

**‘A Political Sound’
France, South Korea, and the Politics of Nation and Representation in Contemporary
Popular Music**

Paper Abstract

In the midst of a burgeoning academic debate that argues for a South Korea that has historically been more racially and ethnically heterogeneous than widely assumed (A.E. Kim 2009; H. Kim & Oh 2011; M. Kim 2014; Han 2015), contemporary Korean entertainment companies are involved in a process that seems decidedly opposite in objective and effect. The repression of political and national identities by a powerful music industry, and its censorship by the state, make of South Korean popular music a fascinating counterpoint to the music scene in France. The French music scene is now dominated by French rap, a lyrical repository consciously detailing the ostracism experienced by those whose multinational identities became the basis of discrimination by the French state and society (Hammou 2020; Ghose 2021).

France’s political imaginary and national identity meet and coalesce to provide a theoretical ideal that, in practice, excludes those whose postcolonial and multinational identities are continually linked to a historically differential application of law and governance (Ghose 2023). Meanwhile, South Korea’s contrasting postcolonial national identity—a societal and nation-centred construct—and its seemingly apolitical national imaginary—manufactured by the collusive, profit-oriented activities of the entertainment industry and the participating state—diverge, separating into distinct, if dialogic, national and global representations of Korea. Both the French and South Korean cases are instructive in demonstrating the diverse spectrum of political expression in contemporary popular music, and indicative of the globalising nature of musical influences, and the increasing influence of music globally.

This paper will compare the manifestations of politics in South Korean and French popular music. It will provide a segue between the two literatures that usually do not meet, but have huge comparative potential (Messerlin & Shin 2017).

[284 words]

Author Biography

Dr. Paroma Ghose is a sociocultural historian and postdoctoral researcher affiliated with the Department of International History and Politics at the Graduate Institute (IHEID) in Geneva, Switzerland, and the Institute of Modern Korean Studies at Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea. Her PhD (IHEID) used the lyrics of French rap to write a history of the ‘Other’ in France (1981-2012), and won her the Pierre du Bois Prize (2020) for the best dissertation in International History. Her current project focuses on what unfolds when popular imaginations of different societies meet and collide on the global popular culture stage over time, using South Korean popular music (1987-2022) as per principal lens.

[109 words]