THOMAS SOLOMON

Self-censorship as Critique: The Case of Turkish Rapper Sagopa Kajmer

Self-censorship can be practiced by various agents at different stages of the process of musical production and dissemination, including by individual performing artists, by the commercial entities such as the record companies that publish and market the artists' work, by media outlets such as radio and television stations, and by other actors or institutions. But the idea of self-censorship most commonly assumes an individual creative artist or musical group choosing, because of prior intimidation or coercion, to alter the form or content of their creative work in order to avoid future sanction. Looking through some of the recent literature on music censorship, it seems to me that the nature of self-censorship is largely taken for granted.[1] It seems to be generally assumed that self-censorship is from the start always a capitulation – even if a sometimes cagey one – to the powers that would censor. And it seems to be generally accepted that when an artist or institution engages in self-censorship, the battle has already been (at least partly) lost. In their introduction to the pioneering collection of essays *Policing Pop*, for example, Cloonan and Garofalo refer to "prior capitulation [...] which leads to that most pernicious of all forms of censorship – self-censorship."[2] Self-censorship is thus assumed to involve a lack or loss of agency on the part of those who are doing it – a surrendering of their agency to the state, the market, religiously oriented pressure groups, or whatever other institution is requiring that the censorship be done. This set of assumptions can be characterized as a *victimology* approach to self-censorship.

But self-censorship is itself a social and cultural practice, also involving agency on the part of those engaging in it. I think that there is a need to more thoroughly theorize self-censorship in those terms. I suggest that, at least in cases where individual artists are involved in censoring their own work, the possibilities for artistic expression are not just limited by self-censorship. In contrast, I suggest that self-censorship can also actually open up new avenues for creative practice. Any social action contains within itself the possibility of both its own propagation or affirmation and its own negation or contestation. It may seem paradoxical, but I want to argue that self-censorship also

1 I have in mind here books such as Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo, eds., *Policing Pop* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), Michael Drewett and Martin Cloonan, eds., *Popular Music Censorship in Africa* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), Marie Korpe, ed., *Shoot the Singer! Music Censorship Today* (London: Zed Books, 2004) and John Street, *Music and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012).

2 Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo, "Introduction," in *Policing Pop*, ed. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 3.

potentially opens up possibilities for creative practice, for reflection on that practice, and even for critique of censorship itself. If, like hegemony, censorship always necessarily contains within itself the possibility of its own negation, one possible source of that negation might be in the creative exploration of the possibilities for artistic expression that self-censorship not only closes off, but that it also potentially enables.

As a way of exploring these ideas, I focus on the self-censorship practices of one particular artist, the Turkish rapper Sagopa Kajmer (Figure 1), one of the aliases of Yunus Özyavuz, also known as DJ Mic Check, and also known in the late 1990s as the "one-man group" Silahsız Kuvvet. When talking about him here in general as a musician and rapper apart from his specific incarnations or personas, I will refer to him as Mic Check. Mic Check also produces his own songs, making the beats for them by assembling tracks in his studio by combining various samples. Being his own producer as well as a rapper, Mic Check has at hand a particular set of resources and skills with which to approach self-censorship as cultural practice.

Mic Check first developed the rapper identity "Sagopa Kajmer" around the year 2001 as an alternative persona to his one-man group "Silahsız Kuvvet" ("Unarmed Forces"), under the name of which he released two albums in the commercial market in Turkey.[3] As Silahsız Kuvvet he had cultivated a rapping style with literary pretensions through allusions to elite Turkish and Ottoman poetic traditions, drawing on his university study of Persian language and literature. In musical terms, many of Mic Check's songs released under the Silahsız Kuvvet name can be placed within the "oriental hip-hop" genre that characterized much Turkish rap during the 1990s, with songs built around melodic samples featuring very recognizable melodies from Turkish folk tunes, which complemented the somewhat elevated Turkish language used in the raps.[4] But as Sagopa Kajmer (a name he says came to him in a dream) he began to explore in his raps a more earthy, colloquial Turkish, including extensive use of Turkish swear words as well as a deeper and more guttural voice from further back in the throat. The musical style of his first songs as Sagopa Kajmer was also distinct from his work as Silahsız Kuvvet. Instead of the thick textures and folk melodies of "oriental hip-hop," these songs were characterized by sparse textures in the rhythm section and by synthesized string (and occasionally piano) sounds, or samples from western classical music.

3 Silahsız Kuvvet, *Sözlerim Silahım*, Hammer Müzik HPNCD002, 2001; Silahsız Kuvvet, *İhtiyar Heyeti*, Hammer Müzik HPNCD005, 2002.

4 On "oriental hip-hop," see Caroline Diessel, "Bridging East and West on the 'Orient Express': Oriental Hip-Hop in the Turkish Diaspora of Berlin," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 13 (2001): 165-187, Martin Greve and Ayhan Kaya, "Islamic Force, Takım 34 und andere Identitätsmixturen türkischer Rapper in Berlin und Istanbul," in *Rap: More Than Words*, ed. Eva Kimminich (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 161-179, Ayhan Kaya, *'Sicher in Kreuzberg': Constructing Diasporas: Turkish Hip-Hop Youth in Berlin* (Bielefeld: Transaction Publishers, 2001) and "Aesthetics of Diaspora: Contemporary Minstrels in Turkish Berlin," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28 (2002): 43-62, Dorit Klebe, "Kanak Attak in Germany: A Multiethnic Network of Youths Employing Musical Forms of Expression," in *Manifold Identities: Studies on Music and Minorities*, ed. Ursula Hemetek, Gerda Lechleitner, Inna Naroditskaya and Anna Czekanowska (London: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2004), 162-179 and Thomas Solomon, "Whose Diaspora?: Hybrid Identities in 'Turkish Rap' in Germany," in *Music and Identity in Norway and Beyond: Essays Commemorating Edvard Grieg the Humanist*, ed. Thomas Solomon (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2011), 253-267.

Figure 1: Turkish rapper and DJ Yunus Özyavuz, aka DJ Mic Check, aka Sagopa Kajmer.

Figure 2: Cover of the self-titled first album of Sagopa Kajmer (2002).

At first, Mic Check kept his new persona as Sagopa Kajmer "underground"[5] – and maintained the songs in their original uncensored form – by releasing the unexpurgated songs for free on the Internet. Eventually in 2002 Mic Check decided to make a commercial release as Sagopa Kajmer with the Istanbul-based record company Hammer Müzik (Figure 2), drawing on these same songs.[6] In deciding to make a commercial release of these songs, Mic Check put himself in the position of coming up against the Turkish state's censorship of recordings in the commercial market.

State censorship of commercial recordings in Turkey

There are various governmental bodies in Turkey empowered to censor journalistic, intellectual and artistic production, telecommunications and the Internet.[7] I will mention here only one of these bodies, which in 2002 operated from within the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. All pre-recorded media products (CDs, cassettes, DVDs, VCDs, CD-ROMs etc.) sold in Turkey, both those domestically produced and those licensed from other companies outside of Turkey, must carry a *bandrol*, a holographic sticker issued by the *Telif Hakları ve Sinema Genel Müdürlüğü* (General Directorate of Copyrights and Cinema) within this ministry. A code number on the *bandrol* identifies the manufacturer and the specific product and indicates that the manufacturer has paid the required tax on the recorded physical units produced. The primary use of the *bandrol* system is thus to indirectly monitor sales by keeping track of production runs.[8] Since the number of unique identifying *bandrol*s issued for a particular title is supposed to be the same as the number of copies of that title actually manufactured, this should ensure that the required taxes are paid for each copy (potentially) sold.[9] But the issuance of a *bandrol* for any specific new title that a publisher applies for is not guaranteed, and the system can also be used to censor material the ministry finds objectionable. The ministry may simply refuse to issue a *bandrol* for a particular recording, effectively banning it from the retail market within Turkey. Among the reasons for this censoring of recordings may be language objectionable to the government for its political content, such as song lyrics perceived to advocate violence, political views the government would rather not see expressed, such as advocating Kurdish

5 For a discussion of the meanings of the term "underground" within the Turkish hip-hop community in Istanbul, see Thomas Solomon, "Living Underground is Tough: Authenticity and Locality in the Hip-hop Community in Istanbul, Turkey," *Popular Music* 24 (2005): 1-20.

6 Sagopa Kajmer, *Sagopa Kajmer*, Hammer Müzik HPNCD006, 2002.

7 A systematic overview of music censorship in Turkey remains to be written. For anecdotal accounts focusing mostly on the experiences of individual artists and performing groups, and largely from an activist perspective, see Şanar Yurdatapan, "Turkey: Censorship Past and Present," in *Shoot the Singer! Music Censorship Today*, ed. Marie Korpe (London: Zed Books, 2004), 189-96, and Freemuse, "And the 'Beat' Goes On – Censorship in Turkey," in *Music Will not Be Silenced: 3rd Freemuse World Conference on Music and Censorship, Istanbul 25-26 November 2006*, ed. Marie Korpe (Copenhagen: Freemuse, 2007), 36-43, accessed September 4, 2007, http://freemuse.org/archives/1003.

8 Eliot Bates, "Social Interactions, Musical Arrangement, and the Production of Digital Audio in Istanbul Recording Studios" (PhD diss., University of California Berkeley, 2008), 77, 151.

9 As Bates notes, this system actually measures production, not final sales.

cultural or political rights, or simply the presence of swear words.[10] For example, another Turkish rapper (not Mic Check) told me he would not even bother trying to have his album issued by a commercial record company since he knew that, because of the swearing in his songs, the album would never make it past the *bandrol*-issuing process. He thus chose instead to distribute the album himself as a so-called "underground" release, selling self-produced copies without a *bandrol* at his concerts and at hip-hop parties.[11]

Knowing that the pervasive swearing in his songs as Sagopa Kajmer would never make it past the censors in the Ministry of Culture who had to approve all new recordings before they could be released on the commercial market, Mic Check had to address the question of what to do with the swearing in these songs. Rather than attempt to hide the presence of swear words by momentarily muting the vocal track (as was common in other Turkish popular music at this time), his solution on many of the songs was to cover up the objectionable language with obvious sound effects or samples which were audibly incongruous with the surrounding musical textures. The net effect of the use of these very obvious sound effects and samples was to blatantly call attention to the fact that the songs had been censored.

Strategies and tactics of self-censorship

In his early songs as Sagopa Kajmer, Mic Check drew on a wide repertoire of strategies for obscuring the Turkish swear words that he anticipated would need to be censored in order for the recordings to be commercially released in the Turkish market. In this section I summarize the musical gestures Mic Check used for covering up the Turkish swear words in some of his first songs commercially released as the persona Sagopa Kajmer, giving a few examples. In the song text excerpts transcribed here, I use the following format: First I present in Turkish the uncensored version that was distributed for free on the Internet, indicating with *italics and underlining* the language that would later be censored, but which remains intact in this first version. Parallel to this I present an English translation, indicating the equivalent strong language also with *italics and underlining*. Then I present a second transcription in Turkish of the censored version that appeared on the commercial CD release, substituting for the censored words a description in English, in [*brackets with italics and underlining*], of the technique or sampled material used to obscure them. Parallel to this I present a second translation in English, also deleting the equivalent censored words and indicating again in [*brackets with italics and underlining*] the technique or material used to obscure the language. These "before and after" transcrip-

10 In actual practice, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism cannot listen to every recording and watch every film before it is published and made available for purchase. Many things which the state might find objectionable are thus allowed to be published and circulate as media products, which then also become available for use by broadcasters. The state operates another, separate organ for censorship of broadcasting; this agency is able to ban material that has already been officially accepted for publication via the *bandrol* system.

11 See Solomon, "Living Underground," 4-5, for further discussion.

tions should give the reader some sense of how these examples sound, but are of course no substitute for listening to the recordings themselves. See the links listed in the appendix at the end of this article for online locations where one may listen to the songs discussed here.

The simplest approach Mic Check used, following common practice in Turkish popular music as mentioned above, to obscure language that would not make it past the government censors, was to simply mute the vocal track momentarily during specific words or syllables, creating a blank space in the vocal line. If the rest of the musical texture – which is *not* muted – is particularly dense, listeners may not even notice the missing words, especially if they are not paying close attention to the song text. An example of this can be heard in the censored version of the song "Ölüm benim doğum günüm" ("My death is my birth").

Excerpt from "Ölüm benim doğum günüm" ("My death is my birth")

Original Turkish, uncensored version	***English translation***
Çepeçevre peşimdeler peşimdeler	They're chasing me, chasing me
Piçler ölmez	*Bastards* never die

Original Turkish, censored version	***English translation***
Çepeçevre peşimdeler peşimdeler	They're chasing me, chasing me
[*vocal track muted*] ölmez	[*vocal track muted*] never die

A second approach Mic Check used is what I call the "generic beep" – an electronic beep that sticks out from the surrounding musical texture and thus, in a way very different from simply temporarily muting the vocal track, calls attention to the fact that something is being obscured and that censorship is taking place. Because of the generic nature of such beeps, one can not be sure if the artist him or herself has introduced this mode of censorship during the initial recording process, or if it has been imposed on the recording after the fact by some other actor, such as a record company or radio station. This technique was used in the censored version of the song "Tımarlı hastane" ("Madhouse").

Excerpt from "Tımarlı hastane" ("Madhouse")

uncensored version	
Sagopa'nın evi tımarlı hastane, yo!	Sagopa's house is a madhouse, yo!
Bok yeme	Don't *fuck up* [lit.: "Don't eat *shit*"]
Otur aşağıya	Sit down there

censored version	
Sagopa'nın evi tımarlı hastane, yo!	Sagopa's house is a madhouse, yo!
[*beep*] yeme	Don't [*beep*]
Otur aşağıya	Sit down there

A third approach was to use other fairly simple ways of obscuring the swear words that begin, I suggest, to show more artistic agency than the "generic beep." For example, Mic Check frequently used a simple turntable scratch effect to cover up specific syllables or short words. This use of turntable scratching more specifically suggests the agency of Mic Check in the act of censorship, since he is also known as a DJ and turntablist, and it can be assumed that he himself added these effects to mask the words being censored. Mic Check used this technique in the censored version of "Yeraltındaki karanlık" ("The darkness underground"), a song about the 1990s wars in Bosnia and Chechnya and the civil war in the Kurdish region of southeast Turkey.[12]

Excerpt from "Yeraltındaki karanlık" ("The darkness underground")

uncensored version	
Öldürdük delicesine masum bildiğimizi	We killed like mad those whom we know are innocent
Siktir et "gelir geçer" dediler	*Fuck it*, they said "this too will pass"
Siktir et "bu da biter" dediler	*Fuck it*, they said "it will be over soon"
Dayanamadım, yıllardır dayanamıyorum	I can't stand it, for years I can't stand it
censored version	
Öldürdük delicesine masum bildiğimizi	We killed like mad those whom we know are innocent
[*scratch*] "gelir geçer" dediler	[*scratch*] they said "this too will pass"
[*scratch*] "bu da biter" dediler	[*scratch*] they said "it will be over soon"
Dayanamadım, yıllardır dayanamıyorum	I can't stand it, for years I can't stand it

What I am particularly interested in, in this article, is a fourth technique of self-censorship which involves much more elaborate ways of obscuring swear words, which Mic Check used especially when the language to be masked involved longer phrases. In these cases, he frequently covered up the phrases with extensive collages of samples. These collages typically drew on a wide variety of source materials for samples, and their construction and deployment in specific songs showed a virtuosic skill in computer-based musical production involving the manipulation and combination of samples. I suggest that these sample collages not only call attention to the fact that Mic Check was engaging in self-censorship, but that in their form and content, the collages actually comment directly or indirectly on the very fact that censorship was taking place in the recording. In some cases, these sample collages seem to make a parody out of the act of censorship, and even to talk back to the powers that are requiring Mic Check to engage in self-censorship in the first place. To account for this, I

12 This song uses as its main musical motif a repeated sample from Mozart's *Requiem*, and is thus an example of Mic Check's use of samples from western classical music in his early songs as Sagopa Kajmer, as mentioned above.

need to briefly give some examples of the source material Mic Check sampled from to use in his songs.

One source Mic Check drew on for samples was other rap songs in English by African-American performers. One specific source he used was a fragment from the song "Public Enemy No. 1" by the well-known American rap group Public Enemy, from their first album *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*, released in 1987.[13] The fragment consists of a descending melodic motif followed by the voice of the group's rapper Flavor Flav exclaiming "o ha!" While "o ha" is a rather generic exclamation in English, by coincidence, in Turkish "o ha" is a rather rude expression of surprise, dismay or disgust. It is not strong enough to be censored, but it is not an expression one uses in polite company either. Another example of an American rap track that Mic Check sampled from is the song "Pump Me Up" by Will Smith and DJ Jazzy Jeff, from Will Smith's second album *Willennium*, released in 1999.[14] The sample is from one of the appearances of a recurring vocal phrase from the mostly instrumental song – a vehicle to show off DJ Jazzy Jeff's scratching skills on the turntable – that appears at the end of sections, where a chorus of voices rhythmically chants "Pump, pump, pump, pump me up!" The Public Enemy and Will Smith samples are both exactly one measure in medium tempo 4/4 time, so they work well as short musical units that can be "dropped in" on top of complete measures in Mic Check's songs when he needed to obscure a longer sequence of Turkish swear words that filled an entire measure. Mic Check's use of samples taken from various recordings of African-American rap in English (including other examples not discussed here) is also a vehicle for displaying his extensive knowledge of American hip-hop music, as he drew on a variety of rap recordings, both canonical and obscure.

Another source Mic Check drew on for sample sources was sound effects and snippets of dialog from cartoons, TV shows and films both in Turkish and, especially, in English. Samples he used in this way included cartoonish screams and noises, gunshot sounds, and dialog from what sounds like gangster films. He was especially fond of using bits of sampled dialog from the American TV cartoon *South Park*, which had begun in 1997. With its ensemble of eight-year old characters who themselves frequently use strong English swear words, South Park had by the year 2000 become well-known for pushing the boundaries of what one can say and represent on television. The show had already by then become something of an icon of resistance against censorship. A running gag during the early years of the show was that in nearly every episode the character Kenny suffered a violent and gruesome death, after which the other characters always exclaimed "Oh my God, they killed Kenny. You bastards!" Kenny would of course return again in the following episode, only for the cycle to be repeated.[15] Mic Check sampled this famous bit of dialog from one of the show's episodes and used the fragments "Oh my God" and "You bastards!" in several of his songs. Yet another

13 Public Enemy, "Public Enemy No. 1," *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*, Def Jam 527 357-2, 1987.

14 Will Smith, "Pump Me Up," *Willennium*, Columbia 494939 2, 1999.

15 A fan-made compilation of several of these sequences can be viewed on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBoTEZxWkec, accessed April 24, 2012.

very recognizable sample from film dialog that Mic Check used was comic actor Mike Myers' "Austin Powers" character's recurring exclamation "Yeah baby!" from the series of films beginning with *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* in 1997.

Mic Check drew on and combined samples from all of these different sources in collages of various lengths, from short individual samples used to obscure individual words or short phrases, up to quite long and complex combinations of samples that he used to cover up longer phrases or even complete lines of rap containing long sequences of Turkish swear words. In some cases the Turkish swear words were masked by sampled swear words in English, which, ironically enough, Turkish censors generally leave alone. All these sample collages, whether short or lengthy, also work musically, in the sense that they begin and end in places that not only serve to obscure the Turkish swear words, but that also maintain the accentuation and rhythmic flow of the music, while at the same time sticking out from the surrounding musical texture in terms of timbre. So the choices Mic Check made regarding which samples to use, how to combine them, and how to integrate them into the rhythmic flow of his songs, show a considerable amount of artistic judgement and musical sense, constituting in effect audible traces of his own agency as the studio producer of the songs.

An example of a song incorporating such complex collages of samples in order to censor extensive use of Turkish swear words is the track "Siktirin gidin," the title of which can be translated as "Fuck you all" or "All of you fuck off."[16] The song targets what Mic Check considered to be superficial commercial Turkish pop music and the people who make and consume it, and asserts hip-hop and rap music as authentic cultural and musical expressions, with Sagopa Kajmer as hip-hop's true and authentic proponent. Parts of the song, not transcribed here, specifically quote from and parody various pop songs from around the years 1999-2000 by famous Turkish pop stars such as Tarkan (parodying his 1990s hits "Hepsi senin mi?," "Şımarık" and "Kır zincirlerini"), Ebru Yaşar (referencing her 1999 song "Seni anan benim için doğurmuş"), Murat Başaran (referring to his hit "Azıcık ucundan" from 1999) and Turkish actress turned pop singer Banu Alkan (parodying her hit "Neremi" from 1998). The chorus of "Siktirin gidin" consists of the repeated couplet "Gerçek adım hiphop, hiphopın askerleri / Siktirin gidin popun piçleri" ("My real name is hiphop, the soldiers of hiphop / Fuck off you bastards of pop!"). In the censored version of the song, the first statement of the second line of the couplet is covered up by the Public Enemy sample mentioned above, and the subsequent repetition of the same line is obscured by the Will Smith sample.

Mic Check's use of sampled film and cartoon dialog and sound effects in the different sample collages (with often very recognizable samples such as the *South Park* and "Austin Powers" dialog mentioned above) to censor the frequent and sometimes long sequences of Turkish swear words during the verses of this song results in an unsettling, disorienting listening experience, deconstructing the song from within, since so many parts of it have clearly been subject to censorship. The censored version of the song can

16 The title of the song, since it contains one of the strongest possible swear words in Turkish, is also censored on the back cover of the CD, where it is listed as "S.K.T.R.N.G.D.N."

thus be heard as a virtuosic display of sample-based studio production techniques that highlights Mic Check's fluency in hip-hop's often-commented on cut-up aesthetics, as in Paul Gilroy's characterization of "the deliberately fractured form" of hip-hop music.[17]

Excerpt 1 from "Siktirin gidin" ("Fuck you all")

uncensored version	
[From first verse]	
Burası Sagopanın mekânı	This is Sagopa's place
Laflarına dikkat et	Pay attention to what he says
Sikerler ananın amını	*They fuck your mother's pussy*
Pop kültürü sardı korkularımı eritti rüyalarımı	Pop culture enveloped my fears, it destroyed my dreams
Binlerce genç paçoz dinledi bu *amına koduklarımı*	Thousands of young whores listened to this *fucking* stuff
Ne alaka var sözlerinde, ne de ritimlerinde bir temel	There is no relevance in its lyrics, no basis in its rhythms
Şerefsiz üçkağıtçı köpekler	Dishonorable scammers, dogs
Ticari işler *sikmiş sizin götünüzü*	Commercial interests *fucked you in the ass*
İmaj makerlar uzatmış ömrünüzü	The image makers make you younger
Mikrofona para diye bakan budala aşık popçular	Imbecile pop stars in love who look at a microphone and see money
Etiler'de yumuşaklar, ticaretçiler, listelerde topçular	The effeminate ones in Etiler,[18] the traders, the strikers[19] in the pop charts
Koy topa patlasın	Put it on the ball and let it explode
Hiphop gerçek adım	My real name is hiphop
Gerisini *sikip atsin!*	*Fuck* the rest *and throw it away!*
Senin gavatin menajerin	*Your pimp is your manager*
censored version	
Burası Sagopanın mekânı	This is Sagopa's place
Laflarına dikkat et	Pay attention to what he says
[*sample: Austin Powers: "Yeah baby!"; electronic beeps*]	[*sample: Austin Powers: "Yeah baby!"; electronic beeps*]
Pop kültürü sardı korkularımı eritti rüyalarımı	Pop culture enveloped my fears, it destroyed my dreams

17 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 104. See also Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London: Methuen, 1987), and Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).

18 Etiler is an upscale district in Istanbul.

19 This is a reference to some famous Turkish football players who ventured into the pop music field and made CDs/cassettes around the year 2000.

Binlerce genç paçoz dinledi bu [*cartoonish scream*]	Thousands of young whores listened to this [*cartoonish scream*]
Ne alaka var sözlerinde, ne de ritimlerinde bir temel	There is no relevance in its lyrics, no basis in its rhythms
Şerefsiz üçkağıtçı köpekler	Dishonorable scammers, dogs
Ticari işler [*indistinct cartoonish dialogue fragment & sound effects*]	Commercial interests [*indistinct cartoonish dialogue fragment & sound effects*]
İmaj makerlar uzatmış ömrünüzü	The image makers make you younger
Mikrofona para diye bakan budala aşık popçular	Imbecile pop stars in love who look at a microphone and see money
Etiler'de yumuşaklar, ticaretçiler, listelerde topçular	The effeminate ones in Etiler, the traders, the strikers in the pop charts
Koy topa patlasın	Put it on the ball and let it explode
Hiphop gerçek adım	My real name is hiphop
Gerisini [*cartoonish sound effects*]	[*Cartoonish sound effects*] the rest
[*Cartoonish sound*]	[*Cartoonish sound*]

Excerpt 2 from "Siktirin gidin" ("Fuck you all")

uncensored version

[End of first verse]	
Huyunu suyunu bilmediğiğm *pezevenklere* Kajmerden darbe	From Kajmer a blow *to the pimps* who I-don't-know-what-they're-made-of
Siktirin gidin orospunun dölleri, orospunun dölleri	*Fuck off you whore-spawn, whore-spawn*
Gerçek adım hiphop, hiphopın askerleri	My real name is hiphop, the soldiers of hiphop
[Chorus]	
Gerçek adım hiphop, hiphopın askerleri	My real name is hiphop, the soldiers of hiphop
Siktirin gidin popun piçleri	*Fuck off you bastards of pop*
Gerçek adım hiphop, hiphopın askerleri	My real name is hiphop, the soldiers of hiphop
Siktirin gidin popun piçleri	*Fuck off you bastards of pop*

censored version

Huyunu suyunu bilmediğim [*scratch; voice: "Muthafucka say what?"*] Kajmerden darbe	From Kajmer a blow [*scratch; voice: "Muthafucka say what?"*] who I-don't-know-what-they're-made-of
[*sound effects; South Park: "Oh my* God!*"; scratch; film dialogue:* "Why don't you shut up!"]	[*sound effects; South Park: "Oh my* God!*"; scratch; film dialogue:* *"Why don't you shut up!"*]

Gerçek adım hiphop, hiphopın askerleri	My real name is hiphop, the soldiers of hiphop
[Chorus]	
Gerçek adım hiphop, hiphopın askerleri	My real name is hiphop, the soldiers of hiphop
[*sample: Public Enemy: "O ha!"*]	[*sample: Public Enemy: "O ha!"*]
Gerçek adım hiphop, hiphopın askerleri	My real name is hiphop, the soldiers of hiphop
[*sample: Will Smith: "Pump pump pump pump me up"*]	[*sample: Will Smith: "Pump pump pump pump me up"*]

While a lot more could be said about this song, I will just point to a couple of aspects. In the uncensored version of the second excerpt, Mic Check obscures the Turkish word *pezevenk*, a very strong Turkish word meaning "pimp" (the word is much stronger in Turkish than its closest English equivalent), with a sampled voice saying in English the phrase "Motherfucker say what?" with a stylized pronunciation suggesting street language or an African-American dialect; the pronunciation of the first word of the phrase can be roughly represented with the spelling *muthafucka*. This vocal sample comes from yet another American rap song, "Boyz-n-the-Hood" by Eazy-E, yet again showing Mic Check's knowledge of canonical American rap recordings.[20] As I have already mentioned, English swear words are typically not censored in recordings released in Turkey, so here Mic Check gets around the requirement to censor strong words in one language by substituting equally strong words in another language. The specific words spoken by the sampled voice are themselves a meta-commentary on the act of verbal communication, referring to someone else's speech – "Muthafucka *say* what?" – and asking what that person said while simultaneously insulting them – "*Muthafucka* say what?" This sampled phrase thus serves both to mask the Turkish swear word (*pezevenk*) with an English swear word (*motherfucker*) while also interrogating someone's speech, demanding a repetition or clarification – "Muthafucka say *what*?" When this sample is heard within the context of the song, the unclear speech referred to can be that of Sagopa Kajmer's own (censored) voice, asking him to repeat what he said because it was not clear, precisely because it was obscured by the very voice demanding the clarification. The intruding sampled voice can also be heard as a stand-in for the very authority that called for the censorship to take place, questioning the rapper's right to say what he wants to. Finally, the sampled voice can also be heard as a proxy voice for the rapper himself, aggressively backtalking the censoring authority and repudiating its demand that censorship take place. The interplay of these different hearings of this sampled voice signifies on the very act of self-censorship, as the

20 This song was first released on the 1987 compilation album *N.W.A. and the Posse* (Macola Records MRC-LP-1057), and then again in a remix on Eazy-E's solo debut album *Eazy-Duz-It* (Ruthless Records/Priority Records CDL57111) in 1988. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for DMO for pointing out the source of this sample, which I had missed.

sampled voice turns the act of self-censorship that it is a vehicle for into a meta-communicative act – in effect, through this sampled voice the self-censorship calls attention to and comments on itself.

As if to emphasize this point, a similar meta-commentary emerges from the very next line of the censored version of the song. This time, in what sounds like a bit of sampled film dialog, a voice exclaims in English "Why don't you shut up?" This can again be heard as signifying on several levels simultaneously. It can be an ironic comment by Mic Check, through the proxy of a sample of someone else's voice, on his own practice of self-censorship. It can represent the demands of the censoring authorities, embodying their voice as it intrudes into Sagopa Kajmer's song and masks his rapping voice. Yet it can also be heard as Mic Check's reply to those same censoring authorities, backtalking them yet again. And, within the context of the concept of the song as a whole, it can even be heard as a statement addressed to the pop artists whom he is criticizing. In "shutting himself up" by using this sampled line of film dialog to obscure the Turkish swear words in his rap, Mic Check can thus be heard as addressing various others, in effect telling them, "Not me, why don't *you* shut up?" The sampled line, with its command that one not speak, works both within the context and concept of the song, and at a meta-level, commenting on the censorship practiced by the Turkish state, and on the self-censorship practiced by Mic Check himself.

As I think these examples show, Mic Check's studio virtuosity in creating the censored versions of his songs also has the effect of displaying his skill as a studio producer in making sample-based music. Mic Check demonstrates in these songs his ability to select and deploy samples that not only serve to obscure the Turkish swear words, but that also "fit," in musical terms, the songs they are used in, both in the practical aspect of being the right length, and in working structurally in the way they integrate with the rhythmic flow of the song they are embedded in, even as they call attention to themselves through the way they create ruptures in the musical texture as the different sampled voices intrude and cover up Mic Check's rapping. And in at least some cases involving samples of other people's speech, the samples also fit in textual terms, connecting with and commenting on the surrounding raps and even the very words they mask.

Mic Check would in subsequent albums under the name Sagopa Kajmer leave behind many aspects of the approach to lyrics used in the songs discussed here. And while he eventually abandoned for good the name of his first rapping persona Silahsız Kuvvet – since 2003 releasing albums only under the name Sagopa Kajmer – the rapping and musical style of his later albums as Sagopa Kajmer represent something of a synthesis of the two personas. There is almost no swearing in the raps (and thus no need to censor them), and the more literary style returns.[21] The musical backing tracks draw on a variety of sources, in some cases including samples from Turkish popular music, such that some songs evoke again the "oriental hip-hop" genre he had culti-

21 Many of his raps include Persian words not commonly used in everyday spoken Turkish; the printed transcriptions of the lyrics in the booklet accompanying the 2005 Sagopa Kajmer CD *Romantizma* (İrem Records 012) include footnotes defining the foreign words.

vated with his earlier persona, though some tracks do retain the rougher edges characteristic of the early Sagopa Kajmer songs.

Conclusions: A poetics of (self-)censorship

In the literature on music censorship, there are many examples of so-called "camouflaged messages." These most often refer to ways artists hide, through metaphor or ambiguity, certain messages (often of a political nature) in their music in order to get them past censors – what Cloonan refers to as "the use of double-meanings to hide political content."[22] Such self-censorship generally involves finding artistic solutions at the textual level to get the desired message to the target audience, using for example coded language that effectively hides the message from the censor, but which the listener who knows the "code" is able to interpret – what Drewett calls "singing about issues in a roundabout way rather than making outright statements (when that is what the artist really wants to do)."[23] Another way in which artists and their record companies or publishers have engaged with the power that censors is to make the music itself exactly as they wish to, but obfuscate the message in written material accompanying the music (for example by making changes in the printed lyrics included on the album cover or that are sent to the sensor for approval), as in the Chinese case discussed by de Kloet.[24] Both of these techniques involve obfuscation in that they direct the attention of the censor away from the material which he/she may find objectionable. This kind of self-censorship works by deflecting attention, and potentially does not work if the censor "lifts the cover" to see what lies underneath. While such practices do involve creativity and artistic agency, it is in effect an agency that has to hide itself in order to get across its message.

In contrast to an agency that hides itself through obfuscation and deflection of attention, I have argued in this article that Mic Check's use of obvious, cartoonish sound effects and sampled film and cartoon dialog in English to cover up Turkish swear words in some of his songs specifically calls attention to the fact that he is engaging in self-censorship, and even makes a parody out of the very act of self-censorship. The juxtaposition of particular words and sounds in the samples used to cover up the Turkish swear words constitutes an ironic approach to, and even a subversion of, the whole self-censorship process. In effect, Mic Check used his own practice of self-censorship as an opportunity to talk back to the censors. In this way his self-censorship becomes a kind of meta-commentary on the act itself of self-censorship and on the whole system that required censorship in the first place. The means Mic Check used to

22 Martin Cloonan, "Popular Music Censorship in Africa: An Overview," in *Popular Music Censorship in Africa*, ed. Michael Drewett and Martin Cloonan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 16.

23 Michael Drewett, "Music in the Struggle to End Apartheid: South Africa," in *Policing Pop*, ed. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 158.

24 Jeroen de Kloet, *China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 184-86 and "Confusing Confucius: Rock in Contemporary China," in *Policing Pop*, ed. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 175-76.

obscure individual swear words in his raps do not just serve to hide the objectionable material. They also, in the way they stick out in the musical texture, explicitly call attention to the very fact that censorship is taking place. And Mic Check's own agency in undertaking the censorship is highlighted through the virtuosic display of his ability to choose, manipulate, combine and integrate into his music the samples that he used to cover up the swear words. This is not camouflage; this is self-censorship that calls attention to itself, self-censorship "in yo' face."

A cursory review of the literature on music censorship suggests that, at least in its conventional meaning, censorship most often has to do with political messages in songs, such as messages of resistance to oppressive regimes, etc. Bastian and Laing's review of twenty years of music censorship around the world, as reported in the regular listings included in the journal *Index on Censorship* between 1980 and 1999, found that roughly three quarters of the incidents listed involved what they classify as political motives.[25] In the case discussed here, for the most part the songs do not have a "political message" in the usual sense of the word. The issue is simply the use of what is conventionally regarded as swear words and "bad language" in Turkish. While the specific content of the censored material (the meaning of the swear words themselves) is not "political" in the conventional sense, Mic Check's use of swear words in these songs does, of course, have a political dimension, in that his insistence on his right to use them in his raps is in defiance of attempts by the Turkish state (through the *bandrol*-issuing process described above) to limit the use of these words in public artistic expression.

In their introduction to *Policing Pop*, Cloonan and Garofalo evoke what they call "the ways in which individual artists experience the prospect of censorship and *what happens to their music* as it becomes subject to broader social forces."[26] The use of this kind of language in relationship to censorship seems to assume that artists are relatively helpless in the face of such "broader social forces," and that once artists have produced finished musical texts and put them into public circulation, they can only watch as other more powerful agents "do things" to their music and compromise its artistic integrity. The case I have discussed here suggests that, rather than seeing self-censorship as simply a prior capitulation to the power that censors – and thus a loss of agency in the face that power – practices of self-censorship can themselves be exploited as creative sites for artistic agency and, paradoxically, for a critique of censorship itself, even, to a certain extent and in certain ways, pro-actively pre-empting censorship. My approach here is thus similar to that of de Kloet, who in discussing censorship and self-censorship in Chinese popular music finds that "the artist is neither fully a victim nor fully an accomplice"; de Kloet further argues that censorship can actually be productive for the proliferation of culture, and that in the Chinese case, "Censorship proves to be more of a playground than a political battlefield."[27] I further suggest that, when self-censorship is happening within the musical text itself (and I

25 Vanessa Bastian and Dave Laing, "Twenty Years of Music Censorship Around the World," in *Policing Pop*, ed. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 57.

26 Cloonan and Garofalo, "Introduction," 5, emphasis added.

27 de Kloet, *China with a Cut*, 181; see also de Kloet, "Confusing Confucius," 182.

don't mean only the lyrics), it is even possible to speak of a "poetics of (self-)censorship" in a positive sense, in that the artist's active engagement with the requirement to self-censor enables new creative musical practices for solving problems that are simultaneously aesthetic and political.

My approach here has been based on a reading of particular sound recordings as musical texts. But I would also suggest that, having recognized these issues, self-censorship as social and cultural practice should also be investigated ethnographically though research in the sites of cultural production, such as recording studios and rehearsal spaces, and through interviews with artists about the details and strategies of their self-censorship practices. Such research on the actual practices of self-censorship has the potential to go beyond the "victimology" approach that I mentioned above, with its assumptions that self-censorship involves a lack of agency, or at best a reduction of agency. In this way we can begin to recognize and explore further the ways in which the requirement to self-censor not only restricts, but potentially enables artistic practice.

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Appendix: Online resources

There are no official video clips (i.e., created and sanctioned by the artist or his record company) for any of the songs discussed in this article. There are, however, a number of "unofficial" clips for both the uncensored and censored versions of the songs, made by fans and uploaded to YouTube and similar sites. I list here some of these fan-made clips (and in one case where a clip was not available, an audio-only website), all accessed on December 3, 2013.

"Ölüm benim doğum günüm"
uncensored version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YroxenYNQKE
censored version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDFp_ib_w0w

"Siktirin gidin"
uncensored version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7fMNwT9eac
censored version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqHv1CW9uz8

"Tımarlı hastane"
uncensored version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqDkuRFY4E0
censored version: http://grooveshark.com/#!/s/TIMARLI+HASTANE+ORJ+NAL+VERS+YON/36y4mF/

"Yeraltındaki karanlık"
uncensored version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70OrcDb1Sz8
censored version: http://www.zapkolik.com/video/sagopa-kajmer-yeraltindaki-karanlik-640959