

Sounds of the Borderland. Popular Music, War and Nationalism in Croatia since 1991. [Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series.] By CATHERINE BAKER. Pp. 278. Farnham: Ashgate. 2010. £60. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-4094-0337-1.

Although thousands of books have been written about the dissolution of Yugoslavia, research agendas continue to be centred on the state and elites. Consequently, the wider social context of popular culture and everyday life practices remains marginalized and theoretically under-researched.

Catherine Baker's book *Sounds of the Borderland* focuses on the role popular music has had as a medium of political communication in Croatia since the country's independence in 1991. Following the work of, among others, Erik Gordy, Stef Jansen, Ivo Žanić, Ivan Čolović and Milena Dragičević-Šešić, Baker divides her study into three key parts: 1) 'the Tudjman years', relating to the period from 1991 to 1999; 2) 'the post-Tudjman era', characterized by new political circumstances in Croatia, and finally 3) Croatia's transnational cultural relationships.

The author combines historical research with participant observation and interviews, approaching 'fieldwork as the field of social relation in which texts circulate' (p. 5). Primary source material, i.e. the lyrics of over 2,000 songs, Croatian and foreign news media, novels and biographies are remarkably well analysed, ordered and structured into a coherent narrative. However, the interviews are rather predictable, since the sample population was limited to 'young, highly educated people in their twenties' (p. 50), and hence they do not contribute many new insights to the research.

The first part of the book explains how, at the beginning of the 1990s, new symbolic boundaries of the national identity became a political source that 'define[d] [...] what Croatia was not' (p. 1). New patriotic popular music, backed by the state propaganda on Croatian Television (HTV), dealt with narratives of the war and images of soldiers, enemies, religion, land, gender and history. Baker gives examples of patriotic music production, from the official Croatian Band Aid songs *Moja domovina* and *Stop the War in Croatia*, to a 'counter-narrative' (p. 30) that promoted the vindication of the fascist puppet state during the Second World War as an expression of Croatian statehood. Debates regarding the definition and distinction of a Croatian music style triggered two strategies analysed in detail by the author: firstly, the attempt to establish the *tamburica* as Croatia's national instrument, and secondly, the support of the westernized "Croatian dance" formula that presented a Croatia without Yugoslavia as a Croatia without folk music.

For the period following President Tudjman's death and the regime change in early 2000, the book underlines the separation of the state from the patriotic music of a kind that strove to provide an apology for the alleged war criminals accused before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Baker accurately analyses the state policies of reshaping memory space related to both World War II and the Croatian War of Independence, and the official approach towards performers like Marko Perković Thompson and Miroslav Škoro. Furthermore, the book deals with the institutional change and liberalization of the music market that returned pop-folk from Serbia to the centre of attention. The controversies relating to Severina representing Croatia at the Eurovision song contest are well documented and interpreted. Unfortunately, the author only theorizes the notion of *turbofolk* or pop-folk, one of the main pillars of 'eastern Otherness' (Chapter 4), and neglects to

give an ethnographic explanation of this phenomenon in Croatia. Baker focused extensively on *turbofolk* music throughout her fieldwork (p. 150), but the only “on-site” ethnographic information she produces is why she felt uncomfortable with the idea of visiting a *turbofolk* club.

Baker expands her research focus in the last part to encompass the entire post-Yugoslav space, in an attempt to avoid a ‘nation-centric [methodological] approach’ (p. 2). A new transnationalism in Croatian music has facilitated the reintegration of Bosnian folk music, and has led to a rise in the influence of Serbian pop-folk and the phenomenon of “yugonostalgia”, supported by legitimately distributed recordings and concerts. Finally, the author describes the return of rock bands across the region after years of stagnation. Surprisingly enough, apart from sporadic references to patriotic rock bands (i.e. Prljavo Kazalište, Jura Stublić), the book neglects the Croatian rock scene. An entire rock and roll subculture, labelled “seventh republic” by Ante Perković, is left aside from the analysis of Croatian popular music. Still, a myriad of bands were formed immediately before or during the war, such as Laufer, Hladno Pivo, TBF, KUD Idijoti, Majke or Elemental, which constituted a real expression of alternative popular culture. Baker rightly notes that official state and ‘counter-narrative’ should be regarded as a continuum (p. 33), but fails to incorporate the phenomenon of rock and roll that opposed the regime and nationalistic narratives in an unpolitical way. Nonetheless, *Sounds of the Borderland* is an excellent read that skilfully demonstrates the interaction between everyday popular culture and national identity. It is without a doubt a book that future researchers in the field will value.

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