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# They've Translated My Song, Ma

## Shifts in Song Translation

### Abstract

*In 1970 American singer-songwriter and First Lady of Woodstock Melanie Safka released her third album *Candles in the Rain*, which included a song lamenting the music industry: *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma*. That same year the song was translated by renowned lyricists Maurice Vidalin and Mogol into both French and Italian respectively, to be performed by Dalida. The following year saw the release of a German version written by Miriam Frances and performed by Daliah Lavi. The song that started as a folk ballad thus travelled from language to language and from genre to genre, from the hippie counterculture to a more middle of the road audience.*

*The article deals with this journey and the people involved. It aims at highlighting the shifts that took place on both the textual level as well as the change of genre linked to the different performers. It follows and presents the results of a four-step comparative analysis: the first step explores music and performers; the second additional actors involved, their positions in the respective field and their contribution to the product; the third looks at the textual level (this includes aspects such as the structure of the song, singability and prosody); the fourth deals with genre conventions. The article is rooted in Translation Studies, but draws on the interdisciplinary nature of the field and connects the discipline with others such as Popular Music Studies or Sociology, thereby contributing to interdisciplinary research.*

**Keywords:** *song translation, singability, Melanie Safka, socio-translation studies, translation studies*

### 1. Introduction

**I**n 1970 American singer-songwriter Melanie Safka released her third album *Candles in the Rain*, which included a song lamenting the music industry: *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma*. That same year the song was translated by renowned lyricists Maurice Vidalin and Mogol into both French and Italian respectively, to be performed by Dalida—*Ils ont changé ma chanson, ma* and *Non è più la mia canzone*—. The following year saw the release of a German version written by Miriam Frances and performed by Daliah Lavi—*Wer hat mein Lied so*

*zerstört, Ma*. The song that started as a folk ballad thus travelled from language to language and genre to genre, from the hippie counterculture to a more middle of the road audience.

The present paper highlights aspects of this journey and takes a look at the performers and translators/lyricists involved. Special attention is paid to the shifts that took place on both the textual level as well as the change of genre linked to the different performers. It is the result of a four-step comparative analysis: the first step explores music, performers and presentation (including aspects such as voice, visual elements or instrumentation); the second additional actors involved (e.g. the lyricists/translators), their positions in the respective field; the third looks at the textual level (this includes aspects such as the structure of the song, singability and prosody); the fourth deals with genre conventions. The article is rooted in Translation Studies, but draws on the interdisciplinary nature of the field and connects the discipline with others such as Popular Music Studies and Sociology.

Paolo Prato describes artists such as Mina, Caterina Valente, Nana Mouskouri, Udo Jürgens and, indeed, Dalida as “generalist performers” (2021). One of the characteristics he names for these performers is that all of them “performed in many languages” (2021, 1). But, even more importantly, Prato explains that these artists were all “ambassadors of genres, traditions and fads coming both from the Anglo-American world and exotic places, whose central role in establishing a transcultural songbook still has to be recognized” (2021, 1). The present article wants to take a step toward such recognition by adding *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma* to that songbook, which could not exist without translation.

## 2. Theoretical background

The methodology used here is made up of the interaction of different approaches outlined in the following paragraphs. The key point of this research, and this is a growing research interest in Translation Studies,<sup>1</sup> is understanding popular music as an object of research within this discipline—similar to and of the same importance as, say, literature. The approaches used here all aim at categorizing the function of the respective text (the original as well as the translated version) as either innovative or conservative. That is why the goal is not just to retrace the transfer of these texts but also, as far as possible, their impact and possible consequences the transfer may have caused. The translations are seen in their historical and socio-cultural context, influencing factors are identified and interrelationships revealed. It is important to

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<sup>1</sup> Publications to this effect include, to just name two examples: Ronnie Apter and Mark Herman's *Translating for Singing* (2016), as well as Lucile Desblache's *Music and Translation* (2019).

emphasise that although different theoretical approaches are combined here, this research is rooted in Translation Studies, and found its starting point in Descriptive Translation Studies and especially in Gideon Toury's three-phase methodology (2012a, 33), which was further expanded and supplemented through additional components.

One of the most important things to remember in this context is that “what a translator is introducing into the target culture [...] is a *version* of the original work, cut to the measure of a pre-existing model” (Toury 2012b, 173, italics in the original). In the context of music, these *versions* are commonly referred to as ‘covers.’ Generalist performers who would release songs in various languages naturally reverted to translations e.g. covers or cover versions. It is through this that they could become what Paolo Prato describes as “mediatori culturali”<sup>2</sup> (2021, 2), and which allowed them to give “vita a una canzone pan-europea”<sup>3</sup> (2021, 2).

It is repeated time and again that a so-called good translation reads like an original, that it is invisible. Lawrence Venuti explains this invisibility as follows:

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable [...] when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text—the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original.’ (Venuti 2008, 1)

An allegedly bad translation, however, draws attention to itself by way of what is perceived as mistakes or disloyalty in comparison to the source text. What both have in common is that the translator, for whatever reason, decided to shift the text in a certain direction.<sup>4</sup> This coincides with one of the characteristics of generalist performers: “Incidono brani in almeno tre o più lingue, veicolando un'immagine cosmopolita che rende più incerta l'identificazione dei loro dischi con il paese d'origine” (Prato 2021, 9).<sup>5</sup> Translated songs mostly appear as songs written in the language they are sung in. Unless the audience knows the original, there is little to no indication that what they are hearing was translated and in some cases modified. It is these modifications or translation shifts that are to be highlighted here.

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<sup>2</sup> Cultural mediators (Unless stated otherwise all translations are by the author).

<sup>3</sup> To give life to a pan-European song.

<sup>4</sup> In the case of song translations in the 1960s and 70s it is important to note that audiences were often opposed to music that did not feature their local language. In 1964 Italy, for example, “60% del pubblico è contrario all'impiego di lingue straniere nelle canzoni” (Prato 2021, 3) (60% of the public is against the use of foreign languages in songs). Audiences in 1960s West Germany showed very similar preferences (Barschdorf 2019, 192).

<sup>5</sup> They record songs in at least three or more languages, conveying a cosmopolitan image that makes the identification of their records with the country of origin more unclear.

In the case of song translations shifts do not only apply to the lyrics but can also be found in the musical genre, which may change as the song travels, and, of course, the image—that of the song and genre as well as that of the performer associated with it. This is part of the cultural significance Gideon Toury ascribes to translation activities (2012b, 171). He explains: “‘translatorship’ amounts first and foremost to being able to *play a social role*, i.e., to fulfil a function allotted by a community—to the activity, its practitioners and/or their products—in a way which is deemed appropriate in its own terms of reference” (2012b, 168, italics in the original). It is crucial to remember this social role and include this dimension in translation research.

The sociological level of Translation Studies is very present in the norms a text is in contact with. As Toury famously put it:

a translator may subject him-/herself either to the original text, with the norms it has realized, or to the norms active in the target culture, or, in that section of it which would host the end product. If the first stance is adopted, the translation will tend to subscribe to the norms of the source text, and through them also to the norms of the source language and culture. This tendency; which has often been characterized as the pursuit of adequate translation, may well entail certain incompatibilities with target norms and practices, especially those lying beyond the mere linguistic ones. If, on the other hand, the second stance is adopted, norms systems of the target culture are triggered and set into motion. Shifts from the source text would be an almost inevitable price. Thus, whereas adherence to source norms determines a translation's adequacy as compared to the source text, subscription to norms originating in the target culture determines its acceptability. (Toury 2012b, 171)

This is not the place for a deep exploration of the different norms Toury describes. However, the importance of norms and the role they play in the decision making of the translator and the ultimate shape a text takes cannot be repeated often enough. They “govern—directly or indirectly—the relationships [...] that would obtain between the target and source texts, i.e., what is more likely to remain invariant under transformation and what will change” (Toury 2012b, 172). With the focus on the changes or shifts<sup>6</sup> that occur between a source and target text, attention also switches from the original to the translation,

to its function in the target culture and to the process leading to its production. As such, it also shifts the emphasis to the way the translator as a target culture agent negotiates contextual constraints pertaining to the target culture, in its historical, geographical, social and ideological coordinates. (Assis Rosa 2010, 99)

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<sup>6</sup> Shifts that take place due to norms are referred to as non-obligatory shifts (Weissbrod 1998, 4). Deviations of this kind are therefore not caused by differences between source and target language.

This shows the importance of including the social dimension in Translation Studies research, and also suggests the need for interdisciplinary approaches. In the case of song translations, both are called for. Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva points out that music has often been considered as being outside the boundaries of Translation Studies, which makes an interdisciplinary approach essential. She also explains that the topic was found daunting because of the “fuzzy boundaries between ‘translation,’ ‘adaptation,’ ‘version,’ ‘rewriting,’ etc.” (Susam-Sarajeva 2008, 189). However, considering this last part, the question that needs to be asked is whether this is not true of every topic covered by this discipline. It is not the scope of this paper to provide an answer to this particular question. But one of its aims is to showcase the importance of interdisciplinarity, which “has been a constant topic of discussion in Translation Studies (TS) since the emergence of the field in the 1970s, with reference to its polydisciplinary origins and the conditions of its independent evolution” (Dimitroulia and Kourdis 2019, 3). This cooperation between different disciplines is characteristic of Translation Studies. After all, it is a field that deals with the transfer of texts between cultures and languages, and thereby contributes to facilitating the transfer of knowledge between disciplines. Translation Studies are closely linked to other disciplines. This is explained by the fact that translation takes place at the meeting point of cultures, at the point at which processes of change take place. The blending of elements of the source culture with elements of the target culture means that translation is always a hybrid entity. It is an essential part of the constant intertwining of cultures. In this regard, Translation Studies represent a key area in cultural research.

In the case of song translations, Translation Studies need to be combined with, for example, Popular Music Studies to even begin getting a clearer picture of the subject matter itself. Just like Translation Studies, Music Studies, too, are by definition interdisciplinary, as Philip Tagg explains:

Studying popular music is an interdisciplinary matter. [...] Indeed, it should be stated at the outset that no analysis of musical discourse can be considered complete without consideration of social, psychological, visual, gestural, ritual, technical, historical, economic, and linguistic aspects relevant to the genre, function, style, (re-)performance situation, and listening attitude connected with the sound event being studied. (Tagg 2000, 74)

Sociology is not only used in music research. It has also been used to contribute to Translation Studies: “a case in point for the interdisciplinary evolution over the last decade is the growing inclusion of sociological approaches and their guiding potential for research development in Translation Studies” (Brems, Meylaerts and van Doorslaer 2014, 5). According to James S. Holmes, the study of translations that were produced at a certain time and place can be

understood as “socio-translation studies” (Holmes 2000, 185). Holmes explained the need for a sociological approach as follows:

No adequate general theory of translation can be developed before scholars have turned from a sentence-restricted linguistics to produce a full theory of the nature of texts. Such a theory will devote extensive attention to the *form* of texts—how their parts work together to constitute an entity—to the way texts convey often very complex patterns of *meaning*, and to the manner in which they *function* communicatively in a given socio-cultural setting. (Holmes 1988, 100, italics in the original)

Holmes described the sociology of translation as “the area of the translation function: how a translated text functions in the society into which it comes” (Holmes 1988, 95). This means that translations must be placed in a bigger picture comprising context, history and social norms (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990a, 11). In the words of Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere: “[t]here is always a context in which the translation takes place, always a history from which a text emerges and into which a text is transposed” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990a, 11). Examining this makes a sociological approach essential, as Michaela Wolf explains: “the notion of ‘rewriting’ is one that denotes both the manipulative interventions on the level of the text and the cultural (literary) devices which direct and control the production procedure in the interplay of social forces” (Wolf 2007, 10). It becomes even clearer when taking into consideration that translation

is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of literature and society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live. (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990b, ix)

### 3. The people behind the songs

Following this brief overview of the theoretical foundations, it is time to take a closer look at the actual songs and the people who were involved in the production and dissemination of *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma*. It is impossible to include all agents involved in the process of music production here, which is why the focus is only on the different performers and the lyricists who, in this case, acted as translators. The next paragraphs thus intend to briefly introduce this group, starting with the three performers.

Peter Winkler mentions Melanie Safka as an example of a “less technically skilled” singer, which he defines as “singers who don’t approach every note straight on, whose pitch intonation is highly variable, whose vocal qualities have a certain amount of ‘dirt’ (impurities such as raspiness or growliness) in them” (Winkler 2000, 39). Perhaps it is this raspy quality of her voice, along with her imperfect singing and almost shy performance style that has made Melanie Safka an instantly recognizable, relatable and beloved performer. As one of only three female solo artists given the stage at the legendary Woodstock festival,<sup>7</sup> she is perhaps best known as the First Lady of Woodstock, an icon of the Flower Power generation, an acclaimed singer-songwriter who has been described as a female Bob Dylan.

Melanie appears to have always stayed herself. Stardom, so it seems, has not made her adopt a diva image. This is also visible in the way she chose to produce her music. First of all through the fact that her husband Peter Schekeryk both managed and produced her for about 40 years. But also because they founded their own label, Neighborhood Records, in 1971 after Melanie had grown dissatisfied with the previous record companies she was signed to—something the song discussed here is testament to.

In contrast to Melanie, Dalida’s image changed over the course of her career, along with the style of the songs she performed (see Lebrun 2020). Amongst others, she was described as the Queen of Jukebox and Reine du Disco (Disco Queen). It is obvious from these attributions that Dalida was in many ways the opposite of Melanie. Apart from the performance style and the musical genres each of these two artists stands for, this also becomes apparent in the fact that Melanie is a singer-songwriter similar to the likes of Georges Brassens or Barbara, while Dalida is a pure performer (which does in no way diminish her talent). The other difference is that Melanie appeals to a very special audience mainly made up of her own generation and like-minded fans. Dalida, on the other hand, stands for mass culture and is more of a commercial artist (Lebrun 2020, 11). She is a prime example of a generalist performer firstly because she recorded songs in various languages including French, Italian, English, Spanish and Arabic, but also because “in musica ogni nazione (o quasi) vanta una o più figure che hanno convogliato su di sé i gusti dell’ascoltatore medio” (Prato 2021, 9),<sup>8</sup> and for France this was Dalida (2021, 9). Does she have anything in common with Melanie? Yes, that raspy voice—less imperfect in Dalida’s case, but still huskier than most other female singers and immediately recognisable.

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<sup>7</sup> The other two were Joan Baez and Janis Joplin.

<sup>8</sup> In music every nation (or almost) boasts one or more personalities who convey the tastes of the average listener.

Similar to Dalida, Daliah Lavi was a performer of pop songs and chansons, and like her Lavi, too, was known to perform in various languages such as German, English and Hebrew. Another aspect these two artists have in common is that they were both all too often reduced to their great looks, with their obvious musical talent only taking second place. Daliah Lavi, for instance, was described as a work of art due to her physical appearance. But the similarities do not stop there: both Daliah Lavi and Dalida had a characteristically husky voice. It is this feature that arguably made both of these singers very good choices to perform translated versions of Melanie's song. After all, the timbres of the performers of all song versions analysed here are quite similar, which provides a moment of recognition on this level for the different audiences. In a way, one could say that this is one of the factors that provide continuity and assure that the song always remains Melanie's, no matter what language it is sung in.

But who were the people who wrote the lyrics to fit these voices and the song's new cultural and social contexts? All three lyricists involved in this were not trained as translators but had a musical background and achieved great acclaim in their field, as the brief overview that follows shows.

Maurice Vidalin, who had first written for Dalida in the 1950s, translated Melanie's song into French and was a key player in the French music field of the time, producing lyrics for a diversity of genres ranging from the very literary *chanson rive gauche* to *yéyé*. He wrote lyrics and composed music for the likes of Gilbert Bécaud (*Le mur*, 1958),<sup>9</sup> Barbara (*Les boutons doré*, 1959), Charles Aznavour (*Liberté*, 1960), Françoise Hardy (*Va pas prendre un tambour*, 1963), Petula Clark (*Walter*, 1964), Juliette Gréco (*In memoriam*, 1965) and France Gall (*Don't Make War, Captain, Make Love*, 1968) to just name a few.

Vidalin's equally well talented and established Italian counterpart Giulio Rapetti, better known as Mogol, may arguably be one of the best-known Italian lyricists. His influence has been so great that Gino Castaldo (2018, 85 and 99) described him as "onnipresente."<sup>10</sup> The list of artists he worked with is seemingly endless, a few examples are: Bobby Solo (*Una lacrima sul viso*, 1964), Charles Aznavour,<sup>11</sup> Adriano Celentano (*Una festa sui prati*, 1967), Lucio Battisti (*7 e 40*, 1969), Mina (*Insieme*, 1970) and Patty Pravo (*La spada nel cuore*, 1970).

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<sup>9</sup> Together with Louis Amade and Pierre Delanoë, Maurice Vidalin formed a team of lyricists that worked with Gilbert Bécaud for most of his career.

<sup>10</sup> Besides ever-present (omnipresente), the other term used by Castaldo (2018, 93) to describe Mogol was "infallibile," (unerring) which shows just how successful his songs have been.

<sup>11</sup> Mogol translated some of Charles Aznavour's songs into Italian: *Que c'est triste Venise* (original lyrics by Françoise Dorin, 1964) became *Com'è triste Venezia* (1970) and *Et pourtant* (lyrics and music by Charles Aznavour, 1963) *Ma perché* (1963)—Aznavour performed all versions himself.



Miriam Frances wrote the lyrics for the German version of *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma*. She also created the German versions of Daliah Lavi's two biggest hits in Germany: in 1970 Frances translated Emil Dean Zoghy's *Won't You Join Me?* to *Oh, wann kommst du?* (oh, when will you come), with which Daliah Lavi stayed in the German charts for 18 weeks, peaking at number four. In 1971 the singer-lyricist-duo took on Olivia Newton John's *Would You Follow Me*,<sup>12</sup> which became *Willst du mit mir geh'n* (do you want to go with me). The song was in the German charts for 23 weeks, peaking at number nine, and firmly established Daliah Lavi as an all-time favourite with German audiences. During her career as a singer in her own right and a lyricist, Miriam Frances worked with performers such as Charles Aznavour,<sup>13</sup> Udo Jürgens (*Mädchen, was soll ich dir singen*, 1975), Nana Mouskouri and Mary Roos.<sup>14</sup> All of this suggests Miriam Frances was an esteemed and successful part of the German music field.

As outlined above, the task the three lyricists portrayed here were charged with in this particular case was to transfer Melanie's song and make it into something that could be received as an original piece in their respective languages. The song was to fit into this new context and adhere to its norms and conventions so that it would be accepted in the host culture and genre.

#### 4. Shifts in song translation—the textual level

As a next step, the analysis moved on to the textual level of the song(s). An interesting phenomenon that is part of all versions of the song is code-switching. Both the original and all three translations scrutinized for this paper include lines that are sung in a language that is different from the rest of the lyrics. In the English original and the German version this is French: "ils ont changé ma chanson, ma/ ils ont changé ma chanson/ c'est la seule chose que je peux faire/ et ce n'est pas bon, ma/ ils ont changé ma chanson" (they've changed my song, ma/ they've changed my song/ it's the only thing I can do/ and it isn't good, ma/ they've changed my song). In the French and Italian versions that part of the song is in English: "look what they done to my song, ma/ look what they done to my song/ well it's the only thing that I could do half-right/and it's turning out all wrong, ma/ look what they done to my song." The "they" used

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<sup>12</sup>The original English lyrics to both songs were written by John Kongos.

<sup>13</sup>Miriam Frances translated Aznavour's iconic *She* (1974) into German (*Sie*, 1974).

<sup>14</sup>Miriam Frances translated song lyrics for both Mouskouri and Roos. To only name two examples: she wrote the German lyrics for Cat Steven's *Moon Shadow* (1970), which was performed as *Ich bin so reich* (I'm so rich, 1970) by Mary Roos and John Denver's *Sweet Surrender* (1974), which was performed by Nana Mouskouri as *Heimliche Liebe* (secret love, 1976).

throughout the song refers to the music industry, which Melanie strikes out to, and also plays a role in other examples of deviations from the English language original.

While code-switching is the most obvious change that immediately stands out when listening to and looking at the different versions of this song, comparing the lyrics reveals several shifts. The first nine lines offer a good overview of this. In the English original, the song starts with “look what they done to my song, ma/ look what they done to my song.”<sup>15</sup> Both the Italian and the German version translate these two lines differently. In the Italian they become “non è più la mia canzone/ non è più mia oramai” (it is not my song anymore/ it is not my song anymore now) and in German they are changed to “wer hat mein Lied so zerstört, Ma/ wer hat mein Lied so zerstört” (who has destroyed my song). In the original, Melanie pleads with the interlocutor to look at what is being done with her music, but in Italian, Dalida seems to simply state that this is no longer her song, and in German no one even knows who is responsible for whatever happened to it.

The next two lines are “well, it’s the only thing that I could do half right/ and it’s turning out all wrong, ma.” This is changed in all three translations. In French Dalida sings: “moi qui l’avais écrite, paroles et musique/ j’aimais bien ma chanson, ma” (me who wrote it, words and music/ I liked my song well, ma). In Italian: “io che l’avevo scritta in una soffitta/ amavo la mia canzone” (me who wrote it in an attic/ I loved my song). These two only deviate from each other in the first part, which is likely due to constraints such as the rhyme scheme and syllable count—prosodic elements that need to be taken into account when producing a singable translation (Franzon 2008, 390). In the German song these lines became “ich wollte singen, was ich niemals sagen kann/ doch darauf kam es nicht an, Ma—” (I wanted to sing what I can never say/ but that did not matter, ma). With that, the German lyrics reflect the desperation of the original more than the other translations and retain Melanie’s feeling of being shut out and not being taken into consideration while the label she is signed to is perceived to have full power over her music and can do with it as they please.

Moving on to four more lines taken from the first part of the song: “look what they done to my brain, ma/ look what they done to my brain/ well, they picked it like a chicken bone/ and I think I’m half insane, ma.” Here Melanie once again describes the helplessness she experiences and the strong feeling of being at the mercy of others who seem to take advantage of her creative output. In French this is rendered as “ils ont changé mon tempo, ma/ et ma musique et mes

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, while the grammatically correct form of this phrase would of course be “look what they have done to my song,” as the title suggests, Melanie seems to omit the word have when singing.

mots/ ils n'ont rien compris à la chanson/ où j'avais écrit ma vie, oh ma" (they have changed my tempo, ma / and my music and my words/ they have not understood anything of the song/ where I wrote my life). Apart from the last line, this is actually a good description of what was done to the song in translation since the tempo was indeed changed along with the tonality in all three versions. The translated songs are all a little faster paced and more lively than the original, which is reflected in a higher number of beats per minute. This may also be the reason why both the French and Italian versions have a shorter duration than the English; only the German version is a little longer than the original. Going back to the lyrics: in Italian these lines are translated as "non son più mie le parole/ le hanno cambiate perché/ cantavo la mia vita, ma non l'han capita/ ho quasi pianto quando l'ho sentita" (the words are no longer mine/ they have changed them because/ I sang my life, but they haven't understood/ I almost cried when I heard it), and in German: "wer hat den Sinn so verdreht, Ma/ wer hat den Sinn so verdreht/ jedes Wort das legten sie falsch aus/ und dafür gab es Applaus, Ma" (who has twisted the meaning, ma/ who has twisted the meaning/ every word they misinterpreted/ and there was applause, ma). This is followed by five lines in which Melanie describes how she would prefer to hide and live in a good book, to avoid having to witness what was happening to her music. The metaphor of the book disappeared in the translation process. Instead, the German version wants for a dream to find happiness and refuge in; and both the French and Italian lyrics speak of the love that went into the song.

The final stanza went through some changes, too: in the original, the alleged deformation of the song is described as it being "tied up in a plastic bag" and turned upside down. In German, this strong mental image is changed to tears and the lines "würden alle Tränen dereinst zu Geld/ wie reich wär' diese Welt dann" (if all tears one day turned to money/ how rich would the world then be). This suggests that a stronger emphasis was placed on the feelings of the musician, who was seemingly reduced to tears as opposed to focussing on what was happening to the song. The Italian and French versions also highlight the singer's emotional state by saying that "they" may have changed the song, but not her (the singer).

To summarise, it can be said that each version uses a different way to describe the story and the emotional distress depicted in the original. They each do so by moving away from the English text as far as metaphors and the lexical level of the lyrics are concerned, which is why these are examples of translation shifts. However, they succeed in transporting and recreating/rewriting the emotional level in a singable way that, at the same time, still respects the conventions/norms of the genre(s) the new lyrics were created for, and that is what song translation should ideally be all about.

## 5. Discussion

Melanie Safka rose to fame during “the commercial folk music revival that took place in the United States during the late 1950s and 1960s. Although initially apolitical, this revival took on political undertones in its later years in response to the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War” (Wollmann 2010, 24-25). However, along with the social and political developments, the genre and its artists changed and “by the mid-1960s, many performers who were active in the folk scene became increasingly interested in expressing personal sentiments” (Wollmann 2010, 25). It is against this backdrop that Melanie, who has never been known as a conformist, wrote the folk ballad *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma*, which deals with her personal feelings towards the music industry. The translations outlined above are testimonies of the song’s international success.

It was translated quickly after its first release in the United States and the lyricists involved in this were well established in their field and successful members of the music scene in their respective countries, as were the performers chosen for the translated versions. All of this suggests that the record labels involved in this process were eager to replicate a song that would do well on the respective market, enter the charts and sell a lot of copies.<sup>16</sup> It was common practice to take hits from other parts of the world and create versions in the local language using high profile lyricists and performers to take advantage of the prestige coming in from all sides—the song as the product and the people who invested their talents and positions to produce it. As Simon Frith puts it: “popular music genres are constructed—and must be understood—*within* a commercial/cultural process” (Frith 1996, 88-89, italics in the original). While folk was a popular genre in the United States at the time Melanie’s song was translated, the European mainstream preferred different genres.<sup>17</sup> It comes as no surprise then that the

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<sup>16</sup> In the case of the French translation this plan worked out: according to the numbers given by Top France, Dalida’s version of the song sold more than 60,000 times. In Germany, Daliah Lavi’s version stayed in the charts for 15 weeks, peaking at number eleven. To contrast: the original song never entered the German charts.

<sup>17</sup> It needs to be mentioned that outside the US, folk also took on meanings and characteristics that differed from the American genre. Jacopo Tomatis describes the Italian view on folk in the 1960s as follows: “Around 1965, the concept of folk in Italy had two different understandings, which often got mixed up. On one side, ‘folk’ meant Italian folk music (*musica popolare*), and bore a political connotation. On the other, the term referred to English and American folksingers—namely Donovan, Dylan and their imitators—and also Italian ones. Later, around 1966, folk music became the new trend. The Italian recording industry started exploiting the tag ‘folk’ as a commercial label to launch some new bands and soloists. Some of them (for instance Luigi Tenco) were also labelled as ‘beat,’ or ‘cantautori,’ in the same period” (Tomatis 2014, 27-28, emphasis in original).

choice of performers for the translated versions of the song indicates a shift away from folk to the more mainstream world of *variété* or *musica leggera*. The translations were thus produced to function in these genres and their new cultural and social contexts. They introduced a certain level of innovation in regard to making the work of a young American artist connected to the counterculture and Woodstock fame, known in other parts of the world, and also by retaining the covert message of criticism towards the music industry found in the song. They did so, however, without challenging genre conventions or social norms or constraints. In a way, it can be said that, as described above, these translations function as well as they did because they ascribe to the formula of invisible equalling good.

The translation shifts described here are arguably not entirely incomparable to the changes that occurred between the original song and some of its English language cover versions. For example, Nina Simone covered *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma* in 1971 and Ray Charles in 1972. Both of these versions take the song away from its original folk genre and introduce it to soul. They both use different instrumentation and made changes to the melody of the song. They are also slightly longer than the original and faster-paced. Nina Simone also introduced changes on the textual level. All of these deviations are similar to those found in the translations. For this reason, it may be called for to think of cover versions such as these as intralingual translations. But apart from that, it is ironic that a song written to decry the music industry was chosen by representatives of that same industry to be translated and thus travel the world to be performed by artists at the height of their commercial success.

## 6. Conclusion

Often, translation shifts in song lyrics cause a considerable discrepancy between the source and target text as far as the story conveyed through the song is concerned (Barschdorf 2018). However, the present example shows that it is possible to find solutions to change certain aspects and details of the story that is to change parts of the song on the prosodic level such as metaphors, wordplay, keywords and/or mental images, without sacrificing the original message. Shifts are an inevitable part of singable song translations, and indeed all translations; they will always occur in one way or another. But they do not always equal a shift away from what the respective artist meant to say.

However, the shifts presented above did influence how the song was perceived outside its original context. As pointed out, each of the performers had a strong public image and acted as a representative of a certain way of life and a musical genre to their respective fans and audiences—thus making them the ambassadors of genres Paolo Prato describes as generalist

performers. In the case of Melanie, this genre was folk, the 1960s counterculture and the protest music associated with that time. Her criticism of the music industry portrayed in the song fits this context and would arguably have made sense to her audience. Both Dalida and Daliah Lavi, on the other hand, had an entirely different fan base and were much more associated with mainstream and mass culture.

The original critical folk song, thus became more of a piece categorized as middle of the road music. Of course the lyrics, as shown above, retained their critical quality. But since the audiences changed along with the performers, this would only be of interest to those few listeners that actually took the time to take in the lyrics and their meaning instead of humming along to the catchy chorus. All of this makes *What Have They Done to My Song, Ma* a prime candidate for inclusion in the transcultural songbook.

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