



**Contemporary Southeastern Europe**

An Interdisciplinary Journal on Southeastern Europe

# Gender and Geopolitics in the Eurovision Song Contest

Introduction

Catherine Baker

Lecturer, University of Hull

[cbakertw1@googlemail.com](mailto:cbakertw1@googlemail.com)

<http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/cse/en/baker>

*Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2015, 2(1), 74-93

---

*Contemporary Southeastern Europe* is an online, peer-reviewed, multidisciplinary journal that publishes original, scholarly, and policy-oriented research on issues relevant to societies in Southeastern Europe. For more information, please contact us at [info@contemporarysee.org](mailto:info@contemporarysee.org) or visit our website at [www.contemporarysee.org](http://www.contemporarysee.org)

# Introduction: Gender and Geopolitics in the Eurovision Song Contest

Catherine Baker\*

## Introduction

From the vantage point of the early 1990s, when the end of the Cold War not only inspired the discourses of many Eurovision performances but created opportunities for the map of Eurovision participation itself to significantly expand in a short space of time, neither the scale of the contemporary Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) nor the extent to which a field of “Eurovision research” has developed in cultural studies and its related disciplines would have been recognisable. In 1993, when former Warsaw Pact states began to participate in Eurovision for the first time and Yugoslav successor states started to compete in their own right, the contest remained a one-night-per-year theatrical presentation staged in venues that accommodated, at most, a couple of thousand spectators and with points awarded by expert juries from each participating country. Between 1998 and 2004, Eurovision’s organisers, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), and the national broadcasters responsible for hosting each edition of the contest expanded it into an ever grander spectacle: hosted in arenas before live audiences of 10,000 or more, with (from 2004) a semi-final system enabling every eligible country and broadcaster to participate each year, and with (between 1998 and 2008) points awarded almost entirely on the basis of telephone voting by audiences in each participating state. In research on Eurovision as it stands today, it would almost go without saying that Eurovision and the performances it contains have reflected, communicated and been drawn into narratives of national and European identity which were and are – by their very nature as a nexus between imaginaries of culture and territory – geopolitical.

The expansion of Eurovision in some ways anticipated, in some ways paralleled, and in other ways outpaced a specific set of political, financial and cultural processes in the aftermath of the Cold War which aimed to produce a geopolitical reconfiguration of their own: the expansion of Euro-Atlantic institutions, chief among them the European Union (EU). In June 1993, the same year as Eurovision’s first phase of post-Cold-War expansion, the European Council (the council of EU heads of state) published its “Copenhagen

---

\* Catherine Baker is Lecturer in 20th Century History at the University of Hull and specialises in the study of nationalism, conflict, narrative, and postsocialism. She is the author of *Sounds of the Borderland: Popular Music, War and Nationalism in Croatia since 1991* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) and *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, in press), and the co-author (with Michael Kelly) of *Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operations, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Parts of this introduction draw on her keynote speech at the “Visions of Europe in the Eurovision Song Contest” conference at the University of Copenhagen, 5.–7. May 2014.

Criteria” for the accession of future members, making democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, minority rights protections and a market economy prerequisites for any future member states to join the EU. While vague, these criteria set the framework for the policy of “conditionality” that the EU would apply to future membership applications and enabled lobbying on matters including gender equality and LGBT rights to take place at an EU institutional level.<sup>1</sup> The most visible symbolic expansion of Eurovision, the introduction of a semi-final in 2004 (meaning that low-scoring countries would no longer be forced to wait a year before participating again), coincided with a landmark in the EU enlargement process even more closely: the accession of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia took place on 1. May 2004, and that year’s Eurovision semi-final and final were held between 12. and 15. May.

The lists of new members in the two expansions were not an exact match. Malta and Cyprus, the two states outside eastern Europe to be included in the 2004 EU expansion, had started participating in Eurovision in 1971 and 1981 respectively; Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia had all started entering Eurovision in 1993 or 1994, and Latvia in 2000, while the Czech Republic would not start participating until 2007. Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which also made their Eurovision debuts as sovereign states in 1993,<sup>2</sup> plus Romania, which had been part of the 1993 Eurovision preselection process, were still each at varying distances from EU accession in 2004 (with Romania joining in 2007, Croatia in 2013, and Bosnia-Herzegovina signing a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU in 2008 which as of the time of writing had still not come into force).

The 2004 contest was (as I suggest elsewhere) nevertheless wide open to being read, so soon after the celebration of the EU’s expansion, as “Eurovision’s own ‘enlargement’”<sup>3</sup> – not least in the context of where that year’s contest and the two previous editions had been held. Under EBU rules, winning the contest gives a broadcaster and country the right to host Eurovision in the following year: the victories of Estonia, Latvia and Turkey in 2001–3 thus led to Eurovision being held in these three countries in 2002–4, and Eurovision’s invitation to viewers to create geopolitical narratives around the staging and performances they see and hear thus turned its lens on each of these countries in turn.

All three countries were part of spaces which throughout the 20th century, and indeed before, had been positioned on the geopolitical margins of Europe by multiple discourses of European identity that employed an “East”/“West”

---

<sup>1</sup> Vermeersch, Pieter. 2004. Minority Policy in Central Europe: Exploring the Impact of the EU’s Enlargement Strategy. *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 3(2), 3–19, 8; Swiebel, Joke. 2009. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Human Rights: the Search for an International Strategy. *Contemporary Politics* 15(1), 19–35, 24.

<sup>2</sup> See Andjelić, this issue.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, Catherine. 2008. Wild Dances and Dying Wolves: Simulation, Essentialization, and National Identity at the Eurovision Song Contest. *Popular Communication* 6(3), 173–89, 174. See also Sieg, Katrin. 2013. Cosmopolitan Empire: Central and Eastern Europeans at the Eurovision Song Contest. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(2), 244–63, 245–6.

division.<sup>4</sup> Turkey's opportunity to host the contest in 2004, and thus to temporarily situate Istanbul as the centre from which this performance of European and national identities would emanate, indeed pushed far beyond the EU's own envisaged boundaries and into the most difficult geopolitical question that the EU of the early 2000s faced (whether and how the prospect of Turkish accession could be accommodated), with the legacies of historical discourses about the European belonging, or otherwise, of Turkey clearly visible in the near background.<sup>5</sup>

In the staging and organisation of all these contests (as one contributor to this issue, Paul Jordan, has already shown for Estonia<sup>6</sup>), and in the responses to them by commentators, journalists and fans, the idea of "Europe" as an imagined geopolitical space that nations could be positioned in relation to was not a static symbol but a resource – something that could be, and frequently was, strategically managed, actively contested and reshaped during the "three minutes" of each song (or longer when a country hosts the contest) in which "a peripherally constructed nation state is literally given centre stage".<sup>7</sup>

### **Southeastern Europe in Eurovision Research**

The argument that Eurovision is a setting through which states, broadcasters and performers communicate narratives of national identity beyond the nation, to an international audience, recurs throughout the research on Eurovision that by the mid-2000s was beginning to draw together as a subfield of its own in cultural studies. Indeed, many (though not all) of the best-known examples that help to prove that claim come from this very period, when the meanings of belonging to "Europe", in Eurovision or outside it, were undergoing multiple forms of institutional and cultural renegotiation.

Ivan Raykoff and Robert Deam Tobin's 2007 edited volume *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest* was the first of several books which sought to draw together multiple researchers' case studies into a wider argument about Eurovision in international politics and popular culture, and emphasised the importance of historical as well as contemporary

---

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Wolff, Larry. 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Todorova, Maria. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Neumann, Iver B. 1998. *Uses of the Other: the "East" in European Identity Formation*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; on music, Stokes, Martin. 1992. *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*. Oxford: Clarendon; Buchanan, Donna A. (ed.). 2007. *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>5</sup> Solomon, Thomas. 2007. *Articulating the Historical Moment: Turkey, Europe, and Eurovision 2003*, in *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Ivan, Raykoff, and Robert Deam Tobin. Aldershot: Ashgate; Christensen, Miyase and Christian Christensen. 2008. The After-Life of Eurovision 2003: Turkish and European Social Imaginaries and Ephemeral Communicative Space. *Popular Communication* 6(3), 155–72.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan, Paul. 2011. *The Eurovision Song Contest: Nation Branding and Nation Building in Estonia and Ukraine*. PhD-thesis. Glasgow: University of Glasgow; Jordan, Paul. 2014. Nation Branding: a Tool for Nationalism?. *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45(3), 283–303.

<sup>7</sup> Stychin, Carl. 2011. Unity in Diversity: European Citizenship Through the Lens of Popular Culture. *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 29(1), 1–25.

Eurovision research.<sup>8</sup> Two other edited volumes – one edited by the musicologists Franco Fabbri and Dafni Tragaki, another edited by the performance scholars Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic – appeared in 2013.<sup>9</sup> To this, one can add single-author works such as Philip Bohlman’s *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of a New Europe*, in which Eurovision is an important case study,<sup>10</sup> and an ever-growing number of research articles.

Southeastern Europe has contributed both to the collaborative audiovisual text that is the Eurovision Song Contest and to frameworks for critically understanding it. The strategy of using the opportunity of a Eurovision performance to attempt to alter foreign perceptions of a nation was exemplified, Vesna Mikić and Marijana Mitrović have both argued, by the presentation of Serbia-Montenegro’s first Eurovision entry under that name in 2004, Željko Joksimović’s “*Lane moje*”, which marked Serbia’s “return” to Eurovision after an absence of 12 years and, even in the year of Ruslana and “*Wild Dances*”, came close to winning Eurovision itself.<sup>11</sup> Joksimović’s embodiment of a modern and gentle Serbian masculinity which could combine elements of (reimagined) folk tradition into a result intelligible through, and appealing to, the conventions of “world music” presentation contributed to an effort on the part of the Serbian broadcaster to reshape foreign images of the country away from the stereotypes perpetuated during the Yugoslav wars.<sup>12</sup>

Three years later, the Serbian representative Marija Šerifović – selected, Shannon Jones and Jelena Subotić argue, as an “attempt to present [Serbia’s] liberal, tolerant and modern face to Europe at a time when the country’s EU application was in jeopardy”<sup>13</sup> – won Eurovision with the ballad “*Molitva*” (“*Prayer*”) and a performance that certainly invited a queer subtext even if (with Šerifović not speaking publicly about her sexuality until 2013) it was not yet text. In the meantime, Croatian entries had experimented with similar practices of essentialised/simulated folklore as Ruslana or Joksimović, causing a domestic controversy in 2006 when Severina’s entry claimed to be based on song and dance from the Dinaric highlands and was arranged by Goran Bregović.<sup>14</sup> Bulgaria, befitting or rather building on its position as the country

<sup>8</sup> Raykoff, Ivan and Robert Deam Tobin. (eds). 2007. *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*. Aldershot: Ashgate. For southeastern Europe, see particularly the chapter by Dean Vuletić (on socialist Yugoslavia), as well as those by Alf Björnberg (on ethnicity and folklore), Thomas Solomon and Matthew Gumpert (on Turkey).

<sup>9</sup> Fabbri, Franco and Dafni Tragaki. (eds). 2013. *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow; Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic (eds). 2013. *Performing the “New” Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>10</sup> Bohlman, Philip V. 2010. *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*. London and New York: Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Mikić, Vesna. 2006. *The Way We (Just Me, Myself and I) Were: Recycling National Identities in Recent Popular Music*, paper presented at the conference “Musical Culture and Memory”, Faculty of Musicology, University of Arts, Belgrade, 12.–14. April 2006; Mitrović, Marijana. 2010. “New Face of Serbia” at the Eurovision Song Contest: International Media Spectacle and National Identity. *European Review of History* 17(2), 171–85.

<sup>12</sup> Mitrović, “*New Face of Serbia*”, 174.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, Shannon and Jelena Subotić. 2011. Fantasies of Power: Performing Europeanization on the European Periphery. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14(5), 542–57, 550. See also Mitrović, “*New Face of Serbia*”.

<sup>14</sup> Baker, Catherine. 2008. When Seve Met Bregović: Folklore, Turbofolk and the Boundaries of Croatian Musical Identity. *Nationalities Papers* 36(4), 741–64.

where an “international marketing trend” for “Balkan” music in the 1990s world music market had originated,<sup>15</sup> developed a Eurovision niche after 2007 of entries combining folk-style vocals and electronic music, before becoming one of several southeastern European countries that (temporarily?) stopped participating in 2014–15.

A necessary instrument for understanding these strategies and performances, the critique of “self-exoticisation” or “self-orientalisation” in cultural production, also comes from the cultural studies and ethnomusicology of southeastern Europe.<sup>16</sup> Writing in 2001, the film scholar Dina Iordanova pointed to a mode of “voluntary ‘self-exoticism’” in 1990s Balkan cinema which, internalising and re-presenting “orientalist” constructions of the Balkans, meant that “the orientalisation of the Balkans cannot be declared a purely Western project”.<sup>17</sup> The relevance of this observation for making sense of self-representation strategies in Eurovision was apparent well before the Romanian singer Elena Gheorghe, participating in what Alexander Kiossev has termed a “Balkan popular (counter) culture” of transnational south-east European pop-folk,<sup>18</sup> sang during her Eurovision entry of 2009 that “the Balkan girls, they like to party like nobody, like nobody” (though on this occasion they also liked to start their weekend not with fruit brandy, as in many other pop-folk representations of “Balkan” hedonism, but “with gin, tonic and lime”).

### **Towards a Critical and Feminist Geopolitics of Eurovision**

All these dynamics can be understood through the lens of “critical geopolitics”, an approach that – as Gerard Toal and Carl Dahlman write with reference to post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina – understands geopolitics as “always a culturally embedded practice operating across networks of power and [...] a field of competing political constructions vying to describe the conditions within which states operate and what normative strategy best realizes state and national interests”.<sup>19</sup> Within critical geopolitics, one object of study is the production of “geopolitical cultures”, involving the “borrowing, adapting and reworking [of] available discursive formations in the international arena”.<sup>20</sup> The case studies above, and many others, show that Eurovision has been deeply implicated in these processes.

---

<sup>15</sup> Buchanan, Donna A. 1997. Bulgaria’s Magical Mystère Tour: Postmodernism, World Music Marketing, and Political Change in Eastern Europe. *Ethnomusicology* 41(1), 131–57.

<sup>16</sup> This point is further developed in Baker, *Wild Dances and Dying Wolves*.

<sup>17</sup> Iordanova, Dina. 2001. *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*. London: BFI, 56. See also Dubravka Ugrešić’s extension of a critique of the Eurovision Song Contest towards the essentialisation of small nations in European literary marketing: Ugrešić, Dubravka. 2003. What is European in European Literatures?: European Literature as a Eurovision Song Contest. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 10(4), 465–71.

<sup>18</sup> Kiossev, Alexander. 2002. *The Dark Intimacy: Maps, Identities, Acts of Identification*, in *Balkan as Metaphor*, edited by Bjelić, Dušan I., and Obrad Savić. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 165–90, 184. See also Buchanan (ed.), *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene*; Archer, Rory. 2012. Assessing Turbofolk Controversies: Popular Music between the Nation and the Balkans. *Southeastern Europe* 36(2), 178–207.

<sup>19</sup> Toal, Gerard and Carl Dahlman. 2011. *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Toal and Dahlman, *Bosnia Remade*, 11–12.

Yet, following Lorraine Dowler and Joanne Sharp, it is possible to search not just for a critical geopolitics but a feminist geopolitics, that is, “a lens through which the everyday experiences of the disenfranchised can be made more visible”, which moves its understanding of discourse beyond representation into the domain of everyday and embodied social practice.<sup>21</sup> In the context of post-Cold-War Europe, Fiona Smith, for instance, used feminist geopolitics to study the “dominant neo-liberal scripts of post-Cold-War restructuring and the tropes of ‘East’ and ‘West’ underpinning reunification” – dynamics, again, in which the Eurovision Song Contest is embedded – by analysing narratives of women in post-reunification eastern Germany about the state and the politics of childcare.<sup>22</sup> With these directions in mind, one can begin to ask: what would a feminist geopolitics, not just a critical geopolitics, of Eurovision look like?

Gender, clearly, would be at the centre of such an analysis – taking account both of the multiple masculinities and femininities that have been performed on Eurovision stages in the contest’s many musical dramatisations of national and European belonging, and of the way in which attitudes to gender equality and “LGBT” rights became constructed as indicators of a country’s relationship to an imagined “Europe” or an imagined “West” in post-Cold-War international politics, producing the set of discursive practices that Éric Fassin has referred to as “sexual democracy” and Jasbir Puar, even more critically, as “homonationalism”.<sup>23</sup> Understanding these latter dynamics at Eurovision requires attention not only to the politics of what is represented on stage but also analysis of the backstage politics within which Eurovision contests are hosted and organised – the framework through which Milija Gluhovic, for instance, evaluates the “tension over gender/sexuality versus cultural/religious identity in the service of a more progressive image of Europe” that surrounded human rights organisations’ campaigns on the issue of LGBT rights in Azerbaijan when Eurovision was held in Baku in 2012.<sup>24</sup>

Also at its centre, however, would be inequality and marginalisation as objects of analysis in their own right (and as dynamics to be *overcome*, not just critiqued).<sup>25</sup> Eurovision as an institution exists within international asymmetries of power and also – or so a feminist geopolitics might hypothesise – is likely to contribute to them, even perhaps to create asymmetries of its own. The account of 1993 as a moment of postsocialist European integration given at the beginning of this introduction, for instance, would be incomplete if it did not recognise that, while the EBU was happy to begin welcoming new states into its space of performance, it was not prepared to accommodate them *all at once*; the new participant broadcasters in 1993 first had to qualify through a

---

<sup>21</sup> Dowler, Lorraine and Joanne Sharp. 2001. A Feminist Geopolitics?, *Space and Polity* 5(3), 165–76, 169.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, Fiona. 2001. Refiguring the Geopolitical Landscape: Nation, “Transition” and Gendered Subjects in Post-Cold War Germany. *Space and Polity* 5(3), 213–35, 213.

<sup>23</sup> Fassin, Éric. 2010. National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe. *Public Culture* 22(3), 507–29; Puar, Jasbir K. 2013. Rethinking Homonationalism. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45(2), 336–9.

<sup>24</sup> Gluhovic, Milija. 2013. *Sing for Democracy: Human Rights and Sexuality Discourse in the Eurovision Song Contest*, in *Performing the “New” Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fricker, Karen, and Milija Gluhovic. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 194–217, 195.

<sup>25</sup> Dowler and Sharp, *A Feminist Geopolitics?*, 166.

preselection event, held in Ljubljana, where Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia were successful but Estonia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia were not.

Eurovision organisers, indeed, continued to find it (or construct it as) difficult to accommodate the increased number of entrants into the format between 1994 and 2003 (on the grounds that thirty-plus entries would be too many for a one-night show). The initial solution of “relegating” countries with low-scoring track records caused tensions when the broadcasters of two countries that made large financial contributions to the costs of Eurovision (Germany and Italy) were not allowed to participate in Eurovision 1996 after their songs’ poor results in 1995. The rules were changed in 2000 so that France, Germany, Spain and the UK (as the four largest financial contributors to the contest) would automatically qualify for the Eurovision final every year. Even once the semi-final format of 2004 onwards allowed every interested broadcaster to send an entry every year, the automatic entry to the final of the so-called ‘Big Four’ remained, with Italy receiving the same privilege once it began entering again in 2011.

Meanwhile, the participants in or on the margins of the region constructed as eastern Europe which recorded such successful results in the contests of 2001–8 – won by, respectively, Estonia, Latvia, Turkey, Ukraine, Greece, Finland, Serbia and Russia – were commonly perceived in western European media, reportedly even by some broadcasters, as having won their victories through ‘bloc’ or ‘political’ voting (the subject of an on-air diatribe by the then BBC Eurovision commentator, Terry Wogan, after Russia’s victory in 2008).<sup>26</sup> The 2009 change to the voting format (so that points would now be given 50% on the basis of public voting and 50% on an expert jury again), followed by two successive wins for Northern/Western European states (Norway in 2009 and Germany in 2010) could persuasively signify (perhaps to the EBU’s relief) “that the Eurovision song [had] returned from one region in Europe to another”<sup>27</sup> – at least until Azerbaijan’s victory in 2011 took Eurovision to Baku. The very structure of participation in Eurovision thus created a geopolitics of asymmetry based on disparities of economic power, with the conditionality of the acceptance of Europe’s southern and eastern peripheries never very far away. Here, however, one is still talking (albeit with some backstage context) about what ends up being seen on screen. An even deeper critical lens on Eurovision would interrogate it in the same way as critical studies of its fellow “mega-events”<sup>28</sup> such as the Olympic Games – an international event which is also the subject of its own (indeed a larger) academic subfield, but where researchers have emphasised structural and material perspectives just as much as the

---

<sup>26</sup> See Fricker, Karen. 2013. “*It’s Just Not Funny Any More*”: Terry Wogan, Melancholy Britain, and the Eurovision Song Contest, in *Performing the “New” Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 53–76, 55; Ulbricht, Sircar and Sloomaeckers, this issue.

<sup>27</sup> Bohlman, Philip V. 2013. *Tempus Edax Rerum: Time and the Making of the Eurovision Song*, in *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fabbri, Franco and Dafni Tragaki. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 35–56, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Roche, Maurice. 2000. *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.



“front-stage” action of the event.<sup>29</sup> Olympics research includes studies of the international politics of representing the home nation,<sup>30</sup> and indeed even some studies of sport as – gendered and ethnicised – performance,<sup>31</sup> but also foregrounds the politics of space, security and exclusion far more than most research on Eurovision.<sup>32</sup>

The contests of 2008 (in Belgrade), 2009 (in Moscow) and 2012 (in Baku), however, created a public agenda around these questions for the first time, through discourses that placed state treatment of sexual and gender diversity under particular scrutiny: from the question-marks over the safety of foreign gay tourists at Eurovision 2008 in Belgrade after the far-right attack on Belgrade’s first Pride march in 2001,<sup>33</sup> through the violent repression of a Pride march by Moscow police on the day of the Eurovision final in 2009, into the campaigns that sought to draw attention to compulsory urban clearance, arrests of opposition activists and state homophobia ahead of Eurovision 2012 in Baku.<sup>34</sup> Like the International Olympics Committee (IOC) at Beijing 2008, the EBU in both 2009 and 2012 stood accused by its critics of complicity with the national promotional strategies of authoritarian regimes.

Indeed, discourses about Eurovision and the Olympics not only paralleled each other but converged. For instance, Wogan’s successor as BBC commentator,

---

<sup>29</sup> The “backstage”/“front-stage” distinction here follows Goffman, Erving. 1990 [1959]). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Hogan, Jackie. 2003. Staging the Nation: Gendered and Ethnicized Discourses of National Identity in Olympic Opening Ceremonies. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 27(2), 100–23; Traganou, Jilly. 2010. National Narratives in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 34(2), 236–51; Ellis, Cath. 2012. The Possessive Logic of Settler–Invader Nations in Olympic Ceremonies. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 10(2), 105–23; Brownell, Susan. 2013. The Olympic Public Sphere: The London and Beijing Opening Ceremonies as Representative of Political Systems. *International Journal of the History of Sport* 30(11), 1315–27; Arning, Chris. 2013. Soft Power, Ideology and Symbolic Manipulation in Summer Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies: a Semiotic Analysis. *Social Semiotics* 23(4), 523–44; Biressi, Anita and Heather Nunn. 2013. The London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony: History Answers Back. *Journal of Popular Television* 1(1), 113–20; Closs, Stephens Angharad. In press. The Affective Atmospheres of Nationalism. *Cultural Geographies*,

<sup>31</sup> Rinehart, Robert E. 1998. *Players All: Performances in Contemporary Sport*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; Kestnbaum, Ellyn. 2003. *Culture on Ice: Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press; Adams, Mary Louise. 2011. *Artistic Impressions: Figure Skating, Masculinity, and the Limits of Sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Boyle, Philip and Kevin D. Haggerty. 2009. Spectacular Security: Mega-Events and the Security Complex. *International Political Sociology* 3(3), 257–74; Falcous, Mark and Michael L. Silk. 2010. Olympic Bidding, Multicultural Nationalism, Terror, and the Epistemological Violence of “Making Britain Proud”. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 10(2), 167–86; Bulley, Dan and Debbie Lisle. 2012. Welcoming the World: Governing Hospitality in London’s 2012 Olympic Bid. *International Political Sociology* 6(2), 186–204; Miah, Andy and Beatriz García. 2012. *The Olympics: the Basics*. London and New York: Routledge; Grix, Jonathan and Donna Lee. 2013. Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: the Lure of the Politics of Attraction. *Global Society* 27(4), 521–36; Boykoff, Jules and Pete Fussey. 2014. London’s Shadow Legacies: Security and Activism at the 2012 Olympics. *Contemporary Social Science* 9(2), 253–70.

<sup>33</sup> Nixon, David and Nick Givens. 2011. *Queer in England: the Comfort of Queer? Kittens, Teletubbies and Eurovision*, in *Queer in Europe*, edited by Downing, Lisa and Robert Gillett. Farnham: Ashgate, 41–56, 47. See also Mikuš, Marek, 2011. “State Pride”: Politics of LGBT Rights and Democratisation in “European Serbia”. *East European Politics and Societies* 25(4), 834–51; Nielsen, Christian Axboe. 2013. Stronger Than the State? Football Hooliganism, Political Extremism and the Gay Pride Parades in Serbia. *Sport in Society* 16(8), 1038–53.

<sup>34</sup> Gluhovic, *Sing for Democracy*.

Graham Norton, referred to Moscow 2009 as “the Beijing Olympics of Eurovision” while discussing the fate of the Pride march on air;<sup>35</sup> the liberal fantasies of Conchita Wurst winning Eurovision as an act of defiance against, specifically, Putin’s Russia unfolded only a few months after the Sochi Winter Olympics, which had themselves been an occasion for imagining an inherently LGBT-tolerant west and a Russia that just as inherently was nothing of the kind. This Eurovision/Olympics convergence can lead us through and perhaps even beyond the discursive to enable Eurovision researchers to pose questions of security, policing and power: even if it took Moscow or Baku to make them enter the agenda, they deserve to stay part of it even in years when Eurovision host sites might be, on the face of things, much less problematised.

### **Eurovision after the Mid-2000s: the Politics of Expansion and Crisis**

Eurovision research is a field that – significantly – coalesced in the mid-2000s at a moment of apparent growth, when narratives about the expansion of the Eurovision Song Contest and the expansion of the borders and prosperity of Europe could comfortably feed off and into each other. By 2013, on the other hand, it was more than apparent that, as Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic noted in their introduction to *Performing the “New” Europe*, “the utopic hopes of European unity following on from 1989 have not materialized”.<sup>36</sup> As of 2013, following the global financial crisis of 2008–, this was primarily the case in economic terms; in 2014, however, this crisis was joined by the diplomatic and military repercussions of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Both developments invited reconfigurations of the meanings of “European” belonging and therefore reconstructions of the geopolitical imaginaries through which the Eurovision of the 2000s had been understood.

After 2004, participation in Eurovision was restricted less by organisational limits on the number of entries that could compete but by the financial limits of whether broadcasters judged the costs of participation to be appropriate uses of their budget. These budgets, after 2008, would be reduced by governments recouping the money they had contributed to supporting failing banks, at the same time as the technical and promotional costs of participating in, let alone hosting, Eurovision continued to rise. The tension between the objective of national promotion and the financial liabilities of participation resulted, far more frequently than before 2008, in the decision not to take part: indeed, some of the very countries that had exemplified the “performance of national identity at Eurovision” argument in the 1990s and early/mid-2000s were not participating in the mid-2000s, including Croatia, (absent since 2014), Bosnia-Herzegovina (absent since 2013) and Turkey (absent since 2013). Serbia, absent in 2014, returned in 2015 to a contest which for the first time since 2002 would not feature the country that, perhaps more than any other, had epitomised the national promotional mode of the 2000s: Ukraine.

---

<sup>35</sup> Jordan, *The Eurovision Song Contest*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic. 2013. *Introduction: Eurovision and the “New” Europe*, in *Performing the “New” Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–28, 5.

Commenting on the “reinvigoration” of Eurovision through its 1990s–2000s enlargement, Katrin Sieg has argued plausibly that “[f]or many post-socialist countries, whose relation to Europeanness was ideologically, culturally or geographically tenuous, the ESC has become a stage where they can perform their imagined relationship to Europe as a ‘return home’ or demonstration of affinity”.<sup>37</sup> Yet what sort of “home” would be being “returned” to after 2008, when the idea of Europe as a common political community was badly undermined both by northern European reactions to the bailouts of southern European banks and by attacks on intra-EU freedom of movement that threatened to undermine many EU citizens’ everyday experiences of European integration? With publics in Britain and Germany questioning why their governments were contributing to bailouts and publics in Greece, Spain and Portugal questioning why their governments were submitting to bailout conditions, the EU’s institutional myth of integration and common purpose had not, therefore, overcome power relations within the Union. One of the most revealing Eurovision-related texts from southeastern Europe in the 2010s was not even from Eurovision, but still about it:<sup>38</sup> the 2011 song “*Eurosong*” by the Bosnian rap collective Dubioza Kolektiv, which – in terms that would certainly not have got past EBU rules against “political” content if the song had in fact been part of any Eurovision selection process – was cast as an address to elites in Germany, Italy, France, Britain and the European Parliament:

*If you wanna meet me, Mr Sarkozy  
You will have to learn my language, parlez-vous gipsy?  
Don't want to be annoying, please don't get me wrong  
I'm sick of being European just on Eurosong*

Even within the constraints of the EBU’s stated ban on “lyrics, speeches, [and] gestures of a political or similar nature”<sup>39</sup> – a rule which, as contributors to this issue confirm, has hardly prevented broadcasters and states using Eurovision for political communication – occasional narratives about the financial crisis have found their way into Eurovision. The Portuguese representatives in 2011, Homens da luta (pastiche the revolutionary songs of Portugal’s Carnation Revolution period after 1974), had been directly engaged in the “*Geração à rasca*” (“*Desperate Generation*”) protests by young precarious workers in Portugal before being selected, on a public telephone vote, to represent Portugal at Eurovision (and were thus much more directly connected to the politics of resistance to austerity in Portugal than might have been visible to most of their Eurovision audience).<sup>40</sup> The musician and satirist Rambo Amadeus, representing Montenegro with “*Euro neuro*” in 2012, was able to bring on stage not only simulated news tickers but also a Trojan horse to illustrate the song’s “monetary break dance”.

---

<sup>37</sup> Sieg, *Cosmopolitan Empire*, 245–6.

<sup>38</sup> Kappler, Stephanie. 2012. “*Mysterious in Content*”: *the European Union Peacebuilding Framework and Local Spaces of Agency in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. PhD-thesis. St Andrews: University of St Andrews, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Dafni, *Introduction*, in *Empire of Song*, edited by Fabbri and Tragaki, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Madeira, Cláudia. 2012. The “Return” of Performance Art from a Glocal Perspective. *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia* 1(2), 88-102, 98. On the Carnation Revolution and Eurovision, see also Pinto, Teixeira Luisa and Martin Stokes. 2013. “*And After Love...*”: *Eurovision, Portuguese Popular Culture, and the Carnation Revolution*, in *Empire of Song*, edited by Fabbri and Tragaki, 221–40.

The second new geopolitical narrative with which imaginations of “Europe” in and around Eurovision have had to contend has been the discourse of a supposed “new Cold War” between Russia and the West. As Felix Ciută and Egbert Klinke note in their analysis of German media coverage of the 2006–8 Russian–German gas crisis, the invocation of a “new Cold War” “reproduces the symbolic order [...] embedded in Cold War geopolitics, working with the same binaries that portray the identities of the protagonists and the bonds of interaction, conflict and in/security that structure their relationship: East / West, aggression / defence, authoritarianism / democracy, irrationality / rationality, and politics / economics”.<sup>41</sup> A feminist geopolitics would note that – after years of discourse and policy that have constructed Western nations as sites of “sexual democracy” on one hand and Muslim-majority societies, as well as racialised immigrants and their descendants, as repositories of intolerance on the other – the imaginary of a “new Cold War” also contains a binary based on attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity.

By the mid-2000s, central and eastern Europe in general had already, as Robert Kulpa argues, been positioned “as the European (homophobic) Other in the[se] emerging discourses of ‘hoinclusive EUropean nationhood’”,<sup>42</sup> not least through the framing of several mid-2000s European Parliament resolutions about homophobia. However, the intensification of state homophobia and transphobia in Russia and especially the passage of a federal “anti-homopropaganda”<sup>43</sup> law in June 2013 increasingly led to this framework being applied primarily versus Russia. Not only did many journalists and viewers interpret Eurovision through these discourses, but events at Eurovision produced new moments in which these discursive configurations would be reworked, with the controversies over Moscow 2009 and Baku 2012 followed by the perfect symbolic storm of a bearded drag queen, Conchita Wurst, winning Eurovision in 2014.<sup>44</sup>

Southeastern Europe, in contrast, is not currently near Eurovision’s geopolitical centre of gravity – potentially another sign that the “nation-building citizenship regime”, as Adrijana Zaharijević has described the policies of post-Yugoslav states in the 1990s, might (as Zaharijević suggests) have been replaced by yet another kind of postsocialist citizenship regime based on adapting states and their citizens to the neoliberal order.<sup>45</sup> In this latter relationship between state, nation, media and public there might be less to be gained from the nation-promoting Eurovision strategies of the past. At the same time, however, the proposition that broadcasters and states actively use Eurovision to perform and promote national identity in relation to Europe

---

<sup>41</sup> Ciută, Felix and Egbert Klinke. 2010. Lost in Conceptualization: Reading the “New Cold War” with Critical Geopolitics. *Political Geography* 29(6), 323–32, 325–6.

<sup>42</sup> Kulpa, Robert. 2014. Western Leveraged Pedagogy of Central and Eastern Europe: Discourses of Homophobia, Tolerance, and Nationhood. *Gender, Place and Culture* 21(4), 431–48, 431. The term “EUropean” appears in the original to denote the centrality of the EU in these discourses: Kulpa, *Western Leveraged Pedagogy*, 431.

<sup>43</sup> Wilkinson, Cai. 2014. Putting “Traditional Values” into Practice: the Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia. *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), 363–79.

<sup>44</sup> See Ulbricht, Sircar and Sloodmaeckers, this volume.

<sup>45</sup> Zaharijević, Adrijana. 2015. Dissidents, Disloyal Citizens and Partisans of Emancipation: Feminist Citizenship in Yugoslavia and Post-Yugoslav Spaces. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 49(1), 93–100, 96.

within a specific geopolitical and historical context has not completely ceased to be valid for southeastern Europe. Macedonia, which (like Albania) has been competing in Eurovision without a break since 2004,<sup>46</sup> corresponds to it most closely, and in 2013 Macedonian Radio–Television (MRT) even selected an entry which, titled “*Imperija*” (“*Empire*”) and performed by Esma Redžepova and Vlatko Lozanoski, would have showcased through its video the grandiose redevelopment and “antiquitisation” of Skopje’s urban space (the so-called “Skopje 2014” project, which drew a line of continuity between the current Macedonian state and ancient Macedonia).<sup>47</sup> Apparently in response to media criticism in Macedonia, MRT withdrew the song less than a fortnight later and replaced it with another song by Esma and Lozano which retained the multilingual Macedonian/Romani nature of the first song but avoided Skopje 2014 associations.

In 2014 itself, on the other hand, MRT stayed well away from the ancient past.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the fantasy of an eroticised, homosocial Macedonian air force that was presented in the preview video for Tijana Dapčević’s entry “*To the sky*” – displaying a homoeroticism which was likely drawing not only on the iconic cinematic masculinity of the *Top Gun* pilot,<sup>49</sup> but also on the homoerotic aesthetic of contemporary post-Yugoslav pop-folk videos directed by Dejan Milićević and others<sup>50</sup> – did not make its way into Tijana’s live performance at Eurovision. The director of the video, Mert Asllani, did, however, carefully arrange the establishing shot of Tijana’s pilot love interest so that the Macedonian flag and EU flag on his uniform could both be seen – a much more subtle geopolitical narrative of Macedonian nationhood than “*Imperija*” had provided, and certainly not a narrative that met the same reception as “*Imperija*” had done.

Outside southeastern Europe, too, the potential to communicate specific narratives of collective identity through Eurovision remains – whether applied for transient purposes or as part of a longer-term communicative strategy. The 2014 Polish entry “*My Słowianie*” (“*We Slavs*”) by Donatan and Cleo was a “self-consciously ‘Eastern’ and ‘Slavic’” performance, with women in sexualised folk costume miming rural domestic work through sexually suggestive movements. Musically, it resembled south-east European pop-folk in combining “hip-hop

---

<sup>46</sup> Slovenia, likewise, has participated without a break since 2001. Montenegro began competing as an independent country in 2007 and, though absent in 2010–11, has participated in every year since 2012.

<sup>47</sup> See Graan, Andrew. 2013. Counterfeiting the Nation?: Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia. *Cultural Anthropology* 28(1), 161–79.

<sup>48</sup> Unlike the Italian representative in 2014, who (unexpectedly for a song referencing high-heeled shoes, pavements, trains and traffic jams) performed “*La mia città*” (“*My City*”) in a laurel-wreathed costume inspired by Imperial Roman victory parades: Gloyn, Liz. 2014. [Classical Reception at Eurovision 2014](#). *Lizgloyn*, 12. May 2014 (accessed: 14. April 2015).

<sup>49</sup> See Jeffords, Susan. 1994. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 16–17; Stahl, Roger. 2010. *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 28.

<sup>50</sup> See “Eurovicious”. 2014. [Queer as Turbofolk \(Part II\): Body Politics](#). *Balkanist*, 25. September 2014 (accessed: 14. April 2015). One gendered spectacle here precludes another: the erotic fantasy of the all-male pilot squadron in a state of partial undress means that (unlike her parodic portrayal of a female Partisan – when not portraying several male and female newsmen from different Yugoslav republics, or Severina – in her 2005 video “*Sve je isto, samo njega nema*”) the viewer is not invited to picture Tijana in uniform herself.

beats with Eastern-sounding folk motifs (think accordions and violins)<sup>51</sup> while lyrically it represented a hyper-essentialised association between the Polish nation, Slavic descent, feminine beauty and (hetero)sexuality, implicitly exclusionary of any non-Slavic belonging to the Polish national whole. The Armenian entry of 2015, meanwhile, had to be interpreted in the context of the Armenian state's long-term commemorative strategy to ensure international remembrance of the centenary of the Armenian Genocide<sup>52</sup> – drawing the Eurovision Song Contest into the international politics of genocide recognition even though the songwriting team only described the song's message in the vaguest possible terms as relating to universal “values of love and peace” over time.<sup>53</sup>

The group of Armenian singers assembled for the 2015 contest, known as Genealogy, contained five musicians from the Armenian diaspora in different continents plus a sixth (Inga Arshakian, who had also been part of the Armenian entry in 2009 with her sister Anush) who still lived in Armenia. The song was initially titled “*Don't Deny*” and its video, released in March 2015, depicted the singers both in present-day and sepia-toned early-20th-century settings (during the song's instrumental break, as traditional Armenian stringed instruments play, the room where the sepia family photographs are being taken is suddenly seen with empty chairs).<sup>54</sup> Although the Armenian broadcaster later changed the song's title to “*Face the Shadow*”, its chorus (still based around the phrase “don't deny”) and video still enabled it to stand as part of a much larger, state-led initiative that was able to use nation-branding techniques to campaign against genocide denial. However these aims were going to be fulfilled in live performance, the Armenian example showed that Eurovision, in some cases, was continuing to be the “valuable stage for conducting everyday politics among European nations as a form of state identity branding and status signalling”<sup>55</sup> that it had very visibly become by the 2000s (and perhaps had always been).

In other cases, however, that value was no longer so self-evident, making the geopolitical space imagined by Eurovision's organisers appear – at least in 2015 – as even more of an abstraction than the idea of “Europe” would be itself. The “bridge” being built to Australia (as per the 2015 contest's slogan “Building Bridges”), which would send an entry in 2015 as a one-off celebration of the 60th contest, was a bridge that passed silently over Ukraine, where the director-general of the national broadcaster NTU stated that war and the high costs of preparing a competitive Eurovision performance meant that (reportedly for only one year) Ukraine was unable to take part: “We understand

---

<sup>51</sup> Kaneva, Nadia. 2015. Mediating Post-Socialist Femininities. *Feminist Media Studies* 15(1), 1-15, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Eurovision was not the only site at which the Armenian state integrated transnational showbusiness into this campaign: in April 2015 the government also co-operated with a visit by the US celebrities Khloe and Kim Kardashian (as well as Kim's husband Kanye West and their daughter North), who were able to meet the Armenian prime minister Hovik Abrahamyan as well as lay flowers at the Armenian Genocide Memorial Complex in Yerevan.

<sup>53</sup> N.N. 2015. [About Genealogy](#). *Eurovision.tv* (accessed: 14. April 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Brey, Marco. 2015. [Armenia: Watch the Video of “Don't Deny”](#). *Eurovision.tv*, 12. March 2015. (accessed: 11. April 2015).

<sup>55</sup> Jones and Subotić, *Fantasies of Power*, 544.

that Eurovision is a prestige contest. But we have no right to make a bad performance. And we have no money for a good one”.<sup>56</sup>

The papers in this issue explore different dimensions of the contradictions between frontstage and backstage, between representation and materiality, at various historical moments since the end of the Cold War, when Eurovision expanded to accommodate a much greater amount of southeastern European participation than it had done in 1961–92 when its only participant from the region was Yugoslavia. Approaching the nexus of gender and geopolitics at Eurovision from various disciplinary and methodological standpoints, they all demonstrate that as apolitical as Eurovision organisers and many participants may state the contest is – indeed, as *depoliticised* as Eurovision organisers might sometimes appear to strive to make it – the structure of Eurovision as a musical competition between nations makes it impossible to exclude politics from the event. Neven Andjelić’s paper sets what quickly became a well-known moment in Eurovision history, the 1993 entry from Bosnia-Herzegovina selected and performed while the siege of Sarajevo was still ongoing, in the context of the Yugoslav and Bosnian music industries and the politics of Eurovision in the early 1990s. Paul Jordan, in another interview-based study, documents the complexities of national identification behind four significant Eurovision entries from Ukraine since 2004, showing the extent to which representations and essentialisations of the nation are *actively* produced – and contested.

The other two papers explore political and media discourses to show some of the routes through which Eurovision has contributed to contemporary geopolitical visions that hierarchically re-imagine a “West” and “East” supposedly divided by attitudes to sexuality and gender identity. Jessica Carniel’s case studies include two Eurovision kisses between women (or rather one, between Krista Siegfriids and a backing vocalist in Eurovision 2013, which actually took place, and another much-anticipated kiss, between the members of t.A.T.u. in 2003, which ultimately did not), as well as the politics of state homophobia in Azerbaijan. Finally, Alexej Ulbricht, Indraneel Sircar and Koen Sloopmaeckers compare voting patterns and media discourses in the 2007 and 2014 contests, both of whose winners – Marija Šerifović and Conchita Wurst – departed from heteronormative conventions of gender expression. Their findings point to some noticeable discursive shifts between 2007 and the present day, but also to discursive continuities. If in 2007 the mainstream tabloid press of Germany and the UK attributed Šerifović’s victory to eastern European “bloc voting” rather than the triumph of tolerance that they projected on to Conchita’s victory in 2014, what might this suggest about developments in geopolitical imaginaries of sexual and gender diversity between then and now? One thing, however, is constant in both their cases: the extent to which a hierarchical “West”/“East” division structures geographical imagination in these two countries, and indeed beyond.

---

<sup>56</sup> N.N. 2014. [Ukraine Withdraws from Participating in Eurovision 2015](#). *Euromaidan Press*, 19. September 2014 (accessed: 14. April 2015).

## Conclusion

Eurovision research, now a flourishing subfield of its own, will likely continue to explore its key domains of performance, media discourse and fan cultures whatever changes the contest undergoes from year to year. Within and around these priorities, there is also scope for its lens to continue to widen, following perhaps the agendas mapped out by feminist geopolitics or contemporary Olympics research, but without having to dispense with its recognition of the pleasures of Eurovision as a televisual – and live – event. Current Eurovision research is, indeed, already acknowledging that, as Fricker and Gluhovic write:

*there is a wide discrepancy between a European citizenship proclaimed in official EU discourses and the actual lack of rights experienced by many ethnodiasporas, migrants, and refugees from non-European and Eastern European countries, which raises many questions about the politics of belonging and non-belonging and the cultural identity of the “new” Europe – questions that are vital for the future of the European continent.*<sup>57</sup>

Sustained engagement is therefore necessary with the material and discursive dynamics of exclusion within current and historical imaginations of gender, geopolitics and “Europe”.

Indeed, already Eurovision researchers are interrogating the limits of Eurovision as a multicultural space: Karen Fricker, for instance, argues that Eurovision is demonstrating “positive progress towards a contest that more accurately reflects the mingling of nationalities, ethnicities, and cultural traditions that is the reality of today’s Europe”,<sup>58</sup> whereas Katrin Sieg is less optimistic, suggesting that even the many Eurovision performances by Afro-Europeans since the 1990s (but very rarely before) “obscure more fraught axes of racialized difference prevailing in their respective contexts”.<sup>59</sup> These, as Ioana Szeman notes, include but are not limited to the marginalisation of Roma.<sup>60</sup> For Sieg, Eurovision still exhibits a lack of examination of “the relationship between contemporary conditions of globalized migration and commerce [...] and the colonial past”.<sup>61</sup> One might, for instance, ask whether it could be conceivable for a Eurovision performance ever to stage the kind of critique that queer and trans people of colour have made of the new sexually diverse nationalism in many European countries, which in this view incorporates gays and lesbians into the nation while putting racialised immigrants under suspicion of not sharing the reframed national values.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Fricker and Gluhovic, *Introduction*, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Fricker, “*It’s Just Not Funny Any More*”, 75.

<sup>59</sup> Sieg, Katrin. 2013. *Wii Are Family: Performing Race in Neo-Liberal Europe*. *Theatre Research International* 38(1), 20-33, 28. See also Ahmed, Sara. 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Szeman, Ioana. 2013 “*Playing with Fire*” and *Playing it Safe: With(out) Roma at the Eurovision Song Contest?*, in *Performing the “New” Europe*, edited by Fricker and Gluhovic, 125–41.

<sup>61</sup> Sieg, *Wii Are Family*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g. Haritaworn, Jin. 2010. *Queer Injuries: the Racial Politics of “Homophobic Hate Crime” in Germany*. *Social Justice* 37(1), 69–89; El-Tayeb, Fatima. 2012. “Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay”: Queer Muslims in the Neoliberal European City. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 19(1), 79–95. See also Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*; Puar, *Rethinking Homonationalism*.



Perhaps it goes without saying that it could not; but, as when anything seems to go without saying, it is always worth thinking through the reasons why.

Eurovision as an institution has always operated with discourses of “bringing Europe together”, in parallel with political discourses of European integration even though institutionally separate.<sup>63</sup> Its geopolitical imaginations of where Europe starts and ends have always been flexible, often expanding, but also subject to fragmentation and absences from within: the contest’s own on-screen maps of Europe, becoming increasingly less “coherent” after 2006 and tending to vanish from screen altogether after 2009, are tantalisingly suggestive of the difficulties of coherently defining this space.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the show and the event are structurally dependent on performances of cultural differences and thus cannot escape the wider politics of representation within which they unfold. To what extent can Eurovision organisers, Eurovision performers, and participants in cultures around Eurovision reshape the elements of those politics that have silencing and marginalising effects? Maybe the question is still not asked enough; but there is room to try.

### Bibliography

- Adams, Mary Louise. 2011. *Artistic Impressions: Figure Skating, Masculinity, and the Limits of Sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Archer, Rory. 2012. Assessing Turbofolk Controversies: Popular Music between the Nation and the Balkans. *Southeastern Europe* 36(2), 178–207.
- Arning, Chris. 2013. Soft Power, Ideology and Symbolic Manipulation in Summer Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies: a Semiotic Analysis. *Social Semiotics* 23(4), 523–44.
- Baker, Catherine. 2008 a. When Seve Met Bregović: Folklore, Turbofolk and the Boundaries of Croatian Musical Identity. *Nationalities Papers* 36(4), 741–64.
- Baker, Catherine. 2008 b. Wild Dances and Dying Wolves: Simulation, Essentialization, and National Identity at the Eurovision Song Contest. *Popular Communication* 6(3), 173–89.
- Biressi, Anita, and Heather Nunn. 2013. The London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony: History Answers Back. *Journal of Popular Television* 1(1), 113–20.
- Bohlman, Philip V. 2010. *Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*. London and New York: Routledge.
- . 2013. *Tempus Edax Rerum: Time and the Making of the Eurovision Song*, in *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fabbri, Franco, and Dafni Tragaki. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 35–56.

---

<sup>63</sup> Tragaki, *Introduction*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Pajala, Mari. 2012. [Mapping Europe: Images of Europe in the Eurovision Song Contest](#). *VIEUU: Journal of European Television History and Culture* 1(2), 3. (accessed: 11. April 2015).

- Boykoff, Jules, and Pete Fussey. 2014. London's Shadow Legacies: Security and Activism at the 2012 Olympics. *Contemporary Social Science* 9(2), 253–70.
- Boyle, Philip, and Kevin D. Haggerty. 2009. Spectacular Security: Mega-Events and the Security Complex. *International Political Sociology* 3(3), 257–74.
- Brey, Marco. 2015. Armenia: Watch the Video of "Don't Deny". *Eurovision.tv*, 12. March 2015 (accessed: 11. April 2015).
- Brownell, Susan. 2013. The Olympic Public Sphere: The London and Beijing Opening Ceremonies as Representative of Political Systems. *International Journal of the History of Sport* 30(11), 1315–27.
- Buchanan, Donna A. 1997. Bulgaria's Magical Mystère Tour: Postmodernism, World Music Marketing, and Political Change in Eastern Europe. *Ethnomusicology* 41(1), 131–57.
- (ed.) 2007. *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Bulley, Dan and Debbie Lisle. 2012. Welcoming the World: Governing Hospitality in London's 2012 Olympic Bid. *International Political Sociology* 6(2), 186–204.
- Christensen, Miyase and Christian Christensen. 2008. The After-Life of Eurovision 2003: Turkish and European Social Imaginaries and Ephemeral Communicative Space. *Popular Communication* 6(3), 155–72.
- Ciută, Felix, and Egbert Klinke. 2010. Lost in Conceptualization: Reading the "New Cold War" with Critical Geopolitics. *Political Geography* 29(6), 323–32.
- Closs Stephens, Angharad. In press. The Affective Atmospheres of Nationalism. *Cultural Geographies*.
- Dowler, Lorraine, and Joanne Sharp. 2001. A Feminist Geopolitics?. *Space and Polity* 5(3), 165–76.
- El-Tayeb, Fatima. 2012. "Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay": Queer Muslims in the Neoliberal European City. *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19(1), 79–95.
- Ellis, Cath. 2012. The Possessive Logic of Settler–Invader Nations in Olympic Ceremonies. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 10(2), 105–23.
- "Eurovicious". 2014. Queer as Turbofolk (Part II): Body Politics. *Balkanist*, 25. September 2014 (accessed: 14 April 2015).
- Falcous, Mark and Michael L. Silk. 2010. Olympic Bidding, Multicultural Nationalism, Terror, and the Epistemological Violence of "Making Britain Proud". *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 10(2), 167–86.
- Fassin, Éric. 2010. National Identities and Transnational Intimacies: Sexual Democracy and the Politics of Immigration in Europe. *Public Culture* 22(3), 507–29.
- Fricker, Karen. 2013. "It's Just Not Funny Any More": Terry Wogan, Melancholy Britain, and the Eurovision Song Contest, in *Performing the "New" Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 53–76.
- and Milija Gluhovic. 2013. Introduction: Eurovision and the "New" Europe, in *Performing the "New" Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–28.

- Gloyn, Liz. 2014. Classical Reception at Eurovision 2014. Lizgloyn, 12. May 2014 (accessed: 14. April 2015).
- Gluhovic, Milija. 2013. Sing for Democracy: Human Rights and Sexuality Discourse in the Eurovision Song Contest, in *Performing the “New” Europe: Identities, Feelings and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 194–217.
- Goffman, Erving. 1990 [1959]. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Graan, Andrew. 2013. Counterfeiting the Nation?: Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia. *Cultural Anthropology* 28(1), 161–79.
- Grix, Jonathan, and Donna Lee. 2013. Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: the Lure of the Politics of Attraction. *Global Society* 27(4), 521–36.
- Haritaworn, Jin. 2010. Queer Injuries: the Racial Politics of “Homophobic Hate Crime” in Germany. *Social Justice* 37(1), 69–89.
- Hogan, Jackie. 2003. Staging the Nation: Gendered and Ethnicized Discourses of National Identity in Olympic Opening Ceremonies. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 27(2), 100–23.
- Iordanova, Dina. 2001. *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media*. London: BFI.
- Jeffords, Susan. 1994. *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Jones, Shannon, and Jelena Subotić. 2011. Fantasies of Power: Performing Europeanization on the European Periphery. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14(5), 542–57.
- Jordan, Paul. 2011. *The Eurovision Song Contest: Nation Branding and Nation Building in Estonia and Ukraine*. PhD-thesis. Glasgow: University of Glasgow.
- . 2014. Nation Branding: a Tool for Nationalism?. *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45(3), 283–303.
- Kaneva, Nadia. 2015. Mediating Post-Socialist Femininities. *Feminist Media Studies* 15(1), 1–15.
- Kappler, Stephanie. 2012. “Mysterious in Content”: the European Union Peacebuilding Framework and Local Spaces of Agency in Bosnia-Herzegovina. PhD-thesis. St Andrews: University of St Andrews.
- Kestnbaum, Ellyn. 2003. *Culture on Ice: Figure Skating and Cultural Meaning*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Kiossev, Alexander. 2002. *The Dark Intimacy: Maps, Identities, Acts of Identification*, in *Balkan as Metaphor*, edited by Bjelić, Dušan I., and Obrad Savić. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 165–90.
- Kulpa, Robert. 2014. Western Leveraged Pedagogy of Central and Eastern Europe: Discourses of Homophobia, Tolerance, and Nationhood. *Gender, Place and Culture* 21(4), 431–48.
- Madeira, Cláudia. 2012. The “Return” of Performance Art from a Glocal Perspective. *Cadernos de Arte e Antropologia* 1(2), 87–102.
- Miah, Andy and Beatriz García. 2012. *The Olympics: the Basics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mikić, Vesna. 2006. *The Way We (Just Me, Myself and I) Were: Recycling National Identities in Recent Popular Music*. Paper presented at the

- conference “Musical Culture and Memory”, Faculty of Musicology, University of Arts, Belgrade, 12.–14. April 2006.
- Mikuš, Marek. 2011. “State Pride”: Politics of LGBT Rights and Democratisation in “European Serbia”. *East European Politics and Societies* 25(4), 834–51.
- Mitrović, Marijana. 2010. “New Face of Serbia” at the Eurovision Song Contest: International Media Spectacle and National Identity. *European Review of History* 17(2), 171–85.
- N.N. 2015. About Genealogy. *Eurovision.tv* (accessed: 14. April 2015).
- N.N. 2014. Ukraine Withdraws from Participating in Eurovision 2015. *Euromaidan Press*, 19. September 2014 (accessed: 14. April 2015).
- Neumann, Iver B. 1998. *Uses of the Other: the “East” in European Identity Formation*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nielsen, Christian Axboe. 2013. Stronger Than the State? Football Hooliganism, Political Extremism and the Gay Pride Parades in Serbia. *Sport in Society* 16(8), 1038–53.
- Nixon, David and Nick Givens. 2011. *Queer in England: the Comfort of Queer? Kittens, Teletubbies and Eurovision*, in *Queer in Europe*, edited by Downing, Lisa and Robert Gillett. Farnham: Ashgate, 41–56.
- Pajala, Mari. 2012. Mapping Europe: Images of Europe in the Eurovision Song Contest. *VIEUU: Journal of European Television History and Culture* 1(2), 3 (accessed: 11. April 2015).
- Pinto Teixeira, Luisa and Martin Stokes. 2013. “And After Love...”: *Eurovision, Portuguese Popular Culture, and the Carnation Revolution*, in *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fabbri, Franco, and Dafni Tragaki. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 221–40.
- Puar, Jasbir K. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 2013. Rethinking Homonationalism. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45(2), 336–9.
- Rinehart, Robert E. 1998. *Players All: Performances in Contemporary Sport*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Roche, Maurice. 2000. *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sieg, Katrin. 2012. Cosmopolitan Empire: Central and Eastern Europeans at the Eurovision Song Contest. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(2), 244–63.
- . 2013. Wii Are Family: Performing Race in Neo-Liberal Europe. *Theatre Research International* 38(1), 20–33.
- Smith, Fiona. 2001. Refiguring the Geopolitical Landscape: Nation, “Transition” and Gendered Subjects in Post-Cold War Germany. *Space and Polity* 5(3), 213–35.
- Solomon, Thomas. 2007. *Articulating the Historical Moment: Turkey, Europe, and Eurovision 2003*, in *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Raykoff, Ivan and Robert Deam Tobin. Aldershot: Ashgate, 135–45.
- Stahl, Roger. 2010. *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Stokes, Martin. 1992. *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey*. Oxford: Clarendon.

- Stychin, Carl. 2011. Unity in Diversity: European Citizenship Through the Lens of Popular Culture. *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 29(1), 1–25.
- Swiebel, Joke. 2009. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Human Rights: the Search for an International Strategy. *Contemporary Politics* 15(1), 19–35.
- Szeman, Ioana. 2013. “Playing with Fire” and Playing it Safe: With(out) Roma at the Eurovision Song Contest?, in *Performing the “New” Europe: Identities, Feelings, and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fricker, Karen and Milija Gluhovic. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 125–41.
- Toal, Gerard and Carl T. Dahlman. 2011. *Bosnia Remade: Ethnic Cleansing and its Reversal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Todorova, Maria. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tragaki, Dafni. 2013. Introduction, in *Empire of Song: Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*, edited by Fabbri, Franco and Dafni Tragaki. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1–34.
- Traganou, Jilly. 2010. National Narratives in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 34(2), 236–51.
- Ugrešić, Dubravka. 2003. What is European in European Literatures?: European Literature as a Eurovision Song Contest. *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 10(4), 465–71.
- Vermeersch, Pieter. 2004. Minority Policy in Central Europe: Exploring the Impact of the EU’s Enlargement Strategy. *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 3(2), 3–19.
- Wilkinson, Cai. 2014. Putting “Traditional Values” into Practice: the Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia. *Journal of Human Rights* 13(3), 363–79.
- Wolff, Larry. 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Zaharijević, Adrijana. 2015. Dissidents, Disloyal Citizens and Partisans of Emancipation: Feminist Citizenship in Yugoslavia and Post-Yugoslav Spaces. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 49(1), 93–100.