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REVIEW | Eastern European Popular Music in a Transnational Context: Beyond the Borders (Palgrave European Film and Media Studies)

Edited by Ewa Mazierska and Zsolt Győri

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Studies on Eastern European popular music, written in English, are quite rare. Some of the latest are published by the editors of this collected volume (Mazierska 2016; Mazierska and Győri 2018). Ewa Mazierska (Professor of Contemporary Cinema at the School of Journalism, Media and Performance, University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom) and Zsolt Győri (Senior Lecturer at the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen, Hungary) emphasise "the transnational character of popular music" in general as well as its "global flow" in their introduction (p. 2), albeit they admit that the transnational character of popular music in Eastern Europe has been limited.

At the beginning of the book the editors discuss with care two key terms: "popular music" and "Eastern Europe". They state: "While in the West the problem of the division between popular and serious/academic music […] was mostly academic and cultural, in the socialist East it was also political" (p. 8). Although Eastern Europe is historically connected with the so-called Cold War "with its relatively neat division between the East and the West, which was overcome by the fall of the Berlin Wall" (p. 4), the editors retain the concept of a distinctive social, political and cultural territory:

> We opt for the term "Eastern Europe" for two reasons. One is the simple fact that this book covers both the period of state socialism and the subsequent 30 or so years, a period labelled postcommunist or postsocialist. The second

> reason is our desire to account for continuities and disruptions in the popular music produced and consumed in Eastern Europe. In the existing histories of Eastern Europe, the discontinuities have attracted more attention: the end of state socialism was a dramatic change, as symbolised by the spectacle of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which opened a new and arguably happier era of freedom and prosperity. However, we believe that although much changed, much remained the same. (pp. 4-5)

An example of continuity is the fact that it was not only during the period of state socialism that most of the pop musicians behind the Iron Curtain were sustainably influenced by Western pop and rock stars (e.g. by the Beatles or the Rolling Stones). In the past three decades this has not really changed, according to the editors as well as some contributors to the volume: now, as before, it is like a one-way street from the West to the East.

Nevertheless, the editors are interested in two-way traffic: "from elsewhere to the Eastern European country and from the Eastern European country to abroad. Most important are two types of exchanges: between the European East and the West and within the state socialist bloc" (p. 10). Concerning the socialist bloc, "another problem with defining Eastern Europe has to do with the status of Russia and its republics, which in some contexts is included in the investigations of Eastern Europe and in others is treated as a separate entity" (p. 4). Mazierska and Győri have chosen to exclude Russia and the former Soviet Union countries from their publication (except Estonia) to leave enough space for smaller countries from the Eastern part of Europe. I am not sure that this was a good idea, as Russia/Soviet Union has been heavily influential in Eastern Europe, especially before 1990.

Which countries are covered by the book? Besides Estonia as one of the Baltic states, the following nations are discussed in particular: Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania, and – most of all – Poland. Also the so-called Balkans, a transnational region, is a topic of the collected volume. It is noticeable that the former German Democratic Republic and East(ern) Germany, respectively, is not covered in a separate chapter, although it belonged to the Eastern bloc, as did Bulgaria and Albania, which do not receive much attention in the book either.

The collected volume has three sections: Part I – Bringing Foreign Music to the European East; Part II – Eastern European Music Crossing the Borders; and Part III – Liminal Spaces of Eastern European Music Festivals. Many chapters refer, directly or indirectly, to the theoretical approach of "cultural imperialism" (Laing 1986). Some chapters gravitate towards another theoretical approach called "aesthetic cosmopolitanism" (Regev 2013). The editors state that "while 'cultural imperialism' concerns international relations, 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' is about transnationalism, expressing a desire to transcend national and cultural boundaries" (p. 12). They see these two paradigms as complementary, rather than opposing each other: "Thus, certain phenomena can be regarded either as a sign of domination of the centre [the West] over the Eastern European music or of its participation in the cosmopolitan culture" (p. 13). Mazierska and Győri try to put things in order: "While the 'cultural imperialism' paradigm appears to be better suited to the cold war period, the 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' approach seems to be more suited to the time after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when a large part of Europe lost its internal borders. Music, thanks to the internet, became practically borderless" (p. 14).

Likewise, the contributors' backgrounds seem to be borderless. There are historians, musicologists, social anthropologists, media and communication researchers, fine artists, political scientists, film scholars, and researchers of Anglo-American studies. They write about musicians (such as Czesław Niemen or Leonard

Cohen), nations (such as Czechoslovakia or Poland), genres (such as punk or electronic dance music), and festivals (such as Sziget or the Intervision Song Contest).

Except for the dominance of Polish issues (five of 11 chapters; even the cover of the book shows a Polish flag), the collected volume is well balanced between the production, distribution and reception of Eastern European popular music. It affords surprises, such as the facts that an EDM festival named Untold in Cluj-Napoca, Romania attracts 350,000 attendees each summer (chapter 11, pp. 213-237), and that the Canadian singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen has been popular in Poland from the late 1960s onwards (chapter 3, pp. 49-73). The chapters provide historical insights as well as informed reflections on several aspects of internationalism and transnationalism in the context of (Eastern) music.

Whilst taking into account that the so-called 'West' in popular music terms denotes first and foremost Great Britain and the United States of America, other Western nations like West Germany, France or Spain could have been referenced in this book as well. Without them, the term 'West' can be viewed as being too narrow, similar to conceiving the 'East' without Russia/Soviet Union.

Overall, the chapters provide a high-quality overview of Eastern European popular music and its otherness from a Western point of view, which still seems to be existing in some respects. This music is still below radar level in Western media as well as Western academia. Therefore, the editors' hints for further research are helpful, including studies on the "history of state socialist record companies, including Amiga, Balkanton, Diskoton, Hungaroton, Jugoton, Opus, Polskie Nagrania, Polton and Supraphon, and especially the role these labels played in the popularisation of western trends and the export of eastern music" (p. 21). Credit belongs to the editors for supplying another rich book on popular music in Eastern Europe. Hopefully, further edited collections will follow.

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