

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF ETHNO-CULTURAL DIVERSITY: YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF *CHALGA* CULTURE IN BULGARIA

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Introduction

Multiculturalism in the West, it has been argued, is characterised by the emergence of 'new ethnicities' (Hall 1996), capable of crossing ethnic boundaries and overcoming racial barriers (Back 1996; Nayak 2003). Hip hop and other types of black music have been seen to provide linguistic and cultural resources which construct for young people a forum for cross-racial communication and a 'landscape of interaction and negotiation' (Back 1996: 51). Indeed, Hall et al. suggest that ethnically based cultural products in general hold the potential to break down inter-ethnic antipathy (Hall et al. 2003: 62). Such arguments about the potential of Western multiculturalism, developed in the context of post-colonial migration, have not been tested, however, in countries outside the global core and in national and regional contexts where inter-ethnic exchange occurs primarily among indigenous or 'indigenised' ethnic groups or peoples. This article seeks to do just that by considering 'regional' forms of inter-ethnic exchange and their potential for fostering multiculturalism. As the article will suggest, based on a study of *chalga* music as a form of popular culture in Bulgaria, multiculturalism in contexts outside the global core could perhaps be more adequately interpreted through focusing on cultural pluralism or preservation and enhancement of values and habits of co-existing groups, rather than on the emergence of radically new forms of ethnicity.

Young people in Bulgaria use both global and regional resources in the production of local youth cultural forms. While global resources are appropriated primarily through Western youth cultural styles and musical genres, such as hip hop, rock, popular music, etc., regional resources are available to young people in Bulgaria via folk or 'traditional' ethnic music from other neighbouring Balkan countries and Turkey. *Chalga* music, which appeared in Bulgaria in the 1990s, is a widespread cultural phenomenon that draws on such regional ethno-cultural musical traditions. *Chalga*, sometimes also referred to as 'pop folk', consists of the production and consumption of a particular type of ethnically mixed music. It is a Bulgarian

modernised reworking of regional folklore, heavily influenced by a variety of regional musical styles. Serbian, Greek and Turkish national musical motifs are used as a source of creative experimentation within Bulgarian popular music, which also draws on sounds usually associated with the cultures of the Roma or ethnic Turkish minorities in Bulgaria.¹

The multi-cultural diversity represented in *chalga* suggests that production and participation in youth cultural practice in contemporary Bulgaria is moving away from a mono-white or a mono-ethnic rationale for cultural engagement, representative of the Socialist past of Bulgaria (Silverman 1989: 147). In the Socialist period, although cultural life in Bulgaria was politically inclusive of ethnic minorities, in as much as they were allowed to participate in the production of 'formal' cultural activities, such as concerts and communal vocal groups, such activities could not be identified as anything but 'Bulgarian' (Kaneff 2004: 167). Thus, the Bulgarian dominant ethnic culture was the only ethnic culture available for mainstream consumption and production.

It is suggested in this article that *chalga* music departs from such homogenous constructions of national culture in that it has become established in people's minds as 'Turkish', 'Roma' or 'Oriental' music. The fact that young people from different ethnic backgrounds use ethnic minority musical elements for the production of *chalga* also means that it has taken on something of a similar role to global forms of hip-hop as a popular medium for inter-ethnic cultural exchange. Drawing directly on young people's experiences and narratives of *chalga* music in Bulgaria, this article explores *chalga*'s roots in ethnic musical forms from Bulgaria and other cultures from the Balkan region. It also considers the significance, or otherwise, of young people's ethnic background and attitudes to their creation and experience of *chalga* as well as the actual and potential role of *chalga* in facilitating inter-ethnic cultural exchange between young people of different ethnic backgrounds in Bulgaria. The article suggests that *chalga* as a specific type of music could both reveal and promote inter-ethnic

tolerance in the attitudes of young people from Bulgarian ethnic background.

The article is based on ethnographic research with young people in Bulgaria, conducted in 2000-01 in the towns of Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo, situated about fifty kilometres from each other. The choice for these urban localities was partly determined by the fact that the study was concerned with provincial youth cultural scenes and was interested in the cross-site interaction between some youth cultural scenes in a relatively close regional proximity.ⁱⁱ Both towns are also 'hotspots' outside Sofia - the capital city - for a great number of youth cultural scenes, including graffiti art, skateboarding, *chalga*, heavy metal music, and skateboarding, which the study was keen to examine and 'map' in relation to each other in each town. The ethnographic process consisted of semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, participant observation and focus group discussions. Material from a total of thirty-two people was gathered. The choice of respondents reflected the youth cultural scenes represented in the towns. Thus, the views included in this article are either from members of the *chalga* scene or members of the other youth cultural scenes in evidence. Although the research was based in the two towns, the pool of participants also included young people who were resident in the wider regions of Veliko Tarnovo and Targovishte. While the research for the study was conducted in 2000-01 (and is therefore only a 'snapshot' of what was observed at the time), its findings remain pertinent to current debates. This is because, firstly, the findings speak to theoretical debates, which seek to understand the impact of, and engagement with, ongoing processes such as globalisation and Europeanisation among young people in the region. Secondly, the popularity of *chalga* in Bulgaria has not diminished since the research was conducted, while, as evidenced by post-fieldwork secondary literature cited here, the discussion of multiculturalism in the region has become even more topical.

***Chalga* as a multi-ethnic 'national' music**

One of the popular ways of describing *chalga* in Bulgaria is to say that it combines re-worked Bulgarian folk music with Turkish and Roma musical traditions. It is also known for attracting to clubs or private parties young people from all ethnic backgrounds in Bulgaria, but primarily ethnic Bulgarians, ethnic Turks and Roma

people.ⁱⁱⁱ *Chalga*, therefore, appears to be a musical genre in Bulgaria which, because (or in spite) of its associations with ethnic minority cultures, narrows the cultural gap between ethnic majority and minority participants in the *chalga* youth cultural scenes. Unlike any other popular music genre in Bulgaria, ethnic minority cultures are openly incorporated into the *chalga* scene. Participants in *chalga* events were observed during fieldwork enjoying and encouraging inter-ethnic cultural experiences by engaging in dances usually associated with the culture of the 'other'. In particular, ethnic Bulgarian fans play a major part in sustaining the Roma and Turkish elements in *chalga*.^{iv} For example, dancing to 'typically' Turkish or Roma rhythms and belly dances is common and is practised widely by ethnic Bulgarian participants in the *chalga* scenes in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo (fieldnotes 10.01.2001, 12.01.2001, 23.03.2001, 25.03.2001). An ethnic Bulgarian fan of *chalga* explained his attitude towards the amalgamation of Turkish, Roma and Bulgarian folk musical elements in *chalga* thus:

It doesn't bother me that *chalga* contains a lot of Turkish and Gypsy melodies. I like Turkish rhythms and I like the romantic character of Gypsy music. But *chalga* is not only Turkish and Gypsy music; it also contains re-worked Bulgarian folk music. It is not traditional folk music, but a lighter pop version of it; it's more dynamic. The combination is strange, but the music is great for dancing. [Jana, female, age 24, Targovishte]^v

The above quotation suggests that the combination of Bulgarian, Turkish, and Roma cultures in *chalga* music is valued by the ethnic Bulgarian participants in the scenes, especially because of the dancing potential *chalga* offers. Although the use of re-worked Bulgarian folk music is often resented by anti-*chalga* oriented young people (see below), the participants in *chalga* scenes seem to value the fact that traditional Bulgarian folk music has been made more accessible and dynamic by bringing it closer to the trendier styles of pop music. A similar trend towards cross-fertilisation between ethnic minority music and pop music has been reported also in Macedonia and Bosnia and

Herzegovina in the late Socialist period (Manuel 1988). In Macedonia, such 'modern' Roma bands employed electric guitar, bass, and other amplified melody instruments, which broadened their appeal to audiences beyond strictly Roma populations. The music of such bands also drew on Turkish rhythms and vocal styles. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the demand for popular folk music with a distinct Roma flavour grew, Roma and other minority musicians started producing 'upbeat' musical improvisations which reflected key elements of popular youth musical trends (Manuel 1988: 139).

Turkish and Roma cultural motifs have also become more accessible to ethnic Bulgarian audiences because of their musical fusion with Bulgarian folk music. An ethnic Bulgarian *chalga* fan explains:

I don't normally listen to Turkish or Gypsy music because I am Bulgarian, but *chalga* uses such music alongside Bulgarian music and the final product is party music – I like it. [Tonny, female, age 20, Targovishte]

Chalga music therefore appears to provide its ethnic Bulgarian fans with an opportunity to appreciate Turkish and Roma musical cultures within their local environments, something that is justified by reference to the fact that it creates a good party sound. As the above quotation suggests, however, the inclusion of Turkish and Roma musical elements into the dance scene does not automatically translate into including Turkish and Roma cultures into notions of 'Bulgarian-ness'. On the contrary, it was 'unnatural' for my respondent - because of her understanding of what it means for her to be 'Bulgarian' - to associate herself with any notion of 'pure' Turkish or Roma music, which effectively excludes these types of music from the realm of 'Bulgarian' culture. Yet *chalga* music, and dance clubs in particular, provide venues where young people from the Turkish and the Roma minorities in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo are welcome and are able to perform publicly ethnic dances - such as *kjuček* - together with their ethnic Bulgarian peers.^{vi}

It is established elsewhere (Levy 2004) that the Turkish and Roma minorities in Bulgaria fully enjoy *chalga* music. My participant observation and informal conversations with

ethnic Bulgarians from the *chalga* club scenes in Veliko Tarnovo and Targovishte confirm this and suggest that it is the Turkish minority in particular that is actively involved in attending public *chalga* events. The Turkish minority is the biggest ethnic minority group in both Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo and maintained a constant presence at the nightclubs where *chalga* was played (fieldnotes 12.06.2001, 22.06.2001). Although Roma young people were also visible in the *chalga* clubs in Veliko Tarnovo and Targovishte, my respondents told me that Roma people in general listened and danced to *chalga* at home where they organise big *chalga* parties that sometimes extend out into the streets in front of their houses. This was particularly visible in the residential areas with dense Roma populations in both Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo - the so-called Roma quarters (fieldnotes 24.07.2001, 02.07.2001). The practice of Roma people dancing to *chalga* music particularly in their homes seems to reflect the association of *chalga* with weddings and other festive occasions, traditionally taking place in the private sphere in Bulgaria (Buchanan 1996, see below).

The enjoyment of inter-ethnic cultural exchange facilitated by the *chalga* youth cultural scenes is not necessarily shared by young people who are not fans of *chalga*. In fact, young people who reject *chalga* often do so because of its use of Turkish and Roma musical elements, which, in the minds of these young people, trigger popular associations based on stereotypical knowledge of, and attitudes towards, Turkish and Roma cultural traditions:

What is *chalga*?...It is Gypsy stuff (*tsiganija*). It originated from Turkish music – some Turkish girls doing belly dancing. And the people who make *chalga* are 'peasants'. [Plamen, male, age 18, Targovishte]

Thus, young people from other cultural scenes, such as the above respondent who is a skater, are not attracted by the ethnic cultural mix *chalga* represents. For them, Roma and Turkish cultures are often undifferentiated, creating a single image of *chalga* as 'Gypsy stuff' or 'Oriental stuff'. These associations mean that *chalga* is not accorded respect within the wider youth scenes in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo.

As a result, *chalga* is also associated with 'village culture', usually synonymous with 'backward culture'. In fact, as noted by Valchanova, in nineteenth-century Bulgaria *chalga* music took on the role of an intermediary form between rural and urban culture (Valchanova 1989). This is also suggested by Buchanan (1996) who points out that the contemporary phenomenon of *chalga* might be linked to the existence in the nineteenth century of small ethnically mixed urban bands, called *chalgadzii*, who were hired by villagers to perform music of different ethnic and musical styles at local weddings, christenings and fairs (202).

This association of *chalga* with village life and other typical festive activities in Bulgaria is understood negatively by some young people as 'anchoring' Bulgarian culture in a rural, primitive past. In contrast, other, more urban, youth cultural practices, such as graffiti or hip-hop and rap, are said to epitomise a quest for a 'modern', more forward-looking future. Yet, interestingly, *chalga* has sometimes also been vested with the opposite potential. It has been suggested that *chalga* might be a way of breaking away from the 'backwardness' of the past since *chalga* culture is associated with consumerism, technological advancement and expression of (male) success (Varbanov 2002: 135), and thus it can be seen as a rebellious departure by young people from their Socialist past (Ghodsee 2003: 238). Whilst to some extent these contrasting opinions are rooted in young people's widely divergent attitudes to *chalga*, one could also argue that such views are not mutually exclusive since 're-traditionalisation' is an integral part of modernity in its late-modern and 'globalised' variant (Giddens 1994). Thus, it might be extrapolated, the revival of a pre-Socialist past through culture can act as a strategy for creating a post-Socialist future.^{vii}

The potential of *chalga* to act as a temporal (between past and future) and spatial (between village and town) bridge, however, is not celebrated universally. Thus, although *chalga* could be seen to 'banish racial things', in the words of Back (1996: 112), within its own cultural parameters, resistance to *chalga* by non-*chalga* fans suggests that stereotypical attitudes towards the Turkish and Roma minorities in Bulgaria limit a wider appreciation of *chalga*. As suggested by Levy (2002: 199-212), this opposition to *chalga*, primarily among the Bulgarian majority, may in fact reflect deep-

lying xenophobic or racist attitudes towards the Roma and Turkish minorities in Bulgaria.^{viii} These stereotypical notions of Turkish and Roma cultures are also embedded in particular practices or socio-cultural characteristics associated with Turkish and Roma ways of life in Bulgaria. The links between *chalga* and Turkishness, for example, are signified by associations with Oriental - and therefore 'un-Bulgarian' - culture, usually borrowing its repertoire from Turkish TV programmes (fieldnote 03.08.2001).^{ix} Likewise, the popular links between *chalga* and Roma culture are manifested in associations of Roma communities with 'rural culture', 'uncivilised' behaviour, and involvement in illegal businesses (fieldnote 26.08.2001).

Overcoming such societal or 'national' attitudes, however, appears to be easier at local level in Veliko Tarnovo and, in particular, in Targovishte (where the ethnic Turkish and the Roma populations are larger) than in some other parts of the country where there are very few ethnic minorities.^x A young ethnic Bulgarian from Targovishte explains this:

It is impossible not to listen to Turkish music in Targovishte. Wherever you go, there is *chalga* or other types of Turkish music. There are a lot of Turks in Targovishte and hearing such music is quite natural. You hear it in the clubs and in the pubs everyday and you get used to it. Besides, the Turks go to the clubs, too, so it is just normal to mix Turkish music and *chalga* in Targovishte. [Petya, female, age 25, Targovishte]

Thus, the infiltration of *chalga* into mainstream popular culture in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo has enabled the scenes to become 'normalised'. This process of 'normalisation', it could be suggested, has provided a rationale for ethnic Bulgarian young people to accept the presence of other ethnicities in *chalga* venues, such as nightclubs and pubs, but also to legitimise the fact that *chalga* culture is bound to contain elements of Turkish music. This means that participants in the local *chalga* scenes are actors in re-shaping the established attitudes or relationships between the majority and minority cultures characterising the social landscape in Bulgaria. The *chalga* scene, it may

be suggested, can be seen as an 'organic bridge' between the traditional perceptions of Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma cultures and the emerging new ones among certain groups of young people. *Chalga* music, in particular, is also a propeller of such new perceptions as it deliberately mixes musical elements from these cultures in order to create popular links between them, thus establishing itself as a dominant genre on the market. As the *chalga* scene expands and interacts with other youth cultural scenes, it is conceivable that these new positive perceptions of ethnic diversity might transfer into other youth cultural scenes in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo, or further afield. At the time of the research, however, the youth cultural scenes unrelated to *chalga* music remained occupied predominantly by ethnic Bulgarian young people.

'Pop Folk' as a Balkan-Bulgarian Fusion

The other defining characteristic of *chalga* music is its association with regional Balkan cultural traditions, and when this aspect of the scene is emphasised the genre is often referred to not as *chalga* but as 'pop folk'.^{xi} Pop folk is considered to be the most popular music genre among young people in Bulgaria^{xii} and its association with Balkan folk music is perhaps one of the reasons for its widespread success. Like its association with ethnic minority cultures, however, this connection with Balkan folk has proven also to be a source of contention; young people in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo either strongly liked or disliked this association.

Pop folk fans who value the links of *chalga* with other Balkan musical styles tend to see *chalga* as a product of inter-Balkan cultural exchange. They see *chalga* as a natural development of the influence of other Balkan countries on Bulgarian culture:

Chalga is quite simply a compilation of Serbian and Greek musical traditions on top of re-worked Bulgarian folk music. It is 'modern' folklore. A lot of people in Bulgaria, who used to listen to Serbian and Greek music, now listen to *chalga* or pop folk. I don't understand why some people are against it – as if there is something wrong with listening to this kind of music. If you don't listen to

chalga, you have to listen to other [pop or Western] music of some sort. Everybody listens to other music but pop folk is something many people find more familiar. [Julia, female, age 22, Veliko Tarnovo]

As argued by Statelova (2000), *chalga* could be seen as 'Balkan-Bulgarian fusion', which is a genre within 'world music'. The Balkan association of *chalga* has also been noted by Silverman, who notes that the term *chalga* used in Bulgaria might be closely related to the Macedonian term *čalgija*, which refers to an urban-based genre heavily influenced by Turkish music (Silverman 1996: 250). The above quotation suggests that *chalga* music has evolved from the interaction of Bulgarian folk music with other types of Balkan music. Indeed, music from the neighbouring Balkan countries, especially from Serbia and Macedonia, has traditionally appealed to Bulgarian audiences due to the linguistic, cultural, religious and geographical proximities between these nations.^{xiii} The cultural links between Bulgaria and the other Balkan countries, however, were overshadowed during Communism by Russophone Soviet cultural propaganda that reflected the political bond between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union. Serbian music was less frequent on national radio broadcasts, while Macedonian music was limited to popular folk songs.^{xiv}

The popularity of *chalga* music since the mid-1990s among young people in Bulgaria, therefore, suggests that regional Balkan cultures are a key factor in determining musical and cultural trends in Bulgaria. This process of 're-Balkanisation' or 're-regionalisation' of Bulgarian culture must be seen in the context of the wider process of 're-traditionalisation' of local cultures inherent in globalisation. Occurring in parallel with processes of modernisation, it serves to consolidate Balkan inter-ethnic links and foster distinct alternative youth cultural identities and lifestyles. Thus, the choice young people make to appropriate *chalga* as a regional resource of cultural activity is rooted, albeit semi-consciously, in a desire to sustain a sense of 'traditional' Balkan culture in the face of powerful infiltration of global 'popular' music in Bulgaria. The acceptance or welcoming of the Balkan associations of *chalga*, it could be suggested, is mediated or encouraged by the existence of general pro-Balkan

sentiments in Bulgaria. These sentiments feed directly or indirectly into young people's sense of regional belonging, ethnicity, and nationality, or into their identifications with 'imagined' or 'emotional' communities, as some parts of the Balkans and their cultures might be seen to represent (Roundmetof 2005). These sentiments, it could be suggested, evoke a kind of 'collective' - Balkan - mentality and produce spontaneous cultural identifications with shared or common historical and geo-political developments. As noted by Todorova, although one cannot talk of a common Balkan identity – or a single Balkan memory – there are, at times, instances of collective Balkan-wide mentality (Todorova 2004: 9). *Chalga*, therefore, could be seen to foster the creation of alternative, regionally aware, youth cultural experiences or identities. Through such alternative youth cultural identifications or lifestyles, young people are able to stand out or distance themselves from other youth cultural and musical scenes, which draw on global or 'Western' trends and fashions^{xv}:

Chalga culture is so popular because there is something Balkan in it, something 'ours'. *Chalga* is part of the musical wealth of the Balkans, of who we are. We can't escape our history. Of course I like other music, too, such as disco, blues, etc., but I don't fully immerse myself in these [musical] styles. What I can't stand at all is hard rock and metal music – these are too alien to me, coming from another planet. [Kalina, female, age 24, Veliko Tarnovo]

Musical identifications for the above respondent, therefore, are also historical and regional. Indeed, as noted by Peters (2005: 10), a number of scholars have pointed out that there are musical features, usually represented by Turkish and Roma musical characteristics, which are found in the urban musical traditions of all Balkan peoples, and which, therefore, can be considered pan-Balkan.^{xvi} In addition, the above respondent's notion of certain musical styles 'coming from another planet' reinforces boundaries between *chalga* and some other youth cultural scenes in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo, such as the 'hard-core' scene, for example. These musical styles, it appears, are not

considered sufficiently Bulgarian or Balkan by *chalga* fans. As well as fostering identifications with the Balkan region and its collective, albeit selective, 'self'^{xvii}, *chalga* acts as a counter-force to other social or cultural processes which attempt to 'leave behind' any associations with a Balkan past and adopt pro-Western orientations. Such processes reflect divergent responses to propaganda campaigns, led by the Bulgarian Government, calling for the forging of a 'new' European or Western identity as part of the 'European integration' agenda (see below).^{xviii} Although in political terms, the 'European integration' agenda is not an anti-Balkan agenda in Bulgaria, the popular association of Bulgarian culture with Balkan values is sometimes perceived as a barrier to becoming truly 'European'.

Indeed, for participants in most other youth cultural scenes in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo, it is precisely the association of *chalga* with Balkan culture that makes its acceptance problematic. *Chalga* is seen as 'stealing' musical elements from other Balkan cultures and not being 'authentic' or sufficiently Bulgarian. Its lack of 'authenticity' is often associated with lack of, or reduced, aesthetic value:

Chalga is a total musical mixture – Serbian, Turkish, and a little Bulgarian. Maybe this is what I don't like about *chalga* – the fact that Bulgarian folk music has completely lost its original sounds. I also don't like the lyrics of *chalga* music – in 99 per cent of cases they are dirty and vulgar. I simply can't like music like that. If I want to listen to ethnic music, I listen to authentic Bulgarian folk music. It is a pity that we [the Bulgarians] don't appreciate our own music enough. [Anton, male, age 24, Veliko Tarnovo]

The emphasis on aesthetics in *chalga* music plays a key role in the way the music is accepted culturally. It appears that some of the young people, who reject *chalga*'s association with Balkan cultural messages, do so on the grounds of *chalga*'s aesthetically and 'morally' unacceptable lyrics. As noted by Frith, it is important to bear in mind that identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics (Frith 1996: 109). It could be suggested,

therefore, that these young people construct their youth cultural identities and their perceptions of national culture, ethnicity, and authenticity with reference to their own perceptions of the aesthetic and moral dimensions of the culture and society around them. They express, produce and re-produce their ethno-cultural associations through moral and aesthetic judgements of *chalga* music, formed in historical and contemporary contexts of social and cultural capital. Indeed, one of the popular arguments about *chalga* music is that its low aesthetic qualities reflect the decline of moral values in Bulgaria and the 'backwardness' of contemporary Bulgaria as a society (Stoyanov 1999). The way in which *chalga*'s aesthetic value has been fused in the popular mind with Balkan cultural heritage and Bulgarian societal developments, therefore, might be considered to exemplify how, in the words of Gilroy (1997: 343), 'the distinctions between art and life, artefact and expression' are dissolved.

The resentment towards the ethnic mix of music, described above by my respondent, suggests, moreover, that *chalga* might be seen as a threat to Bulgarian national identity. Perceptions of *chalga* as 'dirty' or 'impure' could also be seen as symptomatic of certain xenophobic attitudes towards the ethnic national or Balkan 'other'. Xenophobia and racism are tightly woven into the structures of multicultural societies and can be manifested sometimes through opposition to cultural diversity. In post-Communist Eastern Europe, while the collapse of former monocultural regimes revealed the multicultural nature of these societies, the emerging models of multiculturalism were underpinned by various competing forces and processes within the new state systems (Apostolov 2006: 2). Thus, although it would be too simplistic to suggest that opposition to *chalga*'s ethnic mix by young people is a typical example of xenophobia, concealed behind aesthetic opposition to certain types of music, the possibility that such attitudes are deeply rooted in the dominant society's nostalgia for a 'pure', or 'monolithic' Bulgarian culture should not be ignored.

In distancing themselves from *chalga* music, opponents of *chalga* are also conforming to the 'European integration' agenda noted above and, indeed, nostalgia for Bulgarian 'authenticity' is accompanied by a search for European identity. Thus, for some *chalga*

opponents, being Balkan was the opposite of being European:

When I meet foreigners in Bulgaria, I always let them listen to authentic Bulgarian folk music. After all, this is what we are famous for in the world. But the foreigners love *chalga*... and they soon learn that it is not Bulgarian but a mixture of Balkan kinds of music. I try to tell them that they should not associate Bulgaria with this Oriental stuff. Real Bulgarian music is different... We will never become truly European if foreigners associate us with music like *chalga*. [Milena, female, age 24, Veliko Tarnovo]

Maintaining an association between 'real' Bulgarian music - as perceived by the above respondent - and Balkan musical genres, therefore, is believed to hinder the process of the 'Europeanisation' of Bulgarian culture. Remaining true to authentic Bulgarian music is, on the other hand, seen as a way of fostering a distinct, un-Balkan, Bulgarian cultural identity, worthy of association with the cultures of 'modern' Europe. As noted by Rice (2003: 99-100), many educated Bulgarians, such as university students, intellectuals, business leaders, and politicians, think of *chalga* or pop folk as an affront because its use of Balkan forms of music 'harkens back to a benighted past that they would prefer to put behind them and forget'. Such allegiance to authentic folk music could also be interpreted as a symbolic mechanism for protecting Bulgarian national identity from being assimilated into an undifferentiated 'Balkan culture', formed as part of the process of globalisation. This attitude might have its roots in the Ottoman period when the Bulgarian folk song was seen to serve an important role in preserving the Bulgarian language and cultural traditions from extinction (Statelova 2004: 206). More recently, this attitude might have been perpetuated by fears of stigmatisation or 'Balkanisation' of the whole region by the West, following the inter-ethnic conflict in some former Yugoslav countries in the 1990s.

Conclusion

Young people's attitudes in Bulgaria to *chalga* music derive from its simultaneous association with ethnic, regional and national cultures. On the one hand, *chalga* is associated with Turkish and Roma ethnic minority cultures in Bulgaria. This association invokes deeply divided attitudes among young people who either support, or resent, *chalga* music because of its connection to ethnic minority cultures. On the other hand, *chalga* music is associated with a mixture of Balkan types of music, primarily Greek and Serbian. Young people's attitudes to *chalga*'s association with Balkan cultures are also divided, however; some welcome these associations as a way of holding on to 'traditional' or 'Balkan' culture, despite pressures from other global musical forms, while others reject them. These associations and attitudes are deeply infused by issues of ethnicity, nationality, and cultural identification. The attitudes of those who reject *chalga* might be seen as racist, xenophobic or nationalist since they see *chalga* as 'dirtying' the national. However, those who enjoy the ethnic and regional mix of *chalga* are more inclusive in their attitudes towards the cultures of the 'other', foster practices of inter-ethnic cultural exchange and develop positive - ethnically or 'regionally' aware - youth cultural identifications or lifestyles.

A preference for *chalga* does not only reflect pre-existing dispositions, however, but *chalga* itself plays a key role in the way participants in the youth cultural scene construct their perceptions of the 'other'. As argued by Habenicht (1985, cited in Bohlman 1996: 58), inter-ethnic musical exchange is not a discrete process of communication between two groups but takes place against a historical and international backdrop. In the case of *chalga* music this context is evident in the associations it evokes with the Balkan region, its ethnic groups and their history. These symbolic associations between historical cultural contexts and contemporary musical tastes mean that *chalga* may provide a channel for the articulation of deep-rooted xenophobic and racist attitudes towards 'the other' among some sections of Bulgarian society. At the same time, however, *chalga* allows its fans to openly embrace ethnic difference and foster inter-cultural exchange. Moreover, the kind of transcultural dialogue facilitated by *chalga* is, in the words of Malinowski (1991: xxxiii), 'a process from which a new – compound and complex – reality emerges, a reality which is not a mechanical

aggregate of characteristics, nor even a mosaic, but rather a new, original, and independent phenomenon'.

Participants in the *chalga* scene, therefore, contribute to the production of new multicultural experiences or realities, which are informed by their own subjective constructions of ethnicity and inter-ethnic culture. It is the constant give-and-take of different cultural messages, which facilitates the evolution of such subjective constructions. As noted by Glasser (1995: 6), within any society, ongoing intra- and inter-ethnic negotiation and re-shaping of cultural forms in dialogue with material conditions are the 'stuff' of which national and ethnic identities are made and re-made.^{xix} The popularity and visibility of *chalga* in the youth cultural space in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo means that the scene plays a part in such historical configurations and re-configurations of ethnic perceptions and identities. It does so, moreover, not only within its own youth cultural boundaries, but also, albeit indirectly, beyond them. Thus, even though 'outsiders' to the scene may not understand or may resent the 'Orientalness' of *chalga*, by articulating this perception, they too participate in the re-negotiation of the youth cultural and ethnic order in the youth cultural space. *Chalga*, therefore, is a powerful vehicle for cultural change not only because it thrives on the growing mix of national and regional cultures, but also because it engages both its fans and its opponents in a cultural dialogue about ethnicity, national identity and the possibilities for imagining a future in which multiculturalism will be the dominant discourse in Bulgarian society.

Indeed, just as African-American hip hop has been credited with the potential to hold 'transformational power as a multicultural revolution' in Europe (Baadqir 2003: 111), so *chalga* might possess a similar potential to influence inter-ethnic cultural relations in Bulgaria. Unlike the model of Western multiculturalism, however, which tends to portray black music only as a manifestation of successful inter-racial co-existence - almost in isolation from the histories of the ethnic peoples involved - the use of *chalga* music in Bulgaria has demonstrated that the contemporary manifestation of indigenous multiculturalism in a post-Communist context is strongly underpinned by historically embedded processes, such as Balkanisation, Europeanisation, and globalisation; it is triggered or re-created through

a constant interplay between time and space. Such kind of multiculturalism, this article has suggested, is also situated in an unambiguous 'clash of mentalities' between xenophobic attitudes and ethnic tolerance, inherent in the histories of the subjects both inside and outside the *chalga* scene.

Notes

¹The associations of *chalga* with ethnic minority musical styles from Bulgaria, on the one hand, and with regional Balkan cultures, on the other, are two sides of a complex musical genre. Although this article talks about these sides as two distinct categories, the distinctions between them are not neatly identifiable in terms of origins of melodies and lyrical content due to the hybrid nature of Balkan cultures as a whole. Thus, the distinctions that this article makes between local ethnic minority cultural influences and 'regional' Balkan influences should not be seen as rigid and definitive. Rather, they are made on the basis of popular perceptions of *chalga* music among my particular respondents who tended to categorise *chalga* according to how they felt about the music and what they thought its origins were.

² The term youth cultural scene – respectively *chalga* scene – in this article is used to denote both the cultural spaces inhabited by youth cultural groupings (i.e. sites of gathering and performing cultural activities) and the collective cultural characteristics attributable to young people who share similar cultural tastes and interests.

³ The fact that this article focuses on inter-ethnic cultural exchange and young people's attitudes towards *chalga* culture as an ethnic music should not be seen to suggest that ethnicity is the only denominator through which young people associate or dissociate themselves from *chalga* music. As an established popular musical genre, *chalga* attracts fans that simply enjoy being part of a common cultural environment and do not necessarily make ethnically related musical choices. For example, many young people refuse to listen to *chalga* music on the grounds that it is not of high intellectual standing or because it uses coarse, often highly sexualised, language.

⁴ All my respondents were ethnic Bulgarians. Although I was aware of the presence of ethnic Turks and Roma young people in the *chalga* clubs I visited, I was not able to establish contact with these young people for the purposes of the research because of the constraints of the

snowballing approach I had adapted for getting access to my respondents. Although I considered the fact that I interviewed only ethnic Bulgarians a legitimate approach – as long as I was clear that my analysis was going to represent only the experiences of the Bulgarian majority – I subsequently became aware of a further limitation of this approach. Not only was I not able to 'triangulate' my analysis with perspectives from the Turkish and the Roma minorities in the two research sites – which would have provided a fuller picture of *chalga* – but I was also in danger of assuming the 'voice' of the majority by simply being an ethnic Bulgarian myself. I can only hope that I have managed to keep that danger at bay as much as possible.

⁵ All quotations in the article are referenced by the use of a pseudonym assigned to the young person interviewed, an indication of their gender and age, as well as the town where the interview was taken.

⁶ *Chalga* music is sometimes also produced and performed in the Turkish language. Although during the research this was not something my respondents talked about, in recent years some *chalga* performers of ethnic minority background have been singing *chalga* songs both in Bulgarian and in Turkish. The pop folk singer Reihan – of Muslim Roma background – produced an entire album in Turkish. This received a mixed response from ethnic Bulgarian *chalga* fans, but was accepted on the whole as 'normal' by the pop folk musical guild.

⁷ A good example of a public phenomenon where a pre-Socialist past in Bulgaria has been invoked as a strategy for 'creating' a sense of a new future can be found in the events of 2001 when the Bulgarian ex-monarch, King Simeon II, was elected to serve as a Prime Minister of the country. After the break down of Communism (and its Socialist version) and the following years of disillusion with the new 'democratic' rule in Bulgaria, the general elections of 2001 suggested that Bulgarian people needed to draw on the pre-Socialist history of the country – symbolised by Simeon II – in order to begin to imagine a better future for themselves under his newly formed government.

⁸ Although *chalga* culture is normally seen as a cultural mix drawing from Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma cultures, this does not mean that other ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, such as the Pomaks for example, do not participate in consuming *chalga* music. Although the Turkish, the Roma and the Pomak ethnic minorities were all

invisible and marginalised during Communism, the Turkish and the Roma minorities, unlike the Pomaks, have managed to acquire a certain degree of visibility in post-1989 everyday life in Bulgaria. The research reported here did not explicitly address ethnic Turkish, Roma or Pomak communities' perceptions of *chalga* and future research would benefit from such an inquiry. Such new research might also usefully explore the political implications of *chalga* for the cultural representation of these minorities and the Balkan region as a whole.

⁹ It is common practice in Bulgaria for the Turkish ethnic minority to subscribe to satellite or cable programmes broadcast by television channels in neighbouring Turkey.

¹⁰ The district of Targovishte has a population of just over 137,000 inhabitants, about 67,000 of them living in the Municipality of Targovishte. The ethnic Bulgarian population in the district is 76,294; the ethnic Turkish population is 49,495; and the Roma population is 9,868. The district of Veliko Tarnovo has a population of just over 293,000 inhabitants, about 90,000 of them living in the Municipality of Veliko Tarnovo. The ethnic Bulgarian population in the district is 259,099; the ethnic Turkish population is 22,562; and the Roma population is 6,064 (National Statistical Institute 2001).

¹¹ My respondents, however, did not always distinguish between the terms *chalga* and pop folk. Sometimes pop folk was referred to as a lighter version of *chalga* but the majority of my respondents used the two terms interchangeably. Distinctions between *chalga* and pop folk can also be made on the basis of lyrical content and notions of aesthetics. Thus, *chalga* often stands for songs with cynical or profane lyrics under more oriental dance-beat or rhythm, whereas pop folk denotes the more 'benign' and aesthetically acceptable spectrum of the genre. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to the need to reflect further on the complexities of employing *chalga* as an analytic category.

¹² A survey conducted by ALFA Research in a selection of big Bulgarian cities in August 1999 suggested that young people (18-30 years) listened to pop folk more than any other music genre; 62.5 per cent of respondents in the survey said they listened to it (Stoyanov 1999).

¹³ Roundometof (2005) suggests that the strong links between some of the Balkan counties, especially between Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria are rooted in the spread of Eastern Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century. At that time, the new

semi-state-sponsored national churches provided a medium through which the traditional ties of Orthodox Balkan peoples could be strengthened and new national ties constructed. In this way, the Balkan peasantry, Roundometof suggests, was socialised into what he calls the emerging Serb, Greek, and Bulgarian 'imagined communities' (54).

¹⁴ During the Communist period state radio had a selective repertoire of musical tunes. Bulgarian music was a mixture of traditional 'authentic' folk music and a considerable amount of Bulgarian-made pop music (*estradna muzika*). International music from the West featured British pop music hits and other famous genres of the time associated with, French, Italian and German singers. While Soviet music was not the main music on state radio, its presence was considerable. Although Balkan music was available with a limited selection of national-type songs from the region, Soviet propaganda meant that Russian music and Soviet-style *estrada* were among the most popular musical choices in Bulgaria. Many people who resented this propaganda tuned in their radios to Serbian, Greek and Turkish radio stations, which broadcast new forms of popular music that Bulgarians could relate to - music of a Balkan origin (Rice 2003: 91). In the 1980s Serbian music started to return gradually to Bulgarian audiences primarily through state-controlled live concerts of the Serbian pop singer Lepa Brena and in the mid-1990s Serbian and Macedonian cultural products re-gained their high status among Bulgarian audiences. This was, to a great extent, facilitated by the release of two cult films which captured the interest of many young people in Bulgaria: the Serbian *Underground* (Palme d'Or 1995) and the Macedonian *Before the Rain* (1994). Both films dealt with 'Balkan' issues and had an immediate impact on Bulgarian audiences who identified with a number of historical allegories portrayed by the films (Cherrington 2000; Iordanova 1999 and 2000).

¹⁵ This is consistent with evidence from the extra-urban youth cultural practices in Targovishte and Veliko Tarnovo (e.g. hiking and informal gatherings in the countryside); participants in these practices also rejected some mainstream Western experiences, such as clubbing.

¹⁶ For a comprehensive review of research on East European Folk Music, see Elschek (1991: 91-112).

¹⁷ Not all countries from South-Eastern Europe were included within the 'collective' Balkan identity. While Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia were commonly referred to by my respondents in relation to *chalga*, no references were made to other Balkan countries, such as Slovenia, Albania, or Croatia.

¹⁸ Bulgaria has taken a pro-European course of development since the early 1990s and became a member of the European Union in January 2007. As a result, social and political life in Bulgaria has been dominated by the idea of 'returning to Europe' and building a strong European identity. Massive campaigns in this direction have been led by the Bulgarian Government in the last decade in the form of media propaganda, distribution of information sheets, etc.

¹⁹ In her argument, which she develops with reference to Puerto Rican music and identity in the USA, Glasser draws on the work of the anthropologist Frederik Barth. In his book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), Barth pioneers a 'constructionist' approach to ethnic configurations. He believes that ethnic boundaries are not given, but constructed, subject to change, and situational. He is interested in the movement of individuals from one ethnic group to another and in the changes of whole ethnic groups from one identity to another over time (Barth 1969).

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