


AVSENIK IN BUENOS AIRES: TRANSNATIONAL IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES THROUGH POLKA PERFORMANCES AMONG THE DESCENDANTS OF SLOVENIAN POLITICAL EXILES IN ARGENTINA

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This paper discusses the transnational music practices and political reinforcement of national identities. It presents preliminary results of a research in progress about transnational cultural practices among the younger generations of Slovenian political exiles' descendants in Argentina. It will explore the case of Baires Polka, a Slovenian Alpine Style music band that mainly performs cover versions of the Slovenian Avsenik Ensemble, as the basis for the analysis of the ways in which descendants in Diaspora continue their homeland music heritages and then reaffirm these practices through return mobilities and newly established transnational connections. The wish to continue their ancestors' cultural practices and their homeland-orientated commitment based at the beginning on the myth of return encouraged many descendants to musically enact their Slovenianness. The descendants in the case study have chosen to play what is considered Slovenian Slovenian Alpine Style music of today, which emerged after the Second World War and is built around the music style of just one Slovenian region (Gorenjska) modernized by the Avsenik brothers, as a way of preserving and being in touch with their roots and social memory.

Keywords: Slovenian exiles, Argentina, migration, Diaspora, transnational music practices, popular music, political reinforcement of identities

Introduction

The present paper addresses the transnational popular musical practices and political reinforcement of national identities among the younger generations of Slovenian anti-communist exiles' descendants in

Argentina.¹ It focuses on the Slovenian political diasporic community in Argentina, established by political migrants who had left Slovenia after the Second World War because of the communist revolution.

The forced uprooting initiated the diasporic path while deepening the need for group solidarity, identity and cultural preservation, and the constitution of a collective memory that would allow them to work out the shock (Mera 2005). Memories of the circumstances forcing them to leave their territory of origin and the sense of belonging remained vivid among migrants and an important number of descendants that shape this Diaspora, defining the social organization of the community and their social representations and subjectivities about it. The *myth of return* (Clifford 1997) prompted them to organize the community with the purpose of conservation and consolidation of “Slovenianness”,² that is Slovenian identity and culture.

Diaspora experiences are not defined by an essence or purity. On the contrary, recent anthropological theoretical approaches stress that it is shaped by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity. Identities are productions that are never complete, but are always in process (Hall 2013). They are constituted within a relationship with the past and politics, through memory, narrative and myth.

Popular music can be taken as a cultural resource in the construction of diasporic identity and it is inseparable from memory and heritage

¹ Argentina received different Slovenian migration flows, in the context of international overseas immigration policies in Argentina. The first groups moved there during the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th due to socioeconomic problems. A large wave of migrants – some 25,000 – had arrived between the two World Wars. The decision to migrate was closely connected with the economical problems and the loss of territory and reconfiguration of the Slovenian space after the First World War (Mislej 1994). The last flow of the Slovenian migrants and their descendants to Argentina came after the end of the Second World War. Although the immigrants came from the same territory of origin, Slovenia, the different historical contexts and the different migration processes shaped a complex community and multifaceted identifications among the migrants and their descendants. See more in: Molek 2012.

² The concept Slovenianness is used to define the adscription of the actors to a personal way of understanding a Slovenian identity.

construction that helps to link the intergenerational members of immigration collectives through specific sounds, styles, and lyrics. Frith (1999) maintains that music cannot be separated from the movement of the population. Furthermore, Cook (2003) claims that music can be a symbol of national or regional identity, because emigrant communities sometimes strongly cling to their “traditional music”³ in order to retain their identity abroad. In a case study, Marty (2015:90) demonstrates that in the insertion process of Slovenians in Switzerland a series of triad relationships of the immigration communities with the host and source country was established. There, music played an important role in every part of this triple communication. In the emigration context, music and related events are constantly involved in everyday life and festivities. Music enables the building of a flexible symbolic space, which links the original environment and new home. Music remains at the heart of migrant experience. The country of origin remains associated with the place of destination through a complex network of sounds (Slobin 1994:243, in Marty 2015:90). On the other hand, as Vovk (2004) proved in her study of Slovenian musical culture among the Slovene communities in Argentina, that music also plays an important role in integration and connection of immigrant communities. Finally, Van Dijck also focuses his attention on the interrelation between music and memory. Social practices and cultural forms like music appear, according to the author, inseparable from the memory and cultural heritage construction (see further in: Van Dijck 2006; Baumgartner 1992; Connell and Gibson 2004; Frith 1998).

Through my long fieldwork – and my personal experience as a Slovenian descendant – the value that the Slovenian post Second War migrants to Argentina and their descendants ascribe to *their music*⁴ became evident to me. Currently, many young Argentinean-Slovenians still feel an ongoing commitment to “preserving the Slovenianness” and thus

³ Although the term “traditional music” is ambiguous and has been discussed at length, is used here to refer to folk music and popular music, which identifies a singular ethnic group (Shetuni 2011:4). It expresses the connection between an ethnic group, in this case study the Slovenians, and its musical art form, created and passed down orally through time.

⁴ Other researchers have also emphasized the close relationship between music and Slovenian identity among this group (Mislej 1994; Škulj 1995; Šorle 2006).

expressing their feeling of belonging through performing Slovenian music. With the passage of time, generations undergo changes and attention has to be paid to how these generations need to negotiate adapting traditional practices to the present day.

To show this, I will explore the case of *Baires*⁵ *Polka*, a Slovenian Alpine Style music band that mainly performs the cover versions of the Slovenian *Avsenik* Ensemble [Ansambel bratov Avsenik], as the basis for the analysis of the ways in which descendants in Diaspora select, reconfigure, and continue homeland musical practices and then reaffirm these practices through return mobilities and newly established transnational connections that are at the same time reinforced by the National State identity politics. The main hypothesis stresses that for many descendants, it was the wish to continue their ancestors' cultural practices, and the homeland orientated community commitment to preserving the roots and social memory that prompted them to *musically* enact their Slovenianness.

METHODOLOGY

The research issue presented in this paper takes part of the bilateral cooperation project –MinCyT (Argentina)/Mhest (Slovenia) – called “Art in diaspora: Anthropological research of creativity among Slovenians in Argentina and return migrants”. Due to personal interests, I decided to focus on music, understood as a cultural subfield of art.

My research about “Slovenians in Argentina” started eight years ago and is still ongoing. It is linked to my own biography. I am a descendant of Slovenian migrants who arrived in Argentina in the period between the two world wars, and a migrant to Slovenia myself.⁶ Consequently, I have been in touch with the Slovenian community, identity and culture in Argentina, and the experience of transnationalism since I was a child. My father used to work as a cultural agent for the Slovenian community in Argentina in the 1980s and 1990s, and I usually joined him at different festivities,

⁵ “Baires” is one of the nicknames that the Argentinian citizens use to refer to the City of Buenos Aires.

⁶ My parents had a scholarship to study in Slovenia from 1983 to 1987. I also spent a year studying the language between 2005 and 2006.

lunches, and cultural activities where Slovenian music was all around. So, before starting my research, I was familiar with the different associations, social practices, and even everyday life interactions of some Slovenians in Argentina, understanding their social life in general.

From 2009 to 2010 a deep anthropological research was conducted among different Slovenian communities in Argentina (see: Molek 2012). I spent a year and a half doing research in many different locations – Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Río Negro, and among other provinces – in order to explore the ways in which the Slovenianness and the social relations were being defined and perceived by the social actors. I collected information, interpretations and narratives through participate-observation, 60 semi-structured formal interviews, and life histories. The interviewees were migrants and descendants of the different migration flows, who were aged from 15 to 90, of both sexes, and with different levels of education.

Being a kind of an “insider” helped me establish contacts within the group. Nevertheless, for my academic work, I needed to achieve an inverse process of distancing myself from my pre-existing experience in order to be able to denaturalize some of the processes and practices, and translate them into analytical categories.

More in-depth research about the relationship between music and identity is being carried out since 2015. Since 2016, I have been more focused on the transnational social field. I am doing a translocal (Hannerz 1998) and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) in Argentina and Slovenia. For the present case study in particular, I had two interviews with the members of *Baires polka*. The goal was to register their biographies and translocal interconnections and to link them to their decision to set up a Slovenian Alpine Style music band that performs Avsenik Ensemble’s repertoire. I selected the case because I found an interesting way to study how musical practices combine ways of belonging and inaction of identities. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, including some words and phrases in Slovenian.

To reconstruct their presence in the Slovenian transnational community and to delve more deeply into the topic of mobilities, I also followed groups of Slovenians in Argentina on Facebook and in *Svobodna Slovenia*, the

Diaspora newspaper. Finally, I also had some informal conversations about the band and the topic with other Slovenian descendants, the staff of the Slovenian Embassy in Argentina, and the authorities of the Slovenian Governmental Office for Slovenians Abroad in Slovenia.

SLOVENIAN MIGRATION PROCESS TO ARGENTINA AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

During World War II Slovenia was divided in zones of influence by different powers of the Axis: The German Nazis, the Italian fascists, and the Hungarians (Toynbee 1985:448). Between 1941 and 1945 there was a period of war in Slovenia that combined resistance to the occupiers – or the War of Liberation from the Axis powers – and a civil war (Gow and Carmichael 2000). The socio-political landscape was heterogeneous. On the one hand, there was a socialist / communist axis, the “Liberation Front” [*Osvobodilna Fronta*], which had been organized in 1942 to offer armed resistance to the fascist occupation forces and to all those whom they considered traitors (Toynbee 1985). The areas of northern Slovenia had a different political development. They consisted of the most affluent areas of Slovenia and were under the Nazi influence. Among the traditional elite an explicit fear towards communism developed, especially due to the atheism that this meant and the socioeconomic changes that a communist system would impose (Prunk 1998:134). Inside this front various nationalist movements were formed. The largest anti-communist Slovenian organization was called “Slovenian Homeguards” [*Domobranci*]. During the war, the anti-communists turned to an alliance with the occupiers (see more in: Prunk 1998; Rant 2008).⁷

⁷ This topic is still very sensitive among some members of the community. During the Second World War, Slovenia not only had to face resistance to the occupiers (Germans, Italians and Hungarians) but also a civil war (see more in: Molek 2012). Simultaneously with the occupation, the Communist Party enforced a revolution, which caused confusion among the people: “Some just changed sides. They went to one side, but if they didn’t like it, they changed to the other, and vice versa, because the confusion was huge” (M. G.). In the course of my fieldwork I collected various stories about the anguish that this division meant. I also found examples of families where one son was taken by the Germans and the other by the Liberation Front. In other words, some families were divided and some of these young boys were just forced to fight for any party. Of course, there are also cases of

After the German capitulation, the ones who took an active part in the Second World War as soldiers of the anti-communist collaborationist force (Repič 2006, 2016) as well as those who were critical of the new regime, escaped to the neighbouring countries and settled temporarily in the Red Cross refugee camps in Austria and Italy, before migrating to Argentina, Canada, and several other countries (see: Corsellis 1996; Žigon 1998, 2001; Repič 2006; Molek 2013). However, some of them were caught, slaughtered, and buried afterwards in mass unmarked graves (see more in: Corsellis 1996:55; Žigon 2001; Repič 2006; Rant 2008; Molek 2013).⁸

After the Second World War, some of them formed a group of political exiles who arrived in Argentina in search of asylum. Approximately 6,000 settled in Argentina between 1947 and 1954 (Žigon 1998). The majority of these post-war immigrants were concentrated principally in Greater Buenos Aires and Capital Federal, Mendoza and Río Negro. This concentration enabled the formation of the above mentioned sense of belonging, ensuring the construction of the Diaspora identity (Mera 2005) and the transmission of cultural practices.

In Argentina, they rapidly organized a *skupnost* [community], an expression that they use to present themselves as a collective organisation. The exiles gathered following the migration and family networks, which began to develop in Slovenia or in the refugee camps. In fact, the exiles began the communalization (Brow 1990:1) and diasporization process around the “commitment to preserve Slovenianness” in the refugee camps in Austria and Italy (Molek 2012; Repič 2016), where they initiated

people who personally decided to join one side. On the other hand, some interlocutors also mentioned they were against the Nazis, especially those who were sent to concentration camps in Croatia. Nevertheless, what is still controversial is that the *Domobranci* force also concluded collaboration agreements with the Germans. Although this is not explicitly accepted by the community, the fact is that it is still a historical discussion, which remains unresolved, becoming a “negative mark” for the *Skupnost*. See more about this topic in: Molek 2012.

⁸ When Germany capitulated and the Communist party came to power in Yugoslavia, members of the retreating or collaborationist armies or civilian regime opponents were imprisoned, secretly executed without court trials and buried in mass graves by OZNA, the special squads of the Yugoslav security-intelligence agency (Repič 2016:108).

patterns of action that promoted a sense of belonging to a diasporic community together.

Firstly, they organized themselves into national centres, called *domovi* [homes]. After the first stage of integration was left behind, they used the *domovi* as places to build and reinforce their belonging to a community, maintain the collective memories and their identity, based on roots metaphors, the relationship with the homeland, a strong nationalism, the Slovenian language, Catholic faith and ideological anti-Communism (Molek 2013). These Slovene associations were not bonded with the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991). This fact changed after the Slovenian independence in 1991.⁹

The communal relationships and the cultural performances that we can observe nowadays among this group of study are socially constructed, and culturally and historically determined (Brow 1990:2) around the common experience of traumatic displacement and the emphasis on the *myth of return* (Repič 2016; Molek 2013). Many of the exiled thought that they would return to their “only and true home” (Repič 2016) after a while (Corsellis 1996; Žigon 2001; Repič 2006; Molek 2013). This *myth of return* (Clifford 1997), which is very significant for the Diaspora studies, prompted them to organize a community with a clear purpose: the conservation and consolidation of Slovenianness. This would allow them to return to their homeland when the revolution had passed. For instance, they organized Slovene mass in Slovenian language, school programs, Slovene press and cultural activities (Zbornik 1998; Rant 2008), as well as musical and singing performances, which epitomized the idea of continuity with the real or imagined homeland.

Memories of traumas and suffering remain vivid and were internalized through generations, handing over the responsibility of preservation of

⁹ The *domobranci*, their families and other civilians that left Slovenia after the Second World War were considered “traitors” and political opponents by the new state authorities. Consequently, after emigration, they broke off their formal relationship with Slovenia during the period when it was a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1991). In Argentina, they resembled a complex organization or an “ethnic Ghetto”, independent and dislocated from the homeland (Rot 1992:225, in Repič 2016:109) and among other groups of Slovenian immigrants in Argentina this led to some allegiance to the post-war Yugoslavia (Molek 2012).

the Slovenianness and the duty to their ancestors' homeland. Preservation strategies are varied. For instance, the group organizes many cultural and leisure activities (Molek 2012). An interlocutor detailed that the group encourages formal and fixed activities and itinerant events. The anniversary of independence of the Republic of Slovenia, the anniversary of each Association, *Mladinski dan* [youth day]¹⁰ and *Domobranski dan*, the annual memorial service and commemoration for the victims of the Second World War, are examples of fixed celebrations. However, the community actors also organize weekly activities in order to encourage interaction between the associations. The activities work as moments of relaxation and entertainment and usually bring different generations together. They can be varied: from concerts, theatre performances, music festivals, art exhibitions or conferences, to parties like carnivals, celebrations or fairs, etc. Today, whenever there is such an event, music is always present, especially the Slovenian one.

It is very important to highlight for the present case study the importance of the language as an identity “treasure to be preserved” and as a symbol of inclusion/exclusion: “The preservation of the language means a lot to us, it means the survival of the Slovenianness, the bond to our homeland, and the preservation of our community” (T. M.).

Nevertheless, even though many younger descendants (third and fourth generations) still learn Slovenian as first language, the everyday communication among them is conducted in Spanish. Moreover, the participation and commitment to voluntary work for the community of the younger is perceived as “declining”, causing concern among the leaders and intellectuals:

“People are becoming less willing to do anything for free, and to sacrifice time or money for the community. Young people prefer

¹⁰ The day of youth is an event that is usually organized in November by the young descendants of the exiles. The youth organization is very strong. It is divided by gender: the organization for girls SDO (*Slovenska dekliška organizacija*) and the organization for boys SFZ (*Slovenska fantovska zveza*). All Slovene Argentines between 15 and 35 years of age can join. Their main activities are sport tournaments, cultural events, leisure activities, and religious and intellectual meetings, which are usually held in Slovene.

going out, they prefer having fun on a Saturday night... So, they skip the Sunday Slovenian mass, mixed marriages are increasing, young people prefer to learn English rather than Slovene ... If something is not done quickly, the fourth generation of Slovenians will be lost.” (M. P).

There are significant differences among the older and younger generations, which highlight the changes Diaspora groups undergo with the passage of time and the emergence of new generations within the group. Although, there are factors that generally remain constant among the generations – for example the need for a conscious intergenerational transmission of Slovenian identity, social memory and a sense of belonging to the *skupnost*, there is at the same time a difference between the conservative older generations linked to leadership roles within their communities and the younger ones. As in other study cases (see: Hall 2013; Wrazen 2010; Martino 2015; Kunej and Kunej 2016), younger generations developed an identification with several worlds, cultures and practices that transcend the Slovenianness.¹¹ The research shed light on how the older generations expend more effort to organise especially attractive activities for the weekends. Although youth events are not something new among the studied group, it can be observed that in the recent years activities geared towards them are intensifying, such as Rock festivals, Youth nights, pub nights, karaoke nights, parties, etc. This could be understood as a negotiation, where the previous obligation of using Slovenian language for communication is entirely overlooked. Now the focus is on the conservation of social relationships among “people like us”.

FROM “TRADITIONAL MUSICAL PRACTICES” TO “TRANSNATIONAL MUSICAL PRACTICES”

In my ethnographic experience, it was common to find among Slovenian exiles and their descendants in Argentina references to Slovenian music as an important diacritic of national belonging. From its beginnings,

¹¹ Since there are already the fourth and fifth generations among the political Slovenes in Argentina, it would be interesting to explore the process of continuity and discontinuities from one generation to another in relation to identification and belonging that change with the passage of time.

the *skupnost* put a lot of effort into organizing musical events – with either serious, traditional or popular music – as a way of gathering different generations together.¹²

Many interviewed descendants emphasized that music is an important part of their cultural life and tradition, and they felt it was crucial to share it with the new generations.

It was common to hear references to “singing” as a Slovenian cultural tradition. Many descendants interviewed remembered their family members cultivating folk songs at social gatherings and describe themselves as “singing people”.¹³ For example, a migrant who arrived in Argentina when he was 5 years old, recalled:

“It was common to sing at home. When my parents met other Slovenians, it was quite normal for them to sing together some traditional songs from their homeland, ... usually sad songs ... and they sang very beautifully. You know... Slovenians are characterised by singing, they are very much a singing people.” (A. R.).

Music, as a travelling culture (Clifford 1992), came from Slovenia with the first generations of migrants. Many newer generations inherited these national “traditional musical practices” as a way to cultivate the Slovenianness. A descendant recalled about this practice:

“After some anniversary of the clubs, or after *mladinski dnevi*, or if we met somewhere... we were thirty, forty, twenty, it varied, of all ages. And we sang old Slovenian songs, in different voices of course, like they used to be sung before, right?... Above all, we sang the sad ones... *zabučale gore, angelček varuh moj, nocoj pa, oh, nocoj*. But also other, more cheerful songs, *ali me bos kaj rada imela, delaj, delaj dekle pušelj, če študent na rajžo gre...*” (R. F.).

Nevertheless, over the years such tunes started to be displaced by “transnational musical practices”, since the younger began to consume the

¹² See more on this topic in: Škulj 1995 and Vovk 2004.

¹³ Other researchers (Vovk 2004; Škulj 1995) also focused on this phenomenon, although they studied more formal music genres.

“new” Slovenian popular music mediated through diverse technologies – Longplays, Compact Cassette, Compact Disc, YouTube, etc. In the interviews, many descendants claimed to know and like the Slovenian music stars and “Čuki”, “Andrej Šifer”, “Oto Pestner”, “Aleksander Mežek”, “Modriani”, “Adi Smolar” or “Vlado Kreslin” were the ones most named.

Narodno-zabavna glasba [Slovenian Alpine Style music] is the most preferred genre by the “political Slovenes” interlocutors.¹⁴ Many interviewed emphasized the taste for ensembles, such as “Ansambel bratov Avsenik”, “Ansambel Lojzeta Slaka”, “Igor in zlati zvoki” or “Alpski Kvintet”.

This music is found among Slovenian *skupnost* in Argentina in commemorative events, in specific musical festivals, in other social and sport gatherings organized in the *domovi*, as well as at community parties, where “local” ensembles or rock bands perform Slovenian and Argentinean music to entertain the audience who express their enjoyment by clapping their hands rhythmically.

BAIRES POLKA

Some of the younger generations that socialized inside the “fixed boundaries” of the community continue to closely engage with the “commitment to preserve Slovenianness” performing the national belonging through traditional music.¹⁵ For instance, *Baires Polka*, a folk national entertainment band that mainly performs cover versions of *Avsenik* Ensemble – but also of *Alpski Kvintet* Ensemble and *Lojze Slak Ensemble* – is an interesting example to analyze in order to see how the descendants

¹⁴ This is not to say that the actors linked to the other Slovenian migration flows don’t identify this musical genre as “authentically” Slovenian or that they don’t listen to it, however in this paper I only want to concentrate on the proposed case study, because I am researching how the actors can appropriate a genre and compose a song to express their feelings and national loyalties.

¹⁵ It is important to highlight that the community is very heterogeneous. In this article, and for analytical purposes, I decided to focus on descendants’ bands that are still ascribing to their national identity.

connect with homeland social practices and homeland musical heritages (Hofman 2014) in the Diaspora (Schneider 2006), and then reaffirm these practices through return mobilities and newly established transnational connections (Repič 2016:121).

The performance of folk music among emigrant groups in the new environment is not a new phenomenon. In fact, Slovenian folk song, polka and waltz have also had a special significance for Slovenian emigrants and their descendants in other destinations, especially in the United States of America. In Argentina, forming national entertainment Ensembles among the exiles started in the 1970s, when some individuals were hurt to see that there was no Slovenian traditional dance music at music festivals and parties. The first group was founded by sons of Slovenian exiles that settled in Carapachay, the *Slovenski Instrumentalni Ansambel* (see more in: Molek 2017).

Baires Polka was founded in 2012 with five members and six different instruments: accordion, guitar, trumpet, clarinet, bass, and baritone. Four of them are the grandsons of Slovenian exiles, while the fifth, who is “the oldest”, belongs to the second generation. The amateur musicians are mainly autodidacts, who used YouTube as a social media to facilitate their musical learning. In a conversation, he remembered the first steps of the band:

“Baires Polka is a group of young boys brimming with excitement about Slovenian music. Some years ago Marko came home, from Ramos Mejía.... we live in Carapachay... Marko was 20 years old when he became enthusiastic about the accordion, he is self – taught... I mean... I find it surprising. Marko, a young man born in Argentina, studies railway engineering in Argentina, and enjoys performing Slovenian music on his accordion! He even went to the *Avsenik* music school to improve his technique.... He carries this in his heart. He takes his accordion everywhere in the car... even if he attends a party, or on a Friday night meeting. If someone asks, Marko, why don't we sing something? He will get the accordion and start playing Slovenian tunes from 30, 40, 50 years ago! So, once Marko came home with a clarinetist, and they were hanging around exploring some tunes with my sons... And I said, hey! A trumpet is missing here and you have it. My son Alejandro could play the guitar... we

motivated my other son Andrej to play the bass and so we created *Baires Polka*. And then, we rehearsed for a few days and had our first public appearance in *Pevsko Glasbeni Večer*,¹⁶ in 2012.” (F. Ž.).

The young descendants – grandsons – still preserve and perform bonds to the homeland through “transnational musical practices”. The expression “he carries this in his heart” sheds light on how transmitted music – or genres – can mobilise personal and emotional ties to their homeland over generations. The example shows that music performs an important function in transferring a particular identity from the first-generation immigrants to those in the second and third generations who do not have their own experience of their parents’ and grandparents’ homeland (Klein 2005).

Baires Polka plays constantly at community gatherings and parties, especially at associations’ anniversary celebrations among the *skupnost*. But they also integrate diverse celebrations and have taken part in the *Pevsko Glasbeni Večer* event since 2012.

In addition, the band also participates in events of other Slovenian migrants and institutions in Argentina. The Slovenian Embassy in Buenos Aires engages them regularly. For example, they were asked to play at the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Republic of Slovenia, on June 25, 2016. In 2013, they were invited by *Slovensko Društvo Triglav Rosario*, the Slovenian Interwar Association from Santa Fe, to perform at the 29th National Meeting of Immigrant Communities in Rosario.¹⁷ They were also invited to perform at other immigrants’ national celebrations and homes, like *Festival Eslavo* [Slavic Festival] and *Sociedad Friulana de Devoto* [Friulan Association Villa Devoto].¹⁸ In the Argentinean interaction background, they represented Slovenia at the French-speaking celebration organized by the Buenos Aires City Hall at Plaza San Martín.

¹⁶ *Pevsko Glasbeni Večer* [Choir Musical Night] is a music festival in Buenos Aires, where the younger generations perform music.

¹⁷ The organizers uploaded the following video as a tribute to the event at YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5FZsA1uOUo>.

¹⁸ It is important to remark that Slovenian descendants could also be found among the Friulians, due to the historic reconfiguration of Slovenian ethnic territory.

TRANSNATIONAL MUSIC PRACTICES AND POLITICAL REINFORCEMENT OF NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Some years ago, three members of the band were awarded grants to improve their technique of playing in the *Avsenik* music style. One of the members explained to me:

“Republic of Slovenia’s Office for Slovenians Abroad developed a three-year financial support programme. It consisted of the financial support of fifty percent of the airplane ticket and the *Avsenik* Music School fee, available to all the Slovenians abroad who performed Slovenian Slovenian Alpine Style music in the *Avsenik* style. So, Marko and Alejandro participated the first year. Next year I travelled with Alejandro... The course lasted for four days, and it is great, because you can really acquire special skills to improve your music. They not only teach you how to start playing a tune, but they also show you how to take care of your instrument. You learn how to play each piece, how to master it. You don’t learn how to play a song, but you get the ‘know how’. And on the other hand, we have a link to *Avsenik*, and they also know us.” (F. Ž.).

The passage brings together important issues: transnational music practices, mobility and the State reinforcement of national identities. Firstly, the paragraph refers to meaningful mobilities that Slovenian exiles experience to fulfil their desire to “return home”. In fact, since the Independence of Slovenia in 1991, many descendants have “returned” to Slovenia. Most of them travelled there as part of “roots tourism”. In this sense, all the members of *Baires Polka* have been to Slovenia several times and they visited relatives and travelled to or did a tour of the “top destinations” (Ljubljana, Bled, Postojnska Jama, etc.) at least once.

Thus, there are also other forms of mobility that are partially supported by the Slovenian government. For example, every July students of the secondary school mobilize to Slovenia for two weeks as a final immersion in the culture of their ancestors (Repič 2016). Others, e.g. the members of *Baires Polka*, can also “return” for learning mobilities or cultural/sport exchanges.

Secondly, the interview also highlights how diasporic identities and cultural practices are configured in relation to transnational cultural

interconnections and political configuration of national identities through music.¹⁹ With this, I do not want to neglect the own or individual initiative of the actors. On the contrary, my research shows that identity and mobility processes are founded on complex intersections of individual subjectivities, homeland orientation of the Diaspora as well as historical, political or social contexts, and state policies.

Nevertheless, modern national identities cannot be separated from State projects. In social sciences, a lot has been discussed about national “invention of traditions”. Many scholars agree that (solid) modernity (Bauman 2011) “invented” nations and traditions by a constructivist process of “identity and cultural homogenization” (Gellner 1991; Smith 1997; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1997) to build “imagined communities” (Anderson 1997).

Music is in fact an element of reference in modern national identities. In this regard, Bohlman stresses that music is:

“(…) a product of national and nationalist ideologies but rather because music of all forms and genres can articulate the processes that shape the state. Music can narrate national myths and transform them into nationalist histories.” (Bohlman 2004:12).

According to Baily, music’s special effectiveness in this respect is that – beyond the ability to identify different ethnic and social groups – it has powerful emotional connotations that “can be used to assert and negotiate identity in a particularly powerful way” (Baily 1994:48). For Muršič (1996:67) “music is being used as one important bond to create ‘imagined communities’ of different types and sizes”.

¹⁹ It is not my intention to debate the concept of “national identity”, but to give theoretical orientations that allow me to rethink my case study. For more on the “nation” see: Hobsbawm and Ranger 1997; Anderson 1997; Gellner 1991; Smith 1997; among others. As explained before, from the point of view of recent theoretical scholarship, identity is a process, not an essence, that is continually being remade through an internal-external dialectic involving a simultaneous synthesis of internal self-definition and one’s ascription by others (Barth 1976). In this sense, national identities are not held as some natural or eternal substances but rather constructs produced by different discursive operations.

From the proposed constructivist perspective, Slovenia is a modern “invented” nation (Jezernik 2013). Its territory in fact includes diverse regions, which belonged to different empires or States in the past and have consequently developed into very disparate contexts. The reunion of all these regions into a single federal unit started under the 19th Century Slovenian Nationalist Movement (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, Slovenians relied upon music to accompany the formation of the Slovene nation.²⁰ Folk music became “the embodiment of the authentic Slovenian national history” (Kovačič 2015:16) in the context of the “national awakening” at the end of the 19th century. The process of national construction mainly involved folk music, which was nationally performed by choirs (*ibid.*).

In contemporary Slovenia, *narodno-zabavna glasba* became one of the most often performed musical genres that bring together a contrasting set of national ideologies, theories, imageries and rituals. Historically, this musical genre from Slovenia, commonly translated sometimes as “folk-pop music” (Zorman 2016), emerged in the early 1950s (Muršič 1998; Kovačič 2015). After it was launched by the Avsenik brothers and broadcast by radio programmes,²¹ musicians quickly appropriated it and began to perform this genre at festivities. It included various pre-existing musical expressions of the wider region surrounding Slovenia, as well as influences from jazz and the polka played by Slovenian Diaspora in the U.S.A. (Zorman 2016). The genre is a mixture of traditional folk music (Muršič, in Kovačič 2015:93) that combines folk instrumental practices with singing (Kovačič 2015:96). It established a specific constellation of

²⁰ See more on this topic in: Cvetko 1997; Kumer 1975, 2002; Kovačič 2015.

²¹ *Avsenik Ansambl* was an inspiration for the creation of many groups that played similar music and the emergence of a distinct Slovenian Alpine Style genre. They introduced a new combination of instruments (accordion, guitar, clarinet, trumpet and bass), a more pronounced polka rhythm, and a new way of playing the accordion. They were very popular and successful in Slovenia, Germany and other parts of Central Europe. The Avsenik Ensemble continues to be one of the most influential and popular polka and waltz music groups around the world today. See more about Avsenik brothers in: http://www.culture.si/en/Avsenik_Ensemble.

signifiers such as lyrics, clothing and attitudes, as well as a complex system of musical structures and embellishments and instrumental set-up (Zorman 2016), where the accordion stood out and became the central instrument of the genre (Kovačič 2015). Over time it has become highly popular and rose to the status of an “authentic Slovene tradition”. The Slovenian genre rapidly spread throughout the Alpine Europe and around the world (Zorman 2016), reaching the Slovenian Diaspora worldwide.

Thus, from the “actors’ point of view”, of Slovenian exiles and their descendants, the genre in question is perceived as the unquestionable *music signifier* (Stanković 2015:650) of Slovenianness.²² Nevertheless, it is important to highlight again the construction of this tradition (Muršič 2002; Stanković 2015; Ramovš 2005) and its background, the Slovenian nationalism (Zorman 2016).

On the other hand, as the State becomes a regulatory body of national identity (Cuche 2007), I also find it important to take into consideration the financial support for musical technique improvement at *Avsenik* school for Slovenian Diaspora bands that performed Slovenian Slovenian Alpine Style music given by the government body *Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za Slovence v zamejstvu in po svetu* [Office for Slovenians Abroad].²³

Since its independence in 1991, the Republic of Slovenia has developed various Diaspora policies to reinforce the links with Slovenian citizens living abroad (Molek 2012). One of these resolutions is the setting up of a body that looks after the category of Slovenianness, as it is defined by the Slovenian state:

²² Although the empirical case described in Stanković’s (2015) article is located in Slovenia (and contextualized in a certain history and national identity process), my interviews among Slovenians in Argentina showed that these perceptions that link Slovenian Alpine Style music to unquestionable Slovenianness are shared.

²³ Slovenian Diaspora around the world remains a major issue for the Republic of Slovenia today. It is estimated that some 500,000 ethnic Slovenians live outside the borders of Slovenia. Similarly to other European nations, Slovenia developed diasporic policies, through the body *Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za Slovence v zamejstvu in po svetu* [Office for Slovenians Abroad], a specific form of transnationalism “that has as its primary aim the construction and reification of a transnational ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983)” (Edensor 2002:2).

“Slovenianness is a historical and cultural category, representing a community of people who consciously establish a membership in the Slovenian language and culture. The Slovenianness is based on the historical tradition of this community and on promoting solidarity for the preservation and the creative renewal of their natural, social resources, and spiritual values in the present and future” (*Resolution on Relations with Slovenians Abroad Nr. 53000-1/2008/5*).

The quote outlines the main function for the body: to pay special attention to those aspects that guarantee the Slovenian citizens living outside their national territory their rights to maintain their identity, culture, and Slovenian language. The financial support program of the Office for Slovenians Abroad legitimizes that certain national symbolic diacritics,²⁴ which are “traditionally” consumed within a transnational sphere,²⁵ must remain safeguarded and encouraged. It reflects, in other words, mechanisms of institutional recognition, legitimization, and valuation that heritage processes encompass (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004, in Hofman 2014), in order to reinforce the national identity and music heritage.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

This paper tried to explore how descendants of Slovenian exiles in Argentina use music as a symbolic vehicle connecting them to their origins and homeland.

The described musical practices suggested that music is not only an individual everyday practice, but also a collective one, that plays an important role in integration and shaping of immigrant communities’ diasporic consciousness (Vovk 2004). Popular music functions as a cultural resource in the construction of diasporic identity as well as emotional ties that link intergenerational members of the community through leisure and entertainment activities.

²⁴ To learn more about social perceptions about *narodno-zabavna glasba* i. e. Slovenian Alpine Style music, see: Stanković 2015; Muršič 1998.

²⁵ For other case studies about transnational consumption of “national music” in the emigration context see: Vovk 2004; Marty 2015; Kunej and Kunej 2016.

The descendants got involved in transnational music making and music consuming, and consequently, have appropriated their ancestors' cultural practices and the "homeland orientated community commitment", enacting musically, the preservation of the roots and social memory, and specially, their Slovenianness. These cultural practices are contextualized reconfigurations in transnational and intercultural identity formation processes (Clifford 1997).

The *Baires Polka* case study reflects how young descendants get involved in a Diaspora in relation to their "cultures of origin" (Schneider 2006:22), within the formation of identities in Argentina (ibid.:31). The descendants that constitute *Baires Polka* were socialized in "music traditions", developing a "common musical taste" within the borders of an interpretive community, configuring a contrasting process of representations of "us" and the "others". Music attaches the members to a common experience becoming "our songs" and, as Clifford stresses, identifications are not pre-given forms: "This tradition is a network of partially connected histories, a persistently displaced and reinvented time/space of crossings" (Clifford 1997:268). Live music performances, private collections of records, tapes, CDs and YouTube collections make them first "consumers" and then "performers", helping them to transcend the limitations of "being far away", bringing the homeland closer.

Similarly to Marty's case study (Marty 2015), the insertion process of Slovenians in Argentina is established, especially after 1991, in a series of triad relationships of the immigration communities with the host and source country, where music played an important role in every part of this triple communication. In this sense, *Baires Polka* is an example of transnational music practices, where these become a consequence of complex intersections of subjectivities, homeland orientation of the Diaspora, and their social memory processes, as well as historical, political or social contexts, and political reinforcement of national identities through State policies.

Furthermore, the performances of *Baires Polka* at music festivals, such as *Pevsko Glasbeni Večer*, reinforces the socialization of young people in a "relaxed environment" and helps to forge new friendships and associations based around common tastes for music and national identification.

Therefore, music consumption and performance are mixed with relaxation, amusement, the contact with the “roots” and also consumption of “ethnic goods”.

Finally, music led the descendants to reaffirm their practices through return mobilities in order to embrace the national conceived “traditional” and “homeland music heritages” (Hofman 2014). This also reinforces musical and literary heritage and the transnational configuration of Slovenianness among the younger generations.

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Nadia Molek

AVSENIK U BUENOS AIRESU: PROCESI TRANSNACIONALNE IDENTIFIKACIJE KROZ IZVOĐENJE POLKE MEĐU POTOMCIMA SLOVENSКИH POLITIČKIH EMIGRANATA U ARGENTINI

U ovom radu predstavljene su transnacionalne prakse popularne glazbe među mladim generacijama potomaka slovenskih antikomunista u Argentini. Rad proučava zajednicu slovenskih antikomunista u dijaspori koji su pobjegli u Argentinu nakon Drugoga svjetskog rata, поближе, sastav Baires Polka. Iako se migracijski proces odvio prije sedamdeset godina, četvrta te čak peta generacija potomaka slovenskih emigranata i dalje održava kulturne običaje svojih predaka. U znanstvenoj literaturi na ovu temu, ta se pojava tumači specifičnim karakterom migracijskog procesa skupine: prisilno izmještanje i zajedničko traumatično iskustvo raseljavanja u migracijskom procesu dijaspore ojačali su potrebu za solidarnošću, identitetom i očuvanjem kulture. Kako je većina emigranata vjerovala da će se naposljetku vratiti svojoj "jedinoj pravoj domovini", održali su čvrstu zajednicu u kojoj se snažno kolektivno sjećanje reproduciralo na osnovi sjećanja o zbivanjima iz Drugoga svjetskog rata, snažnog nacionalizma, slovenskog jezika, katoličke vjere i ideološkog antikomunizma koji su potkrijepljeni mitom o povratku. Na sličan način, današnje mlađe generacije nastavljaju s predanim radom na očuvanju svoje zajednice i korijena. Međutim, u okolnostima sve slabijega aktivnog sporazumijevanja na slovenskom jeziku i nepostojane participacije mladih, predvodnici zajednice počeli su organizirati atraktivna događanja u kojima popularna glazba sve izraženije doprinosi konstrukciji slovenstva. U tom je kontekstu nastao sastav Baires Polka koji je osnovalo pet amaterskih glazbenika 2012. godine. Sastav čine četiri unuka i jedan sin slovenskih političkih emigranata u Argentini koji uglavnom izvode obrade poznatoga slovenskog sastava Avsenik. Odabrana studija slučaja omogućila je analizu načina na koji potomci dijaspore izabiru, preoblikuju i nastavljaju glazbene prakse iz domovine svojih predaka. Time je ujedno potvrđena važna uloga glazbe u prenošenju identiteta s prve generacije

emigranata na drugu i treću generaciju koje nemaju vlastitih iskustava iz domovine svojih roditelja, baka i djedova. S obzirom na to da je više članova sastava primilo financijsku potporu Republike Slovenije kako bi unaprijedili svoje sviračke vještine u Glazbenoj školi Avsenik, ovaj primjer dodatno rasvjetljava međudnos pojmova poput transnacionalnih glazbenih praksi, mobilnosti i uloge države u jačanju nacionalnog identiteta. Pritom se ističe način na koji se kulturni identiteti i prakse dijaspore oblikuju u odnosu na osobni subjektivitet, transnacionalne kulturne poveznice i političku konstrukciju nacionalnog identiteta.

Ključne riječi: slovenski emigranti, Argentina, migracije, dijaspora, transnacionalne glazbene prakse, popularna glazba, uloga politike u jačanju identiteta

AVSENIK V BUENOS AIRESU: PROCESI TRANSNACIONALNE IDENTIFIKACIJE SKOZI POLKE MED POTOMCI SLOVENSКИH POLITIČNIH IZGNANCEV V ARGENTINI

Članek obravnava vprašanje transnacionalnih glasbenih popularnih praks med mladimi generaciji potomcev anticommunističnih slovencev v Argentini. Osredotoča se na študiji ansambla diasporične skupnosti, Baires Polka. Kljub temu, da so že minili sedemdeset let procesa migracije, izgnanci, ki so zapustili Slovenijo po drugi svetovni vojni, četrte in tudi pete generacije potomcev političnih Slovencev še vedno nadaljujejo s kulturnimi praksami svojih prednikov. V akademski literaturi na to temo, se ta pojav razložiti preko posebnim migracijskim procesom, ki ga je skupina doživela. Prisilna selitev in skupna izkušnja travmatičnega gibanja po jugoslovansko revoluciji po drugi svetovni vojni, je poglobila med diasporo potrebo po skupinski solidarnosti, identitete in ohranjanja kulture. Mnogi izgnanci so mislili, da bi se vrnil na svoj “edini in pravi dom” čez nekaj časa, in zato so ustanovili v Argentini zaprto skupnost, v kateri je obvladal močan kolektivni spomin, ki je temeljil na spomin na dogodke druge svetovne vojne, mit o vrnitvi, močan nacionalizem, slovenski jezik, katoliška vera in ideološki antikomunizem. Med mladimi se ta prozes še danes opazuje, saj še kažejo zavzemanje za trdo delo za skupnost in svoje korenine. Vendar pa v kontekstu, v katerem je aktivna uporaba jezika zmanjšana ter sodelovanje mladih je bolj fleksibilen, so vodja skupnosti začeli organizirati bolj privlačevalne dogodke, kjer je popularna glasba pridobila bolj pomembno mesto v konstrukciji slovenskosti. V tem kontekstu, so pet amaterski glasbeniki ustanovili v letu 2012 ansambel Baires Polka. Sestavljen iz štirih vnukov in sina Slovenske politične imigracije v Argentini, performira v glavnem različice komade slavnega slovenskega Ansambla Bratov Avsenik. Članek analizira preko primera, kako potomci v diaspori izbrajo in nadaljujejo s glasbenimi praksi iz domovine svojih prednikov. Kaže, da glasba ima pomembno vlogo pri prenosu identitete priseljencev prve generacije na druge in tretje generacije, ki niso imeli svoje lastne izkušnje v deželo svojih staršev in starih staršev. Končno, članek tudi povezuje

koncepte transnacionalnih glasbenih praks, mobilnost in državne krepitev nacionalne identitete, preko analize finančne podpore, ki so člani ansambla dobili od Urada za Slovence v Zamejstvu in po svetu za izboljšanje tehnike v Glasbeni šoli Avsenik. Poudarja se tako, kako so identitete in kulturne diasporične prakse nastavljene v vezi z osebnimi subjektivitete, transnacionalne kulturne povezave in politične konfiguracije nacionalnih identitet.

Ključne besede: slovenski begunci, Argentina, migracija, Diaspora, transnacionalne glasbene prakse, popularna glasba, politike identitet

AVSENIK EN BUENOS AIRES: PROCESOS DE IDENTIFICACIÓN TRANSNACIONAL A TRAVÉS DE LA POLCA ENTRE LOS DESCENDIENTES DE LOS EXILIADOS POLÍTICOS ESLOVENOS EN ARGENTINA.

El presente trabajo aborda el tema de las prácticas musicales populares transnacionales entre las jóvenes generaciones de los descendientes de los eslovenos anticomunistas en Argentina. Se centra en un estudio de caso de la comunidad diaspórica conformada por los exiliados eslovenos anticomunistas arribados al país tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la banda Baires Polka. Actualmente, se observa que, a pesar de que ya han transcurrido setenta años del proceso migratorio, las cuartas e incluso quintas generaciones de descendientes de los exiliados eslovenos aún desean continuar con las prácticas culturales de sus ancestros. En la literatura académica sobre el tema, este fenómeno se explica a través del proceso migratorio específico que experimentó el grupo. El desarraigo forzado y la experiencia común del desplazamiento traumático iniciaron entre los exiliados de la revolución yugoslava de la Segunda Guerra Mundial el camino diaspórico, profundizando la necesidad de solidaridad grupal, identidad y preservación cultural. Como muchos de los exiliados pensaron que volverían a su “único y verdadero hogar” después de un tiempo, conformaron una comunidad cerrada en la cual se reprodujo una fuerte memoria colectiva basada en el recuerdo de los acontecimientos de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, un fuerte nacionalismo, la lengua eslovena, la fe católica y un anticomunismo ideológico, reforzado a través del mito de retorno. Así, hoy día los jóvenes aún reproducen un compromiso de arduo trabajo hacia su comunidad y sus raíces. Sin embargo, en un contexto en el que el uso activo del lenguaje se está discontinuando y la participación de los jóvenes es más flexible, los líderes han comenzado a organizar eventos más atractivos donde la música popular ha ido ganando un lugar más importante en la construcción de la eslovenidad. Dentro de este contexto surgió Baires Polka, un conjunto de polca fundado en 2012 por cinco músicos aficionados. Consisten en cuatro nietos y un hijo de exiliados eslovenos políticos, que performan principalmente versiones de la famosa banda eslovena Avsenik. El estudio de caso permite analizar cómo los descendientes en la diáspora seleccionan, reconfiguran

y continúan las prácticas musicales de la patria de sus ancestros. Muestra la importante función que la música tiene en la transferencia de una identidad de los inmigrantes de primera generación a los de las segundas y terceras generaciones, quienes no han tenido su propia experiencia en la tierra de sus padres y abuelos. Finalmente, dado que muchos miembros de la banda obtuvieron un apoyo financiero para la mejora de técnicas en la escuela de Avsenik por parte del Estado esloveno, el caso también permite arrojar luz sobre la interrelación de los conceptos de las prácticas musicales transnacionales, la movilidad y el refuerzo estatal de las identidades nacionales. En resumen, destaca cómo las identidades y prácticas culturales de la diáspora están configuradas en relación con las subjetividades personales, las interconexiones culturales transnacionales y la configuración política de las identidades nacionales.

Palabras claves: exiliados eslovenos, Argentina, migración, diáspora, prácticas musicales transnacionales, música popular, políticas de as identidad