

TRANSLATION TRANSLATION

Proceedings of the
**Society of Architectural Historians,
Australia and New Zealand**
Vol. 31

edited by Christoph Schnoor
(Auckland, New Zealand SAHANZ and Unitec ePress;
and Gold Coast, Queensland: SAHANZ, 2014).

The bibliographic citation for this paper is:

Nikolina Bobic, "Re-Negotiating Balkanism: Body De-Stabilizing in Belgrade's Republic Square," in *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand: 31, Translation*, edited by Christoph Schnoor (Auckland, New Zealand: SAHANZ and Unitec ePress; and Gold Coast, Queensland: SAHANZ, 2014), 213-223.

Published in

*Auckland, New Zealand: SAHANZ and Unitec ePress [ISBN - 978-1-927214-12-1];
and Gold Coast, Australia: SAHANZ [ISBN - 978-0-9876055-1-1]*

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Nikolina Bobic, *University of Sydney*

Re-Negotiating Balkanism: Body De-Stabilizing in Belgrade's Republic Square

The notion of translation will be thought through as re-rendering of the discourse of Balkanism in general, and a specific event in Belgrade spurred by NATO's Operation Allied Force in 1999 in particular. The event, also known as 'Songs Sustained Us', occurred in Belgrade's public space, notably the Republic Square. The potential of Balkanism re-translated and deployed to expose an alternative use of a human body in public space, is that it collapses the binary structure of subject-object and inside-outside.

The focus of this paper will not be on the meaning of NATO's intervention, but how a particular political order operates in response to the deployment of Belgrade's public spaces as agency of resistance. If we accept that public space is not designed for an amplified expression of human behaviour, the Songs Sustained Us made external of what would otherwise be an internal condition. The body was organized differently, and it disassembled the understanding of public space, and re-inscribed it in an alternative way. The events, termed as an act of 'abnormality', were contingent on power; not to react, but expose the way a body was restrained and tamed through the Milosevic regime and NATO's strikes. Thus, when thought through Balkanism, 'abnormality' is no longer a negative but a potential as it blurs the normative notions of how public space is organized and from this perspective challenges the political binary structure.

The general premise of this paper is to challenge the normative use of public space. In particular, body becoming de-stabilized will be thought through a discourse of Balkanism re-framed in relation to a specific event spurred by NATO's bombings on Belgrade in 1999. The event that became known as 'Songs Sustained Us' occurred in Belgrade's public space(s), notably the Republic Square. In the Western media, these events were often characterised as 'abnormal' and perhaps another indicator of the rogue nature of this Balkanist zone.

In order to understand the character of the public spaces eventually mobilised in resistance to NATO's bombings, the history of the Republic Square will firstly be outlined. NATO's attack, under the official name Operation Allied Force, was presented to the world as a 'humanitarian intervention'. However, the focus will not necessarily be on the reasons and meaning of NATO's incursion, but how the classification of particular events and people as 'abnormal' exposes a specific structure of a political order in replay. In other words, the argument will not only be that the 'abnormality' associated with the 'Song Sustained Us' events is a radical potential as it exposes a different deployment of public space and an indication of Balkanism re-conceptualized, but also a means through which one can re-think the dichotomy of a subject-object structure. The human bodies in public spaces revealed ways urban and architectural spaces were utilized to expose and challenge the national and international political inconsistencies of NATO's targeting of Belgrade. The events, just like the re-conceptualized rhetoric of Balkanism, will potentiate de-stabilization of binary politics.

Balkanism, Operation Allied Force and the Republic Square

The zone of the Balkans and the discourse of Balkanism have been associated with violence and barbarism.¹ Balkanism is not a variation on the Orientalist theme,² but is an independent discourse that has emerged due to this geographical zone not fitting within the European Occidental ideal, yet not being Oriental enough to be called Oriental.³ The current understanding of the Balkans is predominantly derived from a particular historical and conceptual point, emerging in the period from the French Revolution in the late eighteenth century to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the mid nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the Balkan War in 1912-13.⁴ Up until this time period, the writings on Balkanism have been non-judgemental,⁵ in that they were travelogue descriptions associated with the geographical terrain of this region. An altered depiction of the Balkans was significant as this zone became portrayed in rogue terms, one whose racial and ethnic hatreds were deep-seated and where 'civilized ways' were not possible.⁶ The region was no longer

1 Rebecca West, *Black Lamb, Grey Falcon* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 21.

2 Milica Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 921.

3 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

4 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 3.

5 Maria Todorova, "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 463.

6 Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), 77.

just a significant geographical, economic and political corridor and an area of great heterogeneity, but a space of friction and excessive violence.

What has been emphasized "about the Balkans is that its inhabitants do not care to conform to the standards of behaviour devised as normative by and for the civilized world."⁷ If one is to accept this interpretation, then this zone can be explained as some form of an agitator as it does not fit in a binary 'us' and 'them' power construct since Balkanism is both within and outside the political order associated with the civilized/developed Western Occident, and a partially uncivilized/undeveloped Eastern Orient. In other words, there is uncertainty where to place and how to understand the Balkans as it is liminal, and overlaps both the Occident and Orient constructs. For this reason, Balkanism is radical as it provokes subject-object/inside-outside power structure.

The attempt to deal with this liminal identification of the Balkans by aligning it with the rest of Europe, began in the nineteenth century. The reorganization of the Balkans, through a process of balkanization, was based on fragmentation and the superimposition of an ethnically pure nation-state model onto heterogeneous nations, which led to violent civil unrest.⁸ However, the noted balkanization of the Balkans did not occur in Yugoslavia. The formation of Yugoslavia reversed balkanization: by grouping together territories where different South Slav peoples lived, meaning that the entity thus created was heterogeneous.⁹ This approach is radical as it challenged the accepted thinking of balkanization, and un-translated it. Post WWII, Tito's Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the post WWII successor state, remained multi-ethnic. Its heterogeneity was further diversified by social, cultural and linguistic rights being given to its constituent nations.¹⁰ The 1990s disintegration of the SFRY was an indicator of this multi-ethnic model in dissolution.

Today, parts of the Former Yugoslavia still retain the Balkanist discourse. Since 2002, the acceptance of the Balkans and its supposed alignment with the West is suggested with this zone now referred to as the Western Balkans.¹¹ However, particular countries of the Western Balkans still carry a Balkanist 'problem zone' tag. The fact that the geo-political zone of the Balkans is historically complex, which since 2002 has been made a solely political connotation by renaming it the Western Balkans, means that countries that now form the Western Balkans (which includes Serbia and Belgrade) are those whose physical and psychological spaces (rather than geographical) are *still* perceived as an inconvenience and an anomaly in the hegemonic system. The inconvenience is precisely because the

7 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 3.

8 Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8.

9 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 33.

10 Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995), 29-46.

11 The change of name from the Balkans to Western Balkans has also seen a shift in the countries included in this region. The term is no longer geo-political but political, being associated with 'problem zone' countries. For the EU, the Western Balkans includes Albania and, except for Slovenia, all the Republics of Former Yugoslavia. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development uses the term Western Balkans to refer to all countries included by the EU, except for Croatia.

current Balkanist countries are resisting to be reformed and conform to a hegemonic Western ideal. An alternative understanding of a new grouping of Balkanist countries would be that they are not only resisting Western ways of life, but that the binary 'us/them' political order loses meaning. Such a position not only allows a continual pursuing of difference, but also exceeds the rationality and sense of purpose associated with referencing behaviour in relation to Western ways of living.

Operation Allied Force

NATO's foremost reasoning for the implementation of Operation Allied Force was the termination of violence and ethnic cleansing by the Slobodan Milosevic regime in Kosovo and Metohija.¹² According to the Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana, the military Operation Allied Force that lasted for 78 days (24 March 24 - 10 June) was described as a necessary "humanitarian intervention" as it was "intended to support the political aims of the international community. It will be directed towards disrupting the violent attacks being committed by the Serb Army and Special Police Forces and weakening their ability to cause further humanitarian catastrophe [...] Let me be clear: NATO is not waging war against Yugoslavia. We have no quarrel with the people of Yugoslavia who for too long have been isolated in Europe because of the policies of their government. Our objective is to prevent more human suffering and more repression and violence against the civilian population of Kosovo. [...] We must stop an authoritarian regime from repressing its people in Europe at the end of the 20th century. We have a moral duty to do so. The responsibility is on our shoulders and we will fulfil it."¹³

The thinking in this paper does not exclude that acts of excessive violence occurred in the Province of Kosovo of Metohija. However, the primary focus will be on how NATO's reasoning for the intervention allowed certain executions of violence and a replay of a particular power structure since the intervention was worded as if the primary focus was to resolve human trauma through

12 NATO, *The situation in and around Kosovo* - Statement Issued at the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, on 12th April 1999, 12 April 1999, accessed 22 June 2010, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-051e.htm>.

13 NATO, *Press Statement by Dr. Javier Solana, Secretary General of NATO*, 23 March 1999, accessed 15 May 2011, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-040e.htm>.

Notably, the pretext of a "humanitarian" campaign silenced the possibility of invoking the civilian horror on ground, as NATO ostensibly never waged war with the Serbian people. Similarly, one would be led to believe that only military facilities would be targeted. Paradoxically, one of the first targets of NATO's 78-day campaign was an empty factory just outside the city. During that same night, three empty schools were partially destroyed as well as a nearby monastery in suburban Rakovica. A more relevant and 'justifiable' target on that first night was the military air base in the Belgrade suburb of Batajnica. Indeed, and on a more general level, the pretext of a 'humanitarian' campaign further eliminated the potential to consider the role external forces (the West) have played in facilitating violence in the former SFRY in general. Differentiating acceptable from non-acceptable violence is a polemical measure. Since the 1999 incursion, particular former SFRY Republics (now independent countries) more easily gained access into the EU, because particular EU conditions have made possible in some former Republics the erasure of certain forms of violence to be considered as violence that occurred during the dissolution of the SFRY. This makes provision for certain 'rights' on how particular spaces and histories are portrayed in politics and the media. Perhaps, the change of name of Balkans to Western Balkans, and its now solely political association, helps perpetuate how violence is translated.

technological means. The underlying argument is that to only understand violence through NATO's highly politicised and habitually accepted lens disguises a number of ulterior and significant modes of violence. One of them is that the targeting of FRY in 1999 was also an attempt to eliminate Balkanism. To kill Balkanism is to allow the continuation of a binary political structure with no outside.

The Republic Square

The site and the immediate context of what is today Republic Square (*Trg Republike*) have a complex history. The area occupied by the square was "near a Roman forum and the site of Roman ruins."¹⁴ The site's more recent history includes the construction of the Istanbul Gate (*Stambol kapija*), which "formed part of a defensive system that ran up the hill from the Danube along the line of what is now France Street [Francuska Ulica], by the National theatre and into the square. On the other side of the gate, the perimeter defences pushed over the brow of the hill and curved their way down to the bank of the Sava."¹⁵

The partially destroyed gate was rebuilt during the short-lived rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early eighteenth century.¹⁶ Immediately behind the gate's three main openings, an area was utilized by the Ottoman Empire as a public execution ground where the living bodies of those showing open revolt against the empire were pierced on stakes.¹⁷ With Serbia's break from the Ottoman Empire in the mid nineteenth century, Belgrade's autonomy was accompanied by the displacement of one political orientation, the Eastern Ottoman, with another, the Western European.¹⁸

The break was marked by the demolition of the Istanbul Gate, which "in the eyes of the Serbs was an iconic representation of Turkish oppression and became their main target when they launched their attack in 1806."¹⁹ The destruction of the gate's massive stone blocks facilitated space for the construction of the current day Republic Square. The shaping of the square (then Theatre Square) in 1869 occurred two years after the first modern urban plan proposal by the architect and mathematician Emilijan Josimovic.²⁰ The first structure that started moulding the Republic Square is the National Theatre designed in the late Renaissance style.²¹ In front of the theatre, a monument

14 Christine Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille': Memory, Agency, and Monumental Public Space in Belgrade," *Space and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2005): 34.

15 David A. Norris, *Belgrade: a Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2-28.

16 Norris, *Belgrade: a Cultural History*, 28.

17 Norris, *Belgrade: a Cultural History*, 28.

18 Cited in Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille': Memory, Agency, and Monumental Public Space in Belgrade," 36.

19 Norris, *Belgrade: a Cultural History*, 28.

20 Ljiljana Blagojevic, "Urban Regularisation of Belgrade, 1867: Trace vs. Erasure," *SAJ* 1 (2009): 28-32.

21 Norris, *Belgrade: a Cultural History*, 28.

to the Serbian ruler Knez (Prince) Mihailo was built in 1882 in a Classical Renaissance style.²² The monument is also known as the Serbian Bastille,²³ as it is associated with the official break from the Ottoman rule during the rule of the Knez Mihailo.

It was only at the start of the twentieth century that the square took on a particularly cosmopolitan function, with the erection of the National Museum in a Neo-Renaissance style. The Museum, along with the National Theatre, enclosed the square, giving it a public status. While planning for an urban public space that would accommodate official parades occurred during Austro-Hungarian rule,²⁴ the initiative was only fully realised in the public gathering on 25 November 1945. During this gathering Tito made his 'first public address to the new Yugoslav socialist federation from the terrace of the National Theatre overlooking the monument and subsequently renamed the space *Republic Square*.²⁵

Today, the Republic Square is used as a promenade, as well as for events ranging from various celebrations to displays of fashion and art. In times of conflict and contestation, the space has been appropriated for public demonstrations. The square held particular importance during gatherings against the SFRY disintegration in the early 1990s, with the 1996-97 period experiencing escalated protests against the increasingly nationalistic Milosevic rule.²⁶ In 1996-97, during the three month long mass protests which averaged 100,000 people per day, humour was used to make political comments on Milosevic's rigging of votes and as a general sign of disapproval of the Milosevic rule.²⁷ For example, "for weeks during the 1996-97 opposition peak, people were asked to bang on pots and pans during the time of the evening news on Milosevic-run television, to drown out the propaganda."²⁸ Additionally, on 13 December 1996, "250,000 people gathered to hold a silent vigil in recognition of Ferizu Balakariju, a Kosovar [sic. an Albanian from Kosovo] who was the victim of [FRY] police brutality."²⁹ During that period, the square was referred to as the Freedom Square (*Trg Slobode*).³⁰ The history of the square reveals that space is not fixed or contained, but that events - official and dissident - are moments of identity renewal, as well as the undoing of the role and use of public space.³¹

22 Norris, *Belgrade: a Cultural History*, 68.

23 Norris, *Belgrade: a Cultural History*, 67.

24 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 34.

25 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille': Memory, Agency, and Monumental Public Space in Belgrade," 38.

26 Stephen Jansen, "The Streets of Beograd. Urban space and Protest Identities in Serbia," *Political Geography* 20 (2001): 35-55.

27 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 41.

28 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 40.

29 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 41.

30 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 39-41.

31 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 32.

Body De-Stabilized: 'Songs Sustained Us'

During NATO's Operation Allied Force, at any given time approximately 15,000 people utilized Belgrade's Republic Square for rock, hip-hop, R'n'B and turbo-folk³² music concerts.³³ These gatherings became known as Songs Sustained Us, and had "an almost carnivalesque character, in the Bakhtinian sense of subversion through reversal and parody."³⁴ At night, the Songs Sustained Us events spilled onto Belgrade's bridges, hosting gatherings of the greatest intensity where concerts continued and human bodies became shields for the bridge. The 1999 Songs Sustained Us became a platform for resistance against NATO's 'humanitarian' targeting and the attempt to control the times when people could occupy public spaces. These gatherings demonstrated a particular will as they went ahead despite NATO's air Commander Lieutenant General Michael Short's threat on 16 May 1999:

"I think no power to your refrigerator, no gas to your stove, you can't get to work because the bridge is down - the bridge on which you held your rock concerts and you all stood with targets on your heads. That needs to disappear at three o'clock in the morning."³⁵

While some Milosevic-owned media stations interpreted the Songs Sustained Us events as signs of support for the regime, the history of 1990s gatherings reflect that the population in Belgrade was significantly against the Milosevic government and the violence directed towards the Albanians in Kosovo. During the 1999 incursion, however, the population of Belgrade would have been more in support of Milosevic than they were at any point during the 1990s. This support would have predominantly occurred because the population agreed with Milosevic's refusal to sign the Rambouillet Agreement,³⁶ and the associated non-negotiability of legal, territorial and free-market conditions stipulated in the Agreement. At that point of time, Milosevic was seen as a 'lesser evil' compared to NATO. However, as Milena Dragicevic-Sesic - the Head of the UNESCO Chair in Cultural Policy and Management and a professor of Cultural Policy, Cultural Management, Cultural and Media studies at the University of Arts in Belgrade - suggests, the final counter evidence to "Western assumptions of unthinking Serbian support for the policies of Slobodan Milosevic [was demonstrated...] by the success of popular protest in securing his removal in the autumn of 2000."³⁷ NATO not only targeted the Milosevic's government and the FRY police and military forces, but also targeted the whole city of Belgrade ignorantly interpreting the Songs Sustained Us gatherings as

32 Turbo folk is a music genre synthesised of Western pop, Oriental beats and Serbian folk music.

33 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 32.

34 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 32.

35 Michael Almond, "Belgrade open for business as usual," *The Guardian*, 16 May 1999, accessed 11 February 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/1999/may/16/theobserver2>.

36 The Rambouillet Agreement was drafted by NATO in what was represented as a peace agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Albanian majority population in Kosovo and Metohija. Yugoslavia's refusal to sign the agreement - on the basis that it contained provisions for the autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija - became a justification for NATO's air strikes.

37 Milena Dragicevic-Sesic, "The street as political space: Walking as protest, graffiti and the student carnivalization of Belgrade," *New Theatre Quarterly* 17:1 (2001): 74.

signs of support for the Milosevic incited violence toward the Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija, despite the 1990s protests showing otherwise.

The site of the Songs Sustained Us gatherings included a significant portion of Belgrade's Old City centre, not only utilized for an exchange of dance and music, but also art exhibitions, film and sporting events. Notably, the Cultural Arts Society (KUD) presented ensembles of Serbian traditional dance with the slogan *With dance and song we are defending Yugoslavia*.³⁸ The National Theatre, a building that fronts the Republic Square, staged numerous plays and operas. The theatre was considered a shelter for freedom of spirit, with performances taking place even at night while the bombs were falling on the city. Other events in Belgrade's public urban spaces included the 46th Festival of Short Film, the oldest film festival in Europe, which ran from 14 to 19 April 1999. The Belgrade Marathon, which took place on 17 April, was organized before the actual bombings started, with confirmed participation by entrants from forty different countries. The event was not postponed despite the withdrawal of international runners. The marathon was accompanied by the slogan *No bomb can break the soul and will of the capital city*, started appropriately in then the Boulevard of Revolution.³⁹ The official poster for the race read *Stop the war, run the world*. Resistance was also demonstrated through the Songs Sustained Us movement's setting up bookstores outdoors between the hours of 11am and 4pm. The inherently internal spaces of bookshops were reassembled to occupy external public spaces. In this manner, the bookstalls became another creative small-scale platform, and evidence of a certain will and freedom of spirit, where the body became an event, and an act of resistance.

Those who perceived the Songs Sustained Us events as yet more evidence of Balkanist abnormality and irrationality included the former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright who stated: "I just don't understand anything, these people are totally insane."⁴⁰ The classification of certain events as normal or abnormal is potentially an indicator that there was an attempt by NATO to extract the resisting body of a political will by deploying the Balkanist discourse, in order to politicise everything about life in Belgrade and eliminate alternative positions seen in everyday life. Here, the political power at play is that the possibility of resistance is deterred due to its intent and visibility being manipulated. Arguably, the classification of the events as 'abnormal' was an act of exclusion, and a reduction of difference associated with the public gatherings. The strategy was a part of a bio-political attack geared towards dehumanisation and negation of difference. Notably, the interpretation of the Songs Sustained Us events in the Western media was not that of a will to resist control, but as evidence of support for Milosevic. Milosevic's nationalism-driven media stations applied a similar technique whereby NATO strikes and the Songs Sustained Us events were used coercively as a sign of support in an attempt to extend the legitimacy of Milosevic's rule, as well as hide the violence perpetrated by the FRY military/police.

38 *Politika*, 24 March 1999 - 10 June 1999, Belgrade.

39 *Politika*, 24 March 1999 - 10 June 1999, Belgrade.

40 Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille'," 32.

During the 1999 Operation, and according to one of many opponents of the Milosevic regime, a Belgrade student was noted as saying that it is “impossible to be correctly informed, either by listening to the Serb media, picking up the Western media or surfing the Internet. Wherever you turn, there’s just propaganda.”⁴¹ The public and private gaze was (almost) eliminated, as the control of information made it (almost) impossible to distinguish information from disinformation, fact from fiction. The use of the media to present events such as Songs Sustained Us as ‘abnormal’, was perhaps done to gain support for NATO’s exercise of violence since only those who participated in the Songs Sustained Us events were coded as ‘abnormal’. In this media spectacle both space and time begin to fold, which in turn helps manage a particular understanding of events, memory and history, including the procurement of the frozen image of Balkanism.

The tendency to regard certain spaces and histories, such as the Balkans, being prone to violence not only treats identity as fixed, but aids in discursively positioning such supposed zones of violence as areas that can only be dealt with using force, as any other approach will not be comprehended. This assumption is often unchallenged because it is so readily accepted. Here, the perception, appearance and translation of a particular zone is through a limited window as the relation between context and expression allows manipulation in that only one type of violence is brought to the foreground. It is an attempt to eliminate all will to resist by setting up a co-extensive active-reactive relationship, where the resistance is an effect of either the Milosevic regime and/or NATO’s targeting. In this binary setup, thinking a way out becomes impossible as the structure of power does not have an alternative or an ‘outside’. However, if Balkanism is liminal, then re-thinking resistance through this discourse is plausible.

The Radical Potential of Balkanism

Rethinking resistance is through body in space since the inhabitants of the Balkans “do not care to conform to the standards of behaviour devised as normative by and for the civilized world.”⁴² Despite that the Songs Sustained Us events diminished in size due to the increase of both NATO’s threats and strikes, the use of the body as a form of resistance exposed that the Operation’s use of force and control could be challenged.

The deployment of the body was the ultimate contestation to NATO’s ‘humanitarian’ intervention. The importance of the body is the ultimate terrain of resistance where individuals, by inserting their bodies into a very politicised and contested space became possible targets of NATO’s strikes, whilst also becoming an open display of an individual’s will. The Republic Square became a prop “where the present [was...] negotiated, staged, and transformed.”⁴³ The gatherings that took place in the Republic Square expose that space is neither fixed nor contained. Instead, events construct

41 Paul Virilio, *Strategy of Deception*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), 49.

42 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 3.

43 Lavrence, “‘The Serbian Bastille,’” 43.

space and are transformative of space. History and space are inscribed with multiple layers, and in respect to the Republic Square, "the tension between movement and inhibition at the square is a metaphor for how the site shifts from an official monument [to Knez Mihailo] to a site of agency, from a reified to a politicized public space. The square is literally the place where divisions intersect and resistance is asserted."⁴⁴

The supposed abnormality of the events taking place in urban public space during the Songs Sustained Us gatherings are a precondition of the radical potential. These small-scale examples of abnormality and violence included applying graffiti to and breaking the windows of embassies of countries that were leading the NATO campaign, notably the USA and UK. Similar treatment was applied to McDonalds, the Western fast food franchise that has become synonymous with free market capitalism. Other visible instances of violence included the burning of an American flag at the Republic Square, and its redesign, where the stars were turned into Nazi swastikas. The use of banners also became prominent, their messages ranging from humour to nationalism: *Sorry we are singing, With bombs for a better tomorrow? Clinton, you are sick to America - pumpkin without a root, NATO - New America Terrorist Organization, Kosovo is Serbia, and In alliance with the people and motherland until we reach victory.*⁴⁵ The complexity of the situation was oddly summed up in these single catch-phrase slogans.

Songs Sustained Us were platforms of resistance where the body became an event, and an act of resistance against NATO's attempt to control the times when people could occupy public spaces. The events were contingent on power; not to react, but expose the way a body was restrained and tamed through the Milosevic regime and NATO's strikes. The relation between Balkanism and the behaviour of human bodies in space became intensified and re-mapped. If we accept that public space is not designed for an amplified expression of human behaviour, the Songs Sustained Us made external of what would otherwise be an internal condition. The body was organized alternatively, and it disassembled the understanding of public space, and re-inscribed it differently in that normative borders began to blur and fade. Thus, when thought through Balkanism, 'abnormality' is no longer a negative but a potential as it blurs accepted notions of how public space is organized and from this perspective challenges the politics of binarism.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to re-think the use of public space through a re-negotiated discourse of Balkanism. The thinking was that the liminal position of Balkanism can both de-stabilize, and potentiate a different re-conceptualization of the use of bodies in public space. Through this re-rendering, the 1999 Songs Sustained Us revealed that it is only in events of supposed abnormality that the paradoxes of violence, such as the 'humanitarian' pretexts of Operation Allied Force, can be

⁴⁴ Lavrence, "'The Serbian Bastille,'" 41.

⁴⁵ *Politika*, 24 March 1999 - 10 June 1999, Belgrade.

exposed and countered. In other words, when interpreted through the discourse, the events exposed the processes of a political active-reactive structure. Here, resistance was not about overcoming power, but exposing the vulnerability and constraints of a hegemonic power in play. Likewise, the re-mapping of public spaces during the gatherings demonstrates the possibility to re-negotiate negation of difference associated with Balkanism through deployment of bodies in space.