

Dorota Urszula Błaszczuk:

“Ethnographic study of interethnic and intergender relations at K-pop parties in Wrocław, Poland”

Opponent’s review of bachelor thesis

In her bachelor thesis Dorota Urszula Błaszczuk discusses a very specific environment of K-Pop parties in Wrocław, Poland. The topic of the inter-ethnic and inter-gender relations between Korean and Polish youth is very interesting as the global K-Pop phenomena is yet to be explored more by academic community.

In five, respectively three main chapters, author describes the history of K-Pop as a musical genre, how are the K-Pop parties organized at Wrocław and also the interplay of Korean and Polish actors. The thesis starts with theoretical, or rather say historical part. This part is little confusing, as the author is jumping from how K-Pop genre actually sounds, to history of the genre, then to commodification and intertwined industries as fashion, food, etc., then jumps back to historical context from where K-Pop came from (TV series, Gangnam style, etc.). For my liking the history part should be separated into sub-chapters to avoid such confusion. However, it seems that author read a lot about K-Pop genre and mentioned every aspect of the K-Pop culture as a musical and economic phenomena in a broader context of South Korean culture. This chapter also consists of history of the rise of the K-Pop fandom in Poland and its transition from online space to offline gatherings at K-Pop parties. In this chapter author also mentions the role of gender and its performativity and how it is perceived mostly by Judith Butler (p.20) but the whole theoretical concept is very late in the text. This is for me one of the major issues with the whole thesis – there is little to none theoretical framework, if there’s some theory explained, it’s very late in the text (p.60).

In the methodology chapter author explains the framework she is working in – she is using the qualitative research, which is a good choice for this kind of research. Alas also in this chapter are some issues. Author was attending the K-Pop parties in Wrocław for one year, however she doesn’t mention how many parties did she attend. Also, I’m missing discussion about ethics in the whole thesis – there are interviews, but are they anonymized? Was it the issue for the agents and for the author?

Apart from that, the author mentions she is a fan of K-Pop genre and it helped her to get into the field and also lead a very insightful interviews with other fans and agents of the Wrocław K-Pop scene. What I am missing is a proper positioning in the thesis. I would like to hear more about why the author like this particular kind of music and lifestyle, if the author is also a musician or just a fan etc. It would open the theses much more towards the reader. We get some of these information on page 30., but again – it is too late in the text.

The main section of the thesis is the ethnographic chapter. The fieldwork is done in one of the Wrocław venues – club Liverpool. This part is very well written, however there are some information missing. The only thing we discover about the venue is that there are K-Pop parties, but we do not get any more information about the broader context. Are there also any other events? How big is the venue? Are there also other genres than K-Pop? It would be helpful to add some photographs of the venue (and of the K-Pop scene in general), so the reader can imagine more about the place where the fieldwork is done. The same issue is with the parties itself – reader can just assume from the ethnographic thick description when does the party start and when does it end (p.54). But is every K-Pop party the same? More profound and exact ethnographic work would be needed there. Despite all of this I really enjoyed the ethnographic details and stories from the Liverpool club in Wrocław, they are very well written and it really gives us a good glimpse how the K-Pop parties in Wrocław look like and how the inter-ethnic encounters work in this particular venue during these events.

There are some formal issues with the thesis. There are some minor mistakes and typos all over the thesis and it seems that there was not much time to proof read (p.12, 13,...), incoherent citation system (p.28), missing ethnographic data (when the interview was taking place), missing citations and links (p.48, p.50 KoreaOnline is not even mentioned in bibliography, what is mentioned is “Korea Online” and with PolSat news on p.70 can’t be considered as an author etc.). Bibliography does not stand to the norms of an academic work as it uses various citation norms. In the whole thesis there are maybe too obvious conclusions (“So, what exactly is a K-pop party? The answer is surprisingly straightforward: it’s simply a club event where only K-pop music is played“ p.18), the topic would be better described with some additional visual material, and there is little to none theoretical framework.

Despite these issues the thesis is a valuable contribution to the academic exploration of K-Pop and even more in the frame of central Europe. I recommend this thesis to defence and consider it as good (3).

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