'She Stole it from Beyoncé!': Transnational Borrowing in Bulgarian Popfolk Music Videos and Audience Reaction to the Practice

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The category of the music video presents a constant challenge to the idea of authenticity and originality. From the very beginning of MTV, the musical clip epitomized postmodernity – picking and mixing a variety of audio-visual genres and traditions in an attempt to infuse them with new meanings or simply exploit their visual appeal. At the end of the 1990s John Mundy praised the unashamed recycling of audio-visual traditions and the uninhibited experimentation, which characterises contemporary music videos, as enhancing their ability to provide visual accompaniment to any musical style or mood. He maintained that the 'pickand-mix' nature of the genre celebrates diversity, freedom and the ability to construct alternative meanings, rejecting dominant ideologies (1999, 28). It is thus no surprise that the music video genre has travelled across borders. The opportunity to experiment enabled the music video form in Bulgaria to develop rapidly, following the formal end of state socialism in 1989. With the rise of the highly commercial pop-folk genre, responding to the need to quickly fill in a void in local entertainment, a number of Bulgarian performers generously borrowed ideas from their Western counterparts. Videos from one of the most prominent genres in the country, however, still divide public opinion (exemplified in entertainment news articles, comedy shows and forum comments). Bulgarian pop-folk is criticized for its consumerist messages, sampled rhythms and scantily dressed performers. In addition, popfolk singers like Mariya, Andrea, Aneliya and Galena borrow heavily from their American r'n'b and pop music counterparts, Beyoncé, Britney Spears, Rihanna, Lady Gaga and Jason Derulo (to name a few). Importantly, Bulgarian pop-folk music video remakes evoke comments on national character and culture. They seem to provoke heated discussions on forums and video-sharing websites, focusing on ideas of intellectual theft and a perceived lack of creativity, not only in Bulgarian show business, but on a more general national level.

In this chapter, I will examine music video remakes appealing to domestic audiences with a mixture of familiar and foreign visual symbols and narratives as well as their role in creating new modes of cultural identification and (lack of) value. I begin with a brief history of the pop-folk genre and a review of selected sources, followed by a clarification of the terminology used. I then move on to examples of pop-folk music video remakes, in order to focus on a comparative case study. I provide a brief analysis of the formal elements of a pair of music videos: Beyoncé's *Crazy In Love* (2003) and its pop-folk version, Aneliya's *Taka me kefish* (*You Please Me So*, 2011). I examine the mise-en-scéne, cinematography, editing, dancing, lyrics and music in outlining the differences and similarities within the pair. On a textual level, I look for nation-specific references and images, as well as cultural borrowings, revealing the levels of cultural translation present in them (Stam 2000, 54–76). Contextually, I employ inductive content analysis (Sudulich et al. 2014, 15) in investigating forum and video-sharing platforms comments. I select particularly insightful or emotionally loaded quotes and examine their implications for pop-folk audiences. What are viewers/online users

noticing primarily in pop-folk music video remakes? How do they conceptualise cultural borrowings? Where is aesthetic value placed and how does that reflect on the sense of cultural/national belonging? In the process of translation and analysis I anonymise the sample comments to ensure compliance with ethical standards. I conclude with observations on the culturally informed pop-folk viewership position towards which critical comments point.

In accordance with I.Q. Hunter (2009), I also believe that it is difficult to locate an instance of an audio-visual form that is not building on a frame of reference and awareness of previous texts. Appropriation, thus, does not exclude originality and novelty, and should not be evaluated in necessarily negative terms. I am, however, interested in audiences' motivations and interpretations in reading these pop-folk music video remakes and in examining the implications for notions of belonging. My work relies on comparative textual analysis, theories of transnationalism, music video aesthetics and audience studies.

History of the pop-folk genre

Anna Aleksieva and Dimitar Atanasov (2013) observe that the pop-folk genre gained its appeal in situations of political and cultural transition when there was a particular need for a new cultural canon. The first instances of music, resembling contemporary pop-folk, occurred mid-nineteenth century, when the Bulgarian population was fighting for its independence and liberation from the Ottoman Empire. The genre, often also referred to as 'chalga' (a point which I will come back to later), was likely the result of the mixture of different Balkan people's folklore, the influence of oriental culture as well as attempts at re-negotiating one's national identity within the culturally diverse Empire and modernizing entertainment music. Aleksieva and Atanasov find the blueprint of contemporary pop-folk in 1840s–1850s songbooks ('pesnopoiki') which featured famous foreign melodies with translated lyrics. More often than not these were appropriated Turkish and Greek songs which, while presenting a stark conflict with the ideas of liberation and revolution, proved particularly popular, even among the most patriotic of Bulgarians. After the Liberation in 1878, however, in the process of legitimizing a Bulgarian national identity, the Ottoman origin of such music resulted in negative associations with 'slave' mentality. Thus, it was pushed to the cultural periphery of 'stari gradski pesni' (a particular type of everyday humorous or love songs) and wedding music (Aleksieva and Atanasov 2013; Bulgarian History 2014). Aleksieva and Atanasov also highlight the connections between the development of Bulgarian pop-folk and analogous genres, evolving simultaneously in Greece, Romania, Serbia, Albania and amongst the Roma populations of the Balkans. Likewise, Eran Livni (2014) draws parallels between pop-folk and 'popular musics from other Balkan countries (including Turkey), Bulgarian canonic folklore, socialist *Estrada*, as well as global pop (especially Arabic shabaiya, Isreali Muzika Mizrahit, Indian Bollywood music, and Latin American Reggaeton)'. The prevailing consensus in academic circles is that, since its inception, popfolk has been characterized by genre fluidity, cultural permeability, mass appeal within its linguistically specific audience and a particular focus on the present, as a site for entertainment, romantic courtship and hopes for prosperity. In character, the music is

uplifting, accessible and often playful or humorous, revealing some of the reasons for its mass appeal. The contemporary version of Bulgarian pop-folk arose at the end of state socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Inspired by the relative ideological freedom which their Yugoslav and Greek counterparts enjoyed at the time, the first Bulgarian pop-folk artists, Dimitar Andonov-Hisarskiya pop (the Priest from Hisarya), Konstantin Stefanov-Kotseto Slaninkata (Kotse the Salo), Radoslav Petrov-Rado Shisharkata (Rado the Pine Cone), Mustafa Chaushev, Toni Dacheva and orkestar Kristal (Crystal band), Sashka Vaseva, Sasho Roman, Volodya Stoyanov, Ilian Mihov, Gloriya, and Rumyana, to name just a few, brought a sense of dissidence and political opposition to postcommunist cultural norms. Their songs celebrated simple pleasures (for instance, having fun at the pub or the beach), praised borderline illegal entrepreneurial spirits (like pyramid schemes), mourned unrequited love, chastised social injustice (particularly, class separation) and commended attractive members of the opposite sex. The freedom of expression and playfulness, which the genre allowed, seemed an attempt to compensate for the decades of ideological correctness and restrictions under state socialism. Unfortunately, the popularity of pop-folk performers with mafia circles, their consumerist messages and images of overly sexualized femininity undermined the subversive potential of the genre, lending its opponents fruitful grounds for criticism (Aleksieva and Atanasov 2013). Reflecting a newly adopted ethos of consumerism and individualism, pop-folk was seen as engulfing every aspect of Bulgarian life and causing embarrassment in local intellectual circles with its emphasis on easy money and equally easy women (Sotirova 2013). Critics often failed to look at the origins, transformations or reasons behind the appeal of the genre, instead implying that it had been imposed onto young people who have no alternative role models or venues of entertainment other than the pop-folk nightclubs.

In the early days, pop-folk music videos were of amateur quality, often shot on location in the restaurants and taverns or at the festivals where the singers performed. Resources were scarce, costume changes and storylines even scarcer, there was no professional lighting and post-production work was minimal. It was not until the launch of the first pop-folk-dedicated cable television channels in the late 1990s and early 2000s that investment in music videos increased exponentially, creating almost a 'barrier to market entry' (Maxwell et al. 2005, 260). Pop-folk videos developed a glossy, advertisement-like look, often featuring exotic locations, expensive cars, designer clothes and extensive CGI. As production companies encouraged performers to source their own videos, competition for external sponsorship and recognition intensified. By 2010 one of the most popular singers, Andrea (also known internationally as 'Sahara'), was boasting a new music video for her collaboration with Romanian producer Costi, French DJ Bob Sinclar and American reggae fusion singer Shaggy, amounting to more than 100,000 US dollars (Kaleva 2010). Perhaps as an attempt to claim their place as part of global show business, outdazzle local rivals and display an awareness of video-making trends, certain performers chose not only to collaborate with foreign talent, but also turned for inspiration to already existing and famous videos, remaking them for the purposes of their own genre and audience.

Terminology and sources

Before I proceed to explore the nature of pop-folk remakes and the response of local audiences, however, I need to clarify the main terminology and sources used to inform this chapter. While some authors employ the terms 'pop-folk' and 'chalga' interchangeably, I opt for the former to describe the genre at hand, for a number of reasons. A review of the sources available demonstrates that the choice of terminology is also tightly linked to the analysis and interpretation of the genre's development and value.

As Livni explains above, pop-folk draws on a number of mainstream musical traditions, much like contemporary pop music, which, in turn, signifies the commercial character of the genre and justifies the first part of the name of the term. In addition, most of the pop-folk performers benefit from formal folklore music training and are aware of the local music traditions which the genre draws upon. As a result, the folklore element in 'pop-folk' is strongly pronounced and, perhaps, that is why it appeals to the local population. The term 'chalga', in contrast, is more specific and ideologically loaded. As Plamen K. Georgiev clarifies, it is derived from the Turkish word *çalgı* (meaning 'a musical instrument'). The musicians, dubbed *calgici*, are self-taught talented improvisers, who play from memory, usually adding their own distinctive beat or rhythm to the performed piece (2012, 54). While there are Bulgarian pop-folk performers who fit the above description, 'chalga' appears too restrictive to accommodate all the modifications, cultural borrowings and innovations that the genre offers. A number of performers, both from the older and newer generation, also have formal music training and experience in other popular genres on which they draw. Furthermore, the term 'chalga' is often utilized in a derogative sense, stereotyping both performers and fans as backward, unintelligent and superficial (see Urban Dictionary). Livni acknowledges the ideological loadedness of the term, explaining that 'people [in Bulgaria] attempt to legitimise musical texts by changing their generic label, calling them pop-folk rather than chalga and thus keying speech and music performance toward *navaksvane* [catching up with Western culture]' (Livni 2014, 29). While this rebranding of the genre makes sense from an ideological point of view, there is also an industrial perspective, which necessitates the use of 'pop-folk' over 'chalga'. With the establishment and growth of popfolk television, radio station and YouTube channels, the professionalization of the genre requires a much more precise and inclusive description. While, in its essence, 'chalga' communicates a type of marginalized performed music, 'pop-folk' signifies a mass-media industry, encompassing not only the style of music, but also the type of music production companies, entertainment venues, print and online publications, live concerts and media channels involved in the production and development of this versatile and resilient music genre. As a result, when discussing the formal and contextual characteristics of music videos - themselves a product of the increased industrialization of the music industry - it seems 'pop-folk' is the most appropriate term to employ.

Most academic research readily acknowledges the embeddedness of pop-folk in contemporary Bulgarian society as well as its cultural and economic adaptability. Aleksieva and Atanasov (2013), for instance, note:

Probably because of its ability to mimic other genres, including musical styles that carry the stamp of intellectual acceptance, chalga manages to escape any attempts for limitation. What is more, recently we witness an attempt to officialise pop-folk. It is illustrated by Sofi Marinova [a popular pop-folk singer of the Roma minority] representing Bulgaria at Eurovision 2012 and by the European funding won by the emblematic chalga production company 'Payner' the year after. We are witnessing a process in which pop-folk successfully leaves the sphere of cultural intimacy and becomes institutionalized in different ways, turning from a product for internal, 'popular' use to a brand for export, signifying contemporary Bulgarian music in general.

Indeed, pop-folk has been quick to adapt throughout the years, borrowing generously from pop, estrada, house, r'n'b, hip-hop, rock and reggae, to name just a few, and promoting collaboration across music styles.ⁱⁱⁱ Through its versatility, adaptability and persistence, it has received formal recognition in most national and even international media, earlier than it has in academic circles.

Many scholarly works glance over the transnational links between pop-folk and other music traditions or pop-folk's implications for the political or intellectual maturing of the nation, preferring to focus instead on genres that are more critically acclaimed or conventional in representing Bulgarian culture. For instance, Claire Levy (1992, 2009) notes, respectively, the influence of British rock on Bulgarian popular music styles and the changes in local folk music through the rise of wedding bands and enthojazz. Similarly, Timothy Rice (1994) documents and interprets the history of folk music, song and dance in Bulgaria over a seventy-year period of changes, while Donna A. Buchanan (2006) draws attention to Bulgarian folk music and its perceived essential role to the country's democratization. However, there are also more nuanced accounts of music in Bulgaria. Gregory Myers and Anna Levy's critical response to Buchanan challenges the idealized notion of indigenous folklore, offering, instead, a short account of Bulgaria's varied transnational music genres before, during and after state socialism (2009). Claire Levy (2001) highlights the artificial dichotomy created between 'high' and 'low' culture and argues that pop-folk is inherently world music, epitomizing the postmodern interplay between local and global, known and foreign, thus, advocating for cultural and aesthetic pluralism. Livni's ethnographic study of chalga (used as an alternative for pop-folk) reveals its role in Bulgaria's transition from one model of national modernity to another (2014, 6). Like the abovementioned authors, I emphasise the interconnectedness of the pop-folk genre with local and global cultures. Unlike all previous studies, I am less focused on musical specificity and more interested in the phenomenon of audiovisual imitation as a site of cultural production and social reaction.

For the remainder of this chapter I provide a few examples of pop-folk video remakes in order to contextualise my analysis of the formal elements of a pair of music videos: Beyoncé's *Crazy In Love* (2003) and its pop-folk version, Aneliya's *Taka me kefish* (*You Please Me So*, 2011). I then investigate audience reactions, captured in social media comments and draw conclusions regarding the direct engagement, aesthetic understanding and erudition of pop-folk audiences.

Pop-folk music video remakes

One of the ways in which pop-folk remakes of Western music videos received greater media attention was through the Bulgarian TV show *Gospodari na efira* (*Lords of theAir*, 2003–). It focuses on comic TV blunders while also investigating more serious audienceraised issues in politics, education, health care and the entertainment business. The show itself is a remake of the Italian *Striscia la notizia* (*The News Slither*, 1988–), parodying daily news, satirizing government corruption and exposing scams, with the help of local reporters who are also comedians. Scrutinizing informal pop-folk music video remakes through a show that is itself a remake, reveals the irony and multiple levels of transnational appropriation in Bulgarian post-communist culture. Importantly though, the show, much like social media, provides viewers with a public forum in which to discuss and react to local popular culture. By inviting direct communication and engagement, it promotes self-reflexivity and a greater awareness of music genres amongst its audiences.

Some of the remakes, exposed in Lords of the Air, include Mariya's Neshto Krayno (Something Extreme, 2012), in which the singer performs in a desert and a CGI maze, remarkably similar to the ones in Chris Brown's video for *Don't Wake Me Up* (2012); Galena's Chik Chik (Mnogo mi otivash) (You Suit Me So Much, 2012), featuring multiplied revolving fragmented female body parts, flashing neon signs and shapes, suggestively positioned female bodies and disco/punk outfits, identical to Santiago and Maurizio's short fashion film She's Electric (2012); and Tatyana's Pozdrav za bivshiya (Greetings to the Ex, 2014) which, with its male silhouettes hip-hop dancing and scantily-clad women twerking against bright orange and blue backgrounds, presented an almost shot-for-shot remake of Jason Derulo's Talk Dirty to Me (2013). Drawing inspiration from successful foreign audiovisual texts, regardless of the country of origin, is typical for a number of contemporary pop-folk videos. For his Leka nosht (Goodnight, 2016) singer Konstantin copied the white mise-en-scène, black leather jacket and sunglasses of French Maître Gims Brisé (2015) in which he, similarly, smashed a mirror with a baseball bat in slow motion. Andrea's clip for Nay-dobrata (The Best, 2014), featuring the singer carving her heart out for her male counterpart, who tortures and abuses her, is, likewise, based on Russian Anna Sedokova's Serdtse v bintah (Heart In Bandages, 2014), released a few months earlier.

This brief list of remakes signifies that unashamed recycling of visual imagery is frequent in the pop-folk genre. Saul Austerlitz (2006, 7) maintains that, just like hip-hop sampling, the borrowings from different audio-visual traditions position musical clips within the pop culture continuum. By using and re-using similar symbols, music videos contribute to the creation of a unique audio- visual language of artistic expression that manages to convey meaning in a matter of seconds. Similar images, sounds and forms influence the aesthetics of film, television and music videos (Weir 2004). They help recognise music that is sensual, aggressive, carefree or depressing, signifying a specific ethnic, class, age or gender group or musical genre. We comprehend the cultural and social content of the accompanying images in order to appreciate the whole work (Vernallis 2004, 191). In this way, Andrea's *Love Is*

Mine (2016) used the same Hollywood pool as Britney Spears' Work B**ch (2013) and Chris Brown's New Flame (2014) to promote a catchy, upbeat summer track, evoking a sense of glamour and fun in the sun, and building upon an already existing image in pop culture.

While there are pop-folk music videos with much more original narratives and visuals, the ones listed above should not be discarded as mere imitation, but reviewed as cultural appropriation for the purposes of the local market. Appropriating the visual styles of foreign music videos for the purposes of the Bulgarian entertainment industry reciprocates Hollywood's fondness of remaking successful European films. Lucy Mazdon explains that the remake, together with the sequel and the adaptation, is a well-known Hollywood form of production which attempts to counter the financial uncertainty of the film business. It is not necessarily inferior simply because it takes as a starting point a previously existing, successful text. Remaking is a diverse activity which holds the potential to entice artistic and business productivity and overcome cultural differences (Mazdon 2014, 208). Thus, by copying the style of already successful foreign music videos, Bulgarian pop-folk performs the function of cultural translation, drawing links between different music genres and attempting to catch up with developments in contemporary global show business. As my analysis shall reveal, the process often also serves the purposes of performer rebranding and helps bring attention to the versatility and growth of pop-folk singers.

Beyoncé's Crazy in Love vs. Aneliya's You Please Me So

Aneliya released her video for You Please Me So, following her much publicized divorce from Bulgarian restaurant business owner and playboy Konstantin Diney, in a period when she was trying to reinvent herself and restart her music career. Previously, the singer had become famous for her emotional ballads and edgy alternative look, refusing to bear too much skin or undergo any cosmetic surgeries, unlike most of her female colleagues. By drawing inspiration from an established American r'n'b and pop icon such as Beyoncé, Aneliya attempted to infuse glamour and sex appeal into her new public image. You Please Me So marked a switch from her signature brunette look to a lighter, blonde, and revealed a more tanned Aneliya, with a complexion very similar to Beyonce's. Crazy in Love, the lead single from Beyoncé's debut solo album Dangerously in Love (2003), following her split from Destiny's Child, was itself a symbol of change and reinvention. Its remarkable success^{iv} helped establish Beyoncé's future career as one of the most successful artists in contemporary pop music (Llewellyn Smith 2009). By opting to remake that particular video, Aneliya implicitly positioned herself as embarking on something different and levelling up with global performers. In this section, I present a brief comparative study between the two music videos, focusing on the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, choreography, music and lyrics employed. I highlight nation-specific references and images, as well as cultural borrowings and maintain that, while You Please Me So obviously draws on Crazy in Love for inspiration, each video features, respectively, certain typically American and characteristically Bulgarian elements, which render them innovative products of glocal entertainment traditions and postmodernity.

Beyoncé's *Crazy in Love* opens with a shot zooming along a road in downtown Los Angeles. From the very beginning, the video establishes an industrial-looking, edgy mise-en-scéne, with derelict buildings, city traffic and beautiful urban skylines. The image of the road, along which the singer struts confidently, brings up the idea of travelling, growing up and exploring different life-paths, which was essentially what Beyoncé was doing at the time as well. It also conjures up the notion of 'manifest destiny' – the nineteenth-century idea that the expansion of the United States across the American continent was pre-destined and blessed by God himself (Mountjoy 2009). However, instead of fuelling American boldness and individualism, in this case the road seems to ignite female empowerment and race awareness, giving Beyoncé her confidence. A dynamic camera moves to catch up with her, voguing down on the floor, in a style, appropriating 1980s ball culture in New York (Baker and Regnault 2011). Much like Madonna in her video for Vogue (1990), Beyoncé brings what was once perceived as the cultural margins to the forefront of commercial show business. Her outfit – a loose camisole, denim shorts and red designer heels – simple and casually sexy. The next shot reveals Beyoncé, posing for a photo shoot in a glamorous short khaki plunge dress on top of a skyscraper. She is both physically and metaphorically elevated by her global super-star status. This is followed by another outfit change – a baseball hat, cropped jacket and a loose tracksuit – more dancing (this time the typical r'n'b and hip-hop twerking, as part of a larger group of women) and flirty bubble-gum chewing in the backstreet of an L.A. neighbourhood. Here Beyoncé epitomises urban youth culture and the dynamics of street life at the heart of big American cities. The rapid and radical changes in location and costume position Beyoncé as the link between different social strata. She becomes the living symbol of the 'American dream' – overcoming her humble background in her rise to fame and riches, she challenges class, gender and race divisions in American society. Next, extreme close-ups reveal Beyoncé's sensual expression in an old American 'muscle' car, just moments before her on- (and off-) screen partner, rapper Jay-Z, sets it on fire. In those rare few moments, we are reminded of the horrors Civil Rights' activists experienced in their confrontation with right-wing groups, in particular the 1961 incident in Anniston, Alabama, where Ku Klux Klan firebombed a Freedom Riders bus (Noble 2003). Beyoncé emerges triumphant, however, like a phoenix in front of the flames, a living metaphor for African American resilience and courage. After having vogued on the ground and danced in front of the blazing flames, she summons the remaining two forces of nature – water and wind. Beyoncé kicks open a street fire hydrant, releasing sprays of water, under which she channels a sexier version of the Singin' in the Rain (Gene Kelly/ Stanley Donen, 1952) famous dance number. She then dances in front of the wind streams of a stylized jet-engine fan in a designer orange. pink and purple mini-dress and over-the-top golden jewellery. The dynamic and playful choreography is complimented by fast cutting, panning and tracking, interspersed close-ups with medium close-ups and wide shots. The cinematography and editing further the idea of Beyoncé representing a vibrant force of nature in her own right, overcoming social divisions in the name of (crazy) love.



Figure 1. Timeline for Beyoncé's Crazy in Love (2003).

Aneliya's *You Please Me So* is much smaller in scale, reflecting the nature and realities of the Bulgarian entertainment market and postcommunist culture. Almost the entire video is shot indoors. It also features less costume changes and dancing than Beyoncé's clip. Instead of overtly challenging class and race divisions, *You Please Me So* sheds light on the permeability of culture and reveals the 'Bulgarian dream' of catching up with the perceived advancements of the Western world.

The video opens in an underground garage, located in one of the new shopping centres in the capital city of Sofia (Iliev 2011). Indeed, American-inspired malls have proliferated, following the end of state socialism and the privatization of public land and buildings. Perceived as providing a direct link with Western culture, newly established shopping centres epitomise the exact opposite of shops existing before 1990. They feature expensive designer brands, a huge variety of products, services, food and drink as well as multiplex cinema chains. Everything is geared up towards entertainment and consumption. Young people embrace the materialistic attitude, often connected with excessive shopping, in an attempt to imitate what they associate (through media and films) with a 'Western lifestyle'. So, the fact that Aneliya's video takes place in the underground parking space of a Bulgarian shopping mall hints subtly towards the political, economic and cultural changes that the country has undergone in the last three decades. The video also features an aircraft hangar and an all-glass business building. Noticeably missing are the urban landscapes and realism of Beyoncé's video. Instead of the old American 'muscle' car, Aneliya's song showcases three brand new

sports automobiles, advertising a local car rental business on their number plates. This clever product placement underscores the commercial character and economic resilience of the popfolk genre. The flashy cars are not set on fire, like in Beyoncé's video, but come to symbolise the higher social status towards which most of Bulgarian society has been aspiring, since the shift to the market economy. Thus, Aneliya's video is more about fitting in and catching up with established capitalist countries than challenging a status quo.

Even though the video features less camera movement and little synchronized choreography, Aneliya visibly mimics Beyoncé's hair-tossing and flirtatious smiles. The singer shifts between a little black plunge dress and an orange and pink ensemble, remarkably analogous to Beyoncé's Crazy in Love final costume. She similarly wears an excessive amount of golden jewellery. However, unlike Beyoncé, Aneliya also puts on display her leopard-print high- heel boots – a provocative accessory, often associated with pop-folk singers' lack of fashion sense (Kirilova 2012). Aneliya's costumes draw links between two different genres and cultures, attempting to overcome the stigma of pop-folk's perceived inferiority, but also displaying close links with the genre's roots. Ultimately, her costumes signify the permeability and mixing of cultures. Next, she is inside one of the cars, suggestively moaning and sighing, in a manner, more explicitly sexual than Beyoncé's car scene. In fact, the lyrics of the song (discussed below), suggest that Aneliya portrays a character that is more predatory and dangerous than Beyoncé's protagonist. The video ends with Aneliya in a red playsuit, marching confidently ahead of a group of suited men similarly, this time, to Beyoncé's promotional video for her 'I Am . . . World Tour' (2009–2010), in which the latter is dressed in a sparkling corset gown and leads her own army of well-dressed gentlemen. The ultimate message in both scenes implies female empowerment and emancipation.



Figure 2. Timeline for Aneliya's Taka me kefish (You Please Me So, 2011).

Gender roles are also discussed in the lyrics to both songs. While Beyoncé wonders how her love interest can exert such influence on her thoughts and behaviour, gradually admitting that she is truly smitten with him, Aneliya challenges the man of her dreams, acknowledging that their attraction is visible to everyone and he should act on it. In You Please Me So, the popfolk singer describes a sinful but addictive man, who likes to play games, but, as the lyrics reveal, so does she. In a way, Aneliya portrays a femme fatale, actively pursuing her love interest, completely aware and unafraid of the potential consequences. The chase 'pleases her'. Therefore, the protagonist of You Please Me So appears more sexually liberated and aggressive than the one of Crazy in Love. It serves as a surprising revelation, bearing in mind that, despite the socialist ideology of gender equality, contemporary Bulgaria is still a patriarchal country as demonstrated by the fact that women are often employed in lower paying jobs, while remaining responsible for most household chores and child-raising (European Commission 2013). So, in *You Please Me So*, Aneliya not only praises the man she admires but also, subtly, establishes herself in a dominant position, subverting conservative gender stereotypes in Bulgaria and, again, revealing an attempt to catch up with the sexual revolution of the West.

The two songs also differ in their instrumentals. *Crazy in Love* is a moderately fast r'n'b/pop song, featuring brass and percussion instruments. The melody is sampled from *Are You My Woman (Tell Me So)* (1970) by the r'n'b and soul vocal quartet Chi-Lites. *You Please Me So*, on the other hand, is an original piece, featuring upbeat pop sound with added synthesiser as well as the typically Balkan *kaval* flute. As a result, both melodies appear to be modernized versions of older music styles, typical of the respective country and continent. *Crazy in Love* builds on American jazz and soul music traditions of the 1970s, whereas *You Please Me So* mixes contemporary pop with local folklore elements. Same as the respective video mise-enscène, cinematography and editing, Beyoncé's music renegotiates class and race, whereas Aneliya's song displays an attempt to combine indigenous rhythms with global pop in an attempt to update and transform the Bulgarian music tradition.

Audience reactions to You Please Me So

Despite the different purposes that the two music videos served, the similarities in set design, costume, choreography and camerawork between them did not go unnoticed by pop-folk audiences. At the time when *You Please Me So* was released, debates sparked across video-sharing websites and pop-folk music forums. To seek out trends in audience reactions, I analysed three sources of information, featuring the video – the global music sharing platform, YouTube, the Bulgarian equivalent of it, Vbox7, and the discussion underneath an article on signal.bg, a website for entertainment news, live interviews and industry gossip. The data collected is summarized in Table 1.

| Reactions to Aneliya's Taka me kefish: | Number of comments: | | | |
|---|---------------------|----------|------------|--------|
| Comment nature: | Vbox7: | YouTube: | Signal.bg: | Total: |
| Love the song and/or video | 209 | 27 | 24 | 260 |
| Dislike the song and/or video | 54 | 1 | 3 | 58 |
| Praising singer's looks | 101 | 2 | 10 | 113 |
| Critiquing the singer's looks | 43 | 0 | 10 | 53 |
| Highlighting/critiquing similarities with Beyonce | 98 | 3 | 10 | 111 |
| Highlighting/critiquing similarities with Jessica Simpson/Jennifer Lopez | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Defending/undermining similarities with Beyonce | 38 | 3 | 4 | 45 |
| Highlighting/critiquing similarities with other pop-folk singers | 13 | 0 | 6 | 19 |
| Refuting similarities with other pop-folk singers | 5 | 0 | 3 | 8 |
| Critique of pop-folk as genre | 68 | 1 | 0 | 69 |
| Defense of pop-folk as genre | 24 | 0 | 0 | 24 |
| Quoting the song's lyrics/title | 47 | 4 | 1 | 52 |
| Other (comments about veridity of subtitles, cars in video, emoji comments, | | | | |
| personal arguments, self-promotion, etc.) | 227 | 13 | 3 | 243 |

Table 1. Reactions to Aneliya's Taka me kefish (You Please Me So, 2011)

A closer inspection reveals that the highest number of viewers, who posted comments, relevant to the aesthetic value of the video, were satisfied with the song and/or the clip. Out of approximately 1,057 comments, analysed in total across all platforms, about 25 per cent were happy with the final product and a further 11 per cent were impressed with Aneliya's transformation. One user, for instance, notes: 'The song is really cool and not to mention that Aneliya looks like a Hollywood star.' So, it seems that the singer's efforts to reinvent herself as a glamorous performer with global appeal were generally well-received. However, a further 19 per cent were engaged in criticizing or defending the similarities they uncovered between Aneliya's video and that of Beyoncé or other local and global performers. Some of the comments included:

Hahaha wow! This woman needs to stop copying Beyoncé's videos! Nothing is original anymore! Songs are stolen, videos are stolen and how are you 'stars' justifying this? . . .

. . .

Whoever says this video has nothing to do with Beyoncé, either hasn't seen Beyoncé's video or is a complete idiot. Aneliya's video is not 1:1 with *Crazy in Love* but the similarities are palpable. The scene in the car is also copied from *Waiting for Tonight* by JLo, the only thing missing are the crystals on her face. P.S. The song is really good, the video . . . works.

. . .

Aneliya is great in this video, even if she copied Beyoncé, it still 'pleases' me.

. . .

I don't know why you think she's copying Andrea . . . As to the Beyoncé-style dress, it's not the only copied outfit [in the world]! What about the Lady Gaga wave? . . .

. . .

I think it looks cheap when they [Bulgarian artists] copy the videos of global stars . . .

The debates generally centred on the idea of an original contribution to pop culture and the inventiveness of pop-folk music videos, compared to those of global stars. In the most heated of disputes, about 9 per cent engaged in general discussion of the value of pop-folk as a genre. Importantly, a number of comments also reflected a sense of cultural/national belonging, expressing their disappointment in the lack of originality, perceived as a national trait.

While certain reactions were, admittedly, overly emotional and one-sided, the above statistic leads to observations on the culturally informed pop-folk viewership position towards which critical comments point. Conceptualizing authenticity and originality necessitates a frame of reference, an awareness of audiovisual traditions and an exposure to a multitude of artistic styles and forms. As Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley explain, aesthetic discrimination based not only on personal taste but on an awareness of musical tradition is what characterises objective value judgements (2013, 119). The fact that almost a fifth of YouTube and forum comments focus on the appropriated images and tropes in Aneliya's video, reveals that the users behind the nicknames draw upon a reserve of transcultural knowledge. This exposes pop-folk fans as active and critical in their selection and endorsement of music, rehabilitating their stereotypical image and challenging the idea that the genre necessarily exerts negative influence over its supporters. Criticizing what they label as blatant copying, forum writers conclude that it is part of the 'uncivilized' Bulgarian/ Balkan character to resort to (intellectual) theft. vi The self-orientalizing nature of such comments confirms Livni's observations that pop-folk reveals a deep social anxiety about Bulgarians not appearing European (connoting, cultured) enough (2014, 8). Importantly, this trend points towards the desire of YouTube and forum users to differentiate between themselves and the texts they are criticizing. Online users are elevated to the point of cultural critics. As a result, pop-folk music video remakes speak tons about the cultural background, popular music erudition and sense of belonging of their audiences. The often critical response of users points towards a selective and cosmopolitan trend of consumption, in stark contrast with Theodor W. Adorno's 'uncritical masses' (1973; 1991).

Conclusion

In conclusion, while relatively unfamiliar abroad, the pop-folk genre proves subject to heated local debates, especially when its performers borrow freely from the music videos of their successful Western counterparts. The critique or admiration of pop-folk music video remakes should, however, always be situated in the broader context of artistic norms, political change and cultural appropriations, evident in Bulgarian culture since the fall of state socialism. A careful analysis of a video like Aneliya's *You Please Me So* reveals that, despite drawing inspiration from Beyoncé's *Crazy in Love*, there are certain specific tropes and symbols, which gain meaning only when placed in the respective national context. Nevertheless, the pop culture erudition and active engagement, displayed by social media and forum users in

responding to such informal remakes, challenges preconceived notions on the type of supporters pop-folk attracts. Ironically, both the informal music video remakes and the critical responses of their audiences reveal a deeply embedded desire to catch up with and gain recognition from Western culture.

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Y Taka me kefish (translated lyrics): I know that games attract you, That is why you are facing me. You do bad things to women, Don't be honest with me. You're used to coming And then going. I know it, you know it,

¹ With the drop in record sales and the rise of Internet piracy, pop-folk singers, much like the rest of the performers around the world, have focused on live gigs and touring as main sources of income. Since Bulgaria features a relatively small market for entertainment, a number of the popular names in the business are also rumoured to have affluent partners, lovers or families, who invest heavily in their careers.

ii Pop-folk performer Veselin Marinov graduated from the Bulgarian National Academy of Music and his first professional experience was in a progressive rock band. Similarly, Rado Shisharkata learned how to play the trumpet and baritone, before joining a hard rock band. Controversial singer Sashka Vaseva (often compared to a Balkan Marilyn Monroe, due to her display of provocative yet innocent sexuality) completed a degree in music pedagogy. Pop-folk doyen Sasho Roman is a professional trumpeter, having studied at a military music school. The most famous representatives of the younger generation in Bulgarian pop-folk – Preslava, Emiliya, Aneliya, Desi Slava, Galin and Dzhena – have all received formal folklore or pop music training as part of their secondary education.

Pop-folk singer Preslava rose to fame with her song *Lazha e (It's a Lie*, 2006) which, in its instrumentals, rhythm and vocals, closely resembled a rock ballad, and reaffirmed her leading position in the industry with house- and electronic-inspired singles *Moeto slabo myasto (My Weak Spot*, 2014), *Na tebe ne otkazvam (I Can't Say No to You*, 2015) and *Bez teb (Without You*, 2016), amongst other songs. Similarly, her main rival, Galena, often experiments with different genres, recently employing famous Bulgarian hip-hop performer and producer, Krisko, to write her #MamaUragan (#MamaHurricaine, 2016). Following the success of the single, her colleague, Mariya, did the same for her recent hit *Vsichko zabraneno (Everything Forbidden*, 2017). Singer Desi Slava has dipped in and out of pop music, having even featured with English-language ballad *My Pleasure, My Pain* (2009) on MTV World Chart Express. Pop-folk doyenne Gloriya is famous for building a discography of tracks that are close to Bulgarian estrada music. Teen idols Galin and Emanuela presented a hip-hop inspired track – 5, 6, 7, 8 in 2017 and pop-folk diva Tsvetelina Yaneva performed a pop and jazz rendition of her then new album *Moga pak (I Can Again*, 2012) at a special gig, hosted by a famous local piano bar. One of the first to collaborate across genres were pop-folk performer Sofi Marinova and hip-hop artist Ustata, who, in 2006, topped local music charts with *Moy si, dyavole (You're Mine, Devil)*.

The single won a Grammy Award for Best R&B Song and Best Rap/Sung Collaboration, three MTV Video Music Awards, the Music Video Production Association award for Best R&B Video and was recognised as one of the most performed songs of 2004 by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).

And lots of others do too...

Chorus: You please me so – somewhat sinful,

Somewhat truthful, somewhat unruly next to me.

You please me so – somewhat sinful, somewhat truthful,

You touch me and you're not running away now,

I want you exactly like this.

I know you are secretly attracted
To keeping me unaware of where you are,
I know, but I also love
These secret tricks.
You're used to coming
And then going.
I know it, you know it,
And lots of others do too...

vi Indeed, such self-criticism appears typical of Eastern Europe, maybe due to being a legacy of different waves of colonialism and an unfulfilled aspiration to look 'western'. For more on the issue, see Ewa Mazierska, Lars Kristensen and Eva Naripea's work on postcolonial Eastern European cinema (2014) and Maya Nedyalkova's research on the transnational aspects of the Bulgarian film industry (2015).