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## [Restrictive Remix: Political Censorship on Western Music in Communist Bulgaria in the 1960s - 1980s](#)

*An aspiration for easy life, for imitation and nonchalance, is also demonstrated by a large category of young people from all strata of the youth, but mostly pupils and students. In Sofia, the so called 'parties' have become popular. These are youthful (mostly pupils') gatherings in lodgings, which by their name come to replace the former jamborees, soirees, djabouls etc. At some of these, secretly from the adults, drinking and fornicating sprees take place, while listening to glaring jazz music. (Protocol)*

This quote comes from a protocol of a 1963 session of the Communist Party Politburo discussing the rampant degradation among the young, particularly under the influence of alcohol, cigarettes and Western music, proposing measures to combat these tendencies. The course of action put forward in this document played a decisive role for the elaboration of a governmental policy towards culture and more specifically music, designing a programme of inhibition of Western music, with a strong emphasis on English-language songs. It laid the guiding principles of a censorship system which led to the creation of a unique type of musical remix only found in the member states of the then Socialist Bloc but particularly outstanding in countries that had less contact with the 'Capitalist World', because of their remoteness, like Bulgaria. By virtue of the reasons behind its emergence, and its ramifications on the local cultural scene, I term this phenomenon 'restrictive remix' and in the following pages discuss its characteristics and role, while reviewing a host of examples illustrating the conversions that the source material underwent in the production of these restrictive remixes.

Similar policies of prohibition, restriction and persecution were in place in other socialist countries as well. In the German Democratic Republic, for instance, the State Security body, *Stasi*, was actively engaged with the disobedient youth whose behaviour did not comply with socialist norms. The characteristics of these 'negative-decadent' young people were: 'Listening to "fast music" (Western music) on portable radios, Beatles-like hairstyles, dancing with "uncoordinated movements", Western fashion (jeans or bell-bottoms) and Western ideas and ideology' (Bundesbeauftragte). Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania also implemented similar programmes - following, naturally, the example set by the USSR. Early persecution in Bulgaria went as far as to send to concentration camps in 1949 the country's most eminent jazz performers, Asen Ovcharov and Lea Ivanova, under charges for 'indecent behaviour' and 'decadent music'.

In Bulgaria, Protocol No. 81 of Session of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party of 26th March 1963, considered 'some manifestations of

bourgeois influences among the youth,' in particular, a 'category of young people who lead an entirely parasitic and licentious life,' and who were located predominantly in the capital Sofia and other major cities. These people had adopted an 'uncritical attitude towards anything that comes from the West' and had a 'humiliating attitude towards the native, the Bulgarian' (Protocol). It was typical of these people to gather at the so called 'parties'<sup>1</sup> where they would, 'secretly from adults, go on drinking and fornicating sprees, and only listen to the glaring jazz music' (Protocol). They would also do the 'anti-aesthetic, very dynamically paced dance, which, with its figures implied erotica and vapidty' (Protocol) called 'twist'. This dance was regarded particularly detrimental as 'because of [its] unnatural bodily movements, it was harmful to the dancers' health' - 'prominent Western scientists and doctors [wrote] anxiously about mass dislocations, injuries of the knee cap, and pulling of the hamstrings as a result of dancing "twist"(Protocol).

Having analysed 'the reasons giving rise to the fast propagation of the decadent jazz music and twisted dances,' the Politburo decided that 'broad access [should be given] to distinguished popular music performers from the USSR and other socialist countries.' Of course, 'good performers from the capitalist countries ought to be invited as well, but as regards those having a dubious repertoire, the respective authorities ought to be much more precise and exacting' (Protocol). Restriction alone could not, the highest Party members recognised, suffice:

Certainly, we do not imagine that by going along this road of prohibition and other administrative measures, the bourgeois influence in the realm of music and dances can be stopped. The decisive means to achieve this we see in the creation of beautiful modern Bulgarian songs and dances that will make a stand against those coming from the West. Unless we do this, we will forever remain in the position of defending ourselves, we will but limit ourselves to the denial of Western songs and dances, without offering ones of our own that will meet the youth's natural drive to listen to, sing and dance new, fresh and cheerful melodies. (Protocol)

Further on in the same document, the key political figures of the time recognised that 'the youth had an affinity to popular and jazz music' and that 'unless we can satisfy it, [the youth] will do this on their own but certainly without the precise selection of the truly beautiful from the decadent jazz music' (Protocol). The youth was 'jaunty, optimistic and desires not only slow, but also temperamental, merry songs,' whereas 'what has so far been composed in the realm of popular music is mostly in a slow rhythm, rather sentimental, and has mawkish and meaningless lyrics' (Protocol).

Special attention was to be paid to performers from the State Concert Directorate, among others, not to become overly fascinated with foreign, mostly Western, plays that had no Bulgarian translation. The excess of foreign plays, foreign dances, foreign films etc. 'instilled in the souls of young people a sense of worship of Western culture and disregard of the native socialist culture.' The Party members therefore contended that the programmes of Bulgarian popular music bands should feature more Bulgarian works, works by Soviet authors

and authors from other socialist countries. Pop performers ought to be 'patriots of our Motherland, [and] to praise Socialism,' and 'insofar as works from overseas authors were performed, this ought to be done using a good translation of the lyrics(Protocol).

In 1960, the Variety Orchestra under the Radio and Television Committee was created, which had 'key importance for the development of Bulgarian popular music (particularly of orchestrated entertainment music)' (BG Estrada). Nearly all recordings during the 1960s and a substantial part of recordings during the 1970s were made using the Orchestra and in practice there were no Bulgarian popular music performers who did not work with it. In fulfilment of the measures recommended by the Politburo, Bulgarian score composers and writers of lyrics became preoccupied not only with the writing of original Bulgarian songs but also with the 'localisation' - producing 'good translation[s]' - of some of the most popular British and American music pieces.

Since both the radio broadcasting network, comprising only a couple of stations in the 1960s, where little attention was paid to entertainment music, and the only vinyl plant, Balkanton, were property of the State (private property was prohibited), performers could not but comply with the requirements of the state apparatus, threatened, at the very least, by obscurity through lack of funding and refusal of access, to political persecution which could send them to one of the correctional facilities. Thus, starting in the early 1960s, what is perhaps the world's first (and only) state-regulated music-remix activity commenced, which I term 'restrictive remix.'

In order to better comprehend this type of remix, we need to first correctly situate it within the existing theoretical framework of remix practices, proposed and elaborated by researcher and scholar Eduardo Navas, which framework, based on the manner in which the source material is treated, comprises three types of remix: *extended*, *selective* and *reflexive*.<sup>2</sup> In *extended* remix, the source work is lengthened by usually repeating the instrumental sections and enhancing the beat, the new version typically targeted at the dance floor. In *selective* remix, various techniques are employed in order to selectively alter the source track in a way that it becomes a different work, usually relocated in a different style and genre - taking, for instance, a rock'n'roll song and making it into a disco piece. Navas writes that the selective remix 'consists of adding or subtracting material from the original song [...] while leaving its spectacular aura intact' (Navas). The third category of remix, the one on which I will be elaborating the remix type I discuss in this text, is the *reflexive* one - it 'allegorizes and extends the aesthetic of sampling, where the remixed version challenges the aura of the original and claims autonomy even when it carries the name of the original' (Navas).

Defined in this manner, the reflexive remix spans a rather large range of reworkings of the source material; therefore, a system of further classification of remix practices is necessary, which I elaborate and expound elsewhere, and which system analyses the **motives** behind the production of alternate versions of the source work. In the case at hand, the rationale has an unmistakable political dimension to it, in which the new work is produced by applying strict censorship rules. The restrictive remix is thus the product of political pressure aimed at hindering the influx of 'degrading Western music' and promoting locally produced, thematically-controlled works, permitting and actually encouraging, where unavoidable due

to the Western song's great popularity, the creation of a 'localized' Bulgarian version of the original music piece. Because of its nature, this type of remix was sometimes called 'translated songs' but this definition is rather inaccurate, as the examples that follow will show, because the linguistic transformations that were made to songs can hardly be described using the term 'translation.'

Producing an accurate translation of the original American or British song was indeed never a priority for the writer of the Bulgarian lyrics, not only by virtue of the impossibility to make a translation that can be used with the same melodic composition but also for the fact that this would, more often than not, be undesirable as the original text conveyed messages or, at a minimum, words and expressions, that the censorship mechanism of the Party would not approve of. Bulgarian songwriters were given the challenging task of creating lyrics that would go with the music of the original and would simultaneously comply with political and aesthetic standards, and, hopefully, retain some of meaning of the source track. The examples I shall discuss below do not necessarily appear in the correct chronological order – for some of the songs no information about their release date is available – instead, an attempt at grouping them according to the degree of alternation of the source is made. Notwithstanding this degree of 'amendment,' all of these examples fall under the category of reflexive remix as they not only 'challenge the aura of the original' and 'claim autonomy' but they actually pretend to *be* the original. The main function of the restrictive remix was to obscure the original, to block its entry onto the local entertainment and cultural stage, to completely replace it. I also argue that the term traditionally applied to this practice – 'cover version' – is unacceptable as it fails to reflect the nature and function of these 'translated songs,' and reveals none of the political forces at play in their making.

One of the earliest examples of restrictive remix (that I have been able to find) appeared in 1964, a year after the Politburo resolution quoted earlier. Two of Bulgaria's greatest names in pop music, Emil Dimitrov and Lili Ivanova recorded versions of the 1949 *If I Had a Hammer* (*The Hammer Song*) by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays (more popular in its Trini Lopez cover). Both have the same title, *Ако имах чук*, which is the exact translation of the original, but while Emil Dimitrov's version loosely covers the first two of the English text's four couplets, and conveys a similar message, Lili Ivanova's version's similarity only goes as far as replicating the opening lines of the first three couplets:

### **Emil Dimitrov**

Wish I had a little hammer,  
A magic hammer,  
In spite of all bad people,  
Wish I had this hammer.  
And all bad people,  
I'd be hitting on the head  
So that they become better, better.  
Wish I had a little hammer,  
In spite of all bad people.

Wish I also had a bell,  
Wish it was magic too,  
]So it could ring  
If there were any lies.  
And all bad people  
The bell would be exposing,  
And would start to chime, and chime,  
When there are any scoundrels.

Wish I had a bell,  
A bell like a bell,  
And with my little hammer,  
I'd go around the world  
In spite of all bad people,  
I'd expose all lies,  
I'd beat them with the hammer,  
And people will be good, good,  
All round the world,  
They will become all good.

Wish I had a bell as well,  
Wish I had a mallet,  
A magic hammer  
In spite of all bad people.

### ***Lili Ivanova***

Wish I had a hammer -  
What are you going to do with it?  
You will behave when you're with  
me. Yes, yes, yes!  
If the phone should ring, I'll hit it  
with the hammer.  
If someone asks for me, my mom  
will say I'm not home. Yes, yes!  
I'll sleep till noon, wow, I'll sleep  
till noon.

Wish I also had a bell  
What are you going to do with it?  
I'll wake up all you  
At the crack of dawn. Yes, yes, yes!  
Those who are sleepy and a little  
lazy,  
The moment that they hear my bell  
They will be asking me to stop, ha-

ha, for just  
a while. "No-no-no - for just a  
while!"

Wish I knew a lively song,  
I'd be singing it all day.  
The world would be merry, good  
and happy. Yes, yes, yes!  
Even if you're asleep, when I begin  
"A-la-la-la"  
Your blood will instantly surge, it'll  
start to dance, ha-ha,  
Along this lively rhythm, along this  
lively rhythm.

***Pete Seeger & Lee Hays***

If I had a hammer  
I'd hammer in the morning  
I'd hammer in the evening  
All over this land  
I'd hammer out danger  
I'd hammer out a warning  
I'd hammer out love between my brothers and my sisters  
All over this land

If I had a bell  
I'd ring it in the morning  
I'd ring it in the evening  
All over this land  
I'd ring out danger  
I'd ring out a warning  
I'd ring out love between my brothers and my sisters  
All over this land

If I had a song  
I'd sing it in the morning  
I'd sing it in the evening  
All over this land  
I'd sing out danger  
I'd sing out a warning  
I'd sing out love between my  
brothers and my sisters  
All over this land

Well I've got a hammer

And I've got a bell  
And I've got a song to sing  
All over this land  
It's the hammer of justice  
It's the bell of freedom  
It's the song about love between my brothers and my sisters  
All over this land. (Arlo)

Following in the same vein, Lili Ivanova recorded two 'translations' of songs by The Beatles: in 1966, *Както онзи ден* (*Just like the other day*), which is loosely based on their 1965 *The Night Before*, and in 1968, *Тя днес си купи билет* (*She Bought a Ticket Today*) exploiting *Ticket to Ride* (again released in 1965). In the former, the similarity stops at the title and the general topic - that of the parting of two lovers, but in the Bulgarian version it is never clear if this is a break-up or just a lengthy absence. And in the latter, there is even smaller resemblance.

For a reworking of the original which stays as close as possible to it, we should mention what proved to be a huge success and an ultimate hit in the late 1960s and all throughout the 1970s - the two Bulgarian versions of Cher's (perhaps more popular in Nancy Sinatra's cover) *Bang Bang*. Lili Ivanova recorded her version in 1968 under the same name, *Бенг Бенг* (*Bang Bang*), and in 1969, another diva of Bulgarian pop music, Margarita Radinska, recorded a substantially different one, featuring almost completely different lyrics from Lili Ivanova's, and notably closer to the English text (Radinska's were written by D. Vasilev, and I have been unable to find any information about the author of Ivanova's):

### **Lili Ivanova**

You and I we were two kids,  
Flushing red from the game,  
You had a revolver and a feather,  
I had a revolver and a jacket.

"Bang-bang" - so you shot,  
"Bang-bang" - and I shot back,  
"Bang-bang", but today, alas,  
"Bang-bang" fills me with sadness.  
Seems to me that since those days  
I have been in love with you,  
But back then this love  
Was in the children's game.

R...

Then I met you once -  
You were a stalwart man,  
But from shyness or from fear

I did not confess my love.

You and I we were two kids,

Flushing red from the game,  
You had a revolver and a feather,  
I had a revolver and a jacket.

### ***Margarita Radinska***

Do you remember when we were kids  
How we played together,  
Flying on my horse,  
How bravely I did shoot - bang-bang,  
Straight in you - bang-bang,  
And then you shot - bang-bang,  
Straight in me - bang-bang,  
But every time I won. Yeah!

Countless summers flew away,  
You and I were deep in love,  
Used to run outside of town  
And again we joked - bang-bang,  
I shot you - bang-bang,  
Amid my laughter - bang-bang,  
And your laughter - bang-bang,  
You were joking - bang-bang. Yeah!

But perhaps it was no joke,  
When you shot it straight in me,  
Hey, hey, hey, hey!

But you love me no more today,  
And you're really far away,  
Yet again I hear how  
Rattles our farewell - bang-bang,  
In the heart - bang-bang,  
And then it cries - bang-bang,  
And you win - bang-bang,  
I'm left without a heart! Yeah!

### ***Cher / Nancy Sinatra***

I was five and he was six  
We rode on horses made of sticks



He wore black and I wore white  
He would always win the fight

Bang bang, he shot me down  
Bang bang, I hit the ground  
Bang bang, that awful sound  
Bang bang, my baby shot me down.

Seasons came and changed the time  
When I grew up, I called him mine  
He would always laugh and say  
"Remember when we used to play?"

R...

Music played, and people sang  
Just for me, the church bells rang.

Now he's gone, I don't know why  
And till this day, sometimes I cry  
He didn't even say goodbye  
He didn't take the time to lie.

R... (Bono)

It should perhaps be noted that Margarita Radinska's star rose a year earlier when she recorded *Кукла на конци* (*Puppet on Strings*), a very close copy of Sandie Shaw's 1967 *Puppet on a String*.

Although the difficulty of producing a close translation, even when the arrangement was slightly altered, was always a factor notably influencing the composition of localised versions of Western songs, in the majority of cases the censorship factor came first. This often led to the production of lyrics where only a phonetic resemblance between the Bulgarian and the English text was sought. An early example for this is Stefan Voronov's 1965 *Урок по танц* (*A Lesson in Dancing*) which samples the music of the 1958 *Skinny Minnie* by Bill Haley and His Comets, singing Bulgarian lyrics written by Bogomil Gudev, author of more than 300 song lyrics, over a dozen of them becoming "evergreens". In Stefan Voronov's case the reason for offering a mere phonetic substitute of the original English text probably goes beyond *Skinny Minnie's* language ('crazy chick', 'dig that chick') - it may be found in the overall 'vapidity' of it, which the Politburo's protocol specifically mentions as undesirable.

Some songs, indeed, attempted to approximate the original text as much as possible, formal restrictions considered and applied. The 1965 *Къщата на изгряващото слънце* (*The House of the Rising Sun*), performed by Emil Dimitrov appears to treat the same subject as The Animals' same-title hit of 1964 - of a young man being taken to prison. In the Bulgarian

translation, however, the parts that were seen as 'unsuitable' from a moral point of view have been left out or completely obscured:

### ***Emil Dimitrov***

A boy from New Orleans  
Was left all alone in the night.  
In the prison there - at the end of the city -  
The world comes to an end.

Forgive me, mother, I have erred,  
I've erred in [my] youth.  
You are a mother, and you will forgive  
My error and my guilt.

You tell her, mother,  
I have gone away somewhere, alone.  
She'll meet a better guy than me, I know,  
May she shed no tear.

Oh, mothers, hear me,  
And protect your children  
From the night where they will err,  
Like I have erred so young.

Oh, farewell, world, farewell, sunny day,  
And sky, and winds and stars!  
My darling, you forget about me,  
Only you, mother, you forgive me!

### ***The Animals***

There is a house in New Orleans  
They call the Rising Sun  
And it's been the ruin of many a poor boy  
And God I know I'm one

My mother was a tailor

She sewed my new blue jeans  
My father was a gamblin' man  
Down in New Orleans

Now the only thing a gambler needs  
Is a suitcase and trunk  
And the only time he's satisfied

Is when he's on a drunk

Oh mother tell your children  
Not to do what I have done  
Spend your lives in sin and misery  
In the House of the Rising Sun

Well, I got one foot on the platform  
The other foot on the train  
I'm goin' back to New Orleans  
To wear that ball and chain

Well, there is a house in New Orleans[nr]They call the Rising Sun  
And it's been the ruin of many a poor boy  
And God I know I'm one. (Burdon)

We see that in Emil Dimitrov's version, all words of religious nature have been removed – 'sin' from the English text has been replaced by 'err' / 'error' and the image of the understanding God has been substituted by the forgiving mother (religion was at the time in utter disgrace with the State). Further on, we notice that the translated version makes no attempt at explaining the meaning of 'the House of the Rising Sun' which appears in the title. Along with it, any references to gambling, alcohol and poverty have been completely obscured.

The treatment of the source lyrics is not dissimilar in the 1969 recording Emil Dimitrov makes of the year-earlier chart-breaker by Tom Jones, *Delilah*. Here, the inscription on the EP's label reads as follows: 'Delilah (Tom Jones, Bulgarian text: V. Andreev), performed by Emil Dimitrov with the Balkanton orchestra, conducted by D. Ganev' and serves to provide a perfect example of the nature of restrictive remix and its reflexive remix characteristics as it actually purports to be the original song, only sung by a different performer.

### **Emil Dimitrov**

I remember your white and gentle smile,  
I remember your blue and gentle eyes.  
You, my love,  
My beautiful, infinitely distant dream.

R: Know, know, know, Delilah,  
I am waiting for you, Delilah.  
As soon as you return into my life,  
Oh, my Delilah, I shall die out of love.

I wait for your steps on the white stairs.  
I wait for your lips by my door.  
You, my love

My beautiful, infinitely distant dream.

R...

You, my love  
My beautiful, infinitely distant dream.

R...

Oh, my Delilah, I shall die out of love.

### **Tom Jones**

I saw the light on the night that I passed by her window,  
I saw the flickering shadows of love on her blind.  
She was my woman.  
As she deceived me I watched and went out of my mind.  
My, my, my, Delilah,  
Why, why, why, Delilah.  
I could see that girl was no good for me,  
But I was lost like a slave that no man could free.  
At break of day when that man drove away, I was waiting.

I cross the street to her house and she opened the door.  
She stood there laughing.  
I felt the knife in my hand and she laughed no more.  
My, my, my Delilah,  
Why, why, why Delilah.  
So before they come to break down the door.  
Forgive me Delilah I just couldn't take any more.

She stood there laughing,  
I felt the knife in my hand and she laughed no more.  
My, my, my, Delilah,  
Why, why, why, Delilah.  
So before they come to break down the door,  
Forgive me Delilah I just couldn't take any more,  
Forgive me Delilah I just couldn't take any more. (Butler)

A story of infidelity, insanity and murder, all notions unacceptable by a political agenda that is building a new social(ist) order, has been expunged and substituted with a somewhat trite poem of anticipation of a lover's return.

While in the above cases political censorship has altered the songs to or even beyond the verge of recognition, in some instances, the original lyrics have been scrapped completely and replaced by a text which has a mere phonetic resemblance to the English text, and its sole purpose is to go with the melody. A very suiting example is the 1977 'translation' titled

*Приятел мой (A Friend of Mine)* of the highly popular gospel *Amazing Grace* by Familia Tonika - there is absolutely no connection between the two texts.

Not only does the censorship machine suppress any traces of undesirable allusions to religion or immoral behaviour, but it sometimes pushes its own agenda through the lyrics of some songs. In 1975, Shturtzite (whose name translates as The Crickets, a striking similarity with The Beatles and actually known as 'the Bulgarian Beatles') recorded *Песен за атомната гъба (Song of the Atomic Mushroom)* which samples the 1972 English progressive rock band Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Living Sin*. The song is a political propaganda of the danger of nuclear arms and obviously has no connection to the English original. The most revealing and essential part of its lyrics goes as follows:

Reach you not for the children's wooden rifles,  
Interfere you not with the children's games.  
Behold, a weird mushroom's growing there,  
It's a relative of Coca-Cola.  
The reckless game of grown-ups, the sensible.

While, arguably, the 'weird mushroom' allusion to the danger of nuclear weaponry is somewhat vague, its creators, playing 'the reckless game of grown-ups, the sensible' are bluntly exposed to come from the same country that produces Coca-Cola - the number one enemy of the Communist order, the USA.

In 1983, one of Bulgaria's most prominent cinema and theatre actors, and popular music performers, Todor Kolev, recorded *Жигули (Zhigouli)* exploiting Louis Prima's 1956 *Just a Gigolo - I Ain't Got Nobody*, where we once again find striking phonetic similarity between the titles - Zhigouli vs. Gigolo - and the lyrics. The Bulgarian song, however, treats an entirely different subject and simultaneously serves a moralising function: it is the story of a family which manages to buy a new car (Zhigouli, a Russian make) for their daughter (who wants to get married but her chosen one says he won't 'take' her unless she has a car to offer as dowry) after years of saving money, ironically, under the pressure of women's emancipation ideas ('the woman of today / is so emancipated / she flies planes / drinks whisky on the rocks / oh, she is evolving'). To celebrate the purchase, the family go out to an expensive restaurant; the husband has a couple of drinks and, driving in the rain on the way back home, crashes the car ('we have a car no more'). Clearly, the original *Gigolo* song could not have passed through the stringent censorship machine because of its sexual references.

Adding to the list of moralising tunes is a song that can be labelled an 'epic fail' for its attempt to discourage smoking habits: *Кашлицата (The Cough)* by Trio Speshen Sluchai (Urgent Show Band<sup>3</sup>), where the only vocal similarity with the prototype song, Scotch's *Disco Band* is the coughing sound. The Bulgarian song appears to be lecturing listeners on the harms of tobacco use:

Hey, you, you're smoking again, you'll get caught by Uncle Cancer.

Cancer will pinch you, and if not, you'll be getting a heart attack.  
Every six in a hundred enjoy this ill honour.  
Cancer will pinch you, pinch and knock, and the heart is cracking madly.  
I don't really wish to frighten you how scary this tobacco is.  
I'm just saying, it's my right, it is shortening my life.  
And you wake up, and you wonder, you've no strength.  
Not only do you cough, but you also pay for it, dear brother.

Another example of the imposition of a completely different text, albeit one that can hardly be perceived to perform a moralising function, is Mimi Ivanova's *Зима, зима, зима* (*Winter, Winter, Winter*), recorded in the early 1980s, where the refrain 'Зима, зима, зима без сняг и без огън, зима, нелюбима зима за мойто сърце' ('Winter, winter, winter, without snow and no fire, winter, that my heart doesn't want') follows the exact rhythmic structure of ABBA's 1979 'Gimme, gimme, gimme a man after midnight, won't somebody help me chase the shadows away.' Undoubtedly, there was no way that the Party would permit the appearance of a refrain like ABBA's.

Bulgarian 'translations' were not only created when there were undesirable allusions or messages in the source text – the very fact that the original lyrics were written in the English language already provided sufficient grounds for the production of a restrictive remix. Although not expressly provided for in any legal document, use of the English language for entertainment purposes was to be avoided – after all English was the language of the 'heart' of 'capitalist evil,' the USA and the UK. This is also apparent from the state's policy regarding foreign language learning. In the period discussed, there were only four English-language schools in the country – the Lovech Language School, established in 1881, but in 1956, the English department was transferred to Sofia, where in 1958, the First English Language School opened; the English Language School in Plovdiv (also established in 1958); the Ruse English Language School, established in 1963, and the Burgas English Language School, established in 1971. Meanwhile, other Western languages (German, French, Italian, Spanish) were enjoying far greater popularity in Bulgarian secondary education.

In the 1970s and 1980s, many more restrictive remixes were produced of English-language songs. Some should be mentioned for the simple reason that they effortlessly reached and occupied the top positions of Bulgarian pop charts not for weeks, but for many years. This is, beyond doubt, largely owed to the fact that the original English track had proven an enormous success in the USA and/or Western Europe. In 1974, Shturtzite (they are for Bulgaria what The Rolling Stones are for the USA and what Deep Purple are for the UK [Rock]), recorded *Виолета* (*Violeta*) which used the music but nothing of the lyrics of Slade's 1971 *Coz I Luv You* – admittedly, the subject matter is the overall similar, the male lyrical hero is asking a girl to love him (Shturtzite) and the male lyrical hero explains how he feels in the presence of his beloved (Slade). The 1978 *Спри се* (*Stop Yourself*) by another one of Bulgaria's monumental rock and hard rock bands, Signal, is yet another example of a purely phonetic resemblance between the translated and the original version – Uriah Heep's 1977 *Free Me*. And a year later, Signal's vocalist, Yordan Karadzhov, performing in duet with Yuli

Dzhongolska, recorded Chris Norman and Suzie Quattro's *Stumblin' in*, titled *Пламък и дим* (*Flame and Smoke*), visibly following the same pattern.

The quest for semantic proximity alongside a phonetic similarity sometimes yielded results where one would find oneself struggling to make complete sense, despite the brilliant performance and perfect rhythmic coincidence between the original English and the Bulgarian version. Here I should mention an example I can only categorise as 'rather impressionist': Mimi Ivanova's 1980 *Лодка в реката* sourced from the same year *Boat on the River* by STYX:

### **Mimi Ivanova**

Our boat is waiting in the river,  
You come to the quay, come to the quay.  
Sorrowful branches the willow is bending  
And slowly a fog is descending

Until yesterday was this river  
Bathing in gold. We offered it  
Our summer as gift, and we called  
That small boat 'My Love.'

Oh, I cannot get to the other side  
Without you - now the boat has stopped.  
The two oars are sleeping languidly.  
How do I return the love back to me?

Sorrowful branches the willow is bending  
And slowly a fog is descending.

Oh, I cannot get to the other side  
Without you - now the boat has stopped.  
The two oars are sleeping languidly.  
How do I return the love back to me?

O-o-o-o-oo-oooo!

### **Styx**

Take me down to my boat on the river  
I need to go down, I need to come down  
Take me back to my boat on the river  
And I won't cry out any more  
Time stands still as I gaze In her waters  
She eases me down, touching me gently  
With the waters that flow past my boat on the river  
So I won't cry out anymore

Oh the river is deep  
The river it touches my life like the waves on the sand  
And all roads lead to Tranquillity Base  
Where the frown on my face disappears  
Take me back to my boat on the river  
And I won't cry out anymore

Oh the river is wide  
The river it touches my life like the waves on the sand  
And all roads lead to Tranquillity Base  
Where the frown on my face disappears  
Take me back to my boat on the river  
And I won't cry out anymore  
And I won't cry out anymore  
And I won't cry out anymore. (Styx)

Many more examples can be adduced: the 1984 Christina Dimitrova and Orlin Goranov *Детски спомен (Childhood Memory)* sourced from the 1983 BZN *Dance, Dance*; Vasil Naydenov's *Julie* which is a loose interpretation of Shakin' Stevens' *Oh Julie* (1982), and *Брак на 33 (Marriage at 33)*, again from Shakin' Stevens – *You Drive Me Crazy* (1984) – but in the latter, there is no connection whatsoever between the lyrics; Boyan Ivanov's 1978 *В живота често става така (It Often Happens This Way in Life)* takes the music of Creedence Clearwater Revival's *Down on the Corner* (1969), Margarita Hranova's 1983 *Не искам да живея, не искам да умра (I Don't Want to Live, I Don't Want to Die)*, which reworks Ingrid Kup's *I Will Not Die*; Tramvay No. 5's *Хей, нощ (Hey Night)* replicates Ottawan's huge disco hit *Hands Up* and their *Дълго отсъствие (Long Absence)* draws heavily on Oscar Benton's *I Believe In Love*. And a personal all-time favourite of mine is the Rositsa Kirilova and Brothers Argirov *Избрах нарочно вас (I've Chosen You Intentionally)*, which was a huge disco hit sampling the music of The Exciters' 1962 *Tell Him*.

In the 1980s, the Politburo's grip on the popular music stage gradually began to loosen – the Balkanton record plant released a number of compilations that almost entirely featured original English-language songs. It should be noted, though, that in most cases the performer's or band's name was transliterated and the song's name translated into Bulgarian, e.g. all five volumes of *Пулсиращи ноти (Pulsating Notes)*, released between 1984 and 1987, or *Музикална стълбица (Musical Ladder)* 1-3, where the only text written in English was 'Made in Bulgaria' and 'Balkanton.' On some other compilations, artists' names and song titles appeared both in Bulgarian and in English, and in rare occasions, where the record featured the entire album of a Western band, singer or soundtrack, no Bulgarian translation was given on the sleeve – but the records label only had the Bulgarian translation, e.g. the Elvis Presley compilations, The Beatles' *Love Songs* double LP, Queen's *Greatest Hits*, Duran Duran's *Notorious*, Whitesnake's 1987 albums, the *Greenpeace – Rainbow Warriors* compilation, the *Flashdance* soundtrack etc. – all reflecting the general attitude towards the English language.



To comprehend the true impact of the restrictive remix practice in Bulgaria at the time, it will probably suffice to say that very few of those who were in their teens or early adult years during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s realised that what they were listening to was in fact a 'translated version' of a Western song - and they were almost entirely people who knew English and had had the opportunity to travel abroad (to 'Western' member states of the Eastern Bloc, incl. Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany). Many people today, almost twenty-five years after the fall of the communist regime, are still unaware of this fact. Browsing the Bulgarian web, one might come upon a couple of forums where examples are given of the Bulgarian song and its English-language prototype in order to 'illuminate' the general public. Disinformation had permeated the public to such an extent that it is not uncommon to come across arguments which song - the Bulgarian or the English - came first, e.g. one forum poster was arguing that BZN had lifted the music for their *Dance, Dance, Dance* from Christina Dimitrova and Orlin Goranov *Детски спомен (Childhood Memory)*.

The issue of reworking Western songs for the politically-regulated market in Bulgaria has attracted very little interest in the general public and none whatsoever in academic circles. This accounts for the continued unawareness of the type of connection existing between the Bulgarian 'original' and the English-language 'prototype.' In the couple of years since I first began researching the phenomenon as part of my doctoral dissertation, recognising its peculiarity and need to be addressed independently, I have only managed to find a few online publications, all quoted below, that in some way acknowledge its existence. While some of them appear to comprehend the reasons for the emergence of such appropriation of foreign musical compositions, they all fail to distinguish these restrictive remixes from commonplace covers that have been, and will continue to be, produced all over the world, without any interference from political authorities.

In *The Great Cover-Making*, the authors incorrectly term this type of musical recordings 'covers' and attempt to answer the question 'Why musicians recorded such covers?'

Perhaps, in the very beginning, when Bulgarian pop-music was making its first steps, there weren't enough good Bulgarian pop songs? Or perhaps the composers who could have written them were ashamed to work with this unprestigious, flippant genre [...] It is the same way even today - everyone starts up with covers and imitations. [...] Another reason is that during the seventies and eighties, musicians undoubtedly took pleasure in recording a western track. (Bat Mitco)

This comment apparently fails to acknowledge the political pressure behind the production of 'localised versions' and supposes, perhaps not mistakenly, that musicians' incentive was the gratification they experienced from this act of recording a Bulgarian version.

Another publication online, under the title *It's Not Only Chalga That Steals*, discusses the 'notorious fact' that not only chalga<sup>4</sup> music is sustained by covers of Greek and Serbian songs but that in the past, nearly all the great names of Bulgarian pop music made covers of

foreign works as well, and therefore had no right to be outraged at chalga's main 'creative pattern' (Kalypso).

An article where the correct reasons for the making of 'foreign covers' are recognised (but not discussed) is *Originals and Covers II – Foreign Covers in Bulgarian Pop Music in the 60s, 70s and 80s* by Daniel Avdala. He writes that

In those times, for political reasons, it is 'undesirable' to officially and freely sing in the English language. Censorship is strict. This is where the first difficulty originates. The second is that, generally, not everyone can sing well in English, and the third is: it is not easy to make covers. [...] In the 60s, 70s and 80s, it was not possible to make a recording in English in Balkanton. Rock bands who sang in this language fell into disgrace and experienced organisational, material and sometimes even political difficulties. (Avdala 2011)

Here, also, the word 'cover' is used to denote these restrictive remixes, as well as the phrase 'covered compositions.' As I hope to have made clear, it is my contention that 'cover' does not adequately represent the meaning of these works. The Oxford Dictionary of the English Language defines 'cover' as: '(also cover version) a recording or performance of a song previously recorded by a different artist' (OED). In the case at hand there is much more: while the cover version of a song usually credits the original performers and retains the work's original title (although it might transpose the work to a different genre), in restrictive remix we find an attempt, and indeed a successful one, to create a substitute for the original performance, to completely replace it. In former Czechoslovakia, the type of reworking of the source songs discussed here was (and still is in present day Czech Republic) known as *předelavky* (literal translation: *reworkings*), and in Poland as 'polskie wersje zagranicznych piosenek' ('Polish versions of foreign songs') which, admittedly, do give some idea of the processes going on in the making of such songs but, like cover (*versions*), fails to expose the powers behind it.

The only publication dealing with the phenomenon that appears to identify the problem of applying an existing definition ('cover') to a unique occurrence such as the one discussed here is *Top 20 of Western Songs Recorded in Bulgaria* by G. Lyutskanov where the author writes the word cover in quotes and explains: "'Covers" is in quotes because very often our performers simply did not mention whose the original song was, but only made do with a simple B.t. (Bulgarian text)' (Lyutskanov). In his article, however, the author not only fails to address any of the issues inherent to this creative pattern (admittedly, his intention was to merely list his own 20 favourite tracks) but he also rather straightforwardly accuses Bulgarian producers of stealing – the subtitle of the article reads: 'Top 20 of Western songs recorded in Bulgaria in the times of Socialism or how our musicians amassed fame and fortune on the backs of their Capitalist colleagues' (Lyutskanov).

While copyright issues are beyond the scope of the present research, I argue that what occurred in the 1960s-1980s cannot be lightly slammed as 'theft,' at least not identifying

performers as perpetrators. There exist no records of how any particular restrictive remix was conceived, and for a great part of these we do not even know who produced the Bulgarian lyrics – and if any copyright arrangements were made (unlikely), they were handled by Communist Party appointees. Considering the general manner in which things happened in the country in this period, orders, plans, designs handed down in a complex system of censorship and power control, it is probably safe to assume that artists did not always enjoy the privilege to choose what songs they could perform and record. The impact of this restrictive remix policy can, however, be seen even nowadays – the official websites of some of the greatest stars of Bulgarian pop music, discussed in my research, fail to give (any) details about the original they have sourced for their work. If one visits the Lili Ivanova website, for instance, and browses her discography, one will find that her remix of *Bang Bang* was featured in two separate albums: the 1968 *Море на младостта* (The Sea of Youth) and the 1968 Russian-market release *Мелодии друзей-68* (*Melodies of Friends 68*). In the former we read ‘Benk – Benk, music: Sonny Bono, arrangement: Ivan Peev,’ i.e. the original composer is credited, whereas in the latter we find ‘Beng-beng, music: I. Peev, arrangement: V. Mirchovskiy’ (Ivanova). Under *If I Had a Hammer*, we read: ‘Music: Trini Lopez, arrangement: Ivan Peev’ but Trini Lopez is not the composer of the music, he only performs the original song. Visiting Signal’s official website, we find the page containing the lyrics of *Спри се* (*Stop Yourself*), which is sourced from Uriah Heep’s *Free Me*, but no crediting whatsoever of the original performers (Signal). Original artist, performer, or composer information is in the majority of cases completely absent from track lists on the original EP/LP released in the 1960s-1980s.

We ought to note, however, that very few of the popular artists, performers or bands mentioned or discussed above, have their own websites, although many of them are still alive and some of them continue to perform old and produce new music, e.g. Vasil Naydenov, Christina Dimitrova and Orlin Goranov, Signal etc. It is solely through the effort of enthusiasts that audio recordings of songs from the period are available today – the songs are, most often, ‘ripped’ from the analogue medium they were originally recorded on, e.g. vinyl record, magnetophone tape or cassette tape, then the sound may undergo some processing using digital equipment to improve the quality, and are then uploaded to free video-sharing platforms such as YouTube or VBox7 (the Bulgarian ‘YouTube’), or to torrent download websites. If the Bulgarian performance had a video clip to go with, it was recorded off the TV<sup>5</sup> by the very few who enjoyed the ‘luxury’ possession of a video cassette recorder in the 1980s, and thus helped the video survive, but often these Bulgarian songs have fan-made videos that may feature photos of the performers, or excerpts from films etc. Naturally, such websites will extremely rarely feature any information whatsoever about the song’s lyrics author, or musical arrangement composer. Infrequently, one might find in the comments section a reference to the original Western artist or band.

Thus, the function of the restrictive remix is successfully performed even today, 24 years after the fall of the communist regime, and the supposed ‘opening’ of Bulgaria to the West. The vast majority of those who during the 1960s-1980s were in their youth remain unaware of the fact that some of their favourite songs have an English-language prototype, that the agenda of political constraint spanned far beyond the impossibility to travel to ‘capitalist’ countries or wear jeans and long/short hair (for men/women respectively). Remarkably, in the function of restrictive remix we discover the antagonist of the function of remix generally,

when viewed chronologically – remixes, reworkings, modernised versions are the instruments that help pass works of art onto the new generations, adapting the old to the current – restrictive remix worked parallel to, not successively, to the source.

Meanwhile, the artists of the period have little, if any, concerns for the legality of their recordings – they can still blame it on the Bulgarian Communist Party’s policy of dictation and inhibition – and they do not officially distribute their performances from those days, as all recordings are the property of either the Bulgarian National Radio or the Bulgarian National Television.<sup>6</sup> The general public, meanwhile, remains generally unaware of the source of the Bulgarian ‘originals’ they enjoyed – and continue to enjoy by playing old gramophone records and magnetophone/cassette tapes, or by searching the internet. And perhaps the most exciting detail to this phenomenon is that, as it was conceived in the early 1960s and had become an established creative pattern by the 1970s, it effectively predates the emergence of the remix practice in the USA (late 1970s, with the advent of disco music and DJs) – and is even antecedent to the topic of intertextuality, closely connected to the practice of remix (as discussed by Navas and by myself elsewhere), the term being coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. Such chronological discrepancy does not, however, constrain the semantic situatedness of the phenomenon proposed above.

The phenomenon of restrictive remix being ubiquitous to all member states of the former Socialist Bloc, and the fact that it has received no attention in academic circles, this article hopes to have raised some awareness of the powers operating behind it – and of its uniqueness – and to prompt the carrying out of further research, particularly comparative and contrastive analysis locally, e.g. deconstructing in a similar manner the production of ‘localised versions’ in former Czechoslovakia, Poland, the USSR etc., and analyse their impact, i.e. if its restrictive function yielded results similar to that in Bulgaria.

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<sup>1</sup> The word used in Bulgarian is "кынон" (comes from the French "coupon") and was a novel word at the time, having a "Western taste" to it.

<sup>2</sup> Navas has subsequently extended the framework to include two more types – regenerative remix and the mashup, but these exhibit features of a different nature and have no relevance to the subject at hand.

<sup>3</sup> 'Urgent Show Band' is the translation of the band's name as it appeared on vinyl labels in the 1980s. The translation of the Bulgarian name is 'The Emergency Case Trio.'

<sup>4</sup> "Chalga" is a musical genre that has been enjoying immense popularity in Bulgaria since the mid-1990s. It traditionally features "skin-deep" lyrics that often treat the subject of love from a predominantly sexual point of view, this demonstrated by the barely-there clothing on female singers who look like a blend of erotic models and porn stars, usually adorned with expensive jewellery and riding luxury cars. "Chalga" is a mixture of "Balkan" rhythms but has a notable Oriental sound, and a large number of the songs' lyrics and/or musical arrangement are "borrowed" from Turkish, Greek or Serbian songs.

<sup>5</sup> Only two television channels existed in the period discussed and they rarely broadcasted for more than 12 hours a day.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, we find that the tradition of the restrictive remix has been passed on in the straightforward borrowing of a melody and composing an arbitrary text to go with it: in 1996, Mimi Ivanova, who had produced a number of restrictive remixes in the 1980s, recorded *Хей, извор чист* (*Hey, Pure Spring*), which "lifts" the tune of Judy Cheeks' 1978 disco track *Mellow Lovin*. And in 2003, the children pop-formation Vrabcheta recorded their ultimate hit, *Бански на лалега* (*Bathing Suit with a Tulip-Pattern*) which samples the music and parts of the lyrics of Brian Hyland's 1960 *Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini*. These examples, certainly, cannot qualify as restrictive remixes as no longer is there a political body to control and supervise such productions. While not knowing if any copyright arrangements have been made for the above songs, in the Discography section of Mimi Ivanova's official website we find the following: "05. Хей, извор чист - т. Развигор Попов" ("05. Hey, Pure Spring - lyrics by Razvigor Popov") (Ivanova 2008), no crediting of the source of the music, whereas the Vrabcheta official website does not have a Discography section (Vrabcheta 2013).