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## **KAFANA SINGERS: POPULAR MUSIC, GENDER AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THE CULTURAL SPACE OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA**

This article explores the phenomenon of *kafana* singers in the light of the official socialist discourses on popular music and gender during the late 1950s and 1960s in the former Yugoslavia. It seeks to understand how/did the process of *estradization* along with the socialist gender policy influence the shift in (self)representation of the female performers in the public realm. By focusing on the dynamic of controversial discourses on folk female singers, the article aims to show how the changes in the official discourse helped their profession to become an important resource of their subject actualizations, implicated in the creation of a new sense of social agency. As controversial musical personas, *kafana* singers' personal and professional lives show nuanced interplay between socialist culture policy and its representational strategies.

Key words: *kafana* singers, popular music, socialist culture policy, *estradization*, gender politics

Petar Luković, a journalist, writes about the folk singer Lepa Lukić in his book *Bolja prošlost: prizori iz muzičkog života Jugoslavije 1940–1989* [A Better Past: Scenes from Yugoslav Music Life 1940–1989], making the following observation: “In the future feminist debates, Lepa Lukić will occupy a special place: before her, women in *estrada* were more or less objectified, primarily treated like disreputable persons. Starting with Lepa Lukić, men had to behave differently – it is never easy with queens, especially when they obtain the right to speak, the right to say aloud how much they are worth because of their stronger sex” (Luković 1989:123). In his short Lepa biography,<sup>1</sup> she is portrayed as an independent woman and important

<sup>1</sup> Lepa Lukić's song *Od izvora dva putića* [Two paths lead from the water spring] from 1964, has been marked as the establishing of the newly-composed folk music [NCFM – *novokomponovana narodna muzika*] as a marketable genre, while she has been considered the queen of folk music.

public persona, who changed the reception of the female professional musicians in Yugoslavia. Is it possible to understand the activities of the female folk singers as a pro-feminist action?

This study explores the controversies over popular music and gender in the official narratives during the late 1950s and 1960s in the former Yugoslavia. It seeks to understand how/did the socialist gender policy influence the shift in (self)representation of the female performers in the public realm. It also aims to draw attention to the multifarious and contradictory nature of the official cultural politics, which calls for more nuanced interpretation than one limited to the manifestations of the discourse-power relations. By focusing on the professional folk singers who were neither visibly sanctioned nor openly promoted by the official politics and both marginalized and glorified, it reflects the complex and contradictory discourses on popular music in socialist societies. Referring to Paul Bowman's claim that there are many ways in which one song (or some other popular culture product) can be unintentionally subversive, even though it is considered to be "trivial", "frivolous", or "enjoyable" (2008:109–110), this study reflects the complex interplay between ideology, discourse and practice. It does not only examine the ways in which socialist institutionalization and formalization of the music vocation shaped the new notions of *kafana* performers as social actors, but also how the professional female musicians themselves mobilized these practices in their self-recognition.

Two leading magazines dedicated to popular music in Yugoslavia, *Estrada* and *Yugoslav Estrada*, which were issued during the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, were used as the main sources for the analysis. Even though the research included extended archival work in the Archive of Yugoslavia, I found no data on the *kafana* singers, who remained entirely invisible in the official narratives. As a result, the main material was based on the "less official" and "non-scholarly" journalist discourses – newspaper articles, music critics and interviews. A large part of the singers' interviews were taken from the *Sabor* magazine, the most popular periodical in the 1980s, particularly devoted to folk music. However, their accounts were not observed as transparent biographical statements, but as a momentous element in the singers' career strategy and the instances of self-positioning they used strategically. Their utterance indicated the ways in which the singer's self-presentation was mediated by the social expectations and norms. The study will therefore shed light not only on the contents of their claims, but also on highlighted or passed-over details, as the strategy justifying their behaviour in accordance with the common frames of understanding pervaded by the larger public or cultural narratives, emphasizing the relation between experience, subjectivity and discursivity.

Even though the phenomenon of *kafana* singers more frequently appeared in the "eastern" part of the former Yugoslav republics (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina,

Montenegro and Macedonia), this mode of entertainment was well-received in the whole cultural space of former Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup> The *kafana* has been a central space for informal socialization, networking and entertainment, in rural, semi-urban and urban environments from 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>3</sup> Offering a specific way of sociability, the *kafana* has been a place where people can drink alcoholic beverages, eat, listen to the music, dance and have a good time in the company of friends. Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the clientele consisted mainly of men, while in the more recent period it has been composed of all types of people from diverse backgrounds. Live music has been one of the most important elements, which marked the specific mode of entertainment taking place in the *kafana*.

The background of the female singers approached in this essay and their ethnic, class and generational identities have arisen as one of the major questions. According to their stories, almost all of them came from a rural background, and agricultural and low-income families, mainly from Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia. They usually started singing at the very young age of 16 and 17, by the end of the primary school or after dropping out the secondary school, going away from home to a bigger village or the local city. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the women featured in this study are not necessarily seen as the representatives of all *kafana* singers. Their personal and professional lives differ widely, which has certainly influenced their unique individual narratives and interpretation of the notion of the female performer.

### **Dangerous Profession**

Brazen people are ashamed of nothing,  
they see her as a sinful woman.  
Fame and money mean nothing to her,  
she must smile when she wants to cry.  
From a goddess to a slave,  
the price of fame is high,  
they extol her to the skies

Bezobrazni ljudi ničeg se ne stide,  
poročnicu u njoj vide.  
Ni slava, ni pare ništa joj ne znače,  
mora da se smeje i kad joj se plače.  
Od boginje do robinje,  
visoka je cena slave,  
u zvezde je dižu, kuju,

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<sup>2</sup> Although the musical genre *kafana* singers performed was associated with the “eastern” part of Yugoslavia, according to the sources, it was widely listened to throughout the whole of Yugoslavia. The archival sources show that NCFM was recorded in the mid-1960s by the music production company belonging to Radio-Television Belgrade (RTB) and the music production company Jugoton from Zagreb. In 1964, 47,6% of all Jugoton output was composed of folk music LPs, while this percentage was 51,7% at RTB.

<sup>3</sup> A term present in the South Slavic languages for a separate kind of local bistro, which mainly serves alcoholic liquors and coffee (and light snacks). The word itself comes from *kafa* [coffee], and its basic “coffee & alcohol” concept probably has Turkish origins. A literal translation of this word would be coffeehouse, but there is no adequate translation for this term; its most approximate synonym would be pub.

and blackmail her later on.	a onda je ucenuju.
There is a very thin line from	Od svetice do grešnice, suviše je
a saint to a sinner,	tanka žica,
which every woman walks on,	po njoj hoda svaka žena,
yet a female singer does it most often.	a najčešće pevačica.

The song *Pevačica* [A female singer], performer Vesna Vukelić Vendi, 2007

The professional music-making was identified as a vocation inappropriate for women in many societies. Regarding female popular music performers, they were often at the centre of extensive debates on negative moral values concerning the sex and entertainment industry. Female entertainers were considered to be “immoral” or “lustful women” in many cultures, equivalent to prostitutes or concubines. Even in the case of their achievement of some level of social dignity as independent women and winning the social freedom denied to the other women, they remained in general on the margins of society in most instances (Kapchan 1994:88).

For women in the rural society in Serbia, singing within a close community was regarded as a desirable gift: “Accomplished dancers, and especially singers, are more successful at attracting the attention of young men, and find marriage partners more easily than those lacking the necessary artistic talents” (Petrović A. 1990:76). However, performance beyond the domestic environment was not given approval. It was inconceivable for a woman to exhibit her musical talents in public.<sup>4</sup> Miodrag Vasiljević, in his book *Narodne melodije Leskovačkog kraja* [Folk Tunes from the Leskovac region, 1960], quotes the statement of the female singer Nasta Denić from the village of Babičko, who explains that singing beyond the private, household settings was not allowed in rural environments:<sup>5</sup> When I was young, women did not sing men’s songs. In the house, in front of her parents or older persons, a girl could not ever sing any other song except a ritual one from that season of the year. Young singers could find love excitement only in the ritual songs they performed for young persons. Only these songs contained love inspiration and that was it. Even these songs we sang alone in the mountains, when nobody could hear us, with livestock and out in the fields (Vasiljević 1960:x).

I received a similar testimony from Milunka Đorđević from the village of Jelašnica in Southeastern Serbia: “At that time we did not sing, that was very shameful” (Hofman, forthcoming).

These discourses were strongly linked to the professional/unprofessional distinction. For rural society, being a musician was a hobby not an occupation,

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<sup>4</sup> The same practice can be traced back in many societies: Tunisia (Jones 1987), Afghanistan (Doubleday 1990), Morocco (Kapchan 1994), Azerbaijan (Naroditskaya 2000), among the Albanians in Macedonia (Sugarman 1997) or Turkey (Ziegler 1990) and India (Babiracki 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Numerous authors including Susan Auerbach (1987) and Jane Sugarman (1997 and 2003) have examined the concept of female musical shame.

and earning one's own living in that way was not something a self-respecting villager would do (Buchanan 2006:147). Paid performing in public was more socially tolerable if done by men, while for women, whose musical activities mainly belonged to the unpaid (domestic) sphere, a musical vocation was not desirable.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the music trade in general was strongly associated with the Roma population, who were the chief music performers in Serbia.<sup>7</sup> Until World War II, the women who performed in public were mainly Roma who usually danced or sang in urban environments. Since they had been freer in expressing their musical affinities, Roma female entertainers were deemed to be dangerous because of their imputed sexuality and freedom and were regarded as women of low moral character – “sexually immoral” women, sometimes even as prostitutes (Silverman 2003:120, Doubleday 1999:121). That notion about Roma musicians and their sexuality, their taking pleasure in feasting or trading was also strongly embedded in the discourses on the music vocation in general and female professional singers.<sup>8</sup> Regarding this matter, the professional singers were identified with the Roma in rural society in Serbia, regardless of their ethnicity, being characterized as immoral and stigmatized by their family and the wider community.

Since professional singing was perceived to be a specific act of breaking the existing norms and disgracing the family name, it was very difficult for a woman to embark on a professional career. In the absence of “a head of the family”, Lepa Lukić's mother did not allow her to begin singing:<sup>9</sup> “I remember the manager of Hotel *Jugoslavija* personally approaching my mother and asking her to let me sing in the hotel lounge. It was considered indecent to sing in restaurants at that time. The female singers' image was shaped by public opinion, as they were compared with homeless and immoral persons” (Lepa Lukić, *Sabor*, a special issue of *TV News*, No. 2, January 16, 1984). After few months of persuasion, Lepa's mother finally agreed to let her daughter perform but only when accompanied by her brother as the male guardian, as she subsequently explained in her interview,

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<sup>6</sup> The distinction between professional and unprofessional performance proved to be a common cross-cultural characteristic of women's performances. The practice was well-known in many cultures where women's performances were considered “non-music” and female-associated genres as not “real music” at all (see Susan Auerbach, Patricia K. Shehan, Hiromi Lorraine Sakata and Karen E. Petersen in Koskoff 1987). In addition, as asserted in the study of professional female blues singers, no women has ever been able to represent an ideal type of a hustler and an entertainer in the same way men were (Bowers 2000:154).

<sup>7</sup> The scholars asserted that Roma in Serbia differed in their trade – they were predominantly ironmongers, potters, horse dealers, bear tamers, and musicians (Gojković 1994:87).

<sup>8</sup> Van de Port in his study about Gypsy bars in Novi Sad (1998) explores the fantasies of the Roma and their position as “internal others” in Serbian society.

<sup>9</sup> Leposava Mušović (alias Lepa Lukić) was born in 1940 in the small village of Miločaj near Kraljevo in Central Serbia. Her mother was a housewife, a father (who was killed by Chetniks during WWII when Lepa was three years old) was a smith. Her mother overtook all the responsibilities as the breadwinner and decision-maker because of the premature death of her husband.

twenty-five years later: “Without the company of her brother, I would not let Lepa sing, even if it was in the local village *kafana*. It is true, I did not support her idea to become a singer, but she was very persistent. Thanks to God everything turned out well. At that time, it was not easy for a girl to become a singer, particularly for a girl from a village” (*Sabor*, No. 6, March 12, 1984). Therefore, many of the singers had to run away from home to start singing professionally, since their families or husbands did not approve.

Bearing in mind the cultural notion of female sexuality in rural society, where modesty was an inherently feminine quality significant for both marriageable girls and married women,<sup>10</sup> the singers who became engaged in the public realm mainly associated with men, were viewed as being completely unacceptable.<sup>11</sup> Thus, professional singers often emphasized that even when they became successful, it was exceptionally important for many of them to assure their parents (particularly their father) and relatives of their earning money in an honest and honourable way, while they rarely dared to sing in front of their fathers: “My father considered singing to be something unstable and temporary. Now it is different, he is proud of me, because I have attained everything I have without any support from the background, but only through my own work and honesty” (Silvana Armenulić, *Sabor*, No. 67, July 7, 1986).

Being active in a “low-profile” profession, the most proper way for *kafana* singers to begin a professional career was to have a strong male figure as support.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, they usually married musicians or managers who made their public exposure “legitimate”. In accordance to their statements, a strong male figure as support was crucial for the young and inexperienced girls getting in among the “*kafana*’s smoky walls”: “You know, that is a big support to have your man in the orchestra while you are entertaining some drunkard, who is drinking directly from the bottle and whose eyes are completely red” (Vera Ivković, *Sabor*, No. 1, December 26, 1983). Therefore, at the beginning of their careers, many of them started a relationship (primarily) with the accordion players, with whom

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<sup>10</sup> There were very strict norms regarding women’s behavior in the Serbian villages. In accordance with the established gender hierarchies, a woman’s bearing had to be demure and had to appear duly bashful, especially in public. For a young girl, it was shameful to speak out, sit beside or dance with a young man when not accompanied by the elders.

<sup>11</sup> Female singers faced the same problems regarding their appearance in the media, particularly in the early socialist period throughout Southeastern Europe. It resulted in a situation where the performers invited to perform on the radio or television refused such invitations, often because their husband or family would not approve of it.

<sup>12</sup> The same was the case with the female instrumentalists. Radojka Živković, one of the first and most highly regarded female accordion players, performed together with her husband Tihomir. Naila Ceribašić also indicates that these gender patterns were identical in the field of traditional music (Ceribašić 2001).

they could performed together.<sup>13</sup> These men were at the same time their husbands, mentors and managers, protecting them and taking care of their personal and professional life.

### And God Created a Female *Kafana* Singer....<sup>14</sup>

I'll return to that *kafana*,  
even if I spend my last penny there.  
There I found a remedy for my crazy heart,  
there God created a *kafana* singer.

She'll be there to sing to me,  
to belly dance during the nights,  
if she had been a man,  
she would have been my best friend.

I would carve her name,  
Give her a golden watch,  
if she would have been a man,  
she would have been like my brother

Vratiću se u onu kafanu,  
pa neka mi zadnje pare tamo ostanu.  
Tu sam naš'o ludom srcu žicu,  
tu Bog stvori kafansku pevačicu.

Da mi peva,  
da mi meša noćima u krug,  
da je muško bila bi mi ko  
najbolji drug.

Urezaću njeno ime, daću  
zlatan sat,  
da je muško bila bi mi ko  
rođeni brat.

The song *Kafanska pevačica* [Female *kafana* singer], performer Željko Samardžić, 1997

The Peter Aschoff gender-specific definition of the social role of the bluesman can be quite usefully applied to the phenomenon of female *kafana* singer: “To be a musician who performs the blues is a musical skill/talent and occupation open to all, but to be a bluesman is a social role close, by definition, to the distaff side” (Aschoff in Bowers 2000:155). In the same manner, being a *kafana* singer was not just an occupation, but a social role.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the politics of place was inherently incorporated in the discourses of female performers. As Alessandra Ciucci pointed out, depending on the type of occupation women carried out in the public domain, their profession was judged according to a variety of factors such as the place and/or milieu in which they worked, the type of services they performed,

<sup>13</sup> The number of the famous singers who started their career with their husbands (such as Ema Redžepova and Stevo Teodosijevski, Radojka and Tine Živković, Lepa Lukić and Vlada Perović, Vera Matović and Danilo Knežević, Zlata Petrović and Hasan Dudić, Zorica Brunclik and Ljubo Kešelj etc.) testified that there were frequent relationships and marriages between the singers and accordion-players.

<sup>14</sup> The English translation of the title of the movie filmed in 1972 by director Jovan Živanović *Bog stvori kafansku pevačicu*, with Lepa Lukić in a leading role. The phenomenon of the *kafanska pevačica* was addressed in many of the movies in the Yugoslav cinematography such as *Lov na jelena* [Deer hunting] with Silvana Armenulić, *Sok od šljiva* [Plum juice] with Vesna Zmijanac or *Lutalica* [Nomad] about Ljiljana Petrović.

<sup>15</sup> The very term *kafana* singer [*kafanska pevačica*] is understood as a specific phrase, which also incorporates a derogatory meaning, particularly while using expressions such as *pevaljka* [warbler or a pejorative term for female singer].

how they appeared in public and, most importantly, the type of interaction they had with unrelated men (Ciucci 2006:85). Even though professional singers performed at various occasions such as private family gatherings (weddings, joining the army, celebrating the family patron saint's day), village gatherings (fairs known as *vašari*, *sabori*), restaurants and hotels, the *kafana* played one of the crucial roles in creating the specific imaginary of the professional female singer. As previously mentioned, *kafanas* were the central places for male entertainment, considered inappropriate for respectable women. Very often, singers were the only women present apart from waitresses. The *kafana* audience often consisted of drunken male patrons who sometimes behaved in an inappropriate way, bothering the singer or waitress with attempts at sexual contact.

A specific interaction between the musician and the audience through live performance involved specific corporal discourses, which developed strategies for using the female body as a central element in the *kafana* performance. The visual element was extremely important for a singer's active structuring and negotiating her (self)representation as a ubiquitous entertainer figure. *Kafana* singers were usually dressed more liberally, particularly considering their rural background and the above-mentioned strict norms as regards exposing female sexuality in rural environments.<sup>16</sup> They usually dressed in such a way that parts of their body were left uncovered by wearing a short skirt or décolletage, but these strategies had been changing gradually in accordance with the then-current levels of liberalization and dominant body discourses. It was often expected of singers to dance on a table and allow patrons to touch some parts of their body (sometimes putting their head between their legs or putting money between their breasts) in order for them to earn a tip.<sup>17</sup> Their direct contact with money also resulted in the fact that their qualities were often related to money-making ability and sexual skills, rather than their musical talents. Their activity was seen as the "selling their body" and some form of prostitution (Silverman 2003:132), while they were considered in the rural environment to be women who had lost their most valued quality – sexual demureness.

Therefore, *kafana* performances were openly associated with sexuality, the singer's visual appearance and seductive behaviour. In their accounts, many of singers lamented being faced with various problems as young performers, complaining about sexual aggression by men of different ages and backgrounds.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it was forbidden for a married woman in Serbian villages to go around with uncovered hair or to comb her hair in front of the male members of the family. The headscarf would become an integral part of her clothing until the end of her life: she did not take her headscarf off even in the presence of her husband.

<sup>17</sup> One of the most popular Yugoslav folk stars, Lepa Brena, has become famous in *kafanas* and restaurants largely due to her specific exhibition of "riding the guests". There was also a story about a beginner singer from Zenica, Hasreta Jahić, who was walking around completely nude in an *Iliaš* club, while she also often repeated her act in the local hotel (*Sabor*, No. 36, April 29, 1985).



Singers also talked about different strategies of behaviour during performing. Lepa Lukić's interviews confirmed that she tried particularly to maintain distance towards the patrons at the early stages in her career. *Kafana* owners<sup>18</sup> often emphasized that Lepa's behaviour revealed more male traits in comparison with her female colleagues; as a consequence, there was no need for them to advise her on how to behave towards the guests: "Guests tried to approach her but she knew how to keep them at a distance. She was a masculine woman [*ženska džambas*] and no one among the guests could cheat or seduce her" (*Sabor*, No. 43, August 5, 1985). Nevertheless, they emphasized that the *kafana* taught them how to act, to stay professional and keep all these people at a reasonable distance, yet without losing the audience: "Compliments are not the most effective things, of course, if you are a young girl. The other flirtations are more protection-like, they are telling you fairy-tales that they will help you to start singing at some elite hotel. The young singers should try to keep away from these kinds of flirtations. I have always been canny enough. Everything I have done and how I have behaved was to achieve only one goal – that people could say: Here is Vesna Zmijanac" (Vesna Zmijanac, *Sabor*, No. 3, January 30, 1984).

The singers had to balance between having close connections with the *kafana* patrons and "knowing how to behave and keeping them at a distance", while they obtained the specific power that came from the ambiguous role they occupied within the male social space. At the same time, they both lacked power in the *kafana* setting by being exposed to the male audience and had specific control over its members. Their main strategy was to establish an intimate relation with the males in order to maintain, but also manipulate and control, the perception of them as sex objects, playing with their own sexuality.

### **Institutionalization of the *Kafana*: Towards Estrada Workers**

Due to the specifically liberal character of Yugoslav socialism, the strong party-led state cultural policy model was abandoned throughout the 1950s, leading to the liberalization of many segments of political, economic, public and cultural life in Yugoslavia (Naumović 1996:56). The influence of the popular genres from the West (particularly Anglo-American and West European popular music) was strongly linked to the country's opening up to the West and establishing popular culture production, which began throughout the 1950s (Vuletić 2008:862). With the beginning of the 1960s and the liberalization of the music market, by spreading the network of local radio-stations and the growth of the Yugoslav record industry,

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<sup>18</sup> Lepa's first husband was Toma Lukić, the director of the "Jadran" *kafana*, where she sang at the beginning of 1960s.

the newly-composed folk music genre emerged.<sup>19</sup> That also coincided with the time when Vlastimir Pavlović Carevac, the leader of the Radio Belgrade Folk Orchestra after World War II, who was the founder of the so-called “radio-singer” profession, died in 1965.<sup>20</sup> Until that time, the composers were largely creating songs derived from the imitation of traditional folk music.<sup>21</sup> After that, they started using the traditional patterns more freely (Čolović 1984:141), combining the local music idioms with the western production and technology.<sup>22</sup> Being neither “authentic” folk music nor an already established genre in western popular music, but “a hybrid creation which retained some rural symbolism and ambience, folk music appropriated for the pop market” (Vidić Rasmussen 2002:xix), NCFM was seen as the controversial phenomenon and a main object of the complex dynamics of ideological and aesthetic prejudices. The exportation of this genre into mass culture was not seen as completely appropriate by officials, which illuminates the controversial narratives and the particular concurrence of the visibility and marginality of NCFM in the public discourse (ibid.:xviii). Despite the fact that the genre (and the label associated with it) gained enormous popularity and the highest selling rates,<sup>23</sup> it was mainly performed within so-called “dedication programs” on national TV (shows such as *Folk parada*). The situation was a little different on the radio: in the mid-1960s, the NCFM broadcast on Radio Belgrade 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> programme represented 20-25 per cent of all musical genres, 12-15 per cent at Radio Zagreb 1<sup>st</sup> programme, but in general, *zabavna muzika* [entertainment music]<sup>24</sup> was the most frequently broadcast genre on all the republic radio stations (more than 50 per cent of all music produced at Radio Belgrade and Zagreb 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> programme and Radio Ljubljana 2).<sup>25</sup> However, with the flourishing of the private radio stations in the late 1960s, NCFM gained public visibility. On the one hand, the state tolerated high rates of production, recognizing the strong

<sup>19</sup> NCFM is the acronym of the English translation of the term *novokomponovana narodna muzika* – newly-composed folk music, introduced by Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen (2002:xviii).

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting that Carevac was a player in the pre-WWII Radio Belgrade Folk Orchestra and its leader after WWII, but was also an owner of the “Savinačka kasina”, *kafana*, where singers practiced their performances.

<sup>21</sup> The so-called “music in the folk spirit” [muzika u narodnom duhu], which was based on the musical and textual characteristics of traditional music (Janoš 2008).

<sup>22</sup> In time, NCFM became one of the most popular genres in Yugoslavia: by the early 1980s, this style had come to account for 58 per cent of the total output of the Yugoslav music industry (Vidić Rasmussen 2002:169).

<sup>23</sup> In 1964/65, the production of LPs of Radio-Television Belgrade and Jugoton, published the highest number of folk music LPs in comparison to the other musical genres (the Archive of Yugoslavia-Belgrade, AJ-475, Fifth Congress of Association of Musical Artists, 5-7.11.1965.)

<sup>24</sup> The term “entertainment music” is a translation of the term *zabavna muzika*, used for the genre that can be defined as equivalent to pop or pop-rock music.

<sup>25</sup> Which supports the claim that *zabavna muzika* was the most important for state ideology from the late 1950s onwards.

market potential of this genre, but distanced itself from its commodified and non-educational character by restricting its visibility in the official media.<sup>26</sup>

As Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen postulates, the *kafana* was an essential setting for performance, maintenance and dissemination of NCFM, from where this genre made its institutional breakthrough on the radio and broad music market (ibid.:69). The NCFM singers frequently owed their initial popularity to their appearance in *kafanas*,<sup>27</sup> as the only and sufficiently prolonged way of advertising. The *kafana* was also a key reservoir of potential hits: a song well-accepted by a *kafana* audience was believed to have the potential to become an instantaneous hit. Being the specific first step along the pathway from anonymous singer to popular star, this was the place where the composers, songwriters, managers and the others in the music business found a potential “new star”.

As the early 1960s arrived, the organized action of institutionalizing the *kafana* music and its performers started. The purpose of the foundation of the Association of Workers of *Estrada* Art [*Udruženje radnika estradne umetnosti*] was to organize, protect and stabilize the music market. The establishing of *estrada*<sup>28</sup> was not just an attempt to institutionalize and professionalize the music activities, but also to give legitimacy to the very profession: “We called them *muzikanti*,<sup>29</sup> after that, singers of entertainment and folk music. Today, according to their status, we are giving them the internationally recognized name of *estrada* workers (Dragomir Majkić, *Estrada*, No. 1, October 1963). Creating the “socialist *estrada* artist” aimed to “raise the *estrada* art up to a higher level and improve the general development of the *estrada* workers” (ibid.). As far as the policy experts were concerned, the so-called “*estrada* art” was still under the influence of the “old way of thinking” because it needed “organized development strategy as the other fields in socialist culture did” (Dragomir Majkić, *Estrada*, ibid.).

The main goal of *estradization* was to establish state control in the domain which operated in an unofficial and an illegal manner, and provide the performers with a stable, legally framed and officially recognized position. Institutionalization would enable *estrada* workers to gain the dignity enjoyed by other artists, as well

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<sup>26</sup> Education was promoted as the most important goal of Yugoslav cultural policy, having a crucial role in creating “healthy” socialist subjects and suppressing “retrograde” ideas and “old” attitudes towards life and culture.

<sup>27</sup> Some of them were also in the limelight through the radio competitions and talent contests (e.g. the most popular one was “The microphone is yours”).

<sup>28</sup> *Estrada* is the term used in many socialist countries in Eastern Europe, but its meaning varies. In the Eastern Bloc countries, it referred to a particular music genre, the sort of popular music called *zabavna muzika*, and did not include folk-based genres (MacFadyen 2001:62). In Yugoslavia, until the end of 1960s, it was predominantly used for the performers of the various genres of popular music, but also indicated comedy, modern dance, circus arts and all other performances. In the following years, folk music performers started applying it in most cases.

<sup>29</sup> *Muzikanti* is a pejorative term used mainly for layman musicians.

as legalization of the music vocation and control of the professional activities, by providing the *estrada* workers regular employment, pensions and health insurance. Therefore, officials considered that performing without a contract and at the places inappropriate for an artist was particularly dangerous for musicians; saving one's dignity was crucial if they wanted to be appreciated as "good *estrada* performers". In accordance with the socialist agenda of modernization and emancipation, the foremost idea was the "cultivation" of the *kafana* musicians and *kafana* music through organized presentation and controlled production. The education of the *estrada* workers has been denoted as something utterly substantial in the way that it was organized in some other socialist countries that properly promoted the folk or entertainment music. The so-called "*kafana* singer's complex" was substituted in the public discourses with the "honourable *kafana* singers", now presented like all other workers who are doing their job dedicatedly and professionally: "We should change our primitive attitude toward *estrada* artists who perform in the *kafana*" (*Estrada*, No. 2, 1965).

One of the additional goals of *estradization* was to establish equality among the various musical genres and to create a balance between "high" and "low" culture. Opera singers, entertainment music composers, folk orchestra instrumentalists or *kafana* performers were presented by policy-makers as artists who deserved equal respect, as "people who entertained us on the improvised stages in the Partisans' camps or visited all our post-war construction sites, singing to a frontiersman or a patient in hospital" (Dragomir Majkić, *Estrada*, No. 1, October 1963). In the official discourse, the creation of the *estrada* art worker included musicians from the rural social milieu, as well as urban performers of "old" and "contemporary" genres unified in the concept of mass-culture, as a part of the integrating process of all social subjects in building a classless society, represented as a main feature of socialist life.

### Body Discourse

I am sweet,	Ja sam slatka,
my skirt is short,	suknjica mi kratka,
everybody tells me	svi mi kažu
that I am "trofirtaljka".	da sam trofirtaljka.

The song *Trofirtaljka*, performer Milica Ostojić alias Mica Trofirtaljka, 1972

As discussed above, *estradization* introduced new discourses on *kafana* performers while also simultaneously promoting new narratives of representation of female singers in the public realm. In accordance with the new conceptualizations of the *estrada* artist, the folk singers were expected to be dressed properly when performing in public. *Kafana* singers were criticized for exposing their sexuality too

overtly, with the short skirts and deep décolletages. The policy makers believed that dignity, as one of the important goals of the *estradization*, was jeopardized by the dubious quality of certain *kafana* singers, who performed as part of orchestras with limited music skills and problematic repertoire [*težgaroške grupe*], also being improperly dressed (*Estrada*, No. 10, October 1966). Officials particularly commented on so-called “non-concert behaviour” [*nekoncertno ponašanje*] embodied in tasteless clothing, familiarization with the audience, provocative gesticulation on stage, such as winking or adding some words apart from the regular lyrics of a song, that could undermine the artistic quality of the public presentation of folk music (Milanović, *Estrada*, No. 8, July 1966). The emphasis was on “traditional” clothing for singers who came from the rural milieu: Lepa Lukić’s first appearances were in a Serbian folk costume, where she represented her rural background. Appropriate dress, followed by the “cultured” behaviour on stage was presented as the main pillar of culture propaganda and an important educational tool in enlightening younger generations.

With the mid-1960s, the NCFM singers abandoned the “traditional” outfits in their public performances and turned to “more urban” clothes. As Zorica Brunclik points out speaking about late 1960s: “The old-fashioned folk costume with *pregača* [apron] and *jelek* [vest] was switched for transparent blouses and hot miniskirts” (*Sabor*, No. 67, July 7, 1986). Some of the entertainment music performers publicly complained about that change, arguing that the female folk singers could not perform in the modern dresses. For instance, Zdenka Kovačićek, a singer from the realm of jazz and entertainment music, openly protested against Silvana Armenulić’s styling: “The luxuriant dresses on yesterday’s peasant girls. These are people who came from the gutter, from the *kafana* to the stage lights, reflectors, publicity, luxurious cars, only to go back later again in the *kafana*’s smoke and fair tents” (*Sabor*, No. 67, July 7, 1986). That stance on the part of colleagues coming from those more “artistic” and “elite” genres confirmed the marginalized position of the *kafana* singers in public discourses, which involved a specific notion of social class. Despite the official attempts to present all performers as equal *estrada* workers, the urban-rural division remained as a strong demarcation line between them, where the ones coming from urban elite treated the ones from a rural background with disrespect.

Considering these changes in the light of the socialist body politics, the previously mentioned controversial stances of official policy toward female singers were visible. Still, a few years after, through legitimizing of the NCFM genre by the record companies and media, the singers started changing their outfits without restraint, becoming more and more stylish in accordance with western trends. The NCFM singers actually employed the dominant discourses of socialist femininity by replacing their “traditional” outfit with the “modern” one. Namely, the women’s dresses became the epitome of the modernization of the Yugoslav society and

their “liberation” and “emancipation” in the gender politics agenda.<sup>30</sup> Making their public appearance in the same way as performers of the other musical genres shed a completely new light on their public exposure. Taking this into account, the body discourse employed by folk singers could well be seen as achieving a certain level of dignity in public discourse, and moving away from the “low profile” image associated with their social role. However, their “modernization” was often noticed as the threat to the current norms of the female “moral” behaviour, which further illuminates the above-mentioned discourses of marginalization, strongly related to the notions of consumerism, popular culture, and the entertainment industry. Even though dressed in modern fashionable clothes, these singers were still deemed marginal in public discourses due to their connection with the *kafana*, market and trade: “Since their talents, images and bodies are a saleable commodity” (Silverman 2003:139), they paradoxically were not seen as acceptable by both the patriarchal and socialist discourses.

### Controversies in Official Discourses and Self-Presentation

Why do you need a female singer,  
I’m asking you in front of the people,  
I did not bring any luck  
neither to myself nor to others.

Why do you need a female singer,  
only a name without the address.  
I live in my own world,  
I live from a song.

Šta će ti pevačica,  
pitam te pred ljudima,  
sreću nisam donela  
ni sebi ni drugima.

Šta će ti pevačica,  
samo ime bez adrese.  
Ja živim u svome svetu,  
ja živim od pesme.

The song *Šta će ti pevačica* [Why do you need a female singer], performer Jana Todorović, 2002

The ambiguity of the Yugoslav culture policy hints at the commercialization of the music market, but also at the inability of the policy-makers to create a strong institutional framework for the popular music performance and stable existence for professional musicians.<sup>31</sup> The *kafana* remained the main working environment and the most important income source for folk music performers, who empha-

<sup>30</sup> In the official reports, the changes in the clothing of the younger generations of women who started wearing the new materials such as buckskin, silk and cotton instead of the home-made (woven) materials were identified as a positive tendency (material from the Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, AJ-142, Fund of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, Federal Conference of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia, The status of women in villages, fabrics from the 1959–1962 period, F-616). This presented an important indicator of the rural areas’ development with the intention of bringing the rural and urban areas in line with one another (Kligman 1998:33).

<sup>31</sup> Despite the institutional attempts, many aspects of the music performing stayed in the hands of private managers.

sized that they earned much more money by performing in the *kafana* or at family and village celebrations (“under the tent” i.e. *pod šatrom*) than from records or concerts: “All of us knew very well that not even five per cent of the singers could make a living from the records and concerts” (Vesna Zmijanac, *Sabor*, No. 26, December 17, 1984). Even though *estradization* marked the “new approach” to the music trade, it actually announced generally ambiguous attitudes towards *kafana* performing, which was still regarded as a “low profession”. That twofold voice was also present in the accounts of the very singers themselves: while narrating their performance experiences, they were simultaneously ashamed of their early performance jobs in the *kafana* but emphasized that the *kafana* was the place where they had learnt the singer’s craft and become professionals: “Some of our female colleagues do not want to mention the *kafana*. I started in a *kafana*, all of us have undergone that experience and we sincerely try to hide it afterwards (Ljiljana Petrović, *Sabor*, No. 49, October 28, 1985). Therefore, despite the official reports, *kafana* performing remained marginalized in the official arena, while being the most favourite place for the everyday consumption of music at the same time. As a specific kind of the cultural niche,<sup>32</sup> it illustrated the space of the specific dynamics between the official and unofficial in the popular culture in Yugoslavia.

Nonetheless, the new narratives of *kafana* performers gave the female singers an opportunity to legitimize their position as social subjects and to re-examine their self-representation and self-recognition, which additionally underlined the ambiguous discourses. Although the patriarchal norms were one of the main obstacles in their professional life, many of the singers never missed an opportunity to highlight their patriarchal families and rural background as the marks of their morality. They attempted to create a public image of the ordinary woman in spite of their “un-ordinary” job, pointing out their roles as wife, housewife and mother. They particularly accentuated that it is possible to be a *kafana* singer and a decent housewife at the same time. For instance, Dragoslava Genčić was portrayed in *Sabor* as “an example of a good mother and housewife, a decent wife, polite interlocutor and a dear neighbour, a woman who does not differ from the other women in their environment. Of course, she is also a great singer. Her husband takes care of her career” (Interview with Dragoslava Genčić, *Sabor*, No. 9, April 23, 1984).

At the level of self-presentation, all of them portrayed themselves as self-made women, bringing a new understanding to female agency and empowerment. According to the words of Petar Luković, exactly these features of self-made women, as the specific achievement of “the American dream in the socialist way” made people excitedly accept and support folk singers (Luković 1989:124). It seems that they used the narratives of gender equality to legitimize their activities, even though they were not openly engaged in discussion about sexism either in their

<sup>32</sup> Certainly, this is not to say that the *kafana* was completely outside institutional patronage, particularly contemplating self-censorship.

songs or in their public appearances. They obtained their economic independence, which was presented in the official discourses as a crucial factor of women's emancipation.<sup>33</sup> However, singers complained that despite their professional success, they were still perceived as “incomplete” women, being the objects of adoration of many of the *kafana* patrons and fans, but not seen as suitable to be a wife or a relative.

Internalization of the dominant discourses of *estradization* as a specific empowerment was also visible in the ways singers negotiated their public and private roles. They pointed to the fact that, despite the officials' emphasis on women's public visibility, women's power in the home was still valued as the most important aspect and their exclusive dedication to a career was perceived as disruptive. They talked openly about the problems they were facing in performing the roles of wife and mother as the most important of all other female roles: “My family took me away from my job; everyone thought that I did not want to do this anymore and that I consciously dedicated myself to the household. I can neither be a housewife dedicated only to the family, nor take care of my child because of the job. I have to walk a tightrope and to be everything at once. Being a musician demands a certain lifestyle” (Olivera Katarina, *Sabor*, No. 7, March 26, 1984). Singers emphasized that not having a partner from the same profession was very often a problem because the husbands restricted their music-making, disapproving of their going away from home and their domestic duties. As a result, many of them stopped singing after marrying, because of the pressure to give up their careers and dedicate themselves to the family. The ones who did not find a partner who would understand their profession either divorced or stayed single. Lepa Lukić's marriages did not last long, particularly the ones with the men from other professions, who could not adjust to her night work and frequent travelling.<sup>34</sup> Although popular and materially secure, she was not able to start a normal family, for which she blamed the hypocritical attitudes of her environment. She claimed that it was difficult to overcome the prejudices related to the female singers and that that was the main problem in establishing a stable marriage: “I sacrificed everything to singing, love, marriage, motherhood, everything, but I do not regret it. Singing and marriage did not go together” (*Sabor*, No. 96, August 17, 1987). Many of the singers asserted that they did not allow jealous husbands to endanger their careers,

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<sup>33</sup> The legal emancipation of women was realized through employment, since economic independence was represented as a crucial factor in women's emancipation. Employed women were recognized in the public discourse as the main driving force behind the modernization of Yugoslav society.

<sup>34</sup> Mobility was seen in the rural environments as something inappropriate for women and was usually limited to paying family visits and going on some short trips to town, but not going away from home. After marrying, some husbands did not allow them to go on tour, particularly with their male colleagues.



and also refused to perform the role of a typical socialist mother-wife-worker:<sup>35</sup> “People have to understand that I am a woman like everyone else. But in fact, I am not an ordinary women for whom apron and scoop are the main things” (Lepa Lukić, *Sabor*, No. 2, January 16, 1984). According to their statements, they did not want to subordinate their singer role to their familial roles; they presented themselves as emancipated women who did not want to sacrifice their personal goals and talents because of family restraints. Lepa Lukić very openly used the socialist discourses of gender equality to legitimize her activities and lifestyle, presenting it as a transgression of the traditional gender norms: “Women have already started challenging the patriarchal model of the happy housewife, with apron and ladle, surrounded by a bunch of children. Whether that is a contribution of every woman or a reflection of changes that have taken place in the society remains to be discussed, but one thing is definitely sure: a woman today, apart from taking care of a husband, children and house, has other spheres of interest as well. The imposed model in which, allegedly, the conversation in female company is merely based on children and recipes, thus giving way to conversations about work, success and the inevitable issue of the opposite sex, but in the way that was exclusively reserved for males” (*Sabor*, No. 2, January 16, 1984).

## Conclusion

The (self)representation of *kafana* singers as public personas became mediated by the socialist politics of *estradiation*. The changes in the official discourse helped their profession to become an important resource of their subject actualizations, implicated in the creation of a new sense of social agency. Their narratives show the interplay of intersubjective and social discourses, mediating the relations between the female singers’ individuality and their social and professional environments, as a strategy for the negotiation and performance of their private and public personas. Their lives highlight the complex, contradictory and dynamic relation of subversion and appropriation, offering a multifaceted picture of the dominant discourses of gender and popular music in the socialist societies. The singers’ life stories suggest that their *kafana* lives were actually empowering part of their self-creation in a broader social understanding of the female entertainer. Even though they did not openly express resistance and rebellion against established gender hierarchies, their overt playing with sexuality and gender roles by employing the socialist discourses of gender, opened new doors for future female

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<sup>35</sup> The so-called concept of the “double burden” and the socialist discourse of “mother-worker” (Brunnbauer and Taylor 2004:230), by which women have to resume their responsibilities at both work and at home was particularly visible in the self-promoting of the singers at two levels: as mother/wife as well as at the professional level.

performers. Nevertheless, as emphasized at the beginning, the life stories, public representations, and careers of the singers presented in this paper differ. Some of them remained mainly *kafana* performers (such as Mica Trofritaljka or Ljiljana Petrović), other became famous folk stars such as Lepa Lukić, Silvana Armenulić and Vesna Zmijanac. Still, their unique personal accounts are strongly shaped by the shared *kafana* experience, which enabled the creation of their specific social power. Their individual music personas suggest caution, however, and the danger of the monolithic interpretation of the feminist perspective of patriarchal dominance over the complexities of the wide range of expression of female power.

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## KAFANSKE PJEVAČICE: POPULARNA GLAZBA, ROD I SUBJEKTIVNOST U KULTURNOM PROSTORU SOCIJALISTIČKE JUGOSLAVIJE

### SAŽETAK

U članku se razmatra fenomen *kafanskih* pjevačica u svjetlu službenih diskursa o popularnoj glazbi i rodu kasnih 1950-ih i 1960-ih godina u bivšoj Jugoslaviji te osvrće na promjene u njihovu (samo) predstavljanju uvjetovane tzv. politikom estradizacije. Uvođenje novih diskursa o glazbenoj profesiji i *kafanskim* izvođačima utjecalo je na to da profesionalna aktivnost *kafanskih* pjevačica postane važnim elementom njihove subjektivizacije, sadržane u višeglasnim i kontradiktornim percepcijama njihove društvene uloge. Analizirani narativi pjevačica svjedoče o dinamičkom odnosu rodnog identiteta, profesionalnog i društvenog okruženja te strategija u pregovaranju privatnih i javnih uloga. Njihove životne priče podastiru višeslojnu sliku dominantnih socijalističkih diskursa o rodu i popularnoj glazbi, pokazujući kako je "*kafansko* iskustvo" bilo važnim aspektom samo-percepcije i samo-predstavljanja pjevačica u širem kontekstu žena-zabavljačica. Naime, premda nisu izravno