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**DON'T BREAK MY LOCUST TREES: CONCEPTIONS OF
HISTORY AND POLITICS IN ĐORĐE BALAŠEVIĆ'S SONGS**

Abstract

Songwriter Đorđe Balašević from Novi Sad is one of the notable singers and poets of the Southeast Europe. Balašević is well known for his characteristic metaphors, comparisons and personifications as well as his social activism. In this context his songs about the past and the present (or rather the present that was actual at the time of the writing – then-present) are being reviewed. Authors distinguish four groups: songs about World War I (Warrior with Peasant Heart, Galicia, Aco My Bro, Oh So Many Sad Loves, The Night When I Swam across the Danube), songs about Josip Broz Tito (I Saw Tito Three Times, Requiem), songs about Socialist Yugoslavia (1987, Count on Us, Oh God, Virovitica, Let Me Be, Pretty Nasta, The Skyscraper), and songs about the breakup of Yugoslavia and Milošević's Serbia (A Legend of Geda the Stupid, Just Let There Be No War, If Only You Had a BMW, The Nineties, It's Our Fault, Fiddle, I'm Not a Loser, I Had to Move Out, The Unbeliever, Blue Ballad, Recruiters' Song, Sevdalinka, Live Free, How the Evil Idiots Demolished the Celebration). Đorđe Balašević wrote songs projecting into the past and then-present his anti-war ideas, internationalism against then dominant nationalism, preoccupation of a small man who isn't privy to the complicated and crucial times.

Key words: Đorđe Balašević, history, politics, World War I, Josip Broz Tito, breakup of Yugoslavia, Vojvodina.

Introduction

Songwriter Đorđe Balašević from Novi Sad is one of the notable singers and poets of the Southeast Europe. He is popular from the Vardar to Triglav. Balašević is well known for his characteristic metaphors, comparisons and personifications as well as his social activism and in this context his songs about the past and the present (or rather the present that was actual at the time of the writing) are being reviewed. Analysing other singers and bands that were active in the period of Socialist Yugoslavia by taking into account the number of political and historical texts Balašević can be compared to Riblja Čorba from Belgrade, Zabranjeno pušenje from Sarajevo, Azra from Zagreb, Lajbach from Ljubljana, and after the breakup of Yugoslavia to Croatian singer Marko Perković Thompson and Serbian singer Baja Mali Knindža. The underlying ideas of Đorđe Balašević are completely opposite to the messages expressed in the songs of Marko Perković Thompson and Baja Mali Knindža. Balašević discusses national myths and narratives as well as their political usage in contemporary society and speaks against national exclusiveness and closeness whereas the two aforementioned musicians emphasize the national affiliation through myths. Besides, Đorđe Balašević wrote more texts about the history and politics in the context of then-present than the two of them. Balašević is a long-lasting singer and poet. He started his career at the end of the seventies and he is still active. Some of the bands and singers mentioned were active for a shorter period of time. Azra stopped performing at the beginning of the nineties, and Zabranjeno pušenje has two branches: one in Zagreb and the other in Belgrade. Thompson and Baja Mali Knindža appeared on the scene in the nineties. Balašević explores different historical themes, not just the actual political situations of the time. His historical-political songs can be divided into four groups: 1 songs about World War I (Warrior with Peasant Heart, Galicia, Aco My Bro, The Night When I Swam across the Danube), 2 two songs about Josip Broz Tito (I Saw Tito Three Times, Requiem), 3 songs about Socialist Yugoslavia (1987, Count on Us, Oh God, Virovitica, Let Me Be, Pretty Nasta, The Skyscraper), 4 songs about the breakup of Yugoslavia and Milošević's Serbia (A Legend of Geda the Stupid, Just Let There Be No War, If Only You Had a BMW, The Nineties, It's Our Fault, Fiddle, I'm Not a Loser, I Had to Move Out, The Unbeliever, Blue Ballad, Recruiters' Song, Sevdalinka, Live Free, How the Evil Idiots Demolished the Celebration).

Đorđe Balašević was born on May 11, 1953 in Novi Sad. He spent his childhood in his hometown in Jovan Cvijić Street, which he mentions in his song Some New Kids. According to him, he was born in mixed marriage –his

father was a Serbian and his mother was half Croatian, half Hungarian. He was expelled from secondary school due to non attendance. Although he wrote poetry and covered foreign hits in the childhood, it wasn't until 1977 that he introduced his first single I Lay a Kiss on Your Parting with a band Žetva. This song soon became a hit with over 700 000 copies sold. Despite the growing popularity and more performances, he left the band Žetva and in 1978 formed another band Rani mraz with Verica Todorović. Their first hit was a song First Love. Bora Đorđević joined the band but because of the worldview differences between him and Đorđe, he left after a few months and formed another band that became popular later on: Riblja čorba¹. The popularity of Đorđe Balašević and Rani mraz was increasing. They recorded many hits, their single Pannonian Sailor won the first prize at the Split Festival, and they sold out the Union Hall in Belgrade eight times in a row. Balašević wrote songs for other singers such as Zdravko Čolić and Srebrna krila. The band Rani mraz broke up in 1982 and Balašević started his solo career which lasts to this day.

Đorđe Balašević published a couple of books as well. They are Three Postwar Friends (1991), One of Those Lives (1997), And Life Goes on (and away from here) (1993), and a book of poems with commentary Touch of Silk (1996). He also wrote a script for TV show Special Redaction and the film An Early Frost. He acted in the TV show Soldiers, Priest Ćira and Priest Spira, and Pannonian Sailor. He won awards as well, such as October Award Novi Sad, Singer Award Yugoslavia, an award for literary contribution in the field of showbusiness at the Domanović's Days of Satire, and a Todor Manojlović Award for special artistic sensibility. He was also named UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador².

Balašević's songs are often divided into political or love songs. However, this distinction is not always suitable because some songs have both political and love motifs. Besides, according to Valentina Đorđević, Balašević's poetry is alltogether connected. He often adjusts the text to the metric form and the music itself. There are texts suited for waltz, tango and czardas (Hungarian folk dance) or a music style (country, rap, reggae etc.)³

¹ While Balašević's songs have slower rhythm like chansons and such, Bora Čorba chose rock music. Balašević is a pacifist and anti-nationalist, while Bora Čorba is a Serbian nationalist, which can be seen in his songs.

² Balašević, Đ. (1991), Three Postwar Friends (cover), Balašević Đ. (2001), Touch of Silk, 5-6

³ Đorđević, V. (2010), Đorđe Balašević, a pacifist poet, available here: <http://eseji.blogspot.hr/2010/05/ore-balasevic-pesnik-pacifizma.html> (visited on 1 September, 2015)

A line of nostalgia, a line of sadness: Balašević about World War I

Balašević wrote a couple of songs about World War I (Warrior With Peasant Heart, Galicia, Aco My Bro, Oh So Many Sad Loves, The Night When I Swam across the Danube). In the song Warrior With Peasant Heart he mentions a certain Braca who returned from World War I (When Braca came back in 1919 / from the faraway battlefield where he was a soldier) and told his war story very typical of a soldier: he was wounded, he went to jail because he cursed at his superior, he talked about girls, faraway places (in this case about Carpathians). This story rounds up with Braca's anti-war attitude (Braca cursed the guilty ones as well as the victims / guns and lice and a muddy trench. / He'd say: you can't count the dead because the czars played war.) This attitude about „czars playing war“ is common to war veterans who come back after years of fighting and then emotionally look at the situation and equally attribute responsibility for the conflict neglecting the complicated causes that led to the conflict in the first place⁴. Balašević notes habits and behaviour of a peasant from Vojvodina who went to army (as a soldier) which is shown in the repeated verses (Hey, I feel sorry for the horses...) This summarizes the attitude of the peasant who is emotional towards the innocent animals – horses that get hurt due to human activity whereas it is obvious that the horses served and helped that same human during both war and peace. Valentina Đorđević notes that the music of the song is actually waltz, which is in fact Austrian cultural tradition and a contrast to the war activities of the sort because the waltz is a symbol of grace, culture, entertainment, peace⁵. Another notable song about World War I is Galicia. Balašević provides contrast in the verses – he described the peaceful scenery of Galicia alongside the fallen elm tree (And the frost is camouflaging my overcoat through the night next to the fallen elm tree), he described sounds of bullets, arson and war (And just so you know... This in the picture shows seemingly gentle scenery of Galicia... / But there is not a moment of peace... Everything is shooting at us...). This song has basis in

⁴ There is a plethora of literature on World War I and here are some most recent works in which causes and effects are explained: Clark, Ch. M. (2012), *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, London; M. Hastings (2013), *Catastrophe 1914: Europe Goes to War*, London; MacMillan, M. (2013), *The War that ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War*; Mombauer, A. (2014), *The July Crisis, Europe's Way to the First World War*

⁵ Đorđević, V. (2010), *Đorđe Balašević, a pacifist poet*, available here: <http://eseji.blogspot.hr/2010/05/ore-balasevic-pesnik-pacifizma.html> (visited on 1 September, 2015)

historic battles of Galicia between Russia and Austria-Hungary (singer / storyteller being on the Austria-Hungary side). He conspicuously mentions the Russian army, especially Cossacks (Under the fog veil rattles the eighth Cossacks' regiment). It is probably the Russian Eighth Army (which included some Cossacks formation) under the command of general Brusilov. This army fought battles with the Austrian – Hungarian army in Galicia for two years, 1914 and 1915. This song expresses both anti-war attitude and the yearning for the faraway places (On the swollen Vistula soldiers squeezed... And all of our thoughts are... Far away...) and love (And don't let the heaven take it the wrong way / But you're the only thing I pray for / Let me be the one to worry... Not you... If I wanted to, I could have died a hundred times...), and in the end about the inanity of war (And while the Vistula flows away, Backways, out of sense.. And the drenched flocks fly away... Far away...). Balašević only briefly mentions World War I in other three songs. In *Aco, My Bro* he talks about the end of World War I (*Aco, my bro, my perky rowdy... You and I are state inside a state: / Franz Joseph and the Habsburgs gave the Devil its due... / Bolsheviks thrashed the czar... / Kaiser fell through like the biggest idiot...*): the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy and the loss of power, the collapse of the Austro – Hungarian Empire (1918), the assassination of the Russian czar and the collapse of the Russian Empire (1917), and the Bolsheviks coming to power is in contrast to the singer and *Aco* who are still at the peak of their power (*But the two of us don't lack anything...*). In the song *Oh So Many Sad Loves* amongst the many brokenhearted characters there is a portrait of Mrs Rose (*Ruža*), Lieutenant Bata's widow (*And Mrs Ruža was making a gobelin and played solitaire on Saturdays. / All that was left of her husband were couple of yellow paintings, an officer's hat and a sword. / Oh there are so many sad loves, here I'm thinking about them: / Lieutenant Bata didn't come back from the First War.*) These verses don't reveal in which army did the Lieutenant Bata fight since the rank of a lieutenant was in both the Serbian army and Austrian-Hungarian army. There is also a possibility that he is an imaginary character. The song *The Night When I Swam across the Danube* contains couple of associations with the World War I just before the War started. Balašević explains the escape from the army because they sought for him and offered money in exchange (*On the bridge the guard shifted / I knew they were looking for me / There's no gendarme who doesn't know my features / Is my head really worth a hundred forints dear gentlemen / It says so under the picture / It's worth at least a filler more.*) It is believed that one silver forint was worth a hundred fillers. It was a currency in Austria – Hungary until 1892. Balašević probably uses it for poetry purposes even for the later period after World War

I. The author mentions the place he's running from (Stay well, green Carpathians, czar's roads) and crosses the Danube. Since the Carpathians and the Danube are mentioned, it is possible to connect these two geographical units and conclude that the author is running from the Carpathians to the other side of the Danube. And since the Carpathians and the Danube overlap at two locations it has to be one of these places where the author swam across the Danube. One meeting point of the Carpathians and the Danube are the Little Carpathians, a mountain range situated in today's Slovakia with the Danube in the south (near Bratislava). The other possibility is the Iron Gates, a gorge between today's Serbia and Romania where the Danube goes through the Southern Carpathians or the Transylvanian Alps. Looking at the historical context of his work and songs, Balašević 'swims across', or at least imagines that he's swimming across, the Danube at the Iron Gates because there was a border between the Kingdom of Serbia, Romania and Austria – Hungary, a part of whom was Transylvania.

In these song Balašević acts as the native inhabitant of Vojvodina, a province that has always been the epicentre of conflicts between Austria – Hungary and Serbia during the first years of war. His songs are centered around the small man, a peasant in Vojvodina who is dragged into the war troubles where he does not belong (Somewhere in Braca there's a peasant's root / And there can be more and more wars / But a peasant is not cut out to be a soldier / He preferred horses and land to people.). World War I brought turmoil into the peaceful Pannonian life and became a part of the culture of remembering. Balašević invokes a nostalgia by singing about Vojvodina's peasants in Austro-Hungarian Army in faraway places such as Galicia, the Vistula or the Carpathians. He mentions World War I in five songs and cherishes the memory of many casualties (human, animal and material), widows, escape from the army and the collapse of many big empires (Habsburgs and Russian). Although Balašević is an anti-war poet who emphasizes the inanity of war, there are also hints of the nostalgia for Austria – Hungary evident in his songs.

The ageing leader didn't acknowledge the young artist – Balašević and Tito

Josip Broz Tito was an authoritarian president of Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1980 and the chief leader of the Non-Aligned Movement as well as the anti-fascist winner of the World War II. In many ways he shaped life and everyday lifestyle for twenty million citizens of Yugoslavia. At the time Tito's cult of personality was nurtured (towns, streets and squares were named

after him and his birthday was celebrated as the national holiday Day of Youth). Yugoslavia was developing during the time of the Cold War and it transformed from the agricultural country of illiterate farmers to a modern society with thriving industry and developed tourism. Although Tito is a complex personality who deserves an in-depth scientific analysis, it should be noted that a certain number of citizens developed respect, love and adoration for their president. Among those were some artists as well, including Đorđe Balašević who dedicated two of his songs to Tito: *I Saw Tito Three Times* and *Requiem*.

Đorđe's perspective on Tito went through at least two phases. In the first phase the admiration for Tito's persona and achievements are put into a song *I Saw Tito Three Times*. Balašević is thrilled with Tito and dedicates this song to him. The second phase is negation, refusal to acknowledge Tito's objective merits, and the reduction of his historic role to banality. Although the song *Count On Us* was put in a group about Socialist Yugoslavia, it shouldn't be neglected that in this song Balašević defines his attitude towards Tito as one of the fundamental symbols of Yugoslavia. Apart from that, Tito is also mentioned in one verse of this song which actually talks about the need to preserve Tito's achievements. It is though as the young author forebodes vague future: 'But life ahead of us hides more battles / And threatens like a deep whirlpool / I know that a hundred more offensives await / Because we must protect peace.' Balašević speaks on behalf of his generation and the song is written as a pledge to Tito or rather a pledge to the worldview that Tito embodied with the protection of peace as the fundamental guideline. The older generation of Partisans can count on the young who pledge to protect their achievement.

In his book *Touch of Silk* Balašević relinquished his songs *Count on Us* and *I Saw Tito Three Times* as well as Tito himself whom he glorified as the unquestionable leader in the aforementioned songs. Broz must have offended Balašević's self-love. The musician who became the object of adoration of his fans didn't experience affection let alone admiration from the ageing leader and idol who turned into a deity in his songs: 'I have an impeccable instinct to detect a person who doesn't love me in a crowded arena, in a hunter's hall in Karađorđevo there were more of those than in all of my concerts, but for some reason I noticed none less than sullen Jozo-Brozo? Nothing personal, of course...' Why did the young artist need Broz to express his affection? Did Broz's indifference towards Balašević define the hurt he manifested in the mentioned book published in 2001. In the same text he tries to portrait himself as an unsuitable man: '...Red Devils didn't forgive me for seeing through them. As a punishment they hired a band form

Ljubljana 'Pepel in kri' to sing instead of me...' It would be useful if Balašević explained how he saw through the 'Red Devils'. He saw through them by writing another song I Saw Tito Three Times or he didn't count Tito as the 'Red Devils'? The song was allegedly written so he would be able to see his wife and daughter because he was serving in the army at the time: 'As Machiavelli would say, little Jovana was five months old and I was prepared to write 'I Saw Field Marshal Goring Three Times' just to be able to slip from the military quarters and see my girl and her beautiful mum.' The song marked the first anniversary of Tito's death⁶. Right after Tito's death Balašević once again 'saw through the Red Devils' saying: 'The endless sorrow grows into an enormous power which will prove that comrade Tito was right when he said that nations that have the youth like this should not worry about their future⁷.'

After all adoration and rejection of Tito, it is hard to say what Đorđe Balašević really thinks of Tito and in which phase of his perspectives towards the former Yugoslavian leader he is now.

Balašević and Socialist Yugoslavia

Balašević wrote couple of songs about Socialist Yugoslavia (Count on Us, Oh God, The Skyscraper). In this phase of creativity Balašević was pro-Yugoslavian idea. It is particularly obvious in his songs Count on Us and The Skyscraper. Balašević is an advocate of Yugoslavia and writes about his childhood and different events with nostalgia, while at the same time fiercely condemns destabilizing factors. Yugoslavia as a union of more nations represents an important part of Balašević's identity, while Balašević himself became one of the symbols of Socialist Yugoslavia. He holds a privileged position in the Lexicon of Yu Mythology⁸. Balašević sees Yugoslavia as his own life setting, a homeland which inspired him, prompted his creativity and musical potential. He expressed his own attitude towards Yugoslavia in the verses from the song Requiem: 'I am not toy they can wind up / I only have Yugoslavia. / All the other torches burn without me... / Hey Comandante...' but he also states that dreams melt like 'icebergs...'

Đorđe Balašević emphasizes a strong Yugoslavian orientation in his songs. In some verses he increasingly approached the concept of national unity in relation to the project of Yugoslavia as a union of sovereign states

⁶ Balašević, Đ. (2001), *Touch of Silk*, 70-73

⁷ *This is Tito* (1982), 210

⁸ *Lexicon of Yu Mythology* (2004), 044-045

defined by the 1974 Constitution of SFRY⁹. Balašević says that the tribes draw borders (Balkans at the end of one century / Every tribe draws their own border / Everyone wants their page), he only has his Yugoslavia (I am not a toy they can wind up / I only have Yugoslavia) and he is a Slav (Her grandfather targeted me: /Am I theirs / or not really/ I'm a Slav, white / a lone ranger.) It is unusual that Balašević calls the nations of Yugoslavia tribes and it is just as unusual that he mentions forming of borders even though the borders were defined earlier. Maybe he thinks of the attempts at redefining the existing borders? In the time of Yugoslavia's crisis there were many different ideas and solutions and Balašević approved of the Yugoslavia's solution although the model wasn't solid nor specific enough. All models oriented towards Yugoslavia ranging from unitarism to a union of egalitarian nations and sovereign states were rejected in the end and Yugoslavia fell apart in a strong gust of Serbian pretensions and radical forms of nationalism in all federal units.

It is worth mentioning couple of songs in which Balašević carries out his review of the Cold War situation. In the song *Let Me Be, Pretty Nasta* he addresses famous German and later American actress Nastassja Kinski. Although the author dreams of this beautiful woman (Nastassja Kinski hunts me all the time / She comes to my dreams.), he turns the tables so it seems as if she's in love with him (She says she loves me, like, truly /and pines after me. /I'm a little worried about this pretty youngster. / I can't approve of her attitude. / She carries my photo like a girl in love / My photo in her purse.). Here Balašević mocks young Yugoslavian men who were in love with the famous young actress and were looking for ways to justify it. The author mocks and makes ironic comments about the Western influences and reactions to them which have gradually penetrated into Yugoslavian society through popular culture (I'm old-fashioned about these things – let me be, comrade Kinski! / It's not your fault, don't take it personally! / These are principles or something like it.) and also attempts to reject the Western culture (Take it easy, bride, stop the attack / Go back to your rotting West / to Paris – Texas and to people – cats / I'm not leaving Bačka!). Another song in which Balašević talks about the Cold War and similarities and differences between the East and the West is *Virovitica*. In this song he contrasts Virovitica (But I often sang in Virovitica / and it went well / Although there are steep cliffs around Virovitica / I would come again. / There are no pressures in Virovitica / and everyone lives peacefully, like hippies in

⁹ More detailed about these processes in Jović, D. (2009), *Yugoslavia: a State that Withered Away*

Virovitica.) with the USA which is full of criminal, homicides and drug addicts (I've never been to America / and I don't intend to / Imagine some guy punched me for a dollar, two or even three / I don't have the nerves for it. / And I'd like to see California / and a couple more places / but I have a terrible phobia / of those junkies and dark cats.). The USA is home to characters from popular culture such as Donald Duck but he is afraid of the American political elite with Ronald Reagan as president (America is fine, great even / when it has Pajo Patak or as they say Donald Duck there / but not everyone is Donald, I'm afraid of that Ronald / he's troublesome.). The contrast to peaceful Virovitica is USSR as well (I've never been to the Soviet Union / and I don't intend to. / In that Union I'd be like in a cage / I don't have the nerves for it.). He admires Russian authors such as Dostoyevsky but he's afraid of persecution to Siberia (There's a connection between Russia and me (Horošo!) / That Dostoyevsky knocks me off my feet. / But not everyone is like Dostoyevsky, I'm afraid of Siberyski, / that one is chilly!). It is notable from the song that the West (the USA) and the East (the USSR) are basically the same, while Yugoslavia (Virovitica here serving as a metaphor) is different. The song 1987 is important because Balašević intertwines global and national events. In the first verses he mentions the Iran – Iraq War (I was listening to the news on the radio yesterday / A special report on the shooting in Persia) and then he offers a detail about Hamdija Pozderac, a distinguished Bosnian politician and a member of the Presidium of the SFRY who was about to become the President of the Presidium in 1987 but because of the Agrokomerc affair he was replaced and soon after he died (They talk less and less about comrade Hamdija)¹⁰. Later on in the song Balašević talks about the financial crisis and the stock market crash (Dogs bark at the stock market / Let dollar sink, we have our bills) which started in Hong Kong in 1987 because of the oil and Iranian attack on couple of American tankers and it soon spread over the world. These events are referred to as Black Monday and Black Tuesday¹¹. The author reviews the Paraćin massacre as well (They kill children while asleep / I'm afraid of rising of the chetnik vampire / what does a vampire know about emigration / he sees everything ethnic) when Aziz Kalmendi, a conscript in the Yugoslav People's Army shot four and killed five soldiers in the military barracks 'Branko Krsmanović' in Paraćin. After shooting he fled to the nearby Karađorđe hill. He was surrounded by

¹⁰ About Hamdija Pozderac and his role more details at Mulaosmanović, A. (2010), *Bihacka Krajina 1971-1991*

¹¹ Causes and effects of the financial crisis in 1987 explained in Carlson, M. (2006), *A Brief History of the 1987 Stock Market Crash with a Discussion of the Federal Reserve Response*

the police and in the official report his death was later declared a suicide. Kalmendi was an Albanian and this event caused fierce anti-Albanian attitude in Yugoslav and especially Serbian public. Newspapers said that it was a shot at Yugoslavia and that the Albanian pastrycooks and bakers are poisoning Serbian children. This campaign caused several Albanian shops being stoned in Serbia¹². Later in the song he brings up the case of Fadil Hoxha, a politician from Kosovo and the vice-president of SFRY from 1978 to 1979 (I watched television yesterday / a misunderstood genius comrade Fadil is tormented / Nobody understands his mighty vision / Public institutions don't rise up). In 1987 Fadil Hoxha was accused of uttering a statement at a private dinner the previous year. He said that the Serbians should bring more Serbian waitresses to Kosovo so they could work as prostitutes if they were concerned about the safety of their Serbian women that Albanian men allegedly rape. After the statement being published and couple of thousands of Serbian women from Kosovo demonstrated, Hoxha was replaced and expelled from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia¹³. These next lines tell a story about student demonstrations in Novi Sad and Balašević brings up Lech Walesa, a Polish dissident and the Solidarity leader (Demonstrations in Novi Sad / The story is well known, the student canteen is to blame / Nation's youth is on the streets / The only thing missing is Lech Walesa). While all the turbulent events are occurring, hardly anyone notices that he has been singing for ten years. This song partly continues in the next song Oh God in which Balašević makes ironic comments about the numerous shifts in the League of Communists that were taking place in the eighties. (I turn the radio on to hear where the respectable comrades are / which poor bastards got replaced in a meeting. / I turn the radio off, take the newspapers to see some new promises from this morning. / Members, clans, Goebbels', Zhdanov's, fog and blizzard.) In this song Balašević expresses his negative attitude towards Slovenians who want to separate from Yugoslavia (Oh why am I not an alien from FR Slovenia? I wish to separate.) and refers to German reunification, the possibility of a breakup of Yugoslavia as well as lifting 'the

¹² Jovic, D. (2009), *Yugoslavia: a state that withered away*, 263-264; Kurspahić, K. (2003), *Prime time crime: Balkan in war and media*, 37-39; Maier, V. (1999), *Yugoslavia: a history of its demise*, 40; Murić, E. (2010), *Pokolj u Paraćinu* (<http://banjalukain.com/clanak/857/pokolj-u-paracinu>), Ramet, S. (2006), *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918–2005*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press. 344; Sell, L. (2003), *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 40 i 48

¹³ Sell, L. (2003) *Slobodan Milosevic and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 67; Serbs' anger flares in province of hate, *The Times* (London), November 1 1987

wall' between the republics (News on TV say that the Eastern Germans are demolishing the wall. No kidding?! / Don't blow it up, just dismantle – we will need it.). Balašević's attitude towards Yugoslavia is best described in *The Skyscraper* where the skyscraper serves as a metaphor for Yugoslavia and each storey has residents from different Yugoslavian nations. On the first storey there are Macedonians he's not familiar with (Our skyscraper is great, a brother is on top of a brother's head / But let's start from beginning, so on the first floor there are some people from the south, I know only their faces and their songs), then Montenegrins and their funny description as well as their connection with the Russians (And above them roar the birds of heroic blood / Yes, they are on the second floor but otherwise they are first, they say: confide in yourself, in yourself and the Russians and let's play the fiddle). Then comes the description of Serbia, Kosovo and Vojvodina (On the third floor there is a multinational disaster / those two tenants are asking for their tenants' rights /so far the litigation is fair, until feathers start flying through our skyscraper) and after that Bosnia and Herzegovina are mentioned in the context of its growing religiousness (The fourth floor is full of sevdah and everyone is in good health / Some pray to God others to Our Lady). Croats are portrayed as quiet (The neighbour from the fifth floor has a good view from above / one window to the west, another to the sea / In case he might burn himself, he will never say anything... that is the best thing to do) and on the top floor is Slovenia who is not interested in Yugoslavia (On the sixth floor there are some sad congregations / They don't socialize with us, we are way too southern / and if I come to think of it, they don't really care about our skyscraper). Although the skyscraper is still standing, it is shaking and the foundation is collapsing (Our skyscraper is a merry mansion, the crowd is shaking it constantly / Now, it has been taken down to ground, but it was conceived to be monumental / There is nothing like it in the whole world, the facade is holding but the foundations are sliding...).

Although he is aware of the elusive ideals and illusions of the former Yugoslavian socialist system, due to the political situation after the collapse of socialism and the long process of Yugoslavia's breakup, Balašević nostalgically evokes memories of the old system, sometimes losing sight of a lot of negative aspects of Tito's era. Balašević's songs never mention violation of religious and political rights of Yugoslavian citizens. Here should be noted that the musician remembers this time from his personal perspective but the possibility of another interpretation of Yugoslavian experience shouldn't be thus excluded. In his book *Three Postwar Friends* (1991) in an afterword of sorts he wrote about regretting the breakup of Yugoslavia because he's invited to 'promote his book for our people in

Vienna... Positive reviews from afar. From the places where there is night when here's day and where there's summer when here's windy... But no postcards from Zagreb, Banja Luka or Pula... Nothing from Varaždin, Maribor or Split... It's just a sign of the times, everyone agrees...“ Later on in the text he makes ironic comments about translating the book into a 'foreign' language, Macedonian or Slovenian.

Scathing criticism and anti-nationalism – Balašević and Milošević

Balašević dedicated a number of songs to the breakup of Yugoslavia and Milošević's Serbia (A Legend of Geda the Stupid, Just Let There Be No War, If Only You Had a BMW, The Nineties, It's Our Fault, Fiddle, I'm Not a Loser, I Had to Move Out, The Unbeliever, Blue Ballad, Recruiters' Song, Sevdalinka, Live Free, How the Evil Idiots Demolished the Celebration).

In this group of songs Balašević advocates internationalism and pacifism. By actively deprecating Milošević's government, Balašević becomes an important part of a complex opposition to Milošević's regime. These songs show certain changes in Balašević's work. He doesn't call for Yugoslavian times as a possible solution but rather advocates a democratic and liberal Serbia. On the other hand, Balašević created more political songs in this period than in any other, which clearly indicates the gravity of social events of the time.

In the song How the Evil Idiots Demolished the Celebration Balašević clearly alludes to the Presidium of SFRY who are engaged in their own importance and organization of a summit during a political crisis which further exacerbates problems because they feed their power on riots and nationalism ((Oh la la) they were sent to Alcatraz / (So what) they did their time / (Oh la la) they shoot the flames from their nostrils/ (I see) they lure people to kill each other/ (Oh la la) I dream about councils, I dream about assemblies/ (So what) I dream about the police and parliaments/ (Oh la la) Somebody pinch me fast/ (I see) they are dragging me to their camps/ (Oh la la) they profit from the riots/ (So what) they hide behind the nation). In this phase Balašević emphasizes his anti-war engagement and thus poses a question how honorable it is to be in an army (Was that honor, olive overcoat? in the song the Unbeliever), he condemns violence (Oh listen to them who go to bed with a battle cry / sing in the praise of the knives / sing and then flee / times have gone from bad to worse / and the worst lead the game) in the Recruitments' Song. He's engaged in the problem of inciting the war (I see, better war than work / I don't want a memorial and there you go) in the song How the Evil Idiots Demolished the Celebration. He dedicated the

song *The Man With The Moon in His Eyes* to Vukovar and other devastated towns (You have no idea, my dear brothers... / You don't know what it means to kill a town). In this song he portrays a desperate man who stays after his town was devastated and he lost his friends and the life he had, which without a doubt devastates and destroys him.

Songs that are especially worth mentioning here are *Just Let There Be No War*, *The Nineties* and *It's Our Fault*. In the song *Just Let There Be No War* Balašević formulated his anti-war concept in which he a priori condemns war and emphasizes that every evil is less and more durable than war. The song is about a crisis in Yugoslavia which threatened to grow into war. It is also a criticism of the political situation of that time: 'Just let there be no war / no madness among people / the Big offer delusions / frighten us with miracles / and harm all fairy tales / Just let there be no war.' In the song *The Nineties* he draws comparisons between the time of his youth and the nineties. He counts all the advantages of Yugoslavian society opposed to the period after the breakup of Yugoslavia but he also highlights an important position Yugoslavia held in relation to other countries: 'The world would put makeup for us' and 'The red passport without a flaw which crosses the border without grumping'. In the same nostalgic tone he mentions journeys and ideals and then heavily criticizes what came after: 'Then the nineties came, sad and miserable... and sinister... / God smelled gunpowder and just disappeared behind the clouds...' And continues: '... Punks entered the students' books... plain punks... / It's too late to panic... We granted the chance for madness to become public... / And now we're simply flabbergasted?' He talks about the openness of the former state: 'At least we had a connection with the planet and the people / it was clear who's wearing a toga and who's wearing a flower in his hair, oh lucky mad people... / Today the lie gathered up courage... and the scumbags preach about morality...' On the territory of the former Yugoslavia an attitude about the real or alleged responsibility and other people's guilt for the one's destiny is often expressed. In the song *It's Our Fault* Balašević confronts the citizens with their own guilt for supporting political conceptions that led to violence. He thinks that the citizens by choice brought to power those officials who are responsible for Yugoslavian drama in the nineties: 'It's not the fault of the primitives that skimmed off the cream / Weed springs up where it can. We can only congratulate them. / It's our fault. Where did all those parasites that made it hard for us come from? / Let it go, my mate, it's our fault for letting them.' He expresses a similar attitude in the song *Fiddle* (From usurpers to democracy / folks hurried to elections/ folks don't have the balls for change.) He develops

consciousness about the guilt and responsibility in his audience. He confronts the public in his own way, as a poet and a musician with intensive emotions.

Đorđe Balašević stood out as the opponent to Slobodan Milošević's politics. While he adored Tito then rejected him and finally became ambivalent, his judgement on political and military performance of Slobodan Milošević has remained the same. In the song *Sloboda-NE* (a wordplay with Milošević's first name which in Serbian means freedom-no) he sees through Milošević and the social structures which enabled his rise (mainly the members of intellectual elite): 'Oh academics turned out to be / bigger villains than the Germans.' He recognizes manipulation of the leading political circles: 'And the news on TV like a rudder, turned by wretches / very suitable./ Everything will, they say, sort itself out, / The truth will win.' Balašević dedicated the song *A Legend of Geda the Stupid* to Milošević. Here he takes one of his dumb cousins as a metaphor for Milošević. He makes fun of him and says that Geda likes wars, almost as a prophecy (there, you see? I want / wars and armies). Balašević attacks Milošević and his regime which went to war with the neighbours and resulted in Serbia's isolation in the song *Live Free* (Long time ago the Devil sat on your doorstep oh, Serbia... / Nobody remembers so many bad things during the reign of a vizier / Around you neighbors put up walls out off resentment and contempt). In the song *Blue Ballad* he mentions demonstrations and the role of police against the demonstrators (I don't know, Blue, it seemed to me that Belgrade was celebrating / A big resurrection of spirit, all those graffiti and then a cordon / In front of those kids as if they were some kind of horde) and later on he calls out the clergy: 'Then came the priests, then cannons, then thieves...'. The song *If Only You Had a BMW* expresses Balašević's disappointment in some politicians from Vojvodina who took Milošević's side (Oh if only you had a BMW and the rest of it / you ran after me / but as soon as you grew up / you voted for another).

In the nineties on the territory of the former Yugoslavia it was common for people to completely identify themselves with the ethnic and religious affiliation and be loyal to the powerful elite which displayed these tendencies in the post-socialist society and only the individuals with strong personal integrity defied it. Đorđe Balašević definitely falls into this category. Nikola Dugandžija, a Croatian and Yugoslavian sociologist, wrote in his book *National Reality and Its Apparition* quoting Erich Fromm: „People are prepared to risk their lives, recant love, sacrifice their thoughts 'to be one with the crowd, to come to an agreement and thus obtain the feeling of identity, even if it's only an illusion'... A complete identification with the nation and church for him is 'incestuous', a proof of a man's 'inadequacy' and

leads to persecution of those who do not belong to the majority. One can exit this circle only by a hard-won individual choice¹⁴.“ Đorđe Balašević couldn't exit this circle because he was never a part of it. When talking about ethnocentrism in the nineties, he stayed loyal to his individual choice. In his songs he defied the complete merging with the ethnic and religious community. Balašević evolved into a musician with liberal views but he also respects the tradition, as can be seen in couple of his songs. In some songs he mentions 'krsna slava' (Serbian Orthodox tradition of the veneration and observance of the family's patron saint; every Serbian family has their own patron saint that they celebrate on the feast day) and associations tied to his family home. He remembers his grandma who takes care of her icon of a patron saint (Some New Kids). In the sound of the wind he hears the Lord's Prayer, and 'the Lord plays the autumn sonata' (When I'm Gone). In the same song he tells the woman he loves: 'Light a candle on Saint Jovan's (John's) Day...' Besides, there is a whole song dedicated to Christmas Eve in which he remembers his neighbour who bakes cakes and his loved one puts her shoe in the window 'you're putting your shoe in the window' and 'At the last minute / as always on that eve / a lady next door / bakes a cake for her grandkids.' Tradition handed down from his ancestors is a part of his complex identity. Also, Balašević advocates ecumenism 'And God doesn't care / If we baptize or bow... (Sevdalinka) but sometimes he renounces God 'But why should I be ashamed / Because I won't see God? / Because that is not the God I knew...' (The Man With the Moon in His Eyes). 'Identity stays the same even when it's subjected to the greatest temptations of a totalitarian unity¹⁵.' Nikola Dugandžija continues in his aforementioned book: 'A sober minded approach to the national figure is rare and it decreases the truth that it is composed of a number of alluviums. The obvious fact that identification is accompanied with both humane and dangerous features (dangerous not just for others but for its own members as well) is not accepted¹⁶.' Balašević recognizes these dangerous features.

His attitudes and especially his criticism of the existing regime in Serbia in the nineties made Đorđe Balašević one of the liberally oriented public figures. This liberal orientation is expressed in the ironic song I Don' Like. He mocks conservatives who are against everything, especially the news. According to ideas of Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel who see popular culture and music as a way of uniting different groups of listeners¹⁷, Đorđe

¹⁴ Dugandžija, N. (2010), National Reality and Its Apparition, 15-16

¹⁵ Same, 49

¹⁶ Same, 64

¹⁷ Storey, J. (2006), Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, 55-56

Balašević was a cohesive element of different groups democratically and pacifistically oriented.

Conclusion

Đorđe Balašević made songs and music projecting into the past and then-present his anti-war ideas, internationalism against the dominant nationalism, preoccupation of the small man who isn't privy to the complicated and crucial times. In the early stage of creativity Balašević is an advocate of Yugoslavia as preferable frame for optimal cultural and political growth of nations in this region. He adopted a rather negative attitude towards nationalist politics of the new elite and its leaders, especially Slobodan Milošević. He clearly perceived nationalism as a basic destabilising factor of new relations in the last years of Socialist Yugoslavia. He acts against manipulation of new political leaders, intellectual elite and the Church. A certain antagonism and domination of political texts became evident after Milošević came to power and Balašević became active in the opposing structures. After the breakup of the former state he abandons the idea of Yugoslavia and advocates a democratic and liberal Serbia.

History is very important in the work of Đorđe Balašević as a sort of mirroring of reality (then-present) in which he lived and through history he offers his romantically – international ideology connecting nostalgia, historic reality and criticism of then-present. History certainly had a particular influence on the complex identity of Đorđe Balašević which comprises of liberalism, pro Yugoslavia attitude, Austro – Hungarian nostalgia, pacifism, anti-nationalism, with a hint of traditionalism and love for his country. Đorđe Balašević is a poet, not a historian nor a documentarist so he doesn't necessarily refers to the exact historical events and neither were all his characters real participants of certain events. Also, the lack of texts that deal with the time of monarchist Yugoslavia is apparent, as well as the fact that in only two songs World War II is mentioned (Count on Us and I Don't Like).

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Sažetak

NE LOMITE MI BAGRENJE: PREDODŽBE O POVIJESTI I POLITICI U PJESMAMA ĐORĐA BALAŠEVIĆA

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Novosadski kantautor Đorđe Balašević jedan je od istaknutih pjevača i pjesnika na području jugoistočne Europe. Osim izričaja s karakterističnim metaforama, usporedbama i personifikacijama, Balašević je značajan kao društveni aktivist. U ovom kontekstu bitne su njegove pjesme o prošlosti i sadašnjosti (tadašnjosti). Autori izdvajaju četiri skupine: pjesme o Prvom svjetskom ratu (Ratnik paorskog srca, Galicija, Aco braco, O kako tužnih ljubavi ima, Noć kad sam preplivao Dunav), o Josipu Brozu Titu (Tri put sam video Tita, Requiem), zatim o socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji (1987., Računajte na nas, O Bože, Virovitica, Mani me se lepa Nasto, Soliter), te o raspadu Jugoslavije i Miloševićевой Srbiji (Legenda o Gedi Gluperdi, Samo da rata ne bude, Da ti je BMW, Devedesete, Krivi smo mi, Gusle, Ja nisam luzer, Morao sam da se odselim, Nevernik, Plava balada, Regruteska, Sevdalinka, Živeti slobodno, Kako su zli dedaci razbucali proslavu). Đorđe Balašević je stvarao pjesme projicirajući u prošlost i tadašnjost svoje antiratne ideje, internacionalizam protiv tada dominantnih nacionalizama, zaokupljenost malim čovjekom koji se ne snalazi u složenim i prijelomnim razdobljima.

Ključne riječi: Đorđe Balašević, povijest, politika, Prvi svjetski rat, Josip Broz Tito, raspad Jugoslavije, Vojvodina.