

# Melancholic Airs of the Orient – Bosnian *Sevdalinka* Music as an Orientalist and National Symbol

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The tunes they played were melancholy rather than martial, and had a weirdness truly Eastern; the music had the curious effect of bringing the Nile scenery, where I last heard such strains, vividly before me (Holbach 1910, 188).

Western authors have often described “Oriental” music as melancholic and sad. Members of “Oriental” cultures, however, have considerably different views on their own musics, which not only have emotional content but are also often given further ritualistic expression as representative of the national culture. Basically, “Oriental” here refers to almost any sort of local music from the Balkans, North Africa, the Middle East or Asia, but I have chosen Ottoman Turkish and especially Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslim non-religious urban songs called *sevdalinke* (sing. *sevdalinka*) and their interrelationship as examples of colonial discourse and the construction of Otherness in Orientalism. My research material comprises musical representations in travelogues on Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>1</sup> and the late Ottoman Empire on the one hand, and scholarly and popular texts related to music on the other. Some of the texts were produced by outsiders, others by Bosnian Muslims, or Bosniaks.

In his influential work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said defines the term more generally as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’” Orientalism is also “a Western style for dominating, reconstructing, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1978, 2–3). Bosnia has been the subject of Orientalist discourse in several phases of its history: the Islamisation of a large part of the population and the Ottoman impact on Bosnian culture during the Ottoman

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, I refer to Bosnia-Herzegovina as “Bosnia.”

rule (1463–1878) underlined the Oriental Otherness of the provinces in the Austria-Hungarian Empire (1878–1918), in the two Yugoslavian states (1919–1941 and 1945–1991), and in the Bosnian War (1992–1995), and its aftermath.<sup>2</sup>

## Oriental Melancholy in Music

Western representations of Oriental music, have typically focused on melancholy in terms of both emotion and mood: the melancholic airs of the East was a common notion in musical scholarship until the First World War, and in travel writing up to the Second World War and even later. Travelogues frequently described and generalised about Oriental music, as in the following British example from 1909:

Native Turkish music, it must be admitted, is still very primitive in character. The airs are generally either wild and plaintive, or sentimental and melancholy, presenting little variety and – in common with the folk-music of Southern Europe – generally they are invariably pitched in a minor key (Garnett 1909, 181–182).

The modern, enlightened Western reader may find such expression strange. In fact, from the ethnomusicological perspective there is a logical explanation behind Western ethnocentric interpretations of Ottoman and Arab music as sad. Firstly, the melodies of the classical and urban music are based on dozens of modal systems called *makamlar* (sing. *makam*) or *maqāmat* (sing. *maqām*), which have specific rules of melodic creation (see Pennanen 1997, 130–134). Because of the differences in musical thinking a person enculturated in Western classical music cannot easily understand the elegance and complexity of these modal systems. Secondly, the lack of chordal harmony, especially functional harmony, leaves the Western listener without clear musical reference points. Thirdly, the slow rhythmic modes of Ottoman and Arabic classical music might sound sad and monotonous to an outsider, and the flowing rhythm lends easily itself to sorrowful associations.

Such qualities were also present in Greek *rebetika* and *laika* music of the 1950s and especially of the 1960s. The expressive singing style and dismal, suicidal lyrics combined with minor-key modes created a heavily depressing atmosphere in the songs. It is no wonder that in the mid-1960s, the Western-educated chairman of the first Panhellenic Psychiatry Conference declared that melancholic *bouzouki* songs were responsible for an increase in mental disorders in Greece (Gauntlett 1991, 11).

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<sup>2</sup> In the last years of Titoist Yugoslavia and during the Bosnian war (1992–1995), Serbian and Croatian propaganda machines repeatedly represented Bosniaks as the Other. The basic thinking behind that attitude was nationalist and religious: the propaganda depicted Bosnian Muslims as corrupted Serbs or Croats and Turkified Slavs (see Malcolm 1994, 226–227).

Contradicting the old European conception of music as a universal language, various musicological and music psychological experiments on Arab and Ottoman (or Turkish) modes have shown that Western listeners do not always interpret the emotional contents of *maqāmat* and *makamlar* in the same manner as native listeners do (see e.g., Touma 1989, 70–74; Tucek 2006, 625).

## Bosnian *Sevdalinka*

*Sevdalinke* are Bosnian songs usually associated with Bosniaks, although the songs have been popular among other ethno-religious groups of Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. The lyrics often concern historical events, various towns in Bosnia and elsewhere in the Balkans, and Bosniak notables. The most common themes, however, are unrequited love and love's yearnings, i.e., *sevdah*, after which the genre is named.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Turkish word *sevda* is of Arabic origin and has several meanings, the main ones in this context including love, passion, intense longing, melancholy, spleen and black bile.<sup>4</sup>

The connection between love, melancholy, spleen and black bile dates back to antiquity. The eminent Greek physician Galen of Pergamum (129–200) introduced the notion of four basic temperaments reflecting the cardinal humours of blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile) and melancholy (black bile). Accordingly, the temperaments were of the sanguine or light-spirited type, the phlegmatic or sluggish type, the choleric or hot-tempered type and the melancholic or depressed type (see Hankinson 2008). Thus, according to *sevdah* logic, melancholy ensues from love's yearnings and is also connected with black bile. That said, not all songs that Bosnians nowadays consider *sevdalinke* are unambiguously melancholic.

Vlado Milošević (1901–1990), well known for his research on Bosnian folk music, ascribes the following musical characteristics of *sevdalinka* melodies: the interval of the augmented second, Mixolydian, major and harmonic minor scales with final on the second degree, chromatic alternation, melismas and long phrases with a wide melodic range. Milošević attributes the melancholy of *sevdalinka* melodies to the augmented second, which “strikes the listener’s ear with extraordinary power, captures attention and pierces through consciousness.” He considers that interval to be the unifying agent among the songs with similar musical content in the Levantine *Kulturkreis*: it characterises the melodic progress and gives an Oriental tone to the singing (Milošević 1964, 32). Milošević clearly adopted the idea of the augmented second as the musical emblem of the Orient (cf. Pennanen 2008, 130–131). As I

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3 On *sevdalinka* lyrics, see Eschker 1971.

4 The translations of Turkish words are from Redhouse 1992 and of Bosnian words from Škaljić 1985.

will show below, not all South Slavic musicologists before Milošević agreed on the Oriental origin of that interval. Interestingly, Milošević also refers to the *Kulturkreis* theory of the German diffusionist school (see Nettl 1983, 325–326).

Contrary to the common assumption, *sevdah* is not the only sentiment connected with Bosnian music. Other Turkish words describing depressed emotions include *karasevdah* (i.e., black, very strong *sevdah*) and *dert* (sorrow, grief), and the Slavic equivalent of the latter is *tuga*. However, *sevdalinka* is linked with other emotional states, most notably *ćeif* (< Turk. *keyif* < Arab. *kayf*), which means good mood, enjoyment, desire, urge and the state of being slightly inebriated. *Ćeif* was one of the curiosities the Austrian officer, traveller and writer Armand Freiherr von Schweiger-Lerchenfeld (1846–1910) described in his book *Bosnia: the Land and Its Inhabitants* (Bosnien, das Land und seine Bewohner). The first edition of the book was published in 1878, whereas the second version came out a year later, i.e., after Austria-Hungary had occupied Bosnia according to the agreement of the Congress of Berlin. Schweiger-Lerchenfeld's account of *ćeif* is straightforward:

The main meals always take place in the evening, namely in the hours of the day when it is not too late, at least during the warm season, to make an excursion to a vantage point where the real Muslim devotes himself entirely to contemplation and idling. The Orientals appreciate this state of *kef* – literally good mood – or the state free of all reasoning; desire for idleness and distantness, spiritual inertness. In performing *kef*, all Muslims are identical: the lively Arab, the unhurried Turk, the restless Kurd, the quarrelsome Circassian, the stale Tartar, the violent Albanian and the power-seeking Bosnian (Schweiger-Lerchenfeld 1879, 152).

Schweiger-Lerchenfeld's words give the impression that all Muslim peoples are the Other and virtually lack positive qualities: Islamic cultures – passive and non-creative – are the negation of Western culture. Strikingly, Said (1978, 40) lists the typical terms of Orientalist discourse as follows: “The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal.’” Such attitudes prevail in the travel literature of the pre-Second-World-War era in particular. Schweiger-Lerchenfeld, however, associates *ćeif* exclusively with contemplation and Muslims. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the origin of the word *kef* is the Arabic *kayf*, which means “pleasure, a state of dreamy tranquillity and a smoking material (as marijuana) that produces *kef*.” On the face of it, Schweiger-Lerchenfeld only knew the Arabic non-musical use of the word, thus echoing the claimed relationship of the Orient with a life of ease and leisure (cf. MacKenzie 1995, 62).

More accurately, regardless of religion, *keyif* is an integral part of Balkan and Middle-Eastern cultures and it also has musical connotations. For instance, Racy (2004, 227) defines the Arabic *kayf* as “a mood of elation conducive to making [Arab-style] *tarab* music or to becoming entertained by the music; also the relative state

that the music produces” (see also Shannon 2003). In the Balkans, for example, the Bulgarian word *kef* and the Greek word *kefi* describe similar feelings of joy and celebration that music can stimulate.<sup>5</sup>

## **Sevdalinka and the Other**

Representations of the *sevdalinka* and the Bosniaks vary considerably in scholarly texts. For example, the Croatian folk-music researcher, pedagogue and music journalist Franjo Ksaver (Šaverijski) Kuhač (1834–1911) was one of the first South Slavic scholars to investigate the Oriental influence on Bosnian and other Balkan Slavic folk music. In his 1898 study on the Turkish element in the folk music of Croats, Serbs and Bulgarians (*Turski živalj u pučkoj glazbi Hrvata, Srba i Bugara*; German translation 1899) he summarises some of the main points of nineteenth-century evolutionist thinking but also brings his own cultural nationalist ideas. Interestingly, according to Kuhač (1899, 562), Arabs and Turks did not initially use the emblematic Oriental augmented second which originated from the Slavic minor scale (i.e., the harmonic minor) and South Slavic melodies: Turks and Muslim Slavs adopted the interval because it reflects love’s yearnings and expressions of Oriental melancholy.

Kuhač largely confines himself to repeating the customary musical classification of Oriental peoples according to the four cardinal temperaments. Consequently, the rapid succession of notes in each rhythmic formation reveals the choleric temperament of the Arabs. The Turks, on the other hand, are more melancholic: the Turk is a dreamer, easygoing and careless, whereas the Slav is sanguineous. The basic character of the Muslim Slavs remains the same even though they have adopted the Oriental melancholy of the Turks. They adhere to the rhythmic structures of Islamic liturgical singing, which are Arabic (*ibid.*, 565).

Another considerably more detailed but largely ignored study on Bosnian music is the doctoral dissertation of Branimir Marijić (Vrđi, Herzegovina 1896 - Zurich 1974). Usually known as Branko Marić, he was a Bosnian Franciscan monk and musicologist who specialised in the folk music of his native Herzegovina. Starting in the 1920s he researched Bosnian-Herzegovinian musical traditions and published scholarly articles on them, finally finishing his doctoral dissertation in Vienna in 1936 under the supervision of Robert Lach. Entitled *Folk Music of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (*Volksmusik Bosniens und der Herzegovina*), it examines the major folk-music traditions of the two provinces, with special emphasis on rural traditions.

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<sup>5</sup> On wedding music and *kefi* in the village of Sohos, northern Greece, see Cowan 1990, 106–112. On wedding songs and *qeif* among the Prespa Albanians, see Sugarman 1997, 148–154 and 278–280.

The most interesting and surprising views Marijić expressed in his dissertation concern the Oriental melismatic style of singing without metre, which he suggested was typical of Balkan Turkish melodies and Turco-Tataric music, as well as of Bosnian *sevdalinka* (Marijić 1936, 76–77). A melismatic melody consists of florid groups of notes called melismas, each of which is sung on one syllable. According to Marijić, the free metre, often called a flowing rhythm, distinguishes the Oriental from the two other melismatic styles of local and Western origin. He describes the cultural context of the Oriental style as follows:

In our region –one could safely say – the Oriental melismatic style is exclusively associated with eroticism. The expression of erotic emotionality in song among the Orientals is totally different in psychological background than in the Christian West. People of the Western culture aim at spontaneous expression in their songs on an ideal level as far as possible. Love is no mystery in the Western World: it must be perfectly clear and transparent. Westerners relish the explanation of the mystery more than the mystery itself.

Conversely, among Muslims, all emotionality – especially of an erotic nature – is based on certain centuries-old ways of life that are incomprehensible to the Westerner. They are so deeply rooted, however, that they no longer serve the people, the people rather serve them, and precisely here lies the emotional depth of the mystery. The particular individuality, and especially the unbelievably deep intensity of erotic emotion, among Muslims are conditioned not only by the carnal ideal of their religion, i.e., by basic ideas, but also by conscious, centuries-old psychological education that regulated even the most subtle nuances of each emotion. The male Muslim has no means of controlling his erotic emotions because his religion does not prescribe anything and he himself has no feeling of prescription. His emotions do not seek a single means of manifestation: on the contrary, his ideal is to offer himself.

This “*ethos enthustiacon*” is taken by the Muslim only on the primitive level. Whereas singing is a symbol – admittedly an emotional one – for the Westerner it is nevertheless a symbol of the expression of longing, pain, crying and hope, for the Muslim the song itself represents the longing, pain, crying and hope. This underlying relationship between the emotion and the song, which is mirrored in the chant of the Muslims, creates special, original impressions in our reflexive eye. These impressions are moulded into an artistic form, sometimes against all the theoretical rules but with deeper theoretical insight in that they no longer represent but have become life itself in its emotionality. It is quite conceivable that this mode of expression (in music) has assumed its own special and strong characteristic through the unrestricted pursuit of pleasure on the one hand and a strict domestic upbringing on the other (Marijić 1936, 82–83).



Thus Marijić maintains a sharp distinction between the Christian West and the Islamic East. As the following table shows, the Muslim world is unquestionably the binary Other of the Christian world.

<b>Christian West</b>	<b>Islamic Orient</b>
rationality	mystery
spiritual ideal of religion	carnal ideal of religion
developed culture	ancient traditions
chastity (sexual control)	unlimited (male) eroticism
song as emotional symbol	song as emotion

These binary oppositions are closely akin to the typical terms of Orientalist discourse. In fact, Marijić portrays the Muslim male as an addict of carnal pleasure and sexualises the Other through pornographic tropes that follow the classic conventions of nineteenth-century Orientalism. Take, for example, Edward William Lane's *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1860), in which he gives rein to his male fantasies of harem life and polygamy. He also tends to emphasise the sexuality in the performances of dancing girls and to represent such music as typical of Egypt (see Zon 2007, 221–224).

More specifically, Marijić relies on the nineteenth-century image of the lustful and cruel Turk, which began replacing the earlier, positive images of Ottoman Turks after the outbreak of the Greek Independence War in 1821 (see Wheatcroft 1995, 209–30). Interestingly, the archetypal image of the old lustful Turk served as the model for the caricature of the deposed sultan Abdülhamid II (ruled 1876–1909) that was published in a Sarajevo German-language newspaper in 1911 (see Picture 1).



Picture 1. Sultan Abdülhamid II as the old lustful Turk (Sarajevoer Tagblatt 13, Aug. 1911).

In order to problematise Marijić's hierarchical relationship between Self and Other I have attempted to give it more dimensions, as Matthew Head (2003, 212–217) suggests – but without success since Marijić's thinking looks entirely black-and-white. What is more, Marijić seems to imply that the imputed overwhelming eroticism of *sevdalinka* is somehow related to its Oriental melismatic melodies, but he fails to rationalise this hypothetical, murky connection in any clear and adequate manner. Marijić's motives may have been more personal than one might imagine. It is not far-fetched to assume that, as a celibate Catholic monk, he was reflecting on his own problematic stance towards sexuality. Indeed, some of his views may have foreshadowed his subsequent ultranationalist activities: after the Second World War he cooperated with the exiled Croatian Fascist Ustaša movement in Spain (Sopta 2004; Borić 2010).

Musicology was not the only branch of scholarship speculating about emotions in *sevdalinka*. The Yugoslav philosopher and “ethnopsychologist” Vladimir Dvorniković (1888–1956) was undoubtedly nationally the most prominent writer on *sevdalinka* between the two World Wars. The role of Bosnian music and melancholy in his relatively well known 1939 *magnum opus Characterology of the Yugoslavs* (*Karakterologija Jugoslovena*) is acknowledged, but his earlier work *Psyche of the Yugoslav Melancholy* (*Psiha jugoslovenske melanholije*, 1925) on the same theme has fallen into oblivion.

Relying on the philosophical ideas of Friedrich von Schelling and Johann Gottfried von Herder, in *Characterology of the Yugoslavs* Dvorniković describes the folk song as the collective expression of Yugoslavism, the ritual “unburdening” of the soul of the Yugoslavs whose identity was rooted in centuries of foreign oppression. He identifies the most intense expression of people's pain in the territories in which Ottoman rule had lasted longest. He also observes that songs inducing *dert* and *sevdah* express the soul of the Yugoslav race most intensely, denoting the pain of perpetual frustration and melancholy caused by the loss of the pre-Ottoman Yugoslav national unity (see Longinović 2000, 623–625, 628). Dvorniković based his work on the idea of the golden age: in his view, the creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia meant a return to the mythical golden age of the mediaeval South Slavic state (cf. Smith 1991, 66–67).

For obvious reasons the royal court of Yugoslavia, fighting various separatist trends in the newly created country, supported Dvorniković's theories. However, although purportedly original, Dvorniković's theory of the “Yugoslav race” actually reiterated the anthropogeographical ideas of Jovan Cvijić (1865–1927), the leading Serbian geographer of his time and President of the Serbian Royal Academy of Sciences in the 1920s (see Wachtel 1998, 92–94). After the Second World War the socialist ideology of Titoism did away with the idea of the “Yugoslav race,” replacing it with the socialist supranational policy of “brotherhood and unity” (see



Wachtel 1998, 128–172). Socialist authorities and folk-music researchers tended to shun *sevdalinka* and its Oriental features, and it therefore became an integral part of socialist folklorism.

## The Bosniak Response

Insiders' views on *sevdalinka* as a form of Oriental music and on the significance of its emotional contents are generally in contrast with outsiders' views. Consider, for instance, the Bosniak singer Hasan Kadragić, who remains a virtually unknown figure in the history of Bosnian music. He published two editions of a popular essay on *sevdalinka* in the early 1930s in Sarajevo and Zagreb, *The Artistic Value of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Sevdalinka* (Umjetnička vrijednost bosanskohercegovačke sevdalinke, 1933) and *On Bosnian-Herzegovinian Sevdalinka* (O bosanskohercegovačkoj sevdalinki, no date). His aim was to use what he earned from them to finance his studies at the Royal Academy of Music in Zagreb.

As a proponent of *sevdalinka*, Kadragić (no date, 6) describes it as “a product of Slavic extreme sensitivity and the powerful Oriental erotic mood.” The very similar notion of *sevdalinka* as an amalgamation of Oriental passion and Slavic sensitivity was subsequently adopted in Bosniak literary research (cf. Rizvić 1994, 191). After setting out the framework Kadragić further outlines the position of *sevdalinka* in the context of Bosniak cultural nationalism:

It [i.e., *sevdalinka*] simultaneously expresses the pride of the Slavic soul, which was subject to war and invasion for centuries. The soul nevertheless remained intact and strong, adopting only the foreign elements that suited its nature and simultaneously amending those that did not.

Slavic melancholy requires Oriental eroticism, and the two are interconnected in *sevdalinka*. Thanks to *sevdalinka*, we Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims have remained Slavic. Although a mixture of many elements, as noted above, it is absolutely original and authentic, and irradiates countless elements of Slavic spiritual depth.

In spite of its Turkish name, *sevdalinka* is so foreign to Turks that it has almost nothing in common with the Oriental Turk, whose spirit is passionate albeit considerably uni-dimensional. Although it emphasises eroticism, originating from the Oriental melodies, it has become unfamiliar to Orientals because it has changed drastically through the expression of Slavic dignity.

Accordingly, the Turks have always seen *sevdalinka* as a foreign creation. On the other hand, it has been the best guarantee of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims against Turkification because they find relaxation for their soul in its strength. Bosnian Muslims have thus not needed to draw upon alien melodies (Kadragić no date, 7).

Thus, the Oriental character of *sevdalinka* is not at all evident in that Kadragić differentiates it from the music he calls Turkish. In stressing the different attitudes towards eroticism he is underlining the difference between Slavic Bosniaks and Oriental Turks and, respectively showing how *sevdalinka* is indigenous Bosnian Slavic rather than Oriental music. Here he approaches “nesting Orientalism”, by which Bakić-Hayden (1995, 919) means the “subjectivational practice” through which all ethnic groups in Yugoslavia defined the “Other” as the “East” to them, consequently and simultaneously Orientalising the “Other” and Occidentalising themselves.

Given *sevdalinka*’s as well as the Bosniaks’ ethno-cultural background, Kadragić emphasises the features of nesting Orientalism. Firstly, the older, nineteenth-century name for *sevdalinka* was *turčija*, i.e. Turkish-style song. Secondly, regardless of their ethnicity, outsiders have regarded Balkan Muslims as Turks an account of their religion. During Ottoman rule all Muslims of the Empire belonged to the same Muslim *millet*, or confessional community, as Ottoman Turks and, according to Hangi (2009, 11), many Bosniaks still called themselves Turks in the late nineteenth century.

Himzo Polovina (1927–1986) express an alternative Bosniak view on *sevdalinka*. He was best known as an interpreter of *sevdalinka*, although by profession he was a psychiatrist who specialised in music therapy. In 1972 he and his team gave a scholarly paper entitled *Melancholy – the Creative Emotional Expression of Folk Poets in the Textual Contents and Melodies of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Small Town Songs* (Polovina *et al.* 1977) at a conference of Yugoslav folklorists. Describing several varieties of Bosnian musical melancholy, which differ in terms of form, genesis, basis and significance, the paper combines *psychoanalytical and medical terminology, such as* Oedipus complex, ego, superego and insomnia, with music and textual analysis. The team concluded that some forms of *sevdah* contributed to its listeners’ ability to face existential problems on a tolerable level: sung poetry expressing melancholy can have therapeutic effects.

The third example of Bosniak views on *sevdalinka* and *sevdah* is from the 1990s and 2000s. Omer Pobrić (1945–2010), accordion virtuoso, composer, producer and founder of the Institute of Sevdah (Institut sevdaha) in Mulići near Visoko, Bosnia, was one of the leading modern proponents of *sevdalinka*. He organised various thematic concert tours in Bosnia and abroad, and even a seminar in Sarajevo at which Bosnian politicians, intellectuals and scholars gave speeches in praise of *sevdalinka* (see Šojko 2007). For Pobrić, such music was essentially a unique expression of Bosniak culture:

It is a gift of God for those lucky ones who think positively and live optimistically and find elements of beauty and pleasure in such a view. And once your soul is filled with

the beauty of *sevdah*, you feel how *sevdalinka* is refreshing and gladdening your heart: “Play and sing to make yourself happy.” (Pobrić 2005).<sup>6</sup>

The reinterpretation of *sevdah* has attracted support on the official level as well: the Sarajevo exhibition complex Art kuća sevdaha, which opened on 8 May 2008, represents the institutionalised and canonised view.<sup>7</sup> The strongest proponent of that institution is Emir Hadžihafizbegović, the Sarajevo Canton Minister of Culture and Sport. Apart from representing the canon in the exhibition rooms and selling *sevdalinka* recordings and books, Art kuća sevdaha serves as a forum for concerts, television broadcasts and even antique markets.

In a sense, Bosniak interpretations of *sevdah* as a positive force are related to the concept of writing back in postcolonial literature (cf. Ashcroft *et al.* 2002). These authors resist the colonial myth of an Oriental, passive, unproductive Bosnia and reinterpret *sevdah* as a building block for a new, active Bosnian culture.

## Conclusion

The aim in this paper was to show the diversity in representations of “Oriental” music and the emotions it arouses, and in their use. For instance, travellers have often produced variations on the Saidian theme of Western superiority and Oriental inferiority: for the Western traveller the perceived Oriental musical melancholy, frequently intertwined with eroticism and leisure, reflects the passiveness of the monolithic, static Oriental culture.

The first half of the article demonstrates the art of fictionalising the Other. Travelogues and scholarly studies portray stereotyped and more or less imagined Oriental music that reflects supposed national or racial qualities. Branimir Marijić’s discourse on the interconnections between the uncontrolled erotic emotions of Muslims, the lack of emotional symbolism in Muslim music and the Oriental melismatic style of *sevdalinka* is an example of Othering *par excellence*. Such Orientalist representations certainly reveal more about Europeans’ own fears and desires than about the Other they are claiming or attempting to describe. Moreover, Orientalist sweeping generalisations about “Oriental” music and its emotional content are evidently detrimental to analyses of the Occidental self.

*Sevdalinka*, like most forms of music, has been connected with cultural and sometimes political nationalism, which are often intertwined. As a good example of this bond, Vladimir Dvorniković’s theories link the emotional aspect of

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<sup>6</sup> See also Pobrić 2007.

<sup>7</sup> For the Internet site of the institution, go to <http://www.artkucasevdaha.ba/>.

*sevdalinka* with the political dimensions of musical melancholy in the framework of a multinational state, thus varying the Orientalist theme in providing justification for a centralised state of South Slavs.

However, Western ideas have not merely promoted the “Western style for dominating, reconstructing, and having authority over the Orient”. They have also contributed to the gradual process of reinterpreting the old Orientalist notion of *sevdalinka* as Oriental, passive and melancholic music among the Bosniaks. This process has been part and parcel of the Bosniak quest for an ethnic, national and linguistic community with a European South Slavic identity, and one of the outcomes is the reversed, positive meaning of *sevdah* melancholy as an activating and creative force.

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