PAPERS AND MONOGRAPHS OF THE FINNISH INSTITUTE AT ATHENS VOL. XIX

OTTOMAN INTIMACIES, BALKAN MUSICAL REALITIES

Edited by Risto Pekka Pennanen, Panagiotis C. Poulos and Aspasia Theodosiou

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Vesa Kurkela

Introduction

Bulgarian *chalga* – local popular music, that is also called "ethnopop" and "popfolk" – has been well-known and celebrated for more than fifteen years in Bulgaria. Musically speaking, *chalga* is a complex mixture of various traditions and musical styles. The components of this fusion include Serbian, Macedonian, Greek and Turkish popular music; older Bulgarian popular songs; various styles of Balkan Gypsy music – especially *svatbarska muzika* (wedding music) and *kyuchek* by Bulgarian Romani players – Western pop, rock, techno and rap; as well as the global currents of flamenco and Afro-Latin music among others. One of the best short definitions of *chalga* and its musical roots is by Carol Silverman: "From wedding music *chalga* drew instrumentation, from Romani music it drew the ubiquitous *kyuchek* rhythms plus eastern melodic and visual motifs, and from pop it drew a slick presentation style plus rhyming texts about money, sex, and corruption".[1] Most scholars stress the eastern musical traits; as Donna Buchanan puts it, *chalga* is "Bulgaria's musical Orient".[2]

During the last ten years, the *chalga* scene and related music production have changed considerably, mostly for technical reasons. Like everywhere in the world, digital technology has pervaded all kinds of cultural industries, resulting in major changes in production and consumption practices. Today, older *chalga* production with audio and video cassettes, and analogous sound technology, mainly belongs to the past. It has given way to audiovisual music production based on digital technology. Increasingly, *chalga* music is also available on the Internet. This paper discusses the changes in the Bulgarian *chalga* scene in the late 2000s, at the point when *chalga* began to be a permanent part of the digital mediascape. In other words, this is a story about how Bulgarian indigenous popular music became part of Western "technoculture" and how new digital technology implicates cultural practices involving music.[3] The change will be analyzed through *chalga* videos distributed by a special Internet service, the ChalgaTube.

Since the mid-1990s, c*halga* has been very popular in the Bulgarian pop scene. However, the rest of the world hardly knows *chalga* at all. Somewhat surprisingly, this swinging dance music has neither gained access to the world music scene, nor to any other special markets of popular music outside Bulgaria.

This paper goes back to my many visits to Bulgaria in the 1990s. My principal aim was to conduct research on the changes of local popular music and audiovisual media after the Communist regime. The post-Socialist reality quite often seemed confusing, not only to me but also to my local colleagues and friends, who had to organize their lives in very unstable and changing social and economic circumstances. It was a time of eco-

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[1] Silverman 2007a, 83–84.
[2] Buchanan 2007, 236.
[3] Lysloff and Gay 2003, 2, 6–8.

nomic transition that lasted (relatively) a long time.[4]

Chalga was a real novelty in the Bulgarian music market in the mid-1990s, when the transition economy and the deregulation of cultural institutions were just unfolding. Personally, I found two aspects of *chalga* especially attractive: the craziness and the Oriental mood. Firstly, the most interesting *chalga* songs had humorous and sarcastic lyrics, often far from political correctness, emphasized by the embarrassing and even offensive visual content in many videos. Even more interestingly, many songs were highly topical when commenting on the socio-political situation in the country. In a way, *chalga* was not only groovy dance music but a new kind of political song.

Secondly, *chalga* song writers, singers and musicians skilfully utilized several Eastern musical traits and cultural images in their songs. Actually, the stylistic core of *chalga* featured distinguishable rhythmic patterns, overall sound ideals and melodic formulas associated with "Oriental" or belly-dance music. These and many visual characteristics in *chalga* videos referred directly to an imagined "East" and, simultaneously, to all kinds of dance music styles found throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Even today, *chalga* is a highly interesting example of Orientalism in the modern globalized mediascape. The Oriental elements are often mixed with Romani musical traditions, thus stressing the importance of minority cultures behind Bulgarian national mainstream music.

In its unique manner, *chalga* could combine Bulgarian modernity and the Ottoman legacy, and this very feature made it extremely popular in the late 1990s. Timothy Rice interprets the *chalga* phenomenon as a twofold game between Western – and neutral – *popfolk* and Oriental – and embarrassing – *chalga*. According to him, "the modern in *popfolk* […] gives its fans hope that some day the economic progress they associate with western European and global markets will come their way. As *chalga*, however, the genre seems to fly in the face of those values by performing Bulgaria's Ottoman legacy and by bringing to artistic and performative prominence what many intellectuals condemn as cheap and tasteless."[5] Rice also emphasizes the political and social function of *chalga*: "*Popfolk* is a way of letting off steam for the vast majority of Bulgarians – steam that scalds some intellectuals and politicians".[6]

Cassette Culture

In the 1990s *chalga* was born and blossomed in close relation to and, actually, as a result of the cassette culture. The compact cassette was originally invented in 1963 by the Phillips Company, and in the next decade it became an important part of Western phonogram industries. In the 1980s, the same happened in the non-Western world and, finally, after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, cassette culture spread all over the Eastern European post-Communist countries. Due to its simple and robust design, the compact cassette spread quite quickly to all levels of the local music market, and radically affected the music consumption habits of everyday life.[7] The compact cassette became the symbol of the new local popular music and related – often hybrid – musical genres. Notably soon, cassette

[4] To a great extent, I reported and summarized the results of the project in two research articles (see Kurkela 1997 and *id.* 2007).
[5] Rice 2002, 37.
[6] Rice *ibid.*
[7] Skågeby 2011.

culture replaced the old and highly centralized music production based on microgroove vinyl discs.

According to Peter Manuel, basing his arguments on the study of cassette culture in Northern India in the 1980s, music cassette production with cheap and portable studio technology had several positive impacts on local music cultures: new local musical styles and genres emerged, and grass-roots music production became possible in the wake of the decentralization and deregulation of music media. These changes increased diversity and the freedom of musical expression, as cassettes can be used at the owner's convenience and discretion. Manuel even speaks about a "socio-musical revolution" in the local music scene "where cassettes and tape players constitute a two-way, potentially interactive micro-medium whose low expense makes it conducive to localized grassroots control and corresponding diversity of content".[8]

Nevertheless, some less positive or at least contradictory aspects were present in the development of the cassette culture. In many countries, old mainstream popular styles disappeared often totally from the local music market.[9] Not only was vinyl technology seen to be outdated, but the music connected to it also often sounded obsolete. In Bulgaria, the *chalga* boom silenced many older folk and popular music styles: *narodna muzika* (arranged folk music) performed by professionally trained, academic musicians; *estrada muzika*, Russian influenced popular songs – "Bulgarian schlager"; and finally even *svatbarska muzika*, wedding music, which was performed mostly by Romani musicians, and (a few years before) had been a symbol of the anti-government and anti-Communist resistance. All of these once celebrated genres lost their popularity in the 1990s, during the first decade of the post-Communist regime.[10]

The other problem was the unauthorized copying of music cassettes. With the special dual deck cassette recorders, commercial recordings could be duplicated quite effectively. This copying usually happened without any licence fees and increasing piracy caused losses not only for international recording companies but also for local labels. In the beginning, piracy was related to music cassettes, but after the writable compact discs (CD-R; CD-RW) became available, quite a large-scale music industry based exclusively on pirated CDs was born in Bulgaria. Thus, in the late 1990s, when Eastern European piracy was a hot topic in the international press and followed by the anti-piracy campaigns targeting local governments, the focus was on unauthorized CD production.[11] By the turn of millennium, the music cassette was still the most frequently used recording format in Bulgaria and elsewhere in post-Communist Eastern Europe.[12] Despite the large scale grassroots activity, cassette users could continue to duplicate unlicensed recordings undisturbed. Officially, all kinds of unauthorized copying were illegal in Bulgaria, but on the eve of the digital revolution, nobody was any longer interested in the alleged economic losses caused by home-taping or poor quality cassette copies sold by street vendors.

Nevertheless, discussion on music piracy persisted in Bulgaria and, likely even today, piracy is an integral part of Bulgarian music market, regardless of the European Un-

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[8] Manuel 1993, 2, 193–195; Jones 1992, 6.
[9] Manuel 1993, 2; Wallis and Malm 1984, 289.
[10] Silverman 2007a, 81–85; Rice 2002, 27–32.
[11] Kurkela 1997, 182–183.
[12] No data on Bulgarian cassette sales are available. However, according to the International Federation of Phonograph Industries in Turkey – Bulgaria's eastern neighbouring country – 87% of recorded music was sold in cassette form in 2001 (IFPI 2001; cf. Morton 2004, 173).

ion copyright legislation and its implementation, or international anti-piracy campaigns targeted at Bulgaria.[13] After the mid-2000s, however, the question of illegal phonogram copies, regardless of the format, was of decreasing importance. In recent years, piracy problems in Bulgaria have followed the general trend in the European Union and the rest of the Western world. The focus of unauthorized copying has moved to the Internet. The catchword of the day in unlicensed copying and circulation is BitTorrent; peer-to-peer (p2p) file sharing protocol and various file hosting networks and services based on it or some other file sharing protocols.[14] These wide-ranging Internet practices provide practically endless opportunities to share and load files with audiovisual content and thereby effectively reduce industry control. Self-evidently the abundant use of p2p exchange very often violates authors' rights and copyrights. [15]

The most popular bittorrent service in Bulgaria is Zamunda (zamunda.net), which is frequently used and difficult for the authorities to control or prohibit. As Bulgarian media insider Ralf Petrov puts it: "Zamunda is an intelligent way to load music files without paying license fees. From time to time, torrent users have troubles with the government but the user network is still growing well."[16]

The cultural practices behind the torrent networks and the massive circulation and loading of non-copyright audiovisual material on the Internet may seem a totally new phenomenon. However, many features of the so-called digital revolution are based on older cultural models, and this also applies to Internet piracy. In fact, the compact cassette – and its audiovisual equivalent, the VHS video cassette – had many features that made cassette culture a kind of prototype of the modern social media typical of the digital age. Music consumption, dissemination and production based on analogous cassette technology were relatively interactive and social in essence. By home taping, listeners could build up their own compilations of music – so-called "mixtapes" – and even record their own music for non-commercial distribution. In the lives of ordinary music lovers – the "end-users" of compact cassettes – cassette culture substantially increased the freedom of choice and easy access to various kinds of music – and, importantly for the economically distressed Bulgarians, this could all be realized at very low cost. When comparing the social networks in cassette culture to those on the Internet, one can easily summarize their differences and similarities. For the user, cassette technology was slower and more inefficient than the digital one, but the attitudes behind using both technologies were similar: the medium is used for accessing and finding one's favourite music as cheaply as possible.[17] From the ordinary user's perspective, the question of copyright is not an issue.

Chalga Videos in the Bulgarian Cassette Culture

After becoming acquainted with Bulgarian *chalga*, I chose music videos for my principal research topic. I realized that audiovisual recording reveals more analytical levels of the overall musical content than audio recordings can ever do. This idea seemed extremely important when Orientalism or other ideological aspects of music were scrutinized.

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[13] Kurkela 2007, 145.
[14] BitTorrent 2011.
[15] Arewa 2010, 436–437.
[16] Ralf Petrov, email 7 September 2011.
[17] Cf. Skågeby 2011.

Furthermore, the most faithful audiences of *chalga* liked to have parties in music bars while watching *chalga* videos on TV screens. Accordingly, video distribution was a very important background factor for the popularity of *chalga. Chalga* videos were also seen as suitable material for commercial TV programmes. At the turn of the new millennium, a few local TV channels in Bulgaria specialized in *chalga,* and these TV services were frequently used in music bars.[18] In a sense, *chalga* music bars are a modern substitute for the centuries old *mehana* tradition, consisting of tavern parties with live music. During the long years of transition economy, the music video became even more important for local social life, since Bulgarians had less money to pay for live music at social parties, such as weddings, birthdays and calendar festivals.

During the last ten years, digital audiovisual formats, most of all digital video discs (DVD), have replaced analogue VHS video cassettes. The technical quality is much better now, but the new DVD products are often so expensive that most *chalga* fans cannot afford them. Nevertheless, another aspect in the DVD production was crucial for the development of *chalga*'s dissemination. Due to new production standards, all new *chalga* videos were almost automatically in digital format and could be loaded easily and quickly onto any other digital sound carrier or music medium. As stated, a need for a cheaper audiovisual medium existed, and this medium could be found on the Internet.

YouTube – ChalgaTube

The Internet has created a very effective network for all kinds of information, and not least for commercial recordings and music videos. Since the central format of modern *chalga* is the digitized music video, it can be easily transferred to, and disseminated via, the Internet. Earlier in the 2000s, this distribution was not possible since no effective video-sharing service was available. However, the situation changed radically in the mid-2000s. The YouTube video sharing website owned by Google Inc. provides a proficient method for making all kinds of music globally well-known. After its launch in 2005, this video streaming service has become worldwide and is frequently used: in 2010, YouTube offered more than two billion videos a day in almost all the countries in the world. In January 2010, this Internet service had over 112 million U.S. viewers and 6.6 billion videos available. Only in a few states, usually with totalitarian regimes, has the watching of YouTube been totally or temporarily blocked: North Korea, China, Libya, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Thailand.[19]

The original idea of YouTube was to display and circulate user-generated video content, such as movie clips, music videos and video blogging. Thus, in principle, the service was planned for and targeted at mainly amateur use. However, YouTube is increasingly used for commercial purposes, and in November 2008 the company reached an agreement with MGM, Lions Gate Entertainment and CBS allowing the companies to post full-length films and television episodes on the site. In particular, the recording industry has recognized the value of YouTube and other social networking sites that aggregate audiences and provide venues for advertising to affinity groups.[20] YouTube is also often aimed at music and video promotion by smaller music producers outside the inter-

[18] Kurkela 2007, 143; Buchanan 2007, 245.
[19] YouTube; Schackman 2008, 2–4; Arewa 2010, 431–432.
[20] Burkart and McCourt 2007, 3.

national music business.[21] *Chalga* is an interesting local example of this phenomenon.

YouTube provides an opportunity to build one's own sub-website which is directly linked to the main site. In this manner, a group of Bulgarian *chalga aficionados* has founded a service called the ChalgaTube, sponsored by a local Internet gambling agency, Superior Online Casino. They have their own website at www.chalgatube.com, and the service is available in both Bulgarian and English. According to the ChalgaTube's own estimate in 2011, the monthly traffic was about 63 000 visitors.[22]

ChalgaTube Content

Actually, the supply of the ChalgaTube is not just restricted to Bulgarian *chalga*; along with Bulgarian videos are chapters of music videos from Greece, Serbia and Turkey. However, the main content of the site is Bulgarian music, and these videos are presented under the title FOLK & GIPSY with the subtitles Folk, Retro and Gipsy (see Fig. 1).

Subtitle FOLK

In autumn 2010, the subtitle Folk contained about 1700 video clips from a great variety of Bulgarian *chalga* singers. A year later, in September 2011, the number of songs had risen to 1920. This section is the biggest in the ChalgaTube, and watching these videos gives a good picture of the overall style of modern Bulgarian *chalga*: for the most part the songs are highly erotic, usually even sexist, and full of images of modern Western society and daydreams of a prosperous lifestyle.

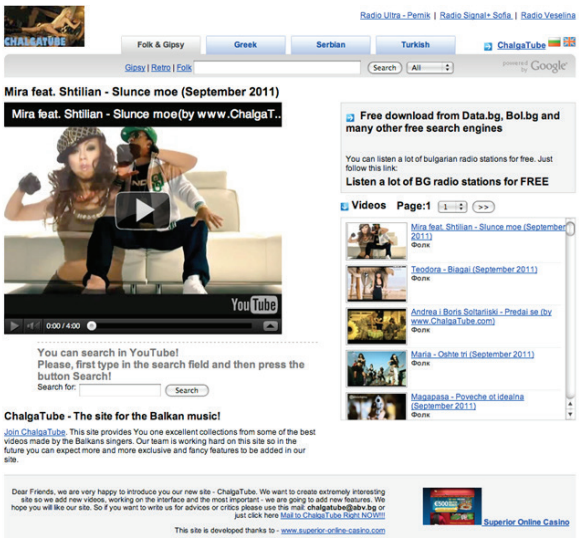

Fig. 1. ChalgaTube site (www.chalgatube.com).

[21] YouTube.
[22] Siteintel 2011.

Oriental images are almost totally absent – practically the only clear marker of Orientalism is the belly-dance rhythmic pattern in 2/4 meter, known in Bulgaria as *kyuchek* (most often mixed with a rhythmic pattern typical of electronic dance, rock or Latin music). In some videos, an Oriental tinge is also created by improvisatory passages using *makam*-derived "Oriental" modalities and nasal and noisy instrumental sounds – usually played by electronic instruments, synthesizers or other computer-aided sound sources.

Most singers are strikingly young, trendy and good looking. The male singers tend to adopt the rough look of the *mafiosi* and businessmen, who are usually the heroes of the video plot; speaking on mobile phones, doing deals and hanging out with beautiful women. The biggest stars, still, are young female singers using short artistic names: Liana, Vania, Emanuala, Dieva, Galena, Mira, Magda and Tedi.[23]

According to Rice, these artists are referred to in the Bulgarian press as "sex-appealing women" and *seksbombi*: "they dress provocatively on album covers and, when they sing, move their hips and bodies sexily in motions related to social dancing in America, Rom *kyucheks* and Middle-Eastern belly-dance styles. They are the perfect objects of men's desire and a symbol of their success." However, due to their roots in the rural folk tradition and university-level training of Bulgarian folk music, at least some pop singers perform the songs in traditional Bulgarian style with a very skilled ornamentation.[24]

The popfolk artists represent the mainstream of the Bulgarian pop scene, and according to other sources, such as commercial recordings and DVD releases, most of the singers do not exclusively perform *chalga* songs but also all kinds of Bulgarian pop songs, including ballads and dance music, without any Oriental tinge. In the ChalgaTube, however, the repertoire seems to concentrate on *chalga* songs. Of course, many older artists are still going strong in the *chalga* business, for instance, Axis, Gloria, Toni Dacheva and Milko Kalaidjiev, but the majority of the *chalga* singers are very young, and many of them are new faces in the local pop music scene. For them, the ChalgaTube is an excellent means of promoting new album releases.

With good reason, however, one can ask why this combination is called "folk". The subtitle arouses some confusing thoughts on the overall terminology surrounding *chalga* music. As already noted, *chalga* is also called "popfolk" which has often made me wonder what the term "folk" has to do with this modern and urban hybrid musical genre. Conventionally, "folk", like its Bulgarian equivalent "narodna", as a musical term refers to the national tradition and in the Bulgarian case, to a monoethnic musical policy typical of communist governments in the 1980s.[25] In socialist Bulgaria, "narodna muzika" (folk music) referred to purely Bulgarian music, and this historical background raises the question as to whether speaking about "folk" in the context of *chalga* means a fundamental change in the conceptualization of Bulgarian popular music. Old nationalist patterns of thought, however, are less suitable for the *chalga* discourse. So far, I have no good answer to this wide and complicated question. One thing is obvious, in any case: "folk" here mostly denotes audiences and, only secondarily, music. Accordingly, *chalga* is music for the ordinary people, the Bulgarian folks.[26]

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[23] ChalgaTube.
[24] Rice 2002, 35.
[25] Buchanan 2006, 39–45.
[26] For a discussion of the fairly nebulous terminology around *chalga* and related musical styles in Bulgaria, see Buchanan 2006, 430–431.

Subtitle RETRO

In autumn 2010, the subtitle Retro contained some 90 old video clips by the most well-known artists. A year later, the number of *chalga* videos in this chapter had almost tripled (240 songs), which may indicate the continuous importance of the older artists and *chalga* evergreens among the Bulgarian audience. Among the singers in this chapter, one can find definite *chalga* legends from the late 1990s: Toshko Todorov, Valentin Valdes, Toni Dacheva, Mustafa Chaushev and Ohran Murad, followed by the younger generation of *chalga* stars like Azis, Svetelina, Extra Nina, DesiSlava, Gloria, Rumjana, Alicia, Ivana and Kamelia. The list reveals that the female singers were especially hot names in *chalga* during the first years of the 2000s – and many of them are still popular in the Bulgarian popular music scene.

The compilation is quite a good review of *chalga*'s history in the last ten years; the oldest clips were originally in VHS format, and thus the technical quality is very poor. In addition, quite often the video is not available at all, but only the text: "video removed by the artist" or "video removed due the terms of use violation". The clips are likely to have been put on the Internet by a *chalga* devotee without permission, and a copyright owner – recording company, artist or songwriter – has informed the Internet service operator. According to its homepage, YouTube controls the use of video content very attentively and acts for any claims dealing with copyright violation.[27]

It can be easily understood that the claims of copyright violation are focused on retro material in particular. The songs in this section are typically evergreens with a continuous demand in the market. The artists and the producers do not need any promotion for the old songs, and illicit streaming on the net simply means financial losses and does not benefit the copyright owners in any manner.

Subtitle GIPSY

In autumn 2010, the subtitle Gipsy contained more than 250 (in 2011, 360) music videos by Bulgarian Gypsy artists and bands: for instance, Amet, Amza, Dingo, Kondio, Aliosha, Kristali, Kozari, Kamenci and Gipsy Aver. Some songs are in Romani or Turkish. Somewhat surprisingly, many videos are simply documentations of band gigs and tavern concerts. Compared to popfolk videos, the overall style of the Gypsy videos is strikingly outdated; except for the videos produced by the big Payner Company, practically no traces of the global Music Television video format, that has been a main model for the mainstream *popchalga* videos since the end of the 1990s, are visible. A very amateurish overall execution and poor technical quality also refer to absolutely low-budget video production.

In these videos, *chalga* is swinging music for dance and celebration, full of attractive Otherness, which is constructed by the versatile application of the Oriental stereotypes and images. It is good to know that at the beginning of the *chalga* boom, the whole *chalga* genre became renowned – and also notorious – above all as music by Roma artists and bands. As Rice puts it, originally, *chalga's* connotations and implications could be captured in the expression "Bulgarianized 'Gypsy' music".[28] The Gypsy connection was apparently the main reason why the growing popularity of *chalga* was a continuous subject of scorn among the Bulgarian Western-minded intelligentsia.

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[27] YouTube Regulations 2011.
[28] Rice 2003, 172.

Gypsy *chalga* constantly seems to be a separate musical style and most likely a genre with its own audience; the close relationship between Romani artists and audiences is often documented in video clips. In the outsider's non-Bulgarian's ears, *chalga* performed by Roma artists often appears to be the most expressive and interesting. In contrast to popfolk videos, the ideals and ideas of video spots come from the East – from Turkey and the Middle East and, even farther away, from India – and the final result is often idiosyncratic and highly exotic. Expressive Roma singers and virtuoso instrumentalists have artistic potential that would make them suitable for the world music scene, as has already happened to some Gypsy artists from other Balkan countries.[29]

Conclusion

In conclusion, *chalga* videos promoted on the ChalgaTube have at least two different contents and meanings of the term: popfolk *chalga* and Gypsy *chalga*. The former refers to the Bulgarian mainstream pop with a few Oriental features, most typically the *kyuchek* rhythmic accompaniment in the 2/4 meter and sometimes instrumental passages played on nasal wind instruments or similarly sounding keyboards.

Compared to Gypsy *chalga* videos, nearly all visual references to the Orient are absent. The overall image is strikingly modern and western. Stereotypical symbols typical of classical Orientalist art, such as belly-dance, veiled harem women, sheikhs and sultans, camel caravans and horseback riding, have been completely replaced by Western ones: luxury cars, sexy young women and men with Western style clothes, romantic love, *mafioso* life and expensive hobbies. I have previously interpreted this transposition of motifs by pointing out how *chalga* Orientalism mirrors and emphasizes its apparent antithesis, the Westernization of culture. The target of humour and possible irony is no longer the oriental past but the Western lifestyle and the dreams connected to it.[30]

The latter type of songs, Gypsy *chalga*, shows that even today, *chalga* also means the music of the Bulgarian ethnic minorities, especially that of the Roma people. These videos are usually full of centuries old Oriental images. All the main musical features – singing style, orchestral timbre and overall sound ideals – sound authentically Oriental, whatever it actually means then in each individual case.

Roma musicians are the real messengers of the Oriental and Ottoman legacy in *chalga*. If *popchalga* performers occasionally use improvisatory sections played by virtuoso musicians, similar instrumental passages resembling *taksim* in the Turkish-Arabic musical tradition are nearly a rule without an exception in Gypsy *chalga* videos. One can easily notice, after watching Gypsy *chalga* on the ChalgaTube, that Orientalism is constructed in a similar manner as in the beginning of the *chalga* boom in the mid-1990s. Contrary to popfolk videos, Gypsy *chalga* does not necessarily transform the Eastern symbolism into a modern one – at least not so often. In these music videos, the Eastern roots of *chalga* are continuously present and by no means hidden.

In the *chalga* musical scene, the cassette culture first gave way to DVD video production and then – as it seems – increasingly to the p2p file exchange networks and streaming services on the Internet. The production of popfolk *chalga* has become far

[29] Silverman 2007b, 344–348.
[30] Kurkela 2007, 172.

more professional than it was ten years ago. Since the turn of the new millennium, Bulgarian video production has been concentrated in the hands of a few local music companies, such as the Payner Company. However, some smaller producers, such as Diapason, Milana, Atlantis and Studio Romano – to name a few – specialized in Gypsy *chalga* and other minority musics.

As already stated, *chalga* is a music genre typical of a small country with its own local languages and musical traditions. Can the ChalgaTube break the regional isolation of c*halga*, and could the Internet give *chalga* access to the international pop music scene? I doubt such a possibility, and one can even ask whether it should be necessary. For the Bulgarians, *chalga* is "our music", an important part of the cultural identity. Several other popular song and dance music styles in the European Union and elsewhere in the world will never gain access to the global music market or become "world music". The Finns have their own *iskelmä*, the Greeks their *laika,* the Turks their *arabesk* and the Portuguese their *fado*. Due to the language barrier, non-native audiences can rarely comprehend the content and meaning of local popular songs.

Afterthoughts

In mid-October 2011, when finishing this article, I suddenly discovered that the chalgatube.com site had totally disappeared from the Internet. Many *chalga* videos were still available on the YouTube main site and even on Facebook, and some other sites for Balkan music were available (videoblast.net; balkanhour.blogspot.com). Slightly earlier, I also noticed that a growing number of *chalga* videos on the site were closed with a simple note "this video was removed by the user" or "this video is no longer available because the YouTube account associated with this video has been closed". A short test with the search engine optimization analyzer (seoanalyzer.net), measuring the visibility of a website in search engines, gave a clear but slightly ambiguous result:

> This can't get worse. Chalgatube.Com ranks lowest in our optimization analysis, with a SEO score of 30% and a world rank of 568.196. This domain has a TLD [top level domain] rank of 312.350 in our .com domains list. […] Almost every time pages that have weak analysis results means that they are parked domains or websites under construction but certainly it's not a website you want to come back to so we estimated the domain value at 397.53 US dollars.[31]

Most likely the site was only occasionally out of use, "under construction", and quite soon the service was likely available for the joy and pleasure of all *chalga* fans. The main experience of this case is, however, as follows: on the Internet, many issues are in a constant state of flux and one can never be sure whether your favourite site or video will be removed tomorrow or next week. The more the content of a site is contradictory in terms of international copyright issues, the more easily a site or part of its content can be closed at any time. One thing is evident: new streaming services or torrent networks will be founded as fast as the old sites disappear. Therefore, in the future, Bulgarian *chalga* will be constantly available for Internet users one way or another. To put all this on a more

[31] Seoanalyser.

general level, the ChalgaTube and similar Internet services certainly provide curious and open-minded music lovers all over the world with a new method for getting acquainted with new local music which were earlier unknown and often totally strange.

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