

***Global Pop, Local Language.* By Harris M. Berger & Michael Thomas Carroll, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003. Pp. 352, ISBN: 1-57806-536-4)**

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***Global Pop, Local Language.*** By Harris M. Berger & Michael Thomas Carroll, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003. Pp. 352, ISBN: 1-57806-536-4)

*Global Pop, Local Language* is an impressive and engaging edited collection which explores “the politics and aesthetics of language choice in popular music” (x). It addresses this issue from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, with contributors hailing from fields such as anthropology, literature, German, music, folklore, ethnomusicology and linguistics. The methodological approaches employed are similarly varied, ranging from interviews to participant observation to diverse forms of linguistic analyses. Moreover, it adopts a particularly liberal interpretation of the term “pop”, for individual papers are devoted to genres as diverse as Irish folksong, drum and bass, hip-hop and Nepali rock music.

In an attempt to impress some degree of coherence upon such wide-ranging material, the editors have divided the collection into three, themed sections. The first section, “Language Choice, Popular Music, and Globalisation”, features contributions which are largely concerned with the tension between English and indigenous languages in globalized pop music forms. Mitchell, for example, compares rap music from five different countries, demonstrating that the performance of rap in indigenous languages other than English often functions as a form of resistance against perceived American cultural imperialism. Although ostensibly concerned with language choice in relation to issues of national, regional and ethnic identity, many of the chapters in the second section continue to be informed by the issue of globalisation. Notable in this respect is Cepeda’s particularly enlightening study of the American music industry’s construction of the Latin(o) music “boom”, together with media representations of the genre. The tension between English and native languages similarly permeates the final — and shortest — section, which is described as addressing the question of language choice in relation to individual performances and songs. Szego, for instance, examines the performance and reception of Hawaiian chant in a private school, exploring how students derive meaning from lyrics set in a language which they do not entirely understand.

Given that the majority of chapters are informed by the globalization debate (and the related issue of the power relationships embodied in the transmission of English versus indigenous languages), these three subdivisions may appear somewhat arbitrary. Nevertheless, several key

themes emerge, such as the role played by subordinated languages in constructing and expressing group identities. As Larkey demonstrates in relation to Turkish communities in Germany, the use of regional dialects and languages can serve as a powerful means of affirming marginalized identities. Many contributions are similarly informed by the role played by the state and the culture industry in directing and regulating language choice in popular music. Tuohy, for example, reveals how the Chinese government has harnessed *hua'er* folksong for political and ideological purposes, and attempted to widen its audience by removing some of its distinctive dialect features. Further recurrent themes are multiculturalism, constructions of authenticity, and the implications of “code-switching”, that is, changing dialect or language within the musical work.

Particularly valuable is the contribution this book makes to the debate surrounding the impact of globalisation on musical forms. Contemporary debate on this issue has tended to polarise around two theoretical positions. Following Alan Lomax’s warnings of “cultural grey-out”, certain theorists have subscribed to the view that globalisation is causing musical forms to undergo acculturation and become homogenised, whilst ensuring the hegemonic position of English in the music industry. More recent studies have argued that the increased population mobility and new technologies associated with globalisation may result in the emergence of new musical forms; in particular, postcolonial theory suggests we are witnessing the emergence of new musical expressions which are locally based, territorially defined and concerned with the lived experiences of ordinary people.

*Global Pop, Local Language* transcends this dichotomous formulation, however. It demonstrates, for instance, that for non-native speakers of English, the decision to sing in English is not necessarily motivated by the standardising influence of the global music industry. Wallach’s fascinating chapter on the politics of language choice in Indonesian underground music demonstrates that performers’ decisions to sing in English, rather than in their native language, can be politically motivated: writing songs in English has offered some Indonesian rock musicians greater freedom to express political opinions and to evade the strictures of government censors. Equally, Wallach’s chapter refutes the notion that the commercial objectives of the music industry are causing the widespread dominance of English in global pop music. It demonstrates

that many Indonesian punk and metal musicians are increasingly choosing to sing in native languages, not only for aesthetic and political reasons, but also as a result of commercial pressures: when underground bands sign to major labels they invariably find themselves under pressure to sing in Indonesian rather than English, because music in the former language is regarded as more lucrative.

As an edited collection, *Global Pop, Local Language* cannot purport to offer exhaustive coverage of the aesthetics and politics of language selection in pop music. Indeed, it arguably poses more questions than it answers. Particularly significant in this regard is the question posed by Harris M. Berger in the introduction, "How does language choice in music link globalisation to issues of gender, class, and social change?" (xviii). Whilst many papers explore how factors such as social change, politics, race and ethnicity relate to language choice in popular music, it is only Dave Laing's interesting survey of the construction of "cockney rock" which examines the significance of social class in any depth. Similarly, considerations of gender only feature in a tangential, yet intriguing, manner in Larkey's examination of the treatment of sexuality in German rock music. This particular contribution suggests there is considerable scope for further research into the relationship between gender and language choice in popular music.

*Global Pop, Local Language* has therefore performed a valuable service in that it has raised the profile of the contentious and topical issue of language choice in pop music, and has identified several potentially fruitful avenues for future research. Indeed, in many respects it is a groundbreaking book, although subscribers to *Popular Music and Society* should be advised that seven of its fourteen papers were originally published in a special edition of the journal subtitled *Global Popular Music: The Politics and Aesthetics of Language Choice* (Vol. 24.3, Fall 2000). It deals with its subject matter in an entirely engaging manner, and while the absence of an index does compromise its accessibility somewhat, it will prove a useful resource for students and researchers of music, folklore, linguistics, modern languages and anthropology.

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