

Armenian self-colonisation in music as a result of the (cultural) policies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union

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Abstract

The author has attempted to follow the cultural self-colonisation in modern Armenia, and analyse how it has been influenced by certain processes in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Such self-colonisation can be explained through Caucasian geopolitics – Armenia is situated on the border of East and West. As a Christian country, it describes itself as European, but in geographical terms it belongs to the Middle East. According to the main thesis of the article, Armenian culture has been highly influenced by the cultural politics of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, both of which perceived the Caucasus as an exotic object. Armenians have always seen Russia as a window to Europe, therefore they also conceive of themselves as an exotic “other”. Music as an element of such self-representation can be used for the benefit of certain ideologies. These processes have been illustrated by way of examples of two Armenian composers: Komitas and Aram Khachaturian. They are considered to be specifically Armenian, but at the same time, European composers. The author suggests that they both serve a wider ideology. Their phenomenon “proves” that Armenians belong culturally to Europe, but also helps to present Armenians as exotic subjects.