Language, cultural space and meaning in the phenomenon of 'Cro-dance'[1]

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Abstract

'Cro-dance' was a musical trend in 1990s Croatia which combined north-west European dance music with lyrics in Croatian and often English, unlike most Croatian popular music which used Croatian language only. This paper applies ideas from sociolinguistics and anthropology to the interplay of languages in these musical texts and the wider cultural narratives with which performers, producers and listeners have associated them.

Keywords: Croatia, dance music, identity, language

For a few years in 1990s Croatia, the entertainment industry and public witnessed the phenomenon of Cro-dance, a localisation of electronic pop music from north-west Europe which, unusually for Croatia, used English and Croatian lyrics. A few Cro-dance performers such as Nina Badrić, Vanna or Tony Cetinski achieved ongoing stardom in Croatia and former Yugoslavia; many more returned to anonymity. This paper, exploring

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language, cultural space and meaning in Cro-dance, also re-engages with data I collected for a PhD on narratives of identity in Croatian popular music. Written up, the research discussed Cro-dance only briefly and concentrated on identity-political issues around patriotic popular music and so-called 'turbofolk'. I revisited issues of language, identity and nationalism in Cro-dance after realising, while working in a Modern Languages department during another project, that sociolinguistics could have helped me explore Cro-dance in more depth.[2]

In popular music studies, the ethnomusicologist Harris Berger has recognised that '[m]uch of our identity in everyday life is achieved through linguistic behavior' and that language choice also illustrates the practical constraints on musical creativity within a commercialised entertainment industry [Berger, 2003: x, xv]. Berger's anthology on language and popular music however focuses on decisions to compose and perform entire musical texts in one language rather than another [Berger, *op. cit.*: xiii]. Perspectives on code-switching within the *same* song text can be found in sociolinguistics, where researchers have studied bilinguals' spontaneous code-switching and, more recently, the deliberate code-switching of composition and performance [Bentahila and Davies, 2002: 187]. Sociolinguistics is particularly interested in hip-hop, about which Mela Sarkar and Lise Winer [2006: 173] observe that code-switching 'may involve languages rappers do not profess to speak fully and upon which they have no ethnic "claim"' – the status of English in Cro-dance. Rappers, and other musicians, singing in a foreign language are not claiming to belong personally or ethnically to the group(s) that recognise it as a mother tongue. They do claim, however, to belong within a certain cultural space where their chosen languages have meaning. This notion of language having meaning within a

[2] See, e.g., Mar-Molinero [2008] on Spanish-language hip-hop and reggaeton.

cultural space implies that space where that language does *not* have meaning must also exist. Following Fredrik Barth [Barth ed., 1969], researchers can then try to identify how a conceptual boundary between those spaces is constructed by the people who believe that they live inside or outside them.

Anthropological research in Croatia is rich in studies of popular music and identity that touch on language. In many fields of Croatian musical practice, singing or rapping in regional dialects of Croatian is a tool in musicians' and listeners' construction of identity: Istrian pop-rock music [Kalapoš, 2002], Dalmatian klapa and urban song [Ćaleta, 2008], 'otočki rock' music from the Adriatic islands [Piškor, 2011] and Croatian hip-hop [Bosanac, 2004]. This amount of plurality within a country of 4.4 million people suggests how culturally diverse Croatia is and how fraught the project to create one national cultural identity out of this historically fragmented space must be. This paper deals not with dialects of Croatian but with the mixing of two distinct languages, Croatian and English. It explores both the musical texts themselves and the ways in which Croatians and other people from former Yugoslavia have given them meaning in later constructions of their own personal and collective identities.

Language, popular music and the nation

Most studies of language choice, cultural meaning and multilingual song texts concern hip-hop, a U.S. invention that has lent itself to localisation and vernacularisation when taken up by creators abroad. In Tony Mitchell's proposed cultural geography of hip-hop, its capacity to 'express a poetics of place and race and ethnicity' has enabled it to

incorporate local symbolic identity-markers and communicate specifically local meanings through them [Mitchell, 1998: 3, 10]. For Androutsopoulos and Scholz, hip-hop in non-English vernaculars exemplifies a 'reterritorialization (or indigenization) of globally available popular culture' [2003: 463] observable in Italy, Germany, Greece, France and Spain. A founding figure of hip-hop, Afrika Bambaataa, encouraged rappers in France and elsewhere to rap in their own vernaculars rather than English during the first wave of hip-hop globalisation in the early 1980s [Alim, 2009: 119]. In Croatian anthropology, Jana Bosanac has demonstrated that the convention of hip-hop in the vernacular (in this case Croatian) created space for many sub-national hip-hop scenes to form around linguistic regionalisms [Bosanac, *op. cit.*].

However, hip-hop is often not entirely in the vernacular but uses linguistic 'code-switching' (switching between languages within one text), developing a more complex relationship to English and other languages and, therefore, to the global. Varieties of hip-hop exist within a network of global cultural flows, creating a 'global style community' [Alim, 2009: 107] even though their texts use a multitude of local vernaculars, not all mutually intelligible. No member of this global community could understand the entire corpus of vernacular texts produced by all its other members. Common signifiers of membership include non-verbal practices (bodily disciplines; musical techniques and technologies; identification with urbanity and/or marginalisation as locally understood) but also common understandings of what creators in hip-hop can and should do with language. This involves a shared preoccupation with 'flow' and rhythm as well as openness to linguistic code-switching within a text, reflecting the cultural and ethnic superdiversity of many contemporary urban centres [Alim, 2009: 115–16] and indeed of

English. The multilingualism and multivocality of hip-hop lyrics, for Pennycook, may destabilise the common-sense concept of fixed and stable national languages: 'Languages are not so much entities that pre-exist our linguistic performances as the sedimented products of repeated acts of identity' [Pennycook, 2007: 13].

The sociolinguistics of hip-hop appears to place vernaculars at the less privileged pole of a power relationship between English and other languages, and/or at the less formal pole of an opposition between vernacular and standard where the speakers concerned are using vernaculars *of* English. One U.S. high school teacher, for instance, framed her pedagogy as a struggle over 'issues with standard English versus vernacular English' in her Black students' linguistic practices [Alim 2007: 162]. The study of nationalism, however, frames vernacular languages very differently, as a precondition for nationalism as a political philosophy [Anderson, 1983: 37–42]. The rise of administrative vernaculars and an industry of printing in the vernacular for profit ran in parallel with the Reformation's undermining of transnational religious authority to produce – quite haphazardly – a situation where political communities could conceive of being identified by the use of a particular language that distinguished them from other political communities. Although, for a transitional period, certain political communities (e.g. Russian nobility) used another modern language that was not their own and that had wider civilisational connotations, once nationalism had become established as a political principle its linguistic standard became the language *of the people*, the vernacular. National movements thus demanded that the vernacular would be the supreme language of administration, prestige and power within the territory claimed for the nation-state. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, nationalist activists in the Habsburg Empire had

popularised the idea of 'linguistic frontiers' between different groups 'as part of a larger strategy to normalize national identities and to eradicate both bilingualism and the alternative loyalties that it represented', a campaign that Pieter Judson views as the origins of competing nationalist projects in central Europe [2006: 5].

Once national movements have established a nation-state, the vernacular of the ethno-cultural group associated with the nation and the state flips its position in the domestic power relationship between the vernacular language and others.[3] For Ernest Gellner [2006: 32], nation-states achieve the cultural reproduction of the nation by providing mass education and ensuring universal literacy, predominantly or solely in the national majority's vernacular. Through language policy, the state has power to determine whether any other languages will be represented in education, bureaucracy, politics, popular culture and public space; it may, e.g., control or restrict music broadcasting in languages that are not the vernacular. Through language planning, the state may exercise the power and authority to decide public linguistic standard(s) or may delegate this to certified experts. States have many solutions to linguistic diversity: official bilingualism or multilingualism may be implemented; minority language rights may be applied in certain sub-state territories only; they may even require only the national vernacular to be used in all public interaction. Whatever the policy, its effects are likely to construct one or more languages as the state norm – the common language of the all-national 'we' – and other languages within that territory as 'minority', different, or less privileged. The vernacular, understood as counter-hegemonic in sociolinguistic studies of hip-hop, through this alternative reading itself operates as the linguistic hegemon.

[3] I use 'domestic' as the closest translation of the Croatian *domaći*, which here connotes the realm within the state in contrast to the realm outside the state (the international, the global). English often denotes this with 'national' vs. 'international'.

Certain authors including Alex Bellamy and Snježana Kordić have regarded the Croatian state's 1990s language policy as far-reaching and prescriptive. The new standards aimed to distinguish Croatian from other variants of Yugoslavia's official polycentric language (Serbo-Croatian) and thereby to confirm Croatia as a fully developed nation [Bellamy, 2003: 137–46]. Kordić, an outspoken critic of Croatian nationalism, describes 1990s Croatian language policy as an expression of nationalist linguistic purism that extended even into the private sphere by requiring particular language choices from private individuals and companies as well as state functionaries whenever language was on public view [Kordić, 2010]. The same language policy that aimed to make ekavica spellings and Cyrillic script – signifiers of the Serbian language and Serb ethnicity – invisible within the Croatian state also targeted internationalisms and anglicisms, aiming to replace these with alternative or newly-coined expressions that had distinctive Croatian roots. Within the Croatian state, the national vernacular, Croatian, could be used to delimit cultural space and boundaries and enjoyed institutional privileges over other languages. Standard Croatian could not, therefore, become the 'resistance vernacular' that Mitchell [2000] detects in much localised non-Anglophone hip-hop; the rejection of anglicisms in 1990s Croatian language policy meant that English, paradoxically, also had this potential.

Indexical and communicative English in 'Cro-dance' music

Cro-dance, which flourished between c. 1993 and 1998, contained certain stylistic elements of hip-hop but could not be said to have shared the cultural and subcultural

meanings associated with hip-hop domestically/nationally and internationally. Hip-hop in late 1980s and 1990s Croatia constituted a small underground socio-cultural scene involving breakdance and graffiti as well as musical creativity, and was hardly represented in mainstream media until 1997 [Bosanac, *op. cit.*: 110–13]. Croatian critics and listeners today still identify hip-hop as part of 'alternativa' ('the alternative'), an assemblage of tastes in music, style and consumption that defines itself against the social mainstream and reflexively constitutes itself as a subculture.[4]

Cro-dance resembled hip-hop only in using some linguistic and stylistic practices, particularly a) rap and b) the dress of male performers in particular; musically it resembled early-1990s northern European house and techno music. Rap was not the core lyrical content of Cro-dance songs but accentuated sung vocals and was placed in introductions and/or middle eights. Rap in Croatian hip-hop used Croatian predominantly [Bosanac, *op. cit.*: 112–13], but rap lyrics in Cro-dance were in English, wrapping around or punctuating sung lyrics in Croatian. Certain Cro-dance producers (notably the original members of the group E.T./Electro Team) had previously been active in Croatia's emerging hip-hop milieu. The Cro-dance scene itself was nonetheless a commercialised popular music that operated within mainstream Croatian showbusiness (*estrada*): its texts and products were oriented towards singles which record labels released to obtain a) radio airplay, b) live discotheque appearances and c) performances in televised variety shows and festivals. Royalties from airplay on state television became a major source of income for producers and managers in the Croatian entertainment industry [Perković, 2011: 127]. The mainstreamisation of hip-hop signifiers in Cro-dance was not unique to Croatia; the 1990s Anglosphere had witnessed similar processes such as the exotification

[4] See Baker, 2010: 149.

of gangsta rap for white suburban audiences [Negus, 1999: 496–7] and the growth of apolitical hip-hop-infused R&B with lyrics about romance and sexual intimacy. Cro-dance drew its chosen hip-hop elements into a different, *estrada*-based language, where the practices of hip-hop became loanwords and underwent yet another phase of localisation and domestication. Yet no matter how simple the content of Cro-dance lyrics were, the lyrics themselves still took the form of linguistically complex texts where code-switching between Croatian and English was routine.

Sociolinguists such as Jan Blommaert consider that the multilingualism of texts and semiotic signs has both communicative and emblematic (or indexical) functions [Blommaert, 2010: 29–31]. Berger [*op. cit.*: xii], discussing popular music, concurs that language choice operates as 'an aural evocation' of the place(s) and nation(s) that language connotes. The second language in a multilingual text (e.g. rapping in English within a song in Croatian) has communicative meaning if or when its content is understood as a meaningful utterance. It also, however, conveys an extra, indexical layer: the fact that *the text contains material in English* is part of the meaning listeners can obtain. Layering languages may help musicians communicate with distinct audiences at once [Larkey, 2000: 10]. The communicative meanings of English sections in Cro-dance songs were limited when the section was vestigial in length or, of course, when a listener did not understand them. To understand layers of cultural meaning in Cro-dance one must nonetheless review how English and Croatian interacted in lyrics and produced meaning through the interaction of languages – even if these meanings were not accessible to all listeners.

English-language content (the divergence from the norm of estrada) could affect Croatian-language content in several ways: mutually reinforcing, intensifying, disrupting, or reintegrating. The examples discussed here come from three well-known Cro-dance songs released between 1994 and 1998 incorporating themes of gender and the body: *Ja sam vlak* (*I am a train*) by Nina Badrić and Emilija Kokić, *Tek je 12 sati* (*It's only 12 o'clock*) by E.T. and *100%* by Annamaria. Paul Greene and David Henderson [2000: 97] observe (studying multilingual Nepali pop music) that '[s]ongs about love […] also implicate other desires', e.g. the desire to exist in a certain relation to modernity or the West. A similar desire emerges in the background of the examples below.

In the simplest example such as *Ja sam vlak* (1996), English and Croatian utterances reinforce each other. The Croatian lyrics concern female empowerment and revenge against dishonest men. The chorus deploys images of power, technology, destruction and chemical explosion:

> Ja sam vlak koji zgazit će te, mali
> vatromet kakav nisi probao
> Ja sam vlak koji zgazit će te, mali
> zaboravit ćeš da si hodao
>
> (I am a train which will run you over, little boy
> A firework such as you've never tried
> I am a train which will run you over, little boy
> You will forget that you used to walk)

These belong to a masculine-gendered sphere of domination, violence and control over the environment and even hint at military technologies.[5] An English aside by Kokić, using Black American slang, makes an outright claim to dominion over the male: 'I own yo' ass, you ugly S.O.B. [son of a bitch]' (followed by Badrić: 'I wanna tell you something'). English recurs at the end: 'I told you / don't ever cross me again'.

A more complex English/Croatian relationship appears in a fundamental Cro-dance text, *Tek je 12 sati* by E.T. (1994). The album including this single (*Second to None*, titled in English) is often viewed as a high point for electronic music in Croatia before its banalisation. With a female singer (Vanna) and two male MCs, the song dramatises female sexual agency outside monogamy:

> Uh-uh, dovoljan je jedan znak
> Uh-uh, i učinit ću sve
> Uh-uh, ne trebam ja s tobom brak
> Baš me briga što si njen
>
> (Ooh-ooh, one sign is enough
> Ooh-ooh, and I'll do everything
> Ooh-ooh, I don't need marriage with you
> What do I care if you're hers?)

[5] See Pratt, 1992; McClintock, 1995; Mostov, 2000. Trains were linked to the conquest of territory in 1995 after the end of the Homeland War when the Croatian president's 'Freedom Train' had travelled through formerly Serb-occupied territories on its way from Zagreb to Split.

On the face of it, this too seemed to transgress mid-1990s Croatian gender norms, depicting a woman as independently sexually active outside marriage/monogamy. English in *Tek je 12 sati* intensifies yet also disrupts the Croatian: Vanna's Croatian lyrics are about transgressive acts (infidelity, sex without commitment) but are still expressed in showbusiness commonplaces (e.g. one line 'u meni nađi spas' – 'find salvation in me'). The MCs' English lyrics, which reference the soul music and slang of what Paul Gilroy (1993) has termed the Black Atlantic ('smooth operator' as per Sade's 1984 song; 'down with it'), are more sexually explicit:

> I'm a lover for one night stand, a smooth operator – I'm your man
> Ain't no time for romance and flirt, I just wanna get down under your skirt
> Your body's getting wet and I like it, your dance excites me, I can't hide it
> I'm not a stereotype, I'm down with it, to show my potential – so get it

In contrast, English and Croatian operate at cross-purposes in the third example, *100%* by Annamaria (1998, released to tie in with the release of the film *G.I. Jane* in Croatia). The video mixes scenes from the film with dance routines featuring Annamaria and female dancers, and is momentarily transgressive insofar as it fantastically transports female bodies into the most masculine of nationalist spaces, the military. The song's introduction, typically, contains an English sentence ('Come on, girls! Shake it! Move your body!'), followed by vocals sung in Croatian:

> Sto posto, ja ne znam drukčije

Sto posto, pusti ili uzmi sve

Sto posto, glasno, glasnije

Sto posto, reci da li igra se

(100%, I don't know anything different

100%, give up or take it all

100%, loud, louder

100%, say whether the bet is on)

A male singer rapping in English interrupts Annamaria's bridge, reasserting a gender ideology that might otherwise have been transgressed:

Yeah, yeah

Annamaria, baby, that's the way I keep on rollin', stallin', movin', jammin'

Rock and rollin' high, yeah, girl

Tonight's the night I wanna kick it

Cause that's the way I was playin'

And that's the way you obeyin'

Freaky things will come and go so slow, girl

(Annamaria: Come on, girls!)

Overpowering the preceding text, the English section reintegrates it into the prevailing social order. Greene and Henderson [*op. cit.*: 111] observe that, in mixed-language

Nepali music, it is 'almost invariably' English that interrupts Nepali; similarly here, though interruption in Cro-dance in general is unusual.

These insights illustrate communicative English in Cro-dance yet do not account for its *indexical* functions. Songs often contained only brief English phrases that could not interact with Croatian in more complex ways. In *I got a feeling* by Kasandra (1994), the only English is an introductory phrase ('Let me go, baby') and the title phrase, followed by its loose Croatian translation:

> I got a feeling, i osjećam to
> Da ti ćeš znati sve što nije znao on
>
> I got a feeling, u zraku je to
> Da noćas s tobom bit će ludo zabavno
>
> ('I got a feeling', and I feel it
> That you will know everything he didn't
>
> 'I got a feeling', it's in the air
> That tonight with you will be madly fun)

The themes of sexual licence and nightlife are typical of Cro-dance. English here is almost entirely indexical: it exists *so that the song contains English* and that whatever 'complex of associative meanings' [Blommaert, *op. cit.*: 29] a producer, performer or

listener attaches to English will be drawn into the text. For Blommaert, indeed, material does not even have linguistic value until/unless it is read by a person with 'sufficient linguistic competence to project linguistic functions on to the signs' [Blommaert, *op. cit.*: 31]. Until then, the sign is solely indexical not referential, making deviations from accepted standard(s) of the referenced language irrelevant. Blommaert's observation could equally apply to English in Cro-dance. In 2000, one dance song with English lyrics in HTV's Dora festival (to select a Croatian representative for the Eurovision Song Contest) was officially titled, and appeared on screen as, *I wanna to fly* rather than *I wanna*, or *I want to*, *fly*. Its ungrammatical nature is communicatively unfortunate but indexically excusable.

In mid-1990s Croatia, state language policy's avoidance of anglicisms could not mask the symbolic resonances of English. English could connote particular Anglophone states, such as the U.S.A. with history (dating back to the policies of Woodrow Wilson) of supporting small nations' rights; it could stand for ideological and practical cosmopolitanism, including mobility and an ethos of openness to culture other than the nation's; before the war it had been regarded as the 'language of the world' (words a Bosnian language teacher I interviewed in 2009 attributed to her parents[6]) by urban professionals throughout Yugoslavia. Access to these overlapping cultural spaces would have been curtailed if the nation had turned in on itself utterly. The use of English, as Cro-dance producers readily explained to the mid-1990s entertainment media, made an instant identity claim that Croatia belonged to the West and to a Europe where similar dance acts were popular. At a time when defining Croatian cultural identity relied on binaries between West/East and Croatia/Serbia, making this claim to Westernness

[6] Interview, 15 April 2009.

performed Croatia's distance from these opposites. Yet the slang forms interjected into Croatian texts also brought with them 'the subcultural prestige in European rap of vernacular English' [Androutsopoulos and Schotz, *op. cit.*: 474]. English in Cro-dance thus also signalled the national culture's inclusion in a transnational space of entertainment. This multi-layered perspective equips us to consider how listeners have made sense of it in the years since its texts were originally produced.

Meaning in space and time

Cro-dance texts and their producers made frequent claims to westernness and contemporaneity. Within songs, these claims were made through musical orchestration and arrangement, performers' dress, video and artwork design, and the indexical use of English. Promotion and publicity in other media, where musicians and producers were depicted talking about their texts, embedded these pieces of music and video in a wider sphere of meaning which attached to the song itself when listeners, viewers and readers were aware of both.[7] Cro-dance producers contributed to this broader text through speaking about their music's western characteristics and arguing that it could only have existed in an independent Croatia, not in socialist Yugoslavia. A 1995 statement by Miro Buljan, who arranged many Cro-dance songs including the hits from *Second to None*, was typical. It employed the same linguistic code-switching as his music:

> I wouldn't call it a trend. Why? I'll explain to you now. With the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, a lot of that changed. For instance, the mentality! I'm not

[7] See Dyer, 1998.

> saying 'their' mentality is worse than ours, nor vice versa. It's just that a consequence was that there appeared a different 'sound' [named in English] which exclusively belongs to – the West. Take care! During ex-Yugoslavia, dance also existed! But it couldn't get through! And, look, with the break-up of that unfortunate Yugoslavia, it was really proven that we here in Croatia have a purely different culturological heritage! [Milčec, 1995]

Such claims were, however, contested. Professional critics and musicians who associated themselves with a 'rock' worldview (which also claimed to epitomise cosmopolitanism) mocked the banality of Cro-dance and rejected its claims to modernity and progressiveness. Some, such as the critic Ilko Čulić, identified thematic similarities between Cro-dance's signifying practices and a genre that Cro-dance producers had declared its opposite, Serbia's 'turbo-folk' [Baker, *op. cit.*: 73–5]. This fusion of pre-war 'newly-composed folk music', European/U.S. house music and hip-hop emerged as a fundamental other in mid-1990s debates over the cultural identity of popular music in Croatia and retains this meaning today. To the extent that Cro-dance opposed Serbian turbo-folk or occupied turbo-folk's market share, it could be integrated into the prevailing nationalist project of the mid-1990s – comments by Buljan, Vladimir Mihaljek and other producers appeared to suit it to this purpose. In practice, however, Cro-dance was problematic for another powerful section of the presidential project which promoted the value of 'spiritual renewal' (*duhovna obnova*). Advocates of spiritual renewal, such as the cleric Don Ante Baković, objected to the promiscuity of Cro-dance songs and

particularly to a subset of songs by I.Bee (Ivana Banfić) that used another electronic dance music culture, rave, as additional stylistic inspiration.

Simultaneously, however, certain Cro-dance texts acquired new meanings when broadcast and heard in Serbia at a time of intense hostility. In a 1994 interview, Vanna acknowledged *Tek je 12 sati* as a big hit in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Belgrade (where the alternative radio station B92 played it). She stated she would be prepared to perform in Sarajevo after 'confederation' (i.e. after a resolution of the political/military crisis between Bosniaks and Croats):

> but I'm not sure if I could perform in other regions. Because, thank God, no normal person could do that and not forget Vukovar [the Croatian town notoriously besieged by the Yugoslav army in autumn 1991]. If I went out in front of an audience in Belgrade, for instance, I'd certainly feel various emotions in the audience, and they would include emotions that I cannot bear and that bother me. [Tomić, 1994]

A book on music and resistance in 1990s Serbia by the British journalist Matthew Collin acknowledges Cro-dance's position in this cultural flow. In contrast to how its own producers situated it, Collin associates Cro-dance with the milieu of turbo-folk music, that is, with the fusion of dance and pop-folk that was being produced in 1990s Serbia:

> Despite the fact that the former Yugoslav republics were at war with each other, turbo-folk succeeded in crossing the frontlines and became popular all over the

> region. Many Serbian hits were actually recorded in Croatia, ostensibly an enemy state, including the greatest of them all, *It's Almost Midnight* [i.e. *Tek je 12 sati*] – its title if nothing else a succinct summation of the apocalyptic feeling of the times.[8] [Collin, 2001: 84]

Among the meanings of Cro-dance in Serbia was simply that its songs were *texts and products brought across borders* – at first in a personal exchange of cassettes sent among musicians and journalists via a third country. Croatian pop had unproblematically formed part of everyday life in Serbia before the war. Insofar as these new Croatian songs represented a common cultural memory not defined by Milošević's discourse and policy, they could form part of practices of resistance in mid-1990s Serbia. Soon after, however, they were co-opted by media institutions owned by the Milošević family and other oligarchs. These happily added the new Croatian pop to their playlists, defusing its resistive value.

Social realities rarely appeared in Cro-dance music: its meanings therefore included an *absence* of the aftermath of war. The exception is E.T.'s debut hit, *Molitva za mir* (*Prayer for peace*), which was released at the end of 1991 during the Homeland War and launched their career in Croatia. This song set the tone for later Cro-dance in its arrangement and linguistic code-switching: its model of female sung vocals and male rapped vocals was repeated on further E.T. songs including *Tek je 12 sati*, though on *Molitva za mir* all vocals except an introductory sample ('It's the beginning of a new and excitingly different story') were in Croatian.[9] *Molitva za mir*'s appeal was inseparable

[8] *Tek je 12 sati* is important enough to Collin that he uses it as a chapter title.
[9] See Ceribašić, 2000.

from the desire – expressed both inside and outside state-driven milieus – to put Croatia's case to the West by approaching the West as culturally closely as possible. However, E.T. are generally not remembered in Croatia as derived from the war, unlike the other showbusiness attraction whose career began with a debut wartime hit (Marko Perković Thompson). The war has consistently structured the stardom narrative of Thompson, a soldier and veteran, while it is not an explicit part of the stardom narrative of E.T. or their former lead singer Vanna.

The wartime exchange of dance music between Croatia and Serbia represented a spatial transfer of meaning across political and cultural borders. Further layers of meaning, however, are only created over time, through the exercise of hindsight and personal memory. Mid-1990s Cro-dance represented material for a professional controversy among entertainment-industry interest groups who competed for room within the politicised space of *estrada*. Most of its market had collapsed by 1998 when state broadcasting was opting for a popularised version of 'tamburica' (Slavonian folk) music and for a more overt folk/pop crossover. Yet, viewed from a distance, Cro-dance and its very absurdity has come to accompany a certain generation's memories of childhood and adolescence. My semi-structured interviews during fieldwork in 2007 included eight with students at the Filozofski fakultet in Zagreb. All discussed Cro-dance during their interviews, usually in response to being asked 'What do you remember in general about music in the nineties?' Only the oldest, Antonija (aged 24), narrated Cro-dance in ways connected to the narratives of identity that producers themselves had used:

In the nineties. I remember that here [kod nas], I think, when I was in primary school, the beginning of secondary school, there were, after the war, there was a big influence from all that music which had come out of dance and become popular, all possible singers were only doing dance songs, everyone was at it, but it was, I don't know, like E.T., Colonia and so on, that was the main thing, and they were everywhere, and… a lot of this rap culture, [it had] a big influence, we all wanted to be rappers… in all the songs, an ordinary pop song, you sing and suddenly some rapping comes out, it was very, it became popular, it's still being used…

[…] Q: Why was it so popular, that dance [music]?

A: I think, I don't know why, but… I've not thought about it at all… I think probably, after the war, then we had all been [focused] on that, and the majority [of people] listened to those bands that awoke the national spirit […] and then probably, I think it came from the region of Germany, a lot of Croats had gone there, probably singers were performing there, and so they brought it back, it was something new for them, almost everyone went mad for them after that period, a big change from what we had had, so for everyone… it's great to do something new, it became very popular.

> Q: Yes, I know there was at least one producer, he was a German Croat, he came to Croatia in, I can't remember, 1990, and he did a lot with dance, he… started Tony Cetinski's career, I think.[10]
>
> A: Aha, I didn't know that at all, but a lot of Croats live in Germany, and then our singers always went there to perform, and one could earn much more there, so they performed there more, it was very popular there at that time, so they understood about that style [of music] that they could do the same thing, more and more…[11]

Antonija's narrative gave the Cro-dance movement political context (popularity through contrast to the patriotic pop of 1991–95) and joined me in a co-construction of meaning that searched for structural and economic explanations. This was an exception: other respondents made much more personal meaning out of Cro-dance, using their narratives about it as part of their presentation of self.[12] Most of the students contextualised dance with reference to the school year they had been in at its height. There was a vague association between the peak of Cro-dance and 1995, in other words with the end of 'wartime' and the beginning of Croatia's post-war period.

Those who discussed dance in more detail did so to distance themselves from it. Maja (aged 21) read dance within the framework of her dislike of pop-folk music or

[10] I had in mind Guido Mineo, whom I had recently been reading about in archived newspapers from the early 1990s.
[11] Interview, 26 March 2007.
[12] Further discussed by, e.g., Gordy, 1999; Jansen, 2005; Baker, 2010: 81–2, 149–52.

'narodnjaci', which Eric Gordy [1999] and Stef Jansen [2005] have established as a constitutive Other in 'alternative' or 'urban' identities in former Yugoslavia:

> I remember dance, that dance which in some form has survived until today, groups like Karma and Colonia, which are getting closer and closer to narodnjaci, that was one form of musical crime…[13]

Krešo (aged 21) contrasted the instantaneity and profit-orientedness of dance with rock (a milieu with which he identified) and in particular the bands associated with the Fiju briju festival, which first took place in 1996:

> And there was also a fashion, dance music, instant music I call it, you make it in your computer and there it is for five minutes, I'm not saying that all music made on computer is bad, even I make music on my computer, but it was instant music, made for a special person for a certain amount of money, and it was also I think the same crowd, the followers of the fashion. […] Again, there was this thing called Fiju briju, the festival where they would all gather, all those rock bands, Pips chips videoclips, again it was in Zagreb, and all the bands were, except for Let 3 which was from Rijeka, and they were an alternative to that.[14]

[13] Interview, 22 March 2007.
[14] Interview, 20 March 2007.

Lana (aged 22) presented herself as having belonged to a cosmopolitan taste culture at home, and implied that her most meaningful musical texts came from outside the national cultural framework:

> When you're at primary school music isn't an important factor of identity, it's later that you identify yourself with the help of music. But, I'd say, it was never important to us what we were listening to, I think, we didn't pay much attention to it, but at home, I'd say, it was mainly foreign music that didn't have much to do with what was actually going on in Croatia. So because of that I somehow have the feeling that I didn't, like when I was young I can't exactly say what was happening in that musical sense, which partly came to me in the form of that dance [music] and those band aids, but that's everything, I can't remember anything else that has… stayed in my memory.[15]

Personal enjoyment of Cro-dance was not part of any of these narratives, which explicitly or implicitly associated dance with a 'mainstream' and then sought to position the narrated self outside that. Dance did not operate as a positive resource for presenting a self that was integrated over time (though it might have done for other young people who defined their tastes and social identities differently). Yet, of all the musical trends that characterised entertainment in mid-1990s Croatia, dance was still the main musical genre they distanced their narrated younger selves *from*. It had meaning in their interviews as a constitutive other that made sense for the selves they were narrating now as alternative,

[15] Interview, 19 March 2007.

creative or differentiated from mainstream tastes (as, e.g. a fan of metal music, a non-professional musician, or an alternative dance practitioner).

Conclusion

Cro-dance's most analytically interesting characteristics – its linguistic code-switching, its producers' attempts to situate it within a wider public narrative of Croatian westernness – are dramatically different from the meanings most student interviewees attached to it in narratives that related essentially to school and childhood. The 'official' or 'desired' meanings of Cro-dance nonetheless showed through in the general association between Cro-dance and the end of war or in occasional comments that Cro-dance had been popular because it seemed 'western': this was stronger in interviews with young people in their mid-20s (who had entered their teens in 1995) than with those aged 22 and below (who had been ten or younger in 1995). Language was not a direct focus of the students' responses, although one or two referred to 'strange' or 'funny' lyrics. Analysing this topic thus leads to an awkward conversation between the emic perspectives of interview participants and the etic perspectives of the researcher, which this paper has attempted to reflect. The body of musical and journalistic texts tends towards one interpretation; the results of interpersonal interaction lead towards another. The interdisciplinary design of my research has needed to acknowledge and incorporate two different ontologies, which risk mutual untranslatability.

Could this problem be reconciled by reconceptualising the cultural space of the research? My text-centric sociolinguistic inquiry and my interview-based anthropological

inquiry both have the transnational in common. Indeed, they both involve deliberately generated transnational encounters: by musicians who intentionally sought to transfer sonic, technological and linguistic practices from north-west Europe to Croatia, and by a researcher who was travelling to Croatia to ask questions she had formed while studying south-east Europe from the outside. All five of Arjun Appadurai's famous 'scapes' – the different flows within the 'global cultural economy' that he first theorised in 1990 [Appadurai, 1990: 297–301] – certainly occur in Cro-dance: his 'ethnoscapes' (the mobility of persons between nations and states) in the movement of musicians and researchers, his 'technoscapes' (flows of technology) in the production history of Cro-dance, his 'mediascapes' in the construction of a European pop-dance milieu, his 'ideoscapes' (flows of ideas) in the formation of Croatian nationalist discourse or my own/students' academic standpoints, and his 'finanscapes' (flows of finance and capital) in Croatian pop musicians' economic dependence on diaspora performances and in the funding from a U.K. research council that enabled me as a doctoral student to travel to Croatia. This transnationalism is not a two-dimensional relationship between 'Croatia' and 'Europe' or 'the rest of Europe'. Nor can it be fully described within the standard post-conflict lens of 'Croatia', 'Europe' and Croatia's political adversary 'Serbia'. The significance of rap as the means of delivering English in Cro-dance, for instance, suggests that even the popular music industry of as small and predominantly white a country as Croatia should also be theorised within the framework of Paul Gilroy's 'Black Atlantic', his term for the 'system of global communications constituted by flows' of people, capital, sounds and ideas between Africa, colonial Europe, the Caribbean and North and South America [Gilroy, *op. cit.*: 80]. Perhaps this was not the project about the

Croatian nation-state that I believed it was. In the constructivist terms of Rogers Brubaker, of course, it would not be such a project anyway: while people may (and often do) take the existence of the nation, ethnic group and state for granted, when a person steps into the role of researcher their object of analysis should be the processes that have naturalised those ideas about collectivities, not the collectivity itself [Brubaker, 2002].

Researching Cro-dance does have much to tell us about 1990s Croatia and the discursive world of Croatian nationalism. The producers' very choices to include English demonstrate that Croatian nationalism was a field of competing discourses, just as Brubaker's model of ethnopolitical conflict [Brubaker, 1996] would predict: Cro-dance presented and legitimated itself in line with the hegemonic nationalist discourse of 1990s Croatia, yet its indexical English diverged from the anti-cosmopolitan strand within Croatian nationalism which would have rejected English altogether. A textual analysis can show that languages could combine to make meaning in contradictory ways even within what were marketed as simple, commercialised and short-lived texts. Anthropological research a decade later established that Cro-dance had become more longer-lived and meaningful than other mid-1990s musical trends that had adapted to political discourse in the same way: Hrvatska Radio-televizija (Croatian state television) had spent even larger amounts of time and money promoting pop songs based on traditional tamburica playing as a music for the whole of Croatia, yet none of these students from Zagreb chose to define their younger selves against *that*. The remembering of Cro-dance has written it into the recent cultural history of Croatia in a more central position than it may even have had when it existed.

Revisiting my transcripts and fieldnotes after four years, I became uncomfortable about whether my interest in narratives of personal and collective identity as a doctoral student had inhibited me from studying practices and relationships of power in the way that even the arch-constructivist of nationalism studies, Brubaker, suggests. The literature I surveyed in my doctoral thesis included research that surveyed, for instance, sport as a performance of nationhood (e.g. Rinehart, 1998); when I have read more recently about transnational sport, I have been drawn to reading about it as *work* (e.g. Carter, 2011). There is research yet to be done on, for instance, the circuits of migration, capital and entrepreneurship that Antonija identified in her interview; music as *labour*, not solely as text. Popular music is personified by its performers; yet, despite the longer-term cultural meanings of Cro-dance became, it did not in most performers' cases become a basis for performers to support themselves over the same long term. Badrić, Cetinski and Vanna were exceptions in the industry; even Kasandra, however fondly remembered by gossip websites and ex-schoolchildren, has disappeared. A second wave of Croatian dance acts in the 2000s, including the groups Karma and Colonia (whose songs both use snippets of English and sometimes of Italian), have had more success. Perhaps the next step in researching the popular culture of south-east Europe will be to write 'finanscapes' into our analysis as deeply as we have been able to incorporate flows of people, texts and ideas.

Coda

I finished drafting the abstract for this paper at lunchtime one day in September 2010, working in my first academic job after my PhD. I posted about the abstract on Facebook where my connections included many fellow researchers of south-east Europe and speakers of Croatian:

> 12:04 Catherine Baker is trying to write an abstract on Croatian dance music and therefore has an excuse to listen to ET and Colonia at work.

The status update was 'liked' by a Croatian friend, Lejla Vukić,[16] who had gone to school with me in the UK in the 1990s. Though Lejla and I had not been close at school, we had been put back in touch in 2007 or 2008 through Facebook and had occasionally discussed my research on Croatia through the site; she might also have heard, through the school's alumni network, that my book on Croatia had come out three months before. A few minutes later, Lejla posted the following message on her feed and attached a YouTube link to the video of *Tek je 12 sati*:

> 12:09 This is for you Cathy!! (but we're talking midday ili ti podne)

I 'liked' Lejla's post reciprocally. In the next couple of hours, a popular music researcher from Croatia liked my post; a woman with a Hungarian surname whom I did not know liked Lejla's; a Norwegian Eurovision enthusiast who collected popular music by various Croatian acts including Vanna liked mine. My initial status update, it seemed when I recorded the 'conversation' in my desk-based field notes, appeared to perform a

[16] This person and all other informants in this paper are referred to by pseudonyms.

continuity of selfhood (represented as a continuity of consumption practices) between my last two years at school, postgraduate studies and professional life, resisting the norm of changing the self with the transition into work. Lejla's response, which itself used English/Croatian code-switching in a playful fashion, referenced the earliest version of my name I had used at school, my cultural competence in the Croatian language, an assumption that I would know this core musical text (its core-ness happened to be encoded in the text Facebook had grabbed from YouTube: 'Video za hit desetljeća!', ie 'Video for the hit of the decade!'), and the time of day ('midday' or 'podne' rather than the 12 midnight at which the song is set). I briefly wondered whether to continue the game by writing a witty comment in Croatian under the status update. Motivated to finish the abstract, I chose instead to interpret it as a ritual of gift and exchange which had been successfully completed by my reciprocal 'like'. Through this exchange, yet another layer of meaning was being produced by two people who had not even been living in Croatia when *Tek je 12 sati* was released, one of whom did not even know the song until five or six years after it came out; and the meaning was facilitated by two digital tools, YouTube and Facebook, which in 1995 had not even been conceived.

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