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Marija Maglov

*Teaching assistant, Faculty of Media and Communications,
Singidunum University, Belgrade
marija.maglov@fmk.edu.rs*

**Musical Genre as an Indicator of the Unity in Diversity
Concept: Case Study of the ESC'S Winning Song *Hard Rock
Hallelujah*¹**

Abstract: In this paper, the author questions the role of musical genre presented on the Eurovision Song Contest in the context of the unity in diversity concept, recognized as one of the markers of European cultural identity. Interpretation of this concept in sociological theory is presented while arguing that it could be understood in the history of the contest. A broader view on genres presented in the first decades of the contest is offered, before focusing on a case study of Finland's 2006 winning song. Although unusual in a purely musical sense in the context of the ESC, it is argued that this entry is more understandable when more determinants of performing European identity on the ESC stage are included in the interpretation, and that music serves as only one of those determinants and thus should be interpreted as cultural discursive practice.

Keywords: Eurovision Song Contest, Europe, unity in diversity, musical genre, Finland, *Lordi*

The Eurovision Song Contest (further: ESC)² became a theoretical field of interest for different disciplines, such as musicology, performance studies, cultural studies, political studies of Europe, gender studies, etc. Accumulated knowledge on ESC

¹ This essay is based upon two previous papers written under the mentorship of Prof. Dr Vesna Mikić. One was written during the project “Jean Monnet Module: *Musical Identities and European Perspective: an Interdisciplinary Approach*”, No 553391-EPP-1-2014-1-RS-EPPJMO-MODULE at the Faculty of Music, Belgrade, in the academic year 2014/15. The other was read as part of the Poster Session by young researchers at the international conference *Musical Diversity and Cultural Identities in the History of Eurovision Song Contest*, Institut für Musikwissenschaft der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, 19–20. June 2015.

² The ESC is a television song competition held annually since 1956 between member countries of European Broadcasting Union (EBU).

forms, in a sense, a trans-network of those differing disciplines, accentuating some of them in the particular case studies. In this paper, focus will be on the assumption that the musical genre can be employed as an indicator of the unity in diversity concept. This concept is distinguished as one of the markers of European identity, according to sociologists Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford,³ who emphasize social constructiveness of identity via, among other, various symbolic markers. I understand ESC entries as such markers and part of the discursive formations used by competing nations to represent themselves. Musical genres⁴ are equally available for creative usage and the establishment of those discursive formations in the nations' ESC performances, although, over the years, some genres became more prominent than others and thus characteristic for ESC. In that sense, Finland's 2006 entry and eventual winning song *Hard Rock Hallelujah* by hard rock/metal band *Lordi* was at first a surprise, since it was miles away from the expected ESC (winning) sound. Strictly in musical terms, this was an odd choice, both for entry and victory alike. However, I will argue that music in the ESC is not an isolated element whose supposed quality will determine the victory, but merely one element in the complex cultural, discursive and social practices working as a strategy employed by the contestant nation, following the dominant ideas of acceptable ways of presenting both national and European identity. In order to examine this problem, I will begin by presenting some insights on the unity in diversity concept as given by Delanty and Rumford, followed by my understanding of its application in the ESC studies. Then, some examples from the history of the ESC will be given in this context, with the focus on Finland's entry and conclusions that could be drawn on the role of the musical genre in the context of performing European identity on the ESC stage.

According to Delanty and Rumford, the concept of unity in diversity was changing through decades of European history and "it embodies two ideas – 'unity' and 'diversity' – but the key is the 'in' for the concept of unity that it indicates is to be found in diversity, not above or beyond it"⁵. It is the phrase "that perfectly captures the cultural logic of Europeanization. It expresses too the political spirit of the age – to be equal but different"⁶. Recognition of diversity became an administrative necessity, especially after the extension of the European Union in 2004 and the new diversity of languages, religions and societies.⁷ Adapting to the changes of the European map, as

³ Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, *Rethinking Europe: Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*, London–New York, Routledge, 2005.

⁴ As Roy Shuker explains quoting Simon Frith: "The usual approach to defining musical genres is 'to follow the distinctions made by [the] music industry which, in turn, reflect both music history and marketing categories. (Frith, 1987). Another approach, suggested by Frith, is to "classify them according to their ideological effects, the way they sell themselves as art, community or emotion." Roy Shuker, *Popular Music: The Key Concepts*, London–New York, Routledge, 2005, 121.

⁵ Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, op. cit., 57.

⁶ Alain Touraine, *Can We Live Together? Equal and Different*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000, as quoted in: Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, op. cit., 60.

⁷ Ibidem.

well as different political, social and cultural contexts, this concept⁸ is understood in various relations of dominance between its two consisting ideas. Delanty and Rumford follow changes in the ways this concept was interpreted in European history.⁹ The authors distinguish those interpretations as *diversity as derivate of unity*, related to the idea that all European traditions are based in the Graeco-Roman and Christian culture, then *unity as derivate of diversity*, where unity derives from overcoming the differences. Another interpretation is *unity as diversity* with emphasis on the condition of diversity with that of unity gained through the interaction of different European traditions. Finally, there is the idea of *self-limiting unity*, which refers to the transcending of national position and Jürgen Habermas's arguments for democratic and constitutional values acceptable for all Europeans.¹⁰ The last two positions seem to be dominant in European society after the 2004 EU extension.¹¹ Delanty and Rumford note that in the context of unity in diversity concept the discourse on differences between nations, religions and customs is usual, but differences “on the level of lifestyles, taste cultures and forms of consumption, class and gender” should be added to the discussion.¹² Since music is a social practice constitutive for the different forms of culture, taste cultures and lifestyles, it is evident that its role should be also closely examined in the discourses on various interpretations of the unity in diversity concept, but also those of forming European identity.

The question on European identity is one of the key questions in European studies. Some of its main characteristics, according to Delanty and Rumford, are: its social constructiveness and processual character; its narrative dimension referring to the stories through which people present themselves to others, with performative and public aspects of this being extremely important as well as a discursive way of self-understanding;¹³ the relation between self and other, constructed by symbolic markers; its multiple nature; the possibility for it to be distinguished as a personal or collective identity.¹⁴ Delanty and Rumford define identity not as “an idea or a cultural given, but a mode of self-understanding that is expressed by people in ongoing narratives and situations; moreover, the boundaries between identities are fluid, negotiable and contested.”¹⁵

⁸ A version of this formulation which states “united in diversity” is accepted as the official motto of the European Union. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motto_of_the_European_Union, ac. 28 March 2015.

⁹ Cf. Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, op. cit., 61–68.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ This extension was significant as ten new countries, most of them being parts of former Eastern Bloc, became EU members. Those are Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

¹² Ibid, 64.

¹³ Margaret R. Somers, “The narrative constitution of identity: a relational and network approach”, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 5, 1994, 605–649. As quoted in: Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, op. cit., 51.

¹⁴ Ibid, 51–52.

¹⁵ Ibid, 52.

It seems that the ESC performances are obviously an opportunity for public statements on nations¹⁶ perceived identities in the European context by bringing different narratives and employing symbolic markers. Or, as Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic state: “The ESC, with its unique, imaginative, and aesthetic modality, has always been a symbolic contact zone between European cultures – an arena for European identification in which both national solidarity and participation in a European identity are confirmed.”¹⁷ Focusing on musical genres presented on ESC stage could, while having in mind the complex identity, narrative and discursive issues they are employed in, support dominant conceptions of the European unity in diversity concept. I believe we can argue that musical practices, different genres and styles, are used as vehicles for demonstrating different social and political concepts in the particular context. As changing interpretation of this concept goes, in the years of Euro-federalism differences are seen as something that is coming from underlying unity, while later, in the age of post-western, ‘New’ Europe, differences are something that should be overcome via the idea of unity. How could we see that if focusing on musical genre?

In the context of forming a united Europe, it is no coincidence that mainstream, popular but not-too-aggressive, quirky or in any way problematic style such as *kanzone*/*chanson* was dominant in the first two decades. Also, one should bear in mind that the ESC was based on the model of the San Remo Music Festival. Although the rules required that every country be presented with the song sung in its official language, the actual musical style, as well as the general style of performance, wasn’t very specific nation-wise. It could perhaps be argued that it was the Francophone song, *chanson*, that was dominant, but this is also the style that was close to other forms of ballads presented at the ESC. Besides *chanson* and ballad, *schlager* and *Europop* were also very common. The solo vocal performance accompanied by the live orchestra, led by the conductor from the participant country or from the host country was required. Visual imagery (the participants’ wardrobe) was in accordance with the mainstream fashion, but that elegant and more conservative aspect of it, and not experimental or one that would push boundaries. Regarding trends, it is obvious that, bearing in mind all the winners from these years, the ESC stood firmly in its own traditional and expected sound and performance. However, some ‘innovations’ have been made, although very modestly and bringing about as little changes as possible. ABBA (1974 winner) set some new standards and possible different trends, but those still responded to the one demand: it was the music that could appeal to diverse European audiences. Thus, we could argue that until the ‘New’ Europe era, (or from 1956 as the year of ESC founding, to *Insieme* by Toto Cutugno winning in 1990) the main tradition of ESC is embracing mainstream

¹⁶ Since the ESC is a contest of different nations, Delanty and Rumford’s further discussion on postnational European identity will be, for now, left for other, broader insights in the context of ESC. As all other individual and collective identities, the national one also exists in the state of flux and is, in the context of ESC, acceptable for further problematization. Cf. *ibid*, 53–54.

¹⁷ Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic, “Introduction: Eurovision and the ‘New’ Europe”, in: Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhović (eds.), *Performing the ‘New’ Europe: Identities, Feelings, and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

musical sounds, styles and genres capable of uniting as many countries in the form of 'light entertainment', as imagined or expected by its founders.

As explained by Delanty and Rumford, EU extension and the forming of 'New' Europe significantly influenced different constellations of European civilization. According to them, new states had different roads towards modernity since having been parts of the Eastern Bloc. Thus, they brought different value systems and many other characteristics, giving the EU a new face. Authors argue that the role of the East became ever more important in European studies.¹⁸ This was also evident in the ESC, with new contestant countries bringing more variety in their performances, emphasising ethno sound. Before Finland's victory, winners were Turkey's Sertab Erener (*Every Way That I Can*), Ukraine's Ruslana (*Wild Dances*) and Greece's Elena Papparizou (*My Number One*), and after 2006 winners were Serbia's Marija Šerifović (*Molitva*) and Russia's Dima Bilan (*Believe*). Philip V. Bohlman notices that the common theme in Finland's Serbia's and Russia's song is religion, used as "a marker of Europeanness in the Eurovision song."¹⁹ Although potentially interesting for making connections between these songs and, generally, for noticing a signifier of Europeanness in the popular songs,²⁰ I will put these assumptions aside because it could be argued that the songs' texts thematically differ significantly, which influences the level of their religious symbolism, making it less explicit than Bohlman states.

Three previous winners are much more alike, given three cases of emphasizing attractive female performers, singing pop numbers with a strong ethno sound, and playing with conventional elements of 'exotic' representation. In that sense, these performances form specific standards in the context of ESC, although not unusual with contemporary trends in music industry at the time, with such sounds being recognizable. It should be added that in the year of Ukraine's victory, Serbia and Montenegro's Željko Joksimović set a specific standard with his song *Lane moje*, which served as a model for other Balkan entries in following years. It is also basically pop with an ethno sound, but articulated in a different way than winning songs because of its ballad character. This is significant because it influenced the general sound dominating the ESC in the new millennium.

In that context, but also in the ESC in general, arguably one of the most unusual performances was that by Finnish hard rock/metal band *Lordi*. The band members came on stage (but also to all previous promotional events) in monster costumes on high wedges and performed the hard rock/metal number *Hard rock Hallelujah* surrounded by pyrotechnical effects. The image of monsters on the ESC stage certainly was unusual, but the band triumphed, setting a new record in number of achieved points (292). *Lordi*'s singer commented on the victory, alluding to accusations of the Greek Orthodox Church and controversies surrounding the metal band: "This is the

¹⁸ Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford, op. cit., 30, 45–49.

¹⁹ Philip V. Bolman, *Music, Nationalism, and Making of the New Europe*, London–New York, Routledge, 2011, 256.

²⁰ Ibid.

victory of rock music [...] and also of those with open mind. We are not Satanists, not the devil's worshippers. This is all for fun."²¹ The song was considerably successful on the European charts, with a music video running frequently on MTV.²²

Thus, the pattern typical for the ESC in previous years consisting of what journalist Paul Majendie termed a "mishmash of power ballads, ethnic rhythms and bubblegum pop"²³ was interrupted by the victory of a hard rock band.²⁴ Although the quoted statement brings facts on really more or less present genres in the ESC, it also presents (as the Majendie's text as whole) judgment on values of some popular musical genres as having more 'quality' than others. Because of its' origins "found in Blues and psychedelic rock, metal inherited elements such as constructed ideas on 'roots' and 'authenticity', as well as interest in virtuosity and timbral intensity", wrote Stuart Borthwik and Ron Moy.²⁵ As opposed to that, pop music in all its varieties usually heard at the ESC is characterized as a 'commercial' genre. According to Borthwik and Moy, this binary relation between rock and pop (with all subgenres originating from them) is a false division on many levels, especially when we bear in mind that rock also means highly paid performers and albums. As David Pattie explains, "the idea of authenticity [...] runs like a ground bass through the practice and study of rock music."²⁶ This division between pop and rock maintains the fragmentation of popular music's audience according to a 'hierarchy of taste', based on different criteria such as class, gender, geographic or ethnical belonging.²⁷ Having that in mind, putting a hard rock/metal number in the glitzy, pop surrounding of the ESC does seem strange and could be seen as a promise of a new, 'quality' musical direction that the contest could eventually adopt. But, since such assumptions on 'quality' are merely construction, the question is: what led to the Finland creative strategic decision to choose such 'out of context' genre as its' entry?

Since its first participation in the ESC in 1961, Finland generally scored poorly, with the best results (sixth place) achieved in 1973 by pop singer Marion Rung. Finland was actually considered "as the ultimate under-achiever of Eurovision", placing last nine times (three of them with zero points) and missing the contest several times due to poor results.²⁸ Having in mind the performance by *Lordi* in the given context of changing ESC trends, performances by previous winners, Finland's history in the contest, but also the general mode of performing identities in the condition of an expanded Europe, it is evident that Finland chose a different 'strategy' of self-representation

²¹ As quoted in Serbian translation at: <http://escserbia.com/2006-atina/>, ac. 28 March 2015.

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_Rock_Hallelujah, ac. 28 March 2015.

²³ Paul Majendie, *Edinburgh Fringe Show Celebrates Eurovision Kitsch*, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2007/08/14/stage-arts-edinburgh-eurovision-dc-idUKL1142844820070814>, ac. 28 March 2015.

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurovision_Song_Contest, ac.28 March 2015.

²⁵ For the purpose of this paper, Serbian translation was used. Stjuart Bortvik i Ron Moj, *Popularni muzički žanrovi* (transl. by Aleksandra Čabraja i Vesna Mikić), Beograd, Clio, 2010, 172.

²⁶ David Pattie, *Rock Music in Performance*, New York, Pallgrave Macmillan, 2007, 5.

²⁷ Stjuart Bortvik i Ron Moj, op. cit., 78.

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finland_in_the_Eurovision_Song_Contest, ac. 28 March 2015. Cf.: <http://escserbia.com/finska/>, ac. 28 March 2015.

in contrast to the dominant ethno pop format, although it also has its own ‘new folk tradition,’ according to Bohlman.²⁹ Instead, Finland put forward an entry that symbolically marks and relies upon discursive formations of its developed hard rock/metal scene, highly recognizable in a European, but also global context. A significant number of Finnish musician (*Nightwish*, *HIM*, *Apocalyptica* etc.) have successfully made careers in the music industry in some variant of these genres, making them characteristically Finnish. In that sense, Finland gave Europe the expected imagery of its musical culture, as much as it seems paradoxical in the context of musical genres typically presented on the ESC.³⁰ Actually, although different from power ballads, ethno sounds and bubblegum pop, *Hard Rock Hallelujah* is a catchy and simple song, effective enough to appeal to a broad audience, with its differences being there just enough to ensure diversity and to made the song recognizable.

Regarding the unity in diversity concept, it seems that changing interpretations of the concept appeared when performing European identity on the ESC stage was in question. While in the years of forming a united Europe there were performances and musical genres uniting diverse nations on the ESC stage, in the period of ‘New’ Europe and the variant of *unity as diversity* where emphasis on the condition of diversity was put forward, performances strove to differ in many creative ways, emphasizing nations’ different traditions united in an ever-expanding EU.

Thus, musical genres shown on the ESC are not to be interpreted as value categories, which are generally problematic because of their being constructed, but as markers of wanted identities, social practices and discursive formations made for self-representation. Music serves as one of the indicators of various discourses and practices in the framework of as complex a social and political entity as Europe is. In other words, considering cultural industry (the catalogue of musical genres serving as equally operative for different purposes within industry), the ESC as a polygon for performing identities and narratives, while establishing discursive formations and symbolizations for nations themselves and for others, the contest’s results putting some European country in the centre of attention after victory are all some of the many determinants that should be taken into account in question of Eurovision and Europe studies. Music is thus not detachable from the broader context of cultural, social and political questions on European identity, and because of that, it remains to be seen what we could read on performing European identities from more recent, as well as future, ESC entries.

²⁹ General term describing renewed interest in folk tradition at the time, but also for the national epics such as *Kalevala*, mixed with various world music practices is “Uusikansanmusiikki”. Cf. Philip V. Bolman, op. cit., 230.

³⁰ However, it should be noted that this diversity in genres is not new in an absolute sense, and after Lordi’s victory, it became more common. For example, the Norwegian entry in 2006 was the rock band *Wig Wam*, and the next year similar entries were made by the Czech Republic (*Kabaát*) and Iceland (*Eiríkur Hauksson*). In the following years, rock songs were presented by Finland (*Teräsbetoni*, 2008), Turkey (*maNga*, 2010) and Georgia (*Eldrine*, 2011). It’s interesting to note that for a while in the metal community there was a contest equivalent to the ESC, wherein the best metal songs by national contestants were chosen each year. More on that: <http://heavymetale.sc.ueuo.com/>, ac. 28 March 2015.