DOI: doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-136-2.1
ISSN 2530-898X (print)
ISSN 2530-8262 (digital)

Female labour and leadership in music
Contexts, constraints, future(s)

Iva Nenić, PhD

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ETHNOMUSICOLOGY, FACULTY OF MUSIC, UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN BELGRADE, SERBIA.

geniijef@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-7573-950X

Tatjana Nikolić, PhD Candidate

RESEARCH ASSISTANT, DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND PRODUCTION IN THEATRE, RADIO, AND CULTURE, FACULTY OF DRAMATIC ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN BELGRADE, SERBIA.

tatjana.nikolic.fdu@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-4506-2232

Received: 16/05/2021
Accepted: 19/12/2021

ABSTRACT

Here we explore the contemporary practices of female participation in the music scenes in Serbia, and to an extent, in the Balkans. This research identified and described the possibilities, gendered constraints, and acts of transgressions that together weave a complex dynamic of female participation in popular music, in relation to the changing field of dominant gender ideologies in Serbia and the surrounding region. This work provides a critical analysis of gender issues in music-making and performing and of the topic of gendered labour in music, by relying on multiple case studies grounded in local contexts. We consider the mores and demands of the music market and everyday culture, their link to personal experiences, and the reach of the social institutions regarding music. Either as role models or cherished leaders, female musicians employ different tactics to fight stereotypes, strengthen communities, and ensure female participation. This work maps the strategies and tools they have been putting in place in order to sustain their audience, income, and presence to the best possible extent. Bearing in mind the imperative of transforming a standard way of working, communicating with audiences, and maintaining earning potential, this text singles out practices that could be recognised as (female) leadership in contemporary circumstances. We also consider a wider spectrum of roles that female musicians and music professionals have taken on or were awarded within their professional circles, local scenes, communities, or wider society.

Keywords: women in music, gender stereotypes, gender equality, cultural management, cultural policy, independent music scene

SUMMARY

Corresponding author: Tatjana Nikolić. University of Arts in Belgrade, Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Department of Management and Production in Theatre, Radio, and Culture. Boulevard umetnosti, 20, 11070, Belgrade, Serbia.
Suggested citation: Nenić, I., - Nikolić, T. (2022). Female labour and leadership in music. Contexts, constraints, future(s). *Debats. Journal on Culture, Power and Society, 7*, 123-138. DOI: http://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-136-2.1

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, ethnomusicology and other social sciences that study music practices have considered a wide range of gender issues, from reintroducing neglected or overlooked female music figures, traditions, and works within a framework of feminist scholarship (Koskoff, 1987; Herndon and Ziegler, 1990) to analysing gender identifications, negotiations over identity, and gender-related attributes of music as expressed or shaped through music (Moisala, 1999; Doubleday, 2008), and most recently, in terms of music labour and music activism performed by women (Troka, 2002; Hofman, 2015). As Beverley Diamond and Pirkko Moisala note in their introduction to the seminal volume *Music and gender* (2000), the main approaches to relationships between gender and music either reveal how styles and genres are engrained with gendered concepts, or how the discourse and practice of music contain deeply embedded but less visible gendered expectations and norms, or even exclusions, that will require careful detangling and deconstruction by scholars to reveal the 'true' working of gender regimes in given social and cultural contexts (Diamond and Moisala, 2000, pp. 5–6).

In addition to the already mentioned trends of gendered music scholarship, observable in its finest hour of late postmodernism at the turn of the century, a widely accepted classification of feminist music scholarship by Ellen Koskoff points to the three main 'waves' of knowledge. Starting with the first wave of 'women-centric' scholarship related to collecting, describing, and representing female music activities, we move to a wider, gender-oriented second wave during which the broader issue of gender relations emerged, as articulated through music. Finally, the last wave was shaped by seeking more profound correlations between music and wider society, with a strong influence of postmodern theoretical nods of feminist theory, LGBTQ and cultural studies, psychoanalysis, and semiotics, among other similar factors (Koskoff, 2000: x). The main theoretical concepts used to study gender and womanhood in music so far are gendered music practices, identity/identification in terms of

construction and negotiation, gender roles through music, overcoming stereotypes and gender-induced obstacles, and female musical agency.

The concept of female music leadership could be one of the orientations that could now help build a stronger cross-disciplinary exchange. It could also help shed new light on female music-making and music-maintaining practices as they relate to the pressing issues and social changes of the present moment. This topic, which could permit a new theoretical paradigm—one that transcends set fields of study and will not remain confined to a specific type of agency—remains poorly researched. So far, research into the gendered aspects of music leadership has relied on a hub of pedagogy, music education research, community music study, ethnomusicology, and youth and leadership studies. However, this loose network is characterised by different research foci and disciplinary paradigms, and so more intense interdisciplinary dialogue is yet to be seen. In this sense, Downing (2010, p. 74) discussed how female agency is specifically instituted in Balinese *gamelan* ensembles comprising girls, in which gendered expectations collide with newly forged ways of bodily movement during playing (*gaya*) and directive musical communication. Similarly, Wells (2011) considered female concertmasters and conductors within the Western music tradition in Australia, by focusing on musicianship versus leadership, the difference between community and professional orchestras from a gendered point of view, and furthermore, specifically building professional positions from female perspectives.

Obviously, the growing and diversified body of research agrees on a stance that the understanding of culturalised female music leadership is important both in relation to overcoming gender constraints and in reaching better social cohesion in different settings. However, disparate research problems, theoretical and methodological frameworks, and starting premises call for a more integrated approach to the very concept of music leadership. Thus, the powerful figures, models of influence, and non-patriarchal, transgressive, and changing practices of guidance and authority could be compared and transferred back to its actors and communities. Perhaps this way of administering leadership—in a shared way, against the grain, through a specific type of labour, and in relation to the affective culture—is worth the research investment as a model contrasting the individualised competitive patterns of leadership based on the supposed gender binaries that the globalised neoliberal appropriation of feminism often promote.

The qualitative methodology used in this research included direct and participant observation, both immediately and online, in a form of a multisite ethnography. We conducted individual and group interviews and performed media content analysis throughout the autumn of 2020 and the winter and spring 2021. Prospective and active female musicians and music professionals working in diverse genres/styles, from different generations, and with differing levels of experience were targeted in the local and regional music scene in Serbia as a part of a wider scientific project entitled *Female Leadership in Music* (2020–2022). More than 80 female musicians, organisers, and decision makers were interviewed in the first year of this research. However, 21 of them were considered in much more depth for the purposes of this current article. The interviews we performed were semi-structured and covered three main topics: (1) *mapping the cultural field the musician was a part of;* (2) *understanding the role of gender within the respective setting; and* (3) *understanding the concept of leadership on these women's own terms*. The questions were divided into various groups of introductory, direct, interpreting, and probing inquiry.

To date, our research collaborators have included diverse figures considered as leaders both by our research team and by their respective communities of origin or affiliation. These women have been visible, present, active, and relevant to a particular genre, scene, organisation, or community, and/or were the frontwomen of their respective bands or ensembles. In addition, some of our interlocutors

were young women still in the process of receiving their music education or at the beginning of their career. We specifically asked the latter about their role models, expectations, and any early obstacles they had come across. Finally, our wider research strategy adhered to the values of feminist scholarship, with an intention to "equalize the relationship between researchers and the research subjects" (Jenkins, Narayanaswamy and Sweetman, 2019, p. 418). Thus, the researchers were put in a supporting and mediating role which stressed the power of the interlocutor to highlight certain issues within the proposed framework and to take on an active role as a collaborator within the process.

FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE REGIONAL MUSIC SCENE OF THE BALKANS

The position of female musicians in Serbian and Balkan popular music scenes is characterised by an asymmetry—namely, the dominant concept of women participating in music is often related to singing and usually to highly sexualised images of femininity. In contrast, the visibility and positioning of women within subcultural scenes that do not conform to the stereotypical imagery of female music-making is confined to specific communities of musicians and fans, making it harder for the general public to approach the full variety of female musicianship, both in in historical and contemporary contexts.

The strong interest among women in gaining musical skills and knowledge is visible through the fact that among higher education institutions in Yugoslavia, music academies saw the sharpest rise in female students among all other art academies (Tomšič, 1981: 116). In parallel, highly acclaimed public female musicians like the accordion player Radojka Živković—who transgressed boundaries by entering the 'male' realm of professional folk music making on the state radio while still maintaining an aura of modesty and indisputable professionalism—helped to gradually increase the participation of women in music scenes outside the conventional role of *kafana* singers with supposedly 'low moral standards'. The first subcultural, all-female bands, like the punk group *Boye* from Novi Sad, were created during late socialism. Their description of cooperation within the band from a 1991 interview is probably the earliest published description depicting shared leadership and collaboration on equal terms between women in Serbia in a pop music setting:

> We do [things] in [a] nice, female way, by discussing everything. The band is what matters, and the different generational experience is also required. Vesna has the fervour, Tanja has the thing of her generation, and that is all good (Ambrozić, 1991).

'Micro-music scenes', as Slobin defines them (Slobin, 1993), in the contemporary Serbian and wider Balkan context translate to small-scale semi- or fully independent music networks of genre-oriented (e.g., jazz, metal, rock, ethno, or Americana) or fusion (e.g., world, experimental, or alternative pop) music that operate at the fringe of the neoliberal music market. They are largely dominated by the music culture of pop folk, characterised by the struggle to survive in hard economic circumstances and uneven support by the media and industry. In addition, these subcultural scenes are a part of a shared regional culture that, after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia, entered a new phase of "reconstruction and recontextualisation in ex-Yugoslav cultural spaces'" around 1999 (Baker, 2006). They are also reaching towards a transnational music context via contemporary digital culture, perhaps best illustrated by the metal music scene and female bands. For example, the all-female metal group Nemesis is a part of the small but dedicated Serbian heavy metal scene and the group's members also frequently perform at regional music festivals. However, the band also aspires to play to international metal music community, as shown by the fact that their latest album, The War is On, recently reached Japanese audiences via the Osaka-based label *Jackhammer Music* (2021).

The intensity of female participation in public music culture has been well documented by historical and ethnographic accounts, as well as in popular biographies and the press. However, in a cunning discursive gesture, the plethora of historical and current female figures related to music have been relegated to the slot of being singular or unique with in their chosen positions. Indeed, this logic of 'exclusion by exceptionality' still pervades contemporary public knowledge of female musicianship in the region (Nenić, 2019). For example, female Serbian players of folk music instruments were dubbed as rare and strange, although their historical and contemporary presence is enduring and indisputable, and in many instances, is jointly seen both by the community and specialists as exceptional (ibid.).

Contemporary female singers and players belonging to the neotraditional music and world music scene actively seek to overcome these difficulties by simultaneously occupying more than one professional identity. On the one hand, they juggle between the 'proper' ways of presenting heritage and femininity and, on the other, transgress the canon and conventional gender behaviours. Neotraditional singer Svetlana Spajić has achieved this by dedicating her own a capella female vocal ensemble *Pjevačka družina Svetlane Spajić* to the precise interpretation of old, traditional Serbian and Balkan songs. In turn, her collaborations with the artists from Serbia and abroad have included conceptual artist Marina Abramović, the American vocal ensemble *Kitka*, which is devoted to the female folk music legacy of Eastern Europe, Bulgarian performer Yanka Rupkina, Greek traditional folk singer Domna Samiou, and many others.

In addition to her field research of village folk music and the stylistically highly accurate performance of ancient ways of singing, Spajić has also ventured into novel areas of music, in one instance by creating a traditional song devoted to the American scholar Milman Parry, in the style of *ojkanje*[1] two-part singing. She also learned some similar singing styles, techniques, and songs from outside of Serbia, such as Central Asian throat (overtone) singing. Her creation and performance of the aforementioned song with *Kitka* served a twofold role, as a gesture of friendship towards that particular group—whose members Spajić has also been training to sing—but also as a rare instance of approaching the distant 'other' through carefully crafted Serbian neotraditional song. Thus, Spajić came to occupy the role of an intercultural music leader.

Other female musicians have invented similar strategies of simultaneously staying true to their roots and bringing novelty into the canon. This juggling of roles is especially visible in the case of players whose instrument is still publicly depicted as chiefly belonging to men. Indeed, the symbolic aligning of instruments with gender and the prevailing idea of male exclusivity within instrumental music performance is persistent across different cultures (cf. Doubleday, 2008). In this sense, through our research we have learned that this symbolic stronghold has led some of Serbian female instrumentalists to even contemplate the creation of instruments without the usual visual symbols, or with a slightly altered contour, size, and colour, in order to symbolically and materially detach them from the reign of male supremacy.

Regarding the jazz scene of the region, it is informative to point out that all three national big bands from Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, the only institutionally supported public orchestras in this genre, are male-only. These three big bands have more than 50 musicians but none of them are women (Jovićević, 2021). The same author describes how there are around 10 important jazz festivals in the region and none of them has previously programmed female instrumentalists in any significant numbers, especially not from the local scene. As this author's

1 For description of the 'ojkanje' or 'groktanje' singing technique, see Ranković, 2019.

research indicates, of the 4% of female performers at those festivals in recent years, only 1% were local female artists (Jovićević, 2021).

Our current and previous enquiry has shown that when female musicians finally receive invitations to perform, this is often as a suggestion or with a nudge, or the motivation for the invite had been external in a form of a subsidy, additional grant, program, or manifesto encouraging female participation in orchestras, festivals, or labels, thus making them tokenism practices. They are presented as part of the spectacular, as for a special occasion and context; not as being mainstream and normalised but as an exception and an attraction (a group interview with five young female instrumentalists, 7 February 2021). Additionally, they are being forced to accept these arrangements if they ever want to be present on the stage and sustain their audience, income, and visibility. They are pressured to show understanding, compassion, and submission and to happily accept reckless underrepresentation or misrepresentation as a gift and an honour (Nenić, 2013; interview with an experienced jazz musician, composer and educator, 12 April 2021).

This situation is not unique to the female musicians in the Balkans because it is part of a wider structural set of obstacles also found elsewhere that, regardless of their cultural background, forces female artists to negotiate their private and professional roles and accept institutionalised gender biases as the status quo. As Stalp (2015) observed in her research on the practice of female artists in two regions in the USA (pp. 41–43), there is a shared experience of hardship in "becoming and being considered artists" and, in general, of not being able to avoid gendered expectations (p. 51).

FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN MUSIC

Our theoretical model relies on the concepts of cultural and cross-cultural leadership being fluent, transformative, and transformational, as well as being shaped by the values and expectations of the context of everyday culture. When considering how leadership in music functions, we depart from the viewpoint of qualitative research in which the emic ideas of what makes someone a leader often get entangled with in-group views, personal values, and the different contingent insights into the very idea of what it means to lead. In other words, we want to overhaul the postmodern stance expressed by Starratt (1993) in which leaders are invited to "attempt a more balanced assessment of the modern world and to adopt a more hopeful stance toward the future" (p. 123), from the culturally and individually framed habitus of the contemporary, interconnected, and heavily troubled world of post-industrial capitalism.

Thus, the model can be claimed to be grounded, reflective, futuristic, and normative, with the latter being part of knowledge mobilisation and joint efforts by both an engaged scholarship and the researched subjects. Furthermore, the notion of transactional leadership—whereby the focus is on the exchange between the leader and followers and its theoretical outcome—and of transformational leadership—where the leader is also expected to be inspirational and supportive and to express both directive and participative behaviour, with a higher and more natural commitment of other social actors (Bass, Riggio, 2008)—seems to be an important launching pad for understanding how female leadership in music functions.

As Caust pointed out, "The position of women as leaders in arts is a continually contested environment… And the journey getting there can be challenging, particularly if the aspiration is to work in creative/artistic leadership roles or be a leader of a major arts institution/organisation" (Caust, 2020, pp. 55–56). The literature shows that next to the direction and effect of political decisions, influential individuals, alongside informal networks within the music industry as a key space for influencing decision making and policy creation, also have an important impact on the development of cultural policies in the field of music. Homan added, "The

role of self-appointed champions and their more informal music industry networks were crucial to changing government attitudes and policy" (Homan, 2013, p. 112). In 2017, Pierce wrote about the "strong international appetites" for a cultural leadership expertise caused by "the atmosphere of crises", both economic and political. In this context, three different categories of cultural leadership are recognised, even though they sometimes overlap and are not mutually exclusive: entrepreneurial, generous ("prioritizing the needs of the cultural form or sector, extending efforts beyond individual or organisational interest"), and public (pp. 13–14).

Edelman (2017) claimed that "the pursuit and engagement of the artistic process predisposes [performing artists] to intuitive understanding of the practices, theories, and concepts of leadership" (p. 25). Certainly, there are notable female musicians that are bestowed with a star status and who are seen as leaders and prominent figures by a broader public. In pop-rock music, performers like singer-songwriter Slađana Milošević (1955) or the guitarist and singer Ana Stanić (1975) have reached stardom and defied the stereotypes of female participation in rock culture. Similar examples are also present in the younger generation of performers: in neotraditional/world music scene, performers like the *frula* player and multi-instrumentalist Neda Nikolić (1998) or the trumpet player Danijela Veselinović (1993) are seen as virtuosos and key figures of the 'new wave' of folk music transformation. This is because they successfully perform and lead in different projects and create collaborative work both in traditional and genre-defying music.

This mode of highly appraised leadership in public spheres equates with stardom in public discourses. Nonetheless, female music stars in independent music scenes often perform many tasks related to intergroup and cultural leadership that remain invisible to the public eye, while simultaneously carrying out several roles and tasks typical of leaders. Both Nikolić and Veselinović lead instrumental ensembles: Nikolić organised ad hoc orchestras (with mostly male participants) for her concerts during the first and second year of COVID-19, and Veselinović is a leader and only female member of the famous and successful brass orchestra named after her. Also, these young musicians are the first not only to make decisions, but also to introduce novelty into the musical repertoire and style, perform managerial tasks, negotiate financial issues, and set the behavioural limits for certain situations. Thus, they are both taking the full and sole responsibility in leadership roles conventionally understood are being 'strong'.

On the contrary, there is a different distribution of roles and responsibilities in all-female music collectives whose members are not necessarily stars or outstanding performers outside the collaborative context. The recently created Serbian-based Romani, all-female hip-hop/fusion music group *Pretty Loud*,[2] exemplifies such multi-layered functioning in regard to leadership. Although its members are equal in terms of deciding upon and offering creative output, some girls take on several tasks at once (writing lyrics, singing, and being informal spokespersons in public situations), and so they function as informal leaders. However, it is interesting to note that during the focus groups we organised as part of this research, the more 'prominent' members of *Pretty Loud* were quick to highlight the qualities of its more shy or quiet members or the best qualities of members that performed 'only' one task (e.g., dancing or rapping).

On another level, the critique the *Pretty Loud* collective expresses through its music is aimed both at the arranged marriages of minors in the Serbian Romani community and at racist stereotypes that portray Roma people as lazy, uneducated, and poor by choice (group interview with three young female Romani artists, 13 April 2021). This public expres-

2 The group was created and continues to be supported by the Gypsy Roma Urban Balkan Beats (GRUBB) foundation; its members are girls and young women from the cities of Belgrade and Niš (http://grubbmusic.com/).

sion of a critical stance puts the whole group in the position of collective and shared leadership. The group won recognition with the *Bring the Noize* award from the Feminist Culture *Center BeFem* for the advocating for the rights of Romani people (2020). In addition, its growing personal and online fandom sees the group's artivism and goals as both contributing to improving the inner workings of the Roma community in Serbia and as presenting a different, active, and engaged role for Romani women (and overall Romani culture) to a wider public in Serbia.

Gender dynamics are particularly relevant in genres such as jazz where the performance is not completely predetermined (as is the case, for example, in classical music) but rather, is subject to the agreements, discussions, implicit relationships, and dynamics among the band members (interview with an experienced jazz musician, composer, and educator, 12 April 2021). However, young female jazz players have been able to transform the structural injury of being put aside into an advantage. Being aware that they lacked a female role model in jazz (apart from jazz singing), some of them sought to actively present themselves to younger girls as successful and inspiring musicians. One of our research collaborators chose to bring young students to her primary music school class by visiting local elementary schools to show them her instrument (trumpet) and talk with and play for them. Although her initial aim was simply to increase the number of children (of any gender) attending trumpet music classes, the number of girls that wanted to attend her lessons was outstanding (interview with a young female trumpet musician and educator, 10 March 2021).

What was notable throughout our field research was that many of the female musicians in leadership positions in bands had formed their own bands because they had not been invited to join those of others (despite their talent, education, potential, and hard work ethic) or had been treated poorly in other arrangements. We could call this 'leadership out of necessity.'

> I have had my own bands since I was 20. There were rare occasions that I was actually invited by others. If I had waited to be invited, I would not have had any career. I played well enough to be invited to fill some spaces, but I was not called in but instead, avoided. That is why I made space for myself on my own (interview with an experienced jazz musician, composer, and educator, 12 April 2021).

Exceptional female musicians that can be thought of as leaders are often engaged in multiple different activities, bands, genres, styles, and platforms and multitask these activities and their career on a daily basis. At the same time, they sometimes negatively describe this 'multipotentiality', are critical towards their "lack of focus and clear path" (a group interview with five young female instrumentalists, 7 February 2021), and are dissatisfied with their spectrum of different talent and their relevance to the community around them. High quality is somehow tied to the idea of focus, consistency, and sometimes isolation, which excludes multipotentialists. This is especially true of women who experience different expectations from society (Medina-Vicent, 2019) and who often face challenges in balancing those expectations with genius and leadership roles as they are traditionally seen.

In many instances, female leaders in music are supposed be overqualified and to agree to additional investment and recognisable devotion in order to achieve legitimacy and acceptance.

> I prepared in three days what they have practiced for three months. After that, I was a regular replacement... I was their girl for everything. I knew the whole repertoire for the three different instruments and was still never placed in a permanent position in that ensemble (interview with an experienced jazz musician, composer, and educator, 12 April 2021).

In one of her past projects in a female-only ensemble, one of our participants had introduced a childcare budget and service for all fellow musicians with small children (at the expense of other possible

benefits for the project participants). Nonetheless, one of the project partners (also a female colleague) criticised this intervention—which was definitely a position of solidarity and feminist leadership—by invoking a common patriarchal trope, why do they even have children if they want to play music? At the same time, women without children constantly face criticism and are marked, in a negative tone, as being selfish and career-oriented (Nikolić, 2016; Medina-Vicent, 2019). In other words, whether choosing motherhood or deciding not to have children, women and the art they produce are 'always already' measured against the rite of passage of motherhood, with a prevailing, almost universal stance that there is an "inherent incongruity between these two roles'' (Stalp, 2015, p. 47).

While our research collaborators gave differing answers to the question of whether they had had female role models working in the same genre to look up to, most of them had not had a chance to easily learn about their female predecessors or other contemporary female musicians from the same socio-musical field. This fact contributes to the logic of exceptionalism that serves as a cunning discursive device which, on the one hand elevates 'exceptional' women, but on the other, cuts them out of music work in their chosen genre. It prevents them from assuming leading positions because they are transformed into an 'addition' or exception to the rule. Almost all the interviewees expressed regret at not being able to learn earlier about similar—whether average or outstanding—female musicians performing in the same genre or mastering the same instrument. Hence, female leadership in music is intricately connected to educational work and to being a role model.

> In my project we engaged male mentors. They had a professional approach and no bias, but my participants did not believe in themselves and thought they could not achieve what they were asked to. Because they did not see other female mentors in front of them, they doubted they could ever make it (interview with an experienced jazz musician, composer, and educator, 12 April 2021).

Providing educational support (to other women) was one of the activities some of our interviewees mentioned as enjoying and being the most proud of. They also recognised that the lack of female professors and role models in 'male-dominated genres' in Serbian music education institutions and organisations was one of key obstacles to wider female participation in those genres (group interview with six teenage alumni of *Girls Rock Camp* in Serbia, 25 January 2021; group interview with five female music students, 1 February 2021; group interview with five young female instrumentalists, 7 February 2021).

WOMEN AND MUSICAL LABOUR

Hofman said that "there is a need to include labour and its practices in the debate about female professional musicians as one of the crucial aspects in the construction of their femininities" (Hofman, 2015, pp. 19–20). Even though the wider public is unaware of the factors that comprise music labour, female musicians are very cognisant of its preconditions and realities. Private and professional domains are obviously intertwined but future female musicians are still instructed to invest all their available time into their artistic and musical advancement and career.

> When you are attending music high school and then the music academy, the schedule of classes is so screwed that you are actually in school from morning to dark, plus practicing at home… Private individual and group classes on weekends… Life prepares you from a very early age that you will not be able to separate your 8 hours of work, sleep, and leisure (group interview with five female music students, 1 February 2021).

These women have witnessed a lack of understanding from the people around them, who simplify their work to being that of only 'Friday and Saturday evenings', in other words, to their performances

only, while the plethora of background work they engage in remains invisible and undervalued. At the same time, young female artists also describe concealment of the work behind the big talents they experience, from their older and more successful colleagues, tantamount to a mystification of their talent and the results achieved (a group interview with five young female instrumentalists, 7 February 2021).

The biggest part of this background work includes the creative process, but also encompasses practicing and learning, communication with colleagues and co-creators, decision making, rehearsals, and organising.

> Organisation… That is one big word. This is all labour that is completely invisible and it may seem that it produces no results (interview with an experienced jazz musician, composer, and educator, 12 April 2021).

Many successful female musicians and those who can be perceived as leaders are not only musicians, but multipotentialists and multitaskers, and are very often their own managers—or at least they significantly participate in their own management and promotion duties. Their profile is close to one of self-employment and entrepreneurship, an ever favourite model category for cultural policies leaning towards neoliberalism in Europe (Santos Ortega, Muñoz Rodríguez, 2019). Nevertheless, considering the small markets in the Balkans and the specificities of its alternative music scenes that this current research is focused on, their profiles still do not resemble entrepreneurship in the full sense of the word.

The mobility of Serbian female musicians is dictated by the relatively scarce resources provided by the state, demands of an international music industry that often exotifies musicians from the Balkans, and requirement that female artists should juggle their professional and personal matters on their own. Moreover, they are told not complain publicly about these difficulties or depict their dual burden of unpaid domestic and highly challenging professional work as anything other than compatible and easy to 'combine.' It is indicative that within the local world music scene, musicians that travel the world are either young female instrumentalists who have not yet started a family or are mature artists that have, after many years of effort, entered the transnational networks. In this latter context, 'Balkanism' as an external and discursively ambiguous framing of Balkan societies and their cultures (Todorova, 1997), is taken and reproduced as a positive value.

Furthermore, young female artists often doubt their skills in managerial, organisational, and promotional work (Nikolić, 2020). In this sense, relevant topics are also their working conditions, low-income, and the insecurity and precarity of working in the performing arts, music, or creative industries in Balkan societies. For instance, Barada and Primorac (2014) outlined the over-presence of under-paid labour and self-exploitation among young women in the visual sector in Croatia stating, "although it is shown that unpaid, under-paid and self-exploitative labour is the only way of entering the labour market, young women [at the beginning of their career] still define it as a choice" (p. 160). In Croatia, 55% of female artists receive a monthly income lower than the Croatian average, and 83% receive insufficient income from their professional engagement for what they described as their realistic basic needs for living, while still using their own money to produce their work (Banić, Gojić, 2018, pp. 50–52).

According to our research participants, working in music differs from other, more common professions because of its image of being easy and fun[3], thereby devouring one's whole identity and everyday life with the non-standardised working hours and unhealthy lifestyle it often demands, exposure to the public, requests to be at the disposal of different

3 In turn, some interviewees had also been mistakenly treated as sexual workers and had received inappropriate proposals and comments. Hofman claims that the social position of female singers is determined by a professional history marked by "moral devaluation, by poor quality, and dishonest service work" (2015, p. 19).

stakeholders—including their fandom, while always being in a good mood—and finally, through a creative process with its own characteristics that is not easy to control or navigate (a group interview with five young female instrumentalists, 7 February 2021).

Our interviewees, whose musical activity was a hobby, sometimes shared a fear that their main passion and purpose would be contaminated should music become their full-time job. They understood labour and work as something that was less valuable than a hobby, passion, purpose, activism, or identity. Indeed, following Stokes, Hofman (2015) wrote exactly how "the value of affective technologies through musical exchange [is] more desirable when not paid and that it should not fall under the commodity [or in this case, job] logic" (p. 19). Young female musicians connect work and labour with the idea of significant effort, discomfort, and even humiliation and subordination, while to them, enjoying creative processes, rehearsals, performances, and collaboration as a part of their music activity represented independence, freedom, equality, and authenticity.

This is in line with Barada and Primorac's conclusion stating that "creative workers are in a constant conflict both with external and internal control mechanisms that limit their autonomy and that also contribute to self-exploitation" (2014, p. 160). Some of our younger research collaborators combined intense practice and performance schedules with teaching at music schools (often as a substitute teacher or in a temporary position), with the latter being their more stable source of income. Although there was often a clear preference towards making a living through music performance, their teaching positions in government-funded public schools had been subtly 'offered' to them as a safer and more viable middle-class alternative to the more insecure positions of performers, both in terms of salary and because of the vaguer working schedule of music.

According to some of our interviewees, performing music is too exhausting and inconvenient to become a profession or job for women who plan to have their own family. This attitude is often seen within the families of girls interested in becoming musicians, their educators, and mainstream journalists who, more often than not, confront successful female musicians with questions regarding their balance between their music career and family duties (Nikolić, 2016; Medina-Vicent, 2019). The participants who did plan to have children talked about 'balancing' between the often precarious and unstable gig economy and more stable jobs such as teaching positions in the public school system and hoping to find enough time for rehearsals and public performances 'during the weekends.' However, as noted by Barada and Primorac, "after a few years of this kind of intensive work, female creative workers feel the consequences in [terms of] their quality of life, which results in dissatisfaction with the career choice. The work-life balance becomes a central issue of the public professional project" (Barada, Primorac, 2014, p. 160). This is one of the reasons why some young female musicians do not choose music as their career choice but rather, maintain it as a hobby. Another reason is the sexism, both hostile and benevolent (Todorović, 2013), offline and online (Hanash Martinez, 2020), ever present in the music industry of this region (Nikolić, 2016; Nikolić, 2017).

Ljubičić (2014, p. 139) showed that "although the legal and institutional framework for the protection of (young) women from discrimination [in post-Yugoslav societies] exists, female victims of gender-based discrimination, discrimination based on pregnancy and maternity status, and women who are sexually harassed, do not sufficiently use the mechanisms of institutional protection". Banić and Gojić confirmed that over one third of female artists in the Croatian city of Rijeka were exposed to mobbing in work situations "while ethics commissions, professional associations, and trade unions failed to be efficient allies" (2018, p. 45). Most of the respondents in that research had experienced discrimination based on their gender or gender identification, such as "sexist remarks, insults, disparagement, segregation, being paid less than

their male counterparts, subordination to their male colleagues, exclusion from (collective) decision making, exposure to (public) criticism, and inability to get jobs" (pp. 58–59).

Recently, all musicians, and especially female musicians in Serbia experienced a significant crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of disruption to their income, plans, and collaboration arrangements, which all contributed to reducing their psychological, mental, and emotional states. Some of them shared with us details of tour agreements for 2020 that had failed and that "no one mentions anymore", invitations for top festivals that had to be postponed, work invested in managing and organising logistics over a year and a half that had gone to waste, and the depression that had arisen from these circumstances (interview with an experienced jazz musician, composer, and educator, 12 April 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

The questions of participation, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion are among the most important of contemporary cultural policy. Indeed, leadership has been a core issue in arts and cultural management discourses and theories for decades. Moreover, the working conditions of artists and wider society's understanding of artistic production as work concerns its practitioners on a daily basis and critically influences their life and existence. We wanted to examine how these three fields intertwine the topics of female leadership and labour in music, and what the responsibilities, reach, potential, and limitations of cultural policies are to intervene.

In a rights-based approach to cultural policies, attention should be paid to the rights of every person, of all genders, to access and participate in cultural life implemented through a spectrum of cultural policy instruments. Progress has been visible in areas such as physical accessibility, but European cultural policies are still struggling to develop mechanisms of active participation in policy design and evaluation that recognise obstacles preventing effective participation and which equally consider every disadvantaged group (Balta Portoles, Dragićević Šešić, 2017, p. 170). Of note, it is female artists who predominantly support cultural participation and empowerment of other marginalised groups such as migrants (Nikolić, 2019).

Our interviews with local female musicians showed that some of them believe in the responsibility, role, and impact of policies to increase even their own self-esteem, ambition, and mindset changes. As they see it, policies, systemic change, and encouragement by institutions and organisations in a top-to-bottom approach could gradually improve and compensate for the lack of self-efficacy they witness alongside other female musicians (a group interview with five young female instrumentalists, 7 February 2021).

Female musicians in Serbia rely mainly on their own, scarce resources: they work in precarious positions, surrounded by hostile and benevolent sexism, and with a poor understanding in their environment. To a significant extent, they are multipotentialists and multitaskers, but the size and structure of the music market within the indie culture and alternative scene this current article focused on, prevents them from becoming true entrepreneurs, primarily because of low income it entails.

Professional work in popular music is perceived as being unhealthy and incompatible with the traditional ideas of motherhood and family life, but at the same time it is seen as being enriching, a result of passion, and as giving a sense of purpose to life. Many crucial activities performed in the background in the build up to live performances remain invisible, are simplified by wider society and are mystified or concealed by more experienced female colleagues.

The basic models of female musical leadership may be intragroup, community, and mainstream public (as related to certain music scenes and spaces), or

intercultural. Some of the female musicians who participated in this work found themselves in leadership positions 'out of necessity,' as a strategy to overcome the barriers and exclusion caused by gender stereotypes, prejudice, misogyny, and patriarchy. Others engaged in collective, 'generous' and transformative leadership and served as role models to younger generations by organising special projects and programs to support future female music professionals, campaigning, and investing additional effort into developing a specific genre, community, scene, or society in general.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Ambrozić, D. (1991). Žene u rocku kod nas? Ispada da su značajnije Magi i Anja nego mi, koje smo cela grupa [Women in our Rock? It seems that Magi and Anja are more important than us, who are a group]. *Ritam*, March 1991. *Yugopapir* online archive. http://www.yugopapir.com/2016/03/boye-zene-u-rocku-kod-nas-ispada-da-su.html

Baltà Portolés, J., Dragićevic Šešić, M. (2017). Cultural rights and their contribution to sustainable development: implications for cultural policy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23:2, pp. 159-173. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2017.1280787

Banić, S., Gojić, N. (2018) *Kako žive umjetnice? [How do female artists live?]* Prostor Plus: Rijeka. https://drive.google.com/file/d/16XLogjHZGytlhwasjJoZ3ttNpDVxcQFH/view

Barada, V., Primorac, J. (2014). Non-Paid, Under-Paid and Self-Exploiting Labour as a Choice and a Necessity: Example of Women in Creative Industries. In M. Adamović, B. Galić, A. Gvozdanović, A. Maskalan, D. Potočnik and L. Somun Krupalija (Eds.), *Young Women in Post-Yugoslav Societies: Research, Practice and Policy* (pp. 143-166). Institute for Social Research in Zagreb.

Caust, J. (2020). *Arts Leadership in Contemporary Contexts*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Ceribašić, N. (2001). In between ethnomusicological and social canons: historical sources on women players of folk music instruments in Croatia. *Narodna umjetnost-Hrvatski časopis za etnologiju i folkloristiku*, 38(1), pp. 21-40.

Diamond, B., Moisala, P. (2000). Introduction. Music and Gender: Negotiating Shifting Worlds. In P. Moisala, B. Diamond (Eds.), *Music and gender*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 1-19.

Doubleday, V. (2008). Sounds of power: An overview of musical instruments and gender. *Ethnomusicology Forum* 17(1), pp. 3-39.

Downing, S. L. (2010). Agency, leadership, and gender negotiation in Balinese girls' gamelans. *Ethnomusicology* 54(1), pp. 54-80.

Edelman, D., Green, J. (2017). The mind of the artist / the mind of the leader: what neuroscience can teach us about the training of arts managers and leaders. *ENCATC Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 7 (1), pp. 17-26.

Hanash Martínez, M. (2020). Feminist Cyber-resistance to Digital Violence: Surviving Gamergate. *Debats. Journal on culture, power and society*, 5, pp. 287–302. https://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-en.2020-17

Herndon, M., and Ziegler, S. (Eds.) (1990). *Music, gender, and culture*. Wilhelmshaven, Germany: Florian Noetzel Verlag.

Hofman, A. (2015). Music (as) Labour: Professional Musicianship, Affective Labour and Gender in Socialist Yugoslavia. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 24, 1, pp. 28-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2015.1009479

Homan, S. (2013). From Coombs to Crean: popular music and cultural policy in Australia. In Homan, S., Cloonan, M., Cattermole, J. (Eds.) *Popular Music and Cultural Policy*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis: London and New York, pp. 108-125. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19 (3), pp. 382-398. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2013.788164

Jovićević, J. (2021). The Pale Image of the Jazz Female Instrumentalists in Southeastern Europe. In Herzig, M., Kahr, M., and Reddan, J. (Eds.) *Handbook of Jazz and Gender*, Routledge (in preparation).

Koskoff, E. (Ed.) (1987). *Women and music in cross-cultural perspective*. Vol. 79. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Koskoff, E. (2000). Foreword. In Moisala, P., and B. Diamond (Eds.) *Music and gender.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. IX-XIII.

Ljubičić, V. (2014). Discrimination of Young Women in the Croatian Labour Market. In Adamović, M., Galić, B., Gvozdanović, A., Maskalan, A., Potočnik, D., Somun Krupalija, L. (Eds.) *Young Women in Post-Yugoslav Societies: Research, Practice and Policy*. Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, pp. 113-142.

Medina-Vicent, M. (2019) Woman, manage your life! The Life-Work Balance Discourse in Popular Management Literature Aimed at Women. *Debats. Journal on culture, power and society*, 4, pp. 59–70. https://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-en.2019-5

Moisala, P. (1999). Musical gender in performance. *Women & Music*, p. 1. Gale Academic OneFile, accessed 15 May 2021.

Nenić, I. (2012). Sviračice kao loši subjekti [Female instrumentalists as bad subjects]. In Duhaček, D., Lončarević, K. (Eds.) *Kultura, rod, građanski status*. Centar za studije roda i politike, Fakultet političkih nauka: Beograd, pp. 143-155.

Nenić, I. (2013). Discrete cases: Female traditional music players in Serbia. *New Sound*, 41, I/2013, pp. 87-97.

Nenić, I. (2015). We are not a female band, we are a band! Female performance as a model of gender transgression in Serbian popular music. *Musicology: Journal of the Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts*, 19, pp. 119-133.

Nenić, I. (2019). *Guslarke i sviračice na tradicionalnim instrumentima u Srbiji: identifikacija zvukom [Gusle players and other female traditional instrumentalists in Serbia: identification by sound].* CLIO: Beograd.

Nenić. I. (2020). 'Roots in the age of Youtube': Old and contemporary modes of learning/teaching in Serbian frula playing. *New Sound* 56, II, pp. 28-47.

10.5937/newso2056028N

Nikolić, T. (2016). *Rodni odnosi na alternativnoj muzičkoj sceni Srbije i regiona [Gender relations within the alternative music scene of Serbia and the region].* Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova: Novi Sad.

Nikolić, T. (2017) Učešće i položaj žena u stvaranju muzike u bivšoj Jugoslaviji. [Participation and the position of women in creating music in former Yugoslavia]. *Zbornik završnih radova studenata 2015/2016 i 2016/2017.* Beogradska otvorena škola, pp. 115-124.

Nikolić, T. (2019) Umetnički projekti sa migrantkinjama u Srbiji - pitanja kulturnog i rodnog identiteta. [Art projects with female migrants in Serbia - the question of cultural and gender identity]. *Interkulturalnost: časopis za podsticanje i afirmaciju interkulturalne komunikacije*, 18, pp. 84-95.

Nikolić, T. (2020). Društveni angažman mladih umetnica u digitalnom kontekstu. [Social engagement of young female artists in the digital context]. *Kultura: časopis za sociologiju i teoriju kulture i kulturnu politiku*, 169, pp. 86-112.

Price, J. (2017). The construction of cultural leadership. *ENCATC Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 7 (1), pp. 5-16.

Ranković, S. (2019). Tradicionalno pevanje Srba iz Hrvatske u svetlu savremenih etnomuzikoloških istraživanja. [The Traditional Singing of Serbs from Croatia in the Light of Contemporary Ethnomusicological Research]. In Stanišić, S. (Ed.), *Baština krajiških Srba*. Novi Sad: Zavičajno udruženje "Sava Mrkalj", pp. 133-173.

Santos Ortega, A., Muñoz Rodríguez, D. (2019). The cult of the entrepreneur within the EU framework: The advance of an entrepreneurship activation model. *Debats. Journal on culture, power and society*, 4, pp. 13–24. https://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-en.2019-2

Slobin, M. (1993). *Subcultural sounds: Micromusics of the West.* Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press.

Stalp, M. C. (2015). Still a man's art world: The gendered experiences of women artists. *Journal of Research on Women and Gender*, 6, pp. 40–55.

Starratt, R. J. (1993). *The drama of leadership*. London: Falmer Press.

Street, J. (2013). Music, markets and manifestos. In Homan, S., Cloonan, M., Cattermole, J. (Eds.) *Popular Music and Cultural Policy*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis: London and New York, pp. 7-24. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19 (3), pp. 281-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2013.788158

Sutherland, R. (2013). Why get involved? Funding reasons for municipal interventions in the Canadian music industry. In Homan, S., Cloonan, M., Cattermole, J. (Eds.) *Popular Music and Cultural Policy*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis: London and New York, pp. 92-108. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 19 (3), pp. 366-381. DOI:10.1080/10286632.2013.788160

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

Tomšič, V. (1981). Žena u razvoju socijalističke samoupravne Jugoslavije. [*A Woman in the Development of the Socialist Self-Management Yugoslavia*]. Beograd: Novinsko-izdavačka radna organizacija Jugoslovenska stvarnost — OOUR Jugoslovenski pregled. AFŽ Archive, visited 15th May 2021. http://afzarhiv.org/items/show/382

Todorović, M. (2013). Benevolentni seksizam i rodna ravnopravnost. [Benevolent Sexism and Gender Equality] *Genero: časopis za feminističku teoriju i studije kulture*, 17, pp. 1-22.

Troka, D. (2002). You heard my gun cock: Female agency and aggression in contemporary rap music. *African American Research Perspectives* 8, pp. 82-9.

Wells, S. E. (2011). *Women as Musical Leaders: Experiences and Perceptions of Female Conductors and Concert Masters in Perth, Western Australia*. Master thesis. Perth: School of Music, University of Western Australia.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Iva Nenić

Dr. Nenić is an ethnomusicologist and cultural studies scholar. Her research interests concern art and popular culture in the early 21st century, ideology and affective cultural practices, and gendered mechanisms of knowledge production. Her book *Gusle players and other female traditional instrumentalists in Serbia: identification by sound* (CLIO, Belgrade, 2019) received the *Anđelka Milić* award from the Section for Feminist Research and Critical Studies of Masculinity (SEFEM) for a scholarly work contributing to critical gender studies.

Tatjana Nikolić

Tatjana is a cultural manager, feminist, and activist behind a series of programmes supporting and advocating for gender equality in the cultural sector. Additionally, she is a researcher and PhD candidate whose PhD thesis is on gender and age equality within the cultural policy of Serbia. Her previous book *The Gender Relations in the Alternative Music Scene of Serbia and the Region* was published in 2016.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, PROMIS, grant n.º 6066876, *Female leadership in music* (FLIM) project. This manuscript was also partially conducted as part of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts institution project, grant n.º 178012, funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development.