

#### 4. Diversity versus Homogenisation

*'Revolucija? Nama je dobro, mi nenamo pojma,  
dok oni se časte, mi jedemo govna.'*

(‘Revolution? We’re all right ’coz we’re clueless and dumb.  
While they’re living the Life of Riley, we live like scum.’)

From the play *Nakaze* (Bosnian adaptation of *Creeps*)

##### ***ISLINGTON, OCTOBER 2008***

Sunday morning, and I was absentmindedly channel hopping. Eventually I settled on T4, Channel 4’s youth-branded slot, because I spotted designer Henry Holland on screen, our foremost third-generation Hoxtonite. Henry was co-hosting a show called Frock Me with Alexa Chung, a top youth TV presenter.<sup>45</sup> To my mind, there was nothing interesting, let alone inspiring, about this show. It was like watching QVC or The Shopping Channel. I was told about the latest collaboration between H&M and a designer label. This time it was Comme des Garçons. I also found out that Dr. Martens boots were back in fashion (you needn’t be a fashion insider to know that this was old news). The fashion-conscious kid who wanted to be the first to know would have scouted street style blogs, which had been featuring shots of people wearing boots (Dr. Martens and other varieties) for a while and had already moved on. Nevertheless, I was told that Dr. Martens were ‘really cool’ and ‘authentic’ but the show delved no further into why that might be, other than listing which celebrities were wearing them. Or, could it be that this very list of ‘celebrity’ patrons was what was making them cool? (Silly me!)

A few months later, in January 2009, *Tatler* UK magazine featured three young women posing nude on its cover: Kimberly, Leah and Peaches. Who? I was not a *Tatler* reader but usually I recognised the cover star(s) be they Liz Hurley, Madonna or someone of that calibre. I was intrigued by the ‘rock babes’ headline, so I parted with my £3.80. I discovered that these ladies were the daughters of ‘rock royalty’ whose ‘sense of style is idolised’. I was encouraged to give a ‘big hand for the smash-hit kids’. As I read on, I became increasingly convinced that the only thing worth applauding about this article was its audacity. I was told that the cover girls ‘need no introduction’ because ‘it would be hard to find anyone in the country who doesn’t have a vague knowledge of who they are and what they get up to’. I was obviously in that minority. The article then elaborated on each girl, starting with 19-year-old Peaches, whose younger sister, Pixie, had already been...

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## ***THE DOUBLE BS***

### ***Big Brother***

Traditionally, fame was the result of paying one's dues and was judged according to a set of meritorious criteria. With the proliferation of reality TV, we have seen the emergence of another type of fame, whereby almost anyone could become a star overnight. In the noughties, the famous-for-being-famous model of stardom dominated. The byword for this trend – and one of the original and most successful exponents of reality TV – is *Big Brother*. An idea created by Joop Van den Ende and Johannes (John) de Mol, the Dutch founders of Endemol (the production company behind *Big Brother*), it was first broadcast in the Netherlands in 1999. This format, essentially a response to the problem of how to generate revenue from the new interactive television technology, became an international success story. This included the conquest of the previously impenetrable US television market with regards to 'foreign' formats. Reality-TV contests – and *Big Brother*, as part of that trend – were among the most successful European exports to the US, though interestingly this time around there were not debates to match the American cultural imperialism furore surrounding the implementation of satellite television in Europe in the early 1990s. The Europeans were perfectly happy to export their 'reality' format without any concern for the erosion of American culture.

Local variants of *Big Brother* included *Loft Story* in France, *Gran Hermano* in Spain, *Grande Fratello* in Italy, *Veliki Brat* in Serbia and *Big Brother USA* in the States. The number of seasons it ran for in each country varied. In the Netherlands, it ran for six, ending in 2006. In France, *Loft Story* ended after two series, but similar formats have since replaced it. By contrast, the UK, where *Big Brother* was launched in 2000, became one of the territories where this show ran and ran (until the final series in 2010). There were also spin-off shows, including *Celebrity Big Brother*. Here contestants tended to be minor celebrities, celebrities by association (sister of, mother of, and so on) or has-beens in need of a career-boost rather than current or genuinely famous celebrities.

Each local version had its idiosyncrasies but all shared the same premise: each was a televised contest in which a number of strangers selected by audition consented to live together for an indefinite period of time, during which they were completely cut off from the outside world. Each week or so, a candidate

was eliminated by public vote until one – the winner – remained. The motivation for participating, and by the same token *watching*, this programme was also the reason it generated a lot of critical reaction. It actively encouraged – legitimised even – the possibility of becoming ‘successful without having to make an effort, notorious without having to work’.<sup>49</sup>

*Big Brother* celebrated ignorance. It was a world in which intellectual curiosity or critical thinking were noticeable only by their absence, not least because access to any means of communication was banned and bringing books into the house was forbidden. Instead, mundane tasks were set by the production team to incite contestants to outwit (or fight with) each other. This helped combat what would otherwise have been unprecedented boredom because, for all the supposed ‘reality’, there was no such idle way of life in the real world. Even when the activities were based on ‘teamwork’, the truth was that each contestant was in it for themselves. There could only be one winner, after all. Consequently, as Vincent Cespedes, the French philosopher and secondary-school teacher who wrote one of the first virulent critiques of *Loft Story* pointed out: ‘The contest becomes a perfect model for social hypocrisy where you have to destroy the other while keeping a smile on your face, pretend to like them only to back-stab them, or conspire with another housemate to eliminate the undesirables.’<sup>50</sup>

The intrigues in the house as well as the unravelling personalities of the contestants became, in turn, conversational currency. To paraphrase another French writer, Alain Schifres, we watched *Big Brother* (or *Loft Story*), and therefore watched nothing, and we talked about *Big Brother*, and therefore talked of nothing.<sup>51</sup> This debate occasionally heated up and stretched into burning...

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## ***CURIOSITY VERSUS VOYEURISM: THE CASE OF COOL BRITANNIA***

### ***Casino-TV Format***

In contrast to the culture of curiosity, which is ruled by open-mindedness, interest in the ‘other’ and celebrating diversity, Red Carpet Culture is a culture of voyeurism. This ideology creates a new ‘imagined community’ where fame regardless of merit and all the bling bling symbols of success are unquestionable. It governs the bulk of mainstream media as well as youth-oriented media and communication – but I shall continue with my *Big Brother* metaphor to explore this trend. Voyeurism, unlike curiosity, is not about openness towards the other

– even though paradoxically, in the case of *Big Brother*, the other was laid bare for our (guilty) viewing pleasure. Instead of celebrating diversity, stereotypes were juxtaposed based on the anticipation that their different social and cultural backgrounds would lead to a clash. There was no sense of fraternity (or sorority) because ultimately, it was all about ‘me’. To learn about each other was not what *Big Brother* was about, even though its producers have used this argument to justify the show. I find it very hard to buy into the spiel that the gay Muslim transvestite or any other such character from a niche community was recruited to put human rights issues on the agenda. The line between freak and unique is very thin here. Contestants entered the *Big Brother* house for their five minutes of fame. To believe that the show was a medium for altruism is nothing short of absurd.

Let us look at the evidence. In the UK, this show only really got noticed when the manipulations of ‘Nasty Nick’ were uncovered in series one. His ‘deceitful’ ways began to feature in the press, especially in the newly-launched gossip magazine *Heat*, which became *Big Brother*’s unofficial print partner (and more generally a partner to the famous-for-being-famous crowd). This set a precedent. From then on, anything went, from physical fights to prospective love stories with the inevitable ‘Have they done it?’ factor, to perhaps the most notorious of all – the infamous ‘racism’ incident in *Celebrity Big Brother*. Here, I refer to the well-publicised episode where Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty was bullied by a group of housemates and ringleader Jade Goody in particular, which caused a diplomatic incident. Goody was the notorious *Big Brother* contestant who managed to carve out a lucrative career as a ‘celebrity’ post *Big Brother* until her premature death from cancer in 2009, the progress of which was put under public scrutiny through carefully orchestrated media ‘exclusives’. All this goes to show that without intrigue and scandal, there would have been nothing to talk about. All means to that greater end – ‘celebrity’ – could be justified. Scandal does sell newspapers, and the rise of the famous-for-being-famous crowd was steadily turning from a ratings dictatorship into a new form of propaganda.

Let me use a metaphor here for the culture of voyeurism epitomised by *Big Brother*, which some readers may find provocative. With *Big Brother* on our screens, we literally watched ‘the lives of others’ unravel. The boundaries between the private and the public were eroded and we consented to being part of this – by being either a housemate or a viewer. It was supposedly for entertainment but the set-up nevertheless closely echoed the scenario of the Oscar-winning

film *The Lives of Others* (directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006). This film depicts life in East Berlin under the communists where freedom was brutally taken away by the regime. The film focuses on a couple being watched constantly without them realising that cameras were secretly installed in their flat. The differences were that in *Big Brother*, instead of the infamous *Stasi* police, it was us who watched; and instead of unsuspecting citizens subjected to 24/7 surveillance against their will, these housemates had given their consent.

More specifically, the idea of *Big Brother* was borrowed from George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Beyond pastiche, a link can be made between our current glorification of celebrity and the voyeuristic attitude this encourages, and the totalitarian system portrayed in the book. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the story of life under non-stop surveillance in a dystopian Britain where its rulers proclaim that 'freedom is slavery'. The supreme ruler is Big Brother, an invisible yet powerful force whose omnipresence is a symbol of communist despotism. Cowed by the constant paranoia created by being watched and fear of being punished, citizens abide by draconian codes. Suppression of thought is the main weapon of coercion. Hence all books have been banned (just like in the *Big Brother* house) while the language, once called English, has been reduced to 'newspeak', a vernacular consisting of only basic vocabulary (something like 'cékikapété') to make 'any other modes of thought impossible'.

In the 1980s, Orwell's novel enjoyed renewed popularity. Though no one thought that communism would collapse, the seeds of change were in the air, particularly in 1985 with the coming to power of reformist Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. Orwell's novel helped strengthen the voices of hope. Referencing the book (along with Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which similarly focuses on the subjects of freedom and oppression) was rock 'n' roll. It meant that you did not agree with a repressive system. It was a stance for diversity. 'Sexcrime (1984)' by The Eurythmics from the soundtrack to the award-winning big-screen adaptation of the novel (directed by Michael Radford, 1984) captured the public mood. ('Sexcrime' was newspeak for 'all sexual misdeeds whatever' in this land of forbidden romance.)

Recently, a number of critics of *Big Brother* (the programme) linked the effects of it to reduced critical capacities. Echoing the Frankfurt School – who provided the first critique of mass culture (and the rise of consumerism) on the grounds of it corrupting the intellect – acting like a 'hypodermic needle' to

spread propaganda and ultimately reproduce capitalism – this more recent school of thought sees *Big Brother* as a genuine symbol of a new totalitarianism. It is premised on the...

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## ***THE POST ROCK 'N' ROLL ERA?***

### ***Fame Without Merit***

So far, I've argued that hip's sell-out was inevitable – but has it even become desirable (a goal rather than a fate)? In its crossover journey, which began in the 1960s, has the definition of hip as understood in the mainstream gone from virulently oppositional (the rock counterculture of baby boomers), via ironically inevitable (post-punk DIY alternative cultures of Generation X) through to becoming its own antithesis (the celebrity culture of Generation Y)? I'm not even considering the new kids on the block – Generation Z and even Generation i. Have we reached a generational precedent in hip's crossover story where the sell-out no longer means anything? Could it be that the emotional rift between the underground and the mainstream, once based on convictions that community ideals had been sacrificed for commerce, has been replaced by a functional, almost Machiavellian attitude where the goal justifies all means?

This is not so much a reflection on a generation as it is on the way the market chooses to construct consumption ideologies. What we mustn't forget is that, as far as the market is concerned, hip is primarily interesting insofar as it opens the door for the wannabe. In our framework, the ability of hip to reinvent itself is also dependent on the readiness of the wannabe to accept it. The interest of marketers in hip always coincides with a need for innovation. Historically, the co-opted hip emulated the minority rebel because that kind of attitude and imagery, when translated into a more palatable language for the silent majority, was a gateway to their pockets. The tone of hip communication has changed over the decades but the principle of hip rebelling against the system – or at least selling that illusion – remained a constant and a powerful marketing tool. It did marvels for Madison Avenue executives in the 1960s (in countercultural terms) just as it did for the cool brands of the 1990s (with irony). En route to the inevitable, hip's trajectory from the underground to the mainstream has always been that of building kudos by paying your dues, crossing over and selling out. That happened to rock 'n' roll just like it did to hip hop and any other subculture you care to mention that

became mainstream.

In the decade of bling, a powerful phenomenon began to compete with hip's ideology of authenticity. The famous-for-being-famous opened the door to achieving fame without talent and started to redefine, even erode, the notion of merit. Wanting to be famous and aspiring to materialism is the antithesis of hip, but it has gradually been legitimised, particularly by youth media brands that almost indiscriminately speak the 'celebrity' language when addressing their consumers. It became cool to be famous (for being famous). 'Celebrity' became the perfect risk alleviator for the corporate paranoia. Like it or not, the wannabe – or the mainstream youth market of today that is the future of tomorrow – has been indoctrinated by this Red Carpet ideology. Gone are the days when hip hop or rave called for moral panic in the tabloid press. In the noughties, *Heat* magazine (more akin to a bestselling tabloid paper than a fanzine) sold in bucketloads to the young. 'Celebrity' was no longer just an advertising medium with huge amounts of money being pumped into it (the fees that stars get for being 'the face of...'). It also became a legitimised career path across many industries, without practitioners necessarily having the right skills, or indeed, any skills other than being famous.

Take the example of the Beckhams. They are the golden couple of bling, but what are we actually getting back from worshipping their cult?

David Beckham has long ceased to be the lad on the pitch ('one of us') and become a one-man global brand and advertising medium. Any excuse to nurture his celebrity status serves as a media hook, which is how Beckham grabbed the headlines when he played his 108<sup>th</sup> cap for England. Essentially a non-event, it provided an opportunity to glorify his status of not-quite-sure-what. He was compared to the legendary Bobby Moore, who also played 108 times. The difference is that Moore led England to its only World Cup victory in 1966. Beckham's team, consisting of some of the most expensive players in the world, not only lost that much-hyped game (a friendly against the European champions, Spain, in 2008) but failed to qualify for the tournament. (The English fans are among the most loyal to their team but England's pathetic exit compelled the BBC – who paid for the rights to the game with the license fee – to make promos in the national team's absence with the slogan 'What team will you support?' in an attempt to soften both the financial and emotional blows.) England's abysmal game at the 2010 World Cup was a wake-up call, with the public increasingly objecting to the players' 'underperformance and overpay'. The football transfer

fees provide in themselves enough material for a thesis on ethics. When the media eulogises the obscene £135 million potential transfer of a footballer (Kaka) from Milan to Manchester City (which did not materialise) on the same day that thousands lose their jobs in the midst of the recession in Britain in January 2009, it is simply immoral. The provenance of a considerable amount of the money paying for colossal football wages is equally dubious – but who cares?

David Beckham's missus, Victoria the former Spice Girl, has recently reinvented herself as a fashion designer. (Taking five obvious market segmentation types – something that cool brands mastered, as we've seen on the example of MTV – with no particular talent for either singing or dancing, the Spice Girls were the ultimate product of 1990s cool marketing hype and became one of the most successful commercial acts of all time. In 1997, the year of Cool Britannia, the Spice Girls were glorified at the annual Brit Awards, as their appropriately titled debut single 'Wannabe' sold in truckloads – thus extending 1990s cool from the early majority or the wannabe to the realm of the mass market. Success for the Spice Girls came at the right time – when cool sold out and was ready for commercial exploitation.) But back to Mrs Beckham. The moment she produced her first collection, it went straight on to New York Fashion Week's catwalks with a huge amount of publicity. Earlier chapters explained how difficult it is to become a fashion designer and how the road to success is very precarious. Yet here was someone who was famous but with no training whatsoever in fashion other than wearing clothes, immediately getting the Red Carpet treatment.

Let me use an example closer to Hoxton to follow the argument through. In 2007 Top Shop, the brand that had taken a risk under the guidance of ...

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### *Attitude to Commerce Revisited*

Among the second-generation Hoxtonites, the sell-out, though inevitable, is still frowned upon. The belief in the set of ideals that governed the scene is still omnipresent, even among the hipsters who have reached the 'tipping point' in the trajectory. A hipster (artist, designer, promoter, DJ) has to make money from their talent like anyone else. In that sense, you have to abide by commercial rules. However, there are degrees of concession; retaining control in this way is a form of resistance that helps retain some integrity in the face of all-out consumerism. Often, you will hear: 'We work only with people we like.' You want to make

money but not at any cost. For example, an authentic hip promoter would turn away brand sponsorship for a club night if the brand's profile or the sponsor's contractual demands did not fit their vision. What also tends to happen among the scenesters who are in demand by brands is that they balance out their commercial work with work for friends. For example, if you are a DJ, PR or graphic designer, you will charge a different rate for a brand than you would for a friend (who might be a fashion designer, artist or similar). The principle of solidarity among the like-minded still exists. It is not all about money.

With the rise of the third-generation Hoxtonites, there has been a change in the attitude towards commercialism, but this is not so much because of an ideological shift within the scene as it is about context. Hip had reached its maturation phase en route to its full commercialisation. At that point, it was sink or swim. Whether you were an authentic hipster or nouveau hip or hereditary hip no longer mattered. It became necessary to adapt to circumstances where the distinction between the mainstream and the underground was getting blurred. This was a different set-up from the end of the 1990s and early noughties, the...

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### ***Rebellion Revisited***

Two decades ago, Generation X was facing criticism for being less engaged in civic duties than its predecessor, the illustrious and groovy counterculture. Alas, it transpired that the counterculture had it wrong. It hadn't changed the world (though at least it had tried). Generation X was going to learn from its mistakes. Less anti-capitalist than the flower power crowd of summer 1967 or those who demonstrated in Paris in May 1968, Generation X nevertheless proved to be as cynical and as rebellious. They just expressed their alternative sense of identity in a way more attuned to their own era of hip hop beats and rave. Politics for Generation X was a reflection of a new sense of individualism. No longer was it about the politics of resistance through style but rather the stylisation of politics. Mainstream political parties did not understand this shift, denouncing young people as apathetic. When MTV rocked the vote, young people turned up in millions to the polls. Amid fashion fads, Generation X fought against racism, learnt about using condoms to protect itself from a deadly virus that could be sexually transmitted and even opposed the war in Bosnia. Acts of citizenship in the 1990s ranged from grand political gestures (abolition of apartheid, collapse

of communism, European unification) to smaller-scale activism through causes (Live Aid set a global precedent for the formation of affective alliances through new media technologies).

Inevitably, when MTV became profitable and the market for music television grew increasingly competitive, it left its citizenship battles behind and focused on the most commercial facets of youth culture. (The question lingered, though – should politics have been left to MTV?) At the same time, politicians now understood that cool was motivating. Applying cool marketing tactics, New Labour achieved a landslide election victory on the promise of Cool Britannia. In the decade that followed, ‘celebrity’ took over the mainstream youth culture...

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*SEX, DRUGS, NO ROCK 'N' ROLL: THE CASE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA*

*'Ignorance Is Power'*

Welcome a topsy-turvy world, where *sponzoruše* (pejorative term meaning ‘sponsored woman’, a local version of the WAG) are the archetypes of being ‘well classy’ while corrupt semi-literate macho-men rule, with a blatant disregard for any influence that doesn’t conform to their insular outlook.<sup>83</sup> This is no longer a case of having no access to cultures beyond your immediate reference, because of ‘communist time’ or ‘the war’ – there’s just no interest. Here, we have a situation where the notion of hip is almost completely extinct (it is a distant memory that lives on in the minds of those who once upon a time listened to rock ‘n’ roll and now write blogs about Omladinski Program). With the rock ‘n’ roll spirit suppressed, the alternative has almost entirely disappeared to give way to the post-war parochial nouveau-riche culture.

The Double Bs dominate. Jelena Karleuša is a role model. A silicone-enhanced pop starlet (from Serbia but popular across all the former Yugoslavia, now referred to as *Regija*), she has the whole package: the aforementioned breast implants, hair and nail extensions, the fake tan that goes with a bleached shade of blonde, Botoxed features, a footballer husband, and she once appeared in a porn video that ‘unintentionally’ slipped out on YouTube. The trials and tribulations of her life are picked over in the gossip media. Jelena is the definition of a career woman, commanding tens of thousands of euros for live PAs (for there is no music industry to generate profits from selling CDs). Her fee is more important

for the public to know about than her music. Her favourite things are ‘shopping and designer clothes’. Her advice for success? ‘For me, my sexual organ is my brain.’<sup>84</sup> Her musical style? A new wave of turbo-folk, building on the tradition of Yugoslavian neofolk – which symbolised all things ‘primitive’ – and the turbo-folk that symbolised all the horrors related to war. However, the new turbo genre conveniently ignores its origins.

It is no wonder the past is taboo. The post-war society’s elite emerged as a wealthy segment amid a majority who are struggling to make ends meet and cope with the psychological traumas of their recent history. Where once there was the amicable existence of different nations united under one flag before the conflict, now there is a total blank. The nouveau-riche culture is literally brand new and it celebrates Jelena. Those whose memories extend as far back as Part One will see a striking resemblance between this and the neofolk culture. Rich in material possessions, this class have always been cultural paupers. Before, they were ridiculed for their small-minded view of the world. Now they rule the world.

Famously on YouTube, there is an interview with a politician from Serbia (but his kind can be found across *Regija*) in which he made the mother of all blunders. He was boasting about being wealthy enough to invite any pop or folk star of his liking to sing at his feet. In fact, the only musicians who didn’t play for him were Beethoven and Chopin. When quizzed by the incredulous interviewer, who thought it might have been a slip of the tongue, our man explained that had he been of the age and stature he was now when they were successful, he would...

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### ***Reclaiming the Right to Diversity***

Dubioza are part of the tiny post-war organic culture. They see themselves primarily as agitators rather than rappers (ie musicians). Their lyrics focus on inciting the development of citizenship values. Their belief is that citizenship action begins at home: you have to care for your immediate environment (rather than destroy communal property, which is common) before you can understand the value of common causes (namely fighting corruption and Big Brother/*Big Brother*). Though not quite an underground band – they occasionally get mainstream exposure, not least because there is a lot of TV and not much going on – Dubioza do not actively solicit mainstream media attention. It’s all about online social networks and word of mouth, which is efficient enough to sell out

gigs. Dubioza share their contact network with a small local hip hop scene from the city of Tuzla gathered around the banner FM Jam (a small radio station and publishing house). It also features Bosnia's most prominent rappers, Frenki and Edo Maajka. The latter is enjoying some mainstream success across *Regija* (co-signed by the record company Men Art from Zagreb).

The other alternative networks are Sarajevo's local radio 202 and EFM student radio, though their respective broadcast reaches are tiny (and the radio landscape is competitive; there are hundreds of stations). Interestingly, I discovered the main host from EFM, Zoran Ćatić, via the German-based Internet radio station Funkhaus Europa. Had Yugoslavia remained one country, this would have been its national network. This feed (in local languages – formerly Serbo-Croat) provides analysis and insight from across *Regija* rather than just serving sensationalist information or nationalist provocation (which still exists). Ćatić's reports could have been on Omladinski Program, I thought when I first heard him. I was not far off. The first thing Zoran said to me when we met for an interview for this book was: 'When I told my mates I was meeting you, they said "Get out of here!" They didn't believe me. We used to bunk off school to listen to Omladinski! You brought us up. Omladinski said "such and such record", [and] we went to buy it.' Zoran is trying to keep that spirit alive on EFM but it is very difficult. 'Young people do not understand satire and irony any more,' he sighs. 'All they know is "Rat i Veliki Brat" (war and *Big Brother*).' This cultural barrier is coupled with a non-existent local music industry. There are only a handful of 'worthy' Bosnian and Herzegovinian alternative bands, such as Sikter (who emerged as a defiance band during the conflict), Skroz, Vunemy and Letu Štuke, but there is no scene. These guys are the first to admit that, as Brano Jakubović from Dubioza put it: 'There is no subculture. Before, rockers and punks used to fight each other for their turf. Now, young people fight each other and kill each other. That's not a subculture... And there is no global connection. Before, we used to stay up just so that we could video *Alternative Nation* on MTV. Now MTV Adria is irrelevant. We went to the opening with Dubioza and we occasionally collaborate, but MTV is an old-fashioned concept. We use YouTube now.'

As ever in times of need, when I contemplate my native culture (now alien to me), I turn to Boro Kontić. He spent the war years in Sarajevo, promoting the voice of reason, and is now the director of Media Centre, a production-cum-research resource. I ask him how come there is no new generation, like we were? And why are there no new Omladinski Program-style movements? Boro is quiet

for a moment. He takes a deep breath and says, 'There's been a total collapse of every system of values here. There is a new system in place that is completely different to what we knew. Rock 'n' roll is no longer the leader. [Pause.] You know, maybe back then we were living in fairyland, a little bit. Maybe we were unrealistic. The cultural foundation of this region is folk, not rock. The war ruptured the continuity between generations. You had Indeks, then came Dugme [Bijelo Dugme], then it was Crvena Jabuka and Plavi Orkestar, then Omladinski with a new soundtrack... The war was horrific. It literally forced people out. All the creators and innovators are gone. That's a huge loss.'

His thoughts are echoed in what remains of the independent critical press. An article entitled '*Bilo bi dobro da su tu*' ('It would be better if they were here') has been cited on many blogs. Its original source might have been *Dani*, the magazine owned by one of the Senads from Omladinski. The article speaks of the tremendous cultural vacancy created by the loss of trend leaders, which is coupled with the 'brain drain' phenomenon (incidentally, a problem across former Eastern Bloc states unable to offer work/life conditions that match Western opportunities).<sup>90</sup> The article then listed the opinion formers that the country 'needs' back. I was one of them.

My good friend Boris Šiber (Šibi), a former *Nadrealista* and now the head of youth programming on FTV, one of the state networks, has the same explanation for the lack of organic youth cultures: 'First, for me, being young is a state of mind. Audience research forces me to put a cap on 29 but I don't pay much attention to focus groups and demographics. If you want to know what young people do, hang out with them. Do the same things. If you go to Exit music festival [Novi Sad, Serbia], you'll be doing as they do, but you'll also realise that not everyone there is under 29. Still, 90 per cent of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not use their brain. It's turbo-folk and *Big Brother*, dumb it down and especially do not let them think. These kids grew up with no electricity and the post-war decade has been tough in another way. The climate is such that cities have become villages. We [urbanites] are in the minority. There is no Lida Hujčić. She's gone to London.'

Here we go again. Šibi is speaking metaphorically but that sense of responsibility to do something collectively good is still the mentality of our breed. In terms of relationship to the dominant culture – that is not just individualistic ('I could be a star!') but also reproducing the grab-what-I-can economy – there is no common link. The chasm appears unbridgeable. I genuinely could not think

in what way 'all my connections' might be useful. If anything, people like me are *persona non grata*. The set of skills that afford me a decent lifestyle appear to be of no relevance in Bosnia, even as a guest lecturer to media students. I guess I should mention that in the late 1990s, it was fashionable to interview 'our successful people abroad', something that I always declined to participate in. When I got my PhD, my proud mother was talked into giving a graduation photo to a journalist, which led to a few articles. Unapologetically sensationalist (apparently, I regularly drink coffee with Madonna), the articles were never used to suggest that the education system might benefit from my input. The only opportunity that emerged of genuine interest was a consultant's position at the BBC (advertised circa 2001) to rebuild Bosnia's public service broadcasting (the institution where I'd left a legacy and where some of my former colleagues/friends were still working). However, I did not even get an interview. Only when I complained did I get an apology for the 'obvious' omission. I then went through the charade of being interviewed for a vacancy that had obviously already been filled (the BBC has to advertise vacancies by law). From my experience, it was not about recruiting the most competent person for the job. The Bosnian brief was just a drop in the ocean for the BBC where a bunch of professionals dealing with 'difficult zones' are tenured before moving on. That consulting project would prove to be one among a series of failed initiatives when it came to Bosnia's broadcasting reform, as we shall see. If you have the misfortune of coming from a region that needs 'charity' or help from an 'international public fund' to get back on its feet, you realise that 'individual causes' are primarily addressed as generic (to which models are applied). If it doesn't work, there is no accountability. At the same time, the fact that it hasn't worked usually panders to those locally who favour the status quo. The one losing out is the local good guy, the one you wanted to help in the first place.

I finally succumbed to the idea of 'doing something' to counter to the mass-culture trend in the midst of discussions with various friends about a cultural lift, as things were getting worse. Retaliating against *Big Brother* propaganda with hip propaganda was my thinking. In true DIY style, I decided to film a TV series in London that would break all boundaries and thus open new horizons. With hindsight, it was a crazy idea but I did it anyway. It was called *VIZA* (a backstage pass, but also a pass to see the wider world). You might have thought that the TV networks would have jumped at the opportunity to show to their audiences a brand new project as well as sell it to advertisers. Think again. The story of

*VIZA* is that of hip's struggle. It is a prime example of how challenging the status quo, particularly if it hits right where it needs to, involves overcoming many barriers. It also goes some way to proving that innovation (a counter-trend to the homogenising, lowest-common-denominator drive) is the only way forward for diversity, not just in Bosnia but anywhere else in the world.

*VIZA: the 'Exclusive' TV Programme that No One Wanted*

*VIZA* should have been dumb-proof. It was anything but. I can shed light on some sabotage, while other factors that acted against it will forever remain perplexing. The only explanation here is the local Bosnian saying: 'Where Bosnia starts, that's where all logic ends.' For starters, I had all the right contacts locally that would ensure *VIZA's* placement (local production company to offer the product, local agency to attach revenue and TV network to host it and adequately promote it). The product should have been gold to the local market. There was nothing like it. In any case, I didn't care about the money. The main thing was to offer an alternative for audiences.

I had one condition, but it was not set in stone: my preferred TV network was BHT, which is where my former head of programming at TV Sa3, Haris Kulenović, and the production director, Ivan Stojanović, still worked. Under the post-war partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, public service broadcasting was divided into three feeds: BHT is the state TV channel that covers the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the two other TV channels are FTV for Federacija, which is one part of Bosnia, and RTRS, the channel for Republika Srpska, a post-conflict entity created for Bosnian Serbs (very contentious issues still, but beyond the scope of this book). Any viewer in Bosnia and Herzegovina has access to all these terrestrial channels. With cable, the whole of *Regija* can watch each other's TV channels, including a number of commercial channels (TV Pink, Hayat and OBN being the main ones in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

*VIZA* was to be a six-part series based around an interview format. Its USP was that it was a local production with international scope. Always a winning formula, getting the balance between local and global right is what had made MTV so successful. The idea was to mobilise A-list stars and brands with a bit of top-notch Hoxtonite stuff to be ahead of trends, but to clearly gear the interviews towards *Regija*. The crew was also international – and therefore 'Western' – but again, working for a local programme. For the most part, the crew generously...