

Nicholas Tochka. 2016. *Audible States: Socialist Politics and Popular Music in Albania*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-046782-1.

Historians of state socialism have suddenly become well served for studies of popular music. A growing interest in the cultural history of everyday life, youth and leisure in Cold War Europe, often aiming to draw comparisons across the period's ideological and geopolitical divides, has produced a wealth of new studies this decade on music and the limits of state socialist ideology in practice, offering fresh insights into the everyday experiences of cultural workers and members of the public living under Communist rule. These have added to existing currents such as the vibrant amount of research by ethnomusicologists of (especially) south-east Europe into the politics of folk music during and after socialism. Within the interdisciplinary field that constitutes south-east European popular and folk music history, Albania has been less well covered than Bulgaria or the Yugoslav region, the countries which usually provide comparative conclusions about music in the Balkans with their baseline example, though Jane Sugarman has made important contributions since the 1990s through her work on folk and wedding music and Eckehard Pistrick has enhanced the literature on music and postsocialist migration with his more recent research into Albanian multipart singing. *Audible States* joins these predecessors as not only a sorely needed study of Albanian popular music during and after state socialism, but an exemplary investigation of the tensions between ideology, capital and creativity which deserves to influence research on culture, socialism and postsocialism well beyond Albania.

*Audible States*, based on extensive ethnographic and archival research in Albania during the late 2000s, stakes its place in ethnomusicology, popular music studies, cultural history and political economy through five exhaustive chapters that connect the state socialist and postsocialist periods more organically than almost any similar book. The system of 'light music' festivals through which Albanian Communism institutionalised musical production and created the system of professional incentives and sanctions within which Albanian composers and musicians were forced to operate until the 'transition' period of 1988–92 existed throughout central and eastern Europe but, in Albania as elsewhere, was translated from its Soviet and Italian models into localised ideological needs: Albania's flagship pop festival, Festivali i Këngës (the Festival of Song), was first held in 1962 and had the responsibility to fill the sudden void in domestic cultural production all but thrust upon it after Khrushchev had broken off relations with Enver Hoxha's regime. The controversial Eleventh Festival of 1972, where the new director of national radio and television had permitted an unprecedented attempt to co-opt youth culture for the Party, provoked public denunciations from Hoxha the following year and led many of its contestants to be removed from the centre of Albania's 'symbolic economy' (p. 103) by being reassigned to lowly music jobs in remote towns.

Tochka follows the politics and economics of creativity at the Festival through the 'transition' years and into the 'enlargement era' of postsocialism, when the Festival gained an additional function as the competition to represent Albania in the Eurovision Song Contest and thus to determine how Albanian cultural identity would be mediated through music for a *European* gaze. This extra layer of imagined audience to which composers had to tailor their creativity dragged FIK into the project of repackaging Albania for a European gaze. Tochka's explanation of how this operated in practice during and after FIK in 2008–9 (when the vocalist Kejsi Tola and her songwriters Edmond Zhulali and Agim Doçi won the right to represent Albania with an ethnopop song that was to be translated into English for Eurovision and stripped of one of its two sampled traditional wind instruments so that only the more 'eastern'-sounding, not the more 'national'-sounding, one remained) sets a new standard for Eurovision research as well as showing how the festival system had adapted to a very different economic and ideological setting and a very different geopolitical position compared to

those for which it had been designed. Whether the Festival's harnessing to Eurovision nation-branding, which has certainly altered its politics of incentive and taste, itself amounted to an ideological distortion is left for the reader to decide: but the problem of 'an entire host of concerns that find little resonance with local listeners' emerging from composers' 'calculations about how best to address Europe' (p. 203) echoes forms of democratic deficit across south-east Europe where elites concentrating on appealing to European institutions are unable to, or choose not to, hear local political and social demands.

*Audible States* rests on an impressive, yet always clearly explained, theorisation of creativity, cultural production and power to demonstrate what the everyday and often still trivialised cultural politics of a genre like light music can reveal about identity, ideology and nationhood under state socialism and in postsocialism. By showing how the political economy of ownership, patronage and informality changed – and did not – as state socialism collapsed and adaptation to neoliberalism reared its head, it speaks both periods' thematic languages equally authoritatively, exemplifying how scholars might both apply the insights of as foundational a work as Katherine Verdery's *What Was Socialism And What Comes Next?* and extend them with twenty years' more knowledge of the neoliberalism and Euro-Atlanticism that was beginning to come. The history of Festivali i Këngës and the institutions and individuals surrounding it becomes, in Tochka's hands, a triumph that deserves to inspire future scholars of cultural production across the region to reveal as much history, ideology and power in the political economy of the everyday.

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