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## Nation Branding in Two Major Serbian Music Festivals, Exit and Guča

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**ABSTRACT** This article looks into the nation branding phenomenon surrounding two major Serbian music festivals, Exit and Guča, in the post-Milošević era. The departure point of analysis is the once-dominant national identity narrative of Two Serbias, by which Exit (as a purveyor of Western-style popular music) and Guča (as the self-proclaimed guardian of the Serbian brass-band tradition) were pitted against one another as representatives of Two Serbias, one looking towards the West, and the other towards the East. Moving away from this obsolete model of interpretation, this article examines the effects that the inception of nation branding in Serbian public discourse has produced on the local perception of each festival as well as on Serbian national identity within the broader contexts of post-socialist transition, the EU integration, and globalization. It also analyzes the ways in which the principles of market economy and branding practice are being “bastardized” in both festivals, resulting in what Mladen Lazić (2003) calls *normative-value dissonance*. Nation branding has forged a more unified view of Exit and Guča as national brands that ostensibly improve the international image of the country but which in reality deplete both festivals of their initial cultural and political potency. Ultimately, however, the proof of normative-value dissonance in Exit and Guča supports the argument that nation branding in these two festivals feeds back into earlier Balkanist discourse on Serbia’s indeterminate position between West and East; and it does so in a way that provides little hope for alternative visions of the nation’s future.

**KEYWORDS** Music festivals, national identity, and nation branding; Serbia’s Exit and Guča trumpet festivals; post-socialist transition; Balkanism; critical theory

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### INTRODUCTION

The Exit and Guča trumpet festivals are two major music festivals in post-Milošević Serbia but very different in their origin, aesthetic form, and conceptual underpinnings. Exit is a purveyor of Western-style popular music and is based in Novi Sad, capital city of Serbia’s northern province, Vojvodina. It was launched in 2000 as a lengthy youth protest against the Milošević regime and has since then evolved into a highly acclaimed pop spectacle in Southeast Europe. The Guča trumpet festival, by comparison, was established in 1961 in the village of Guča in the Dragačevo region of western Serbia with the aim of reviving the vanishing Serbian brass band tradition. Hence its main focus and

\*This article draws and expands on my doctoral research on national identity in post-Milošević Serbia (i.e. from 2000 onwards) using two major Serbian music festivals as case studies—the Exit and Guča trumpet festivals. See Jelena Gligorijević, *Contemporary Music Festivals as Micronational Spaces: Articulations of National Identity in Serbia’s Exit and Guča Trumpet Festivals in the Post-Milošević Era* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Turku, 2019).

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appeal reside in the brass band competition part of the program, which includes a range of awards with the First Trumpet, First Band, and Golden Trumpet being the most prestigious ones. Nowadays Guča Festival draws around half a million visitors every year, and from 2010 onwards, when the category of international competition was introduced into the festival program, organizers immodestly called it “the trumpet capital of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Being fundamentally different in their musico-ideological orientations, Exit and Guča were often narrated domestically as representatives of Two Serbias and thus of two dominant cultural models at work in post-socialist Serbian society: a liberal and a conservative one. Specifically, the discourse of Two Serbias emerged at the beginning of the 1990s, when a group of Belgrade intellectuals joined to oppose the militant nationalism and autocracy of Serbia’s notorious leader, Slobodan Milošević. It was thus through the joint oppositional activity of the anti-Milošević camp that the term “Second Serbia” (with the meaning of “alternative” or “an-other”) first came to be coined. The self-identification of Second Serbia automatically set in motion the discursive construction of First Serbia as its opposite pole. Thus, if First Serbia stood for ethnic wars waged across the former Yugoslav region in the 1990s, as well as for a general sense of intolerance, violence, poverty, isolation, and moral decline experienced at the time, then the notion of Second Serbia was associated with the antiwar agenda and the cosmopolitan and urban values of civil society.

The construction of Exit and Guča as the representatives of Two Serbias upholds a widely accepted view of Serbia, and the Balkans in general, as “a place of specific liminality,”<sup>2</sup> a place neither Western nor Eastern but something in between.<sup>3</sup> This line of theoretical thinking is commonly known in academia as *Balkanism*,<sup>4</sup> and in some

1. Adam Tadić et al., *Guča: Pola veka Sabora trubača u Guči (1961–2010)* (Guča: Centar za kulturu, sport i turizam opštine Lučani “Dragačevo,” 2010).

2. Stef Jansen, *Antinacionalizam: etnografija otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu* (Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek, 2005), 99.

3. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić, eds., *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Donna A. Buchanan, ed., *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007); Kathryn E. Fleming, “Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography,” *The American Historical Review* 105/4 (2000): 1218–33; Mladen Lazić, “Serbia: A Part of Both the East and the West,” *Sociologija* 45/3 (2003): 193–216; Marko Živković, “Nešto između: Simbolička geografija Srbije,” *Filozofija i društvo* 18 (2001): 73–110.

4. Balkanism is a field of studies that both differs from and overlaps with Orientalism. Common to both Orientalism and Balkanism is the asymmetrical relationship between two poles of the West-East equation, which only attests to the positional superiority of the Western discourse throughout the modern era and its power to (re)produce a corresponding system of knowledge about the Orient / Balkans. The main difference between the two fields is that Orientalism constructs the Orient as Europe’s imputed Otherness (Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 17), or as “the Other without” (Donna A. Buchanan, *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007, xviii). Balkanism is, by contrast, a relational discourse that feeds off the “imputed ambiguity” of the region’s interstitial location (Todorova, *ibid.*, 17), and thus conceives it as “the Other within” (Buchanan, *ibid.*, xviii). In any event, Balkanism is ultimately “a stigmatizing discourse” (Alexander Kiossev, “The Dark Intimacy: Maps, Identities, Acts of Identification,” in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, edited by Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005, 180), which points to the undiminished role of “West / Europe” as the region’s / Serbia’s most Significant Other, in relation to whom members of the Balkan / Serb population variously position in their efforts to deal with what Erving Goffman calls the “tribal stigma” and “spoiled identity” (Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

TABLE 1. Binary oppositions associated with Exit and Guča

Exit Festival	Guča Festival
West	East
Europe	The Balkans
North	South
Modern	Traditional
Urban	Rural
Progressive	Conservative
Cosmopolitan	Nationalist
Rock culture	Neo-folk culture
Austro-Hungarian heritage	Ottoman heritage

interpretations it corresponds closely to an Orientalist model of the West-East divide and a long list of binary oppositions associated with it.<sup>5</sup> When applied to Exit and Guča, all such dichotomies point towards a clear demarcation between the festivals' respective meanings and representations, situating them as extremes on a continuum (see Table 1).

The pacification of the Serbian political scene and the attendant consolidation of the country's pro-European orientation has since 2008 rendered the narrative of Two Serbias increasingly obsolete and paved the way for the rise of alternative narratives of national identity, in particular that of nation branding.<sup>6</sup> At stake here is an ideological discourse whose primary aim is to legitimize the purported efforts of national elites across the globe to improve the international image and prospects of their respective countries for success on global markets.

I have discussed elsewhere<sup>7</sup> the transformation of Exit and Guča into (national) *brandsapes*, defined by John F. Sherry as “experiential social space[s] where marketers

5. Catherine Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-Conflict, Postcolonial?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review* 54/4 (1995): 917–31.

6. There are specifically two additional discursive trends that emerged during the 2000s. One amounts to the narrative of Third Serbia, the main focus of which is on bridging “constitutive asymmetries” between First and Second Serbia (Ivana Spasić and Tamara Petrović, “Varijante ‘Treće Srbije,’” *Filozofija i društvo* XXIII/3, 2012: 23–44). And the other goes under the name of nation branding. The growing influence of both trends was paralleled in the production of a culture that shifted from emergent to dominant. In addition, the narrative of Third Serbia, especially since 2012, has mutated into what Milanović calls “multi-party kleptocracy” (Branko Milanović, “Multi-party kleptocracies rather than illiberal democracies,” *Global Inequality*, 22 July 2017, <http://glineq.blogspot.fi/2017/07/multi-party-kleptocracies-rather-than.html>). According to him, in “this new breed of quasi democratic regimes,” a multi-party system and a pragmatic combination of both liberal and anti-liberal values (as is currently the case in Vučić's Serbia) are primarily deployed as a smoke screen behind which lurks the actual rule of a single party and blatant misuse of state power for the private gain of its members and affiliates (*ibid.*).

7. Jelena Gligorijević, “Practices and Ideological Effects of Music Festival Branding: A Case Study of Serbia's Two Major Music Festivals, Exit and Guča,” in *Musik & Marken / Music & Brands*, edited by Michael Ahlers et al., 2021 [forthcoming].

engage consumers in the co-creation of brand meaning.”<sup>8</sup> Exit and Guča as brandscapes thus provide festival consumers with resources from which to build their identities, lifestyles, taste cultures, and social experiences. It is specifically from the meaning-making potential of cultural practices they accommodate that they generate symbolic capital for their consumers, their businesses and associated sponsor companies. What also falls within the purview of this definition is a gradual shift in understanding the nation in commercial terms and thus Exit and Guča as national brands—a process that is part of the larger global neoliberal restructuring of post-socialist countries and the world beyond.<sup>9</sup> While I have previously analyzed the present-day practices and ideological effects of branding in terms of brand canopy, corporate social responsibility, and the promotion of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism at these festivals,<sup>10</sup> in this article I focus on the effects that the reconceptualization of the nation as brand has produced on the local perception of each festival as well as on the related discursive field of national identity within the broader contexts of post-socialist transition, the EU integration, and globalization.

The article consists of two parts. First, I present local narratives of defeat, nostalgia, and authenticity loss in Exit and Guča brought about by a shift towards the ideology of (nation) branding, while simultaneously offering reflections on the political implications of this change from a critical leftist perspective.<sup>11</sup> Second, I analyze the ways in which the principles of market economy and branding practice, normatively adopted by both festivals, come to be bastardized in execution, resulting in what Lazić calls *normative-value dissonance*.<sup>12</sup> This is, however, not to say that principles of market economy and branding practices have some sort of purity that has become corrupted or distorted along the way. These principles are rather approached as embodying the ideal type of market economy, or put differently, as utopian constructs that are objectively possible but unlikely to be confirmed completely in the phenomenon under study. The ideal type of market economy is thus used here as an analytical framework that will refine our knowledge of Exit and Guča’s branding practices precisely through analysis of the reasons and ways in which these practices diverge from the ideal type. The article is otherwise grounded in a neo-Marxist critique of the ideologies, logics, and practices of branding / market economy. As

8. John F. Sherry (1998), quoted in Nicholas Carah, *Pop Brands: Branding, Popular Music, and Young People* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 8.

9. Andrew Graan, “Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia,” *Cultural Anthropology* 28/1 (2013): 161–79; Gerald Sussman, “Systemic Propaganda and State Branding in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 23–48.

10. Jelena Gligorijević, “Practices and Ideological Effects of Music Festival Branding: A Case Study of Serbia’s Two Major Music Festivals, Exit and Guča,” in *Musik & Marken / Music & Brands*, edited by Michael Ahlers et al., 2021 [forthcoming].

11. Nicholas Carah, *Pop Brands: Branding, Popular Music, and Young People* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (London: Flamingo, 2000); Slavoj Žižek, “What Is a Brand? Marketing Redefines Our Lives in Strange New Ways,” *Playboy – The 60th Anniversary Issue* (30 December 2013), <https://playboysfw.kinja.com/what-is-a-brand-marketing-redefines-our-lives-in-stran-1487556406>.

12. Mladen Lazić, “Serbia: A Part of Both the East and the West,” *Sociologija* 45/3 (2003): 193–216.

such, it provides a vantage point from which to criticize not only the poor (“bastardized”) implementation of branding discourse in Exit and Guča, but also its very ideological premises and implications.

Finally I posit that while nation branding has forged a more unified view of Exit and Guča as national brands that ostensibly improve the international image of the country, but which in reality deplete both festivals of their initial cultural and political potency, the proof of normative-value dissonance in Exit and Guča supports the argument that (nation) branding in both festivals ultimately feeds back into earlier Balkanist discourse on Serbia’s national identity schisms. In view of this, it follows that the ever-changing hegemonic narratives of Serbian national identity throughout the country’s post-socialist history—from the narrative of Two Serbias, Third Serbia, and nation branding to that of “multi-party kleptocracy”<sup>13</sup>—along with the corresponding repositioning of discourses and practices surrounding Exit and Guča, do not seem to abolish the power of Balkanist discourse. Rather, the existing points of convergence that foreground national identity in these two Serbian festivals come to be recast into the new ones, in accordance with the historical, political, and socioeconomic changes in Serbia and the world beyond. Balkanist discourse on Serbia’s indeterminate position between West and East will furthermore continue to appear uncontested as long as the perceived hegemony of Western / European epistemological paradigms and cultural values remains in place.

In short, using the above theoretical concepts and approaches, this article presents a critical cultural analysis of Exit and Guča as national brands with reference to such eclectic sources as the interview transcripts with relevant festival actors produced between 2011 and 2014, as well as a variety of media-generated data on Exit and Guča, specifically popular publications, documentaries, TV and radio shows, media reports, blogs, and online forums. The article will conclude with a brief discussion on two crucial questions that the previous analysis has raised, namely, whose interests among chief festival actors and supporters alike does nation branding primarily serve? And what does this tell us about the political potential of Exit and Guča for envisioning alternative and preferred futures in today’s world?

#### ON NATION BRANDING IN GENERAL AND IN SOUTH / EASTERN EUROPE SPECIFICALLY

Nation branding is a global trend that began to dominate the public stage since the mid-1990s, and that was accompanied by the boom of nation-branding literature across disciplines with either market-driven or critical concerns.<sup>14</sup> Nation branding is defined as “a marketing practice that simplifies and borrows only those aspects of a nation’s

13. Branko Milanović, “Multi-party kleptocracies rather than illiberal democracies,” *Global Inequality* (22 July 2017), <http://glineq.blogspot.fi/2017/07/multi-party-kleptocracies-rather-than.html>.

14. Nadia Kaneva, “Nation Branding in Post-Communist Europe: Identities, Markets, and Democracy,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012a), 3–22.

identity that promote a nation's marketability."<sup>15</sup> It is often emphasized that there is more to (nation) branding than "just advertising." While advertising is usually understood as one way of communicating the core meaning of (nation) brand identity to the outside world,<sup>16</sup> nation branding aspires to become an integral part of national policy and, as such, "reconstitute[s] nationhood at the levels of both *ideology* and *praxis*" (emphases in original).<sup>17</sup> The success of nation branding shows in substantial public funds that many governments around the world are willing to invest in numerous media and marketing campaigns, as well as in the services of branding experts that advocate or supervise them.

In post-socialist countries, nation branding is closely intertwined with the discourses of transition, Europeanization, and globalization. Being imported from the West, nation branding operates as a metonymy for modernity. As such, it recommends itself to South / Eastern European countries (S/EE henceforth)<sup>18</sup> as a new discursive vehicle for reimagining nations as "hip" and nominally equal to the West. In this respect, nation branding implicitly reproduces the West-East hermeneutic, whereby Occidental Europe remains a desired model of civilization and modernity that S/EE countries are to replicate and aspire to. In fact, the S/EE region views nation branding as the only possible way to respond to the changed rules of the global game. According to these new rules, a nation can apparently survive in the global arena solely by adopting the language of advertising and branding. For S/EE countries, nation branding has thus become one of the pathways to neoliberalism—a pathway securing their integration into economies of the EU and the world at large.<sup>19</sup>

15. Zala Volčić, "Branding Slovenia: 'You Can't Spell Slovenia Without Love . . .'" in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the "New Europe,"* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 148; Simon Anholt, "Branding Places and Nations," in *Brands and Branding*, edited by Rita Clifton and John Simmons (London: Profile Books, 2003), 213–26.

16. Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 5.

17. Nadia Kaneva, "Nation Branding in Post-Communist Europe: Identities, Markets, and Democracy," in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the "New Europe,"* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012a), 4.

18. To highlight that "the Balkans" (i.e. Southeast Europe) and "Eastern Europe" are at times used in this work interchangeably, I have put forward the following form of addressing the two regions: "South / Eastern Europe." From the logic of the argument presented in the article, it should be sufficiently clear that I employ the theoretical models and concepts that refer to either "Balkans" (as in Balkanist discourse) or "Eastern Europe" (as in Kaneva's theorization of nation branding in Eastern Europe within the broader context of post-socialist transition, Europeanization, and globalization), but that they are in their geopolitical and ideological reach applicable to both regions (as in the label "South / Eastern Europe"). There are arguably two main reasons that account for this. First, both regions have experienced a similar predicament of post-socialist transition; and second, Eastern Europe occupies a similar position of "imputed ambiguity" in the symbolic geography of Europe since the eighteenth century (Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), and especially since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Tomislav Longinović, "Music Wars: Blood and Song at the End of Yugoslavia," in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, edited by Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 622–43).

19. Andrew Graan, "Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia," *Cultural Anthropology* 28/1 (2013): 161–79; Nadia Kaneva, "Who Can Play This Game? The Rise of Nation Branding in Bulgaria, 2001–2005," in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the "New Europe,"* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012b), 99–123; Gerald Sussman, "Systemic Propaganda and State Branding in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe," in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the "New Europe,"* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 23–48.

Within the overarching framework of neoliberal global capitalism, nation branding represents an integral part of wider branding practices and their primary focus on sign-value production “through the commodification of affective attachments.”<sup>20</sup> As Kaneva further points out, the effects of this discursive shift are such that “the economic and ideological are no longer separable” and that branding has become a constitutive part in the everyday production and circulation of social meanings.<sup>21</sup> Speaking more broadly, what lies at the core of branding is the ideology of free market utopianism, which is arguably used to conceal two major truths: one, that (nation) branding ultimately serves the interests of global capital;<sup>22</sup> and two, that branding naturalizes capital as the only imaginable form of social organization.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the copy-paste character of nation branding campaigns,<sup>24</sup> and despite the fact that there is no real evidence that nation branding improves the prospects of a brighter future for individual countries and world as a whole,<sup>25</sup> the development of a nation branding strategy is still widely accepted as a necessity. The same applies to the former Yugoslav countries, including Serbia, where the idea of nation branding is based on “[t]he promise . . . that with a better image, other social problems can be addressed, that ultimately they are all tied to the economy, and the economy is tied to the national ‘brand.’”<sup>26</sup>

Nation branding started gaining a foothold in Serbian public discourse at the turn of the millennium.<sup>27</sup> Because the Serbian government’s efforts at nation branding initiatives are most tightly linked to those of making Serbia an attractive tourist destination, it is virtually impossible to draw the dividing line between two economy sectors. This is all the more remarkable insofar as one acknowledges that the discursive framing of culture as a resource seems to be central to each. Within this line of thinking, as Nicos

20. Nadia Kaneva, “Nation Branding in Post-Communist Europe: Identities, Markets, and Democracy,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012a), 10. See also Tom Blackett, “What Is a Brand?,” in *Brands and Branding*, edited by Rita Clifton and John Simmons (London: Profile Books, 2003), 13–25; Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (London: Flamingo, 2000); Scott Lash and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007).

21. Nadia Kaneva, *ibid.*

22. Nadia Kaneva, “Who Can Play This Game? The Rise of Nation Branding in Bulgaria, 2001–2005,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012b), 99–123.

23. Nicholas Carah, *Pop Brands: Branding, Popular Music, and Young People* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

24. Zala Volčič, “Branding Slovenia: ‘You Can’t Spell Slovenia Without Love . . .,’” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 147–67.

25. Gerald Sussman, “Systemic Propaganda and State Branding in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 23–48.

26. Zala Volčič, “Branding Slovenia: ‘You Can’t Spell Slovenia Without Love . . .,’” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 147. See also Andrew Graan, “Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia,” *Cultural Anthropology* 28/1 (2013): 161–79.

27. Branislava Mijatović, “The Musical (Re)Branding of Serbia: ‘Serbia Sounds Global,’ Guča, and Exit,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 213.

Papastergiadis and Meredith Martin explain following George Yúdice, “Culture no longer simply serves as a realm of legitimation, but, rather, must itself be legitimated on the basis of its explicit social and economic utility.”<sup>28</sup> It comes as no surprise that the main strategy in Serbia’s nation branding and tourist promotion initiatives is to use local cultural events, notably Guča and Exit, as “a hook to attract tourists.”<sup>29</sup> Both music festivals are indeed heavily integrated into Serbia’s official tourist offer—as the 2011 campaign *Sounds of Summer in Serbia*<sup>30</sup> organized by the Tourist Organization of Serbia (TOS) can attest to—and are largely promoted at various international fairs or within presentations of the country to foreign guest journalists who then report on them in their native countries.<sup>31</sup> In line with the mantra “culture as a resource,” Exit and Guča are furthermore described as engines of economic growth at both local and national levels, each contributing particularly to the development of tourist industry in the country (see statements by Exit Festival CEO Dušan Kovačević, quoted in *B92* 2014; or by then-Serbian PM Aleksandar Vučić, quoted in *Blic* 2016).<sup>32</sup>

By the same token, the Serbian government has allocated substantial funds to both tourism and nation branding. Examples of Serbia’s nation branding initiatives include annual Brand Fairs (since 2005), costly nation branding ads on CNN and on one of the central London billboards, “smaller scale projects and events, and the creation of two national bodies for country brand development.”<sup>33</sup> Note that Exit, Guča, and Profile Ltd (a Belgrade-based marketing and communications agency responsible for building the Guča brand since 2006) also do their share in promoting nation branding. Both festivals, for example, were nationally awarded the status of Superbrands Serbia in 2006 and 2007. Furthermore, Profile Ltd organized a nation branding conference

28. Nikos Papastergiadis and Meredith Martin, “Art Biennales and Cities as Platforms for Global Dialogue,” in *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere*, edited by Gerard Delanty, Liana Giorgi, and Monica Sassatelli (London: Routledge, 2011), 45.

29. Dina Vuković, a spokeswoman for the Tourism Organisation of Serbia (TOS), quoted in Gordana Andrić, “Tourist sector pins hopes on month of fun,” *Belgrade Insight* 96 (28 July – 9 September 2011), 1.

30. The campaign was based on the promotion of Serbia’s three music festivals—the Guča Trumpet Festival, the Nišville Jazz Festival, and the Belgrade Beer Fest—all of which taking place within two weeks of August 2011, except for the Novi Sad Exit Festival, which was promoted as a “plus” event in July.

31. Interview with Ljiljana Čerović, PR representative for the Tourist Organization of Serbia (Belgrade, 10 August 2011).

32. Another good case in point is that thanks to the Guča Festival, many facilities have been built or upgraded in the village, such as festival stages, bridges, roads, footpaths, heliport, sanitary knot with public toilets, motel, sports facilities, swimming pools, riverbed and promenade along the river Bjelica, monument to Desimir Perišić, and Trumpet Museum (Adam Tadić et al., *Guča: Pola veka Sabora trubača u Guči (1961–2010)*, Guča: Centar za kulturu, sport i turizam opštine Lučani “Dragačevo,” 2010). According to Vladimir Ilić, “Over the period 2004–2010, the festival generated around 1.6 million euros in revenue, while Guča saw around 5.4 million euros in investment” (Vladimir Ilić, “Guča: Od vašara do svetskog sabora,” *Večernje novosti*, 14 October 2011a, <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/spektakl.147.html:349315-Guca-Od-vasara-do-svetskog-sabora>).

33. Branislava Mijatović, “The Musical (Re)Branding of Serbia: ‘Serbia Sounds Global,’ Guča, and Exit,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the ‘New Europe,’* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 226. See also *B92*, “Počeo Sabor trubača u Guči” (30 August 2006), [http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2006&mm=08&dd=30&nav\\_category=15&nav\\_id=209921](http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2006&mm=08&dd=30&nav_category=15&nav_id=209921).



in 2004,<sup>34</sup> whereas Exit initiated a series of conferences titled *Rebranding Serbia* (2013–2015) with the aim of highlighting “the significance of the systemic development of a positive image of Serbia and the Serbs in the world.” Apart from the participation of globally distinguished nation branding experts, the conferences also brought together Serbia’s public and private sectors. Yet it is the private sector that is seen as a primary leader in nation branding, while the government’s engagement with this branch of marketing industry is criticized as either insufficient,<sup>35</sup> or as lacking a clear “vision . . . coordination between various governmental bodies, and . . . strategic plan of action.”<sup>36</sup>

From the foregoing evidence, it appears that nation branding has forged a more unified view of Exit and Guča as national brands having much in common, above all promoting a positive image of the country to the outside world. To paraphrase Profile President Milan Ristić, Guča and Exit are internationally recognized brands that cater to the nascent needs of global society, which are freedom and human equality.<sup>37</sup> Exit co-founder Dorijan Petrić asserted in like manner that there is plenty of room for cooperation between the two festivals, from sorting out common infrastructural issues, to the possibility of exchanging selected World Music artists.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the two festivals are said to complement each other to such an extent that they might form a synergy in the future, as the proposed slogans *Exit at Guča* and *Guča at Exit* suggest.<sup>39</sup>

#### NARRATIVES OF DEFEAT, NOSTALGIA, AND AUTHENTICITY LOSS IN EXIT AND GUČA

The production of Exit and Guča as brandscapes has affected local attitudes towards each festival. While the former largely used to serve as a vital source of legitimacy for Serbia’s urban, progressive, liberal, and pro-Western crowd, the latter catered to the cultural needs of both nationalists and cosmopolitans, depending on the perspective assumed.<sup>40</sup> It is my assertion, however, that branding practices have robbed both festivals of their initial politico-ideological meanings, reducing each to a “menu” of cultural resources from which to build a “self” around the pleasure principle and life politics. That brands ultimately hollow out our social and life-worlds is a viewpoint echoed in some of the critical reviews

34. Milan Ristić, “Brendiranje Srbije kao zemlje festivala – Guča kao globalni brend,” the Exit First International Conference “Rebranding Serbia” (NIS Business Centre, Novi Sad, 10 July 2013).

35. *Ibid.*

36. Branislava Mijatović, “The Musical (Re)Branding of Serbia: ‘Serbia Sounds Global,’ Guča, and Exit,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 227.

37. Milan Ristić, “Brendiranje Srbije kao zemlje festivala – Guča kao globalni brend,” the Exit First International Conference “Rebranding Serbia” (NIS Business Centre, Novi Sad, 10 July 2013).

38. Dejana Milović Buha, “Hulahop,” interview with Exit co-founders Dušan Kovačević and Dorijan Petrić, Radio B92 (Belgrade, 5 July 2008).

39. Milan Ristić, “Brendiranje Srbije kao zemlje festivala – Guča kao globalni brend,” the Exit First International Conference “Rebranding Serbia” (NIS Business Centre, Novi Sad, 10 July 2013).

40. For an extensive and nuanced analysis of the ideology in each festival, see Jelena Gligorićević, *Contemporary Music Festivals as Micronational Spaces: Articulations of National Identity in Serbia’s Exit and Guča Trumpet Festivals in the Post-Milošević Era* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Turku, 2019).

of Exit and Guča in the Serbian media. Zoran Panović states, for example, that the sponsor “breweries . . . treat both [Guča] and Exit as ‘value neutral.’ Both events are evaluated solely on the basis of the amount of sold beer kegs.”<sup>41</sup> Jovanov likewise views Exit as part of the wider capitalist project of conquering new (EE) markets by transnational tobacco and music festival industries.<sup>42</sup> A similarly critical take on Exit’s business operations is also echoed in the rhetorical question posed by Uroš Milovanović: “Why does Exit have to ‘participate’ at all costs in the festival corporate circus that circulates around the continent every season?”<sup>43</sup> And the following remark by a local Exit-goer contains similar anti-capitalist sentiment: “What worries me most are not political tensions in the former Yugoslav region, but that these Tuborg wristbands render us all walking ads.”<sup>44</sup> This is clearly one way to criticize the dehumanizing effect of contemporary corporate culture in which the bodies of festivalgoers become, too, part of the festival brandscape.

It should be emphasized again that the comments surrounding Guča Festival are similar in tone. Senior curator at the Belgrade Ethnographic Museum Marko Stojanović notes, for example, that “[t]he main sponsor, Apatin Brewery, has encircled Guča with its advertising space and thus appropriated culturally all the happenings during the festival, pushing also trumpet music into the background.”<sup>45</sup> The lines between festival sponsors and sponsored culture have indeed become severely blurred, as the case of Serbian brass band *Zao Taro Lajt* illustrates strikingly well. According to band member Miloško Đurić “Beko,” the band was named after its sponsor company, owned by Vidan Mihailović, a Serbian businessman working in Russia.<sup>46</sup>

No wonder, thus, that a majority of Serbian quotidian discourses of Exit and Guča are nowadays infused with a sense of nostalgia and authenticity loss, calling into question the very credibility and significance (national and otherwise) of each festival. Given its strong political starting point, Exit Festival in particular has left many of its early followers deflated and glum. Prevailing in the public domain is specifically the “sell out” discourse in its several variants. To begin with, Exit is accused of selling out to foreign festival participants at the expense of domestic cultural interests and needs. Criticized here is the festival’s unspecified policy regarding the selection criteria as well as the allocation of performance timeslots and stages for participating domestic acts. This is, in turn, taken to signal a lack of Exit commitment to the affirmation of the local “alternative” scene.<sup>47</sup> A similar point of view is upheld in domestic online forums. For example, *Keti S.* depicts

41. Zoran Panović, “Od Tita do Velje,” *Danas: Guča* 51 (9 August 2007/2011), 7.

42. S. Jovanov, “Exit – kao ‘ulaz’ za pušački concern,” *Danas* (11–12 May 2002), n.p.

43. Uroš Milovanović, “EXIT za početnike: Gde je IZLAZ?,” *B92* (6 July 2010), <http://www.b92.net/kultura/exit/istorija.php>.

44. Anon., quoted in *Petrovaradinsko pleme* [documentary], directed by Borut Bucinel et al. (KUD Pozitiv Ljubljana, 2005).

45. Dragoljub Petrović, “Trubači u Guči postaju predgrupa Ceci,” interview with Miroslava Lukić-Krstanović and Marko Stojanović, *Danas* (29 August 2012), [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/trubaci\\_u\\_guci\\_postaju\\_predgrupa\\_ceci.t4.html?news\\_id=246724](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/trubaci_u_guci_postaju_predgrupa_ceci.t4.html?news_id=246724).

46. *Danas: Guča* 53, “‘Zlatnu jabuku’ do sada dobili Užičani, Knjaževčani i Požežani” (7 August 2013b), 12.

47. Interview with Bojan Bošković, former Exit CEO (Belgrade, 18 September 2014); Uroš Milovanović, “EXIT za početnike: Gde je IZLAZ?,” *B92* (6 July 2010), <http://www.b92.net/kultura/exit/istorija.php>.

Exit as “a festival catering fully to the taste of the British audience . . . dominated by ‘slimy’ Britpop and . . . even slimier RnB.”<sup>48</sup>

Next in line are the domestic narratives of defeat, which convey a sense that there was nothing authentic about Exit as a political project, given its poor material effects and its commercially minded replicability in the external politico-economic markets. Indeed, in hindsight, Exit supporters came to the disappointing realization that neither the festival, nor Serbia’s so-called “October 2000 Revolution” it is associated with, brought about any major sociopolitical changes in the country. The illusion about the “revolutionary” character of Exit 2000 was specifically shattered in the light of the fact that the Western / U.S. financial and know-how assistance in toppling the Milošević regime was largely driven by the economic interests of global capital. As Sussman notes,

There was nothing at all actually revolutionary about the uprisings in [such] countries [as Serbia, Ukraine, and Georgia], as they can be seen as little more than intra-elite transfers of power, world capitalist integration of their economies, and expectations of their membership in NATO.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, it has turned out that some of the key people involved in the movement *Otpor!* [Resistance!]<sup>50</sup> and Exit Festival—namely, political activist Srđa Popović and music promoter Rajko Božić—made international careers out of this experience, selling the template of the Serbian “revolution” elsewhere. To be exact, Popović is a founder and executive director of the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS; since 2003), which “has worked with pro-democracy activists from more than fifty countries, including . . . Ukraine [and] Georgia” (see *Canvasopedia.org*). Božić was for his part sent in 2009 to Havana by a U.S. government contractor on a mission to spark a youth movement against the Cuban government using the popularity of notorious local rapper Aldo.<sup>51</sup> According to the same source, Božić has been hired for similar projects in Tunisia, Ukraine, Lebanon, and Zimbabwe.

48. Posted on *B92* [comments], “200.000 ljudi na EXIT R: Evoluciji” (15 July 2013), [http://www.b92.net/kultura/komentari.php?nav\\_id=732487](http://www.b92.net/kultura/komentari.php?nav_id=732487).

49. Gerald Sussman, “Systemic Propaganda and State Branding in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 39.

50. According to the official festival magazine *Exit News* (2001), the story of Exit began with the anti-Milošević 1996-97 student protests in which the key Exit people (then university freshmen) took a politically active role for the first time. The same group of students in the meantime came to be associated with the Vojvodina civic resistance movement *Otpor!* and its non-violent tactics of political confrontation through creative cultural activities. Among a series of politically engaged concerts and multimedia events that they organized at the time, the two are said to have stood out as the ideational precursors for the Exit festival production. One was the “Noise Spring Party” held in 1998 in Spens (the largest hall of the Sports and Business Center Vojvodina), which was remembered for the strong symbolism of on-stage breaking of the “wall” in parallel with the rising noise of drumming. The other event, “Šakom u glavu” [Punch in the Face], was organized in October 1999 and its anti-Milošević agenda was conveyed through a politically engaged theater performance, rock songs, and a video screening summarizing the disastrous effects of Milošević’s politics.

51. *National Post*, “Rajko Bozic, rap spy: How one promoter was tasked by the U.S. to sneak inside Cuba’s hip hop scene” (12 December 2014), <http://nationalpost.com/news/rajko-bozic-rap-spy-how-one-promoter-was-tasked-by-the-u-s-to-sneak-inside-cubas-hip-hop-scene>.

It is said, alternatively, that Exit has sold out intra-nationally to the ruling politico-economic elite. In the words of a commentator under the alias *ćirilica je zakon* [the Cyrillic rules]:

Screw the festival that belongs so unequivocally to the [political] establishment, that is under so much control and has unreserved media support, without a single critical note. The music of youth was once subversive, the media used to ignore or dread their concerts, and now it's business. Young hedonists have no [new] ideas, no rebellious impulses, only a state-approved and state-controlled kind of fun.<sup>52</sup>

Exit was admittedly quick to adjust to the new political situation brought about by the Serbian presidential and parliamentary elections in May 2012. The radical shift of political power into the hands of the more populist coalition gathered around the Serbian Progressive Party and soon after consolidated at all levels of government, was already visible in the Exit programming next year. Two significant changes are worth acknowledging here. The first was in the Exit attitude towards sexual minorities, as evidenced by the festival's subdued support for Loud & Queer<sup>53</sup> Cruising Point (LQCP) in 2013. Namely, in 2011 and 2012, the LQCP was enthusiastically promoted as the first queer-oriented stage to be seen at any music festival in the region and beyond, offering all Exit-goers "an opportunity . . . to learn more about queer culture and the LGBT community."<sup>54</sup> In 2013, however, the LQCP was downgraded and turned into an obscure, semi-dark site lying on the fringes of the festival happenings, with the insufficiently profiled music program, apparently played by gay DJs. According to one of them, the program of Exit's Loud & Queer Stage was downplayed because the city's new political leaders do not think favorably of sexual minorities (field notes, July 2013). Or as the former Exit CEO Bošković put it to me in an interview, "The people currently running Exit are committed to the Church and family values."<sup>55</sup>

The second important change in Exit is that the festival has become almost totally apolitical.<sup>56</sup> One example of this is a topical shift in festival discussions towards the fields of youth development, creative industries, and place branding. But perhaps even more conspicuous is the absence of the highly critical Serbian NGO *Peščanik* [Sandglass]<sup>57</sup>

52. Posted on *B92* [comments], "200.000 ljudi na EXIT R: Evoluciji" (15 July 2013), [http://www.b92.net/kultura/komentari.php?nav\\_id=732487](http://www.b92.net/kultura/komentari.php?nav_id=732487).

53. *Loud & Queer*, the oldest event management organization in Serbia (since 2004), takes charge of a variety of cultural and artistic activities within the local queer community.

54. *Exit News*, "Loud & Queer Cruising Point na EXITu!" (4 July 2012), <http://www.exitfest.org/sr/news/loud-queer-cruising-point-na-exitu>.

55. Interview with Bojan Bošković (Belgrade, 18 September 2014).

56. It should be noted here that Exit's (self-)proclaimed status of counterculture has over time lost its initial political power and significance owing to the rapid and overlapping processes of festival institutionalization, commercialization, and internationalization. I illustrated elsewhere that the discursive effects of Exit "countercultural" activity were still traceable in Serbia's national self-narration at least until the significant shift of political power towards authoritarian populism following the 2012 parliamentary elections (Jelena Gligorijević, *Contemporary Music Festivals as Micronational Spaces: Articulations of National Identity in Serbia's Exit and Guča Trumpet Festivals in the Post-Milošević Era*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Turku, 2019).

57. *Peščanik* (since 2000) produces and publishes articles, radio and TV talk shows that cover a variety of sociopolitical issues in the country, region, and world, respectively. The uncompromising critique by *Peščanik* can be

from the festival program from 2013 onwards (this organization used to put on relevant political debates from 2009 through to 2012 upon the invitation of Exit organizers). Furthermore, the growing apolitical character of the festival is very much in line with the Serbian media (self-)censorship and zero tolerance of the new ruling political class to any kind of criticism. The Exit compliance with the authorities is rewarded in return by the Serbian political leaders, who obliged themselves in writing to sponsor the festival over the next six years.<sup>58</sup> In an ironic twist, as Petrović observes, selected Exit organizers were officially welcomed in 2014 by the Serbian PM Vučić, who was saying “everything contrary to what he thought about them only a decade ago. And they even handed him a [framed] thank-you note.”<sup>59</sup> The same amount of scoffing criticism can also be discerned in the online commentary, such as: “Vučić decides about the future of Exit Festival, which is a symbol of the struggle precisely against that man and his politics in the 1990s;”<sup>60</sup> or as *Milan* points out referring to the festival’s self-proclaimed status of the State of Exit, “Not only will Exit survive, but it will even be proclaimed the STATE OF SPP [the ruling Serbian Progressive Party] by organizers!.”<sup>61</sup> One point worth making here is that branding and brands “as an institutional embodiment of the logic of a new form of informational capital,”<sup>62</sup> seem to thrive equally well under conditions of so-called “illiberal capitalism” to be found in all corners of the world, notably Russia and China, but also Serbia.<sup>63</sup>

Guča, for its part, has always been constituted as a site of fierce ideological struggles owing to the controversial notion of *Volksgeist* on which it is built. Thus, the festival’s ever-present nostalgic sentiments and authenticity debates, as articulated through such dichotomies as traditional-modern, old-new, authentic-commercial, or native-foreign, are an integral part of folk and World Music discourses and can attend to both nationalist as well as cosmopolitan concerns.<sup>64</sup> Within the new nation branding paradigm, what has arguably changed is not so much the topics of Guča-related debates, but rather their

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characterized, on the one hand, as modernist, elitist, and highly ethical in its scope and content, and on the other, as cosmopolitan, pro-Yugoslav, and leftist in its support of progressive but not necessarily anti-capitalist values and ideas.

58. *Blic*, “Vučić: Exit će imati finansijsku podršku Vlade Srbije,” (16 February 2016), <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/vucic-exit-ce-imati-finansijsku-podrsku-vlade-srbije/xd6ydw1>.

59. Dragoljub Petrović, “Festival Exit: Od Miloševića do Vučića,” *Al Jazeera Balkans* (12 July 2015), <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/blog/festival-exit-od-milosevica-do-vucica>.

60. *Vlada*, posted in *B92* [comments], “Egzit će ipak preživeti?” (8 November 2012), [http://www.b92.net/kultura/komentari.php?nav\\_id=658575](http://www.b92.net/kultura/komentari.php?nav_id=658575).

61. *Milan*, posted in *ibid.* Former Exit CEO Bošković likewise warns, “Exit should operate separately from the authorities rather than act as their favorite bitch. The situation was different in the past, when there were some democratic instances of political power to lean on. Now the rule of the political establishment is monolithic and I am at their blacklist.” (Interview with Bojan Bošković, Belgrade, 18 September 2014.)

62. Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), vii.

63. *Financial Times*, “Illiberal capitalism” (22 January 2008), <https://www.ft.com/content/f820a134-c509-11dc-811a-0000779fd2ac.2008>

64. Jelena Gligorijević, *Contemporary Music Festivals as Micronational Spaces: Articulations of National Identity in Serbia’s Exit and Guča Trumpet Festivals in the Post-Milošević Era* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Turku, 2019); Iva Nenić, “World Music: From Tradition to Invention,” *New Sound* 27 (2006): n.p., [http://www.newsound.org.rs/eng/content.php?clanak\\_casopis\\_broj=27](http://www.newsound.org.rs/eng/content.php?clanak_casopis_broj=27).

overarching ideological framework and teleological vision. In other words, the discourses of authenticity and nostalgia associated with Serbia's Guča brand are now largely being appropriated to serve commercial ends.

To understand this paradigm shift from Guča as a hegemonic nation-building exercise to Guča as a national brand, however, one must address the confluence of factors that have led to the growth and popularization of the festival, both locally and globally. One such factor was the great international success of several movies made in the 1990s by Serbian film director Emir Kusturica. Many of the characters featured therein were also Serbian Romani brass band musicians playing under the supervision of Yugoslav musician and soundtrack composer Goran Bregović. Coinciding with the growing fame of Kusturica's movies and Bregović's music creations was the rise of the transnational World Music (WM) niche market, which was eager to accommodate the Balkan / Serbian / Romani brass and the related phenomena, such as Balkan Beats and Gypsy Punk, as great commercial novelties. The next key factor that contributed substantially to the global visibility of Guča Festival was the shift in Serbia's political leadership following the overthrow of Milošević in 2000. Advocating the politics of EU integration, the country opened up to the Western world and began to recover economically with its financial support. The government could accordingly secure more funds for the national and international promotion of Serbian tourism, with a special emphasis on such music events as the Exit and Guča trumpet festivals.<sup>65</sup> As a result, the increasing trends towards the internationalization and rejuvenalization of the festival were already evident in the early 2000s along with the changing demographic structure of the festival audience. As Miloš Timotijević documents, Guča 2003 witnessed for the first time large groups of foreign visitors, and at Guča 2002, the overwhelming majority of the crowd was made up of younger festival-goers.<sup>66</sup> Last but not least, it was all these factors that gave the Guča festival program a new profile in the post-Milošević era—one characterized by a split between old and new with all its derivatives (traditional-modern, local-global, and so on). All such binaries came to the fore the moment contemporary commercial acts and repertoires began to enter the Guča official stage, ranging from the introduction of so-called *Midnight Concert* (in 2001), comprising local brass band performances of a free-choice and largely pop-oriented repertoire, to the staging of individual concerts, first by Serbia's most renowned brass bands, notably Boban and Marko Marković Orchestra (since 2004), and then by other mainly local and regional popular acts from the commercial worlds of ethno, World Beat, neo-folk, and turbo-folk<sup>67</sup> (since 2010).

In accordance with the festival changes listed above, the Balkan / Serbian / Gypsy brass is increasingly packaged for foreign and local audiences alike as an "exotic" WM product.

65. Interview with Ljiljana Čerović (Belgrade, 10 August 2011).

66. Miloš Timotijević, *Karneval u Guči: Sabor trubača 1961–2004* (Čačak: Legenda KD / Narodni muzej Čačak, 2005), 135–37.

67. Turbo-folk is a Serbian hybrid music genre that combines techno rhythms and nasal oriental singing. Its emergence at the beginning of the 1990s coincided with the rising wave of militant nationalism in the country, which made it a controversial target of criticism (largely over its oriental elements) by different social groups on both ends of the political spectrum.

Here the term “exotic” denotes any music “coming from (or referring to, or evoking) a place other than here.”<sup>68</sup> Widespread global interest in Balkan / Serbian / Gypsy brass bands represents therefore an integral part of the wider postmodern search for “natural” musicians and musics that are largely seen as existing outside historic time.<sup>69</sup> As Johannes Brusila writes, “The expectations of the audience, for whom the world music artist signifies Otherness, are underpinned by the idea of an unchanged essence of other cultures, in which notions of place, ethnic groupings and music are combined.”<sup>70</sup> More to the point, what counts as the exoticism of Balkan music as a whole seems to be applicable to the Serbian / Romani brass, too. Silverman specifically argues:

In the Balkans exoticism is coded as ‘oriental’ or eastern (Turkish and Middle Eastern), and marked by scales and rhythmic patterns that are associated with the East, Gypsies, sex, and passion. These elements of musical style and text have been appropriated by non-Roma and are now widespread in pop and fusion styles such as *chalga* in Bulgaria and *manele* in Romania.<sup>71</sup>

It perhaps goes without saying that the same kind of Balkan exoticism can also be found in Serbian turbo-folk, in musical constructions of the Balkans in Bregović’s songs,<sup>72</sup> as well as in the music repertoire of Guča Festival.

Despite the underlying symbolic and marketing power of “Gypsy” stereotypes that the festival counts and capitalizes on, Guča is nonetheless marketed as strictly Serbian. The notion of Serbianhood is here deliberately left open to both the exclusivist (i.e. ethnocentric) and universalist (i.e. inclusive of all ethnic groups, including Roma) interpretations of Serbian national identity.<sup>73</sup> More accurately, Guča Festival uses the discursive strategies of self-exoticization to construct and perform Serbian racial-ethnic difference as specifically Balkan. This is most vividly conveyed through the construct of *madness* emerging from media coverage of the festival, both national and international.<sup>74</sup> The trope of madness is especially prominent in the Western media, where common reference points are Kusturica’s films such as *Underground* (1995) and *Black Cat, White Cat*

68. Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

69. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, “Introduction: Music and Race, Their Past, Their Presence,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, edited by Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 29–30.

70. Johannes Brusila, “Local Music, Not from Here:” *The Discourse of World Music Examined Through Three Zimbabwian Case Studies: The Bhundu Boys, Virginia Mukweshu and Sunduza* (Helsinki: Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology, 2003), 165.

71. Carol Silverman, *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics and Balkan Music in Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 245.

72. Aleksandra Marković, *Sounding Stereotypes: Construction of Place and Reproduction of Metaphors in the Music of Goran Bregović* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2013).

73. Jelena Gligorijević, *Contemporary Music Festivals as Micronational Spaces: Articulations of National Identity in Serbia’s Exit and Guča Trumpet Festivals in the Post-Milošević Era* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Turku, 2019); Jelena Gligorijević, “Contested Racial Imaginings of the Serbian Self and the Romani Other in Serbia’s Guča Trumpet Festival,” *Arts*, 9, 52 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts9020052>.

74. *Ibid.* See also Jelena Gligorijević, “World Music Festivals and Tourism: A Case Study of Serbia’s Guča Trumpet Festival,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20/2 (2014): 1–16.

(1998).<sup>75</sup> It is arguably the use of Magical Realism in Kusturica's movies<sup>76</sup> that falls back on the Western racial imagination of a "crazy" Balkan (Serbian / Gypsy) Other. This is something that Slavoj Žižek, for example, has critically reflected on:

In Underground, [Kusturica] stages for the Western gaze the image of the Balkans as a crazy piece of the world, outside history, where people, frankly [speaking], eat, drink, kill, and fuck all the time. A perpetual spiritual orgy. This is what the West wants to see in [Balkan people], and he's delivering it to them. I'm against him, not because he's a too primitive Balkan, but because he's too Westernized.<sup>77</sup>

The Guča madness likewise finds its expressions in such Orientalized and commodified musical forms as Serbian / Balkan WM, ethno, neofolk, and TF. Here recourse to Magical Realism clearly entails "the self-exoticization of the periphery [Serbia] which is intended for consumption in the [Western] Metropolis."<sup>78</sup> And, as Marko Živković notes further, "Each periphery should ideally be an exemplary place, a perfect embodiment of some extreme cultural difference."<sup>79</sup> In Serbia's case, this is clearly Guča's pre-packaged image of a crazy Balkan / Serbian / Gypsy 'Barbarogenius Decivilizer' (to borrow the neologism of Serbian avant-garde artist Ljubomir Micić) that simultaneously thrills and terrifies the Western imagination.

Packaging the Serbian ethnic-racial difference in a commercially appealing way apparently necessitated a certain change in the festival representation, specifically a move away from the historico-heroic and religious ethos in the self-national narration towards an ever-growing appreciation of all things Serbian that are deemed natural, mundane, true to life, jovial, and pleasurable.<sup>80</sup> In short, the institutionalization of branding discourse in the Serbian public sphere under conditions of advanced globalization clearly pushed the earlier ethnocentric discourse into the background.<sup>81</sup>

Based on the evidence above, it is safe to conclude that the transformation of Exit and Guča into national brands should be understood as indicative of a larger post-socialist discursive shift towards what Pawel Surowiec calls *corpo-nationalism*<sup>82</sup> and Zala Volčić—

75. See e.g. Garth Cartwright, "Europe's wildest party," *The Guardian* (23 May 2009), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2009/may/23/guca-balkan-serbia-festival-party>; or the synopsis for *Guča* [documentary], directed by Milivoj Ilić (UK: Red Earth Studio and O Films, 2006).

76. Edmund Yeo Yee Haeng, *Application of Magical Realism in Cinema: Depicting Cultures and Traditions* (MA thesis, Waseda University, 2013).

77. Slavoj Žižek and Bernard-Henri Levy, "Violence and the Left in Dark Times" [video of public debate], LIVE from the New York Public Library (16 September 2008), <https://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/violence-left-dark-times-bernard-henri-levy-slavoj-zizek>.

78. Marko Živković, "Nešto između: Simbolička geografija Srbije," *Filozofija i društvo* 18 (2001), 106.

79. *Ibid.*

80. For more details, see Jelena Gligorijević, *Contemporary Music Festivals as Micronational Spaces: Articulations of National Identity in Serbia's Exit and Guča Trumpet Festivals in the Post-Milošević Era* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Turku, 2019).

81. Cf. Srđan Radović, "Globalizacija identiteta u zakasneloj tranziciji: predstave o Evropi i Srbiji među studentima u Beogradu," *Glasnik Etnografskog instituta SANU* 55/1 (2007): 45–59.

82. Pawel Surowiec, "Toward Corpo-Nationalism: Poland as a Brand," in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the "New Europe,"* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 124–44.



*commercial nationalism*.<sup>83</sup> As Volčić explains, “Nation branding relies on the conflation of citizen and consumer, promoting a sense of national identity as something to which the consumer has the individualized, choice-based relationship associated with consumption.”<sup>84</sup> Implied by the nation branding discourse is thus a post-political understanding of nation as a commodity to be marketed and consumed. In this understanding, to quote Volčić again, “nationalism becomes a form of consumption and citizenship a mode of ‘living the brand.’”<sup>85</sup> The professed affiliation to either Exit or Guča national brands becomes accordingly a matter of the different taste culture of consumption, and thus a different expression of the same (commercial) type of nationalism.

#### NORMATIVE-VALUE DISSONANCE IN EXIT AND GUČA

While the principles of market economy and branding practice are normatively adopted by both festivals, they tend to be bastardized in execution. This incongruity between the given normative system (as represented by the distributive vs. market type of economic operations) and exercised value patterns (be they collectivistic / traditionalist / economically egalitarian or individualistic / modern / politically egalitarian) is generally indicative of Serbia’s East-West schisms, resulting in what Lazić calls *normative-value dissonance*.<sup>86</sup> Such contradictions appear in both music festivals but are more pronounced in Guča, whose key organizers and most dedicated supporters (among politicians, intellectuals, and artists) are predominantly associated with Serbia’s conservative political culture.

Let me start by saying that both festivals are engulfed by a series of corruption scandals. One example relates to a widespread public perception that key Exit people, sometimes referred to as “Exit mafia” by some of my Novi Sad interlocutors, generated their wealth illegally (e.g. by opening off-shore companies, manipulating financial statements, money laundering through real estate investments, and so forth). Whether such allegations are true is difficult to determine. But it is, perhaps, worth emphasizing that embezzlement charges against Exit organizers in 2004 were in the end dismissed due to lack of evidence. At the same time, the festival organization does operate to some extent in the grey zone, as evidenced by sales of black market Exit tickets,<sup>87</sup> or by the concessions made on the festival lineup at the request of selected politicians and sponsors with interest in music.<sup>88</sup> At yet another level, the model of Exit business operation is rather advanced in that it reflects a close match between adopted market-oriented norms and desired value patterns. The festival has, for instance, long aspired to control the money flows at the festival core sites by introducing, first, a token system (since 2007), and afterwards Festival Payment

83. Zala Volčić, “Branding Slovenia: ‘You Can’t Spell Slovenia Without Love . . .,’” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 147–67.

84. *Ibid.*, 149.

85. *Ibid.*, 162. See also Andrew Graan, “Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia,” *Cultural Anthropology* 28/1 (2013): 161–79.

86. Mladen Lazić, “Serbia: A Part of Both the East and the West,” *Sociologija* 45/3 (2003): 193–216.

87. *Država izlaza* [documentary], directed by Jovan Todorović (Belgrade: Lando Production, 2004).

88. Interview with Bojan Bošković (Belgrade, 18 September 2014).

Card (since 2013)—an electronic payment system for food and drinks at the festival. Exit organizers also seem to be keen on putting up a fight against the overwhelmingly displayed dissonance in the environment, specifically against semi-legal private initiatives by local citizens, such as informal street selling of both legal and counterfeit goods, grey economy in hospitality and transportation services, or taxi fare rip-offs targeting foreign tourists.<sup>89</sup>

Examples of corrupt conduct in Guča are much more dramatic and include allegations of concealing the Serbian Ministry of Finance’s inspection report on substantial anomalies in the interconnected business operations of Guča Festival and the Municipality of Lučani (to which Guča belongs). The report specifically pointed to serious mismanagement of public funds by appointed political authorities.<sup>90</sup> In another on-site tax inspection of Guča’s catering facilities, it was likewise established that about eighty-six percent of them operated in violation of tax laws, relating to such issues as unreported employment and the sale of goods and services without issuing receipts.<sup>91</sup> Apart from controversies surrounding public procurement, investment, and other expenditures, there are also local media reports on breaches of sponsorship agreements—for example, with MB Brewery to serve only this beer brand in Guča public spaces during the festival.<sup>92</sup> Guča is additionally infamous for rigged brass band competitions.<sup>93</sup> And perhaps the most striking example of nepotism is the most recently uncovered monument to Dragačevó’s greatest trumpet player and the 1961 competition winner Desimir Perišić (in 2010), which was designed by the daughter of Slobodan Jolović, the most prominent local political figure other than Adam Tadić that participates in the Guča festival organization. To be accurate, Jolović was the longest-serving president of the Municipality of Lučani and thus the longest-serving chairman of the Festival Administrative Board (these two roles are interlinked). Tadić was likewise the longest-serving director of Guča Culture House, which plays an equally influential role in the Guča festival organization. Note that both men come from the political party originally formed by Slobodan Milošević—the Socialist Party of Serbia.

What also stands in sharp contrast to the declarative endorsement of neoliberal (i.e. market-based and individual-oriented) ideology in Exit and Guča, are elements of

89. Dejana Milović Buha, “Hulahop,” interview with Exit co-founders Dušan Kovačević and Dorijan Petrić, Radio B92 (Belgrade, 5 July 2008); Predrag Novković, “Drum ‘n’ bass ‘n’ pljeskavice,” *Exit News* 3 (10 July 2002), n.p.

90. Aleksandar Arsenijević, “Opština Lučani kao privatni posed Slobodana Jolovića,” *OzonPress* (9 September 2011), <http://www.ozonpress.net/politika/135-opstina-lucani-ka0-privatni-posed-sloboana-jolovica>; Vladimir Ilić, “Lučani: Razrešenje direktora Centra za kulturu,” *Večernje novosti* (22 March 2011b), <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/srbija.73.html:323869-Lucani-Razresenje-direktora-Centra-za-kulturu>; Nenad Kovačević and Dragoljub Petrović, “SPS ‘tuča’ oko Guče,” *Danas* (13 December 2010), [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/sps\\_tuca\\_oko\\_guce.14.html?news\\_id=205711](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/sps_tuca_oko_guce.14.html?news_id=205711); Ilija Stanković, “Guča prevrsila meru: bojkot Sabora trubaca,” *FiestaMania goes TuttiMundi* (28 July 2013), <https://fiestamania.blogspot.fi/2013/07/guca-prevrsila-meru-bojkot-sabora.html>.

91. Gorica Avalić, “U Guči niko nije izdavao račune,” *Blic* (13 August 2013), <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Ekonomija/398691/U-Guci-niko-nije-izdavao-racune>.

92. *Ekonomist*, “Guča – biznis od 30 miliona evra” (19 August 2007), <http://www.ekapija.com/website/sr/page/122519>.

93. A. Jovanović, “Guča je nameštena!,” *Informer* 384 (8 August 2013), 18.

authoritarianism and populism to be found in each festival's marketing strategies and internal social relations.<sup>94</sup> For example, according to one Exit employee, social interactions at the company sometimes resemble those in an "authoritative male culture," since it is the Exit general manager who often has all information and makes decisions by himself.<sup>95</sup> Severely criticized, too, is the existing hierarchy in the Exit organizational structure, which is based on the length of one's tenure in the organization as well as on the level of relationship closeness to management. In Guča-related media reports, the person in charge, Slobodan Jolović, is likewise described as a whimsical, disdainful, and inconsiderate man, "who deals with Municipality of Lučani as though it was his private property," and who bullies his associates.<sup>96</sup> Anthropologist Miroslava Lukić-Krstanović also identifies authoritarianism as one of the prevailing modes of interaction within the Guča management structure, additionally fueled by a constant struggle for power among people in charge of the festival production.<sup>97</sup> The other two modes of Guča operation that she scrutinizes are those of national populism and exoticism.<sup>98</sup> With regard to issues of Guča populism, suffice it to say that the ideal of Serbian folk tradition held by festival founders and organizers is often (mis)used with the following goal in mind: to present selected Serbian elite members as ones of the people, by the people, and for the people, while concealing their particularistic interests, political, economic, and otherwise.

Exit, for its part, also deploys populist tactics, fused with either left- or right-wing appeals. One example of promotional campaigns with leftist undertones includes the sale of cheaper festival tickets for local Exit-goers. Another example is the staging of free concerts in the city center of Novi Sad, including that of Ceelo Green organized in June 2013 as part of the festival's birthday celebration. To both left- and right-wing categories may belong, for instance, the Exit fundraising initiative for the reconstruction and development of Petrovaradin Fortress,<sup>99</sup> which is simultaneously the city's more than three-century-old historico-cultural monument and the epicenter of Exit happenings.<sup>100</sup>

94. Once again, this is not to imply that authoritarian and populist tendencies cannot exist within neoliberal paradigms and as consequences of neoliberal ideologies. Rather, neoliberal ideology is viewed here through the lens of an ideal type, as articulated in Lazić's theorization of normative-value dissonance (Mladen Lazić, "Serbia: A Part of Both the East and the West," *Sociologija* 45/3 [2003]: 193–216).

95. "Exit: Najbolji brend u Srbiji," paper written for the Change Management course (2008), <http://www.seminarski-diplomski.co.rs/UpravljanjePromenama/ExitNajboljiBrendSrbija.html>.

96. Aleksandar Arsenijević, "Opština Lučani kao privatni posed Slobodana Jolovića," *OzonPress* (9 September 2011), <http://www.ozonpress.net/politika/135-opstina-lucani-kao-privatni-posed-sloboana-jolovica>.

97. Dragoljub Petrović, "Trubači u Guči postaju predgrupa Ceci," interview with Miroslava Lukić-Krstanović and Marko Stojanović, *Danas* (29 August 2012), [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/trubaci\\_u\\_guci\\_postaju\\_predgrupa\\_ceci.14.html?news\\_id=246724](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/trubaci_u_guci_postaju_predgrupa_ceci.14.html?news_id=246724).

98. *Ibid.*

99. Note that contemporary discourses on cultural heritage preservation tend to cut across conventional ideological divides in that they draw on the same essentialist quest for authenticity, albeit with different aesthetic-ideological motivations and outcomes. See Christopher Koziol, "Historic Preservation Ideology: A Critical Mapping of Contemporary Heritage Policy Discourse," *Preservation Education and Research* 1 (2008): 41–50.

100. *Novosadske razglednice* [informative TV program], "Da li tvrdava puca po šavovima?," RTV1 (6 March 2014a), [http://rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/vojvodina/novi-sad/da-li-tvrđjava-puca-po-savovima\\_467534.html](http://rtv.rs/sr_lat/vojvodina/novi-sad/da-li-tvrđjava-puca-po-savovima_467534.html); *Novosadske razglednice*, "Prvi koraci ka obnovi Petrovaradinske tvrđave," guest: Nemanja Milenković from Exit Foundation, RTV1 (3 July 2014b), [http://rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/vojvodina/novi-sad/prvi-koraci-ka-obnovi-petrovaradinske-tvrđave\\_500160.html](http://rtv.rs/sr_lat/vojvodina/novi-sad/prvi-koraci-ka-obnovi-petrovaradinske-tvrđave_500160.html).

Examples for Exit's rightist-inspired moves include the initiative *Youth Heroes* (since 2009) providing 65 young people from Serbian enclaves in Kosovo with free festival tickets, transport, and camp accommodations; or an incident in which Exit organizers cancelled a Björk gig after the singer dedicated her song "Declare Independence" to Kosovo during a performance in Tokyo.<sup>101</sup> Given the centrality of the Kosovo myth<sup>102</sup> in the nation's collective memory, it is plausible to think of such moves as an Exit attempt at pleasing a more national-minded segment of the festival audience. In any event, the main intent of these and similar Exit campaigns is clearly to increase the festival popularity among the local population by presenting itself as coming down on the side of the people.

Another instance of normative-value dissonance in Exit and Guča can also be discerned in the critical claims, assessing that neither festival is run professionally enough to capitalize on its high commercial value. In the case of Exit, there often seems to be inconsistency in adhering to the established rules within the company, constant changes within the organizational structure, lack of work discipline and of clear labor division.<sup>103</sup> What is much needed, in the opinion of Exit associate Ilija Milošević, is better communication with sponsors and better financial planning, with the help of which the festival could manage just as well without state funding.<sup>104</sup> Underlying all such statements is thus a belief that if introduced, the proposed changes would help the festival become "a truly modern, global company."<sup>105</sup> A similar criticism also applies to Guča, where a need for improvement is discussed in relation to such matters as insufficient expertise in the music festival business,<sup>106</sup> the prevalence of political rather than vocational considerations in the Guča organizational structure and in the festival management itself, as well as unexploited capacities in the field of agro- and eco-tourism in the region.<sup>107</sup>

Despite given evidence to the contrary, both Guča and Exit CEOs are ostensibly supportive of an open market economy and individual initiative. Jolović asserts, for instance, that "the organization [of Guča Festival] must not be based on donations, patronages and sponsorships but on the strict market principles."<sup>108</sup> And perhaps there

101. Cila Warncke, "Exit Festival 2008: Bjork and the Balkans . . .," *Ibiza Voice* (1 April 2008), <http://www.ibiza-voice.com/story/news/1433>.

102. Historically, the 1389 Kosovo Battle marked the very beginning of the Ottoman Empire's invasion of the Serbian principalities, resulting in the death of both armies' leaders—Prince Lazar on the Serbian side, and Sultan Murad on the Ottoman side. Central to the mythical interpretation of the event is Serbia's defeat, which is celebrated as a spiritual victory and as a guarantee of the holiness and salvation of the Serb people. See Florian Bieber, "Nationalist Mobilization and Stories of Serb Suffering: The Kosovo Myth from 600th Anniversary to the Present," *Rethinking History* 6/1 (2002): 95–110.

103. "Exit: Najbolji brend u Srbiji," paper written for the Change Management course (2008), <http://www.seminarski-diplomski.co.rs/UpravljanjePromenama/ExitNajboljiBrendSrbija.html>.

104. Interview with Ilija Milošević (Belgrade, 14 August 2012).

105. "Exit: Najbolji brend u Srbiji" (2008), n.p.

106. Miroslava Lukić-Krstanović, quoted in Dragoljub Petrović "Trubači u Guči postaju predgrupa Ceci," *Danas* (29 August 2012), [http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/trubaci\\_u\\_guci\\_postaju\\_predgrupa\\_ceci.14.html?news\\_id=246724](http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/drustvo/terazije/trubaci_u_guci_postaju_predgrupa_ceci.14.html?news_id=246724); Ilija Stanković, "Guca prevrsila meru: bojkot Sabora trubaca," *FiestaMania goes Tutti-Mundi* (28 July 2013), <https://fiestamania.blogspot.fi/2013/07/guca-prevrsila-meru-bojkot-sabora.html>.

107. Nika-Nikola Stojić, *Trubačka budilica – Od Guče do večnosti* (Čačak: TV "Galaksija 32," 2006).

108. Slobodan Jolović, quoted in *Ekonomist*, "Guča – biznis od 30 miliona evra" (19 August 2007), <http://www.ekapija.com/website/sr/page/122519>.

is no need to repeat that positive appraisals of neoliberal ideology are more uniquely associated with Exit-related discourses.<sup>109</sup> Either way, the entire “free market” talk in Exit and Guča appears largely an exercise in wishful thinking if one is to consider the given discrepancies between the professed rhetoric and the realities on the ground. Perhaps nothing reflects this more than the incapacity of each festival to survive on the market without financial assistance from the state.

Branislava Mijatović, having investigated the cases of Exit and Guča from a nation branding perspective, found both festivals politically innocent.<sup>110</sup> Specifically, the main assumption and conclusion of her analysis are that Exit and Guča were co-opted by local politicians for nation branding purposes only after each succeeded in the transnational music festival market on its own, thus independently of political interference. In contrast to her interpretation, I posit that the (nation) branding talk surrounding Exit and Guča is ultimately exercised as a source of political legitimacy for the declaratively pro-European national elites (festival producers included) and, relatedly, as a discursive disguise for the relationships of mutual interest between politicians and festival organizers. As an example of these mutually beneficial relationships, the following statement by Adam Tadić, Director of Guča Culture House, can be cited here: “I look forward to politicians, ministers, ambassadors . . . their presence [at the festival] may prove useful in achieving our goals. On the other hand, politicians like to be with the people.”<sup>111</sup> Bošković’s assertion that “Exit was, in a way, a success both thanks to and despite of politicians,”<sup>112</sup> is partly similar to that of Tadić. Indeed, when the Exit project was in its infancy, Vojvodinian politician Nenad Čanak pulled some strings in a national electricity distribution company to technically support the festival organization.<sup>113</sup> Exit people also publicly acknowledged that the festival’s key business contacts were initially realized with the help of the G17 Plus, an NGO later to become an influential Serbian political party.<sup>114</sup> Nowadays, as argued above, the Exit Festival seems to have become fully integrated with the ruling political class.

The above illustration of normative-value dissonance in Exit and Guča additionally shows that the primary purpose of (nation) branding is to lend credibility to the Serbian elites and the privileged positions they are handed in the processes of Serbia’s transition and EU accession. When situated in the broader context of post-socialist societies, nation branding has apparently become an efficient discursive vehicle for signifying a power shift towards more technocratic elites, whose vast expertise, so the public is told, should speed

109. Čedomir Jovanović and Dušan Kovačević, both quoted in Dinko Gruhonjić, ed., *State of Exit: Specijalna publikacija EXIT 03 / akademski program* (2003).

110. Branislava Mijatović, “The Musical (Re)Branding of Serbia: ‘Serbia Sounds Global,’ Guča, and Exit,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 213–35.

111. *Danas: Guča 53*, “Dok svira truba – nema problema,” interview with Adam Tadić (7 August 2013a), 2.

112. Danijela Jakobi, “EXIT: ostrvo ili kontinent?,” interview with Bojan Bošković, *Nova misao* 7 (2010), 63.

113. Dejana Milović Buha, “Hulahop,” interview with Exit co-founders Dušan Kovačević and Dorijan Petrić, Radio B92 (Belgrade, 5 July 2008).

114. *Ibid.*

up transition and lead post-socialist nations into a better future.<sup>115</sup> In Serbia, nation branding has, especially since 2008, also turned into a site of rivalries among nearly all factions of the political elite. To understand the actual implications of these power struggles, however, one has to acknowledge that “nation branding is intended primarily for external legitimation.”<sup>116</sup> The adapted use of nation branding by the local elites should therefore be viewed as symptomatic of the inverted roles of elite and people. To paraphrase Croatian philosopher Boris Buden, it is not the people across post-Yugoslav and S/EE societies who need the guidance of the national elite. Rather, it is the elite who need the people to climb up the ladder of success in the international political, business, and cultural arenas.<sup>117</sup> This is also why Buden further claims that post-socialist S/EE countries, including Serbia, are actually represented and governed by so-called *comprador elites*, that is, by a select group of local agents who essentially act under instructions from external centers of political power and corporate capital. To conclude, then, the new Serbian elites, cloaked either under the patriotic disguise (as in Guča) or under a technocratic rationale (as in both Exit and Guča), do not seem to have capacity for autonomous action. In neither case do they seem able to respond creatively to the challenges of the contemporary world, thereby offering no alternative visions of the nation’s future.

## CONCLUSION

The liminality of the Balkans and thus of Serbia is discussed in the pertinent academic literature as the region’s potentially empowering feature with which to reclaim power over its representation. As Fleming points out, “To be ‘liminal’ . . . is to be *between* (and overlapping) two (or more) domains, while to be marginal [as the Balkans appear to be within the transnational symbolic geography] is merely to be at the edges of one” (emphasis added).<sup>118</sup> In favor of this viewpoint is also a reading of the Balkans / Serbia through the lenses of Michel Foucault’s *heterotopia* and Edward Soja’s *Thirdspace*—in a nutshell, as a real, hybrid space, a sort of counter-place opposite to utopia, split across space and time, “a place without a place” that belongs nowhere, that inverts the prevailing regime of truth and “resists the discourse of universal rationality.”<sup>119</sup> Accordingly, the

115. Nadia Kaneva, “Nation Branding in Post-Communist Europe: Identities, Markets, and Democracy,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012a), 3–22; Nadia Kaneva, “Who Can Play This Game? The Rise of Nation Branding in Bulgaria, 2001–2005,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012b), 99–123.

116. Gerald Sussman, “Systemic Propaganda and State Branding in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe,” in *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the “New Europe,”* edited by Nadia Kaneva (New York: Routledge, 2012), 42. See also Andrew Graan, “Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia,” *Cultural Anthropology* 28/1 (2013): 161–79.

117. *Skriptatv*, “Boris Buden: Ustav je posthistoričistička bajka,” interview with Boris Buden by Veronika Bauer and Damjan Rajačić (Berlin, 25 April 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc1lIXB7eHk>.

118. Kathryn E. Fleming, “Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography,” *The American Historical Review* 105/4 (2000), 1232.

119. Dušan I. Bjelić, “Introduction: Blowing Up the ‘Bridge,’” in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, edited by Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 7; Sanja Lazarević Radak, *Nevidljivi Balkan: Prilog istoriji postkolonijalnih geografija* (Pančevo: Mali Nemo, 2014), 203–14.

Balkans and similar places are deemed inherently critical because of their openness to an-Other as the third term that disrupts a system of familiar binaries, allowing thereby for new significations and representations to emerge. The Yugoslav project, whose non-alignment policy secured the state's sovereignty and integrity, perhaps came closest to the realization of the liminal potential of Balkan heterotopia / Thirdspace. Its success was arguably reflected in the country's capacity "to gaze back at those who gaze at [the Balkans] in order to reverse the panoptical process of the center" (emphases in original).<sup>120</sup> But as Lazarević Radak points out, within the current context of transition and neoliberal globalization, the Balkan liminality is not really acknowledged for the epistemological, spatial, and cultural alternatives it potentially offers, but rather is narrated and experienced by the region's inhabitants as a never-ending nightmare.<sup>121</sup>

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120. Dušan I. Bjelić, *ibid.*, 19.

121. Sanja Lazarević Radak, *Nevidljivi Balkan: Prilog istoriji postkolonijalnih geografija* (Pančevo: Mali Nemo, 2014).

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