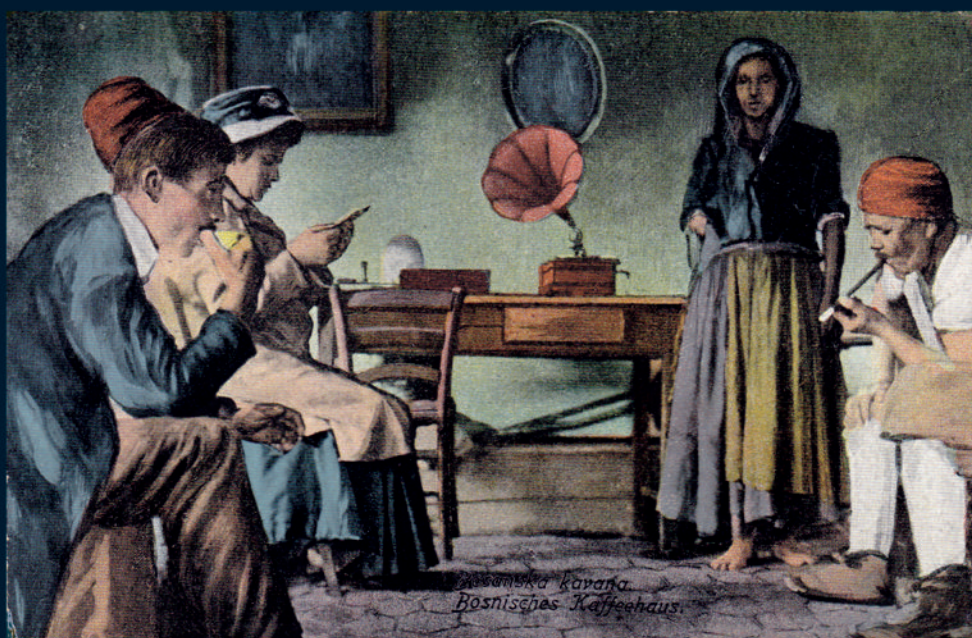


# OTTOMAN INTIMACIES, BALKAN MUSICAL REALITIES



OTTOMAN INTIMACIES,  
BALKAN MUSICAL REALITIES

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BALKAN MUSICAL REALITIES

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# Imagining the Balkans, Imagining Europe: Balkan Entries in the Eurovision Song Contest

Derek B. Scott

When August Zeune, a German geographer, put forward the notion of a Balkan Peninsula stretching below the Balkan Mountains in 1808, “Balkan” was not intended to be anything more than a geographical label. The countries that came to be known as the Balkans, however, were those that were part of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The term has never been precise and often ignores the fact that parts of Greece, Romania (Transylvania) and Serbia (Vojvodina) were not under Turkish rule. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly more for political reasons than geographical reasons that some countries find themselves categorized as Balkan.<sup>1</sup>

I am examining, here, how Balkan identity has been mediated through music chosen for the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). In the first decade of the twenty-first century the contest has frequently been seen, on the one hand, as a means of solidifying national alliances and, on the other, as an opportunity for airing political quarrels. Given the context of an expanding European Union and expanding pan-European legislation, the choices made concerning how to represent Balkan culture are of considerable significance, especially because political ambitions for the Balkans now involve membership of the European Union. The question, then, is should these countries emphasize sameness rather than difference? Alternatively, should there be an attempt to demonstrate a linguistic and cultural diversity that, far from posing a threat to the idea of European unity, adds instead to the richness of European culture?

In exploring such questions, we need to consider the impact that political and social history has had on contemporary mediations of Balkan identity and how the tension between past and present may be evaluated through the play of (post)modernity and tradition when representing Balkan culture in the ESC. In the twentieth century, the term “Balkanization” – referring to disorderly state fragmentation into nationalist entities – reinforced the political rather than the geographical connotation of the Balkans.

Nationalism was not always the driving cause of such fragmentation, however: the establishment of an independent Albania and the carving up of Macedonia in 1913, for instance, were attempts to ensure a balance of power. Most of the Balkans became communist countries after the Second World War, but strife between them was rekindled in the 1990s when independence movements challenged the federal structure of Yugoslavia. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the friction of past and present affects the very description “Balkan”, which some would wish to drop as a consequence of its having acquired too many negative associations. In 2003, for example, the *Balkan Times* was restyled the *Southeast European Times*. Greece is now more commonly referred to as a Southern European country, although there is no official definition of what constitutes Southern Europe. Croatia and Slovenia have made efforts to reject the description “Bal-

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<sup>1</sup> A history of the designation “Balkan” is given in Todorova 1997, 22–32. I should point out that the similarity between the title of my essay and that of Todorova’s book *Imagining the Balkans* is coincidence and not meant to indicate correspondence in our interpretations of representations of the Balkans.

kan”, preferring, instead, to be called Central European nations.

## National Identities and Eurovision Songs

Generally, Eurovision songs embrace a variety of music I describe as the “third type”, by which I mean the music described in different countries as Schlager, chanson, *musica leggera*, *zabavna glazba*, *λαϊκή-δημοφιλής μουσική* and easy listening. This is neither classical music nor folk music, but the commercial popular music that developed in urban environments as part of a leisure industry.<sup>2</sup> Of course, urban popular music has always been able to draw on traditions from a variety of countries, and that is because the urban sensibility is characterized by an inclination towards cosmopolitan taste and liberal attitudes. In the first few decades of the contest, countries often tried to mix something of an ethnic character that would have tourist recognition and appeal, at the same time as incorporating something typical of Eurovision. When Greece first entered the contest in 1974, for example, it was with the inspired idea of combining the sounds of a *bouzouki* with a familiar and much parodied kind of Eurovision song, a song that strives for the widest appeal by abandoning a language specific vocabulary. Such songs have the “boom bang”, “ding dong” or “la la la” refrain that aims for universal appeal beyond language borders.<sup>3</sup>

Another familiar kind of Eurovision song is that which carries a political or spiritual message. Sometimes a country goes too far, however: in 2009 when the contest was held in Russia, the Georgian entry *We Don't Wanna Put In* was banned for its over-political protest at Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's intervention in South Ossetia (note the pun on “Put in” in the title).<sup>4</sup> By way of contrast, the Greek song of 1976, performed by Mariza Koch, lamented the Turkish invasion of Cyprus of 1974, but subtly and indirectly. Cyprus is never mentioned, but it was of Cyprus that people thought when they heard some of the words.

Στον τόπο αυτό όταν θα πάτε, όι-όι μάνα μ'  
Σκηνές αν δείτε, αν δείτε στη σειρά  
Δε θα 'ναι κάμπινγκ για τουρίστες, όι-όι μάνα μ'  
Θα 'ναι μονάχα, μονάχα προσφυγιά<sup>5</sup>

In just the same way as a song needs to avoid being too clearly political, a song that evokes a spiritual mood should avoid implying anything specifically liturgical. Broad appeal needs to be maintained in order to be suggestive of the people as one, a British example being *Power to All Our Friends* (No. 3, 1973).<sup>6</sup> Who could possibly object to such a sentiment?

<sup>2</sup> See Scott 2008, 5–6; *id.* 2009.

<sup>3</sup> It was *Κρασί, θάλασσα και τ'αγόρι μου* (words by Pythagoras, music by Giorgos Katsaros), sung by Marinella and featuring a “la la la” chorus.

<sup>4</sup> The words were by Bibi Kvachadze and the music by Stefane Mgebrishvili. The performance by Stephane & 3G emphasized the homophone with the Russian prime minister's name. They resisted pressure for alterations, and the Eurovision Broadcasting Union declared that the song did not comply with section 4, rule 9 of the ESC, and so was refused entry. See Bakker 2009.

<sup>5</sup> “If you go to this place, oh my mother, if you see a row of tents, it won't be camping for tourists, oh my mother, it will be refugees only.” *Παναγιά μου, παναγιά μου*, words by Michael Fotiades, music by Mariza Koch.

<sup>6</sup> Words and music by Guy Fletcher and Doug Flett, sung by Cliff Richard.



A third common Eurovision song type is the “enjoy life” or party-time song. Examples are *Congratulations* (UK, No. 2, 1968),<sup>7</sup> and *Laß die Sonne in dein Herz* (“Let the Sun into Your Heart”) (Germany, No. 2, 1987).<sup>8</sup> In these songs the idea of social celebration overrides matters of European ethnicity: the last-mentioned song, for instance, is reggae influenced. Although *Congratulations* was a British entry, it might be thought that the move into the final refrain is indebted, rather, to Greek culture: the acceleration of tempo sounds more than a little like *Zorba’s Dance*.

This dance, from the film score by Mikis Theodorakis to *Zorba the Greek* (1964),<sup>9</sup> became known rapidly throughout Europe. It is significant, however, in the light of my previous comments, that *Zorba’s Dance* is the *συρτάκι*, which, unlike the *συρτός*, is not a folk dance; in fact, it was composed specially for the film. It mixes two forms of the *χασάπικο* dance: the *βαρύ χασάπικο* (4/4 slow) and the *χασαποσέρβικο* (2/4 fast). In brief, it is born of popular culture (the movies), not of folk culture. Since strong two-beat rhythms are a favourite of Eurovision songs, it would be surprising if no country other than Greece saw the potential of the *χασάπικο*. A modicum of exploration uncovers the Dutch entry of 1972, *Als het om de liefde gaat* (“When It’s All about Love”).<sup>10</sup>

A final type of tried and tested Eurovision favourite is the song suggestive of public spaces for experiencing leisure-time pleasure, an example being *Ze rak sport* (“Viva Sport”, Israel, No. 6, 1992).<sup>11</sup> The Greek entry of 1978 made Charlie Chaplin its subject matter.<sup>12</sup> He was, of course, someone who transcended the language barrier, a silent screen star of international appeal.

It is rare to find a song in the ESC final that is marked strongly with an ethnic character throughout (Bulgaria’s *Boda* [“Water”] of 2007<sup>13</sup> is one of the exceptions), and if ethnic features are present, they are most likely to be found in the verse or instrumental interludes rather than the chorus. In the twenty-first century, Greece has generally chosen urban styles that mix a variety of elements. *My Number One*, performed by Helena Paparizou in 2005, mixed folky elements with tourist appeal, contemporary dance and a Europop chorus.<sup>14</sup>

## Nationalism, Folk Music Parody and Camp Performances of Identity

The collapse of the Yugoslav socialist federation meant that popular music of a nationalist character took on a strong political dimension, not least because it could open old wounds.<sup>15</sup> Belgrade in the 1990s saw the development of what became known as *turbo-*

<sup>7</sup> Words and music by Bill Martin and Phil Coulter, sung by Cliff Richard.

<sup>8</sup> Lyrics by Bernd Meinunger, music by Ralph Siegel, sung by Wind.

<sup>9</sup> Directed by Michael Cacoyannis (based on the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis).

<sup>10</sup> Lyrics by Hans van Hemert, music by Dries Holten, sung by Sandra and Andres (Holland, No. 4, 1972). Listen to the section beginning *Ach, wat is het moeilijk om een eerlijk mens te zijn* (“Ah, How Difficult It is to Be an Honest Person”).

<sup>11</sup> Lyrics by Ehud Manor, music by Kobi Oshrat, sung by Dafna.

<sup>12</sup> *Τσάρλυ Τσάπλιν* (Charlie Chaplin), words by Giannis Xanthoulis, music by Sakis Tsilikis, sung by Tania Tsanaklidou. It came eighth. Chaplin had died in December 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Performed in Bulgarian by Elitsa Todorova (words and music) and Stoyan Yankoulov (music). Even this song managed to include elements of techno, a musical style well-known in European urban club culture.

<sup>14</sup> Words by Christos Dantis and Natalia Germanou, music by Dantis.

<sup>15</sup> For a summary of the effects the civil wars of 1991–1995 had on music in the formerly multinational Yugo-

*folk* (a mixture of folk, pop and urban dance club rhythms). Serbian *turbofolk* found an audience in Croatia and Bosnia, even during the time when it might have been considered the enemy's music. Croatia, more particularly its capital Zagreb, had been vitally important to the Yugoslav music industry (despite Belgrade being the capital of Yugoslavia), but links with Serbia dried up after the war. In the 1990s, it was virtually impossible for Serbian and Croatian musicians to perform in each other's countries, even though no official ban existed. Slobodan Milošević's fall from power in 2000 changed that, but there were still those who continued to have strong negative feelings: Oliver Dragojević, born in Dalmatia, allegedly refused 200 000 euros to sing in Belgrade.<sup>16</sup>

As always, what is crucial is the way music with national associations is used or consumed. To choose a British illustration of this, when *Land of Hope and Glory* is sung at the *Last Night of the Proms* it is not a call to reengage with imperialist adventure. The words that call for Britain's boundaries to be set wider and wider are now sung with an ironic knowingness of past colonial exploits. Croatia's entry in the Eurovision Song Contest of 2006 incorporated folk styles from Zagora and Herzegovina, music that was marginalized by the Croatian media as a consequence of political unrest in those areas,<sup>17</sup> but the music was reused in the context of folk parody, and the words were nonsensical. *Moja štikla* ("My stiletto") was performed by Severina, an artist associated with folk-pop crossover, accompanied by the Croatian band Let 3.<sup>18</sup> The promotional video, released before the contest, made the postmodernist character of the song obvious by creating a sense of incongruity between the music and the urban buildings and traffic scenes. The song nevertheless put Croatia in danger of exposing sensitive issues at Eurovision. The composers, Boris Novković and Franjo Valentić, asked Goran Bregović, a Sarajevo rock musician of mixed ethnic background, to do the arrangement. The result sounded Serbian, and newspapers began to debate whether or not the lyrics were in a Serbian rather than Herzegovinian dialect. Catherine Baker, in her book *Sounds of the Borderland*, covers the debate in the media about whether the song was Croatian and, if so, what made it Croatian. It led to the resurfacing of the old notion that Croatia's culture was inclined towards Austria, Slovenia and Hungary, whereas Serbia looked in the direction of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.

In the two years that followed *Moja štikla*, Croatia played safe, first with a rock ballad and then with a song in Latin style. This was a way of avoiding the problems thrown up by displaying Balkan features and is easily accounted for: Croatia was seeking a solid European identity, and the Balkan elements may be taken to connote cultural otherness.<sup>19</sup> *Moja štikla* showed that trying to modernize or, rather, postmodernize folk traditions could prove problematic. Croatia was now nervous about whether a Balkan sound might be heard as part of a contemporary and postmodern outlook or whether it still carried connotations of a pre-industrial rural society, economic hardship and political

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slavia, see Pettan 2010, 179–181.

<sup>16</sup> Gajić 2002, cited in Muršič 2011, 94.

<sup>17</sup> Baker 2010, 143.

<sup>18</sup> Words by Severina Vučković, music by Boris Novković and Franjo Valentić. When Let 3 later found themselves being censored in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was not because of making fun of local folk music but, rather, for indulging in the Western European rock-and-roll habit of exposing their penises on stage.

<sup>19</sup> "Otherness" is a key concept in postcolonial criticism and plays an important role in debates about ethnic stereotyping. For a lucid introduction to theories of otherness, see Hall 1997. For a collection of essays examining how the Balkans have been constructed as the Other to Europe since the mid-twentieth century, see Hammond 2004.

strife. The ESC exposes countries to the gaze of Europe, the dominant image of which is urban, while the lingering image of the Balkans is rural. The consequence is that a Balkan country may worry about giving an impression of having an outlook that is inward and backward looking, rather than cosmopolitan and international. Yet, ignoring indigenous traditions means that the same country ends up staging a performance that carries no clear message about national identity. This has its own negative effects: it fails to create a distinct impression about the country concerned and fails to generate tourism with its associated economic benefits.

Croatian popular musicians have long sought success across Europe as a whole, and the Eurovision holds out the potential for achieving this. The example of the international fame accorded to the Swedish group Abba following their ESC appearance in 1974 always springs to mind. Yet it is not Croatia but Bosnia that has come closest to imitating Abba. Feminnem's *Call Me*, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian entry of 2005 was sung in English, and that was not the only resemblance it had to Abba's *Waterloo*.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it ended up in fourteenth place when votes were cast. As evidence that ethnic features do not necessarily damage a country's chances at the Eurovision, Bosnia and Herzegovina found that their entry the next year, *Lejla*, finished eleven places higher, at number three.<sup>21</sup>

What was notably absent from the Croatian media debate about the ethnic character of *Moja štikla* was any reference to the concept of camp; yet this is the quality that places the song more firmly in the tradition of Eurovision than in Croatian or Serbian traditions. Robin Deam Tobin, citing lesbian, transsexual and transvestite performances from 1997 on, suggests that the contest "offers a model of European citizenship that is particularly amenable to the needs that are present in queer populations and communities" and that it is a model that "relies on the possibility of camp performances of identity".<sup>22</sup> He holds that the sense of citizenship on offer here is that of belonging, of having a voice and equal rights. The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights put Europe at the fore in defending the rights of gays and lesbians and by doing so recognized that liberal attitudes to sexual minorities and the protection of their rights form an important part of what it means to be European. On 17 September 1998, the European Parliament passed a resolution denying admission to any nation that failed to respect gay and lesbian rights. At the time, this meant Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania and Romania.<sup>23</sup> The Eurovision Song Contest is widely recognized to be an event during which camp is on abundant display.

Camp celebrates artificiality and thus runs counter to blood and soil ideology. Dana International made the gay and camp qualities of the ESC overt in 1998. These days the audience is more than ready to make camp and queer readings of what they see (for example, to see kitsch as intentional and to interpret excessive amounts of machismo or femininity as ironic poses). At the same time there are some subtly nuanced performances: *Molitva* (*Molitva*; "Prayer"), the Serbian entry of 2007 was the first non-English language winner since 1998, and the singer Marija Šerifović dressed as a drag king but

<sup>20</sup> The words and music of *Call Me* were by Andrej Babić. The words and music of *Waterloo* were by Benny Andersson, Stig Anderson and Björn Ulvaeus.

<sup>21</sup> Words by Fahrudin Pecikoza and Dejan Ivanović, music by Željko Joksimović. Performed by Hari Mata Hari.

<sup>22</sup> Tobin 2007, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Tobin 2007, 31, n. 28.

sang like a woman.<sup>24</sup> Her prayer was not religious but, rather, a plea to be released from the pain of love. Despite the minor key, the song is not especially marked ethnically, and, indeed, the piano is at first the most conspicuous instrument in the arrangement. Marija was surrounded by five women all wearing suits and ties and offering supporting gestures; they were unsmiling and there was no dance routine. This is a remarkable example of Eurovision avoiding any obvious “showbiz” quality and also avoiding the exploitative lesbian packaging of tATu, the duo who sang for Russia in 2003.

## Embracing European Values and Challenging Balkan Stereotypes

Having won the contest with *Molitva* in 2007, Serbia was the next to play host to the ESC. After the conclusion of the 2008 Eurovision song contest held in Belgrade, the international media heaped praise on Serbia for running the event so smoothly. They commented on the positive way it affected Serbia’s international image, which had been damaged by events of the 1990s. Even in the weeks before the contest, Serbia was receiving negative publicity because Serbian fascists were threatening gay visitors with violence as well as citizens of countries that recognized the independence of Kosovo. In the event, the show was a success, and the Serbian national TV director Aleksandar Tijanić, interviewed by the *Blic* newspaper, declared “we have managed to change the stereotypical image of Serbia and that is something priceless”. A CNN report (quoted by *Blic*) concurred with this: “Serbian authorities went out of their way to throw a well-organized party, seizing the chance to present the country to the world as a normal European nation after years of pariah status in the 1990s under late strongman Slobodan Milošević”. According to the BBC, the way that the contest was handled proved that Serbia was part of Europe and able to show a friendly face that had not been seen in the media for a long time.<sup>25</sup> The question, then, is how to avoid a negative image of Balkanization – that of an area divided up into squabbling states – in the context of addressing a large group of countries that are committed to moving together with a set of common aims and interests. The ESC clearly allowed Serbia to change the political perceptions of many countries and to signal that it was moving in a pro-European direction.<sup>26</sup>

Thomas Solomon claims that when Turkey won the contest in 2003, it was regarded by many Turks as “a symbol of finally being accepted as a ‘European’ country rather than a ‘Middle Eastern’ one” and that it “fuelled Turkey’s aspirations to join the European Union”.<sup>27</sup> However, Turkey won with a performance that Matthew Gumpert has described as “auto-Orientalism”, a song in English (*Everyway That I Can*) accompanied by a certain amount of ethnic stereotyping in both music and dance (belly-dancing being the most obvious where the latter was concerned).<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, he also makes a case for the performance to be seen as a rejection of Orientalism through its knowing

<sup>24</sup> Words by Saša Milošević Mare, music by Vladimir Graić.

<sup>25</sup> See *Balkan Travellers* 2008.

<sup>26</sup> In fact, from the 1880s onwards, most of the Balkan states had been making the transition from Ottoman to European patterns of life (see Jelavich 1983a, 45–50).

<sup>27</sup> Solomon 2007, 135.

<sup>28</sup> Gumpert 2007, 147. The words to *Everyway That I Can* were by Demir Demirkan and the music by Cemirkan and Sertab Erener. It was sung by Sertab Erener.

deployment of Orientalist clichés.<sup>29</sup> We have a familiar postmodernist mix of inscription and subversion.

Indeed, Turkey would have felt no need to fall back on Orientalist clichés, given that they had achieved third place in 1997 with *Dinle* (“Listen”) performed in Turkish by Şebnem Paker & Grup Etnic.<sup>30</sup> This offers evidence that it is not necessarily fear of a poor result that inclines countries to stress or play down ethnic features. Moreover, compromise is the name of the game: in spite of the ethnic character of *Dinle*, the singer makes Western-style dance movements and wears a black mini-skirt.

An important consideration in choosing a song is what sort of image the country wishes to project, and this is often guided by political rather than aesthetic reasons. Serbia and Montenegro chose to demonstrate that they were in touch with European popular taste by selecting a Montenegrin boy band, No Name, to represent them in 2005, despite nearly winning with the ethnically marked *Лане моје* (*Lane Moje*; My Sweetheart) the previous year.<sup>31</sup> However, the boy band proved highly untypical in their willingness to sing confidently in 7/8 time, the first time Eurovision had encountered a song in this metre.<sup>32</sup>

## Political Bias in Voting Patterns

Although many would argue that political voting has become more pronounced, it is difficult to show that the current system of voting allows political *manipulation*. There is clearly a need, however, to account for some of the voting patterns. The contest of 2008 seemed to some to spell the end of the idea that the song itself was the subject of voting. Still fresh in the mind were memories of the previous year, when the votes awarded and received by countries that were new to the contest meant that most of the Western European countries were wiped out at the semi-final stage. The only ones to participate were sponsoring countries like France and the UK, since they could not be voted out at that stage. Not only did the same thing happen in 2008, but it was often predictable which country would award the maximum number of points to which other country. Usually, and perhaps surprisingly, it involved neighbouring countries that had endured a history of conflict with each other. That is why the concept of “buddy voting” is too simplistic (although it may apply in certain cases); it fails to explain why countries are able to award high marks to neighbours they appear to dislike at other times. Alf Björnberg has described the Eurovision Song Contest as filling the function of “focusing issues of national identity and prestige in an international setting”.<sup>33</sup> He also notes that the voting system allows a “manifestation of allegiances” between countries who may feel they are on the periphery of Europe rather than politically or culturally central.<sup>34</sup> However, it needs to be stressed that this is not simply a question of allegiances *per se*, but of *allegiances within the periphery*, that is, allegiances that arise from having the periphery in common and not

<sup>29</sup> Gumpert 2007, 154–157.

<sup>30</sup> Words by Mehtap Alntemiz, music by Levent Çoker.

<sup>31</sup> Words by Leontina Vukomanović, music by Željko Joksimović.

<sup>32</sup> *Zauvijek Moja* (“Forever Mine”) words by Milan Perić, music by Slaven Knezović. The additive metre is 3+4.

<sup>33</sup> Björnberg 2007, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Björnberg 2007, 17.

necessarily from sharing a history of amicable relations.

Another matter that needs to be brought into the equation is immigration. Some European countries have substantial ethnic minority communities who can affect the voting. For example, although nobody living in Turkey can vote for Turkey (because people are not allowed to vote for their own country), this rule presents no obstacle to anyone Turkish who is living and working in Germany or, for that matter, anyone Albanian living in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The enthusiastic voting of ethnic minority populations in various European countries is sometimes cited as having a major impact on the contest's outcome. It is also something that countries hosting such populations may reflect upon when selecting songs for the competition: Thorsten Hindrichs claims, for example, that Germany's *Reise nach Jerusalem / Kudüs'e seyahat* ("Journey to Jerusalem")<sup>35</sup> of 1999 was influenced by Turkish star Tarkan's ethno-pop song *Şımarık* ("Spoiled"), a European hit of the same year.<sup>36</sup> The words of *Reise nach Jerusalem* were sung in both German and Turkish, taking advantage of the fact that the year it was entered a change in the rules allowed songs to be sung in any language.

Questions about the fairness of the contest have increased in recent years. The voting in 2008 showed that, of the 43 voting countries, 17 (approximately 40%) gave their maximum number of points to a country with whom they shared a border. Yet historic voting patterns between countries were actually taken into account when planning the semi-finals in 2008. The 38 participating countries were grouped into six "pots", and both geographical location and voting history governed who was in each pot. Then half of each pot participated in semi-final one and the other half in semi-final two. Six entries from the Balkan countries were, for example, placed in pot one – Serbia was absent because, as host country, its place in the final was assured. The other automatic finalists were the sponsoring countries: France, Germany, Spain and the UK. They all ended up in the bottom ten when the 25 finalists were voted on. In 2009, there was a return to the use of national juries who would have a 50% say in the votes, alongside the telephone voting in each country. It was not evident that this improved matters very much for Western Europe. It may well be that music styles are developing in Europe that link certain nations into groups (Balkan, Nordic, Western European) and that the Western European style no longer holds sway.

## Conclusion: Balkan Beats and Global Fusion

In brief, the Balkan myth is that countries in this culturally varied part of Europe share a set of hostile characteristics threatening Western values. That is why the myth relates to Orientalist discourse.<sup>37</sup> By the middle of the twentieth century, this myth had led to some people making almost no differentiation between Balkan nations. Here is a caricature of a Balkan state from an Agatha Christie novel of 1925: "Principal rivers, unknown. Principal mountains, unknown, but fairly numerous. Capital Ekarest. Population, chiefly brigands. Hobby, assassinating kings and having revolutions."<sup>38</sup>

A more recent example of Balkan stereotyping is found in *Eurobeat*, a stage mu-

<sup>35</sup> Sung by Sürpriz; words by Bernd Meinunger, Deniz Filizmen and Cihan Özden, music by Ralph Siegel.

<sup>36</sup> Hindrichs 2007, 55.

<sup>37</sup> See Norris 1999, 11–13.

<sup>38</sup> *The Secret of Chimneys*, quoted in Todorova 1997, 122.



sical based on the ESC, first performed in Edinburgh in 2007. It is set in Sarajevo, presented by hosts Sergei and Boyka. The Eurobeat website has a helpful list of phrases in Bosnian:<sup>39</sup>

*Help! – Upomic!*  
*I've been injured – Povrijedio sam se*  
*Do you have a toilet? – Da li imate je WC?*  
*I need aspirin – Treba me lijek za boi*  
*How much is this turnip? – Koliko je ovo repa?*

This says a lot about Western European perceptions of the Balkans as violent, undeveloped and rural, although the musical itself is good humoured and much more interested in being a camp-fest.

In 2007, Romania turned the tables on the “othering” of the Balkans by gently poking fun at stereotypical images of Western European countries in a song sung in six languages.<sup>40</sup> The song tells us that love means the same everywhere. The first character to appear wearing his traditional national costume or, at least, his urban outfit complete with bowler hat, is English. Romania was also at the forefront of the celebration of Balkanness. In 2009, their entry assured us that “Balkan girls they like to party, like to party like nobody”.<sup>41</sup> We were also able to witness, in the Romanian official video preview, the ingenuity of Balkan girls in discovering how to avoid the difficulty of driving back home after a night drinking “gin, tonic and lime”. They arrive at the dance club using a mode of transport guaranteed to remember the way back for them: horses.

The Balkan myth has frequently guided interpretations of what was happening in this part of the world, and I want to end by asking if we are encouraging further myth-making these days when we suggest that an emphasis on Balkan musical features promotes ideas of cultural isolation and otherness because it indicates Balkan unwillingness or inability to integrate with the rest of Europe. After all, there are musical styles and genres in Western European countries that do not travel easily elsewhere. French chanson, for instance, has never entered mainstream entertainment in the UK. In fact French popular music has for many years, with the exception of jazz, set itself apart from Anglo-American models. In the later twentieth century, however, French popular music began to make a wider impact in the genre of electronic dance music and its associated club culture. In recent years, it appears that Balkan music, too, has been playing a growing role in club culture. Two significant factors have coalesced to make this possible. First, globalization has meant that all kinds of music from around the world have become more accessible. In the first decade of the twentieth century an international audience grew for Balkan brass ensembles, a tradition derived from both the Habsburg and Ottoman past, but reworked as party music rather than military music. The star attractions as I write this chapter in 2011 are the Boban and Marko Marković Orchestra from Serbia and Fanfare Ciocărlia

<sup>39</sup> See *Eurobeat*.

<sup>40</sup> *Liubi, Liubi, I Love You*, multilingual words by Ghedi Kamara, Vlad Crețu and Mister M, music by Mister M. Performed by Todomondo. The languages used are English, Italian, Spanish, Russian, French and Romanian, but reference is also made to Neapolitan (the word *guagliò*).

<sup>41</sup> *The Balkan Girls*, words by Laurențiu Duță and Alexandru Pelin, music by Daris Mangal, Ovidiu Bistriceanu and Laurențiu Duță. Performed by Elena Gheorghe (and friends). In verse one Elena informs us, “I’m gonna start my weekend with gin, tonic and lime”.

from Romania (the latter being better known abroad than they are in their own country).<sup>42</sup> Second, we have witnessed the rise of the DJ as a creative agent in electronic dance music, a genre that makes much use of sampling. From the sampling of certain sounds to being inspired by those sounds is a small step, and it is now by no means uncommon to hear Balkan sounds in some Western European clubs. In Austria, Anja Brunner was engaged throughout 2010 in a research project investigating what she calls the “Balkan club scene”, which embraces music labelled variously as “Balkan Beats”, “Balkan Pop” and “Electric Balkan”.<sup>43</sup>

A question arises about how far these developments might be viewed negatively as appropriation; but this anxiety may serve only to lead us back into further myth-making and an uncritical adoption of a theoretical framework that relies on ideas of cultural authenticity and culture being “in the blood”. Musicians, more than most artists, have always taken whatever they like from whatever culture they encounter. The years of Ottoman rule left a legacy of cultural networks connecting Turkey to the Balkan countries. The most ethnically marked music should not be presumed to have evolved in the rural areas, for the reason that the Ottoman Empire located its administration in the cities.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, despite the nationalist aspirations that have existed within Balkan states, Barbara Jelavich, in her large-scale study of Balkan History, insists that “the legacy of Ottoman rule was an intimate part of the life of each individual and one that could not be easily obliterated”.<sup>45</sup> Ottoman musical practices were able to fertilize local musical styles, rather than causing them to stagnate. Donna Buchanan has written an instructive account of the various transformations of the nineteenth-century Turkish song *Üsküdar*. She points out that a phrase from the melody even appears in the German Eurovision entry of 1999 *Reise nach Jerusalem*.<sup>46</sup> To offer another example of cross-fertilization, the instrument so crucial to *rebetiko* and immediately associated with Greece, the *bouzouki*, was most likely developed from the Turkish *buzuk saz*. Moreover, the *bouzouki* is an urban instrument and *rebetiko* a form of urban song that was related in its early days (the 1930s) to Ottoman café music.

Although there are distinct styles associated with particular places and social groups in the Balkans, there are also plenty of shared features, whether in rhythms or vocal production or dance movements. In recent years, indeed, Balkan musicians have been borrowing so much from each other that it might be concluded that a common Balkan music is developing, in which it is difficult to say which elements might be Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian or Turkish.<sup>47</sup> This is at odds with the effort that each country often makes to construct a sense of its own national identity.

Perhaps we need to refocus on cultural choices rather than cultural genes. We have seen time and time again the ability of social groups across the globe to identify wholeheartedly with a musical style that is in no way indigenous to the country in which they were born or reside. This was as true of the Viennese waltz a century and a half ago as it was of reggae from Trenchtown, Jamaica, in the 1970s. We still do not know why par-

<sup>42</sup> Fanfare Ciocărlia can be seen (and heard) giving a Balkan interpretation of the Steppenwolf song *Born To Be Wild* (Mars Bonfire, 1968) on YouTube, see Fanfare 2010.

<sup>43</sup> See Brunner 2010.

<sup>44</sup> See Pettan 2007, 369 and Norris 1999, 89.

<sup>45</sup> Jelavich 1983b, 104.

<sup>46</sup> Buchanan 2007, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Sugarman 2007, 300.



ticular styles can quickly gain widespread and enthusiastic acceptance. The singer Tom Jones recollected the immediate impact that Bill Hailey's *Rock Around the Clock* had on him as a young man. It says it "jumped out of the radio at him".<sup>48</sup> Note that he did not say he realized simultaneously that he could identify with the people behind this kind of music – although, of course, he later did so. No, the effect was visceral and spontaneous.

Balkan sounds are currently firing the imagination of popular musicians in various parts of Europe, and this could spread rapidly along the DJ circuit. Of course, I am not suggesting that it means we can celebrate some kind of cultural preservation. No, what is happening is alive, out of control, and we cannot determine where it is heading. But we do know that it is bound to help at last to eradicate the notion that the Balkans are Europe's internal cultural Other and replace it with an acknowledgement that the Balkans have a fully integrated role to play in Europe.

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<sup>48</sup> Desert 2010.

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