THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AMONG
THE YOUTH OF TRANSITION-ERA SLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT

Since the fall of communism in the former Soviet Bloc, significant social and cultural changes have occurred, as western culture has grown particularly dominant. The present socio-political situation in Slovakia and the various ways that young people use popular music in the process of negotiating their identities is the focus of my work. As elsewhere in the world, young people in Slovakia are defining their identities, most often employing music, film, and fashion. For the youth, the experience of adjusting to the unstable and capricious Slovak society of today sharply contrasts the adolescent experiences of their elders. Fundamental to the thesis are the political and sociological theories of generations and generational units. The work suggests that the level of exposure to the communist and/or traditional ways of life significantly affects the individual’s knowledge of, and preferences for, certain types of music.

Supported by pertinent research and exemplified through my field research in Bratislava, as well as with a group of young people in the rural eastern county of Spis, my work explores the once relatively strong sense of Slovak ethnic identity in relation to the omnipresent effects of globalization. Through the experiences of young people and their relation to the traditional,
communist, and present day capitalist cultures that define their country, music's central role in the construction of both the individual as well as group identities is examined.

Currently Slovakia is in a period of transition and the social, political, and cultural destination of the country cannot be known. This work offers a glimpse at the relationship between youth culture and the sense of national or ethnic identity through the lens of music, allowing for a closer examination of Slovakia's difficulties with the cultural effects of the globalization process.
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Music
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In July of 2002, I arrived in Bratislava for the second time in my life to study Slovak language, culture, and music, this time with a fieldwork grant from The Ohio State University. During the months of August and September I spent considerable time with a group of young people in Spis County, observing their musical preferences and social interactions. Spis is a region in Slovakia’s east that stretches to the Polish border in the Tatra Mountains. Tiny villages and cities of moderate size dot the foothills and forests of the rural region. For centuries, Spis was at a crossroads along the trade routes from north to south and east to west. The Germans, Hungarians, and Polish have all had stakes in Spis and in many respects the county’s history is representative of Slovakia’s tumultuous past.

It is my intention in this work to explore the current youth culture and their use of music in the construction of their personal identities within the context of the unique Slovak society and the difficulties present therein. How these choices
and trends may possibly impact the future of Slovakia economically and politically is hypothesized as well. My research is based on observations made and information gathered in Slovakia in the summer of 2001, and the three months I spent there between July and September of 2002. My fieldwork was done specifically in the capital of Bratislava and in Spis, with the most extensive work done in Spis. My thesis is therefore most exclusively based on the current socio-cultural dynamics in Spis; the processes discussed here are not necessarily characteristic of the multi-ethnic Slovak society at large.

Slovakia has always been an interest of mine. It is a country in the center of Europe that few have ever heard of and it is the country of my mother's family. I had grown up in family with Slovak values, language, and sense of identity. This sense of identity had been something that my elders had always been fully aware of; they knew what was "theirs," what was "the tradition" and what was, "the custom." Most notably, their relation to other ethnic groups seemed to be defined by their Slovak identity and fervent Catholicism. The sense of identity and customs that they had brought to America, first in the 1930s and later after communism in the 1990s, remained strong. Much of what I had observed and experienced there in Slovakia was indeed quite familiar to me.

The way my elders had lived and the values to which they adhered could almost be referred to as a code, and it was this code that I hoped to unravel in Slovakia. I was fully aware of Slovak history as the history of a colonized,
dominated, and trampled over people. This is the understandable reason for the Slovaks’ often-tenacious hold on their culture and customs. The same fire that fueled the inter-ethnic conflicts in the Balkans existed in Slovakia, but fortunately its recent political break with the Czechs had been amicable.

The Slovak people have been bound together under the rule of others for centuries and clung to what was theirs in order to maintain a sense of identity and survive countless attempts of assimilation into other cultures. In 1993 Slovaks found themselves within their own borders, under the Slovak flag, and looking to the capital of Bratislava for leadership, not Prague, Budapest, Moscow, or Vienna. The Slovak nation had finally been created and with the Western democratic powers in its corner, nothing foreseeable could take it away from the Slovak people. The question that I had sought out upon arrival was what happens to a people who have been relatively certain of their national and ethnic identity for a millennium when the necessity is suddenly gone?

Woodward points out that the issue of identity is in essence the issue of an identity in crisis. When identity must be discussed, questioned, and reconfigured, this process occurs at a point when one’s relation to others and to one’s self must be re-analyzed.¹ Societies in transition, chaos, wartime, and reconstruction have also been another fascination of mine and historically Slovak society is of course one that could be considered as such. First under Hungarian domination for centuries, then marched over and split up during the wars,

Slovakia spent most of the twentieth century as the last frontier of the communist East, peering over the Danube at Vienna. Fortunately Slovakia’s independence came easily in 1993, but its construction of a new capitalist society has been difficult at least.

Marred by corruption, mafia infestation, unemployment, and disillusionment, the transition to democracy has not been as smooth as the Slovak people would have liked. An uneasy renegotiation of the Slovak identity has been underway in recent years, as there has been a rapid drive towards the twenty-first century, the new Europe, and the “West.” In this work, the terms “West” and “East” appear in quotation marks, as there is no clear cultural or geographical boundary between the two. The nomenclatures are used here as perceived by many in Slovakia who must negotiate between the two centers of cultural and political orientations.

The flashy signs are now everywhere in Slovakia’s cities. MTV, McDonald’s, and Coca-Cola are certainly aware of the country that no one has ever heard of. The Slovak people are behind their neighbors in almost every way and have never been exposed to this way of life. How the Slovaks negotiate the identity that they had once been so sure of and that has sustained them for 1000 years, and emerge in the new Europe will be telling of how the globalization process affects the identity of a society that’s ethnic identity had once been remarkably strong.
In terms of the Slovak peoples’ interactions with cultural traditions, two types of lifestyle ostensibly exist in Spis and Slovakia today; those people who adhere to traditional life found mostly in the villages, and those who have lived the majority of their lives under the auspices of the communist regime. Regardless of lifestyle, it is rather difficult for the Slovaks accustomed to the old ways to acclimate to democracy and capitalism. Of course these older generations have and will continue to adjust to the new way of life, but the nebulous future of Slovak society and politics will generally be dependent on the decisions that the youth make today regarding political and cultural alignment.

In Slovakia and indeed Spis, those who have been born within the past eighteen years or so have the unique privilege (or disadvantage) of simultaneously constructing their personal identities, as well as the one that the international community of the future may acknowledge as Slovak culture. Of course most young people do not realize this explicitly, but do understand that what they choose to be associated with and appropriate as their own will effect the future of their people in some way. Identity and its construction is a process and there is no one specific ethnic, cultural, or individual “destination” that can be reached. The tendencies observable today may point to the identity processes and opportunities for those in the Slovakia of the future.

The development of Slovakia’s culture is one matter, but the socio-political structures and international relations that will develop and dominate in Slovakia are in many respects more important in having a substantial impact on what the
people and the culture will have significant contact with. The factors of culture and politics are reciprocal in this case and in many others in the past. Like in adolescence, the identities that are often constructed with music, film, art, and fashion impacts the future identities of the individual and the same can be said for the society in general. As individuals we have many facets to our personality and display these differently under certain circumstances, and the same can be said for a small society such as Slovakia's. What kind of identity the young Slovak people choose to construct today may affect politics and society more than they are able to predict.

This work primarily deals with music's role in the exceptional and intriguing situation that many transition societies in Eastern Europe have found themselves experiencing. My work specifically corresponds to the Slovak Republic and its unique historical and cultural dynamic, particularly through my experiences in Spis County. The process of music selection and interpretation both individually and within broader social trends is examined. Individual case examples illuminate the multifarious relationships that exist between generational units and across the conventional generations.

My fieldwork experience is supported in this work by sources from various fields, including the history and political sciences of Slovakia and Eastern Europe, as well as adolescent and educational psychology, sociological and generational studies, and works on popular culture. The theories that I apply to the construction of identity with music and music's role in youth culture come
from various fields outside of ethnomusicology. The issue of music and identity in ethnomusicology generally discusses the construction of a national or ethnic identity and concerns itself with the “performance” of identity, such as in Clayton, Herbert, and Middleton’s *The Cultural Study of Music: a Critical Introduction*.^2^ Musicological sources also deal with a national identity as found (or not found) in, for example, Chopin’s compositions as discussed in the work of Zdzislaw Mach.\(^3\) This also does not directly relate to my study. Therefore, works outside of ethnomusicology and musicology support the main framework of my thesis. Nevertheless, the work that I have undertaken is in fact ethnomusicological and does relate to music and national identity. It is, however, the process of personal identity construction that may impact the future national identity that I discuss.

Due to my personal “share” in the culture of Spis and Slovakia, the methodology employed throughout the research is grounded in ethnomusicological works that deal primarily with notions of insider/outsider research. Rice, Barz, Cooley, Manganaro, and Kubik are the primary researchers whose methodological works are the foundation of the thesis.\(^4\) Understanding that the field and discourse is fluid and contingent, a balance between “insider” and “outsider” perspectives, as well as ontology and epistemology, is considered in the thesis in order to present the most insightful

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^4^ For other pertinent methodological works and current writings on the insider/outsider issue, see the bibliographic entries of Chou, Hartel, Herndon, Lortat-Jacob, Merriam, Pian, Pratt, and Titon.
observations and ideas. Fundamental to the field of ethnomusicology is the notion of music within the context of culture. This concept is central to this work, since much of the music discussed is not particularly divergent from western classical and popular forms. The music, however, does take on new meaning, as it maintains a different, yet dynamic role in the culture of Slovakia and Spis.
CHAPTER 2

Slovakia and the Historical Framework for the Thesis

Slovakia is a central European nation with a population of 5.4 million people, 9.7% of which are Hungarian, 8% Czech, with smaller minorities of Germans, Moravians, Ukrainians, Silesians, and Ruthenians. Approximately 500,000 Roma live in Slovakia, particularly in the east of the country. The remaining majority of the country is Slovaks, a Slavic people who speak a Western Slavonic language that have lived between the Danube River and Carpathian Tatra mountains since between the sixth and eighth centuries CE.5

Originally a loose confederation of Slavic tribes tied historically to the Slovenes, the tiny population of Slovaks have found themselves part of many empires (often splitting them amongst several ruling forces) throughout their history. The ancient Great Moravian Empire and Poland-Lithuania were the

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earliest states to incorporate Slovaks, but the most important and long lasting was the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which Slovakia (referred to as Upper Hungary) was under Hungarian rule for the majority of its existence.\textsuperscript{6}

The Hungarian authorities attempted assimilation or “Magyarization” over the centuries, but the obstinate Slovaks had successfully resisted. The Slovaks, due to a tenacious adherence to their language, Slavic traditions and customs, and music had defied the Magyarization efforts. Though some Hungarian vocabulary and music (including the traditional Czardas) has been incorporated into Slovak culture, the Slovak people emerged in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century generally intact.\textsuperscript{7}

After their release from Hungarian rule following World War I, the Slovaks then became part of the new Slavic state of Czechoslovakia, (though achieving a brief period of independence during World War II). Originally intended to be a state run equally by both Czechs and Slovaks, it soon became apparent that the Slovaks were to be the junior partner in the Czechoslovak agreement. The Czechs, who had been culturally “Germanicized” by centuries of affiliation with Austria and Bavaria, eventually kept much of the advanced labor and technology to themselves, leaving the Slovaks with an economy based in agriculture and heavy industry. Again, the Slovaks professed their ethnicity with the cultural devices that had helped them survive the Hungarian domination.

\textsuperscript{6} Kirschbaum, \textit{History of Slovakia}, 23, 61.
\textsuperscript{7} Kirschbaum, \textit{History of Slovakia}, 84.
Czechoslovakia was a relatively prosperous country before the Soviet occupation; Czechs and Slovaks enjoyed a standard of living comparable to that of the Scandinavians, which of course did not continue under Soviet rule. Throughout the communist era, folk culture had been promoted throughout Slovakia, but generally Soviet funding remained in the Czech lands and most communists supported a new Czechoslovak identity as opposed to the separate Bohemian, Moravian, Slovak, Hungarian, and Ruthenian identities that officially made up the country.

At the time of the communist collapse, the Slovaks entertained the idea of maintaining the Czechoslovak state. For the most part Czechoslovakia had worked, Slavic brethren had shared the land and there was relatively little animosity between the two groups (especially as compared to the Yugoslav situation). But, the desire for autonomy, politically as well as culturally, was something that the Slovak people had wanted for the length of their existence. Czechoslovakia could have remained and may have worked better in many respects than Slovak independence, but recognition and self-determination was something for which the Slovaks had waited and overwhelmingly supported.⁸

Today the political situation in Slovakia is gaining stability, but has nevertheless been rather turbulent since independence in 1993. After falling behind its neighbors due to the crippling and corrupted administration of Vladimir

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Meciar, Slovakia is beginning to catch up and in May 2003, was the fifth new country (after Slovenia, Malta, Hungary, and Lithuania) to vote to join the European Union.

Though the future may seem brighter, problems nevertheless persist. The national government has been replaced at every election and many political parties vie for control, making the victors representative of a small percentage of the already tiny population. A sense of nostalgia exists amongst many for the stability and socialist promises of the communist era, while most push on towards a democratic and capitalist society.

The communists of the previous era did not simply disappear; many of them are still in positions of power (with no thanks to Meciar). STV's (Slovak Television) broadcasts had been marked by strongly conservative propaganda. Now the foreign owned station Markiza has emerged in replacement and grown immensely popular.⁹ A conservative tone motivated by communist nostalgia, as well as general public confusion exists in Slovakia, an atmosphere that is at least unique in which to come of age.

In Slovakia, most initially equated democracy with capitalism and felt if one fails; the other must have also failed. A 1993 poll shows that 67% of Slovaks emphasized the economic features of democracy rather than the political.¹⁰

Playing a central role in this economic and political transition are the powers of

the "West," primarily Germany, Austria, the US, and the UK. Alongside this political and economic transition, one can assume that a significant socio-cultural transformation has occurred throughout the past decade as well.

Slovakia is now at an important moment and turning point of their existence. The "West" that was once an enemy, exotic, and eventually a "shocking" cultural phenomenon is now playing an entirely new role. The identity that the "West" has constructed for itself in Eastern Europe represents different things to different people in the region. Some vehemently oppose it, some embrace it, and some are confused by it. To embrace the "West" means economic and technological development, money, and a standard of living comparable to that of their neighbors, while rejection will result in a nebulous future at best. What is occurring now is like an adolescence of Slovak society. The people, both individually and as a country, must now discover themselves and their Slovak identity within the new Europe and in relation to the "West," their Slavic brethren, and their former rulers in Russia and Hungary.

The present state of affairs has tremendous implications for the youth of this society, especially for those who have lived most of their lives in the new Slovakia. While young people worldwide discover themselves and construct their identities, making decisions and choosing from the numerous components of society and culture available to them, the process for Slovak youth, particularly in regards to the relationships with their elders, is unique.
An enormous pressure is being placed on the youth of Slovakia, as they are sociologically marked as agents of change. Young people in Slovakia are the strongest proponents of democracy and capitalism and the greatest potential beneficiaries, as well as most common victims. Nevertheless, the younger the individual, the less is remembered of the social programs and guaranteed employment of the communist era and the more willing they are to enterprise and invest in their future. The “new reality” which the young Slovaks are experiencing has rapidly affected every facet of Slovak society, including the traditional role of music.

Traditional music in Slovakia blends ancient Slavic musical practices with western art music influence and has most recently and extensively been chronicled by the Slovak ethnomusicologists Alica Elschekova and Oskar Elschek. The instrumental music is most often is based on vocal forms and the rhythmic nature of the language is central to the rhythmic and phrasing irregularities of the music. Solo performances by the two-meter fujara (shepherd’s duct flute) are interrupted by vocals intended to imitate the pristine sound of the instrument. An often “meter-less” parlando rubato section introduces pieces that commonly fuse duple and triple meter and rapidly shift between time signatures and tempo. Approximately 80% of the music is intended for dances that are most often accompanied by song. Song and dance genres include the Cardas and Karicka that are highlighted by whistles, shouts.

boot slapping, and foot stamping. Instrument ensembles are typically small and include strings, zither, and clarinet. Near to the Hungarian border, zither bands are common while Goral dancing is found in the mountains bordering Poland.¹²

Like elsewhere, music has existed in Slovakia to distinguish ethnic identity, perpetuate tradition, pledge allegiance, and bind the community. The omnipresent capitalist culture and the coinciding reorientation of values present new phenomena, reshaping the role of music in Slovakia today. The variety of music and ideas that come into Slovakia are picked apart and carefully selected by the young people in order to construct an individual identity, rather than by default declaring ones subservience to the rest of Soviet society. This is where the complication arises as the choices and preferences of those closer to the elder generation and their way of life conflict with those of the youth culture.

Machacek points out, "as in all transitory periods, this one contains a dynamic mixture of fragments of the old and the new reality, of the world of the future and the world of the past. It is an intrinsically contradictory, contentious mix."¹³

The tiny population of Slovak people has existed in the geographic center of Europe for more than a millennium and for better or worse, that location has had a resounding effect on their history, tenacious disposition, and strong sense of ethnic identity. Finally after centuries of merely surviving their location, the Slovak people have emerged and the growing pains of nation building are being

felt. The ethnicity that the Slovaks were sure of while oppressed may not be the
identity that perpetuates their survival. As a people, they will have to reach within
themselves and form a new identity that serves them better in the new Europe.
The Slovaks have always clung to music as an emotional outlet and social
function. How it will now play a new and vital role in the shaping of Slovak
society and culture in the 21st century is what I discuss and illuminate in this
work.
CHAPTER 3

Political and Social Factors Contributing to the Formation of "Slovak" Identity

Three socio-cultural eras, in my assessment, ostensibly contribute to the present processes of identity construction for the Slovak people. Throughout my travels, as well as supported through research, I have observed both physically and socially these three elements. The first is the historical era and the coinciding "traditional" or "ethnic" identity associated with Slovakia, second is the culture of the communist era, and third is the culture of the transition era of the past thirteen years. The following section expounds the effects of these factors in relation to the construction of identity for the individual, as well as the society.

As stated in my introduction, Woodward points out that the study of identity is in fact the study of an identity crisis and the work often refers to the post-Soviet "East" as examples of these crises. It is at times of great personal growth, change, or movement that the sense of identity emerges and is evaluated.\(^1\) The first time we become aware of this in our lives is during

adolescence when our bodies, minds, social processes, and gender roles first drastically change, becoming our first points of self-reflection. Parallel to this, after times of great socio-political upheaval and the transformation of economic and international structures, the members of the society must also reassess and redefine themselves to the regional and international community, as well as inwardly for themselves.

Woodward also discusses the complexity of modern society and the global community, bringing forth the concept of “dislocation.” In the past, a core center existed for many societies, (and indeed Soviet society with a foundation of communism to reference at least politically), whereas today several such “cores of reference” exist, often in far off and culturally rather different places. The “West” and European Union (as well as the Slovaks themselves) are pushing for a pan-European community, or at least market. This process of globalization extends the sources of reference for identity constructing, consequently straining the Slovak cultural center. This is particularly relevant to the youth, who invest the most time in social and identity construction activities, reaching more frequently out of Slovakia for a sense of self and place.

In my own discussions with a Slovak recording artist, Sui Vesel, who has achieved a notable degree of success in Europe, she told me that unfortunately no folklore or traditional Slovak music is being taught at present in the Bratislava schools. The music that is taught is generally from the classical European

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tradition. She also noted that regrettably her fourteen year old daughter knows nothing [explictly] of the Slovak "ethnicity" or "cultural identity," as she spends her days listening to pop radio and watching MTV and VIVA with her friends.\textsuperscript{16}

The sensitive issue of ethnicity is the first of the three main elements that I perceive as fundamental to the changing Slovak national identity. As I have mentioned in the introduction, the Slovak people were initially a collection of Slavic tribes that settled in the hills and river valleys south of the Tatra Mountains and north of the Danube. Still today, regional dialects differ rather greatly and there was temporary uncertainty as to which dialect to standardize as "official Slovak" in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. (It is the central dialect as chosen by Anton Bernolak).

The Slovaks historically are Slavic people and their traditions, ancient calendric and life cycle rituals, language, and cultural traits show certain similarities to other Slavic peoples. How to distinguish the Slovak culture from the cultures of other Slavic peoples, I believe lies in the relationship of the Slovaks to the other ethnic groups that border them. The Slovak population is tiny and sparse over their fantastic landscape. Woodward states that it is initially our physical body that begins to define who we are.\textsuperscript{17} This theory can be related to Slovak identity in connection to the physical nature, or at least location, of their country.

\textsuperscript{16} Sui Vesn, interview by author, mini-disc recording, Bratislava, 9 September 2002.
\textsuperscript{17} Woodward, "Concepts," 3.
The first chapter of *Identity and Difference* by Katherine Woodward discusses the notion of the identity construction process based essentially on what the individual or social entity is not, as a process of elimination of sorts.\(^{18}\) This process has typically not been difficult for the Slovak people in the past. They were not the Magyars that had ruled them and they were certainly not Germans or Austrians. Cultural similarities exist between the Slovaks and Czechs, and were accepted, but the differences always highlighted. Mountains and forests separated the Slovaks from their other Slavic neighbors, the Poles and Ukrainians, but similarities were again understood.

Though Slovakia and Hungary are not the most amicable of neighbors, their histories are nevertheless intertwined with one another and this is evident throughout Slovak society. Non-speakers typically perceive Slavic languages and their pronunciation as rather thick. Many native speakers of other Slavic languages have noted the Slovak language’s divergence, as its pronunciation and rhythm is often reminiscent of Finno-Ugric Hungarian. This can generally be attributed to the Hungarian domination and its linguistic and cultural influence. The influence of Hungarian traditional music, costume, food, and architecture can also be detected throughout Slovakia. Kosice’s nickname, *Bozmak City*, is a derogatory reference, in Hungarian, to the number of Hungarians and their influence that exists in Slovakia’s second largest city.

The mountainous region of southern Poland and northern Slovakia share many similar traditions, notably in music and dance. Other similarities can be noted on the Czech and Ukrainian borders. Nearer to Ukraine, the language becomes increasingly eastern Slavic and the architecture more Byzantine, as the practice of Ruthenian-rite Byzantine Catholicism becomes more common than Roman.\textsuperscript{19} The concept of "ethnic blurring" is of course not unique to the Slovak Republic; this is often the case in many countries, including the various regions and borders of the US.

The Slovak people have maintained a unifying sense of ethnic identity while being surrounded by exceptionally powerful neighbors throughout their history. The Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled most of central Europe for centuries and Bratislava sat between Budapest and Vienna, often serving as an interim capital. Czech ties to German lands and the Great Moravian Empire can also be noted, as can their economic and political dominance throughout the Czechoslovak state and today. Poland and particularly the Poland-Lithuanian Empire controlled much of Eastern Europe, parts of Slovakia included. Today Poland is the self-proclaimed new leader in Eastern Europe with increasingly strong ties to Washington and London. Finally, Ukraine and the various Russian Empires over the centuries, at times seated in Kiev, sat directly to the east of Slovakia. Despite being dominated and split up amongst five neighbors with

\textsuperscript{19} Byzantine Catholicism is divided into four rites: Greek, Melakite (Arab), Ukrainian, and Ruthenian. Liturgical practices are comparable to those of the Eastern Orthodox Church, yet Byzantine Catholics acknowledge the Pope and Rome as the head of their denomination. This religious boundary contributes to Slovakia's prominent position on the nebulous "border" between Eastern and Western Europe.
varying degrees of power throughout their entire existence, the Slovak people maintained a relatively coherent sense of identity that has perpetuated them as a people through to the present day.

I will not delve into the specifics of Slovak traditional life and customs that they believe define them as a people, this is not the intent of the work. It is, however, important to stress a sense of identity, perceived in a variety of ways by the Slovak people and by their neighbors who have shared regional history with the Slovaks and have recently developed political and economic interests in Slovakia. The traditional ethnic identity that separated the Slovaks from their powerful neighbors, and perpetuated them as a socially constructed group, has resulted in a tremendous sense of pride. This sense of ethnic identity, distinct from those around them, is the first main element contributing to the evolving Slovak identity today and, as I have described, it is an identity forged in defiance and survival rather than free artistic expression and cultural exploration.

Todorova defines ethnicity as what is "used as one side of self-determination and self-designation of a person. Commitment, ideology, or faith (often secular), based on a sense of (most often invented) kinship and common historical experience and, as a rule, a community of language, religion, and customs" is the essence of ethnicity.20 This "often invented kinship" can only exist when "explicitly stated in a conscious act of self-definition."21 Succinctly, the Other

21 Todorova, "Ethnicity," 90.
cannot assign ethnicity to a group unless a member, or members, of the in-group acknowledge and self-apply at least some of the identifying features of the particular "ethnicity."

Though historically credited as a "primordial" relationship amongst people in a sense of extended kinship employed for the survival of man, Todorova explains that ethnicity is clearly a product of modernity that is tied, in European history at least, to the rise of nationalism.\textsuperscript{22} Nationalism however is a product of the nation state and the demarcation of national boundaries wherein ethnic lines became useful. In this sense, Slovakia is for the first time in recent history experiencing an explicit dialogue of national and ethnic identities. In the past this had been tacit, particularly under communism where such discourse was suppressed or deemed useless in that the only Other worth delineating from was the capitalist "West."

Today Slovaks struggle with a misunderstanding of the "West" and the "West's" misunderstanding of them. Slovak people have feared the changing of their borders and have experienced apprehension with whom they should align. These are all problems of identity and a sense of place that Slovakia's neighbors have better managed due to a lasting sense of internationally recognized national identity that the Slovaks must now define several hundred years later than everyone else.

\textsuperscript{22} Todorova, "Ethnicity," 95.
Goldman details the relationships that have developed over the last decade between Slovakia and the powerful bedfellows with which they have had to cooperate including Russia, the "West," Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Romania. The 1990s saw a Slovak government led by former communists with allegiances to Moscow. Though Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic had immediately and actively sought out NATO and EU membership, Slovakia toyed with the ideas of neutrality and allegiance to Russia and the former Eastern Bloc. Moscow cautiously encouraged this line of thought. Once again however, Slovakia's location eventually became too powerful to overcome. Surrounded by countries with close(r) ties to the "West," the US and Brussels took a vested interest in Slovakia's incorporation into NATO and the EU. Slovakia's geographical location was too important to all parties involved to be ignored. Russia of course could not promise the economic stability that the "West" could, and this pushed Slovakia in that direction.23

Economically the "West" had won Slovakia's commitment, but many Slovaks felt distrustful of western behavior that they equated to the condescending, arrogant "Czech behavior" they had become familiar with over the seventy-five year Czech-Slovak relationship. Constantly being pressured by Brussels and Washington to treat their minorities better and to work harder at democratization, many Slovaks felt misunderstood and looked down upon by the international community. It is here perhaps that the national identity crisis in its

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relation to others first emerges. Many Slovaks felt misunderstood primarily because the minorities in their country were "a potential threat to Slovak cultural identity" and recently achieved borders did not feel necessarily secure or at least ensured.  

Since the separation of Czechoslovakia and the deterioration of the Warsaw Pact, Hungary has become quite interested in its countrymen stranded in Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, and the former Yugoslavia. It is here the Slovaks became increasingly paranoid about their borders and threatened cultural identity. Bratislava became quite viscous towards Budapest, who the Slovak government believed was still considering re-annexing part of Slovakia as Upper-Hungary. From this point the Slovaks developed a friendly relationship with Romania out of a shared sense of paranoia, but this relationship quickly dissolved due to their mutual interests in the joining the western community. Yugoslav states, however, were not interested in this Slovak-Romanian alliance due to their internal problems and civil war.

Polish-Slovak relations have been generally amicable and have grown more so over the past decade. It was partly Poland's encouragement that swayed Slovak considerations of neutrality and Russian allegiance. Austria has been relatively kind to Slovakia, partly out of a public relations interest to portray an image of "doing their part" in terms of reaching out towards the "East." Also,

24 Goldman, Slovakia since Independence, 179.
25 Recent laws passed in Budapest granting special rights to Hungarians abroad have caused great controversy in the region and has generally been favored by the Hungarian public. Many Hungarians demonstrated in support of their countrymen stranded in the annexed counties.
26 Goldman, Slovakia since Independence, 186-218.
investment in Slovakia helps strengthen Austrian resistance to German economic domination. Relations with the Czech Republic are also good. Though difficulties were experienced regarding the intricacies of essentially splitting up a nation, Czech-Slovak relations have been friendly and fruitful and animosities have generally assuaged.27

As Goldman has pointed out, the Slovak people's slow development has been fueled by "hypersensitivity towards outsider perception of them."28 Feeling alone and misunderstood in its region and in the international community, it took Slovakia some time to catch up to its neighbors, primarily because of the leadership of the conservative, nationalist, ex-Communist Vladimir Meciar who awarded top positions to communist friends and family and exerted an undemocratic control over the media. It was during Meciar's term that while exploring its options, the Slovak government made an official recognition of Slovakia's historical (either political or ethnic) ties to Russia. The Slovak people, however, believe that they belong culturally and historically to the "West."29

Slovakia's historical roots may be similar to some of its neighbors and its past may be intertwined with others, but its situation is unique and the Slovak people essentially define themselves by what they are not. Since independence Slovakia has looked over its shoulders in mistrust at all sides, nervously considering the intentions of their neighbors. The international community has

27 Ibid.
28 Goldman, Slovakia since Independence, 159.
29 Goldman, Slovakia since Independence, 153-185.
now assured the cultural identity and borders the Slovaks want to protect and Slovakia’s acceptance into the European Union has now allowed them to breathe freely and explore their culture and re-evaluate their heritage as a luxury, not a necessity.

The Soviet regime that controlled Slovakia for the forty-five years between World War II and the fall of communism in the early 1990s is the second element contributing to the identity construction process of the Slovak people. In 1994 Millar and Wolchik examined the social effects of the communist era on the populations of Central and Eastern Europe. What Millar and Wolchik found could be described succinctly as confusion and contradiction. Incredible levels of naiveté existed in the region in regards to democracy and capitalism, as did an overwhelming desire of the people to have their societal cake and eat it too.

In the early 1990s the people of the former communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe overwhelmingly supported democracy (their perception of it at least), with a few stipulations. Guaranteed employment, health care, and housing were felt to be the responsibility of the state. The desire for state ownership and control of much enterprise and industry existed as well, but people felt that they should be able to own small businesses and farms and have the opportunity to make as much money as they wanted. Seventy-seven percent of people wanted to be able to make as much money as possible, but also wanted guaranteed work. Surveys revealed to the contrary that though people
should be able to make as much as they wanted, many were wary of private enterprise and individuals making excessive amounts of money at the suffering of others, not with the community's best interests in mind. Though state control of many aspects of society was desired, a great deal of mistrust for the competency and honesty of public officials and institutions persisted, but also a personal disinterest in public involvement in government existed as well.  

Polls also showed discrimination in moral and illegal activities. Those activities that generated profit and hurt others were perceived as wrong, while those such as bribery and nepotism that allowed people to obtain needed goods were deemed acceptable. No victims ostensibly existed and these were the necessary evils of working the system that was required of Soviet society citizens.

To the American capitalist, these opinions are almost absurd, as the Slovak, and formerly Soviet, public's notion of democracy and capitalism was, and in many cases still is, greatly skewed. Contrary to popular belief in the "West," however, it was not necessarily the "East's" quality of life that was the driving force for reform throughout the 1980s; rather it was the lack of availability of necessary goods in the system's command economy. The people enjoyed the guarantee of jobs and social services, but the desire for more opportunity and cheap available goods eventually became overwhelming.

31 Ibid.
Towards the end of communism, national and ethnic disputes began to emerge. Millar and Wolchik state that the “ethnic and national affiliations represent the most powerful self-sustaining forces driving political activity today in many countries of the region.”\textsuperscript{32} By the end of the 1980s, Czechs and Slovaks maintained an amicable relationship both politically and personally, but ethnically had grown rather distasteful of one another. Polish and Czech opinions were generally comparable on issues of political and economic development, while Slovaks and Romanians expressed similar interests in a greater degree of state control.\textsuperscript{33}

Ethnic differences of political opinion fueled the split of many communist nations in Eastern and Central Europe, most notably in the Balkans. Todorova offers a rather plausible theoretical explanation in that the small countries of the Soviet Bloc never felt themselves culturally inferior to Russia, and in fact recognized themselves as ethnically distinct. Soviet power, however, afforded them a slight sense of arrogance in that they were at least equal to western power. By the end of the 1980s the “East” was once again poor, colonized, and inferior to the “West.” The ethnic distinctions arose along with finger pointing and differences of opinion that were generally quelled throughout the communist era due essentially to futility.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34} Todorova, “Ethnicity,” 101-103.
As Millar and Wolchik point out, it is "the pre-communist values, Marxist teachings, and the survival techniques that grew out of a culture of permanent scarcity" that are the main contributors to the social legacy of communism in Eastern and Central Europe today.\textsuperscript{35} As I have shown through Millar and Wolchik’s work, naïveté and confusion are generous terms to describe the popular attitudes of the formerly Soviet peoples. It is evident that the general public had a long way to go to filter these misconceptions out of their social consciousness and create a realistic post-communist society. Millar and Wolchik do note that the young, primarily urban and educated, suffered less from these socialist debilitations, being far more realistic in their opinions and expectations for the future of their respective societies. As I will continue to highlight, youth’s role in the development of a new political and economic structure, as well as ethnic and cultural identities, is fundamental to the future of Slovakia.

The third and final element that contributes to the evolving Slovak identity is the capitalist injection of the post and "post-post" communist era that has been Slovak society for the past thirteen years. It is in this period that the "East" has been exposed to the material wealth and the cultural reality of the "West," and for those countries in closer proximity like Slovakia, it has become increasingly overpowering. The phrase, "reality of the ‘West’" is used because prior to

communism's end, the "West" was more or less a mysterious Other with only bits
and pieces of capitalist culture crossing over the iron curtain to be deciphered,
often rather peculiarly.

Sampson states that since communism's end, the "West" has been
essentially "demystified" and progressively reinterpreted by those in the "East."
Today the "West" is the dominant economic, political, and cultural force in the
region. Throughout the communist era and indeed closer to its demise, many
believed that anything western was good and representative of freedom. During
this most recent period, the "West's" true power has been confronted and its
demanding nature realized through EU requirements. For the first time the
"West" was truly rejectable for what it was rather than what it was thought to be.\(^{36}\)

During the communist era, one could reject the "West's" ideology and
materialism, but the basis for this rejection was often the product of the state's
rhetoric and most Soviet citizens did not in fact hate the "West," but their liking
was generally the result of fascination and illusion. Since the Soviet era, Eastern
European culture and identity has become "more substantive than under Soviet
rule."\(^{37}\) First, because the truth and the reality of both "East" and "West" have
become known, but also because "substantive" national identities are being
defined through the integration processes of democracy building and mafia


\(^{37}\) Steven Sampson, "Exporting Democracy," 152.
eradication. The integration process into Europe has helped bolster the already stable national identities of many of the eastern states, but for Slovakia it is the first time in at least fifty years that dialogue over national identity has occurred and with who to align has become an issue. What the countries of the “East” seek for their futures, and how they build their nations individually, rather than bound to Moscow and one another by the Warsaw Pact, will effectively substantiate their national identities and distinctiveness.

It is now sealed that Slovakia will join the EU as the people have made their decision to become a full part of Europe and the global market. However, during the years that the country was making the necessary changes at the inflexible demands of Brussels, their culture evolved concomitantly. The EU's requirements were strict, non-negotiable, and had to be executed in order to join Europe. As I have stated, the Slovaks initially struggled with these demands and severely lagged behind their neighbors in meeting them. Brussels forced the Slovak government to legitimately democratize, sanction free speech in the media, and treat their minorities well; all of which were difficult tasks for the Slovak government to execute and for many Slovak citizens to swallow. It was through these demands that public discourse first occurred regarding such topics and it was soon that “traditional” Slovak society began to change.

Sampson proposes three factors contributing to the process of identity construction emerging in the new Europe- Occidentalism, Orientalism, and pan-

38 Ibid.
Europeanization. There has been the desire to create a pan-European market and identity both politically and economically, and reinforced by the European Union, the concept of a (voluntarily) united Europe has grown strong for the first time in history. It is, however, when the details are scrutinized and conflict emerges in the discourse that Occidentalism and Orientalism manifest. As I have referenced above, identities can only exist when they are at least partially accepted by those who are being labeled as such.

Inferior, superior, wealthy, poor, and unsophisticated, are all terms ascribed to both sides by one another and in many instances the pan-European ideal is left aside. For example, although considered the “new Europe” with the process of assimilation underway, most easterners have a great deal of difficulty traveling to the “West,” while those of certain countries, regions, or ethnicities are placed in the same immigration category as those from third world nations. This results in what McBride calls a “double racism,” in that the westerners look down upon easterners as lesser, and the easterners look down upon those of third world nations as inferior, feeling that they are at least “as good” as the [Western] Europeans.

The low living standards of the “East” are constantly being reinforced by the western media which always advertises the “newest,” most desirable, youthful images and often have little regard for local traditions which are

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sometimes regarded as absurd artifacts. The “East” concedes that it lost the Cold War, but in the past ten years it has ultimately conceded to imitating the “victors,” as opposed to creating their own version of democracy (which most people of course did not have the necessary education or foundation to undertake in the early 1990s).\textsuperscript{41}

The process of at least imitating the victors has been particularly difficult for Slovakia. Throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the country has experienced three drastically different forms of government; the parliamentary democracy, its own version of fascism, and of course the various shapes of socialism, from Stalinism to the “real socialism” of the late 1960s. What is unique is that Slovakia became completely modernized under socialism without a market economy.\textsuperscript{42} Butora points out that this did not give birth to individualism, but rather produced a lack of creativity, initiative, and personal responsibility, because many Slovak people believed that progress, (which the elder generation felt that they had witnessed in their lifetimes), was possible without freedom or democracy. This has become an incredibly debilitating factor in Slovakia’s development.\textsuperscript{43}

The burden is therefore being placed disproportionately on Slovakia’s youth who, regardless of the hardships experienced, are still adamant supporters of democracy. Many voters are young and for the most part vote liberally, helping to eventually oust Meciar in 1998, who still receives much support from

\textsuperscript{41} William L. McBride, \textit{Philosophical Reflections}, 92-93.
\textsuperscript{42} Martin Butora, “Democracy in Slovakia,” 94-95.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
those in need of socialist promises and nationalist rhetoric. Under communism, the youth were considered the “bright future” of the socialist ideal and were treated accordingly to win their allegiance. The communist mandated youth programs and special treatment are now gone and the youth today, unlike their elders, do not have to adhere to a “social plan” and may focus on “personal development” and “self-realization.” Prior to 1993, for most young people it was important to have an interesting job, whereas today it is steady employment with a good salary.44 The shift towards capitalism can be detected. Since more of the youth are unemployed due to the lack of new jobs and the older generation’s tenure of positions, more young people are willing to try business activity, placing them at the epicenter of Slovak capitalism.

A new sense of citizenship has developed as well amongst the youth. While the last generation was expected to be subservient and western-like individualism was not an option, the younger generation now has the opportunity for self-determination. The organizations to which the older generations had once belonged are non-existent and irrelevant in the new Slovakia. Today, youth organizations exist and are watched closely by the EU for progress, though the sense of organization has popularly shifted to the social sphere, comprised of what could best be described as “scenes.”45 Today the youth can freely float from clique to clique; exploring whichever social, political, ideological, or musical identity they choose.

In 1997, Romanian president Constantinescu stated that the former Soviet Bloc was in the period of "post-transition, because people are now preoccupied with the future, not the past." Made on observations of the economic and political developments in the region, the statement in essence officially declared the past bygone, as the new era was at hand. With the influx of youth into Eastern European society and the European market, the young people that have not experienced socialist promises, and have only known free discussion of politics and economic plans, are simultaneously constructing their own identities, within the new "substantive reality" attributed to the post-communist era, as they reshape their country.

The following section discusses the multiple cultural sources accessible to the Slovak youth. Slovakia's central location and multi-ethnic society allows the people to be relatively queued in to the popular European political and cultural trends, as well as a consciously shared European heritage. The various sources of reference are negotiated and subscribed to by Slovaks and the often problematic and confusing nature of this process should prove evident.

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46 Steven Sampson, “Exporting Democracy,”, 155.
CHAPTER 4

Sources of Reference for the Construction of Identity

As referenced in Chapter 3, Woodward's concept of "dislocation" can be applied to the various difficulties experienced in the forging of a new Slovak identity and cultural heritage. For the youth of today, multiple sources of reference exist politically, socially, and culturally. Those that are presently being most adhered to and re-appropriated are hints at what may be the future dominant trends and social processes of Slovak culture.

The first source of identity is of course the one from within, the one that is Slovak tradition and heritage. This is the inexorable source and the intricacies of its historical and inter-communal ties will only be fused with newly formed or foreign cultural elements. "Slovakness" or the notion of being Slovak, while at times publicly, or even personally implicit, is nevertheless the foundation of the Slovak identity, while other cultural attachments could be considered the luxuries of self-determination in a free society. This concept of Slovakia in and of itself as
a foundation of identity and reality to reference is important, because for most Slovaks, the particulars of their cultural personality are explicitly tacit; there are those that distort them at the expense of others.

I refer to the nationalist or skinhead movement that has disturbingly taken root in much of Europe, and though this group does reference sources outside of its national heritage, they are an example of the bastardized side of ethnic awareness. This work is not intended to expound the causes and effects of the right-wing political movements in Slovakia and Europe, but it must be mentioned here, because while the majority of society instinctively builds their new reality upon the old with little turbulence, there is another side that exists, negating much of the theory presented in this work. These factions adhere to a system of beliefs divergent from the norm, yet are a legitimate contemporary generational unit that persists under a misperception of their collective pasts and future, firmly claiming their ethnic heritage as their primary source of cultural reference. So while ethnic "awareness" or "character" is fundamental to the process of identity construction, these notions can be, and are, used negatively, and executed maliciously, by those disenfranchised with their socio-economic status and who are deluded regarding the sources of the various social ills.

Sources of identity to reference other than the "ethnic" are far too numerous to name, but can be grouped into categories already referenced— the pan-European, Oriental, and Occidental. A pan-European source of identity does exist, as the history and location of Slovakia directly relate to that of the
continent. European issues economically, politically, internationally, culturally, and socially are relevant to Slovakia in that such issues are obviously important to the survival of the people in the center of the continent. Within this group, various European musical trends and scenes, as well as artistic and philosophical movements, can be mentioned. Economic and diplomatic sources of identity and political affiliations can be noted here as well. Any Slovak that subscribes to one or many of these options can be said to have a reference of identity elsewhere in the world, sometimes to a specific location (for example England’s now international Drum & Bass scene), or sometimes to a generally shared continental sentiment.

An example of the pan-European consciousness that had been considered by the Slovak public is the choice that the country had to make between alignment with Russia or the EU. This choice was the catalyst for an almost irreversible process of social and political restructuring. Slovaks individually and as a community had to constantly reference both identities of Western and Eastern European, experiencing its sizeable share of the growing pains associated with the creation of a pan-European community.

Common Eastern European problems such as politics, history, and economics exist in the region as an Oriental source of identity. Activities benefiting the region democratically, such as belonging to various NGOs, or even occupations that entail international commerce or the eradication of the mafia, all contribute to the evolving identities of the individual and society in connection to
citizens of the former Soviet Bloc. There is a dramatic difference in living standards and average income between Eastern and Western Europe and until the situation becomes more balanced, the “East” will continue to commiserate with one another, as the differences between them and the “West” will always be highlighted.

For the youth, Orientalism offers something rather interesting in that though the “West” has proved dominant, there continues to be ideological and artistic references where the “East” is the source. While western music is most prevalent for reasons I will detail further on, there is a music scene that combines the populations of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, as there are comparable scenes elsewhere in the “East.” Many of the young people appreciate and encourage this music, though its perpetuation is difficult. Most often the music performed by these groups is re-appropriated western popular musical forms, and the performers seldom travel west, as their audience is solidly in the “East.” In Slovakia, it is typically the young people in the rural parts of the country that support these groups, and most often those that are in their twenties and less tied to “West” culturally. The musical, artistic, and film efforts of the “East” find little support in the “West,” but the Oriental culture to reference exists and could be considered strong, particularly in sizable Russia.

The people of Slovakia may also, and most often do, reference the Occidental as a source of creating identity. Here, the Occidental will include the US, as it is culturally relevant to Occident. Again, western music, fashion, art,
and film are all being discovered and appropriated by those in the "East." While one's identity may be intrinsically based on their ethnic Slovak heritage and a shared Eastern European past and present, they may simultaneously reference French impressionism, American punk rock, and German automobiles as cultural entities with which they desire to be associated.

While Eastern European history is indeed rich, layered, and fascinating, the past sixty years have slowed its cultural development as the Soviet ideal of a homogenous society has made the cultural outlets of the "East" fewer in number, and due to a lack of resources, poorer in many respects than that of the "West." The innumerable literary and popular music genres that have produced new and challenging ideas in the "West" are now being discovered and expanded upon in the "East." Cultural descriptors as simple as products, which at one time were less relevant in the "East," are now serious factors in the construction of identity. To simply wear a T-shirt with a certain character, slogan, or product image expresses an identity that one wishes to represent. The relatively sophisticated and educated people of the former Soviet Bloc interpret the ideology of the "West" intensely, and in many respects may be more queued in to the process of identity construction than their Western European or American counterparts.

The cultural sources of reference for the construction of identity go further than the three main sources I have mentioned. The Slovak recording artist I mentioned in Chapter 3 has involved herself particularly in the arts, music, and culture of India, as many Eastern Europeans have recently discovered eastern
philosophy and practices such as yoga. The individual ideologies, scenes, movements, and trends that a young Slovak can subscribe to are, as stated, innumerable and this process of constructing the individual identity, as well as Slovak national identity, is presently marked by a “two steps forward, one step back” phenomenon that I have observed.

Most of the cultural elements that are being self-ascribed and re-appropriated by the youth of Slovakia are from the US and Western Europe, while Oriental options combine with a pan-European consciousness and whatever other viable preferences that vary individually to a great degree. The young people align with the “West” out of a sense of comfort, but also due to the incessant encouragement from every aspect of their lives. Yet even for the young people that could best be described as “westernized,” every step they take towards westernization and the potential abandonment of heritage, there is an inevitable retreat inward. In an example that I will detail in a later section of the work, it will be made evident that though enthusiastic towards outside (by forfeit usually western) influence and ideas, pride and the unparalleled strength of Slovak identity manifest and pervade.

A Slovak youth, who I will discuss in Chapter 7, often admitted a sense ignominy for his country while praising the superiority of the “West.” In spite of this, he was rather proud and excited that a friend of his produced a rap CD of his own. The youth admitted that he found it more applicable and personal when
good Slovak artists record music in the genre that he prefers.\textsuperscript{47} However fascinated by or drawn to the "West" and its offerings the individual may be, there persists a deep-seated sense of ethnic identity that has been ingrained in them by past generations. This sense of ethnic or national identity is challenged daily by the media culture and commercial products of the "West." This rather remarkable process of "two steps forward, one step back" manifests, as the youths in Spis occasionally become openly bitter towards the western cultural entities that they generally appreciate.

Today in many smaller European nations such as Denmark for example, a sentiment of anxiety regarding cultural heritage has emerged, as the English language and foreign culture have grown increasingly dominant throughout most segments of society.\textsuperscript{48} In my estimation, though the "West" has grown exceedingly influential in Slovakia, its language and culture will not envelop the country as it has the potential to in cultures more closely related. The central role ethnic identity has played in the history of the Slovak people is presently being tested and renegotiated, but should not falter as its history of struggle is remembered and embedded in the social consciousness and cultural practices of the people.

In the following section, the importance of music in the lives of young people is shown through empirical research regarding the perception of individuals within in-groups and out-groups through the force of music. Though

\textsuperscript{47} Palec, interview by author, mini-disc recording, Levoca, August 2002
\textsuperscript{48} http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3049669.stm
the research did not incorporate youths of Slovakia, the processes of identity construction can be compared and the intricacies highlighted. I have described the unique socio-cultural situation regarding youth in Slovakia and the following section will examine their relationship with music more closely.
CHAPTER 5

Music and the Construction of Identity by Youth

Bennett notes that music in the lives of young people is "one of the most, if not the most popular leisure activity."49 Prior to the advent of rock music, youth culture did not have the omnipresent assistance of the identity-defining power of music, or the galvanizing core of music for generational empowerment, as it did with rock music. In the "West," particularly prior to the birth of rock 'n' roll, many academic musicians have scorned the notion of popular music as a decadent and vapid social outlet. MacDonald had stated that, "Mass Culture is imposed from above. It is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying."50

This statement was based on the theories of the Frankfurt School, particularly that of Adorno who felt that popular music (in his pre-rock 'n' roll interpretation of it) has pre-defined and formulized meanings. The music, Adorno

49 Andy Bennett, Popular Music and Youth Culture: Music, Identity and Place, (New York: St. Martin's, 2000): 34.
50 Bennet, Popular Music and Youth Culture, 36.
felt, was "pre-digested" in that no psychological or intellectual effort was necessary to interpret a personal meaning for the music in reference to greater historical knowledge and scholarly efforts by the individual. Adorno's prejudice against popular music is based on what he saw as the creation of a homogenized mass culture where artistic expression is dominated by the trite and shallow. This indeed may be the case in certain societies and circumstances, but Adorno could not foresee the present situation in the former Soviet Bloc.

The freedom to choose to explore, or "buy or not buy," from the infinite catalog of western pop music, as well as the freedom to create music with an idiosyncratic sentiment of ideology, was not something that fully existed in the homogenized Soviet culture where more academically artistic pursuits were valued, as opposed to the capitalist commercialism in the arts which is dominant today. Though western pop culture and popular music may be "pre-digested" and without significant meaning to many of the intelligentsia of academic and art music throughout the world, its initial meaning and purpose (ultimately to sell), is being re-semantized by those in the "East." The music that may mean nothing, or at least very little to some, means independence, individuality, progress, openness, and modernity to those deprived of popular music as a cultural phenomenon for generations.

51 ibid.
As McBride points out, under socialism, in a certain sense, status within the society was often gauged by one’s level of cultural achievement. This ideology, alongside the Soviets’ desire to exhibit their cultural superiority to the rest of the world, produced the phenomenal orchestras, ballets, and individual performers that have come to be associated with the former Eastern Bloc. Today government funding of such exploits is scarce and music, like at some level in the rest of the world, is now a commodity in Eastern Europe. There are no more “state owned Stradivariuses” or intense youth programs in the “East” to produce their performers.\textsuperscript{52} The young people that would once have been encouraged into the performance of art music now have the freedom (or distraction) to choose from the western catalog of popular music and the values of which it is representative.

Many in Slovakia to some degree resent the westernization of their culture and the shallow intentions and meanings behind its music. However, though rock music’s influence on the political events that toppled communism, particularly in the former Czechoslovakia, has been overstated, the music was symbolic of a lifestyle that the people increasingly grew to covet. The people’s right to reject and openly criticize the “West” and its music’s influence is the very essence of the rebellious nature of the youth’s popular music, be it rap, rock,

\textsuperscript{52} McBride, \textit{Philosophical Reflections}, 83-84.
reggae, or techno. In order to have a legitimate youth culture in a free society, the employment of music as an agent of change, individuality, and independence is fundamental to the process.

Musical Identities by MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell offers insight into the various processes of identity construction, in particular amongst adolescents. The chapter that is most applicable to this work is by Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, and states that young people experience an identity crisis of sorts, explore their options, and choose to adhere to one such identity. It is most often the case that the identity to which the individual would like to subscribe is that of celebrities, in particular popular musicians, including their image, ideology, and lifestyle.\(^{53}\)

Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves reference Marcia’s theory that this process of identity “selection” takes on four stages. The first stage in this process is “diffusion,” representing the early adolescence’s lack of proclaimed identity. Second is “foreclose” wherein the youth commits to an identity set without the experience of crisis. The third stage is identity “moratorium,” or the first identity crisis where the youth opts to explore alternate identities available. Finally “achievement” is gained when options have been explored and crises experienced as the youth settles on a certain identity for a time.\(^{54}\)


\(^{54}\) Ibid.
Within the context of the global, capitalist society of which Slovakia is now a part, the media (particularly MTV, VIVA, and popular radio) offers the most entrancing and readily available source of "information and advice" regarding the youth's construction of identity. As Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves explain, "acquiring a set of beliefs and values, performing socially responsible behavior, developing emotional independence from parents and achieving mature relations with peers" are all factors that contribute to the developmental importance of music in the lives of young people, as it also helps them to "cope with the fluctuations of mood to which these tasks naturally give rise."\(^55\) The western media's omnipresence in Slovak society bolsters the central role of music and its ideology (by forfeit western) in identity processes of the Slovak youth.

The developing of independence is important for all adolescents, but in Slovakia the reality of the youth's independence differs greatly from that of their parents. It is most often not merely "growing pains" that give rise to conflict between the youth and the elder generation, but the society to which the children are trying to adjust that is volatile, unstable, and entirely different from that of their parents' experience. The developing of mature relations within the peer group is an act that's potential is now being fully flexed as well. Who to align with personally through friendship is now complicated in Slovakia today by factors such as socio-economic status, accessibility to consumer products, and personal preferences regarding fashion, film, and music.

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\(^{55}\) Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, "Youth Identity," 135.
Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves show that within peer groups, maintaining amicable relations, and ensuring lasting membership with the various members of the in-group, is empirically based on the exhibition of the proper behavior.\textsuperscript{56} A group chooses a sense of humor, value set, recreational habits, and various cultural alignments. These activities and values make up the group's social code and adherence to the code is imperative for positive intra-group relations.

For many peer groups in Slovakia today, exactly which western ideology the group subscribes to is the main defining element. Which western music is listened to? What films are enjoyed? What fashion trends are predominantly followed? What are the career goals of the individuals in the group, and how "western" or progressive are they? These are all implicitly the defining factors of the groups though their discussion is commonplace.

Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves relate music's function within adolescent social groups to a badge of social identity and alignment. The type of music that one most often listens to is a key indicator of what "type" of person the individual is, and a profound statement of one's values, aspirations professionally and culturally, and hint at to which peer group the individual may belong.\textsuperscript{57} Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves also show that young people more knowledgeable about pop music are viewed more positively and perceived as more popular than those who do not.\textsuperscript{58} In the streets of Bratislava now this is as evident as in any western

\textsuperscript{56} Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, "Youth Identity," 136.
\textsuperscript{57} Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, "Youth Identity," 139.
\textsuperscript{58} Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, "Youth Identity," 141-143.
city, if not perhaps even more so. T-shirts with the American and British flags are popular as are clothing choices clearly influenced by western pop stars. Though young people in the “West” most often realize that the styles are merely costumes of the performer and do not typically wear such clothing, those in the “East,” with little actual contact with the “West,” often imitate the styles as closely as possible.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) proposed by Tajfel insists that socially constructed groups inherently possess a desire for positive self-image, as well as a desire to appear “better off” than others comparable to themselves. This is exhibited through a vast array of activities and behaviors in which in-groups perceive themselves in more affable ways than others. The SIT and its implications for small peer groups can also be applied to the structure of Slovak society in general. Interpersonal and intercommunity relations are high, and as expounded earlier, a strong sense of ethnic identity exists within the small population. The Slovak people, in line with the SIT, have the overwhelming desire to perceive themselves at least equal to those around them. As opposed to in the Balkans where matters are rather bleak, the Slovaks have the opportunity to measure up to their neighbors in anticipation of membership in the European community. No in-group wants to feel inferior in any sense and neither does the Slovak population. Therefore, the often-prejudiced claims made about

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59 Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, “Youth Identity,” 137-140.
those in the region by Slovaks are generally attempts to bolster their own
national self-image and maintain a positive group identity. Coincidentally, it has
been empirically shown that those with a higher sense of group allegiance and
identity are more often discriminatory towards others not within the in-group, as is
the case with right-wing nationalists.

An older study by Asch is referenced in the Tarrant, North, and
Hargreaves work that offers insight into what is known as “trait information” in
regards to opinion forming:

A sample of college students was told that their usual tutor would be replaced by
a guest lecturer, and that they were to evaluate this lecturer following his talk.
Prior to the talk, participants were given some background information about the
lecturer. This was the same for all participants in all but one respect: some were
told that the lecturer had, amongst other things, a ‘warm’ personality, and others
were told that he had a ‘cold’ personality. Participants who received the ‘warm’
description subsequently evaluated the lecturer more favorably than those who
had received the ‘cold’ description; they were also more willing to interact with
the lecturer during the session.\(^{60}\)

The Asch experiment may be applied to the formerly Soviet societies of Eastern
and Central Europe. Those of the older generations who had been told their
entire lives that the “West” was fundamentally wrong and a cultural and political
opponent have a more negative perception of the “West” and are less “likely to
interact” with it. Those who are young and have understood that the “West” was
more or less a positive, if not merely omnipresent, force in their lives, are in fact
more likely to engage in its politics and culture. This is obvious when comparing

\(^{60}\) Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, “Youth Identity,” 139.
the older and younger generation, but the individual generational units that exist within youth culture are often affected by the negative and positive perceptions they respectively have of both Soviet and capitalist societies.

Music always plays an integral role in the identity construction of adolescence and this point cannot be stressed enough. Young people choose which images and sounds connect most intimately to their socio-economic status or aspirations, sexual existence, frustrations, recreational activities, or to the self that they in no way embody but in some way desire to associate with, or at least about which they fantasize. This has profound implications for today’s Slovakia whose youth are growing up in a country that’s average annual income is $3,700 while neighboring Austria’s is almost 6.5 times greater.61

The following chapter will discuss the problematic nature of creating the identity constructing communities known as “scenes.” Communities with a shared interest in music, fashion, and ideology typically make up the scenes that are of great importance for the youth culture. Scene construction requires a certain degree of financial commitment, both by the individual and the society. In small countries, such as Slovakia, this is difficult as the coherent social entity of the scene is transferred to the more viable “taste community.”62

61 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1198491.stm
CHAPTER 6

The Construction of Taste Communities

The process of constructing significant musical or cultural "scenes" is difficult in small countries due to the tremendous financial strain placed upon on local artists, particularly those with a unique language. Kahn-Harris details such difficulties and idiosyncrasies in the Israeli Extreme Metal scene. He states that "global flows of capital and signs are no respecter of national boundaries and while they do not make the nation state irrelevant, they undermine the idea that states can be bounded, self-sufficient, coherent entities."63 This is indeed the case as the global economic nature of most music scenes, both popular and alternative, endangers any true sense of indigenous creative efforts as Krims writes that even local music intersects with the global, with nuances in the music always referencing the dominant trends.64 Identity is based on discourse and

communicative flow and is therefore contingent and contradictory, creating an atmosphere of confusion and inconsistency in the ideological stances of the individuals in small countries.  

Globally, the Heavy Metal scene that Kahn-Harris depicts is based often on tribal allegiances, anarchism of sorts, and typically an anti-religious or pagan stance. For Israeli Metal enthusiasts, this is the cause of considerable turbulence and in many instances Israel, Judaism, and Semitism is renounced by those wishing to align with the global Extreme Metal scene, based primarily in Northern Europe. If deemed necessary by a particular scene, Slovaks would find it more difficult to renounce their Slovak heritage in order to adhere to one more acceptable to that scene. A Slovak could not claim to be anything else other than perhaps a European or Slav, while an Israeli in this situation could claim to be an atheist and emphasize heritage, for example, in Germany. Coincidentally, Kahn-Harris found that the individuals who gained the most acceptance in the notably anti-Semitic global scene were those that acknowledged and took pride in their heritage, but did not deliberately promote it.  

In the case of Slovakia and its various musical trends, an adherence to an at least regional scene, if not continental or global, is imperative for the survival of artistic musical expression. A country of five million native Slovak speakers

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65 Kahn-Harris, “Israeli Extreme Metal Scene,” 138.  
66 Kahn-Harris, “Israeli Extreme Metal Scene,” 122-152.  
67 Ibid.
simply does not have a market to support an individual act. Larkey's *Pungent Sounds: Constructing Identity with Popular Music in Austria* discusses the difficulties of creating local music in a country the size of Austria. His work can only be amplified when discussing Austria's poorer, Slavic neighbor. Slovakia inarguably has a small recording market. In order to recoup the costs of record production, a CD must sell between twenty-five and fifty thousand copies.\textsuperscript{68} If a Slovak wanted to produce a rap CD, it would be exceedingly difficult to sell to a population that may barely have fifty thousand rap fans. For those individuals that do enjoy the genre, they may not enjoy this artist's particular style, or may not relate to what he or she has to say. In Austria, the record company awards a musician of only overwhelming popularity national promotion of an album.\textsuperscript{69} Also, Austria is more fortunate in that if a musical group chose to record in German, there is a market of approximately ninety-five million native German speakers in Europe. Slovakia does not have this luxury.

If the Slovak artist chooses to record in Slovak, only five million Slovaks and nine million Czechs would fully understand the lyrical content. The Polish, if enthusiastic about the music, would possibly make the effort to buy and understand the Slovak lyrics. Future Slovak artists who wish to gain any significant international success must, like many other European artists, sing in

\textsuperscript{68} Larkey, *Pungent Sounds*, 33.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
English or perhaps German. As KEHICLE points out, to sing in one's own language in what could be considered a global genre of music, is a conscious, yet futile act of defiance against said global genre.70

Many Slovak musicians do in fact sing in Slovak and therefore sustain themselves on the income of performing. In small countries, due to the expense of recording, musicians must perform, as the recorded CD functions often as a mere by-product of the professional performer.71 Performing can also prove to be difficult for the Slovak musician because venues are not abundant and in order to earn a loyal following and sustain oneself professionally, let alone within a relevant scene, the music and image must appeal to the greatest number of consumers possible. This inhibits the power of the sub-culture in Slovakia and other small countries, as it cannot be fully explored and expanded upon by the people as it can in a large country. Music and the local scene is nevertheless an important avenue for the construction of identity in Slovakia because, as LARKEY points out, while listening to the radio is a rather passive method of appropriating identity, purchasing a CD involves a greater financial commitment, as attending a concert or performance requires a relatively significant dedication of capital and time on the part of the consumer.72

Most western musical acts do not travel to the “East” very often. The distance alone is often not a financial incentive for the weak buying power of

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71 Larkey, Pungent Sounds, 33.
72 Larkey, Pungent Sounds, 25.
most Eastern European markets like Slovakia's where media promotion will suffice. When western artists do travel east, it is most often to Moscow. The Russian market is relatively large and the act itself could be considered "symbolic" of the new age in Europe and many performers enjoy the opportunity to perform in the former Soviet Union. Most recently Paul McCartney performed a concert in Moscow, but of course did not make appearances in Vilnius, Minsk, or Bratislava.

Engaging in musical activity with the performer is an important event for many youth of any culture. Through vocals, lyrical content, rhythm, musical style, fashion, and even the band name itself, young people identify with those performers deemed personally most appealing. Individuals often mimic the dress and style of the performers and sometimes appropriate their philosophies as transmitted through the music.\textsuperscript{73} In more militant scenes, such as Punk Rock or as mentioned, Extreme Metal, stricter social codes are to be adhered to and upheld, but in any scene, certain significant identifiers are essential for "membership." For example, for one to become involved to a considerable degree in the hip-hop scene, they must not be racist, because it was founded by, perpetuated by, and is predominantly performed by, African-Americans. For most, to simply not be racist enough to listen to a type of music is not a conscious or at least difficult decision, but for some youth it could be considered a significant step and break from the societal status quo.

\textsuperscript{73} Larkey, \textit{Pungent Sounds}, 24-29.
For Slovakia most youth do not have the time, or more importantly money, to invest in local scenes. The country is still predominantly rural as Bratislava, its largest city, has a population of only 461,459. Therefore most scenes are not actual scenes, but rather “taste communities” supported by the media.\textsuperscript{74} Communication between individuals regarding favorite groups and artists is important, as is the fashion and ideology of the young individual, learned most often through the media. For the majority of young people in Slovakia, particularly Spis, actual contact with scenes is relatively rare and the product that is transmitted from the “West” is subsequently manipulated to serve the needs of Slovakia’s young consumers.

Since the possibility for a legitimate scene is most often too difficult, particularly for those in rural areas, these taste communities develop. As Durant points out, “significances of manner, accent, lyric, and musical style alter as they are shifted from audience to audience, region to region, or between nations.”\textsuperscript{75} For young Slovaks, media contact is basically the only contact with the “West,” its performers, and scenes. The western musical product is therefore re-semantcized and re-contextualized, since their original meanings are ‘not simply imported’ but are recreated ‘through patterns of local influence and cultural

\textsuperscript{74} The term “taste communities” is referenced from Larkey’s work. I expand on the concept here as it is relevant to the Slovak Republic.

\textsuperscript{75} Larkey, Pungent Sounds, 23.
Aspiration. As I will show through an example in Chapter 7 of a youth and a trip to a gypsy disco, in more extreme cases, local influence, or at least tradition, can be ignored by the individual.

The notion of "cultural aspiration" is imperative to the perpetuation of taste communities and scenes for Slovakia's new youth culture. What the individual aspires to be personally, culturally, professionally, and financially all come into play during the teenage experience. Without the necessary means for a substantial Slovak music scene today or even potentially in the future, due to size and language restriction, it is the dominance of the various western musics that have the greatest influence on the youth of Slovakia's ideological standpoint, though the content is often significantly reinterpreted. The "cultural aspirations" of the young person will at least partially become their culture of their future. Most Slovak youth have chosen to utilize the "West" in the construction of their identity (voluntarily or not is subject to debate). The nuances of western values learned now, in combination with that of the home and community will result in a continuance of significant changes in Slovak traditional values and culture.

In the following section, the implications of the recent developments in Slovak history will be expounded as the concept of generation comes into play. The thirteen years since 1990 have been the majority of many young people's lives and this post-communist era is indeed their reality, as they personally have

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76 Ibid.
little connection to the debilitating effects of communism. It is in this transition era that many individuals have grown in tandem with their country, as the identity of both the individual and the nation are in question.
CHAPTER 7

Generations and Identity

Pertinent to this work is the sociological and political study of generations. Because the differences between the older and younger generations in Slovakia are so stark, it is indeed an important subject in the discussion of this particular society in transition. As Huntington notes, the interest in generations, both academically and socially (like the question of identity), occurs after times of tremendous social and political upheaval, and like notions of class or ethnicity, generational lines are most often blurred.\(^7\) In Slovakia, however, the lines between the young and old are in fact rather distinct, but within the teenage and twenty-something age group, breaks in experience and opportunity are evident.

"Tradition, hierarchy, and the lack of any legitimate pattern of succession and the nature of absolute power all served to slow down the generational change [in Eastern and Central Europe]."\(^8\) There was indeed no youth culture under communism as it is regarded in the "West" due to "less privacy, less


affluence, and infinitely more police control."\cite{79} In essence, there were typically few youth oriented activities that could be interpreted as "challenging the system," because such challenges, as well as individual expression, were suppressed.

Rebellion did occur throughout the former Soviet Bloc and did in 1968 in Czechoslovakia, but for the majority of the communist era, the rebellious youth culture of the "West" was at least publicly non-existent. Also, the citizens of the Soviet countries generally exhibited an unhealthy degree of "apartism," wherein they simply would "go along to get along" within the system.\cite{80} This is evident in the Millar and Wolchik research above, but also in the voting trends of more recent times in which every nation voting to enter the EU was concerned with gaining the fifty percent of eligible voters necessary to make the poll legitimate. Mass marketing campaigns were utilized in every country to get people to vote, yet the Poland referendum was under the fifty percent mark and had to hold an extended poll.

The idiosyncratic political culture that existed under communism is still evident in the socio-political habits of most of Slovakia's older generation. The younger generation, however, is now empowered with western style individualism that they can freely express, accompanied by the numerous cultural and political outlets afforded to them to construct their identities. Whereas the older generation experienced the afore mention stagnancy of generational

\cite{79} Ibid.
\cite{80} Griffith, "Generational Change," 126.
change and difference, the current rapidity of culture, education, and technology
has increased the potential for socializing events, which expands the number of
identifiers and identifying groups, as well as the number of politically significant
constituencies.\footnote{Richard J Samuels, “Introduction: Political Generations and Political Development,” in Political
This is reminiscent of the western culture which Slovakia is
now somewhat part of. The youth culture in Slovakia has been defined by this
phenomenon, while the elders remain essentially one block culture with fewer
differences that can be detected, for example, between a forty year old and a fifty
year old. Due to this factor, an additional generational identifier exists.

When differences in interests between the older and younger generation
are few, there is little cause for conflict or rebellious behavior. In many cases in
the “West,” as well as other parts of the world, the young people’s experiences
are similar to those of their elders, therefore making rebellious behavior often
misdirected, trite, and sometimes rather odd in nature. In Slovakia and the
former Soviet Bloc, however, the conflict is relatively high as the experiences
between the generations are dramatically different, particularly in regards to the
basic adolescent task of constructing identity that was impeded for the elder
generation by socialism.

Within this large gap in the generations, an age group exists with a foot in
both experiences, so to speak. Generations are constantly evolving through time
as the elements that define them change with events experienced. “Shared
relevant socio-political experiences must exist to shape the generation."\(^{82}\)

Generations are a socially constructed phenomenon, not chronological or biological. Mannheim states, "Mere chronological contemporaneity cannot of itself produce a common generational location."\(^{83}\) Generational location refers to the opportunities and chances that establish the fate of the particular generation.\(^{84}\) The experiences of Slovak youth today are what binds as well as divides them.

In the US, though the rate of cultural change is high, seventeen and twenty-four year olds generally have the same opportunities, and though the twenty-four year olds are more experienced, the two groups share a similarity of experiences and a shared sense of culture, as their opportunities in life are, and should continue to be, essentially the same. In Slovakia however, a twenty-four year old would have been fourteen when Slovakia achieved independence, while a seventeen year old would have only been seven years old, and about four or five at the fall of communism. The two share much, but are divided by their childhoods spent, for the most part in completely different eras and in contrasting societies.

Consider being a twenty-four year old in rural Slovakia today. You were twelve years old at the fall of communism, but still as a child you were a Pioneer (the scouting equivalent in the Soviet Bloc to promote communism amongst its

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\(^{82}\) Samuels, "Political Generations," 1.

\(^{83}\) Ibid.

You did not go to university because financially it was rather difficult, but also you did not necessarily feel compelled to. You are fortunate to have a job working for your father, as unemployment in the region is at twenty-five percent, but like many young people in Eastern Europe, you live at home to save money, because apartments are very expensive. Slovakia has just voted to join the EU and in one year, when you are twenty-five, it will be a member and the available opportunities should increase.

Now consider being that twenty-four year old and living at home with an eighteen-year-old sibling. Your sibling was five when communism ended and her [sic] schooling was done completely in the new Slovakia. That sibling has developed socially in her [sic] peer group with the influence of western television, fashion, music, and literature. The younger sibling is excited to go to university in the fall and also for the travel opportunities it may provide. When she [sic] is done with school, Slovakia will be several years into EU membership and western borders will be open.

This example is hypothetical, but based on two people with whom I spent much of my time in Spis. The difference of experience is of course subjective to personality and other factors, and in my example their experiences are polarized to highlight the different realities separating many young people in Slovakia today. The older sibling is closer to the traditional life and has been installed with a certain degree of communist ideology, which though he disavows it, its influence remains. The younger sibling knows nothing of the socialist
experience, only the aftermath and its influence on friends, family, and community. A strong break exists in the younger generation of Slovakia that typically does not in the "West." The differences between these groups may continue to clash politically and ethically for the next fifty years due to their early life experiences.

The changes between generations are continuous and eventually produce the breaks that I have described. Mannheim called these breaks "generational units," and in the case that I have shown, the older and younger siblings are part of different generational units because they have experienced change and events from different vantage points.\(^85\) The units are a "result of a constellation of factors" and in this case age, political events, the media, opportunities, school curricula, and a host of other factors are what have divided the siblings into their respective units.\(^86\) Mannheim would call this an "asynchronicity of contemporaries," as those ostensibly of the same generation who have experienced the same household, community, and socio-political climate, work the "material" presented to them in different ways, perceiving their pasts and futures differently.\(^87\)

An individual generation, or generational unit, can be considered active or passive, and most are indeed passive until something unites the generation and catalyzes some sort of action. The passive generation basically accepts

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\(^86\) Ibid.

society's status quo while the active generation does not and attempts to forge a new cultural heritage based on the opportunities available to them. Most often the generation becomes active after some sort of traumatic experience (Vietnam, September 11th, Pearl Harbor, etc.). \(^88\) Communism's fall is generally regarded as a positive event and the experience would not necessarily be considered traumatic, but the politically charged environment in which the Slovak youth has grown up could be considered as such. Intergenerational conflict, even between the units, as I have mentioned, can be attributed to what Bourdieu labeled "clashes between systems of aspirations formed in different periods." \(^89\) Though this would not necessarily be the case in western culture, in Slovakia some of the aspirations of the twenty-four year old were formed in a drastically different period than those of the eighteen year old.

The notion of generational units is fundamental to this research as I describe the identity construction process of youth in Slovakia, particularly Spis, with music. The encouragement of society in general to westernize and the dominance of western media is what the very young know and accept as Slovakia. The young Slovaks, that are a bit older, are familiar with another Slovakia, and the fruits of capitalism that they were promised several years ago have proven to be more difficult to attain than expected. The childhoods of this group coincide with the communist era are often entangled with happy memories and the lack of adulthood stress. How these different units perceive their

respective pasts and plan for their futures will be evident in the identity constructing devices they employ including, film, fashion, and the focus of this work, music.

In Slovakia the youth live with an elder generation whose cultural practices often seem antiquated and whose social values may seem obsolete or even wrong. The older generation is also perceived to have constructed, or at least tolerated, a society that lags behind their neighbors in every way. Since many youth understand this to be the case, (though there may not necessarily be a harsh sentiment expressed, or ill feelings towards the elders), their rebelliousness in most cases extends to the “West” for support and a new sense of identity.

Most parents realize the current socio-political situation, and though they feel that they may have difficulty adjusting to the new Slovakia, they understand that their children will have far fewer problems with the process and therefore in many cases encourage travel to the “West” for education and employment. The Catholic Church that remains a powerful force in Slovakia, particularly in the rural areas, has always claimed to be a strong proponent of democracy (particularly with the current Pope’s ties to the region) and have made this explicit to their congregations of both parents and children. Schoolteachers and administration
that had formerly been assigned to promoting communist rhetoric and a socialist perception of history have revised their curricula to relate to the new democratic Slovakia.

It is indeed a rather ironic situation in that the youth, in order to construct a sense of self and reform Slovak cultural heritage, have essentially one source (the “West”) to do so, but those against which they are rebelling typically do not have a problem with this. They rebel by rejecting old notions of Slovak or Slavic heritage, re-appropriating the images, sounds, and styles of the “West” in self-definition, while generally every constituent of the old society, i.e. parents, church, government institutions, and school, are in support of this extension. There are few cases of elders deliberately denying their children access to western media, and even if the children were to be reprimanded, parents could not realistically enforce this, because their lives are saturated with the culture and economic dominance of the “West.”

This is where complications arise in that identity is multifarious and certainly not bound to any predetermined notion of ethnic capacity. For those youth born in the mid 1980s, their lives have been full of western ideology, imagery, and maybe most importantly sound. The “power of music” begins not necessarily with its potential ideological nature, but rather with the sonic phenomenon itself. For this group of young people, rap music and r & b for example, has been the norm on television and radio their entire lives. Though initially they did not understand the lyrics, and their elders might not have had a
taste for this rather exotic form of music, much of the youth developed a sonic appreciation for the music early on. This appreciation, along with newly revised curriculum in their schools and other forms of social encouragement, prompted the new generation of Slovaks to learn English. This was easier at a younger age and though in remote areas such as Spis where few spoke the language, music promoted English every day, and through this formula of music and language an at least perceived connection to the “West” had been drawn.

At times, this connection becomes evident in the actions of the youth as they severely contrast societal mores. I had found that a young person nicknamed Palec, with whom I had spent considerable time in the rural eastern town of Levoca, was particularly westernized. At eighteen, he was an avid skateboarder, English speaker (which he spoke with his local friends often for fun), and hip-hop enthusiast. Palec explained to me that rap music was his favorite kind of music and that there was none better in the world.90 This young man was also coincidentally the one who had arranged for his friends and me a trip to a disco in the Roma section of town. No whites had ever been to this gypsy disco, the town and society is for the most part segregated, and evidently no Slovak ever had the desire to go and no gypsy had ever invited them. To note, this is an activity that the parents of the young Slovaks involved would definitely not have approved of, and it was in fact kept secret by all those involved.

90 Palec, interview by author, mini-disc recording, Levoca, August 2002
It was 2002 and no one in memory had ever crossed the ethnic line to come together to drink and dance on a Friday night in this way. The elderly had talked of the Roma living in closer proximity and there being less segregation between the two groups, but this had been long ago and before communism. I believe that what had finally broken the barrier was this young Slovak’s appreciation of black American music. Though he had probably never even met an African-American, he, initially through a sonic appreciation for the music, developed a respect for the music and culture of a different ethnic group, which was coincidentally the historically oppressed, non-white Other of American society. Over time, he may have eventually transferred this appreciation to the historically oppressed, non-white Other of his community. This bright, university bound, and relatively worldly young Slovak from rural Spis, broke an at least decades old social code and interacted affably with the local gypsies, which can be attributed to the acceptance of others learned not by the example set by his community, but through a specific type of western music that he had learned to appreciate and wanted to be in some way associated with.

In this case, the encouragement to align with the “West” from home and community manifested in a way that starkly contrasts the traditional social code and is one of an infinite number of examples where the evolving Slovak identity is evident. Palec is one that has wholeheartedly embraced the “West” and what it stands for; even to go so far as to break tradition at considerable risk. For many young people, particularly those just a bit older than this eighteen year old, the
new ideology and its divergence with the traditional are a bit harder to cope with. For most, the “West” is something to be negotiated, not just accepted. The question of, “How much?” comes into play.

During the communist era, the “East” had culturally been more or less a product of their lack of exposure to the “West.” In Bratislava and other cities, western products were made available on rare occasions for the people to purchase. Inevitably, people came from great distances to buy the clothing, music, cosmetics, and other goods that were not normally available to them. Since the fall of communism and the recent era, Slovak people have been immersed in western consumerism and commercialism. What were once a people whose identities were constructed in isolation from the “West,” they now define themselves by their level of exposure (both personally and as a society) to the “West.”

Predictably, two sides in opposition have emerged with most people in the gray area in between. Those that reject the “West” and promote some version of nationalism or communism are countered by those that consider themselves adamant capitalists and pro-democracy. Of course the majority lay somewhere in between, negotiating exactly how much “West” they want or need in their lives. For the Slovaks it is difficult to ignore the importance of the “West” and one fact is certain- the more foreign investment there is in their country, the higher the living

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91 Steven Sampson, “Exporting Democracy,” 152.
standard is of Slovak people. This has heavy psychological implications for the Slovaks and their perception of the "West," because for any negative association made with the "West" and present societal ills, it remains glaringly evident that the "West" provides employment, quality entertainment, and readily available necessities at the fundamental competitive price.

The following chapter will depict an event that I attended in Spis hosted by my twenty-three-year-old cousin and his eighteen-year-old sister. The music that the siblings and their friends knew and engaged in is indicative of the theories presented in this chapter and those previous. The elder participants of the event showed a far greater connection to the traditional way of life, as well as the communist era, through their musical repertoire and social behavior. The younger participants showed a preference for western music and a noticeable lack of knowledge of Soviet era music.

92 Minton Goldman, *Slovakia since Independence*, 111.
CHAPTER 8

The Garden Party

In late July 2002 I arrived in the village of Baldovce in the rural eastern county of Spis. Baldovce is a typical Spissky village of approximately two hundred people. One road runs through the village that ends at a small church on the side of a vast wooded hill. Behind the homes is farmland, and in the distance is Spis Castle, the 800-year-old ruins of a Hungarian fortress atop the highest hill in the area. The villages surrounding this castle are separated by only a few kilometers and are in fact my ancestral homeland. The people with whom I was to stay for the time were the Jurik family. Alzbeta Jurikova, the grandmother, is my mother's first cousin and niece of my grandparents. The two siblings that I mentioned in Chapter 7 are Alzbeta's grandchildren Rado and Mirka, my third cousins.

My research in the region, as well as in the country, was confounded by the fact that the distinctive Slovak culture is part of my heritage. My relationship with those whom I was interacting and conversing was at times difficult, as I often felt exceptionally comfortable with their culture. At times, this factor made
observation and the analysis of dialogue and events rather challenging. Other times, however, I felt entirely outside the culture and American. This dichotomy of “insider” and “outsider” identity in a foreign country was indeed difficult, but had afforded me a particularly revealing glimpse of Slovak culture and identity.

I felt most at ease, and considered myself a complete insider and family member when I was with the grandmother, as well as other older relatives in the region. My younger cousins considered me a blood relative and their friends were welcoming, but I did not feel especially connected to them. My culture, language, and values were not the same as the young people in Spis and they did not immediately accept me, as did their more traditional elders. As an outsider, my merit as a person was subject to judgment and assessment if I was to gain the younger Slovaks’ friendship, rather than being wholly accepted on the basis of my family lineage. The young Slovaks and I did, however, share a similar familial foundation and were therefore comfortable with one another within the family unit as we related to our elders and their customs.

The situation I describe in this work is an event in which the youth of the region often participate. With a poor economy and little urbanization in eastern Slovakia, the youth often devise their own recreational activities, in this case it was, as they had labeled it in English, a Garden Party. At such events, young people gather on their land, build a fire, eat, drink, converse, and sing songs that involve the entire group. Though my presence, as well as that of my traveling
companion (to be introduced later), had an impact on the discourse of the group, the interpretations of the event's various occurrences that are indicative of the theories presented in this work should be accurate.

The knowledge of certain specific musical genres and songs is a key indicator of the individual experiences, cultural preferences, and aspirations of the individuals involved in this event. The individual repertoires of the participants point to the cultural and even political forces that have shaped their lives and may continue to influence their futures. Music embodies the ideologies, objectives, and cultural familiarities that work in a dynamic relationship with other elements to identify the individual. This event has shown, however, that the explicit socialist ideology of certain music can be, in part, left aside when personal experiences with the music and its ideology are in conflict with the typical historical context and interpretation. The individuals at this event can, in many respects, be considered representative of the broader social trends that I have associated with Slovak youth.

A Brief Description of Those in Attendance

At the time of the party, Rado was the twenty-three years old and the organizer of this party at the Jurik home. He also was the only guitar player aside from me; this therefore made him the de facto leader of the evening. Rado never attended university and currently works with his father at an auto dealership in nearby Levoca. Rado primarily speaks Slovak, with limited German and English
capabilities. His hobbies for the most part include cars and music. Rado writes much of his own music and is interested in American and European rock bands, including those of the region.

Mirka was eighteen years old at the time of the party and had spoken fluent English for several years. Mirka’s position at the party was for the most part that of a participant, and she often assumed the traditional hostess role of serving drinks and food. Mirka is currently a student at Comenius University in Bratislava studying psychology. Mirka enjoys American literature, television, and movies, as well as rock music. While Rado works, Mirka spends her days with her friends, socializing and spending time in nearby Levoca. (Rado and Mirka also have an older brother named Richard who is a priest in nearby Spisska Nova Ves).

Lucia, nineteen at the time, assisted Mirka in the hostess duties. As Rado’s girlfriend of several years, she has spent much time with his family, as her life has been heavily involved with theirs. Lucia is presently a university student in Banska Bystrica and speaks mainly Slovak with slightly better English facility than Rado. Though younger than Rado, Lucia’s connection to him and his lifestyle is a significant factor in her individuality, as her age and suggested generational unit at times conflicts with that of Rado’s.

Heinz is the twenty-four year old second cousin of Rado and Mirka and is also Rado’s best friend. While his real name is Peter, his nickname Heinz is derived from his favorite German racecar driver. He speaks Slovak with
functional German because his sister lives in Germany with her German husband and children who often come back to Spis to visit. Heinz works at a factory in the town of Spisska Nova Ves, living at home with his family in a nearby village.

My traveling companion is a twenty-four year old ethnic Slovak whose family has been living near Budapest for over two hundred years (since a particularly devastating Turkish invasion). His name is Tamas and he is a market analyst in Budapest who speaks fluent Hungarian, Slovak, and English. He can usually be found in bars, singing, dancing, and on the phone organizing parties for everyone he knows.

This was not my first encounter with the Jurik family, as I had been there in Spis with them the previous summer. At the time of this event, I was twenty-two, as was Rado. Though I had more in common with Mirka and had spent more time with her over the course of my visits to Spis, my relationship with Rado was special because we felt that we had experienced the same era of communist deterioration and societal transition from opposite perspectives. The rhetoric and propaganda that he and I had been taught as children regarding the "enemy" was confronted, as were the changes his culture has had to make at the demands of mine. As cousins of like age, we had come together and discussed our respective experiences and reanalyzed our opinions on various matters.
As the participants ate and drank around the fire, three categories of song emerged to be performed, each indicative of the personal repertoires and social experiences of those involved. The first category is made up of Western European and American popular music. This is of course the favorite type of music amongst the youth of Slovakia and songs by artists such as Bob Marley, Chris Isaak, the Police, and the Gipsy Kings were sung at this event. While the lyrics to popular songs are difficult for many native English speakers to interpret and remember, this is even more so the case for Slovaks who speak limited English (except for Mirka). The performance of such songs was therefore limited to short extracts, often only the refrain of the song, before the piece was inevitably given up on. I have considered that my presence may have instigated the performance of such songs in order to involve or impress me, but knowing the musical tastes of those involved, as well as the popularity of western popular music on Slovak television and radio, I feel that these songs would have been sung in any case. It is interesting to note however that since most English (German, or Spanish) lyrics were not known, Rado often had re-appropriated the tunes, replacing the original text with comical Slovak lyrics that the participants enjoyed. Rado is a songwriter and a creative person who truly enjoys music. Songs to which he may not have known the lyrics were subsequently re-semanticized and replaced with a lyrical content that is more familiar and understood, making it far more engaging and entertaining to his audience and himself.
Though everyone around the fire could communicate in Slovak to some degree, Mirka, Tamas, and myself most often spoke English together. While at first such English language conversation did not cause conflict, eventually Rado, with support from Heinz and Lucia, demanded its termination. As I will discuss, most of the songs performed this evening were of Slovak origin, and it was four Slovaks, one Slovak-Hungarian, and one Slovak-American that were gathered around a campfire singing predominantly Slovak music. The less “westernized” participants, Rado, Heinz, and Lucia, were comfortable in their village with their friends and their music, and therefore were not particularly enthusiastic about English working its way into their personal social sphere. Coping with the English language and western culture on a daily basis, Rado, Lucia, and Heinz eventually grew aggravated at its presence in their private recreation, and reacting in line with the stereotypical “traditional” Slovak temperament, they ordered it to cease. Possibly the catalyst for this frustration was the next category of music which may have produced a particularly patriotic sentiment for the evening.

Slightly more dominant than the popular western music performed at this event were songs that I label original to Slovakia, because the participants perceived the songs to have been written or modified in Slovakia by Slovaks. Though musically the songs are sometimes similar to western songs, it was the context of the music that placed the songs in the Slovak category. These songs were far more successful with the participants, due not only to the understood
lyrics, but also a significantly greater degree of emotional and physical commitment by the performer and participants who sang, clapped, and rocked to the music. This category of Slovak music is comprised of songs composed by Rado himself, traditional Slovak, Spissky, and gypsy songs, songs by Slovak recording artists, and songs learned during childhood in school. The musical style of this category is troublesome to categorize due to the often-derivative musical format of the pieces, particularly those composed by Rado and the Slovak groups who compose in the western rock style. Textually however, these songs often involve traditional Slovak subject matter such as drinking, dancing, and inter-gender relations. The melodies and irregular phrasing of the songs sometimes hint at Slovak influence as well.

The participants, particularly Rado and Mirka, were aware of my interest in Slovak music, and I thought that perhaps this was the factor that instigated the performance of this music. The reaction to these songs by the participants contradicts this notion, as it became evident that the Slovak music was essentially the best known. Along with understood and generally memorized lyrics, a greater degree of confidence for participation was afforded to those who desired to sing along and move to the music.

While songs by Rado and Slovak popular groups were enjoyed, the participants often mocked those that were considered “traditional” Slovak pieces, as they were considered old fashioned, boring, and un-relatable to the youth. The traditional gypsy song, however, was not mocked and deemed worthy for
participation as Lucia excitedly sang and imitated the gypsy dancing style along with the music.

The most popular type of music within this Slovak category throughout the evening comprised of the songs learned in grammar school by the Slovak participants. These songs were often based on popular European folk songs and were initially used for pedagogical purposes by their grammar school teachers. In this event, the songs united the participants due to their easily learned lyrics and simple melodies. The enthusiastic performance of this music was the catalyst for the third and most intriguing category of music performed during this event.

After performing one of these childhood songs, Rado scanned his repertoire for a piece that would effectively engage the participants. Since his mind had already been prepared for nostalgia, as these songs had evoked memories of childhood, along with the enjoyment of conversation with an intimate group of friends and family, he began to perform Gimn Sovetskogo Soyuza; the Soviet national anthem. Songs of communist ideology is the final category performed by those at the garden party.

Rado does not profess to be a communist in any way and is fully aware of his country's struggle under Soviet rule. He had, however, experienced the rhetoric of communist curriculum in his school, as well as through his participation in the Pioneer organization. Like the English, German, and Spanish songs Rado enjoyed, but did not understand; the ideological content of Gimn
Sovetskogo Soyuz is also not entirely explicit for him, as he does not speak Russian. Under normal circumstances with peers or in a pub when the topic of communism arises, it is popularly decried and certainly no one would ever erupt into the singing of the song that is the best representative of the Soviet era.

While many scholars believe that the ideological content of music is intrinsically and consciously bound with its performance, I posit that this is not necessarily so. In certain contexts, such as this event with a considerable tone of nostalgia, music can be detached from its explicit ideology and re-semanticized to form new meaning. In this event, the Soviet anthem was an evocation of childhood and shared experiences at a young age.

Gimn Sovetskogo Soyuz was taught to all citizens of Soviet countries at an early age. Initially the song, whose lyrics are not immediately and explicitly understood by those who do not speak Russian, would have been fun to engage in with other children due to its compelling, yet simple melody. The ideological content of the song is to be noted here as this anthem, as well as other propaganda songs, was imposed upon the children of Soviet society for a specific purpose. As children they sang the song together, unaware of the textual content, but also without the capacity to comprehend the political and ideological declarations of socialism the song possessed. Therefore, for those who experienced this music at an early age, but proceeded in their lives without
the necessity for the music due to the failure of socialism, under certain circumstances the song has evidently became associated with their childhood and school days.

While Rado performed this song, Mirka and Lucia coincidentally did not join in. They were not taught the song in school because they were too young, and while it began to be performed, they ignored it and chatted. Mirka and Lucia's indifference was interrupted when Tamas (twenty-four) began to sing along with the Hungarian text that he had been taught as a child. He cheerily sang the song, even though the lyrics and ideology were understood in his native Hungarian. He, like Rado and Heinz, also apparently enjoyed the song because it reminded him of childhood, eventually instigating conversation regarding his youth.

Rado, in fact, also recognized the political nature of the song. Immediately following its performance he briefly played a few lines from the Slovak national anthem, *Nad Tatru sa Blyska*. To Rado, *Gimn Sovetskogo Soyuzu* was a song that he associated with childhood, but also an anthem, like his country's own, that possessed a symbolic political intent. While both Rado and Tamas initially ignored the political nature of the Soviet anthem, its ideology was eventually realized and briefly coped with. A further example of the realization and coping process that indicates an initial unawareness by the individual of the ideological content of a political song came later in the evening. Tamas, whose thoughts were set in motion by the performance of the anthem, as
well as other childhood songs, recalled a song he had learned as a child titled 
"Happy, Happy Day."\(^93\) Tamás had only recently realized the meaning of the 
lyrics and was in disbelief as he described the song.

"Happy, Happy Day" was a song that proclaimed communism the great 
benevolent force on the planet. The song stated that the world would only know 
peace and prosperity when all people accepted communism. When this occurs, 
the world will say, "Everything is really good" in Russian and the Americans will 
especially enjoy the benefits of socialism as they sing "Happy, Happy Day" (the 
refrain of the song). As Tamás described this to Mirka and me, he explained that 
he had sung this song his entire life and only recently, in his twenties, had 
realized what the text was implying. This is often the case for many of us who 
have sung songs since childhood without considering the content of their text. 
For example, "Ring Around the Rosie's" gruesome depiction of the plague is 
generally not what first comes to mind when the song is sung, nor is the 
communist subtleties of "This Land is Your Land."

As Tamás' translation of the text unraveled, Mirka was audibly shocked, 
while Rado and Heinz apathetically were not. Tamás was also adamant in his 
persistence that the Slovaks must have learned a similar song to the same tune

\(^93\) The song "Happy, Happy Day" is sung in Hungarian. The line "everything is really good" is sung in 
Russian, while the refrain, "Happy, Happy Day" is sung in English, as it would be by the Americans 
celebrating communism's arrival.
as children. As Rado accompanied Tamas in the singing of this song, he indeed recalled the chorus of a similar song that he had been taught at an early age and proceeded to sing along.

In this particular situation, the generational units to which the participants belong, in correlation to their respective pasts, are rather clearly based on their knowledge of certain music. While Mirka knew the English and western songs better than her brother, Rado had knowledge of communist propaganda songs that his sister did not. Rado and Heinz were also more familiar with Slovak, Polish, and Russian bands to a greater degree than Mirka, who had admitted that she learned much about the music from her brother. Rado's appreciation for the regional music, as well as a considerably developed repertoire of Slovak songs, is an indication of his ties to traditional and communist lifestyle. Lucia's repertoire and preferences are interestingly situated between these units. Though she was closer in age to Mirka and lacking in knowledge of communist music, she is personally connected to Rado to a greater degree, therefore being more familiar with some of the traditional music he knew and enjoyed performing. Rado's influence brings her in many respects closer to his vantage point while she generally lacks many of his early life experiences.

The Jurik family is rather traditional, living in a village in the area that their family has for centuries. They grow much of their own food and have several chickens. The grandmother lives with the family and they attend church weekly.
The eldest brother Richard is a priest and Rado is going into his father's business. Unfortunately, this leaves Mirka few options to win her family's favor. In addition, she has come of age, attended school, and developed aspirations in a reality unlike the rest of her family's. Her values, behavior, and relationships with peers and family, however, were formed in a cultural experience unlike that of her older brothers, just four and six years older. The vantage point from which she has experienced the transition of her country is in many respects more positive and personally beneficial than that of her brothers'. In four years Mirka will be a university graduate, fluent in English, and fully benefiting from an EU country. These factors are profoundly reflected in her musical knowledge and preferences.

The relationships Mirka has formed with her friends, including Palec, the young man who arranged the trip to the gypsy disco, has been influenced and guided by the images and sounds of television and radio, as well as the Internet. Mirka, who has spent the majority of her childhood and adolescence with the influence of the western media, has a significantly developed repertoire of western popular songs. For those who, unlike Mirka, grew up without the dominance of western culture, its relative unimportance to them is evident as they lacked Mirka's more comprehensive knowledge of the music. Though everyone in attendance at the garden party was familiar, to a certain degree, with
the popular music of the "West," the lack of knowledge of communist music, particularly in regards to Mirka and Lucia, is evident as they did not experience the communist era in the same way as their older counterparts.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS

The central role of music in the lives of young people is significant to the study of cultural and ethnic identity, particularly for those societies that are relatively unstable and the questions of identity and generations are being scrutinized. At such a time in unstable Slovakia, the role of music in the lives of the youth is fundamental to their personal development and growth, but consequently for that of the country as well. The knowledge and application of music by the young members of this society offers tremendous insight into the various stages and processes of social and political identification.

The often-derogatory remarks made by some intelligentsia regarding the process of globalization and the subsequent loss of national and/or ethnic identity are not necessarily misguided, but to a certain extent are one-dimensional in their perception of the situation. If democracy is valued and deemed necessary for the fruitful and fair development of society, then it is inevitable that the negative attributes of "Wild-West capitalism," the most excessive form of this ethos, will have to be negotiated.
The "traditionalists" and scholars that are in fear of a mass cultural homogenization, or deterioration, most often criticize the film, music, art, and literature that are considered popular. The nomenclature "popular," as used by some academic circles, sometimes suggests a negation of the intrinsic value of the creative effort due to the perceived shallow and pre-fabricated nature of the product. However, the process of re-semanticization of these cultural outlets in non-western cultures, even when they are deemed negative, sparks the necessary social discourses and instigates the opportunities that are fundamental to a free and open society. I have shown that different the individuals, as dictated by their respective generational units and social vantage points, as well as idiosyncratic personal factors, appropriate and re-semanticize the popular music of the "West" in a variety of ways.

For the people of the formerly socialist Soviet Bloc, the taste of opportunities and freedom to join the rest of the world may be worth the negative cultural effects of capitalism; the people can at least now criticize these effects relatively freely and informed. The people confronted this situation are considerably educated and have become significantly sophisticated throughout history in science, the arts, and philosophy. Twenty years ago they were members of one of the most powerful coalitions in world history, and though today they are not, the people remain steadfast in their determination to equal their former adversaries. Much of this strength is presently being drawn from the youth's more advantageous socio-political position within the country.
The construction of identity by the youth in Slovakia, both individually and within social units, is a complex and multi-layered process. Unlike in former times, the youth now are bound to a less confining political ideology and its resulting availability of cultural outlets. The availability of cultural outlets is now restrained by the practical and financial restrictions that are the nature of capitalism in relation to a more remote, poor, and small nation. The vast wave of culture as commodity and ideology is being dealt with, often arduously, by an older generation in Slovakia whose very concept of life and social interaction was formed at a time virtually devoid of many of the tenets of democracy and capitalism, while their children have come of age immersed in these ideas.

It is within the Slovak youth culture that the “East” and “West” ideologically come together, as those more acclimated to the culture of the “Other” have become less reticent to the rhetoric and prejudice that inhibits the elder generation’s reception to unfamiliar value sets and beliefs. As the youth of the “East” grow older, they may deeply consider the conditions of their upbringing within a society that has fostered many debilitating peccadilloes. One can speculate that as the younger generation ages, some significant works reflecting on the transition process and identity construction should emerge as they become the new scholars of the “East” and begin to offer fresh and challenging philosophic perceptions of the historical events and their repercussions.

Strong commitments by the individual to either Eastern or Western allegiances of identity should slowly assuage as the distinction becomes futile in
the new Europe, as ethnic distinctions once were under communism. The ideologies that fuel the individual's natural dispositions for such alignments and identifiers, however, may persist in new forms. Music has already begun this process of building up "East/West" cultural relations, while mutually alienating factors slowly dissolve. As has proved elsewhere, ethnic, religious, and racial lines can be forgotten at least temporarily through music, while a sentiment of at respect often remains.

Politicians promote Slovakia's future as bright or at least better than it is at present and has been in the past. The Slovak youth, however, must understand the reality of their situation, especially in regards to the size of their country. For a nation as small as Slovakia to fulfill any lofty cultural aspirations is extraordinarily optimistic. As discussed in Chapter 6, countries such as Austria, Israel, and the Netherlands do produce significant local musical product, but continue to be culturally dominated by the powers of Germany, the US, and the UK. Due to the financial and social constraints of a small population, it is far more difficult to build, maintain, and project subcultures to the world. Those wishing to align with an alternative identity must subscribe to an at least globally or regionally sponsored subculture. For neighbors traditionally distasteful of one another, this may prove challenging. Slovakia's Nylon Union is, however, a band that often shares a bill with their Hungarian friends, Amber Smith. This may be a
harbinger of cross-cultural relationships, once strained, that will continue to develop in the future as similarities grow to outweigh the differences between groups.

As referenced in Chapter 4, many Western European small countries that are in fear of being Anglicized and globalized have devised language and culture laws to protect national and ethnic heritage. While these countries strive to maintain some semblance of cultural heritage, the Slovaks are decades behind in this struggle, as they are defining their culture anew and perhaps even toning down their relatively strong traditional ethnic identity. Far more young Slovaks speak English than their elders, and this trend will most likely persist through the twenty-first century. It does not seem likely, however, that Slovakia, or any other Slavic nation for that matter (except for perhaps the Czech Republic), will be in jeopardy of losing their language and cultural heritage as a result of globalization due primarily to the cultural dissimilarities between “East” and “West,” as well as a centuries old struggle against the numerous obstacles that confront the ethnic identity of a small population.

Numerous times throughout my travels, I had heard from many people in various ways that the world was very small if one did not speak English. This is inarguably now the case, and for those in Slovakia such as Rado and Heinz who have been ostensibly left behind in the great push “West,” their lives and habits may grow to become curious artifacts of another time. A delicate balance of the
old and new, as well as the "East" and "West," will continue to be negotiated as Slovak people continue to accept new and foreign cultures into their lives.

Throughout the present thesis, the young have been shown as proponents of democracy and capitalism and portrayed as champions of the potentially prosperous future of Eastern and Central Europe. The distinct generational layers caused by rapid modernization and the various past political structures in Slovakia, however, may offer the society a rather unique asset for assured significant cultural perpetuation.

As stated in Chapter 3, Slovakia experienced three different types of government during the twentieth century and almost every citizen has experienced at least two of these. In rural situations, the elderly often live in close connection to their younger family members and share with them a way of life far removed from western culture. Slovakia, for many of the very old at the time of their youth, was the pastoral northern part of Hungary and its residents essentially considered backwards peasantry. This generation understands Slovak culture and the strict "customs and traditions" to which I referred in the introduction. The family units continue to remain relevant and coherent social entities in Slovakia, and within them certain fundamental identifiers of culture persist in the intricacies of daily life, the methods of meal preparation and sharing, the communal values, and interpersonal relations. These practices and customs persist, and as they are imparted to younger generations, they will continue to help define the Slovak ethnic identity.
The issue of globalization and its effects on traditional culture and ethnic heritage is an enormous undertaking relatable to sociology, psychology, political science, marketing, and economics. Music has a stake in each of these disciplines. The Slovaks, with whom I developed relationships, utilize music both explicitly and through implicit knowledge, to express their individual identities. The experiences shared in this work offer a small glance at the globalization process through the lens of music, as it has affected one particular culture, primarily the rural eastern Spis region.

The thoughts presented here are by no means generalizations, but observations of one specific culture by a student who is in part connected to it. Researching partially from within Slovak and Spis culture, proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated, but it afforded me the necessary personal devotion to the subject. While I was unraveling Slovak identity as it was understood and negotiated by the Slovak people, I became an active participant and part of their own self-discovery. Being Slovak means different things to different people, yet most cannot verbally express it. It seemed that I was apparently expected to know what being Slovak meant and I felt that in a sense I did. Perhaps no one can express it succinctly, but I have attempted in this work to explain the numerous layers and factors contributing to what the Slovak identity had been, and, more importantly, where the process is perhaps going in regards to its potential opportunities and socio-musical state.
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