

Music identity schizophrenia in the current alternative rock scene in Bulgaria. How identity emigration has led to the rise of the cover value

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Abstract: The current Bulgarian alternative music scene is divided internally and externally by various factors. After 1989, Bulgarian alternative bands intentionally moved astray from pro-Russian affiliation and Bulgarian musical idioms and quickly adopted the English language as a basic composing language. This situation was enhanced by the super image of Western bands and their unreachable international success and geographical distance. This created a kind of aura around foreign musicians and their music, a status of non-approachability where they are never to be criticized, their melodies never to be altered. This attitude is based on many psychological factors and led to the current state where the alternative scene in Bulgaria has morphed into a schizophrenic place which praises any foreign material while severely scrutinizing any Bulgarian songs and artists. The abyss created in this way lures bands into playing covers also due to the gradual and persistent club domination over the years and clubs' lack of responsibility towards forming a stable club audience and club community. All of these factors led to the alternative music's decline in Bulgaria and the identity emigration of the Bulgarian alternative music scene.

Keywords: alternative music, club suggestion, identity emigration, musical-spatial transposition, symbiotic and parasitic hybridization, bio-musical autosuggestion

Introduction

The current Bulgarian alternative music scene is one divided internally and externally by various factors. Internally it suffers from lack of leaders and mentors to communicate change and new symbols between different rock alternative generations and build a stable rock community. The chaotic reinvention of what alternative music stands for through the years led to three separate generation emigration waves among musicians. These can be categorized as physical, virtual and identity emigration waves and they continue up to the current moment. Externally what divides the alternative music scene in Bulgaria is the prevailing mainstream music in the media and in the musical reality TV formats, concerts of big international stars combined with numerous musical festivals abroad with qualitative line-up. Despite the fact that according to Walker limited resources and scarcity can provoke creativity [1] in the recent years the alternative scene has shrunk rather than matured in Bulgaria. This resulted in an even greater state of imitation on the alternative scene rather than bands exploiting the situation to their benefit. This identity emigration led to a schizophrenic state which is the problem that the following article dwells upon. The article also poses the questions of how and when Bulgarian identity became unappealing to the local alternative scene, how music is used to create imaginary worlds and musical autobiography and finally how clubs in Bulgaria further facilitate this escapism by their playlist choice and club suggestion.

The methods used are of complex nature and an interdisciplinary approach is applied. The current research is based upon a three-year doctoral anthropological terrain conducted in the period 2014 - 2016 which includes inclusive observation, attendance of more than 100 events and concerts on the alternative Bulgarian scene, case studies, in-depth interviews with more than 70 representatives of the alternative scene such as active and non-active musicians, event managers, PRs, journalists, club owners and audience. The article summarizes some of the final conclusions from the doctoral

dissertation and introduces the terms club suggestion, identity emigration, musical-spatial transposition, symbiotic and parasitic hybridization, bio-musical autosuggestion and others.

Where is my mind? Where is my identity?

Since identity is at the core of every musical idiom and further produces, regenerates or nourishes personalities in an individual it is important to outline the different dimensions of what identity stands for and how it can and has morphed on the music scene. Stalova explains that 'identity' is formed gradually and develops and shapes in the presence of 'difference' and 'interaction' [2]. This is exactly the place where we find alternative music in Bulgaria – being completely different from the surrounding music and interacting with the few alternative channels and options left. To the distinct position on the scene and the importance of being different with others as a group Thornton adds that 'non-actors' in this act of self-construction are class inferior others and from this 'exaggerated otherness' the idea of an existing community strengthens even more [3]. Appadurai emphasizes that it is a different kind of a community or more specifically, an 'emotional community' as it is a group of people who present themselves together and feel together [5]. These emotional communities occupy somehow not so ordinary places situated somewhere in a distorted space and time and add to this the property of musical language, as Kong claims. These distorted places on the alternative scene are the alternative clubs that exist in Bulgaria and that choose to distort time and space by playing covers of famous hits and emphasize an imaginary music universe of rock stars, dedicated fans and glorious musical past. According to Rief, club experience can be taken as a form of a self-development or self-realization process, a so called 'identity project' concerning love and romance [7]. Exactly these identity projects are what sways to one extremity or another on the alternative scene in Bulgaria. Shankar further claims that music and dance help people reinvent the surrounding world and their place in it [4]. Here we can add that on the Bulgarian alternative scene people not only interpret the world but also autosuggest a reality to their own liking.

Slowly after the fall of the Communist regime bands were given total freedom which resulted in them turning to the authority they accepted and wanted to recognize or in other words the foreign one. A certain type of escapism came into being mainly through the usage of English language which has unfortunately turned the alternative music scene in Bulgaria into an imitation of the rock scene abroad. The most distinctive feature proving the change from pro-Russian affiliation towards Anglo-Saxon one is the appropriation of English language as basic composing language resulting in English names for Bulgarian bands. Before 1989 and more specifically in the 70s and 80s, bands were forced to have Bulgarian names at the time if they wanted to be played on the radio. Such bands are *Нова Генерация*, *Ревю*, *Кокоша глава*, *Атлас*, *Бели Зелени Червени*, *Второто Национално Нищо*, *Клас*, *Зеленото убива*, *Вход Б*, *Сребърните гривни*, *Щурците* etc. (which can be translated in English as the bands New Generation, Review, Hen's Head, Atlas, White Green Red, The Second National Nothing, Class, The Green Kills, Entrance B, The Silver Bracelets, The Crickets). The appropriation of English language as the basic composing language emerged at first with a couple of bands like *Babyface Clan*, *Pistamashina*, *Panickan Whyasker*, *Pyromania* and others. This desire to be an alternative of the alternative itself was understandably left unrecognized by the wider audience. The alternative bands that were meant to inherit the trodden ways and

dedicated fan base of the first Bulgarian wave of alternative bands were slowly moved to the back, and forgotten. Including the aforementioned bands bands with English names are also *P.I.F. (Pioneers In Fashion)*, *Slang*, *Awake*, *Gravity Co*, *Wicked*, *smallman*, *LaText*, *Apeman*, *Popara*, *Voyvoda*, *Macrophone*, *Musicoholics*, *Bears and Hunters*, *Urban Grey*, *Soundprophet*, *Der Hunds*, *No More Many More*, *Jin Monic*, *Comasummer*, *Nick Chongi*, *Balkansky*, *Doesn't Frogs*, *Urban Grey*, *Black Swells*, *Affection*, *Panic Station*, *D*Vine*, *Drynch*, *Jeremy?*, *Overgame*, *Kottarashky & The Rain Dogs*, *Hayes & Y* and others. Ninety percent of these bands write their lyrics in English using the excuse that English is easier to sing to or that they strive to make it on the foreign market. What they fail to admit to themselves is the identity emigration that they have embarked on a long time ago together with a physical and virtual emigration.

After 1989, the alternative scene started trickling away into three exit-escapes. First of all together with the physical emigration of many musicians from Bulgaria many others decided to stay but changed the market where they offer their musical material by using tours, projects, hiring foreign management, production, and also studying abroad. This led to the disappearance of many talented bands who thought that once they emigrate to England or America they will have more chances to get a contract. What they underestimated was the unimaginable competition that places like London offer. Such bands are *Babyface Clan* that emigrated to London and managed to be a warm-up band before a *Placebo* concert. Another band that recently emigrated to England is the band *Hayes & Y*. Though a promising band in Bulgaria half a year has passed now without a word from the band and any kind of a success abroad. As history repeats itself once again one event manager in Bulgaria turns to other bands illusions asking them the right question: 'So you can play well, so what? So what?!?' [15] This turns out to be the hardest lesson for Bulgarian musicians i.e. to get rid of the rose-colored glasses and realize making it in Bulgaria and on the local market is actually a lot easier as long as you put an effort to make a quality product that will appeal to the audience.

Virtual emigration when we talk about alternative bands in Bulgaria is through the power of imagination i.e. bands imagining themselves in a different context by actively participating in tribute nights, cover nights, Seattle nights, where the ultimate product is a crude imitation of certain rock idols and where improvisation and creativity are not tolerated at all. Virtual emigration is the first stepping stone towards identity emigration and completely losing the realm of where the artist exists in the here and now. As an example to many bands turn to their fans on facebook in English, talk on concerts to their audience in English and emigrate from any Bulgarian symbolism in their artwork, clothing style or manners. As English language is not understood by the majority of Bulgarians this choice can be interpreted as a way of emigrating from the audience itself. The abundant imitation as to tested role models and Western stereotypes resulted in three distinctive imitation waves through the years which were the new wave, the grunge wave and the britpop wave while currently there is the indie rock wave.

Never Underestimate The Power of Denial.... My Reality Is Better Than Your Dreams

Talking about escapism and the following identity emigration what bands deny is the practical reality that they have bad English pronunciation, poor vocabulary in English and poor knowledge in Bulgarian music idioms and folklore music. They deny also the theoretical reality that the differences in languages are not only a real barrier in

communicating with people from other cultures but are basic in the way we view the world and how we think. As Paceva puts it, this is because the principles of classification are different and mutual understanding is just an illusion [8]. Identity emigration has led to a music generation gap where the music of one generation is like white noise to other older generations. It is not a coincidence that Bulgarian pop songs are in Bulgarian. The withdrawal from Bulgarian reality to belong to an imaginary Anglo-American one and the overuse of symbols that originated in another place and context is a kind of a spatial transposition. A specific example is the high prestige of the Seattle groups in Bulgaria and the annual tribute of Seattle bands that takes place in the country, the so-called 'Seattle Night'. Kade Krichko, a resident of Seattle and a tourist in Bulgaria in June 2017, notes his observations of the Bulgarian alternative scene as follows: "It's like I'm in Seattle in the 90's. I hear more classic pieces from my home town than when I'm there - groups such as *Nirvana*, *Pearl Jam*, *Soundgarden*. It is more Seattle than Seattle [9]. The Bulgarian groups in their conscious or unconscious imitation are in a state of a musical-spatial transposition, which term I introduce here. It references a state where bands and musicians intentionally deny their immediate reality to try and transpose in a different space and time through the medium and the suggestive powers of music. Thus they do not create a product for the Bulgarian audience and market, but for the Seattle market which currently is completely different meaning that the scene that bands imitate and use as a pillar of perfection does not exist anymore. In this respect, the Bulgarian grunge groups have moved beyond time and space, but unfortunately in the opposite direction to the musical development and are going backwards to the current processes of the alternative music scene at the moment. The difference between the other two waves - the new wave and the britpop wave is that the grunge wave lacks a local group to serve as a local example or a mentor to translate these musical idioms with local words. This happened with the bands *New Generation* and the *Ostava* band, which bands gave a touch of authenticity to these new musical styles and translated it in Bulgarian while the bands *Skre4* and *Awake* were active only for a few years and left the grunge wave without a strong leading band. When we focus on the phenomenon of hybridization there are two types of working with foreign material that generates a product and that is currently active on the Bulgarian alternative scene.

Symbiotic and parasitic hybridization. Who are you to wave your finger, you must have been out your head.

Symbiotic and parasitic hybridization are two terms that will be introduced here and which, as two different hybridization cases, should be considered separately because they have a positive or negative impact on the music scene.

Symbiotic hybridization is a process in which two cultures draw information from each other which in most cases is a diachronic interaction and not only. This exchange on a musical level is a conscious and a careful exchange and consequently involves paid copyrights and other public acknowledgements so as to ethically announce who the source of influence is and so on. Such a band for example is *Beirut*, which is influenced by the musician *Goran Bregovic*. In order to pay tribute *Beirut* plays covers of *Goran Bregovic*'s *Ederlezi* during concerts and in interviews point out their style is a mixture of French chanson and the music of *Goran Bregovic*. Hybridization in the act of musical symbiosis generates a product which can be a new genre or a sound and this hybrid does not devalue the host scene and we have a symbiosis as it promotes a particular style and performer from Eastern Europe, while French performer *Zach Condon* and his international band *Beirut* also reap success. There is a

product that stands firmly on two pillars or source cultures and both cultures benefit from that product. This includes even groups performing parodies such as *Weird Al Yankovich*, whose parodies are made with the knowledge of the respective musicians, observing American copyright laws. Another symbiotic hybridization is the case of the Bulgarian groups *Voyvoda* and *smallman* who borrow styles that originated abroad and use this frame to mix it with Bulgarian motifs, traditional songs, Bulgarian instruments and more. Symbiotic hybridization is observed in many bands from the second rock alternative wave in Bulgaria - largely bands, active during the years between the middle of the 90s up to the year 2000.

Parasitic hybridization is currently more common on the Bulgarian alternative scene than the symbiotic one and it first appeared after 1989. On the one hand, parasitic hybridization is when one of the cultures is of a lower status or prestige whether it comes from within or from the outside as an attitude and there is clearly an ongoing process of undermining the prestige of the host culture. On the other hand, parasitic hybridization is present when the host culture has lost its integrity due to some deficiency, so the penetration of foreign elements aims at filling this deficiency while at the same time it irreversibly damages it.

When we talk about the first case, we have to note it is also accompanied by prestige damage and ignoring ethical norms in particular - music theft in all its forms. In this configuration, the purpose of parasitic hybridization is not a musical product but rather equals financial benefits in the form of quick profit. One example of this is the study of Dimov in which he takes examples from neighboring countries at the beginning of the 1990s and the production of pop-folk Bulgarian songs, compositions, ideas, translating lyrics, etc [12]. The reason is that, because of the communist regime, the artificially created vacuum due to the prohibition of certain styles had to be filled with melodies and meanings borrowed from neighboring countries. The same thing happened in a way with alternative rock where clubs manipulated bands to play covers using their club suggestion to the maximum and suggesting to bands that covers are the right thing to do to keep an audience interested and entertained. With their high prestige both clubs and the high prestigious world-famous song would leave no other option to bands than to agree to be the carrier of parasitic hybridization thus following a market principle and producing a flat music product that damages the band and the scene, but providing momentary dividends to the owner or manager of the club. Hybridization in this case is flat because there is no reasoning what the musical message is, no natural path beginning from the cover leading to the band's own material. That's why using this ready-made material/song would eventually lead to no authentic musical product thus retaining the lower status of the local group in comparison to the foreign group. The negative influence comes from the fact that the host position of the respective musical scene towards external influences, which are based on parasitism rather than symbiosis lead to filling the musical vacuum with even more foreign production and lowers the already low prestige of the host scene and of the groups there. In this line of thought, covers on the musical scene in Bulgaria are the product of such parasitic hybridization, which gives birth to the cover value which term will be later dwelled upon.

I want it that way: A dream in a dream or what is a bio-musical autosuggestion?

According to Appadurai the word "culture" means the mobilization of identities in which mass media and imagination play an increasingly important role [10]. This transition to imagination is made with the help of linguistic means and song lyrics whose main purpose is to make the familiar words unfamiliar, to make the ordinary

world unusual and to create a narrative of affection, gestures and history as Middleton points out [11]. This versatile narrative or lyrics of the song tell archetypal stories which draw the listener to identify with the drama, the feeling, even the outcome of the story. To indicate a certain state where an individual strongly binds a song to one's autobiographical narrative I will introduce the term bio-musical autosuggestion. Here is the time to clear out that the term "suggestion" that Lozanov first noted is a type of offer, a proposal, which is given by a source with an undeniably high prestige and leads to the memorization of more information than usual [16]. Club suggestion is another term that this paper will introduce but this time it is connected to the psychological factors that develop between actors with higher and lower status on the club scene and the growing power of clubs. Going back to the bio-musical autosuggestion it is important to clear out that this suggestion is a suggestion that every individual chooses to perceive or to ignore based on one's musical preferences and how central is music to one's life. Bio-musical autosuggestion means that a given song, artist or a band has created an emotional cluster in one's subconscious mind. This emotional cluster grows with each listening of the song and the individual can recreate the same autobiographical moment over and over again returning to the same sensations and mental pictures just like a drug addict. An example of bio-musical autosuggestion is the narrative and testimonies associated with the band *The Eagles* and their song *Hotel California* whose listeners in the need to experience the same emotion from the song decide it is time to split up with their girlfriend and then drive along the highway listening to the song. In extreme instances of bio-musical autosuggestions music is used as a background for committing crimes or suicides. Such cases were several shootings in American schools while listening to Marilyn Manson's songs or the suicide of a young man while listening to a song by Ozzy Osbourne which presumably had additional subliminal messages. That is why Ozzy Osbourne was later investigated and sued for. Bio-musical autosuggestion is such that can change the course of one's life when a certain melody can inspire actual action and a decision but in most cases it dooms the person and gets him or her in a vicious circle where one repeats over and over again the same reactions, mistakes and emotions sentencing oneself to a set of repeated patterns that bring joy from the musical identification with the artists' emotions. There lies the foundation of musical communities and their collective memory and identity. There we find club power which produces the context for nourishing such communities and their bio-musical imaginary worlds.

Clubs as alternative media. Love is Noise

Clubs as alternative media can be divided into 4 types according to the authors of „Understanding Alternative Media“[17]. Alternative media can be divided into four types according to the authors. One such type is when the media serves a community where center is the club. Such a club is Stroeja club in Sofia, Bulgaria. The second type is when the club is an alternative to mainstream. This used to be the former Neu!Berlin club in Sofia. In smaller cities any club that differs from mainstream music is such. The third type of clubs as an alternative media is when the club is an alternative as part of the civil community. This club is Stage 51 in Plovdiv that chooses to form a community, apply for public grants and dedicate time and know-how to form a community around bands that reside there. The last alternative media is when to be alternative means to be a rhizome. Most clubs are rhizomatic offering every night different entertainment thus being dependent on turnover not on forming and caring after a community and vice versa. In addition, they become dependent on

organizing concerts and events every night in order to have any customers at all. This turns out to be the trap where many clubs become dependent on difference itself and in a constant running from what is familiar they paradoxically become like all other clubs that do the same in Bulgaria. Thus the scene in its rhizomatic state produces disposable clubs to the audience, it turns out that this situation produces disposable audiences for the clubs and what inhabits these spaces are disposable bands who play covers. In the same way as we have fast food chain policy; only this time we have fast music. It is the recipe to keep customers at the club happy and sedated not with one tested product, but with all tested products. Due to the lack of producers, managers and labels on the alternative scene the only source of income for bands become the club scene which led to the rise of the cover value which is a term introduced by Rayzhekova that needs some clarification. Music constructs on the Bulgarian alternative scene are of three types: author's song, which is a song composed and recorded by an author with original music and text; a cover where a foreign material is deconstructed and reused by a different band on the scene where text or melody is used, this cover includes many elements by the band that uses and plays it; and the third construct on the scene is the cover value [13]. This peculiar musical construct is something that appeared on the Bulgarian alternative scene and is a cover that is played as close to the original as possible so as to produce the feeling of musical-spatial transposition or in other words that the audience is attending the concert of the original band somewhere in the Western world. The three musical constructs form a triangle that is turned upside down in Bulgaria because the situation is that the closer you are to the original, the better. The saint-like image of Western bands enhanced by prohibitions created the attitude that foreign melodies should never be altered, disrespected due to their out-of-this-world status or prestige. On the Bulgarian alternative scene we have the combination of prestige plus authority or in other words, Western bands and their covers combined with local clubs and their policies, both armed with great public image, lead to strong club suggestion [13] which creates in the audience the intuitive sense of correctness and plausibility on the scene that this situation is fine. As a result, covers dominating a concert are something quite acceptable and even obligatory and thus the cover value continues to spread and remain strong on the Bulgarian alternative scene.

Destructive club suggestion. World Unite Love You Forever (WU LYF)

This suggestion is protruded by several media factors including the before-mentioned musical blackout before 1989. The suggestion that whatever comes from the west is of better quality than any Bulgarian product as the saying goes 'Good job, but Bulgarian'. The tendency to devaluate alternative Bulgarian music and bands. The lack of Bulgarian folklore musical root in the fourth and fifth wave of alternative musicians leads to lack of authenticity. This attitude is based on many psychological factors and in return the scene has morphed into a schizophrenic place which praises foreign material, scrutinizes Bulgarian artists and songs and hangs in the created abyss surviving on covers played by local artists. Paradoxically, the only medium to shelter emigrated identities left is the club. As media, audience, authorities, managers, mentors had left, the alternative music scene clubs started incorporating all of these features turning into alternative media themselves and the only connection between one reality and another, a bridge. The problem – the club institution in Bulgaria is another borrowed enterprise from the Anglo-American music scene and as such is a bad replica in the Bulgarian context as most clubs in Bulgaria are simply cafes, restaurants, bars, venues which call themselves "clubs" because it is modern. The

reality – if we nevertheless choose to refer to these places as ‘clubs’ then we have four types of clubs where 99% of clubs choose the easy way - to be schizophrenic. The situation hasn’t changed much since the 90s as is proven by an interview with John Peel (BBC) who discovered the bands *Led Zeppelin*, *Jethro Tull*, *David Bowie*, *Ten Years After*, *Pink Floyd*, *Sex Pistols*. When asked about Bulgarian bands he says that ‘the thousands of records of Bulgarian bands I’ve heard suffer from lack of authenticity. To reach your dreams you must be authentic or to verify labels in a new way’. Statelova adds to this that ‘our boys are in a state where they feel authentic – in loved clichés’ [14]. Paradoxically speaking ‘our boys’ continue to lovingly defend their clichéd bio-musical autoerotic autosuggestive lucid dream which they call alternative rock scene.

Give Me One More Cliché About Bulgarian Alternative Music. Conclusion

The alternative scene in Bulgaria has morphed into a schizophrenic place which praises any foreign material while severely scrutinizing any Bulgarian songs and artists. The abyss created in this way lures bands into playing covers due to the gradual and persistent club domination over the years and clubs’ lack of responsibility towards forming a stable club audience and club community. All of these factors led to the alternative music’s decline in Bulgaria and the identity emigration of the Bulgarian alternative music scene. The terms club suggestion, identity emigration, musical–spatial transposition, symbiotic and parasitic hybridization and bio-musical autosuggestion were introduced in this paper.

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**Сп. „Реторика и комуникации“, брой 33, март 2018 г., <http://rhetoric.bg/>
Rhetoric and Communications E-journal, Issue 33, March 2018,
<http://journal.rhetoric.bg/>
Special Issue – “Dialogues without borders: strategies of interpersonal and inter-group communication”, 29 – 30 September 2017, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, Bulgaria**