

KEEP IT SIM- PLE MAKE IT FAST!

AN APPROACH
TO UNDERGROUND
MUSIC SCENES (VOL. 4)
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Keep it Simple, Make it Fast!

An approach to underground music scenes (vol. 4)

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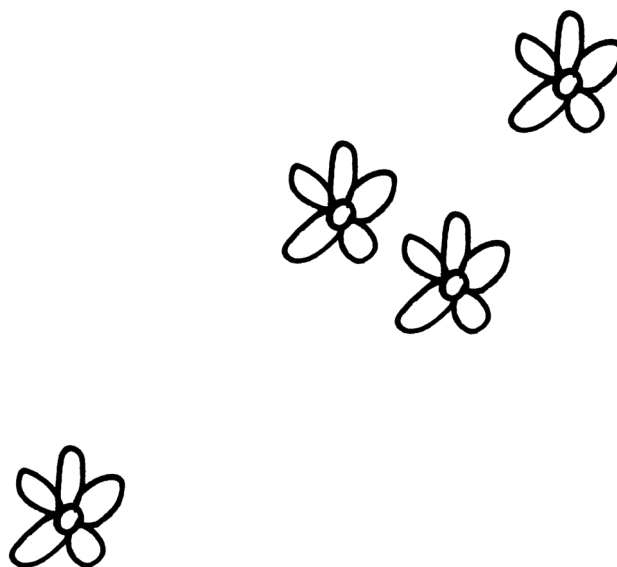
5.4. 'Patriotisms' of Polish popular music

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A b s t r a c t

The co-creation of collective identities through popular culture has a very rich tradition in Poland. This phenomenon can be traced in patriotic plots in popular music visible in the songs of The Peoples Republic of Poland and in popular music after 1989. This overlaps with the phenomenon of subcultural nationalism, the folklorisation of popular culture and the so-called high culture and the official historical politics. In our paper we will analyse the chosen lyrics of popular songs (including rock and rap music) and present how patriotism has been defined and how its significance has changed over the course of years. Our analysis will encompass popular song lyrics in the years 1996-2016. We conclude that whereas in communist Poland, patriotic popular songs were in accord with the political reason of state which was forced from above, however contemporary patriotic songs of Polish popular artists are particular and party-oriented. These texts can be described by the expansion of chauvinist subcultural nationalism (in the authors' definition: patriotism), which found an institutional frame in organizations and parties such as Law and Justice (the governing party in Poland), The National Movement and Solidarity 2010.

Keywords: popular music, patriotism, nationalism, historical politics.



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The main purpose of this article is to recognize the content of discourse of Polish patriotism in selected texts of popular music. We argue, that after 1989, Polish patriotism evolved from pro-European attitudes towards nationalistic attitudes. One can even put forward the thesis that currently in the public space in Poland (also in the field of popular culture) we are dealing with a specific war of cultures, a symbolic dispute between cosmopolitan liberals and isolationist (neo) conservative collective identity (Burszta, 2013).

Tim Edensor (2002) in his famous book *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* rightly notes that the affective power of traditional cultural forms and persuasive practices related to the nation are complemented and increasingly replaced by the meanings, images and actions taken from popular culture. He also efficiently analyzes complex relationships between broadly understood entertainment and national identification, that appear in a variety of situations, such as sports spectacles, contemporary forms of carnival, or attempts to reactivate national myths, as for example is the case of the film "Braveheart" (Ibidem). Edensor's analytical work concludes with a notion that today, unlike, for example, 50 years ago, the association field around "patriotism" begins to include the pop culture and entertainment, while national identification is lacking pathos and certain formality, which was obligatory in the past. Indeed, ceremonies full of pathos are still being practiced, but more and more often you can hear and see that cultivating patriotism consists of contexts of a feast, festivity and an entertaining spectacle (it is very visible in Poland during the debates about the celebration of Independence Day).

After 1989, at first, patriotic themes in Poland came down from large stages, locating themselves in specific niches, such as the skinhead subculture's scene, or the scene of so-called identity rock (Wojdyła, 2005). The situation changed only in the second decade after the fall of communism, with the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising in 2004 as a direct impulse for implementing patriotic themes in popular music. In 2005 Lao Che, a rock band, released its "Powstanie Warszawskie" (Warsaw Uprising) album, which paved the way for similar initiatives. This album abandoned the worn-out martyrdom code for the sake of literality, sometimes even using some drastic metaphors. It also tried to convey emotional climate. Specific expressionism, or better: neo-expressionism, dethroned a kind of ideological national elation. It is worth mentioning that the songs from the album, unlike most patriotic lyrics written for special occasions, do not have any propagandistic character, nor can they be directly written down in any political project.

Above all, they implement the original vision of its authors, as it usually happens in the formula of a so-called concept album, Lao Che's specialty (they have always released a "religious" or a "folk" album). Historical events are not a political emblem but a subject for the artist. The main author of the idea, Hubert "Śpięty" Dobaczewski, tried to give the album a polyphonic character by combining the original text with various quotes – from speeches, film dialogues, or poetry from the Uprising period. There are attempts, however, to update the expression, for example in the song "Stare Miasto" (The Old Town), where phrases like "Welcome to the place / Where Fryco¹³⁸ dies" are heard (Lao Che, 2005). The paraphrase of the modern football hooligans' slogan conveys its contexts and has its consequences, as the last anniversaries of the Warsaw Uprising became the stimulus for a so-called new right-wing art (murals in which "canonical" insurgent ethos is mixed with the hooligans' ethos), as well as the opportunity to manifest a new kind of patriotism, which we can call "a

¹³⁸"Fryco" means a German

patriotism of a football hooligan". It need not be and probably is not the sole merit of Lao Che, but without their album the band would not have moved on a wave of patriotic intensification, with many others alongside.

There have been a lot of CDs, concerts and musical performances over the last 10 years, mostly (but not only) devoted to the Warsaw Uprising, which is commonly perceived as a manifestation of the renaissance of patriotic attitudes and general interest in history. They are accompanied by numerous so-called historical reconstructions. In a research report on reconstructions and re-constructors, written in 2012, Tomasz Szlendak (2012) notes that patriotism can be a motivation, but it can also be a consequence of participation in reconstruction movements, that mainly refers to those reconstructing Polish troops from World War II.

Many facts and events from the area of current popular music, such as L.U.C's album "Zrozumieć Polskę" (To understand Poland), a compilation "Gajcy" devoted to a famous poet from Warsaw Uprising time, De Press's album "Żołnierze Wyklęci" (Excommunicated Soldiers), a concert and album untitled "Morowe Panny" (Brave Maidens) in homage to Uprising young female participants are undoubtedly a sign of a new trend among Polish musicians that explore the history of the war and occupation period. Nevertheless, all these performances and albums represent very different models of understanding of patriotism. L.U.C is closer to Braudel's historical sensitivity focused on the details, or a sense of humor embedded in the realities of the war cataclysm. Andrzej Dziubek from De Press leaves no doubt singing: "Fight Bolsheviks in any form, because this is your biggest enemy today". "Morowe Panny" in turn generated an unprecedented model of patriotism: a feminist patriotism (De Press, 2009).

Apart from attempts to create new approaches to history, as well as unconventional manifestations of patriotic feelings, more traditional expressions are also functioning. Paweł Kukiz, once the first scoffer of Polish rock, has recently played a role of a defender of allegedly endangered Polish national feeling. One of the manifestations thereof is his song about Erika Steinbach, who is a German conservative politician known for her anti-Polish sentiments (Kukiz, 2012).

The same singer also appeared in the rock-opera "Krzyżacy" (Teutonic Knights), a peculiar performance representing a nostalgic patriotism based on school curriculum novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, who wrote patriotic novels during the partitions of Poland at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Similarly, guitarist Andrzej Nowak, co-founder of the heavy metal band TSA, at the moment a front-man of Złe Psy (Mad Dogs), wants to be considered a patriot according to a nationalistic understanding. The evidence thereof consists of lyrics of his widely commented song "Urodziłem się w Polsce" (I was born in Poland): "I proudly wear Polish colours. As knights, and soldiers. If needed I am obstinate" (Złe Psy, 2012).

Some Polish rappers also use the nationalistic or even chauvinistic tones in their lyrics. Our analyses show that lyrics of musicians that constitute the Polish scene of patriotic rap, often contain anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic threads (Zańko, 2018). The pedagogy of hatred towards the Other (who in this case is a Muslim), used by right-wing and ultra-right-wing circles, including Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) party currently in power in Poland, is for example present in a song titled "Eurokalifat" (Eurocaliphate) performed by Szejka Biforjuz (2016): "I am terrified to see how many are coming here. No

more pork in menu, but they are all swines. They want our public money and produce kids. In two generations you will have three mosques standing in the neighbourhood. They conquer Europe with their birth rate. That is how you do it today, no need to use guns. You have to be happy, that is end of discussion. If you say something contra, they'll call you a fascist".

Basti, another rapper, uses even more aggressive anti-islamic poetics. In one of his songs he predicts the imminent end of western, liberal Europe, flooded by radical "Islamic hordes": "We don't want any war, but we have it today. Crazy people make Jihad in Allah's name. European governments and their leftist policy. Versus radical Islam and intentions to have a caliphate. They hate us, they don't know democracy (Guerra, 2013, 2016). They don't respect our laws, they want Shariat all over the world. They are stronger with Christianity's weakness. They are happy, those murderers from ISIS. That is the consequence of deviated tolerance (...) don't look at the West, because its end is near. We need to be wiser than they were there. They are doomed, they will lose the war. That is the end's beginning, they will be flooded by the Islamic hordes" (Basti, 2016).

We should add here that patriotic rap has recently been heard more and more often at the so-called Independence Marches in Warsaw that take place every year on Independence Day (November 11th). This patriotic manifestation, intended to commemorate the day Poland regained its independence, is in fact the greatest manifestation of Polish nationalism. Despite the fact that the threads of martyrdom and national patriotism seem to dominate the lyrics of popular music, we can also find artists who oppose such narratives (Zańko, 2018). A good example is Maria Peszek, who in the song "Sorry Poland" is in favor of open, constructive patriotism, whose essence is working for the common good of citizens: "(...) I pay subscription. And I pay for a ticket. I go to elections. I am not a stowaway. Just don't tell me to die. Just don't tell me, don't tell me. Don't tell me to fight, don't tell me to die. Don't want my blood, Poland! (...) Better an alive citizen than a dead hero" (Peszek, 2012).

Analyzing "patriotic" expressions of contemporary Polish artists and pop music performers, it can be noticed that today's pop-patriotism is different in relation to that of the times of the communist regime. First of all, it is not associated with the imposed "raison d'état". Mostly it is of original character. It also has a particular character, or that referring to political parties. It also noted that a multi-current expansion of chauvinistic nationalism subculture (in the words of its partisans: "patriotism") expands in a much larger scale than even in the last decade of the communist regime (See Guerra, 2019).

It has also found a convenient institutional framework in such organizations as Ruch Narodowy (National Movement). The contemporary music scene does not, of course, divide in the same way as the political scene, but now and then the consequences of the aforementioned historical policy propagated by the ruling party are shown. The new work of Kukiz or Nowak are not the only examples, as we could see during the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, or recent Independence Marches. Maybe it is not the same as "Patriotism of Tomorrow" invented by Law and Justice Politicians, but we certainly can see here a vision of national unity with a strong nationalist-clerical tone. Sevenfold attempts to set fire to the rainbow at Warsaw's Zbawiciel Square, along with commentaries made by right-wing politicians who saw in this artistic installation by Julita Wójcik a symbol of LGBT, find their artistic expression in the song "Niezwyciężeni" (Invincible) of Konkwista 88, a group that has many merits in expanding a nationalistic way of thinking:

“Contemporary streets. Addiction and homosexuality. Did they fight for it? Did they die for it? They should be back. At least for some time. Brave and firm. The pride of our nation” (1996).

To sum up, the peculiarity of our times is a subcultural war of nationalist radicals with anarchists, which is a detachment of a larger whole: culture wars. These culture wars – whose sources date the youth revolution of the 1960s in the United States – are understood here metaphorically as a political and symbolical dispute over the collective identity and a shape of social reality, which is a result of having different sources of moral interpretation. The actors in this dispute are liberals and conservatives, two axiologically different camps that embody two different visions of the nation as a moral community (Burszta, 2013). On the one hand, we have heirs (ers) of the contestation movements of the 1960s and their love of freedom, people who imagine the social world as a place for everyone regardless of race, origin, religion or sexual orientation. On the other hand, we have the so-called guards of tradition and Christian values, for whom all manifestations of the liberalization of social life are perceived as a threat to the Western civilization. Unfortunately, in Poland the voice of the former does not reach everybody. The voice of various patriotic-nationalist (sub) cultures is much louder. The same refers to politicians that proclaim national pride, as well as the Church hierarchs who warn about a moral corruption of the cosmopolitan West. We claim that the modern redefinition of patriotism against such powers unfortunately has no greater chances.

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