disenchantment of the Yugoslav world" and its ethnonationalist re-enchantment. In this context, the strategic purpose of *Plavi orkestar*'s revolutionary Yugoslavism was to offer a "total(izing) aesthetic" (i.e. one that has an all-encompassing musical, visual, and presentational style, as well as an all-encompassing reach) as a means of re-enchanting the Yugoslav world and stirring it away from the disenchanted present. Central to this was crafting a music and visual style by way of merging the traditional folk and revolutionary partisan aesthetics. Tapping into the traditional forms was of strategic importance for giving the band's call for a return to partisan values a matching stylistic aura that had an authentic ring to it, and for de-intellectualizing the cultural platform offered so as to make it appear naturally spontaneous and "of the people." Both of these were essential in making sure that *Plavi orkestar*'s revolutionary Yugoslavism was devoid of elitist and, thus, pretentious tendencies and was given a broad and, thus, non-alienating populist appeal.

The second objective was grounded in Muharem's remark that "we are arguing for an all-encompassing concept of culture which will enable representation of the creativity of the

last peasant” (in Bašić and Maleš 1987, 23), which, effectively, was a critique of the existing dichotomy between the “enlightening mechanism” of the elite culture and the “(un)culture of the masses.” From this viewpoint, the strategic purpose of *Plavi orkestar*’s revolutionary Yugoslavism was to advocate against cultural elitism and for an all-inclusive Yugoslav cultural framework that would not prioritize and valorize one particular – or, indeed, any – cultural expression over others. At its broadest (and most ambitious), then, the band’s music and visual aesthetics figured as an all-encompassing cultural project/cultural platform that was at the same time – because of its “pedagogical moment” – “elitist” and – because of its non-elitist reach – populist. Or as Muharem puts it:

Orkestar is aesthetical totalization because it audaciously takes the iconography of the bottom and the methods of the élité [and creates] the totalizing aesthetic which encompasses everything and attempts to not permit anyone to step out of any of its segments. (in Bašić and Maleš 1987, 22)

Plavi orkestar’s Yugoslavist platform was inaugurated on the band’s debut album, *Soldatski bal*, released in 1985. The record artwork – a reworking of The Beatles’ famous *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* cover – offers *Plavi orkestar*’s perception of Yugoslav culture by bringing together the 49 cultural icons from the past and the present, selected by the “way of nostalgia” rather than some “objective criteria of importance:” “we used the bird’s-eye-view way of nostalgia[,] and, from that viewpoint, I take these [people] as the myths from my childhood rather than as being imposed by some historical context” (Lošić in Janjatović 1985, 20). The back of the record cover features Saša Lošić, as an “embodiment” of *Plavi orkestar*, in front of the blue, white, and red stripes of the Yugoslav flag and a rather striking red star, thus offering an unequivocal visual referent for, and a symbolic means of, identifying the source of the band’s socio-cultural inspiration and ideological grounding.

Musically, *Soldatski bal* projects the band’s Yugoslavist platform by incorporating traditional folk elements into the rock music idiom and, in doing so, merging the two – from the viewpoint of official culture – culturally incompatible musical forms. The strategic purpose of this symbiosis was to acknowledge the *de facto* existing cultural reality of Yugoslav society – namely, that folk music was the *default* music of Yugoslav popular culture, and thus the most populist cultural expression there was. As well, it was to shake up the elitist concept of Yugoslav culture by testing the boundaries of its tolerance through irritation (such as a duet with Nada Obrić, one of the most popular folk signers at the time). As Lošić put it:

as a form of culture, rock music here has yet to position itself. ... Rock culture in Sarajevo shares spot number ten with the parking and health services[,] and has no impact except for being concentrated in two, three bars. It is enough to take a walk on the streets of Sarajevo’s periphery and everything is perfectly clear. (in Janjatović 1985, 20)

Lošić’s point here is that what was habitually considered peripheral culture – or culture of the periphery – was effectively *the* culture of everyday life, and of the majority, and to fancy otherwise was to be deluded. Given this, shunning the “culture of the periphery” as non-culture was not only a cultural hubris of the most ignorant degree but also a fundamental denial of Yugoslavia’s cultural essence. In this context, the intent of *Plavi orkestar*’s rock-folk symbiosis was to craft the musical expression of the real-life culture of the country and to problematize Yugoslavia’s cultural elitism that finds this kind of symbiosis irritably uncultured.

In terms of the songs on *Soldatski bal*, “Stambol, Pešta, Bečlija” is the most direct expression of *Plavi orkestar*’s Yugoslavism and, through an invocation of the country’s foundational brotherhood-and-unity axiom, an affirmation of the socialist cultural normativity as the *de facto* principle of an all-encompassing, genuinely Yugoslav, cultural

experience. Crafted as a series of heartfelt expressions of friendship among “comrades” from different parts of Yugoslavia, and peppered with easily recognizable local cultural references, the song accentuates the idea that, as the chorus has it, “all people here are alike; all people here are good.” The same idea is highlighted by the guest singers in the song who, through their regional inflections united in harmony, “help carry the same emotion throughout different parts of Yugoslavia” (Lošić in Milosavljević 1985, 43). As Lošić puts it (in Janjatović 1985, 20), “‘Stambol, Pešta, Bečlija’ is ‘brotherhood and unity’ incarnate – a mini Band Aid.”¹³

“Death to fascism!”

The follow-up to *Soldatski bal*, *Smrt Fašizmu!* (Death to Fascism!), furthered *Plavi orkestar*’s Yugoslavist platform by offering the totalizing aesthetic of “new Partisanism.” The conceptual premise of the record was grounded in the idea of using the partisan war film genre – a specific cultural expression of a concrete period in the history of Yugoslav society – as a generalized scenario for re-examining a particular “aesthetic of living” (see Bašić and Maleš 1987, 22). Central to this was not the genre’s subject of revolution but the fact that the revolutionary ethos nursed in the partisan films had a strategic socio-cultural (and perhaps even pedagogical) function of fostering a specific “Yugoslav spirit” as the foundational element for the worldview of a generation that grew up on this particular kind of cinematic experience. In other words, the genre was important not because it was about the war but because it was grounded in particular moral and ethical themes that very much shaped the “aesthetic of living” of Yugoslav citizenry.¹⁴ The ultimate objective of “*Smrt Fašizmu!*” as a form of “socio-cultural interventionism” was thus to re-examine the logic of the “Partisan aesthetic” as a symbolic vehicle for a specific aesthetic of living, and re-introduce it as a reference point for dealing with the carcinogens of the current socio-cultural moment. The purpose of the record, therefore, was not to glorify the past but to “aestheticize” and offer it as both a symbolic foundation for resisting the ethnonationalist de-Yugoslavization of society, and the basis for a new Yugoslav(ist) cultural platform (see Rajin 1987, 47).

“*Smrt Fašizmu!*” is framed conceptually as an unironic adaption of the partisan war film into music (see Miletić 1986, 34; Tomić and Đorem 1986, 7). Thus its front cover functions as a movie poster, visually encapsulating the record’s normative essence: most of the space is devoted to the picture of an old woman (who, in the context of partisan iconography, symbolizes the determination of the Yugoslav people to resist occupation) standing in front of a red Communist flag, with the bottom of the cover depicting Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler overseeing the mobilization of their troops. The top of the cover has the band’s name prominently displayed in the color shades matching those of the flag and symbolically indicating identification with everything that the “Partisan” portion of the cover represents; the bottom part of the cover has the slogan “death to fascism!” covering most of the visualization of Nazis and Italian Fascists, indicating a resolve to write them off. The record’s title itself is suggestive of the affirmation of the Partisan legacy, because “death to fascism!” is the first part of Partisans’ World War II greeting slogan: in full, the slogan proclaims “death to fascism! – freedom to the people!”.

Musically, “*Smrt Fašizmu!*” boasts partisan folkloric imagery and revolutionary composition as the basis for expressing the moral and ethical themes of the partisan war films and, ultimately, creating an “aural revolutionary aesthetic.” The opening track, “*Fa, fa fašista nemoj biti ti (jerbo ću te ja draga ubiti)*” (Don’t You Be Fa, Fa, Fascist (Because I Will Kill You, My Dear)) is perhaps the most explicit example. The song

opens with the ominous sounds of an air raid and dogs barking (representing the occupation of Yugoslavia and the beginning of war), and unfolds as the tale of a patriotic Yugoslav's painful experience of his sweetheart "turning fascist"—and therefore becoming an enemy—by going astray and falling in love with a German soldier; throughout, the dichotomy between "good" and "evil" (i.e. antifascists and fascists) is accentuated with the language that gives the narrative an unequivocal tone and provides a moral—and historical—lesson regarding the inadmissibility of "fascist aberration." Musically, the song relies heavily on "revolutionary folklore" in terms of its relatively simple tune and the way its lyrics are delivered: evocative of the partisans' World War II call-and-response method where the initial singing introduces a lyric and melody bit to the peers, and the repetition functions as a way of joining in and learning a song step by step, every line of "Fa, fa fašista nemoj biti ti" is first sung by Saša Lošić alone and then reiterated and reinforced by the rest of *Plavi orkestar*. With the folkloric and partisan aesthetics woven into its narrative, melody, and arrangement, the song – along with the rest of *Smrt Fašizmu!* – is thus not only *Plavi orkestar*'s affirmation of the revolutionary ethos but also a declaration of the artistic commitment to the moral and ethical universe of values that ethos embodies and stands for.

As a form of socio-cultural interventionism, *Smrt Fašizmu!* is centered on advocating the broadening of Yugoslavia's cultural platform through "syncretic amalgamation" of the country's heterogeneous socio-cultural elements. This key conceptual premise and proposition of the record is predicated on the belief that, given Yugoslavia's multiethnic and multinational cultural foundations, "syncretically amalgamated" cultural pluralism ought to be (established as) the country's only acceptable cultural framework. Once in place, such a framework would not only affirm Yugoslavia's genuine cultural-ideological essence (the roots of which are in the Partisan revolutionary struggle) but also provide the best means of confronting the ethnonationalist "monoculturalism" and cultural parochialism. The end point of syncretic amalgamation, thus, is to offer a framework for the (new) "cultural aesthetics" grounded in a complementarity between the socialist cultural-ideological essence and the culturally multi-perspectival nature of Yugoslav society. This is perhaps best illustrated through *Smrt fašizmu!*'s juxtaposition of partisanism and religion as, in the conventional cultural-ideological formulation, two diametrically opposed and (almost) mutually exclusive worldviews, but, in Lošić's (re)interpretation, "differently complementary" forms of Yugoslav socio-cultural experience:

syncretism therefore in the form of everything being part of Yugoslavia – religion together with our glorious tradition. ... Represented are both offensive and defensive religion, from all places, but in a mild form[.] In other words, without partisanship. ... We are creating a reconciliatory state – Yugoslavia with all of its differences. (in Miletić 1986, 34)

Lošić's ideal of "Yugoslavia with all of its differences" is most directly addressed in the song "To je šok" (That's a shock), which centers on the bewilderment within an "earthly-secular being" at having a religious experience. The "complementarity of differences" is also brought to the fore with most – if not all – songs on the record being grounded in the folkloric music idioms of Yugoslavia's diverse ethnic communities, thus making the case for the brotherhood-and-unity distilment of the Partisan revolutionary tradition being the finest and most valuable exemplar and expression of the syncretic amalgamation of Yugoslavia's socio-cultural diversity.

(The end of) revolutionary Yugoslavism and beyond

In the period of 1985–1986 *Plavi orkestar* was the most commercially successful band in Yugoslavia. Its debut album, *Soldatski bal*, sold some 600,000 copies and the follow-up,

Smrt fašizmu!, more than 300,000 copies.¹⁵ As a teen pop-rock sensation, *Plavi orkestar* was responsible for the mid-1980s Yugoslav version of “Beatlemania,” which, like the original Beatlemania, was a “perfect storm” of youthfulness, good looks, and catchy love-themed songs that quickly established themselves as veritable emotional diaries of a generation. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the band’s meteoric rise to fame and cultural prominence was by and large rooted in a particular kind of emotional-generational appeal rather than in a consciously political note of their music and visual esthetics. The latter, needless to say, did not go unnoticed, but the band’s revolutionary Yugoslavism was not the main “culprit” responsible for all the success.

Nevertheless, “the premeditated” was of great importance to *Plavi orkestar* and, as discussed, the real conceptual bedrock of the first two records. It brought the band into the political spotlight and made it *the* subject of intense political debates and criticisms – so much so that, some 20 years after, Saša Lošić would refer to the period following the release of “Smrt fašizmu!” as the loss of artistic innocence and the moment when his creative wings were clipped (see Vesić 2006). The turmoil surrounding *Plavi orkestar* was part of a larger socio-cultural gauging of *New Partisans*’ radical revolutionary spirit that polarized Yugoslavia’s cultural-political authorities (and the public) on the issue of the movement’s character, methods, and ultimate intent. On the one side, there were those who recognized *New Partisans* and its poetics of the patriotic as a genuine and sorely needed impulse to revitalize the crumbling foundations of the Yugoslav socialist community, and who understood its methods of revolutionary folk-rock aesthetics as a constructive and strategic means to a (much) great(er) socio-political end (see Perišin 1987, 6). On the other side, there were those who (mis)read *New Partisans*’ musical-aesthetic pastiche of Yugoslavia’s folkloric/revolutionary idioms and the movement’s unabashed Yugo-(senti)mentality as nothing but a profanation of the sacred values and accomplishments of the partisan anti-fascist struggle, and who therefore dismissed the whole project as nothing more than an attempt to reduce the socialist revolution and its legacy to the banalities and trivialities of immature and fundamentally irresponsible popular-cultural embezzlement. In their eyes, *New Partisans* and its politicization of rock music was nothing but the latest incarnation of a highly problematic “estradsation” of the country’s revolutionary tradition, rooted in the 1970s trend of transforming the Yugoslav socialist culture into profit-driven cultural clichés (for the crux of this position, see a comment on “original Partisanism” in Ivanjek 1977, 19).

In terms of *Plavi orkestar*, the response to this polarized and highly charged debate was to move away from revolutionary Yugoslavism and turn toward an apolitical music and visual aesthetics that signaled the band’s (willingness to) return to its original, benign roots. The artwork for the third album (released in 1989), *Sunce na prozoru* (Sunshine on the Window), prominently featured the somber- and pensive-looking members of *Plavi orkestar*, as though wanting to communicate that the lesson from the aftermath of the whole *New Partisans* episode had been learned and well understood. However, the front and the back of the record cover also prominently featured an array of “hippie-looking” flowers that seem to communicate the band’s new (apolitically political) “flower power” direction and the embrace of “peace, love, and understanding” as the new – albeit more abstract – means of addressing the old Yugoslavist concerns and pre-occupations with harmonious togetherness. The most explicit indication of this was the closing track of *Sunce na prozoru* – a rendition of one of the quintessential anthems of the “Age of Aquarius,” “Let the Sunshine In” by *The 5th Dimension*, that transformed the original’s “turn on, tune in, drop out” message into an affirmation of the healing and redemptive power of love, and a statement of hope for a better tomorrow. The same

“flower power” direction was furthered on the band’s last Yugoslav-period album (released in 1991), *Simpatija* (Sympathy), which opened with a rendition of “California Dreamin,” retitled and “re-appropriated” as “Ljubi se Istok i Zapad” (The East and the West are Kissing). As with the reworking of “Let the Sunshine In,” *Plavi orkestar*’s take on *The Mamas and the Papas*’ 1966 classic gave the song a new and broader dimension centered on love, togetherness, and a plea for “the age of tenderness.”

The advocacy of the same “hippie ethos” was very much evident in the last couple of years of the band’s performing life, the end of which coincided with the end of Yugoslavia in 1991. As the threat of ethnonationalism loomed ever larger and the possibility of a violent disintegration of the country became ever more real, *Plavi orkestar* dedicated more of its time on the road advocating the “Yugoslav option” and promoting peaceful and harmonious coexistence as the only meaningful and viable choice for all. Eventually, the band joined forces with other artists and musicians in order to become an “artistic front” for the Alliance of Yugoslavia’s Reform Forces (*Savez Reformskih Snaga Jugoslavije*) – a political party formed and led by the last prime minister of Yugoslavia, Ante Marković – and devoted much of its efforts to participating in peace initiatives and performing at concerts for peace organized in larger cities around the country (the most prominent of which was the one in Sarajevo on July 28, 1991 (see n/a 1991)). All considered, one would not be amiss to maintain that, until the very end of its existence, *Plavi orkestar* remained very much the “blue-white-and-red orchestra” and that – with or without the “new Partisanist” conceptual platform – the band always considered itself as quintessentially “of Yugoslavia” and, ultimately, “for Yugoslavia.”

Conclusion

After a seven-year hiatus (and the end of ethnonationalist violence), the members of *Plavi orkestar* reconvened in 1998 and decided to re-form the band. Since then, *Plavi orkestar* had released three records – *Longplay*, in 1998, *Beskonačno* (Infinity), in 1999, and *Sedam* (Seven), in 2012 – and toured extensively throughout the territory of former Yugoslavia and abroad. They quickly regained their status and yet again became popular in all parts of the country that was no more, appealing to now multigenerational Yugoslav-era and post-Yugoslav audiences. The question is – why? If, as Pijer Žalica’s documentary *Orkestar* (2011) suggests, *Plavi orkestar* was, on the one hand, a socialist-realist incarnation of *The Beatles* and, on the other, a popular-cultural surrogate for brotherhood-and-unity as one of the foundational principles of socialist Yugoslavia, what is it that makes the band and its music resonant in the post-Yugoslav and post-socialist world of neo-liberal capitalism? An intuitive answer here might be – nostalgia. But, even if true, the question then is: nostalgia about/for what? In part, the answer can be found in Saša Lošić’s statement that “reactivating the band was about friendship; about the way life used to be; the way it ought to have been, but it never will be” (in Dragaš 2010). From this viewpoint, the resonance and relevance of *Plavi orkestar* in the new socio-cultural context rests in the band’s “extra-musical” quality – namely, in the ability to tap into the “romantic subconscious” of its audiences, which is in part about emotion, in part about (personal and/or collective) memory, and in part about (the sense of) “normalcy of existence.” In other words, as a “relic from the past” *Plavi orkestar* (still) matters because it offers to its audiences a “mnemonic referent” that conjures up the personal, the generational, the cultural, the political, and the national, and provides “symbolic markers” for re-remembering the past the way it was once

remembered through everything that the “blue-white-and-red orchestra” was, meant, and embodied.

In a broader sense, the band’s continuing resonance has to do with its music being a soundtrack for the country that never was – that is, an expression of what, from the viewpoint of a particular generational cohort and its location in the “Yugoslav socialist universe,” the community they thought of as their own ought to have been but never really was. The value of this soundtrack to *Plavi orkestar*’s current audiences rests in offering not only a particular window into the pre-post-socialist past, but also in being a symbolic expression of a certain kind of “retrospective utopia” that gauges the realities of the post-socialist – that is, neo-liberal capitalist – present against the future-oriented desire for “a safe world, fair society, true friendships, mutual solidarity, and well-being in general” (Velikonja 2009, 548). And it is precisely because of its quality and ability to figure as a “normative compass” for the life of dignified existence – or, in the socialist parlance, “life in the measure of man” (*život po mjeri čovjeka*) – that the music of *Plavi orkestar* matters now (perhaps) as much as it mattered then. For while the socio-cultural, political, and economic realities of the territory formerly known as Yugoslavia might have changed, what has remained unchanged is the impulse to illuminate these realities – whatever they might be – and lay them bare against the “higher standard of humanity.” At the end of the day, what *Plavi orkestar* offers is a humble, but Promethean, contribution to this Herculean, but perennial, undertaking.

Notes

1. See Ramet (1985); Denitch (1996); Pavković (2000); Ramet (2005); Jović (2009); Dyker and Vejvoda 2014.
2. On Yugoslavism, see Sekulic, Massey, and Hodson (1994); Djokić (2003); on ethnonationalism, see Connor (1994); Kecmanović (2002).
3. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are mine.
4. “Vilayet” is an Arabic-derived word for one of the chief administrative divisions in Turkey. In the Bosnian context, it refers to an administrative province within the Ottoman Empire.
5. A Bosnian meat and bread delicacy.
6. Arguably the most important Yugoslav rock band.
7. Although it is undeniable that, in creating something unique and distinct, the Sarajevo Pop-rock School left an indelible imprint on the popular-cultural consciousness on Yugoslavia, it is worth nothing that the exact nature of that “something unique and distinct” if somewhat difficult to define and detail. One of the key reasons for this is that the music of the Sarajevo Pop-rock School lacks stylistic, or genre, uniformity, and is devoid of “signature sound” that spans across the entire range of its pop and rock music output. Yet, despite all of this, there seems to be an almost ethereal—and illusive—quality to the music expression minted by Sarajevo musicians that is as indefinably distinct as it is distinctly indefinable. When heard, it is easily recognizable; but what exactly is being recognized is—and remains—somewhat of a mystery. Ultimately, all that one can point to is the music aesthetic that is distinctly “of Sarajevo,” but what makes it so is all but undecipherable.
8. A part of Sarajevo.
9. Given the *New Primitives*’ strategic objectives, the lead singer and leader of *Plavi orkestar*, Saša Lošić, thought that a better name for the movement might have been *New Traditionals*. As he saw it, the term “new primitives” carried the risk of equating “traditionalism” with “primitivism” and thus devaluing the local socio-cultural realities of Sarajevo as primitive. According to Lošić (in Palameta 1983), if the aim of the movement was to authenticate particular local experiences and to (pro)claim them as uniquely Sarajevo’s, then correlating “local” with “primitive” might—in some minds—result in mistaking as inferior that which, in reality, is exalted.
10. A mountain near Sarajevo.
11. Nele Karajlić’s remark, while likely factually incorrect, captures the essence of a generational sentiment regarding Sarajevo: “I am not sure about the exact percentage of people who, at that

time, felt like Yugoslavs ... but I am sure that, at least in the city [of Sarajevo], that number was double-digit that begins with 9” (Karajlić 2014, 37).

12. Reflecting on the uniqueness of Sarajevo, Elvis J. Kurtović (the leader of the *New Primitives* band *Elvis J. Kurtovich & His Meteors*) states: “As a multinational environment, Sarajevo represents the highest possible degree of integration to be expected from people: the relationships among different nations are balanced out naturally, with no overmuch of one group to allow for harassing others” (in Jalovčić 1990, 39). The same sentiment is expressed by *Bijelo dugme*’s Goran Bregović:

Besides, when one grows up in Sarajevo one cannot have exclusionist tendencies possible in other places; to grow up among Serbs, Croats, and Muslims prevents you from going astray. I even believe that it is the same way in Yugoslavia: [a]ll of us have been intermixed for quite some time – especially in Sarajevo! (in Loza 1990, 36)

13. Lošić’s reference to an ad hoc group of UK musicians and artists who in 1984 released the song “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” in order to raise money for famine-stricken Ethiopia.
14. Lošić, for example, talks about “Partisan love” as one of crucial aesthetic themes of the partisan war films that had a significant impact on setting normative standards for (what) genuine real-life expressions of love (ought to be). As he puts it:

Love [today] is coquetry of a sort. You know: I’ll play it cool on the phone today so she’ll start liking me, start chirping. During the war there was no time for bullshitting. ... ‘I love you, comrade’ had such an emotional force the hills around were crumbling. (in Tomić and Dorem 1986, 7)

15. On average, a rock album in Yugoslavia sold 50,000–100,000 copies.

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