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THIS IS THE BALKANS: CONSTRUCTING POSITIVE STEREOTYPES ABOUT THE BALKANS AND AUTOBALKANISM*

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Abstract: This paper deals with 'Balkan music', a specific sound notion of an imaginary place of the 'European inner Other'. It emphasizes a very significant role of music in the process of creating stereotypic images about the Balkans. The paper points to current acceptation and adoption of the so-called positive stereotypes that represent the Balkans as the European corner for fun and a place of exaggerated passion. By means of this process, the products of popular culture in Serbia are being converted into cultural resources leading to autobalkanism, i.e., understanding of self as a member of the Balkan culture as seen from the Western perspective. As an example of the mentioned adoption and use of stereotypes in representing own national identity combined with the Western identity, this paper analyzes the song *Ovo je Balkan (This is the Balkans / Balkañeros*), composed by Goran Bregović, as well as media coverage related to it.

Keywords: the Balkans, 'Eurovision song contest', Goran Bregović, autobalkanism.

The study of popular music genre based on cliché-ridden music characteristics related to the image of the Balkans, has, in recent years, been gaining significant attention of scientists from various disciplines with common theoretical basis in so-called Balkan studies. The studies of Edward Said (2008), Maria Todorova (2006, 2010), Milica Bakić-Hayden (2006), Vesna Goldsworty (2002) and others, have found the application in analysis of this music which is mostly performed outside the Balkan area (Dimova 2007, Hemetek 2009, Kovačić 2009, Laušević 2007, Marković 2008a). This paper aims to contribute to the examination of this Balkan phenomenon on the basis of a domestic example, by particularly investigating why is this song at all of a local origin and by trying to point out the imperativeness of emic approach. It is also important to mention that the problem of perception and use of Balkan stereotypes in popular music was not significantly considered in works by professionals. This is especially problematic since it makes up a part of their everyday life. Additionally, the concept of the Balkans is gaining more representative status in public discourse and, at the moment, it is very important in state cultural politics.

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Edward Said's concept of orientalism was fundamental for numerous later reflections on the Balkans: 'Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'. (...) Without examining orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period' (2008: 11–12). The thesis where the Occident attributes stereotypes of racial, cultural, religious and gender inferiority to the imaginary Orient (i.e., the Other) is applicable to the study of the Balkans in regard to Europe, and it simultaneously serves more complex interpretations, since the Balkans is a part of its own West as well as the place of interaction between the Orient and the Occident. Essentialized constructs of the Orient and Balkans are vital even today, and it is particularly problematic that due to long perpetuation in Western European discourse, the stigmatized ones adopt them. When discussing the notion of self of the peoples of the Orient, Said indicated the danger of stereotype assumption, especially negative ones (2008: 431). He additionally noticed an 'almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity', which he called a latent orientalism (Ibid.: 275). The problem of the assumption of stereotypes about disputable phenomenon and the release from the same was very important for Said's scientific successors.

On the pattern of the concept of orientalism, Marija Todorova established balkanism - '(...) it relates to all the interpretations by which the phenomena from Southeastern Europe, i.e. the Balkans, rest upon the discourse (in Foucault's term) or a stable system of stereotypes (for those who have an aversion to the concept of discourse), that place the Balkans in a cognitive straightjacket' (2006: 10). Throughout the book entitled 'Imagining the Balkans', she also explained the appearance of various negative attributes relating to the Balkans, labelled by the (imagining) West. This attribute is more complex than the negative concept of 'balkanisation', which implies 'the process of nationalist fragmentation of former geographic and political units into new ones' (Ibid.: 97). Even in today's popular culture and art, it is obvious that the strong pressure on the Balkan people relating to the negative stereotyping (as primitive, violent, etc.) is still present, but owing to emancipating efforts of the mentioned researchers, that aspiration is being demystified and abandoned in public discourse. In her renowned book about representations of the Balkans, Todorova dedicated the chapter "Balkans' as self-designation' to problem of the notion of the Balkans in educated elite, and pointed out that being accustomed to belittling from the outside, influences the self-image of the Balkan people and indicates a form of self-compassion (Ibid.: 96, 105-44). In the spirit of postcolonial studies, Todorova posed a question whether it is possible that the subaltern speak for themselves and whether the impossibility of self-presentation makes them oppressed (Ibid.: 33). This paper will illuminate the use of representing power and mechanisms of its politics as an attempt to convert the subjugation into predominance.

The liminal position of the Balkans – as a clash-and-meet point between East and West, as European incomplete other and incomplete self (Fleming 2001: 31) – implies an ambivalent attitude of the West towards the Balkans, and it therefore might be interpreted as an object of disgust and as that of consumer's desire (Kiossev 2005: 180). There are also some positive stereotypes about the Balkans, i.e., benevolent representations such as wild, exotic, authentic, passionate, and immoderate. The image of the Balkans as the ethnographic museum on the periphery is constructed in Western European discourse (Todorova 2006: 352), and is substantiated by both former and current interest of the people of Europe for the Balkans as the place of ecstatic experience and entertainment. Based on the available research of foreign authors (Jansen 2001, Razsa and Lindstrom 2004), as well as numerous domestic media contextualization of everyday and popular culture, it might be said that members of some nationalities of the Balkans have formed attitudes toward the Balkans and the West that are usually perceived as binary opposition, where Europe (i.e. the West) has the positive, while the Balkans entails a negative connotation. This may be elaborated on the example of each of the Balkan countries, but this paper will discuss the relation toward Serbia as a representative of the Balkans.³ The case of Serbia is paradigmatic since the representation of the Balkans as (half)other relates to Serbia as well, and because of the fact that it is usually referred to as being nationalistic and violent in light of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Apart from that, Serbia is in actual socialpolitical transition recognized in a more current discourse of the Western Balkans in media, showing its geopolitical tendency toward European union, but still remaining in the domain of the Balkans which generally represents a new form of balkanism (Svilar 2010: 515-518, 534). This reflects in the music as well, but that will be a topic of a separate study.

Stereotypes about the Balkans are used in different forms of popular culture – literature (Goldsworthy 2005), movies (Iordanova 2001), music (Marković 2008a) – which all contributes to their expansion among the Balkan population. Positive stereotypes about the Balkans essentially originate from negative ones and might be more precisely named as pseudo-positive. Positive

¹ This interesting exist in different countries (Slovenia, Austria, Netherlands, United states of America), and there is also a huge number of newspaper articles on this topic, as well as the Internet presentations of the fans of the Balkans who actively participate in the 'Balkan' fun events.

² On the perceptions of the East more in: Bakić-Hayden 2006.

³ 'Another feature common to all Balkan nations is the self-perception of being at the crossroads of civilizational contacts, of having the character of a bridge between cultures', particularly the countries of former Yugoslavia (Todorova 2006: 138, 128). Though this comment of Todorova might be understood as partially correct, this paper deals with the situation in Serbia since it is more familiar to the author. Similar researches exist in other countries as well (e.g. Jezernik 2010).

stereotypes are not at all less harmful than the negative ones, since they feature a trait of being acceptable and non transparent at times. It seems that popular music is a particularly suitable device for positive stereotyping, since its concept is propagation of the Balkans as the place of entertainment, and due to its simplicity, is universally impressionable. According to the literature, Balkan people internalize negative stereotypes, although in an axiologically positive context, where the concept of the Balkans represents the justification for a bad quality and confirmation of inferiority (Todorova 2006: 96). In addition to this, in their self-image, they convert negative stigma into the satisfaction of what is forbidden in Europe (Kiossev 2005: 185). In this paper, the assumption of stereotyping the Balkans by the Balkan people, in particular the positive stereotypes since they are more easily adoptable, is referred to as autobalkanism. Autobalkanism is a continuation of this discourse, since it represents the comprehension of the Balkans from the Balkan aspect of out-of-Balkan image of the Balkans.

Most problematic in this paper appears the adoption of these stereotypes as cultural and tourist resources (Република Србија 2006: 7–11), primarily inspired by economic reasons. A strategic approach makes disputable the presentation of simulacra of the Balkans as a revived folklore heritage, i.e., adding the aura of authenticity. In this manner, the stereotypes are repeated and super structured, and the problem becomes more complex when they start incorporating other collective identities, such as national, and when they aspire to press them. Therefore, autobalkanism has various forms of manifestation. An official document of the Republic of Serbia, 'Strategy for Development of tourism in Serbia' from 2006, refers to the use of positive stereotypes about the Balkans as a cultural resource:

The Republic of Serbia has to build its competitiveness in tourism over the long term and according to the following strategic advantages: (...)

6) Spiritual heritage and tendency toward festivals, celebrations and other events, which enables the Republic of Serbia to present its own life style. (p. 7)

The Republic of Serbia is the Transdanubian, Central European and Balkan country, which identically evaluates all natural and cultural resources at its disposal. Belgrade, the capital, is a metropolis of cosmopolitan spirit that uses its dynamism, and the accentuated 'joie de vivre' attitude of its citizens thattract business and other guests from all over the world. (p. 8)

The fact is that in the last decade, none of the traditional Balkan countries turned to tourism valorisation of the term Balkan, which is an inexhaustible basis for branding of tourist experiences on an 'emotional'

⁴ The most representative example of this tendency might be the 'Trumpet festival' in Guča, where the experiences of the visitors and media reportings do not accentuate the music programme for the sake of promotion of entertainment, which is at the same time the part of marketing strategy for the attraction of a larger number of foreign visitors.

scale. Bearing that in mind, it is important to emphasize that this option, over the long term, could represent a significant marketing potential in tourism. However, we should point out the fact that the general shortfall of positive connotation of the term Balkan is still present. (p. 10).

The case study is the song *Ovo je Balkan (This is the Balkans)* composed by Goran Bregović, while poetic lyrics were written in collaboration with Marina Tucaković and Ljiljana Jorgovanović. This song was interpreted by Milan Stanković at the 'Eurovision song contest' in 2010 (Example 1: Eurovision 2010b).⁵ Beside this one, there is also a version in the Spanish language (*Balkañeros*), performed by Bregović in concerts with his 'Wedding and funeral orchestra' (Example 3: Milagroeucaristicoor 2010), and whose performance rights were also ceded to the music group 'Gipsy kings' (Example 4: Magnificosteiner 2011). This case is very interesting and multilayered, because apart from being explicitly autobalkanistic by its name, it can be of great help for following music representations of the imaginary Balkan, characteristics of the so-called newly composed music in Serbia, relations between Balkan, national (Serbian) and European identity, as well as the manners of adaptation of the same song but in various market conditions.

First of all, mechanisms of representing the Balkans in this song should be clarified. Since the concept of the Balkans is constructed and elusive (according to mentioned literature), logically, it is musically presented through simulacra and hybrid products arising from elements of the existing folklore and popular music. This song features the main musical characteristics of the Balkans, common in works by many authors of this genre: trumpet accompaniment and emphasized 'es-tam' rhythm during the entire song as a basis; highlighted lines of trumpets in parallel thirds in the second refrain and in passages; 'hijaz' tetrachord in lead vocal of the strophe and in trumpet parts; timbre of back vocals typical for the singing manner of the Central Balkans; and singing ornamentation ('shouting out' of back vocals, etc.). The second refrain refers to the Balkans directly, so even when the context of performance and performer are changed, autobalkanism remains constant. Singing in one of the 'Balkan' languages is also indicative, and banal poetic lyrics contain in substance macho stereotype about men from the Balkans as very skilled lovers, which once again shows the appurtenance to the disputable discourse.

⁵ In addition, see the example from the 'Eurovision song contest' (Example 2: Eurovision 2010a). This recording is not as interesting as the one mentioned above, since the performance in the interpretative sense is significantly inferior as opposed to one at the national contest. Example 1 is an official video of this song.

⁶ Autobalkanistic tendency was noticed by anthropologist Ivan Čolović as well. He concluded that the artists use the Balkans as profitable raw material which is exactly the same as the criticism Goldsworthy addressed to British writers (Čolović 2010).

The author of the song, Goran Bregović, is the primary signifier for defining this song as the 'Balkan song', because it is well known that, in spite of all controversies relating to his opus, he is the personification of the Balkans in the world. In the world, Bregović has created an image about himself as 'the ambassador of Balkan music', which implies that the music he creates is representative of and usual in the region in question, and that he has the authority to (re)construct and (re)present the image of the region to those who are not familiar with its geographical, cultural, historical, and musical qualities (Marković 2008b: 12). The reference point that probably explains the work of Goran Bregović in music of the Balkans in the best way is the authenticity of hybridity, since apart from the fact that he presents the Balkan as authentic, Bregović's musical hybrid of folklore from the Balkans and his composer work, gained the status of authentic (about the relation between the authenticity and hybridity in world music, see: Stokes 2004: 59-62). In his compositions, Bregović made effort to present the Balkans as a place of passion and entertainment. For that purpose, he used reduced elements of local folklore (first of all trumpets, 'estam' rhythm, and female singing of the Central Balkans) in fusion with Western popular music. Autobalkanistic discourse is reflected not only in the composer's origin, but in his commitment and power of representation of a specific group by the concept of the Balkans. The three songs he composed for the national contest, Bregović described in the following way:

'Simple, joyful songs! Some will like them, some won't, but the one who has the ambition to be pleasing to everyone, doesn't do what I do. All of the three songs are trumpet songs, because as I said before – you wanted Brega, you'll get *Brega*! All lyrics are cheerful – that's the way I imagine that...' (Serbian broadcasting corporation 2010, e.a.: M.D.).

The previous system of election of representatives for the 'Eurovision song contest' in Serbia implies a contest of numerous composers and performers. Bregović was the first composer engaged by the Serbian broadcasting corporation in this new system, and his reference was his undisputable popularity in the world (Serbian broadcasting corporation 2010). After mediocre success in the finals of the 'Eurovision song contest' and withdrawal of Milan Stanković from the popular music market, the song has continued to live through the performance of Goran Bregović, and in that way, it has gained a new form of manifestation.

Soon after Serbian, the Spanish version of the song was created, which Bregović performed with his ensemble. It is well known that music from the Balkans is very popular in South America, and Bregović was touring the continent at the same time when the 'Eurovision song contest' took place.⁸ In his regular

⁷ In Example 1, it may be noticed that Bregović instructs Stanković how to interpret the 'Balkan' atmosphere of the song in the best possible way.

⁸ Example 3 is recorded at the concert in Chile on the 13th of April 2010 (before 'Eurovision song contest').

repertory, Bregović included all the songs he composed for the earlier national contest '3 pa 1 za Oslo' ('3 down to 1 for Oslo') which he still performs, and on his sound publication *Champagne for Gypsies* (2012). Parallel with the considered versions, Bregović remade his own composition and as a result, he created a mediator for a new market and provided the possibility of simultaneous existence of his work in different areas (Mikić 2011), expanding the balkanism network. The band 'Gypsy kings' started to perform song *Balkañeros* with very few arrangement interventions (the flamenco guitar, especially in instrumental interludes). As a consequence, the song became the hybrid of balkanistic and Latino constructions. It is notably interesting because Bregović also collaborated with the Roma in this project, who (even though they were French, in this case) are marked as the carriers of the Balkan culture in Europe (Petan 2010).

The second important identity represented by this song is national, i.e., Serbian. In musical characteristics, it appears similarly to the previous one, which may be explained by the appurtenance of the nation (Serbia) to the region (the Balkans), but it is specific. Above all, Serbian identity is reflected in the use of Serbian language, then poetic referrals to the female name of Ljubica and to Belgrade in refrain, and in mentioning of the Serbian custom of kissing three times, as well as in localism po naški je – 'this is how we do it'. Additionally, the dancers in the official video (Example 1) are dressed with clear references to female traditional costumes from Southeastern Serbia, Šumadija, Bačka and in Vlach robes. Their choreography includes associative elements of Serbian kolo, such as the holding, hopping, etc. The performing of stereotypes about the Balkans is applied to the construction of representation of Serbian culture. As with representing the Balkans, the most important determinant is context out of music: the song is identified with Serbia since it represented Serbia in the 'Eurovision song contest' and since it was produced by the Serbian broadcasting corporation. If the Balkans was the key reference point for the acceptance of the song by the foreign audience, the links to national identity provided the success in Serbia. Namely, one of the most important identifier of Serbian music is the origin of this song in contemporary newly composed folk music (Tucaković and Jorgovanović are prominent figures of that field in the country, while the singer had a noticeable participation in music contests with the aim of choosing the future star of newly composed folk music). Even here, it might be perceived that autobalkanism is a tool of national identity enforcement, because the self-image from the presumed perspective of the Western European Other became an ideal. 11 This

⁹ The song *Predsedniče, halo* from this competition is processed on the same model (Bregović and 'Gypsy kings' are performing it as *Presidente*), as well as *Ti, kvariigro* (performing Bregović featuring Eugerne Hütz of 'Gogol Bordello' as *Quantum utopia*).

¹⁰ The latter ones are in the similar manner essentialized in North America and Europe and widely spread in global popular culture.

¹¹ This tendency is noticeable in the construction of national identity in the opus of Serbian composers from the first half of the twentieth century (see Milanović 2008).

approach is not completely original, since similar (although successful) strategy was used by Turkey at the 'Eurovision song contest' in 2003 when Turkey exploited its oriental self-image (Gumpert 2007). Despite all, this approach is definitely significant in the cultural policy of Serbia.

In this example, there is one more identity that autobalkanism aims at. It is the European identity, which is best reflected through iconographic determinants of the performance at the contest, and in finale of the official video: specific haircut of Milan Stanković, costume and choreography show the tendency toward presentation of Serbia as a contemporary ('modern') country not only turned to its tradition, but to 'Western' lifestyle, as well. The indicator of that progressiveness is the gay iconography of the performance, aimed at contribution to the best possible ranking, too. 12 In addition to this, the idea of presentation of the Balkans as modern can be seen in the second part of the refrain, since the only part where Balkans is explicitly mentioned is the part which the singer performs in 'rap' manner. In general, considering the performances of Serbian 'Eurovision song contest' representatives and their presence in Serbian mass media, it is noticeable that great significance is given to the contest, and that may be confirmed by the fact that the local media sponsor is the public service Serbian broadcasting corporation. The 'Eurovision song contest' in Serbia may be compared to great sports competitions in terms of perception of representation of a nation and its collective identity, as well as the significance in international context. The goal of Serbia's representation strategy was not only to present itself as a potential part of the European Union and to stimulate potential voters from the region, but to establish its position as a country of entertainment, as well.

The relations of Balkan, Serbian and European identity are very dynamic – in music, and in society in general. The 'Eurovision song contest' is considered to be the stage of representations of European (or for Europe acceptable and interesting) identity, through presentation at the national level. More precisely, it is a framework for performance of various identities in national, regional, and international context (Bohlman 2007: 48). Balkan identity functions as a mediator between national and European identity and it once again confirms a common metaphor of the Balkans as a bridge. In the case of 'This is the Balkans', the elements of Serbian and Balkan identity infuse: the result of the collaboration of the creators of Serbian popular music (Tucaković) and Balkan music (Bregović) also illustrates the refrain of the song where Belgrade and the Balkans are mentioned together. In the aforementioned symbiosis, the Balkan representations prevail; therefore, it is obvious that the intention of the authors was to create a song that would be popular in the whole region while attracting votes from the countries of the Souteastern Europe and spectators outside the

¹² 'Eurovision song contest' is known to be LGBT event (cf. Tobin 2007).

parent-countries.¹³ Balkanism continued strengthening through the new versions of songs (*Balkañeros*), thus enabling global-market success for Bregović. Still, most important is the fact that Serbian audiences accepted the incorporation of Balkan representations into its own national identity and therefore enhanced autobalkanistic tendencies. The combination of two representations is the best example of the way autobalkanism develops. In other words, autobalkanism is actually balkanism publicly performed in a national manner. The example from the national competition essentially defines autobalkanistic; not showing the music characteristics from the Balkans in a manner usual for Bregović, but adoption of that as the highly representative distinction, which included the acceptance of the positive stereotypes and their amalgamation with contemporary discourse of newly composed folk music, and the status of national emblem which is a characteristic of autobalkanistic music creation is exactly what is disputable. This hybrid presentation is also obvious in the performer's perception of the song:

It's not about Balkans. It's about a boy who asks his girl to kiss him better, more passionate, not once, not twice but three times, cuz that's our style, that's the Balkan style. (...) Our song is completely different: this year you have a lot of pop ballads and Euro-dance sound, while this is an unusual sound. I count on Goran Bregović because he is our greatest composer. (...) Why would they vote for me? The song is in Goran Bregović style, he is worldwide famous and I count on that. And on the other side, I count on me and my style. (Eurovision 2010a).

Autobalkanism is in terms of chronology, an extension of the period of Western fascination with the Balkans. Reaching out for the imaginary music of the Balkans for the purpose of presenting its own country in the 'Eurovision song contest' happened before, e.g. in 2009. That year, Marko Kon and Milan Nikolić (representatives of Serbia, the song Cipela / Shoe), Elena (from Romania, The Balkan girls), and Nelly Ciobanu (Moldova, Hora din Moldova / Dancing Moldova) performed songs based on simulacra of the music from the Balkans. However, the jury and the audience that voted via telephone did not toprate these songs, while the song Fairytale performed by Norwegian Alexander Rybak won the greatest number of votes in the history of competition so far. It may be assumed that interest of the non-Balkan audience in music from the Balkans abates, and that audiences from Western Europe (again) are discovering other fascinating music practices. Considering the performance of Serbia in the 'Eurovision song contest', it might be noticed that the subsequent contests are marked with a drift from music of the Balkans in favour of Western pop music (songs Čaroban / Magical and Nije ljubav stvar / Synonym). How-

¹³ It is well known that Bregović, apart from the Balkan, which is popular in the world, uses Yugoslav identity as well, which is popular in the countries of former Yugoslavia.
¹⁴ Aleksandra Marković predicted the similar situation (2008a: 287).

ever, the song *Ovo je Balkan* represented Serbia as a periphery of Europe, a country which runs late regarding trends, even its own, since native audiences have recently become fascinated with music essentially based on stereotyped representation of themeselves, thus contributing to the development of balkanism through autobalkanism.

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Марија Думнић

ОВО ЈЕ БАЛКАН: КОНСТРУИСАЊЕ ПОЗИТИВНИХ СТЕРЕОТИПА О БАЛКАНУ И АУТОБАЛКАНИЗАМ*

Резиме

У овом раду говори се о "музици Балкана", специфичној звучној представи имагинарног места између Истока и Запада, ентитета источнијег од Запада, европског "унутрашњег Другог". Истовремено, истиче се веома значајна улога музике у процесу конструкције стереотипних слика о Балкану. Овај рад указује на данашње прихватање и усвајање такозваних позитивних стереотипа који приказују Балкан као европски кутак за забаву, место пренаглашене страствености и сл. У Србији се тим процесом продукти популарне културе презначавају у културни ресурс, што доводи до појаве аутобалканизма, односно посматрања себе као припадника културе Балкана виђене из аспекта Запада.

Као пример преузимања позитивних стереотипа о Балкану и њихове употребе у представљању сопственог националног идентитета, у овом раду анализира се песма *Ово је Балкан* (*Balkañeros*) коју је компоновао Горан Бреговић, као и медијски текстови везани за њу. Песму је 2010. извео Милан Станковић, представљајући Србију на такмичењу "Песма Евровизије". Зарад тржишних потреба начињена је и верзија поетског текста на шпанском језику коју данас интерпретира Бреговићев "Оркестар за свадбе и сахране" и музичка група "Gypsy kings". У складу с контекстом извођења песме *Ово је Балкан*, балкански музички идентитет се у овом тексту тумачи као посредник између националног и европског идентитета. Посебно се разматра појавност аутобалканизма у музици као комплексан репрезентативан однос наведеног балканског и савременог националног музичког идентитета.

 $^{^{*}}$ Интегрални текст на српском језику доступан је на приложеном диску. / Integral text in Serbian is available on the attached DVD.