Not your ordinary drone: odes to the Bayraktar in the Russia–Ukraine war

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Abstract

'Bayraktar', a pop/rap song written by a Ukrainian soldier following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, went viral, spawning various covers, from electronic dance music to hardcore punk. I analyse this digital archive of 19 'Bayraktar' songs, including five that share only the title with Taras Borovok's paradigmatic song, and contextualise it within the broader historical and decolonial frameworks of Ukrainian resistance music, including the protest music of the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan *demonstrations, and the anti-war music produced during the Donbas war and in the first six months of the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war. I apply the method of multimodal critical discourse analysis to highlight the ways that sound, image (videos and stills) and text (lyrics and verbal descriptions on* YouTube*) forge nationalist and global protest rhetorics, and also function pragmatically to raise awareness, fundraise for the armed forces and humanitarian efforts, and boost morale in Ukraine and abroad.*

Introduction

Thanks to their airtime (up to 27 hours) at altitudes as high as 7620 metres (25,000 feet) and physical capacity to detonate enemy military assets (Al Jazeera 2022), the Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones became indispensable to the Ukrainian Territorial Defence Forces in the initial months of the Russia–Ukraine war. Selçuk Bayraktar, Chief Technology Officer of Turkey's Baykar drone company, described the unmanned aerial vehicle as 'one of the symbols of resistance', adding that 'it gives [Ukrainians] hope' (CNN 2022).[1] Haluk Bayraktar, his brother and CEO of Baykar, confirmed that their company '[has] not delivered or supplied [Russia] with anything, [and] we will as well never do such a thing because we support Ukraine, support its sovereignty, its resistance for its independence' (Al Jazeera 2022). Besides the TB2s purchased by Ukraine between 2019 and 2022, Baykar has also donated several drones to Ukraine following the 24 February 2022 invasion.

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[1] Selçuk Bayraktar is also the son-in-law of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a key Russia–Ukraine mediator.

In popular culture, Bayraktar TB2s were quickly transformed into a meme to mock the ineptitude of the Russian forces. For example, in a satirical concert dedicated to Russian soldiers, the late Russian crooner Iosif Kobzon (impersonated by Ukrainian showman Ievhen Koshovyi) sings, from the depths of hell, of the stealthy yet crushing arrival of the Turkish drone (Kvartal 95 Studio 2022). In the same style of patriotic satire, the Kvartal 95 Studio production company featured 'Bayraktar News'.[2] There was even a Radio Bayraktar, a channel on Radioplayer endorsed by the Ukrainian information industry and devoted to 'war-ready pop' (Kornhaber 2022). The name *Bayraktar* itself (meaning 'flag-bearer' in Turkish) exemplifies the iconic power of the flag, as captured in Emile Durkheim's oft-quoted claim, that a flag is 'only a piece of cloth' that a soldier will nevertheless die to save (Durkheim 1995, p. 229). In popular music, the drone became an immediate hit, as well, with the release of Taras Borovok's viral pop/rap song 'Bayraktar',[3] whose message was so powerful that an instructor of Russian at a technical college in occupied Crimea was fired for playing it to his students; this was described by the occupying administration as an act of 'treason' (Mazurenko 2022).

In this paper, I analyse the digital archive of popular Bayraktar TB2 songs (19 in total) to demonstrate that it is not only a timely, localised contribution to the Russia–Ukraine war, but also a significant intervention into the tradition of popular resistance music and wartime culture more broadly. 'Popular' means, in this case, 'widely liked' and also 'belong[ing] to the ordinary people of a society' and how they 'express their interests and concerns'; and 'popular music culture' encompasses the ways in which this music has been consumed and can be theorised (Wall 2013, pp. ix–x). I focus on Borovok's 'Bayraktar', which was first released on the Ukrainian Ground Forces' Facebook page on 28 February 2022, just four days after Russian President Vladimir Putin had launched his so-called 'special military operation'. Borovok's song, set against a simple catchy beat, slings insults at the Russian army (calling them 'orcs' and *rashists*, i.e. 'Russian fascists'), their rusty equipment and the rotten Russian-style cabbage soup they drink from their bast shoes. I then trace the influence of Borovok's original on cover songs and remixes,[4] which range in genres from synth- and ethno-pop, EDM (electronic dance music) and house/rave to hardcore punk. Eleven of these songs use Borovok's original Ukrainian lyrics (with one phrase in Russian); one features multiple languages (Lisa Schettner); and another is exclusively in English (Big City Germs). Four EDM songs and one death metal version (Karl Oak, Lostlojic, Kulparkivska, Sergio Gusto, Anzu) adopt the title but neither Borovok's lyrics nor the four-chord sequence (Am–F–G–Em); therefore, I consider this last group separately.

Measured in terms of YouTube views and Spotify streams, the impact of the original song has been surpassed by its covers: the combined numbers for

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[2] Kvartal 95 was founded by now President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Koshovyi starred alongside Zelenskyy in the Ukrainian sitcom *Servant of the people* (*Sluha narodu*, 2015–2019), in which Zelenskyy played the President.

[3] Ukrainian and Russian languages are transliterated according to the ALA-LC Romanisation Tables. Exceptions include the surname of Ukraine's President Zelenskyy, as it is commonly spelled (cf. Zelens'kyi), and the names of Ukrainian musicians, adopting the spelling used on their YouTube channels.

[4] Two of the remixes (Unstable Routine and Madame Buttons et al.) note potential copyright infringement, while others (e.g. Lisa Schettner) give explicit attribution to Borovok.

Borovok on YouTube, Facebook and Spotify are just over 620,000,[5] *vs.* one of the cover's 3 million clicks on YouTube alone (Andriy Muzon). Remixed versions were produced in Ukraine and other countries, including France, Germany, Poland and Canada, and the original was also featured on at least one YouTube channel in Turkey (*Nationalist Songs*). How popular Borovok's base song became is all the more remarkable given the circumstances surrounding its production: joining the Ukrainian armed forces immediately after the invasion, the 49-year-old Borovok was asked to write a propagandistic song about Bayraktars, which it evidently took him only 15–20 minutes to do (Weichert 2022). Finally, owing to the essential role Bayraktar TB2s played at the start of the Russia–Ukraine war, this musical production peaked in March 2022 (nine songs), then tapered off in April (four songs) and May (two songs), with the most recent versions added to YouTube in August 2022.

I contextualise my analysis within the broader historical and ethnomusicological frameworks of Ukrainian resistance music, reaching back to *avtentyka* ('authentic' village folklore) and folk music revivals as protests against Soviet mainstream folkloric practices and, more recently, the resistance music produced during the Orange Revolution (a series of protests against government corruption in Ukraine in 2004–2005), the *Euromaidan* demonstrations and the Revolution of Dignity (a series of anti-government protests fueled by Ukrainian President Yanukovych's disruption of Ukraine's European integration, which started in November 2013 and turned into a full-blown revolution in February 2014) and the 2014–2022 war in Donbas (the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Eastern Ukraine) (Hansen et al. 2019; Sonevytsky 2019; Shuvalova 2020, 2021).

I also place Borovok's original and the folk version by Svitohliadets' of the 'Bayraktar' in the context of Ukrainian mockery and travesty, a tradition harking back to Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneïda* (1798–1842), a burlesque mock-epic of Virgil's *Aeneid* and the first literary work published in the Ukrainian language. Indeed, while projecting serious resilience, 'Bayraktar' also participates in a long tradition of ethnic dark humour. According to Borovok, he '[tried] to balance between making [his songs] funny but not completely like a comedy', so they might 'give positive energy to cheer people up and make them believe' (Weichert 2022). Commenting on the witty banter of contemporary Ukrainian broadcasters, Adriana Helbig has said, 'They're like, *We'll be back to our regular programming as soon as we kill off our invaders*' (Kornhaber 2022; original emphasis). This historic practice of taunting the enemy, while common to other conflicts, was showcased in the 'most public and brazen act of mockery': the parade of burned Russian armoured vehicles in Kyïv's Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti) for Ukraine's Independence Day on 24 August 2022 (Kramer 2022), thus putting a spin on the Russians' 'somewhat melted' military inventory mocked in Borovok's lyrics.

Further, I examine this popular musical material through a decolonial lens (Chernetsky 2007; Grabowicz 1995; Pavlyshyn 2010) that places Ukraine's current war in the broader context of nation-building and anti-imperialist resistance against the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation (RF), with its false pretensions toward a 'brotherly' *Russkii mir* ('Russian world', with the RF as the unchallenged 'big brother') and assault on the sovereignty of

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[5] The numbers are likely to be larger, since there are multiple versions even on Borovok's Spotify channel, but then it becomes harder to distinguish between the original and its remixes.

the Ukrainian state as well as the legitimacy of the Ukrainian language and culture. I apply the method of multimodal critical discourse analysis (Wall 2013; Machin 2010; Vernallis 2004) to a corpus of 19 songs, homing in on the ways that sound, image (stills and videos) and text (lyrics and accompanying verbal descriptions on YouTube) forge nationalist and global protest rhetorics, and also function 'pragmatically' (Green & Street 2018, p. 172) to raise awareness, fundraise for the armed forces and humanitarian efforts, and overall boost morale amid war, both in Ukraine and abroad.

Methodology: multimodal critical discourse analysis

In Tim Wall's very accessible definition, 'Discourses are the kinds of language that we use to talk about popular music, the sorts of social practices of listening, watching and buying we use to consume music, and the assumptions and beliefs that lie behind our use' (Wall 2013, p. xi). Discourse analysis, then, examines language as 'communicative events' and 'as it is actually used' (Griffin 2013, p. 93). Because language as discourse 'contributes to the (re)production of power relations', containing both the effects of such power relations and the means of resisting them, critical discourse analysis, as defined by Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, posits that it is only by critically examining language/discourse that we can effect change (Griffin 2013, p. 98).

Building on Wall's notion of 'music discourses' and the work of David Machin, Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, who foreground the visual in critical discourse analysis to systematically analyse images and sounds in conjunction with words (Machin 2010, pp. 6–7), I apply multimodal discourse analysis to a digital archive of 19 popular Bayraktar songs posted to YouTube in the first six months of the Russia–Ukraine war (February–August 2022). Although I have also consulted Spotify (whenever available), YouTube is my primary platform because it combines all three media. The analysed 'Bayraktar' songs are predominantly amateur productions insofar as they are created by lesser-known contemporary Ukrainian solo artists or groups, thus doubling down on the meaning of 'popular', with videos comprising publicly available footage, including drone videography, digitally animated sequences (e.g. liquid or lava lamp flow backgrounds) and thematically relevant static images/stills.

By homing in on various synchronies across sounds, images and words, I also follow Carol Vernallis, whose work is, in turn, informed by Nicholas Cook's (1998) multimedia research (Vernallis 2004, p. xiv). Examples of specific synchronies I identify include direct linkages between images and the experiential qualities of sound ('audiovisual sync'), such as the link between the artist uttering a word and the viewer experiencing the referenced object on the screen ('vertical connection'), and also indirect ones, where sounds, images and words are more loosely interwoven ('symbolic, indexical, or iconic resemblance') (Vernallis 2004, pp. 182, 175).

Decolonial and ethnomusicological contexts: Ukraine's protest song tradition

Since the series of anti-corruption protests in 2004, commonly known as the Orange Revolution (*Pomarancheva revoliutsiia*), contemporary Ukrainian musicians have been

taking political and social stances on various issues, from foreign policy to human trafficking (Helbig 2014, p. 11). In fact, ever '[s]ince the 1980s, music and national politics have been deeply intertwined' in Ukraine (Sonevytsky & Ivakhiv 2016, p. 143). In the 2000s, after a challenging decade following Ukraine's independence in 1991, Ukrainian musicians assumed once again the role they had played in the late 1980s of 'validat[ing] music as an important avenue for social commentary' (Helbig 2014, p. 12). 'Together we are many' ('*Razom nas bahato*'), a version of which was submitted to the European Song Contest held in Kyïv in 2005, is one example of a 'socially conscious rap that rallied support for the antigovernmental protests' (Helbig 2014, p. 12).

Other contemporary anti-war music from the early phase of the Russia–Ukraine war is equally diverse in genres (rap, rock, ethno-pop) and viewer impact (from 45K to more than 50M YouTube views), and recycles much of the same war footage, including amateur (i.e. created by non-specialists rather than mainstream production companies) and professional videography, and viral TikTok videos. Yet whereas the 'Bayraktar' tunes tend to be of lower production value and by lesser-known artists, other music produced by artists in and outside of Ukraine post 24 February 2022 also includes hugely successful musicians, like Max Barskih, Nataliia Mogilevska, Oleksandr Ponomariov, Okean Elzy, Kalush Orchestra and Skofka, as well as Ed Sheeran, Gogol Bordello and Pink Floyd. Initiated by Borovok's untutored intervention, the 'Bayraktar' songs present perhaps a more democratic, open space, free from the perceived gatekeeping of mainstream music production. As in the war in Donbas, anti-war songs can be made quickly and cheaply, often without a full band, and disseminated via online streaming platforms, thus providing snapshots of current experiences.

There is historical precedent for such contemporary variations on Ukrainian wartime music culture in the West Ukrainian army's 'rifleman songs' ('*strilets'ki pisni*') of the wars of 1914–1919, when popular music was similarly used to recruit, forge a sense of national identity and inspire fighters against Poland and the Russian Empire, including the elite Sich Riflemen; similarly, the 'insurgents' songs' (*povstans'ki pisni*') of the 1940s and 1950s helped to mobilise the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Hansen et al. 2019, p. 27), a paramilitary organisation that engaged in guerilla warfare against the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Given the absence of an official nation-state except for the short-lived West Ukrainian People's Republic (1918–1919),[6] the aforementioned 'riflemen songs' effectively served as conduits for the Ukrainian language, culture and nationhood, which, like Ukraine's then yet emerging literature, can now be turned to for a record of national consciousness. This is what Vitaly Chernetsky has described as 'literature-centrism', an attribute of Ukrainian and other Eastern European national cultures (Chernetsky 2007, xiv; 269n). In the case of the 'Bayraktar' archive, then, the contemporary songs are no longer birthing, but rather reinforcing a national consciousness under attack – a language, culture and official nation-state whose painstakingly vindicated legitimacies are once again being arbitrarily and forcefully denied.

The ethno-pop cover songs of Borovok's 'Bayraktar' by folk ensembles Nazustrich Sontsiu and Svitohliadets', as well as Inseptic's EDM remix of the

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[6] Commenting on Ukraine's historically nonlinear and, according to some, uncertain status as a 'historical nation' prior to 1991, Grabowicz alleges that it is, in fact, 'a paradigmatic post-colonial issue', and that nationhood is 'ultimately a matter of identity and self-perception' (Grabowicz 1995, pp. 675, 678).

cover by Svitohliadets', tap into the tradition of Ukrainian *avtentyka* and village song revival movements, which have historically provided an outlet for Ukrainian nationalist resistance to the Soviet Union's institutionalised and secularised versions of folklore, validating indigenous Ukrainian music and other facets of ordinary life as 'true', 'natural' and 'primordial' (Sonevytsky & Ivakhiv 2016, pp. 136, 141). This indigenous Ukrainian tradition is contrasted with the RF army's perceived urban militarism and industrial prowess, but in actuality, ineptness and outdatedness: as we learn from Borovok's acerbic lyrics, the occupiers' military 'inventory' ('*inventar*') is not all that it is cracked up to be, as they are reduced to drinking 'cabbage soup' ('*shchi*') from their 'bast shoes' ('*lapti*'), recalling the overinvestment in the military–industrial complex over basic societal needs that was also a dismal reality of life under Soviet Socialism. These contemporary 'Bayraktar' songs also foreground the native defenders' 'natural' advantage, as compared with the foreign occupiers' lack of connection, reconnaissance and commitment, since they are unfamiliar with the land in which they have no stake. The 'Bayraktars' have this in common with what Iryna Shuvalova identifies in contemporary war songs produced since the start of the Donbas War in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, on the level of content as well as of language: in pro-Ukrainian war songs, Ukrainian figures as the language of the rural past intimately connected to its people's history, as compared with Russian – the discourse of modern urban warfare (Shuvalova 2020); in the so-called songs of the 'opolchenie' ('insurgency') written by pro-Russia separatist militants, fighters are linked to the natural landscape while the Ukrainian army is demonised (Shuvalova 2021, pp. 100–1).

Although the ethno-pop/folk approaches rehearse traditional strategies of anticolonial opposition, the original pop/rap 'Bayraktar', along with its EDM covers, reaches outside of homegrown musics to engage with hip hop as a global music phenomenon. As Helbig writes, while maintaining its association with the United States, hip hop as a genre is also 'reshaped through local contexts and identities', becoming 'a polysemous conduit for intercultural and interracial exchange' (Helbig 2014, pp. 1, 192–3, 6). Ukrainian hip hop has served as a commentary on diverse social issues, including racial and ethnic tensions connected to a growing market economy (Helbig 2014, p. 12).[7] The song's objective may seem narrowly defined – to celebrate the literal and symbolic power of the Turkish-made drone to fight Russia's terrorist war; however, 'Bayraktar' also engages with the fight for Ukraine's European and global integration, played out here through the localisation of global rap to unapologetically mock Russian militarism and to expose the gaslighting of pro-Russian state propaganda meant to contain Ukraine in its sphere of influence.

The 'Bayraktar' songs, therefore, gesture both east and west: on the one hand, through their nationalist assertiveness and opposition to the RF, they recall and vow not to repeat Ukraine's colonial experience under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the experience which George Grabowicz has described as fitting two models at once: 'the colonial' and 'the provincial', as 'a semi-autonomous or vassal country' within Russia and also 'a somnolent province' of Muscovy, what the Hetman State had become at the end of the eighteenth century (Grabowicz 1995, pp. 678–9). On the other hand, through their adoption of global musical genres, like rap, hip hop

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[7] Examples of socially informed musical interventions outside of Ukraine include the UK's Afro-Caribbean artists using hip hop to stand up to police brutality and racial profiling, and German hip hop foregrounding race in post-Nazi politics (Helbig 2014, p. 1).

and EDM, as well as their investment in the Ukrainian indigenous folk tradition (most obvious in the folk covers, but also through the use of the Ukrainian language, whose legitimacy and cultural cachet have been continually undermined by the RF), these songs orient themselves towards Europe and the west. Accordingly, contemporary popular music functions much like literature did in the late 18th century, when, in the words of Marko Pavlyshyn, it served as 'a vehicle of nation-building and nation[al] self-expression', for in the cultural imagination, it was 'the Ukrainians' historical ties to Europe [that] distinguished them from the Russians', and this 'became an article of faith in Ukrainian national ideology' (Pavlyshyn 2010, p. 190; cp. Andrianova 2015, pp. 94–5).

The digital archive of 'Bayraktar' songs: a snapshot

Just as during the *Euromaidan* (2013–2014), the current war songs are shared across social media, with YouTube being the most popular sharing platform, and similar to the earlier output, much of the songs are 'covers, mixes and edited versions of previously released music', with footage often recycled (Hansen et al. 2019, p. 44). Some clarification about the term 'cover song' is warranted, then, given its various permutations. Kurt Mosser claims that the term itself is 'systematically ambiguous'; he sketches out several types, including: 'reduplication covers', which refer to live performances of the 'base' (or paradigmatic) song ('base' is used rather than 'original', because a cover song could also cover another cover); and 'interpretive covers', ranging from 'minor interpretations' or a 'homage' to 'major interpretations'. The former typically 'maintain the general sense of the base song, including tempo, melody, general instrumentation, and lyrics', while the latter contain 'one or more changes to the tempo, melody, instrumentation, and lyrics', but with the base song still recognisable (Mosser 2008).

On Mosser's scale, 'Bayraktar' cover songs range from 'interpretive covers' to 'major interpretations', with the exception of the five songs titled 'Bayraktar' which otherwise do not engage with Borovok's paradigmatic version. Specifically, the 'Ukrainian patriotic song' uses the original track and sets it to a different video sequence; seven songs remix the original and typically fall into the 'interpretive cover' category (Unstable Routine, Andriy Muzon, Jeden z Mirków, intgr., Madame Buttons et al.), somewhere between 'interpretive' and 'major' (Oleg Novosad) and 'major' (Lisa Schettner); two songs are 'major' folk interpretations that speed up the tempo and change the instrumentation to include, for example, violin, accordion or tambourine (both Nazustrich Sontsiu covers and Svitohliadets'); one is a remix of a folk cover by Svitohliadets' (Inseptic); and one is a 'major interpretation' with Borovok's lyrics translated into English, the genre changed to hardcore, the tempo sped up and the instrumentation altered from a synth keyboard to a full band (drums, bass, distorted guitar, punk male vocals). Table 1 provides a visualisation of the compositions (analysed below), along with the languages used, genres, dates posted, impact, pragmatic function and country of origin.

Verbal analysis: the languages of 'Bayraktar'

Borovok's original 'Bayraktar' features monotone recitativo male vocals against an arpeggiated synth-pop organ. The song's Ukrainian-language lyrics featured in 11

Table 1. A snapshot of the digital archive of 'Bayraktar' songs (February–August 2022)

Song title	Artist	Language	Genre	Date posted (2022)	YouTube/ Spotify (3/2023)	Pragmatic function	Country of origin
1. 'Bayraktar'	Taras Borovok	Ukrainian	Rap/pop	28 February	70.3K/181.7K	None in description; support in comments	Ukraine
1a.'Bayraktar'	Taras Borovok	Ukrainian	Rap/pop	28 February	21KFacebook	None in description; support in comments	Ukraine
2. 'Ukrainian patriotic song-Bayraktar'	[Taras Borovok, unnamed; *Nationalist Songs* YouTube channel]	Ukrainian	Rap/pop	1 March	353K	Keywords (Ukraine, Russia, Donbas) in description; no links; support in comments	Turkey
3. 'Bayraktar'	Lostlojic	N/A; instru-mental	Rave	3 March	29.4K/35.4K	N/A; comments disabled	Ukraine
4. 'Bayraktar'	Big City Germs	English	Hardcore Punk	4 March	21.6K/101.4K	Supports Ukrainian humanitarian efforts; donation links; support in comments	Canada*warning
5. 'Bayraktar'	Anzu	Ukrainian, Russian, English	Black metal	4 March	729/2.6K	Links to support Ukraine; support in comments	Czech Republic
6. 'Bayraktar (bye bye tank rave remix)'	Unstable Routine	Ukrainian	Electro-pop, rave	8 March	6K	Supports the anti-war movement, hashtags (#stopwar); support in comments	Poland*Copy-right issue
7. 'Bayraktar'	Sergio Gusto	N/A; instru-mental	EDM	10 March	2.2K/2.1K	N/A; comments disabled	Ukraine
8. 'Bayraktar (Vesnianyi Bayraktar)'	Taras Borovok (Andriy Muzon remix)	Ukrainian	Synth-pop	10 March	3.3M	N/A; support in comments	Ukraine
9. 'Bayraktar-Ukrainian war army song'	Nazustrich Sontsiu	Ukrainian	Ethno-pop, folk	22 March	291.6K	N/A; support in comments	Ukraine*warning
10. 'Bayraktar' (Slap House 2022)	Karl Oak	N/A;instru-mental with Bayraktarrepeated	EDM	26March	143 (previous/ now defunct weblink: 8.2K)/19K	N/A	Unknown

Table 1. Continued

Song title	Artist	Language	Genre	Date posted (2022)	YouTube/ Spotify (3/2023)	Pragmatic function	Country of origin
11.'Bayraktar'	Kul-parkivska	Ukrainian	Rap, hip-hop, 'free-style suburban trap'	4/5 April	2.2K	N/A; comments disabled	Ukraine
12. 'Bayraktar (Mirek pop remix)'	Jeden z Mirków	Ukrainian	Synth-pop	6 April	816	References Borovok base; no comments	Poland
13. 'Bayraktar (intgr. remix)'	intgr.	Ukrainian	EDM	7 April	31.5K	Link to donate to UN list of orgs.; support in comments	Germany
14. 'Bayraktar song mashup edition'	Schettner, Lisa, Taras Borovok, and Tyler Brooker (remix)	Multiple	pop/electronica	7 April	112.8K/33.3K	All proceeds to the Ukrainian Red Cross; support in comments, incl. from Borovok	France
15.'Bayraktar'	Madame Buttons (feat. B3arr & Lyubimov & Andreev)	Ukrainian	Pop, house remix	6 May	2.3K/371K	N/A; description addresses copyright; unrelated comments	Ukraine*Copy-right issue
16.'Bayraktar-Ukrainian war song'	Svito-hliadets'	Ukrainian	Ethno-pop	23 May	1.79M	Comment on freedom-fighting soldiers; support in comments	Ukraine
17.'Ukraine war song – Bayraktar (Chicho Mitko house remix)'	Inseptic	Ukrainian	House	3 Jun.	317	N/A; no comments	Germany
18.'Bayraktar'	Nazustrich Sontsiu	Ukrainian	Ethno-pop, folk	2 Aug.	39.6K	N/A; comments disabled	Ukraine
19. 'Bayraktar'	Oleg Novosad and Taras Borovok	Ukrainian	EDM, chill dance	4 Aug.	11.1K/49.6K	N/A; comments disabled	Ukraine

of the examined songs include six quatrains, with an *aabb* rhyme scheme, followed by an *aab* tercet. The final line in each of these four-line stanzas is 'Bayraktar . . . Bayraktar . . .', a repeated threat to the RF 'occupiers' that, even when absent from the last stanza, is nonetheless ominously implied by the end rhyme *tsar:* 'But now even their tsar knows a new word' (Borovok 2022, my trans.). The lyrics are written/sung from the Ukrainian soldiers' perspective, whose main agent of defence, both literally and figuratively, is the Bayraktar: although they arrive sporting 'brand new uniforms' and 'military machines', the drone melts the enemies' equipment and overheats whatever meagre sustenance these 'occupiers' have, leaving them little choice but 'to sip their fucking cabbage soup with a bast shoe'; it superbly shepherds them as one would 'ovine flocks'; further, it serves as the potent response ('comment') to all of the Russians' so-called 'arguments' or 'reasons', which come in the shape of various weapons, 'powerful rockets, machines made of iron'; and finally, it turns these unwelcome 'orcs' and 'bandits' into 'ghosts' so effectively that even their own police 'can't find the killer of the *rashists*' – or, rather, refuse to recognise the actual death toll, alleging that this murder is 'an unsolvable case',[8] as part of their propagandistic denialism. The enemy is denigrated through animalisation ('sheep', 'ovine flocks', 'orcs'), tinged with orientalism ('from the east') and vilification ('bandits', '*rashists*,' i.e. Russian fascists who follow Putin's political ideology and social practices).[9]

The single line in Russian –'For the restoration of the great country' – conveys Putin's neo-imperialist ideology. The tone is unambiguously sarcastic; Ukrainian spelling is employed in most versions of the lyrics posted online to mock an exaggerated Muscovite accent, exposing the premise that sovereign Ukraine is to be brought once again under the Russian/Soviet yoke and Ukrainian culture erased as part of the greater Russian World, *Russkii mir*. This 'great country' presupposes a unity among all Eastern Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians), and is an imagined modern iteration of a Russian civilisation rooted in the medieval Kyivan Rus commonwealth with its core in Eastern Orthodoxy (Mankoff 2022). The song lyric recalls, for example, the efforts to sign a memorandum for 'The Union of Ukrainian and Russian Citizens' in 2011, an integration meant to restore Ukraine into Russia's sphere of influence and tariff-free zone, which was accompanied by a series of supportive demonstrations in several Russian cities (Starikov 2011). The concept of *Russkii mir* is attributed to a number of Russian 'image makers' and political strategists of the 1990s, and can be traced back to the 1960s 'methodology' school of philosopher Georgii Shchedrovitskii (Laruelle 2015, pp. 3–4; Gessen 2022; Pertsev 2022).[10] It refers to the objective of restoring to Russia 'parts, or all, of Ukraine and untold other lands', an anti-Western neo-Sovietism promulgated by the Kremlin which alleges that Western nations (especially the United States and Great Britain) are determined to impose their decadent notions, such as homosexuality, on Orthodox Russian culture (Gessen 2022). Part of this so-called 'anti-Russia project'

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[8] The literal translation of this line is: 'Who's to blame that there is a grouse in our field'. A 'grouse', in Ukrainian law enforcement slang, refers to a case unlikely to be solved (*hlukhar* n.d.).

[9] In a case of life imitating art, two videos shared on Russian-language social media in October 2022 showed Russian soldiers complaining of 'animal-like' conditions and 'having to buy their own food and bulletproof vests' owing to general mismanagement (Gessen 2022).

[10] Shchedrovitskii's son Pëtr is one of these 'image makers', along with Gleb Pavlovskii, Efim Ostrovskii and the 'self-styled philosopher' Aleksandr Dugin.

is the West's allegedly nefarious forging of distinct Ukrainian and Belarusian identities; as Putin has made clear, 'the modern states of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus should share a political destiny both today and in the future' (Mankoff 2022). The realisation of Putin's objective is, however, forcefully obstructed by the agent in the song's refrain ('Bayraktar'). The 'tsar' mentioned in the song's final line refers to Putin himself, as the synched news video footage makes obvious; the use of the term 'tsar' evokes Ukraine's colonial history under the Russian Empire, and is also, through the contrasting 'new word' (i.e. 'Bayraktar'), condemned as outdated, obsolete. 'The Kremlin scumbag', in Borovok's words, may persuade his own citizens, who 'swallow these words whole', but neither the propaganda nor the attempt to capture stands a chance on Ukrainian territory owing to the ingenious Bayraktar (Borovok 2022).

The lyrics of two 'major interpretations', in Mosser's terms, are worth noting: one is a loose translation of the original lyrics into English and the other combines the base with new material. The former is the approach in the hardcore punk cover of 'Bayraktar' by Big City Germs, a group from Vancouver, British Columbia, where the genre of the song is also changed (the tempo is more fast-paced, the instrumentation and vocals distorted). This English translation condenses the original to four quatrains followed by a tercet, similarly doubling up on 'Bayraktar' in the fourth line of each stanza and imitating the original rhyme scheme, as well as the implied, unuttered 'Bayraktar' at the end, which is symbolically rhymed with 'star'. The closing line delivers a doubly (triply?) assonant punch through an internal or middle rhyme of *czar/star*/[*Bayraktar*]: 'And now the czar knows a new star' (Big City Germs 2022).

Big City Germs' lyrics preserve the stanzaic structure along with the base song's main themes: the inadequacy of the enemy offensive despite their '[t]anks and guns'; the ineptitude of the soldiers, who fail to navigate a foreign country and are reduced to consuming food scraps; the Turkish drone's counteroffensive to Putin's neo-imperialist designs on Ukraine's 'green fields'; and the rude awakening that the 'Invaders' – 'the convoy of death [that] didn't get very far' – must be experiencing with the advent of the TB2, 'the killer of fascists that leaves no trace', 'the best shepher[d]', and 'a new star'. The 'czar' is affiliated with the KGB, who lay 'blame from afar', and the 'false prophets' (equivalent to Borovok's disseminators of propaganda), whose 'lies' starkly contrast the native army's 'Truth'. The latter is further elevated through its celestial (i.e. spiritual, enlightened) association with 'a beam of light from the sky' (Big City Germs 2022).

Lisa Schettner's 'Bayraktar song mashup edition' is, in turn, both a 'homage' to 'Bayraktar' and a 'major interpretation'. Schettner opens her version with new material, which is eventually mixed in with Borovok's sampled base. Schettner's song opens with the audio and teletext of a news release announcing Russia's invasion of Ukraine against a background of indigo and white, a lava lamp/liquid effect with a heart shape in the centre. Caustic, fast, staccato female vocals kick in as soon as the announcer concludes, with the refrain (in English), 'You're killing your "brothers"' (Schettner 2022). The female lyrics, like the opening announcement, are spelled out in teletext on the screen. These consist of four quatrains, or a verse–chorus structure, with the following rhyme scheme: *abab bcbb dbdb bcbb*; the second and fourth (chorus) stanzas are identical except for their final line. The closing refrain – 'Get your greedy hands off Ukraine' – is also repeated for emphasis. The end-rhymed nouns (in the *b* lines) articulate prominent themes of the Russia–

Ukraine war: *Cain*/*Ukraine* evokes the myth of brotherhood between the two nations, most recently weaponised by the Kremlin in an effort to absorb its 'little brother'; *Ukraine*/*grain* evokes Ukraine's historic role as Europe's breadbasket, as well as the war's threat to European and global food supplies (Wong 2022), even as the repeated lyric references Russia, rather than Ukraine, and its wealth and insatiable, 'greedy hands': 'You've got rivers and forests, potatoes and grain,/petrol and diamond mines/ And you still complain'; and *treason*/*reason* alliteratively exposes the hypocrisy of the RF 'chief', who is 'insane' (Schettner 2022). The end word 'mines' (in the identical *c* lines) is equally noteworthy for its ambiguous meaning: mineral excavation sites and explosives. The synthesised drums (two beats) plus a drum roll following 'complain' and leading into 'pain' in the next line ('You cause so much pain') sound like artillery fire, with a notable synch whereby the verbal carries over into sound. Later in the song, the chromatic design changes momentarily to Ukrainian national colours (blue and gold), before returning to the initial indigo and white.

The refrain about 'killing your brothers' warrants further comment. In Schettner's song, it is thematically related to the biblical story of Cain and Abel, and references the complex ways in which the Russian and Ukrainian cultures are interconnected. However, such an appeal to brotherhood has also been invested with colonial overtones as part of an aggressive imposition of an 'all-Russian' state discourse. This political ideology reaches back to early modern imperial attempts to thwart what the elites believed to be 'deliberately promoting Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalism as a geopolitical tool for weakening Russia', and again, under Joseph Stalin in the 20th century, to Ukraine being forcibly Russified, Ukrainian nationalist intellectuals persecuted and millions perishing in Stalin's calculated anti-Ukrainian genocide known as the Great Famine, or *Holodomor* (1932–1933) (Mankoff 2022).

Moreover, what is interesting about Schettner's incorporation of the base song is the creative (mis)translation of Borovok's lyrics supplied in the subtitles to the YouTube video. The occupiers' 'military equipment' ('*inventar*') is derisively rendered as 'shiny toys'. Another line literalises the threat that is merely implicit in Borovok's lyrics through the addition of animal slaughter: 'Our shepherd took them to the abattoir'; in Borovok's verse, meanwhile, 'The best shepherd' becomes deadly only through sarcastic metaphor. The claim '[t]o restore a great country' is attributed here to 'those beasts', thereby augmenting the negative association between Russian occupiers and non-human animals. Similarly spelling out what is implicit in Borovok's words, the Ukrainian 'comment' ('*kommentar*') is rendered in the subtitles as, 'We have a special thing to say au-revoir'.

Visual analysis: the images of 'Bayraktar'

The decolonial content and resistance message of the 'Bayraktar' lyrics are amplified by the visuals employed. The music video for Big City Germs' cover is a pastiche of actual war footage, a feature it shares with two other 'Bayraktar' covers along with most contemporary Ukrainian anti-war music videos. With over 21K YouTube views and 101K Spotify streams, it appears to be the Canadian band's most impactful song.[11] In the

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[11] The official music video for BCG's 'Cease to Exist' (released on 23 May 2022) has only 8.5K views; 'James Cameron' (released on 14 March 2022) has 2K views (the latter may also receive additional clicks from searches for the actual James Cameron).

opening sequence, a closeup of a hand flipping switches on a switchboard cuts to a medium shot of cannons raised to ready positions. In the song's refrain, the word 'Bayraktar' is audiovisually synched with the detonation of enemy assets: on the downbeat, drone footage is cut to coincide with explosions produced by the TB2s. (The opening sequence as well as this audiovisual synch are nearly duplicated in the 'Mirek pop remix' by Jeden z Mirków, released a month later.) Other footage shows the TB2s both in flight and on display during a peaceful military parade, and towards the end, there is another shot of switches turned on by fingers with painted nails, then a woman driving a truck and a closing sequence showing Ukrainian refugees, including children and newborn babies; the latter footage is from a hospital in Dnipro where, under the threat of war, staff at a neonatal unit took newborns into a makeshift bunker ('Recém-nascidos' 2022). At this point, too, the tempo slows down to stress the war's dire civilian toll. At the mention of 'false prophets' and 'the czar', the camera zooms in on Putin signing a document (in a newsclip). The line, 'And now the czar knows a new star', is visually synched with another shot of Putin, now looking up and out to the side, and then the Bayraktar appears right as the singer says 'star' – a heavy-handed 'comment'.

Borovok's most played cover, with over 3.3M YouTube views, is Andriy Muzon's remix, also titled 'Spring/Vernal Bayraktar' ('*Vesnianyi Bayraktar*'). This catchy EDM remix uses much of the same footage as the videos by Big City Germs and Jeden z Mirków. The opening sequence prior to the vocals coming in is worth noting: the song starts out with footage of the Bayraktar and a shot of a news headline that reads, 'Great success of the Bayraktar TB2 Drone Made the Turkish [Ind]ustry a Success'; this is followed by shots of targets coming into focus, a rocket being released, this rocket exploding, various angles of the drone and the drone being recharged with more ammunition. More audiovisual synching ensues: when the 'occupiers' are mentioned, we see footage of Russian soldiers walking; when their military equipment is mentioned, the camera shows Russian soldiers sitting on top of a tank with the Russian flag to the left and a gold-coloured cross in the background, just to the right (reminding the viewers of the alleged Eastern Slavic connection to *Russkii mir* as well as the inhumanity of the daily attacks against Ukrainian civilians, presumably under God's eyes). When the Russians' broken machinery is referenced, the camera turns to the blown up remains of said machinery, quickly cutting to a closeup of the letter 'Z'. The latter is Russia's alleged symbol of peace that has become coterminous with *rashism* (Sauer 2022). A sequence of aerial shots follows. Much of the video is, basically, Bayraktar porn, a glamourised visual representation of the drone's deadly capacity – aerial shots, different angles, explosions. Other notable audiovisual synching includes: a closeup of Putin at the mention of 'tsar'; at the mention of '*rashists*', a closeup of Igor Konashenkov, Lieutenant General and RF military officer who has been the chief spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence. Finally, when the lyrics mention the 'orcs', the video shows heart-wrenching images of civilian suffering and resilience, including the footage of newborns on medical support at the makeshift bunker (1:59).

In contrast, the music video for the folk rendition of Borovok's 'Bayraktar' by the ensemble Svitohliadets' is less of a pastiche of war footage. The song opens with staccato notes on the accordion, is sung by two men with the rest of the group chiming in, and the fiddle joining at the catchy refrain ('Bayraktar'). The tempo is upbeat, and the E minor in the original chord progression is appropriately

changed to E major (Am–F–G–E). The performers, dressed in khaki, dance happily to the beat, their guns swinging between their legs like oversized phalluses out of ancient Greek comedy. The men stand in a semicircle, the encampment serving as their temporary stage, and are surrounded by decommissioned tanks and other burnt Russian military equipment, bearing part of the phrase made famous by the Ukrainian border guards on Snake Island in the early days of the war: 'Russian warship, go fuck yourself' ('*Russkii voennyi korabl', idi na khui*'). Interspersed with the video of their live performance is that of the combat drone and brief clips from Russian state media featuring Putin and others. Inseptic's 'Ukraine war song – Bayraktar (Chicho Mitko house remix)' is an EDM remix that reshuffles both the music and the video, looping the line 'The occupiers came to us in Ukraine' ('*Pryishly okupanty do nas v Ukraïnu*'), with the second iteration modulated up (0:30; 2:24). The visuals are looped as well, with the more humourous elements repeated – namely, the rhythmic phallic gun-slinging and the sequence with the two singers squatting, swinging their guns, now held upright, side to side.

The music video for the other folk cover of 'Bayraktar', by the ethno-ensemble Nazustrich Sontsiu, follows a visual arrangement similar to the cover by Svitohliadets'; like the original, its tempo is 100 beats per minute, as compared with Inseptic's 126 beats per minute. 'Bayraktar – Ukrainian war army song' opens with the ensemble, dressed in camouflage uniforms and bulletproof vests, saying collectively, '*Dlia Erdoğana*' ('for Erdoğan'), thereby acknowledging both the drone's country of origin and the Turkish President's role in Russia–Ukraine mediation. The vocals are also sung as a choir, making this more pronouncedly folk. The video of their live performance, set against the background of a blue sky, crosscuts to footage of the TB2 flying; at the mention of the 'occupiers', the focus shifts away from the performers to a tracking camera sequence that moves along a line of tanks prominently displaying the symbolic 'Z'. At the mention of melted equipment, an audiovisual synch displays destroyed Russian military machinery as part of aerial footage of drone-instigated damage, and just as in the Big City Germs and Jeden z Mirków videos, the word 'Bayraktar' in the refrain coincides with the explosions caused by the TB2s. The element of mockery is present, too, with the soldier-performers smiling and playfully, carelessly even, dancing in ironic contrast to the gravity of the verbal content. The re-released version of the song by the same group has no video; rather, displayed is a photo of Nazustrich Sontsiu with a Ukrainian flag and the name 'Bayraktar' written against its background. One other difference is that the August mix adds female vocals, and there are also comical call–response interjections, such as 'Shcho?' (Whaat?) (0:58), leading into the chorus.

Other EDM remixes of 'Bayraktar'

As compared with Andriy Muzon's 'Spring remix', other EDM covers of Borovok's paradigmatic 'Bayraktar' have no accompanying videos. Jeden z Mirków's 'Mirek pop remix' adds little to Muzon's song other than more reverb and an arpeggiated piano, but it is also the only EDM cover to have a fully produced music video consisting of war footage analogous to that of Big City Germs (although not necessarily derivative, because these clips have all been recycled elsewhere). The house version by Madame Buttons (feat. B2arr & Lyubimov & Andreev), for example, offers only a still with the artists' names and the song title in Ukrainian colours glowing against a black background. In the refrain, the last syllable of 'Bayraktar' is repeated several

times before moving into a compressed house beat, this cover's one memorable element. intgr.'s German 'Bayraktar' opens with a 30 s synth introduction, but is otherwise a duplication of the base song. The accompanying video features a TB2 in the centre, against a blue–yellow Ukrainian background, and a white–red–green–yellow heart pulsates right behind the drone, with small digital squares emitted centrifugally.

The electro-pop/industrial techno cover of Unstable Routine (the Krakow-based Jędrzej Rusin), 'Bayraktar (Bye Bye Tank Rave Remix)', in turn, recalls the sounds of Ladytron, the female-fronted British electronica group, with a walking bass, high reverberation, overproduced drums and other synthesised flourishes, giving the composition an overall creepy vibe. The video is a simple animation played in a loop and limited to the three primary colours: a yellow drone against a blue background, littered with red tanks which get decimated as it flies over them.

Ukrainian electronic dance producer and DJ Oleg Novosad recasts Borovok's 'Bayraktar' as a chill dance tune. Against this chill backdrop, we hear an upbeat groove with claps on the unaccented second and fourth beats, high-frequency synth in the foreground and the vocals muffled – clean, without distortion or reverb. The percussion is mostly subtle, although more pronounced in the verse that opens with the occupiers' objective of immediate capture: 'They wanted to capture us right away' ('*Vony zakhopyty khotily nas zrazu*'). There is no video, but the featured image shows part of the TB2, its left wing extending across the screen beyond the frame to suggest formidable size and wing capacity; the chromatic palette is limited to the Ukrainian colours, white and black, with the drone mostly blue with a yellow highlight and 'Bayraktar' written in yellow letters across the screen. The background features a mountainous landscape with four black tall palm tree silhouettes – presumably a Turkish landing strip.

Lisa Schettner's aforementioned multilingual 'official mashup' is, like Unstable Routine's remix, accompanied by a basic animation, with the featured colours and heart shapes changing (to aqua and red, blue and yellow, then the complementary green and red), as the opening song is mixed with Borovok's 'Bayraktar' right when the female vocals repeat, 'Get your greedy hands off Ukraine' (1:04). The original track is played against an indigo liquid background with the words spelled out in Ukrainian across the screen, along with subtitles at the bottom. In the pauses between Borovok's lines, the female vocals interject, 'You're killing your brothers' and 'Keep your greedy hands off Ukraine', along with the lines of Schettner's first verse. Meanwhile, the colour palette changes to white and red, and then, when returning to indigo–white, a drop of bright red blood appears in the centre as Borovok mentions the 'sheep [coming] from the east'; a white heart is revealed momentarily with the blood drop at its centre (1:56). At this point the lyrics are visually and not just aurally intertwined:

Naikrashchyi pastukh ('the best shepherd')
You're like Abel and Cain
baraniachykh otar ('of ovine flocks')

At 2:22 the screen turns dark, the music pauses, and the sound of sirens grows louder, with 'Bayraktar' kicking in again with percussive beats, but also a series of news releases in a number of languages announcing bombings of Ukraine's capital and other cities: English, French, Ukrainian and Spanish all appear on the screen without subtitles. The video closes with Zelenskyy's '*Slava vsim nashym heroiam*!

Slava Ukraïni!' (subtitled as 'Glory to all our heroes!'). By combining popular music with news media and mixing Ukrainian and foreign verbal material, this multilingual artefact of popular culture both condemns Russia for its atrocities and aims to raise morale in Ukraine. Its comparatively low impact (113K YouTube views and 33K Spotify streams) is perhaps due to its more conceptual approach, female-fronted production (as almost all the others are produced by men), and also the absence of what I have referred to as 'Bayraktar porn' – the sadistic pleasure of watching the enemy be blown up, apparently by Bayraktar drones.

Other 'Bayraktar' songs

Of the five songs titled 'Bayraktar' which do not reference in any way Borovok's base song, three are EDM instrumental compositions of which two were produced by musicians in Ukraine (Karl Oak's location is unknown). Oak's upbeat dance song does include the word 'Bayraktar', repeated eight times in heavily distorted male vocals. There is no video, but the featured image is that of the Ukrainian flag with the TB2 in the middle, its wings straddling the border between dark blue and yellow; the artist's name is written in yellow against the sky, the song title in blue against the yellow. Lostlojic's (Volodymyr Baranovskyi) rave version similarly features an echoey male voice repeating 'Bayraktar', along with another indecipherable refrain, against a synthesised beat and melody, both repetitive and trippy, as appropriate for the genre. Similarly, there is no video, only an image with the black silhouette of a TB2 against the backdrop of the Ukrainian flag. With just over 35K streams, this is also Lostlojic's most played song on the artist's Spotify channel. Finally, the house remix of Sergio Gusto (Sergey Milkovsky, a DJ based in Kharkiv, Ukraine) is 5 minutes 30 seconds of dance beats and synth melodies. Once again, there is no video; the still is bright red with the word 'Bayraktar' written in caps, and a TB2 drone placed over the first 'A'. Although none of these remixes include war-related rhetoric or user comments (which are disabled), the overall message – an ode to the Turkish drone and its role in the Ukrainian resistance – carries nevertheless through the title and song/album cover image.

The final two songs transfer the Bayraktar's resistance symbolism into other genres. Kulparkivska is, as self-defined by the Lviv artist Vitalii Hetmanskii, 'Ukrainian freestyle suburban trap' (Kulparkivska 2020). The album cover for *Styagonosets* ('flag bearer', the Ukrainian translation of 'Bayraktar') features a satellite photograph of smoke rising from the water after the Ukrainian navy attacked and reportedly sank a large Russian landing ship in the port city of Berdiansk on 24 March 2022, which was widely shared across online platforms (Sutton 2022). The song, which comes with an explicit parental advisory warning, opens with a voice-over insisting that, when the enemy shoots at your home and threatens human lives, they must be annihilated, and there is no sin in that. The explicit, at times nonsensical, rap lyrics rhyme, among other things, 'generations of Soviet Socialist Republics' ('*pokolinnia SSR*') with 'wiped arse' ('*zhopu pidter*'); in the hip hop chorus, a melodic male voice accompanied by acoustic guitar sings, 'I'm letting my Bayraktar roam free' ('*Ya vidpuskaiu svoho Bayraktara huliaty*'). The reference to the Soviet Union and the threat of the Bayraktar recalls Borovok's sarcastic swipe at the Kremlin's neo-Sovietism.

The final composition in this group is the most unusual. It is written and produced by Anzu, a black metal group, evidently from the Czech Republic, which

shares its name with at least one other group in Canada as well as the theriomorphic divinity featured in Mesopotamian mythology, a mystical bird that can breathe fire and earth. Anzu's Facebook page features a photo of four shirtless men in black kilt-like wrap-around skirts and silver-coloured tribal masks, holding sceptres carved with symbols, and it includes invitations to 'join the tribe' (Anzu n.d.). Anzu's Instagram profile features similar photos of masked shirtless men and insignia (Anzu Tribe n.d.). Although the YouTube video has about 700 streams, on Spotify the song has over 2.6K.

According to the description of the 'Anzu Tribe' on YouTube, this song is

dedicated to [the mythic warriors of the Anzu Tribe], to those who carry our flag even though they are facing their own destruction. 'Bayraktar' means 'flag-bearer' in one of the middle eastern languages. It's also a weapon they use to hunt down their enemies like a hunting falcon shining on their coat of arms. They deserve our eternal gratitude and utmost respect. (Anzu n.d.)

The description concludes, 'Even though their language is foreign for us [...] we believe firmly, that they will understand hence the values contained in the message we send are universal among all peaceful and honest nations worldwide. Hail Anzu, [*Heroiam slava*]!' The latter, 'Glory to the Heroes', is the common response to '*Slava Ukraïni*' ('Glory to Ukraine!'), a motto which emerged in the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the 1930s and 1940s (Shuvalova 2021, p. 99) and has now become a conventional greeting and shibboleth that affirms pro-Ukrainian support. This description is accompanied by links to support Ukraine as well as the Anzu Tribe. There is no video, but the image shows a rough surface painted black with a symbol in white – a trident with two dots on each side, which recalls the trident on Ukraine's coat of arms, but also the Japanese kanji character for 'mountain'. Just as this image is potentially a heterogeny of cultural traditions, so are the lyrics that combine English, sung in a solo male death-metal voice, with Ukrainian, sung-shouted by a male choir. Musically, there are echoes of early Fear Factory, the American heavy metal group, with melodic interludes juxtaposed with death metal vocals and heavy percussion, although less generically hybridised than their likely musical influence. Towards the end (3:17), following a brief distorted guitar riff and aggressive double bass drums, we hear the message Ukrainian President Zelenskyy delivered to the Russian citizens, in Russian, on 24 February 2022: 'When you push ahead, you will see our faces' ('*Nastupaia, vy budete videt' nashi litsa*').

The lyrics to Anzu's 'Bayraktar' are posted to the group's YouTube page. In addition to Ukrainian and English alternating within the three choruses, there are also three verse stanzas exclusively in Ukrainian, which, in turn, alternate with verse stanzas in English (Anzu n.d.). Such blending of languages may be understood as the mythic Anzu Tribe's show of solidarity with contemporary Ukraine, a sort of trans-historic bilingual alliance. There are a total of 13 stanzas of varying lengths, with near or partial rhymes *abab* (e.g. *tribe/light*, *war/restored*) along with perfect *aabb* couplet rhymes (e.g. *night/fight*, *chests/west*). The song opens in English with a dignified hunting simile ('Like falling falcon hunting the prey/Valiant heroes guarding the gates/Repelling oppression'), yet closes abruptly and abrasively with the Ukrainian for 'Fuck you!/Bitch!' (Anzu n.d.).

The text shares some themes with Borovok's base and covers, but these are also generic enough not to warrant direct influence. For example, the simile of the 'falling falcon hunting the prey' in the first verse stanza evokes animal symbolism; however,

this is used not to denigrate the enemy, but to celebrate 'Valiant heroes'. These heroes are, moreover, identified as the 'guard[ians]' of 'the kingdom in the west', as opposed to the 'Unholy sheitans' (alternate spelling of *shaitans*, 'devils' or 'evil djinns' in Arabic), which invites a parallel to the orientalist othering of the Russian army in Borovok's 'sheep [coming] from the east' while, at the same time, appealing to the same kind of imagery of light *vs.* dark ('Eternal defenders of light') found in Big City Germs' English rendition released on the same day. (In contrast, in the propagandistic songs of the '*opolchenie*' by the pro-Russia Donbas militants, the Ukrainian army is portrayed as 'the forces of darkness' who destroy churches and other symbols of faith, and it is the so-called 'insurgents' who figure as 'harbingers of light'; Shuvalova 2021, p. 104.)

There is, furthermore, a broader medieval masculinist aesthetic created in the Anzu lyrics through diction, such as 'Valiant heroes', 'kingdom', 'chieftain', 'guardians' and 'kin', who 'fight for their women and children', and this is reinforced by the final gendered epithet slung at the opposition, which is meant simultaneously to emasculate and dehumanise them (through the comparison with a female dog). In contrast to other 'Bayraktar' songs, the tone here has no element of irony, only genuine derision and hatred for 'the aggressors', with contemporary Ukrainian soldiers suggestively reimagined as mythic warriors part of Anzu's mythological 'tribe'. Deliberately or not, Anzu thus evokes the medieval Ukrainian tradition of Cossack warfare and valour, as in, for example, Yarmak featuring Alisa's '*Dyke Pole*' ('Wild Field'),[12] another contemporary anti-war composition, where 18th-century Ukrainian Cossacks are reimagined as medieval knights and the Russia–Ukraine war acquires cosmic proportions as the forces of light confront those of darkness and evil.

Conclusion

The above analysis of the digital archive of 19 'Bayraktar' songs that share their title with Taras Borovok's 'wartime pop' original reveals how artists in Ukraine and abroad have stepped up to contribute to the cause of resistance and liberation. In the first 6 months following the February invasion, the multiple iterations of 'Bayraktar' functioned 'pragmatically', in the words of Andrew Green and John Street, to fundraise for the political cause of Ukrainian victory over Russia, and also 'prefiguratively', 'to constitute the political during performance through allowing participants to embody ideal social relations' (Green & Street 2018, p. 172), specifically, by inspiring audiences with faith and confidence necessary to end the war and reconstitute Ukrainian sovereignty. Although only four of the analysed songs include explicit pragmatic information and donation links in their YouTube write-ups (Big City Germs, Anzu, intgr., Schettner), and although it is not impossible that some DJs remixed 'Bayraktar' for personal gain (e.g. to obtain clicks), the majority of user comments even on songs without explicit pro-Ukraine messaging indicate

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[12] The '"wild field" [*dyke pole*] that flowed into the Crimean peninsula' was meant to be 'tamed' in tsarina Catherine the Great's narrative of domination; in this narrative, Ukraine, as Russia's province, was belittled as 'its unruly youngster sibling' (Sonevytsky 2019, p. 4). In Yarmak's song, as in other ethnic compositions examined by Sonevytsky in *Wild Music*, Ukraine's border identity is being radically reclaimed.

that they are fulfilling their purpose of spreading awareness and increasing support. In several cases, their 'Bayraktar' versions have the highest number of views/streams than any other songs (Anzu, Big City Germs, Karl Oak, Lostlojic). Commenters self-identify as being from Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Albania, Bohemia, Germany, Turkey, Syria, Canada and Colombia. In the comment section to Unstable Routine's 'Bayraktar' (bye bye tank rave remix), a commenter from Russia alleged that the two peoples were 'brotherly' and was immediately checked by two users from Belarus and Ukraine (Unstable Routine 2022). Based on user comments even more than the countries where these songs originate from, Borovok's paradigmatic 'Bayraktar' and its many covers have had a global reach. One of the artists, in fact, singlehandedly contributes a global dimension: Elisabeth (Lisa) Schettner is a French singer-songwriter of French, Czech and German descent, who has spent time in Colombia, Canada and Austria and currently resides in France (Schettner 2008).

In the subsequent phases of the ongoing war, the HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) became more prevalent, spawning hundreds of popular memes (Daly 2022). Although it has also inspired songs, such as one remix of the Chemical Brothers' 'Do it again' (RockSolid 2022) and other videos on Saint Javelin's official YouTube channel (Saint Javelin 2022), HIMARS has not generated the same number of clicks on streaming platforms. Even Borovok's own 'HIMARS' song, released in July 2022, has only 45K streams on YouTube and Spotify combined. And while the TB2s themselves may have become largely ineffective by now, as the Russians have learned how to counter them with their air defence systems (BBC 2022), Borovok's musical legacy remains vital as the anthem of Ukraine's resistance during the first 6 months of the Russia–Ukraine war. When placed in the context of other resistance music in Ukraine and abroad, such artefacts give us a glimpse into how popular music, while short of changing the actual course of the war, can almost instantaneously, and without much expense or resources, mobilise thousands, if not millions, across digital platforms and national borders into learning about, supporting and effectively contributing to the anti-war cause.

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