



‘Chile – Ballad of the Cameraman’: New Song and ‘Revolutionary’ South America in Wolf Biermann’s Anthems of East German Critical Solidarity

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Abstract

Using GDR dissident singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann’s ‘Chile – Ballade vom Kameraman’ as a point of departure, this article explores the role that ‘revolutionary’ South America and its musical corollary, the Nueva Canción, played in expressions of inner-communist critique in 1970s East Germany. Biermann’s critique was Janus-faced. Lyrically, the ‘Chilean’ allegory of his ballad, in which a cameraman is murdered by a soldier, expressed support for the Allende administration while simultaneously destabilizing Soviet Bloc rhetoric. Musically, references to Nueva Canción music such as that of singer-songwriter Daniel Viglietti represented the anti-imperialist Other while simultaneously rejecting GDR-style socialist realism. On the one hand, Biermann’s inspiration in South America can be heard as a colonizing gesture; on the other, it can be understood to reflect a provincialized East German society looking to the Third World for alternative sociopolitical – and musical – models.

On 15 November 1976, in a watershed moment in the history of Cold War German–German relations, East German singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann was expatriated from the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The immediate pretence for Biermann’s expatriation was the ‘antagonistic’ content of the songs that he had sung several days earlier at a concert in Cologne, his first official public appearance since 1965. By singing and reciting texts containing ‘extreme attacks against the socialist state’, reported GDR authorities, Biermann had ‘grossly injured’ his duties as a citizen.¹ Already banned from publishing or performing in

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Initial research for this article was made possible by a travel grant from Mount Saint Mary’s University, Los Angeles. Staff at the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut of the Staatsbibliothek Berlin, the Evangelisches Landeskirchliches Archiv in Berlin, and the Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft, Archiv der DDR-Opposition assisted in the identification and digitization of pertinent materials. An early draft of the article was read and critiqued by Claudia Macdonald and Raymond Knapp. Wolf and Pamela Biermann, Clouds Hill GmbH & Co., and Lourdes Villafaña kindly authorized use of translations and transcriptions. Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers identified by *Twentieth-Century Music* for their feedback and to Alejandro L. Madrid for his patience and support.

1 This rationale is a paraphrase of ‘Maßnahmen zum Abschluß der Bearbeitung Karl-Wolf BIERMANNs’, an East German Secret Police document from 15 November 1976 reproduced in ‘*Staatsbürgerliche Pflichten grob verletzt*’. *Der Rauswurf des Liedermachers Wolf Biermann 1976 aus der DDR* (Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 2016), 71–2. The full text reads: ‘In dieser

the GDR for over a decade, he was now expelled from the 'good Germany', a state whose socio-political reform had been his *cause célèbre*.

To ears unfamiliar with the cultural politics of 'late socialism' in the GDR, the content of many of the songs Wolf Biermann sang at his Cologne concert might not seem to justify the harsh reaction of the East German state. This seeming incongruity is exemplified by 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' ('Chile – Ballad of the Cameraman'), the first of two encores on Biermann's 1976 programme. Released in West Germany in 1973, the year of the *coup d'état* that cut short Salvador Allende's experiment in Chilean socialism, 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' can be heard as an expression of Marxist solidarity with the Third World: a rejection of Western 'imperial aggression' easily confused with Soviet Bloc rhetoric. Thomas Rothschild's West German exegesis of the ballad reflects just such a hearing. In recounting the story of a cameraman who films his own murder at the hands of a Chilean *golpista*,² explains Rothschild in a 1979 essay, Biermann strove to demand international solidarity with the Allende administration and to emphasize the capacity of art as a weapon of (socialist) activism.³

Given Wolf Biermann's storied history with the GDR establishment, and the chronological proximity of his expatriation to the expulsion of Soviet dissidents such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, it could be argued that the semantic content of songs such as 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' had little to do with the 'Biermann Affair'. Indeed, declassified Secret Police documents indicate that the East German state had been planning to expatriate Biermann for years before his Cologne concert and that GDR authorities would not have been shy in mischaracterizing the content of his music to justify this expulsion. That said, no such mischaracterization was necessary in the case of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann'. The song is, in fact, more than a call for solidarity with Chilean socialists. It is also a form of protest against the Soviet Bloc orthodoxy of the East German state. In explaining how and why this is the case, this article both adds a musical dimension to the extant lyrical analyses of Biermann's songs and provides a transnational context for their genesis, exploring the meanings of 'revolutionary' South America to East German ears.

Being among the most popular singer-songwriters in post-war German history, Wolf Biermann has been the subject of a substantial bibliography of scholarly analysis.

Veranstaltung, die teilweise vom "Westdeutschen Rundfunk" übertragen wurde, sang und rezitierte Biermann insgesamt 25 Texte, die überwiegend extreme Angriffe gegen die sozialistische Staats- und Gesellschaftsordnung in der DDR und Aufforderung zu deren Beseitigung; Diskriminierungen des sozialistischen Staates, seiner Organe sowie Repräsentanten . . . Biermann hat durch die dargelegten Handlungen weiterhin während eines Aufenthaltes im Ausland seine staatsbürgerlichen Pflichten grob verletzt.'

2 A conspirator in a *coup d'état* (*golpe de estado*).

3 Thomas Rothschild, 'Also doch auch mit Gitarre', in *Geschichte im Gedicht. Texte und Interpretationen (Protestlied, Bänkelsang, Ballade, Chronik)*, ed. Walter Hinck (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979). A similar hearing is voiced by *Frankfurter Rundschau* music journalist Hans-Klaus Jungheinrich in his 12 December 1976 review of the album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*, 'Kein Solschenizyn: Ein neuer Biermann': 'Spanischer Bürgerkrieg, Franco-Tod, Unidad Popular und Che Guevara: es scheint, als markiere Biermann mit dieser alle "Linken" vereinigen- den Thematik noch einmal unmissverständlich seine ungebrochen sozialistische Position. Er stellt sich auch eindeutig in die Tradition des internationalen Kampfes wider den Faschismus. Hieß der Autor nicht Biermann, dann stünde der Veröffentlichung der Platte in der DDR wohl nichts im Wege.'

Particular attention has been paid to the strategies of the inner-communist critique embodied in his protest songs. Like other members of the East German intelligentsia, argue scholars, Biermann used the 'rhetorical terrain' of the socialist cannon to reform the socialist state from the inside,⁴ drawing on the carnivalesque writings of Francois Villon,⁵ the irreverent poetry of Heinrich Heine,⁶ and the Marxist theatrical strategies of Bertolt Brecht⁷ in order to expose the contradictions between GDR establishment ideology and the lived experience of its citizenry. Given that these claims have been made almost exclusively through analysis of Biermann's poetry, the first contribution of my look at 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' is to supplement lyrical interpretation with musical analysis. The 'Chilean' subject matter of Biermann's song adds an additional dimension to this exploration. As Jesse Freedman has shown in his recent article on the East German reception of the Chilean *Nueva Canción* (New Song), 'revolutionary' South America played an important symbolic role in the political dimension of musical life in the GDR, serving as a vehicle not only for the expression of state-sanctioned solidarity with the Third World, but also for the exploration of alternative approaches to Soviet Bloc socialism.⁸ A closer examination of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann', a song that serves as a central example in Freedman's text,⁹ provides a more precise account of how Biermann borrowed from both sides of this coin. Drawing on visual and literary symbols central to GDR political rhetoric and a musical 'vocabulary of dissent' shared by non-aligned *Nueva Canción* singer-songwriters such as Daniel Viglietti (a musician with notable, if ambivalent, visibility in East Germany and who Biermann knew personally), this song expressed support for the Chilean socialist experiment while simultaneously attacking the authority of the East German state and the morality of the Soviet Bloc dogma it espoused.

The following analysis opens with a close read of the text of Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' and then pans out to explore the East German context in which it was written, the lyrical and musical particularities of the inner-communist critique it launched,

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- 4 This strategy of political/artistic resistance was outlined by David Bathrick in reference to East German literature. More recently, Elaine Kelly has applied it to East German music. David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Elaine Kelly, *Composing the Cannon in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - 5 David Robb, 'The Legacy of Brecht in East German Political Song', in *Edinburgh German Yearbook 5: Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Prosperity*, ed. Karen Bradley and Karen Leeder (Rochester, NY: Camden House).
 - 6 Dieter P. Meier-Lenz, *Heinrich Heine-Wolf Biermann. Deutschland ZWEI Wintermärchen – Ein Werkvergleich* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1977).
 - 7 David Robb, 'Mühsam, Brecht, Eisler and the Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Heritage', in *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s*, ed. David Robb (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007).
 - 8 Jesse Freedman, 'Political Participation and Engagement in East Germany through Chilean *Nueva Canción*', *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 54/1 (2022). For an exploration of *Nueva Canción* as an expression of East German solidarity, see Christina Richter-Ibáñez, 'Latin American Songs in the GDR and the East German Singer-Songwriter Repertoire', *Twentieth-Century Music* 17/3 (2020). For an examination of the South American imaginary as a political alternative to real-existing socialism, see Jennifer Ruth Hosek, *Sun, Sex, and Socialism: Cuba in the German Imaginary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012) and Jamie H. Trnka, *Revolutionary Subjects: German Literatures and the Limits of Aesthetic Solidarity with Latin America* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).
 - 9 Freedman's work went to press while this article was under review.

and the Nueva Canción music with which it shared an aesthetic 'language of dissent'. Through sung poetry and sophisticated guitar accompaniment, I argue, Biermann's song simultaneously re-articulated and deconstructed 'South American' symbols and tropes central to East German orthodoxy, expressing a 'critical solidarity' with the socialist world that demanded self-reflection from his communist listeners and encouraged overtly political statements of anti-establishment protest. The article concludes with a look at Biermann's work in the light of recent discussions about the German embrace of Third World subjectivities.

'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann'

Let us begin with the song itself. 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' is a sonic reworking of a visual text: a short film taken during the *Tanquetazo*,¹⁰ a failed coup orchestrated by the Chilean military in June 1973, several months before the ousting of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity administration in September of that year.¹¹ The film is alarming in its intimacy. Taken for Swedish National Television by Argentine-Swedish journalist Leonardo Henrichsen and quickly circulated throughout the Western world,¹² it captures Henrichsen's murder at the hands of a Chilean soldier. Much of the text's power derives from its first-person subject position, which transforms the viewer into a victim: a truck full of soldiers pulls up near *La Moneda*, the Chilean presidential palace. A soldier takes aim and fires. Then the camera falls and the screen goes black.¹³

In Biermann's hands, Henrichsen's film is transformed from the documentation of a singular incident into multi-layered allegory simultaneously describing the events of the film, the reactions of the narrator to these events, and the lessons that can be interpolated from them. These three components of the work are partially delineated by lyrical form. In the introductory stanza, Biermann appeals to his 'comrades', provoking them to action through understanding; the following verses describe the details of the provocation (the setting of the film in Santiago in that 'bloody year', the violence of the attempted coup, and the murder of the cameraman); the choruses serve to reinforce the lesson to be learned, repeated with escalating intensity through a series of dialectical oppositions (fist and face; muzzle and mouth; gun and camera; gun and guitar). By the end of the final chorus, Henrichsen's film has been re-examined and its oppositions resolved.¹⁴ The audience

10 Biermann's reference to Henrichsen's film in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' is documented in Rothschild, 'Also doch auch mit Gitarre', 274 and by Biermann himself in Wolf Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!* (Berlin: Ullstein Taschenbuch, 2017), 303.

11 *Tanquetazo* refers to the column of armoured vehicles, including six tanks (*tanque*), that a rogue faction of the Chilean military drove into the centre of Santiago, the location of the Chilean presidential palace.

12 Rothschild claims that Biermann saw the film on TV. Further research is needed to ascertain whether Henrichsen's film circulated in the GDR, a variable that would have impacted the reception of the song by those East Germans who managed to obtain an illicit copy of Biermann's recordings.

13 Henrichsen's fragment was used in the opening scenes of 'El golpe de estado' (1976), the second installment of Patricio Guzmán's documentary film trilogy *La batalla de Chile, la lucha de un pueblo sin armas*.

14 This passage paraphrases lyrical observations made in Rothschild, 'Also doch auch mit Gitarre', 277-278.

has learned the 'whole truth' of Popular Unity: violence must be fought with violence using 'gun and guitar' (Figure 1).¹⁵

Biermann's musical choices¹⁶ both reinforce and extend the structure and content of his lyric, acting not only as accompaniment to but also as commentary on the text. This guitar music comprises a series of musical gestures derived from the repeated two-bar 6/8 phrase that introduces the song: a plunging glissando, followed by a softly strummed Em⁹ and a percussive whack (Example 1). The music of the verses unpacks this semantic kernel to express both affect and context: in verse one, 6/8 drumming on the guitar strings serves simultaneously as a kind of funeral march and an index of South American indigeneity, accompanying the death of the cameraman with a tritone (Example 2); in verse two, rapid alternation between scale degrees 6 and 5 on the bass strings, punctuated by percussive 'explosions', indexes fear while describing fleeing crowds (Example 3); in verse three, the music slows as the 'film' ends, imitating the slowing of the projector wheel, the murder of the cameraman, and the emotional exhaustion of the narrator. The music to the choruses brings the tenor of the song to its height, reinforcing the violence of the lyrical message with a metrical shift and powerful strumming.

The lyrical and musical meaning of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' is notably enriched by the sonic and visual content of the West German records on which it was released.¹⁷ In the first of these records, the single 'Chile/Che Guevara' (1973),¹⁸ the song is closely tied to 'revolutionary' South America. Musically speaking, the single makes this association through the pairing of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' with 'Comandante Che Guevara', Biermann's German-language reworking of Carlos Puebla's 'Hasta siempre' ('Until Forever'). South America is implied in the cover art as well: one side of the record sleeve features a photo of the Chilean military officer from Henrichsen's film, an image that would likely have been recognizable to German audiences of 1973. The other side is dominated by a rough likeness of Che Guevara on a red background.

If Wolf Biermann initially framed 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as a 'South American' song, his re-release of the composition in 1976 on his West German 'Spanish'

15 As highlighted at other junctures in this text, Biermann's interpretation of the Tanquetazo – and the Allende administration's collapse more generally – does not necessarily reflect the complexities of the Chilean experience. Indeed, although certainly aware of the Soviet Bloc's complicity in the failure of Allende's experiment, it is unclear to what degree Biermann perceived the damage to the Popular Unity Party inflicted by fissures within the *Chilean* left. His portrayal of the Chilean soldier as a fascist murderer, meanwhile, may reflect a lack of awareness as to the degree to which Allende's project was both enabled and protected by sectors of the Chilean armed forces. See Jeremy Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021) and Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile & the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

16 The version of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' described here was recorded in 1976. Musical details from an earlier 1973 version are included later in the article.

17 Like most of Biermann's oeuvre, 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' was never officially available to East German audiences.

18 Wolf Biermann, 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann, Comandante Che Guevara', *YouTube*, single, CBS 1903, 1973, www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVaFLMugDDw.

Chile – Ballad of the Cameraman

Comrades, now say something! Does no one remember?
 Man, at least one of you? Someone here must
 Still know the name and where and when
 He died in Chile, the cameraman!

In Santiago, in that bloody year
 So many died, too many
 And that is Chile in a word:
 A man films his murderer murdering him!

Ach, power comes from fists
 And not from a good face
 Power comes from muzzles
 Not from mouths!
 Comrades, this is clear
 This is and remains true
 This is the bitter truth
 Of POPULAR UNITY

It turned out to be an instructional film
 I saw the business of soldiers: killing
 I saw images that everyone knows:
 The people run for their lives over the pavement
 And how the guns sweep the street
 And how the workers lie down to die
 I saw the shots tear into the children
 And how the women throw themselves on the dead.

You see him at work with his submachine gun
 Especially this animal, this cop with a steel helmet
 How he presses his jaw to the gun
 And how he takes time to aim, to aim...
 The cameraman aims directly at the man
 The man aims directly at the camera
 Then the image shudders, the film breaks off
 – that is what I have seen.

Ach, power comes from fists
 And not from a good face
 Power comes from muzzles
 Not just from mouths
 Comrades, this is clear
 This is and remains true

Figure 1 Lyrics to Wolf Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as printed on the insert to the 1976 album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. Translation into English by the author.

This is the precious truth
Of POPULAR UNITY

The bullet came out of the gun
It didn't come out of the camera
And our fight continues
Where the film breaks off:
With gun and guitar
Comrades, this is clear
And this is the whole truth
Of POPULAR UNITY

Figure 1 Continued.



Example 1 Guitar introduction to 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as recorded on the 1976 album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. Transcription by the author.



Example 2 Tone painting in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as recorded on the 1976 album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. The murder of the cameraman is followed by tritones. Transcription by the author.



Example 3 Biermann's musical description of fleeing crowds in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as recorded on the 1976 album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. Transcription by the author.

LP, *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod* (*There is a Life before Death*),¹⁹ recontextualizes it within a larger constellation of largely Iberian signifiers. Musically speaking, most of the tracks on *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod* refer in some way to the recently deceased Spanish dictator

¹⁹ Wolf Biermann, *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*, LP, CBS 81259, 1976.

General Francisco Franco, or to the events of the Spanish Civil War; three tracks are songs written for and sung in the 1930s by the International Brigades. The collage of images on the record sleeve mirrors this semantic web, assembling symbols of Spanish 'fascist' and 'communist' worlds in seeming free association: on the back cover, a small reproduction of the cover art of the 'Chile' single is placed alongside a portrait of Franco, an execution scene from the Spanish Civil War, photos of the Spanish Republicans Dolores Ibárruri and Julian Grimau, and a likeness of International Brigades singer Ernst Busch. Biermann plays a central role in his photomontage: images of him, his mother, and his father feature prominently among protagonists of twentieth-century world history.

Wolf Biermann and the GDR

The centrality of Wolf Biermann and his family to the cover art of *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod* reflects the importance of this singer-songwriter's biography to his style of musical politics. The power of this persona derived from its congruence with the 'anti-fascist' mythology of the GDR. Established in the aftermath of the Second World War under the aegis of the Soviet Union, East Germany saw itself as the antidote to its Nazi past: a non-nation that could serve as a refuge for the world's communist intellectual elite and a nursery for the 'new man'. The son of German communists, one of them a German-Jew murdered by the Nazi dictatorship, Biermann embodied this imaginary. Volitionally adopting East Germany as his home at the age of 17, the young singer-songwriter was mentored by the GDR's artistic elite, first as an assistant director at Bertolt Brecht's Berlin Ensemble and later the mentee of composer Hanns Eisler. Up until the early 1960s, he was a darling of the new society, a living advertisement for the 'good Germany'.

But much like many promising minds of the West's post-war generation, Biermann was a cultural contradiction of sorts:²⁰ rather than continuing to further the goals and values of the society that had nurtured him, he interrogated them. As in the West, this interrogation was in many respects merited: by the 1960s, the East German idealism of the immediate post-war era had faded, replaced by an increasingly sclerotic state that, led by veterans of the pre-war-era communist establishment, was largely subservient to the dictates of Soviet policy. As the Cold War escalated, the disjuncture between official claims of a successfully realized socialist society and the East German lived experience of 'real existing socialism' intensified. Unable to satisfactorily address the new challenges it faced, the GDR resorted to (the threat of) violence: in 1961, the state began the construction of an 'anti-fascist protection wall', a measure underwritten by a growing network of secret state police. In the summer of 1968, it condoned the brutal suppression of the Czechoslovakian Prague Spring, disillusioning a generation of young communists.

20 In *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), Daniel Bell attempted to explain the emergence of countercultural communities in the United States. See Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) for an exploration of the parallels between Cold War-era protest movements on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Biermann's turn to political critique had begun long before the Prague Spring, at which point he was already a *persona non grata* in the GDR. Indeed, by the early 1960s, the singer-songwriter was a well-established protagonist of the self-identified 'inner-communist opposition', a group of East German intellectuals who believed that the democratic reform of socialist institutions could help to prevent the misuse of Marxist doctrine and, ultimately, the rise of a socialist dictatorship.²¹ Poems of this period reflect the brashly confrontational – and intentionally offensive – nature of Biermann's initial approach to inducing such communist reform. In the 1962 poem 'An die alten Genossen' ('To the Old Comrades'), Biermann attacks the 'old men' of the East German state, questioning the relevance of their pre-WWII experience and demanding immediate change.²² In the first chapter of his 1965 'Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen' ('Germany: A Winter's Tale'),²³ he channels the sarcasm of nineteenth-century poet Heinrich Heine to proclaim East Germany the 'buttocks' of the world, a Nazi successor-state 'scrubbed red' with Stalinist ideology.

The GDR establishment had little tolerance for such critique. Ideologically unable to distinguish criticism from treason – and, perhaps equally importantly, haunted by the tragedy of the Weimar Republic, in which leftist factionalism had contributed to enabling the rise of the Nazi dictatorship – the East German state reacted to Biermann swiftly and with increasing severity.²⁴ A temporary ban on the singer-songwriter's work in 1963 was followed by a permanent and total ban in 1965. An apparent thaw in cultural policy in the early 1970s masked a change in state protocol from censorship to expatriation: declassified East German secret police documents indicate that preparations for Biermann's expulsion from the GDR began as early as 1972.²⁵ By 1976, he had been forced into West German exile.

The decade of East German censorship between the total ban on Wolf Biermann's work in 1965 and his expatriation to West Germany in 1976 provides the context for the emergence of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann'. This period in Biermann's career was marked by a

21 For more on East German strategies of political dissidence, see Christian Joppke, *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989. Social Movement in a Leninist Regime* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); and Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Meier-Lenz, *Heinrich Heine-Wolf Biermann*, and Peter Thompson, 'Wolf Biermann: Die Heimat ist Weit', in *Protest Song in East and West Germany Since the 1960s*, ed. David Robb (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007) are particularly articulate as to Biermann's 1968-era political stance.

22 The poem 'An die alten Genossen' unleashed a scandal when Biermann read it publicly at the East Berlin Akademie der Kunst in 1962. It was published in *Die Drahtarfe* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1965).

23 The title of Biermann's poem is a reference to Heine's 1842 work of the same name, a satirical reflection on Restoration-era Germany written by the German-Jewish poet following his brief return from Parisian exile. Quatrains such as the following description of a customs search at the German border (Caput II: 16–20) illustrate why the 'banned' Biermann might have identified so strongly with Heine's poem: 'Ihr Thoren, die Ihr im Koffer sucht! / Hier werdet Ihr nichts entdecken! / Die Contrebande, die mit mir reist / Die hab' ich im Kopfe stecken' ('You fools, searching the suitcase! / You won't find anything there / The contraband that travels with me / I've stuck in my head!').

24 This reading is closely informed by Joppke, *East German Dissidents*.

25 See Dietmar Keller and Matthias Kirchner, eds., *Biermann und keine Ende. Eine Dokumentation zur DDR Politik* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991) and the East German Secret Police documents in 'Maßnahmen zum Abschluß der Bearbeitung Karl-Wolf BIERMANNs', 'Staatsbürgerliche Pflichten grob verletzt'.

paradoxical combination of isolation and publicity: although confined to his closely monitored apartment in East Berlin, Biermann enjoyed seemingly unfettered access to Eastern and Western culture, maintaining close contact with activists on both sides of the Iron Curtain.²⁶ And although absent in East Germany's 'official' public sphere, Biermann's music was well known across the German-speaking world. Wildly popular in West Germany, where the singer-songwriter's work was published in both written and recorded form,²⁷ this repertoire circulated in East Germany as *samizdat*, illicit copies distributed by underground networks of students and intellectuals. As Biermann wrote with customary irony in his 1965 'Das macht mich populär' ('That Makes Me Popular'), East German efforts at suppressing his critical voice had only broadened his audience: 'You put out the fire with gasoline . . . you create what you mean to prevent: You make me popular!'²⁸

But if GDR state censorship failed to silence Biermann, the decade following his blacklisting did witness an important shift in the singer-songwriter's tactics of inner-communist opposition. In a manner similar to other East German intellectual contemporaries, Biermann developed a Janus-faced form of artistic expression in which symbols and narratives of communist ideology were simultaneously re-articulated and deconstructed. A degree of ventriloquism was central to this operation: speaking with the voices and the *musics* of 'Others' – including those of South American Nueva Canción musicians – the singer-songwriter both disguised and reinforced his calls for socialist reform.

Wolf Biermann's 'critical solidarity'

In an open letter to Biermann published shortly before his expulsion from the GDR, West German radical Rudi Dutschke²⁹ characterized songs such as 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as acts of 'critical solidarity',³⁰ texts that, through rigorous self-critique,

26 Biermann's autobiography provides an entertaining picture of this period. Visitors to his Chausseestraße 131 apartment included East German 'dissidents' Robert Havemann, Stefan Heym, and Heiner Müller as well as Western activists Joan Baez, Rudi Dutschke, Allen Ginsberg, and Daniel Viglietti. See Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*.

27 Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Wolf Biermann, der Dichter zwischen allen Stühlen', in *Wolf Biermann: Der leidende Liedermacher*, ed. Thomas Anz (Marburg an der Lahn: LiteratureWissenschaft.de, 1978); Thompson, 'Wolf Biermann: Die Heimat ist Weit'.

28 The song 'Das macht mich populär' was published in score form in West Germany 1972 and released on the West German LP *Aah, ja!* in 1973. The poem was written almost a decade earlier, in 1965. For the score, see Wolf Biermann, *Für meine Genossen: Herzlieder, Gedichte, Balladen. Mit Noten zu allen Liedern* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1972). For the chronology of the poem, see Wolf Biermann, *Alle Lieder* (Cologne: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1991), 164–9.

29 Dutschke's biography was in some ways the mirror image of Biermann's: born in East Germany, he emigrated to the West as a teenager.

30 See Rudi Dutschke 'Offener Brief für Wolf: Kritik und Selbstkritik', in *Wolf Biermann: Liedermacher und Sozialist*, ed. Thomas Rothschild (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976). Dutschke's commentary on 'critical solidarity' reads as follows: 'Eine kritische Solidarität versteht sich . . . als eine stärkende Kraft im Lager der antikapitalistischen Front. Die Solidarität kann nur solide werden, wenn die Kritik einen angemessenen Stellenwert einnehmen kann. Der "Kältestrom" der kritischen Schärfe und der "Wärmestrom" der Solidarität – um mit E. Bloch zu sprechen – bedingen einander. Durch diese Einheit, so meine ich, erreichen wir potentiell eine politische Stärke und soziale Breite, die es erst möglich macht, den Feind und die Aufgaben im Rahmen des Klassenkampfes konkret zu erfassen und davon

broke down the ideological barriers dividing the socialist community, thus opening the way for a successful socialist future.³¹ Dutschke's formulation aptly captures the complexity of Biermann's political positioning, for if Biermann condemned 'real existing socialism', he did so in the hope of preserving, not dismantling, the East German experiment. Indeed, the official East German ban on Biermann's music in no way lessened the degree to which it was shaped by – and committed to – socialist thought. Songs such as 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' embodied a deep-seated belief in the transformative political power conferred on artists by socialist ideology. Equally importantly, their materials were drawn largely from the GDR's rhetorical terrain. Written with East German audiences in mind, they re-articulated discourses and symbols integral to the East German cultural imaginary.

The GDR's tradition of political song is among the most important sources for Biermann's musical expression of critical solidarity. Embracing the experiments in 'didactic' and 'fighting' music launched by German-speaking communists during the 1920s and 1930s, GDR cultural institutions actively promoted a corpus of songs intended to mould ideal socialist citizens. Biermann's work was an outgrowth of this effort. Abstractly speaking, central aspects of the formal structure and musical style of songs such as 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' can be traced to Bertolt Brecht and Hanns Eisler, including the Lehrstück-like didacticism of its lyric and its montage of popular and avant-garde sounds. More concretely, a great deal of Biermann's repertoire was itself drawn from the 'classics' of GDR political song. This was particularly true of the album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. Prepared for the fortieth anniversary of the Spanish Civil War – a conflict celebrated in the GDR as a symbol of international resistance to fascism³² – the content of Biermann's 'Spanish album' paralleled that of the contemporary East German Aurora record catalogue, which included a series of Ernst Busch re-releases that paired songs such as 'Freiheit' ('Freedom'), 'Jaramafront' ('The Jarama Front'), and 'Die Herren Generale' ('The Generals') with biographies of Spanish Republican heroes.³³

ausgehend zu handeln' (67). Jamie H. Trnka has used the term productively in her work on representations of Latin America in East German literature.

- 31 Many members of the East German intelligentsia agreed. In a letter to GDR head of state Erich Honecker in the period following Biermann's expatriation, activist academic Robert Havemann wrote: 'Wolf Biermann übt Kritik, harte und scharfe Kritik. Aber war es nicht immer so, daß gerade unsere besten Genossen die Waffe der Kritik mit schonungsloser Schärfe handhabten. Und zwar ganz besonders, wenn es darum ging, unsere eigenen Fehler und Irrtümer aufzudecken. Diese Art Kritik, kommunistische Kritik, übt Wolf Biermann . . . Er verkörpert heute in zwiespältiger Weise, eine Art letzter großer Hoffnung, auf einen Sozialismus, von dem sie schon aufgehört hatten, zu träumen.' Robert Havemann [Letter to Erich Honecker, probably from late November 1976], in *Staatsbürgerliche Pflichten grob verletzt'. Der Rauswurf des Liedermachers Wolf Biermann 1976 aus der DDR* (Berlin: Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, 2016), 78.
- 32 The Spanish Civil War was particularly important for the anti-fascist imaginary of the GDR. Involvement in the International Brigades had been one of the few ways in which German-speakers overtly opposed the rise of the Nazi dictatorship, and much of the GDR's political leadership had fought alongside the Spanish Republicans. See Arnold Krammer. 'The Cult of the Spanish Civil War in East Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39/4 (2004). 'Zum 40. Jahrestag der Formierung der Internationalen Brigaden in Spanien im Oktober 1936', a document published in 1976 by the Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR, closely informed this author's understanding of the subject.
- 33 Consult, for example, Ernst Busch, *Canciones de las Brigadas Internacionales auf Aurora Schallplatten*, 45, Aurora 580001 and 580002, 1963; Ernst Busch, *Spanien: Venceremos auf Aurora Schallplatten* 585023, 1976.

The political subject matter of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' also ran parallel to the protest songs popularized by the GDR's Singing Movement,³⁴ a state-sanctioned musical community that, established in the late 1960s, reached its apogee around the time of the release of *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. A reaction to the popularity of protest song among Western youth, the Singing Movement strove to modify the genre to make it more appropriate for an East German society putatively free of class conflict, stipulating that songs be optimistic with respect to the socialist present and, accordingly, that calls for rebellion 'of the oppressed classes against the exploiting classes' be replaced with 'expression(s) of the common interests of the workers'.³⁵ In line with both communist ideology and the more prosaic geopolitical interests of the East German state, internationalism was a central component of the Singing Movement. In 1970, the GDR established the first Festival for Political Song,³⁶ an annual event held in East Berlin 'in the spirit of anti-imperialist solidarity, freedom, and friendship'.³⁷ Over the course of the subsequent two decades, the event brought hundreds of protest singers from all over the world to the capital of the 'good Germany'.

Chile and Chilean Nueva Canción musicians played an oversized role in the early years of the GDR's Singing Movement. Perceived as a symbol of emergent Third World communism during the Allende years and a Latin American re-enactment of the Spanish Civil War in the aftermath of the 1973 coup d'état,³⁸ Chile was second only to Vietnam as an international subject of East German musical production, and the 1970, 1973, and 1974 editions of the Festival of Political Song were dominated by Allende-affiliated protagonists of the Chilean Nueva Canción movement, including Quilapayún, Inti-Illimani, and Isabel Parra. As is explored in greater detail later, the musical fruits of the Nueva Canción movement – a repertoire of leftist, socially engaged folksong that flowered across South America in the late 1960s – were stylistically and ideologically diverse. That said, East Germans seem to have been more likely to be 'officially' exposed to those songs congruent with communist state

34 See Hartmut König's recent autobiography, *Warten wir die Zukunft ab* for a detailed history of the Singing Movement, or Singebewegung. Hartmut König, *Warten wir die Zukunft ab* (Berlin: Neues Leben Verlag, 2017).

35 As East German musicologist Inge Lammell stipulated in *The Workers' Song* (1970), 'Die neuen Lieder werden für die Politik von Partei und Regierung geschaffen. Sie sind nicht mehr Kampfmittel einer unterdrückten Klasse gegen eine Klasse von Ausbeutern, sondern Ausdruck der gemeinsamen Interessen aller Werktätigen.' Quoted in David Robb, 'Political Song in the GDR: The Cat-and-Mouse Game with Censorship and Institutions', in *Protest Song*, ed. Robb, 230. The Singing Movement's iconic song, the Oktoberklub's 'Sag mir wo du stehst' ('Tell Me Where You Stand'), expertly realizes this goal, transforming the call for social and economic justice in Pete Seeger's 'Which Side Are You On' into a demand for loyalty to the Communist Party.

36 The first two years of the Festival of Political Song are documented in Sieglinde Mierau, *Intersongs: Festival des politischen Liedes* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1973). See Lutz Kirchenwitz, *Rote Lieder. Festival des politischen Liedes Berlin/DDR 1970-1990* (Berlin: Lied und soziale Bewegungen e.V., 2011) and Andreas Ruhl, *Stalin-Kult und Rotes Woodstock: Die Weltjugendfestspiele 1951 und 1973 in Ostberlin* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2009) for contextualized histories.

37 '[E]in bedeutendes Liederfest im Geiste der antiimperialistischen Solidarität, des Friedens und der Freundschaft'. Quoted from Peter Porsch and Siegfried Jaroszewski, eds., *Festival Magazin: Das Festival des politischen Liedes: 1970-1986, Berlin DDR* (Berlin: Junge Welt Verlag, 1987), 15.

38 This metonymy is explored in greater detail later.

orthodoxy. The 1973 Eterna label single 'Solidarität mit Chile' ('Solidarity with Chile'),³⁹ a reproduction of a live performance at that year's Festival of Political Song, gives a sense of this situation. On side A, the iconic Chilean group Inti-Illimani sings 'Venceremos' ('We Will Triumph'), an upbeat, march-like anthem written in an effort to rally support for Allende during the 1970 election campaign. On side B, they join the GDR's flagship Singing Movement ensemble, the Oktoberklub, in a multi-lingual rendition of 'El pueblo unido' ('The People United'), a similarly march-like anthem written in order to raise morale within the Popular Unity Party. Lyrically, at least, the parallels between this latter song and Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' seem self-evident: both advocate for solidarity with the socialist cause, the former within the Chilean community, the latter in the East German one.

But if Biermann re-articulated aspects of East German rhetorical and musical culture in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann', the style of this re-articulation simultaneously served to defamiliarize them for listeners in the GDR. A comparison of Biermann's composition with 'Chile tanzt' ('Chile Dances'), a Nueva Canción-inspired solidarity song written by Oktoberklub co-founder Hartmut König, highlights the lyrical and musical dimensions of this defamiliarization. Released in 1972, a year before Biermann's ballad, 'Chile tanzt' draws on both the lyrical stipulations of the Singing Movement and the musical aesthetics of Nueva Canción groups such as Quilapayún: optimistic Allende-led peasants dance their way into a syncopated, D major communist utopia, achieving political transformation through exuberant footwork.⁴⁰ Biermann's sombre, dirge-like depiction of the Chilean Popular Unity Party is a radical departure from this song. Musically, the aggressive tenor of Biermann's minor-mode ballad suggests sadness and anger – not celebration. Lyrically, it attacks the East German state on both international and domestic fronts. On the one hand, Biermann's retelling of the collapse of the Popular Unity administration is a powerful condemnation of the Soviet Bloc's foreign policy of 'peaceful coexistence'. On the other, it is an exposé of the *internal* failings of state socialism. By focusing on a *victimized* South American rather than the triumphant Chilean collective, Biermann transforms the Chilean allegory from a symbol of hope into a cipher for the pitfalls of communist state governance, particularly its disregard for the individual and for independent, critical thought.

A more-detailed look at the lyric of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' highlights these two aspects of Biermann's attack on the East German state. First, there is Biermann's defamiliarization of the Soviet Bloc rhetoric of solidarity with the Third World. On the one hand, this rhetoric is glibly re-articulated in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann': outlining a black-and-white geopolitics in which 'good' Third World socialism (the cameraman) is pitted against 'evil', 'fascist' power (the Nazi-like soldier), Biermann asks his listeners to express their support for an anti-imperialist state. And yet, woven into this re-articulation of Soviet Bloc orthodoxy lies a bitter critique, for the kind of militant solidarity of 'gun and guitar' that Biermann demands was much more akin to revolutionary Maoist – or, perhaps more

39 'Solidarität mit Chile: Originalaufnahmen vom Liedfestival "Politische Lieder zu den X"', single, Eterna 415130, 1973.

40 'Chile tanzt' is the first song on side B of *Hartmut König. Porträt in Liedern*, LP, Amiga 855303, 1972.

precisely, revolutionary *Cuban* – discourse than anything underwritten by the GDR. Indeed, in an effort to maintain détente with the United States and curb China's influence in South America, the Brezhnev-era Soviet Bloc held back on financial and military aid to the Allende administration and denounced 'adventurist' armed struggle in favour of a 'peaceful transition' to socialism involving broad coalition building and economic reform.⁴¹ 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' overtly condemns this policy of 'peaceful coexistence'. In what can be heard as a paraphrase of Che Guevara's 1966 *Message to the Tricontinental*, the chorus of the song reads the demise of Chilean socialism as further proof that only violence can repel the (military) might of capitalist imperialism and that, accordingly, true solidarity is not merely 'a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to death or victory'.⁴²

Such critique had dire repercussions for a celebratory Soviet Bloc historiography that portrayed the collapse of socialist Chile as a cipher for the defeat of Republican Spain; a temporary setback on the inexorable path to communist utopia.⁴³ As is often the case during this period of Biermann's work, this critique is masked by a rhetorical re-articulation: the very inclusion of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' on the 'Spanish' album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod* indicates a fundamental agreement with the central tenets of Soviet Bloc discourse. That said, Biermann's focus on the victimization of the (Chilean) cameraman inverts the indexes of its future-oriented triumphalism, replacing celebration with tragedy. The same critique is launched in other songs on *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. In his bitterly satirical rendition of the GDR's de-facto national anthem 'Freiheit' ('Freedom'), for example, Biermann all but omits the word 'freedom' from the chorus and *whispers* the triumphal 'we fight and die for you' that proceeds it, condemning the rhetorical hypocrisy of Stalinism and – equally importantly – the East German establishment.⁴⁴ In 'Ballade von

41 See Ilya Prizel, 'Wars of National Liberation or Peaceful Transformation' and 'Case Study: Chile', in *Latin America through Soviet Eyes: The Evolution of Soviet Perceptions during the Brezhnev Era 1964–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 135–43, and 160–7; Harmer, *Allende's Chile & the Inter-American Cold War*; Friedman, 'Democratic Communism', in *Ripe for Revolution*, 75–123. Friedman in particular highlights the paradoxes of the Soviet Bloc's approach to the Allende administration, which was discursively vaunted as a model of 'peaceful transition' and simultaneously considered unlikely to succeed given its perceived political factionalization and administrative incompetence. 'Realizing full well what was at stake and looking for ways to help', he concludes, Soviet leadership was still unwilling to invest fully in Allende, remaining 'more afraid of the wrong kind of revolution than a counterrevolution'. Friedman, 'Democratic Communism', 117.

42 The full excerpt from Guevara's *Message to the Tricontinental* reads: 'The solidarity of the progressive forces of the world towards the people of Vietnam today is similar to the bitter irony of the plebians coaxing on the gladiators in the Roman arena. It is not a matter of wishing success to the victim of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to death or victory.' Quoted in Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (New York: New Press, 2007), 108.

43 In this 'long view' of history, Chile was a stepping-stone in an immutable path to global communism. Like the Spanish Civil War, a conflict lost to the fascists in 1938, but ultimately won with the capitulation of Nazi Germany to the Soviets in 1945, Chile would eventually turn to socialism, regardless of the success of the Allende administration.

44 As in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann', Biermann's intention in this rendition of 'Freiheit' was to destabilize the Soviet Bloc 'anti-fascist' rhetoric, using it as a mirror in which to highlight the violence of the communist establishment itself. This included overt attacks on GDR leaders such as Walter Ulbricht and Erich Mielke, who he portrayed as

den Spaniern im Dresdener Exil' ('Ballad of the Spaniards in Exile in Dresden'), meanwhile, the Iberian catastrophe repeats as languishing Spanish Republican exiles, betrayed by the 'world revolution that never came', are replaced with Chileans: 'What can I do / and what can you do', asks Biermann in a Lehrstück-like moment akin to the introduction of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann', 'so that these comrades here from Chile . . . / aren't abandoned for forty years / . . . because Pinochet was stronger / than our good, strong word: solidarity'. In Biermann's songs, Spain and Chile are not so much first steps on the inevitable road to world socialist revolution as they are repeated and *avoidable* socialist failures with real – and terrible – consequences for socialist individuals.

As outlined earlier, the lyrics of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' can be heard to simultaneously re-articulate and deconstruct discourses surrounding the GDR's engagement with Allende's Chile. But it can also be understood as a highly personalized critique of the *internal* features of Soviet Bloc society, one in which 'anti-fascist' East German rhetoric is instrumentalized to critique the GDR's treatment of its own citizens. The first of the Janus-faced symbols worthy of note in this hearing is the Chilean Tanquetazo, at once a symbol of the brute power of 'fascist' sectors of the US-backed Chilean military and, simultaneously, an evocation of the *Soviet* occupation of Prague in the summer of 1968.⁴⁵ The second is Biermann's cameraman. As explored earlier, the cameraman in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' can be heard as a Third World victim of Western imperial violence. That said, as Jesse Freedman documents, it was also understood as a metaphor for the Biermann's *own* fate at the hands of the East German establishment. Blacklisted by the GDR for his songs – aesthetic objects that, like the cameraman's footage, documented the trespasses of an authoritarian police state – Biermann implies that he has been metaphorically 'murdered', physically removed from the East German public sphere.⁴⁶ In appealing to his audiences to remember the cameraman, then, Biermann can be heard to ask them to remember *him*, and to join him with 'gun and guitar' in opposition to the misused – and perhaps even 'fascist' – power of communist institutions.⁴⁷

having betrayed the communist cause during the Spanish Civil War, participating in Stalinist purges rather than fighting Franco. As Biermann wrote in 1992: 'Ich hatte dieses Lied durch meine Interpretation dermaßen gegen den Strich gebürstet, daß es für die Wissenden im Osten eine herzerfrischende Provokation gegen die herrschende Ideologie war, in den Augen der Obrigkeit ein Sakrileg . . . Der Junge sang die Worte neben sich her wie Worte ohne Sinn. Bloß nicht nachdenken! "Kameraden ohnegleichen" hatte er nicht nur "stehn" sondern auch fallen sehn. Und ein Rückwärts gab es sehr wohl, und diesen Rückzug hatten die Faschisten mit Hilfe der deutschen Legion Condor erzwungen. Ich wußte, als wir die Spanienlieder aufnahmen, wie sehr der Stalinismus die Kampfkraft der Spanischen Republik gelähmt hatte. Und ich kannte auch die Berichte über die Heldentaten von Walter Ulbricht und Erich Mielke, die als Spanienkämpfer in Spanien nie gegen die Faschisten kämpften. Sie hatten die Aufgabe, andersdenkende Genossen hinter der Front zu liquidieren, und sie haben diesen Parteauftrag der Komintern treu erfüllt.' Wolf Biermann, *Der Sturz des Dädalus* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch Verlag, 1992), 44–5.

45 The Soviet occupation of Prague was a GDR-supported intervention aimed not at fighting imperialist expansion, but at derailing the reformist platform of Alexander Dubček, who attempted to democratize Czechoslovakia's communist institutions.

46 This 'removal' could very well have transcended metaphor. In his memoirs, Biermann claims to have been targeted for assassination by the East German secret police.

47 This lyrical ambivalence is also recapitulated in many of the 'Spanish' songs that accompany it on the album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod*. On the one hand, these songs re-articulate tropes central to GDR anti-fascist mythology,

Biermann's decision to end the final chorus of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' with the announcement that he is telling the 'whole truth'⁴⁸ of the Popular Unity Party provides a fecund point of departure for encapsulating the messages of critical solidarity that can be heard in his song. This phrase seems significant in two respects. The first is that Biermann does not necessarily claim to tell *the* truth. Rather, faithful to the dialectical tradition, he presents his listeners with theses and antitheses in an ongoing cycle of oppositions,⁴⁹ arriving not so much at a formula as to an approach: to reject dogma (communist or otherwise) and embrace independent, critical, and above all, *public* thought. This direct and open engagement with political life constitutes the second aspect of 'truth' that Biermann can be heard to explore. For in telling the 'whole truth' in his song, Biermann is openly condemning the decision of Soviet Bloc opposition writers to 'live in truth' through retreat to the private sphere.⁵⁰ On the contrary, Biermann seems to assert, 'truth' is not to take flight to the world of 'good strong words',⁵¹ but to act outwardly – to engage *politically* in Hannah Arendt's understanding of the term – even in the face of overwhelming power. In this sense, 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' may be heard not only as inner-communist critique, but also as an inner-communist call to action, an appeal to Biermann's 'comrades' to pick up their 'guns and guitars' and continue to struggle openly and outwardly for communist reform.

Wolf Biermann's 'revolutionary' South American sound

The 'South American' musical content of Biermann's vocal and guitar style plays an integral role in shaping the ambivalent lyrical content of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann'. This music was intentional. 'With the right music', Biermann related in a 1974 interview, 'it is possible to say things that cannot be said in a poem', adding that it was the emotion communicated by sound – not necessarily the thoughts communicated by words – that made song such a potent political tool. 'That is why rulers fear songs', he explained. 'They don't fear the songs themselves, but rather the latent passion provoked and brought to the surface by them.'⁵² Later in life, Biermann would elaborate on these general ideas in a more technical vein. In

condemning dictators and expressing solidarity with the victims of violent regimes. Closer listening, however, destabilizes the partisan nature of these anti-fascist messages. In the final strophe of 'Das Franco-Lied' ('The Franco Song'), for example, Biermann's appraisal of communist solidarity suggests that gruesome crimes have been perpetrated by the 'right *and* left', for 'bad *and* good'.

48 Previous choruses proclaim that he is communicating the 'bitter truth' and the 'valuable truth'.

49 Oppositions in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' include: the gun is more powerful than the camera, but the camera is important to mobilize the gun; Western 'imperialism' felled Chile's socialist state, but the Warsaw Pact nations crushed the Prague Spring; the cameraman died at the hands of the Chilean military, but dissidents like Biermann were also being metaphorically 'killed' by East German repression. See Thompson, 'Wolf Biermann: Die Heimat ist Weit' for further discussion of Biermann's engagement with the concept of the dialectic.

50 Václav Havel's well-known formulation to 'live in truth' was probably not familiar to Biermann at the time he wrote 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as Havel did not publish his essay 'The Power of the Powerless' until 1978 (Václav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', in *Open Letters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991 [1978])).

51 This phrase comprises the last line of Biermann's 'Ballade von den Spaniern im Dresdener Exil'.

52 Klaus Antes, 'Wolf Biermann im Gespräch mit Klaus Antes', in *Wolf Biermann*, ed. Ludwig Arnold (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1976), 22.

his 1997 *Wie man Verse macht und Lieder* (*How to Make Verses and Songs*), he suggested that music could relate to text in four ways: carrying the text, copying the text, interpreting the text, and contradicting the text.⁵³

'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' evidences several of the facets of the music–text relationship outlined in Biermann's book. As explored earlier, Biermann's use of word painting is particularly notable. Sometimes, as in the pairing of the cameraman's murder with a tritone, musical description borders on cliché, quite literally mimicking specific actions or concepts. In other instances, as in the gradual *rallentando* in the guitar part at the end of the third verse ('Then the image shudders, the film breaks off / That is what I have seen'), such musical description plays a subtler role, reinforcing the multi-layeredness of the lyrical metaphor. But, as Biermann himself noted, the central power of his music is affective: for this listener, in any case, the distinctively raw grain of Biermann's voice combined with the timbral and harmonic dissonance of his guitar playing communicate across linguistic boundaries, reinforcing that his is a song of confrontation and protest, an urgent – even desperate – demand shouted and splatted into the listener's ear. It is perhaps self-evident that the same text sung by a different voice, and/or set to different accompaniment, could have a very different meaning. The paucity of recorded covers of Biermann's most popular songs may attest to just how essential his musical style was to the perceived authenticity of his message.

The singularity of Biermann's sound illuminates another role that music plays in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann', for if one of Biermann's greatest virtues was to sound like 'himself', he was also skilled in using music to reference – and perhaps even to attempt to embody – strategic subjectivities not precisely his own. When listening to a voice, writes musicologist Nina Eidsheim, a listener asks the 'acousmatic question': who is this?⁵⁴ For (East) German Biermann listeners of the 1970s, the answer to this question would have been multifaceted. Most fundamentally, perhaps, Biermann's solo voice and guitar style identified him as a musician in the 'Bob Dylan at Newport' mould: a 'lone fighter and social outcast' whose 'I-songs' contrasted with the 'we-songs' of establishment groups such as the Oktoberklub.⁵⁵ But, in some of his songs, Biermann's ubiquitous countercultural alterity was accompanied by sonic representations of *ethnic* communities whose oppression at the hands of Western society gave their voices a certain critical legitimacy. In his 1966 'Preußische Romanze' ('Prussian Romance'),⁵⁶ for example, Biermann compares the power of his guitar – a 'six-shot machine gun' that keeps him company in the cell where his 'brothers' have imprisoned him⁵⁷ – with a

53 Katherina Götsch, *Linke Liedermacher: Das politische Lied der sechziger und siebziger Jahre in Deutschland* (Innsbruck: Limbus Verlag, 2007), 113.

54 Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre & Vocality in African American Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

55 Georg-Friedrich Kühn, 'Kutsche und Kutscher: Die Musik des Wolf Biermann', in *Wolf Biermann*, ed. Klaus Antes (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 1975), 74.

56 Biermann published the score to 'Preußische Romanze' in his *Mit Marx- und Engelszungen* (Berlin: Verlag Kalus Wagenbach, 1968). The poem was written in 1966.

57 Biermann's lyric is almost certainly a parable for his blacklisting, which had occurred the year previously, in 1965. In this sense, 'brothers' is likely a reference to his socialist comrades, but also to the Old Testament story of Joseph, whose

'Spanish Jewess' singing the 'blackest blues'.⁵⁸ The recording of the 'Romanze' included on *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod* (it is the last track of side A) embodies this comparison musically. Here, Biermann begins his song with a guitar solo that moves from a flamenco-inspired E Phrygian dominant riff to a blues-like E minor pentatonic, inventing a fusion of A minor pentatonic/A Phrygian along the way. The intentionality of this meandering improvisation is reinforced with the entrance of the vocals, in which Biermann sings the words 'the blackest blues' to a descending pentatonic line (followed by a $b5$ riff in the guitar) and 'Ay, the Jewish blues' to a Phrygian melody featuring a portamento between E and F \sharp (Example 4).

As in 'Preußische Romanze', Biermann's musical references to 'South America' are closely tied to his political critique. This connection is particularly overt in his 'Comandante Che Guevara', an adaptation of 'Hasta siempre' that pairs 'a very free translation' of Carlos Puebla's lyric with a flamenco-inspired reworking of his 'Latin America harmonies',⁵⁹ thus transforming a celebration of Che Guevara's contributions to the Cuban Revolution into a condemnation of the East German establishment (Figure 2).⁶⁰ 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' can be understood to attempt a similarly politicized sonic reference to the South American Other. Biermann's adaptation of the South American 'sound' is especially evident in his 1973 version of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann', in which a charango (or charango-like strumming on a guitar) bursts in at climactic moments, lending the ballad an Andean flare. But it can also be heard in the percussive guitar techniques common to both his 1973 and 1976 versions: a drum-like pounding on the bridge of the guitar that would seem to evoke indigenous traditions iconic to the South American altiplano – or at least the South American guitar styles that evoked this sound.⁶¹

There is also an argument to be made for a more abstract set of musical references to South America in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann'. Indeed, in addition to his efforts at emulating South American instrumentation, Biermann clearly shared – and perhaps was even inspired by – a musical 'language of dissent'⁶² characteristic of certain anti-establishment branches of the Nueva Canción. As is highlighted earlier, this was not the language of the Nueva Canción repertoire celebrated in the GDR, which seems to have been largely limited to songs whose

jealous siblings sold him into slavery. That Joseph rose to great esteem on account of his gift for prophecy would seem a not insignificant component of the metaphor.

58 This is likely a nod to the poem's dedicatee, Joan Baez. Baez, of course, was neither Spanish nor Jewish. But her Mexican heritage and very public relationship with Bob Dylan suggest such a poetic reading of her ethnic identity.

59 Writes Biermann: 'Der Kulturredakteur des WDR, mein Freund Peter Laudan, hatte mir den Text und das Tonband des Liedes "Hasta siempre, Comandante" von Carlos Puebla aus Kuba in die Chausseestraße geschmuggelt. Ich fingerte mir die lateinamerikanischen Harmonien in die Gitarre und reimte mir ein sehr freie Übersetzung zusammen, die viel mit der DDR zu tun hatte und wenig mit Kuba.' Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, 275.

60 This critique is particularly evident in the depiction of Guevara included in the song's second verse: 'Und bist kein Bonze geworden / Kein hohes Tier, das nach Geld schielt / Und vom Schreibtisch aus den Held spielt / In feiner Kluff mit alten Orden' (see Figure 2 for a translation).

61 Similar techniques were used by Nueva Canción father-figure Atahualpa Yupanqui to represent indigenous drumming.

62 The term 'language of dissent' is used by Jeremi Suri to refer to a transnational literary vocabulary used towards anti-establishment ends on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the 1960s. Suri, *Power and Protest*.

Comandante Che Guevara

We are left with what was good and clear:
 That you were always transparent
 That one saw love, hate, but never fear in you
 Commander Che Guevara
 They fear you, and we love
 You on the frontlines of battle, where death laughs
 Where the people put an end to suffering
 – now you are gone and yet remain!
 We are left with what was good and clear...
 And you didn't become a bigwig
 Not a bigshot looking for money
 Playing the hero behind a desk
 Cosey with the old order
 We are left with what was good and clear...
 Yes, precisely the poor of the earth
 Need more than just to eat
 And that is what you never forgot:
 That people are created from people!
 We are left with what was good and clear...
 The red star on the jacket
 The cigar in the black beard
 Jesus Christ with a gun
 – your image leads us onward to attack
 We are left with what was good and clear:
 That you were always transparent
 That one saw love, hate, but never fear in you
 Commander Che Guevara

Figure 2 Lyrics to Biermann's reworking of Carlos Puebla's 'Hasta Siempre' as sung on the 1976 album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod* and printed in *Fliegen mit fremden Federn*, 35. Translation into English by the author.

crisscrossed the Iron Curtain, touring Europe's major cultural capitals. By 1974, he had reached East Berlin, where he shared the stage with Inti-Ilumani in the Festival of Political Song and, according to Biermann's memoirs, rubbed shoulders with the 'prohibited' singer-songwriter at his Chauseestraße flat, teaching him the chords and words to 'Hasta siempre'.⁶⁷ Biermann would have been aware of the Uruguayan singer-songwriter long before this encounter: the international attention gleaned from his incarceration notwithstanding, recordings of Viglietti performances had been available to Europeans at least since Le

67 As Biermann himself relates: 'Der romantisch-revolutionäre cantautore Daniel Viglietti aus Uruguay tauchte damals in Ostberlin auf. Ihm verdanke ich mehr als nur seine Kunst. Die Parteikastraten des DDR- "Oktoberklubs" hatten ihn angemietet für ein Konzert beim "Festival des politischen Liedes". Er aber verscherzte sich das Wohlwollen seiner Gastgeber, denn er besuchte bei dieser Gelegenheit mich Geächteten. Von ihm lernte ich die typischen Harmonien und Worte für das Canción Cubana des Carlos Puebla: "Commandante [sic] Che Guevara". Wolf Biermann, *Fliegen mit fremden Federn: Nachdichtungen und Adaptionen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2011), 10. According to Biermann's memoirs, Viglietti also attended the East German singer-songwriter's fortieth birthday two days following his 1976 Cologne concert. Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, 331.

Chant du Monde's release of *Uruguay. Chansons pour mon Amérique* in 1968,⁶⁸ and his poems and scores had been published in the widely distributed 1967 protest song compilation *Basta ya!*⁶⁹ as well as the Casa de las America's 1968 booklet *Canción Protesta*.⁷⁰ Some had appeared in German translation in East German publications.⁷¹

The lyrical parallels of Viglietti's poetry with Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' suggest similar political perspectives, if not direct influence. The common emphasis on the necessity of anti-establishment violence is particularly notable: 'paper against bullets / cannot be effective / the unarmed song / cannot confront a gun', writes Viglietti in his 1971 'Sólo digo compañeros' ('I Just Call Them Comrades'),⁷² re-articulating the messages of earlier militant songs such as his 1967 'Canción para mi América' ('Song for My America'), which calls for the 'doors to be broken down' with 'screams and guns', and his 1967 'Canción del hombre nuevo' ('Song for the New Man'),⁷³ which paints a vision of a society led by Che Guevara-like guerrillas.⁷⁴ Similar lyrical parallels to Biermann's composition can be identified in the 1972 song 'Por todo Chile' ('For All of Chile'), in which Viglietti describes Chile as a nation in which 'hundreds of thousands' of armed farmers, miners, and students reclaim the 'entire country' by force, taking back the Andean copper mines from the grip of global imperialism.

Similarities between the sonic aesthetics of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' and those of Viglietti's oeuvre also reflect a shared musical 'language of dissent' – perhaps even an effort on Biermann's part to reconstitute a specifically South American 'revolutionary' identity. This is

68 Daniel Viglietti, *Uruguay. Chansons pour mon Amérique*, LP, Le Chant Du Monde LDX 74362, 1968. The album was a re-release of his Uruguayan album *Canciones para mi América* (LP, Orfeo ULP 90501, 1968) with the addition of 'Canción para mi América', which did not appear on the original LP. *Uruguay* received critical acclaim, winning the French Académie Charles Cros prize.

69 Uruguayan scholar Méri-Franco Lao's French-language protest song compilation *Basta!* included a translation of Viglietti's 'Canción para mi América' ('Chanson pour mon Amérique'). Franco-Lao's volume was published in Italian in 1970 and Spanish in 1972. Méri Franco-Lao, *Basta! Chants de Témoignage et de Révolte de l'Amérique Latine* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1967), 168.

70 *Canción Protesta*, a documentation of the 1967 Cuban international protest song conference of the same name, was released in 1968. It included an introductory essay by Viglietti as well as scores to the singer-songwriter's 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' and 'Canción para mi América'. The accompanying *Canción Protesta* LP included a recording of the latter composition, which may have reached European audiences contemporaneously with *Uruguay*. See Daniel Viglietti, 'Canción del guerrillero heroico', in *Canción Protesta* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1968).

71 A translation of Viglietti's 'Cruz de luz' ('Cross of Light'/'Ein Kreuz aus Licht'), for example, appears in the 1973 GDR publication *Intersongs*. Mierau, *Intersongs*, 45–7.

72 This song was released in Uruguay and Argentina in 1971 and 1972, respectively: *Canciones chuecas*, Orfeo, SULP 90558, 1971; *Canciones chuecas*, América Nueva, L-CPLA002, 1972. It was not commercially available in Europe until 1975: *Canciones chuecas*, Le Chant du Monde, LDX 74 584, 1975. Note that the lyric may also be heard as a statement against (socialist) factionalism.

73 This song was released in 1968 by Orfeo, Uruguay (*Canciones del hombre nuevo* ULP 90501) and Le Chant du Monde, France (*Uruguay. Chansons pour mon Amérique* LDX 74 362).

74 Viglietti's lyrical treatment of the guitar as a 'weapon' that 'by fighting, learned to sing' ('Canción para mi América') is a much more literal use of the gun/guitar metaphor than those propounded by Woody Guthrie or Tom Lehrer, both of whom leaned towards pacifism, and neither of whom were likely to have encouraged their listeners to wield – much less use – actual firearms.

not just a question of instrumentation. Granted, Biermann's 'lone rebel' stage persona was very much congruent with Viglietti's, and his use of a nylon-stringed guitar (as opposed to a steel-string) could be understood as a reference to 'Iberia' or 'Ibero-America'. That said, more convincing similarities can be found in the musical approaches of the two singer-songwriters, both of whom gravitate to folk-like genres less as vehicles for popular transmission than as materials for deconstruction.⁷⁵ Take, for example, Viglietti's 'Canción del hombre nuevo', a 'chacarera' (or something similar) which sonically 'makes' the 'new man' from the clay of a minor second,⁷⁶ launching into a recognizable folkloric groove only when describing the (socialist) creation's militant character (Example 5). Or 'Cruz de luz', a eulogy for the revolutionary priest Camilo Torres that approximates a traditional 'zamba' dance form, but defies both choreography and collective song, weaving a text-centric musical fabric studded with harmonic dissonances and cadential shifts from minor to major (Example 6).⁷⁷ A similar harmonic adventurousness is found in the early Nueva Trova,⁷⁸ which could also be construed as an effort at finding a new musical language for the 'new man'. Formally and timbrally, it bears resemblance to the work of Nueva Canción father-figure Atahualpa Yupanqui, whose 'cannibalization' of popular genres I have discussed at some length elsewhere.⁷⁹

There is an argument to be made that, more than simply sharing a 'language of dissent', the similarities in Viglietti and Biermann's oeuvre were in fact the result of direct influence, perhaps even emulation. Indeed, a historical contextualization and musical comparison of Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' with Viglietti's 1967 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' ('Song of the Heroic Guerrilla') suggests that Biermann may have intentionally referenced Viglietti's oeuvre. Written in Cuba in response to Che Guevara's death, 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' was published in score form alongside Carlos Puebla's 'Hasta siempre' in the Casa de las Américas' 1968 *Canción Protesta* booklet,⁸⁰ a coupling that may very well have inspired Biermann's pairing of 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' with Puebla's song on his 1973 'Chile' single. The lyrical and musical congruencies between the two songs reinforce this thesis. First, there is the emphasis of Viglietti's lyric on the necessity of revolutionary violence and the martyrdom of a Third World insurgent, a theme that is quite similar to that of Biermann's song (Figure 3). Second, there are pronounced musical parallels. Like

75 Some of these stylistic similarities may have been products of parallel musical education. Like Biermann, Viglietti was classically trained, having studied with guitarist Abel Carlevaro as a university student. His first recording (*Seis impresiones para canto y guitarra*), which includes short compositions in the Carlevaro vein, suggests that he nurtured ambitions of becoming an art music composer. See Pellegrino, *Las cuerdas vivas de América*, 181 and Benedetti, *Daniel Viglietti*, 32.

76 It is perhaps unnecessary to note that the minor second is the smallest unit of the Western musical language.

77 Note that the chord chart of 'Cruz de luz' in *Intersongs* omits many of these details.

78 Viglietti was intimately familiar with this repertoire, recording a selection of it on his 1973 LP *Trópicos*, Orfeo, SULP 90575. The album, which was produced in Cuba, was initially released on the island in 1972 as *Daniel Viglietti y el Grupo de Experimentación Sonora del ICAIC*, Areito-Egrem, LDA 3395.

79 Julius Reder Carlson. "Basta ya!" Aesthetic Calibanism and Cold War-Era Context in the Protest Songs of Atahualpa Yupanqui, *Music & Politics* 13/2 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0013.203>.

80 Biermann may also have heard 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' on Meri Fanco-Lao's 1971 LP *Canti al Che*, where it is included as track 3. *Canti al Che. A cura di Meri Franco-Lao*, LP, I Dischi dello Zodiaco. VPA 8127, 1971.



Example 5 Viglietti moulds the new man from the 'clay' of a minor second in the opening bars of the guitar part to 'Canción del hombre nuevo'. The interval expands gradually over the course of the first line of text ('We will do it, you and I / we will do it / we will take the clay / for the new man'), culminating in the perfect fifth of an A minor chord at 'new man'. Transcription by the author from *Canciones para el hombre nuevo* (1968).

Example 6 Excerpt from Viglietti's 'Cruz de luz' evidencing harmonic dissonances and a cadential shift from minor to major. Note that this shift occurs on the word 'revolution'. Transcription by the author from *Canciones para el hombre nuevo* (1968).

Viglietti's Che Guevara anthem, the vocal line of Biermann's ballad is in a sombre, minor-mode 6/8.⁸¹ The opening melody, a long-held, almost liturgical, chant characterized by the leap of a perfect fifth, is surprisingly similar to Viglietti's. So are the tonic minor ninth chord of Biermann's guitar introduction and some of his percussive techniques (Example 7).

Whether or not Biermann *intended* to emulate Viglietti in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann', he was clearly inspired by the Uruguayan musician and his work, revelling in his open contempt of authority and adapting several of his songs following their initial meeting in 1974.⁸² Viglietti's recollections of his first trip to East Berlin, in which Biermann claims he snubbed the Oktoberklub 'castrati' in favour of a visit to his Chausseestraße flat,⁸³ reflect the ambivalence of 'revolutionary' South American identity to

81 Viglietti notated 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' in 3/4 despite the duple metre tendencies of the song's vocal part, a convention that I follow in my transcriptions of 'Canción del hombre nuevo' and 'Cruz de luz'. Contemporary musicologists sometimes emphasize the horizontal and vertical hemiola grooves central to folk music genres of the Southern Cone using mixed metre. My somewhat unusual decision to transcribe 'Canción del guerrillero' heroico' in 6/8 is an effort to highlight its similarities with 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann'.

82 Adaptations included 'Dale tu mano al indio' / 'Gib deine Hand dem Indio' and 'Por todo Chile' / 'Für ganz Chile'. See Biermann, *Fliegen mit fremden Federn*, 26–30.

83 'Die Parteikastraten des DDR: "Oktoberklubs" hatten ihn angemietet für ein Konzert beim "Festival des politischen Liedes". Er aber verscherzte sich das Wohlwollen seiner Gastgeber, denn er besuchte bei dieser Gelegenheit mich Geächteten.' Biermann, *Fliegen mit fremden Federn*, 10.

Song of the Heroic Guerrilla

My commander, Guevara
There is no flower in your death
But there are machine guns
Stems of blood and pain.

Know this, assassins:
You haven't just killed another man
You've killed those that doubt
That now is the time to fight.

Know this, generals:
There is a bullet of sunlight
For the dark lie
That you have for a heart.

In the course of the rivers
From the Aymara dialectic
Through highlands and jungles
The guerrilla will speak.


And it will speak the hundred reasons
It must win or die
And each new guerrilla
Will make itself feel alive.

Figure 3 Lyrics to Daniel Viglietti's 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' as performed on track 3 of the 1971 album *Canti al Che*. 'Know this' is replaced with 'listen closely' in the lyric printed in *Canción Protesta* (1968). Translation into English by the author.


East German life, a liminality that exercised a powerful symbolic attraction to Biermann and others like him. Indeed, as Viglietti recounted to Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti (at a comfortable temporal remove), East German authorities were deeply suspicious of his 'Guevarism' during his appearance at the 1974 Festival of Political Song, censoring him for propounding a radical politics that they did not feel had a place in the world of 'real existing socialism'. 'I had been invited to the (German) Democratic Republic to sing at the Red Songs festival' related Viglietti,

[And while I was there] I began to observe that I was no longer included in the big televised events, and this called my attention. But something even more serious occurred: they started to ask me before every performance what songs I was going to play and request details about the lyrics in a form of disguised – and occasionally not-so-disguised, censorship . . . In response to my insistence as to why I was being subjected to these pressures, a functionary told me that he had information to suggest that I was a 'Guevarist'. Just like that. Well, it had been some time since I had held an


(a)



(b)



(c)



Example 7 Similar phrases in Daniel Viglietti's 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' as included on the 1971 album *Canti al Che* (a and b) and Wolf Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as recorded on the 1976 album *Es gibt ein Leben vor dem Tod* (c). Compare (a) with the guitar introduction in Example 1. Compare (b) and (c). Note that the key of Viglietti's song is closer to E \flat minor in the digital copy of *Canti al Che* procured for me by the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Despite the fingerings on Viglietti's 1968 sheet music, which suggest standard guitar tuning, the resonance of the guitar on this recording indicates that Viglietti likely performed 'Canción del guerrillero heroico' in open D, possibly with a capo on the first or second fret. Transcriptions by the author with reference to Viglietti's score in *Canción Protesta*, 8–12.

idealized vision of socialism in that region of the world, but I have to confess I did not expect that argument. I didn't feel classifiable in any specific 'ism', but I grilled the bureaucrat as to why Che's ideas were considered negative in a country that self-defined itself as socialist. I assure you that I felt like a 'Guevarist' down to my bones. I told him I would no longer participate in the Festival.⁸⁴

As this vignette suggests, Viglietti's 'revolutionary' music simultaneously embodied a Third World liberation movement endorsed by the GDR *and* an alternative to 'real existing

84 'Yo había sido invitado a la RDA para cantar en el Festival *Rote Lieder*, Festival de la Canción Roja. Fui notando que en los eventos masivos con transmisión televisiva, ya no era incluido, y eso me llamó la atención. Pero ocurrió algo más serio, pues comenzaron a preguntarme antes de cada actuación sobre qué canciones iba a interpretar y a pedirme detalles de las letras, en una forma velada – y no tanto – de censura previa. . . ante mi insistencia en saber por qué razón sufría esas presiones, el funcionario mencionó tener informaciones de que yo era "guevarista". Textual. Bueno, desde hacía mucho tiempo yo no tenía una versión idealizada del socialismo real en aquellas geografías, pero te confieso que no me esperaba tal argumento. Yo mismo no me sentía clasificable en un ismo determinado, pero a aquel burócrata la cuestioné que se consideraran las ideas del Che como algo negativo en un país que se autodefinía como socialista. Te puedo asegurar que me sentí guevarista hasta los huesos. Les dije que yo no iba a continuar en el festival.' Excerpt from transcribed interview in Benedetti, *Daniel Viglietti*, 117. Translation into English by the author. It is worth noting that Viglietti's (reported) confrontation with GDR authorities did not prevent the inclusion of at least some of his music in the 1974 Festival of Political Song LP (Eterna 815 075) and the *Cantaré* songbook of 1978. He returned to East Berlin as a Festival participant in 1980 and 1989.

socialism' that threatened the established Soviet Bloc socialist order. In referencing – and perhaps even emulating – a Viglietti-like musical style, Biermann can be heard to have harnessed and highlighted the ambivalent meanings of South American 'revolution' to the East German world, at once re-articulating and critiquing the politics of the GDR.

Wolf Biermann's South America: colonial gesture, provincialized Europe

Returning to the riddle that begins this article, it seems clearer why a song that West German listeners heard as a call to international socialist solidarity was simultaneously understood as an act of treason by the East German socialist state. It was, in fact, both. Indeed, the reception of songs such as Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' reflected Cold War schisms not just between East and West, but also between factions *within* the communist world,⁸⁵ each with very different perceptions of socialist revolution and, accordingly, very different types of 'revolutionary' music. At a historical remove, Biermann's resistance to East German institutions in songs such as 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' is difficult to hear. But in contesting the success of 'real existing socialism' and, equally importantly, fomenting an ethos of rebellion against the East German state, such songs were deeply threatening to an already unstable – or at very least terribly insecure – governing class. Ultimately, this class proved unable to address Biermann's critique: the expatriation of this singer-songwriter opened a wound in the cultural fabric of the GDR from which it never fully recovered and which, it could be argued, contributed to its collapse.⁸⁶ The tragedy for both sides was that neither side won. Biermann and other members of the East German 'inner-communist opposition' were ostracized by the East German state; the state itself ultimately ceased to function, precisely the disaster that the 'opposition' had been hoping to avoid.

If the ambivalent politicization of South America in Biermann's 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' was problematic for GDR institutions, Biermann's relationship with the continent is at least as difficult to swallow from the perspective of much contemporary scholarship. Indeed, while Biermann's embrace of 'Chilean' subjectivity may have been an effective means of questioning one form of political and ideological violence, it can all-too-easily be heard to simultaneously re-inscribe another, re-enacting the European colonial effacement of the South American experience. Such concerns with respect to the German idealization of and identification with Third World subjects have been a staple of recent scholarship in

85 The complexity of the situation is nicely captured in Nick Rutter's tripartite division of socialist politics into orthodox, radical, and diplomatic. Nick Rutter, 'Look Left Drive Right: Internationalism at the 1968 World Youth Festival', in *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

86 The GDR was understandably eager to downplay the disruption caused by Biermann's expulsion to the West, portraying it as a decision taken by an ideologically united East German cultural community (see, for example, the entry for 20–25 November 1976 in the GDR state publication *Unsere Kultur: DDR – Zeittafel 1945–1987* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1989)). Ulrich Mählert's post-Wende study of the GDR, meanwhile, provides a very different account, suggesting that the 'Biermann Affair' marked a break in GDR cultural history, causing intellectuals to lose faith in the East German state, and for some to abandon it altogether. See Ulrich Mählert, *Kleine Geschichte der DDR* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1998), 129–30.

cultural studies. In her work on musical expressions of solidarity in the GDR, for example, musicologist Elaine Kelly has described the East German relationship to the Third World as 'autopoetic', a kind of self-referential monologue.⁸⁷ Similar arguments have been made across the scholarly spectrum.⁸⁸ Quinn Slobodian's commentary on West German 'corpse polemics' is particularly condemning. In an effort to mobilize political action, details Slobodian, 1960s-era West German radicals disseminated photographs of suffering Third World bodies, self-identifying with oppressed Others in order to legitimize German voices.⁸⁹

Such critiques could certainly be levelled at Biermann's treatment of South America in 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann'. Not only is Biermann's commentary on Allende's Popular Unity Party principally an engagement with East German politics, its references to the 'Chilean' experience are decidedly abstract: the use of the short film at the heart of the allegory would seem to indicate a confusion of the 1973 Tanquetazo with the coup that toppled the Allende administration later that year;⁹⁰ the protagonist of the lyric, Leonardo Henrichsen, was an Argentine-Swede, not a Chilean; one of the song's likely musical references, 'Canción del guerrillero heroico', is a work about an Argentine-Cuban revolutionary by an Uruguayan singer-songwriter. Indeed, a particularly harsh reading of Biermann's song could accuse him of latching on to the suffering of South American subjects for his own *personal* gain, using Henrichsen's 'corpse' and a Viglietti-like 'revolutionary' style as vehicles for his own self-aggrandizement as a political martyr of the East German state.

That said, such readings may be unnecessarily severe. The intentionally border-blurring vagaries of internationalist discourse notwithstanding, Biermann would not be the first singer-songwriter to have communicated via opaque political allegory, a tactic rendered expedient by Cold War-era censorship. Moreover, the imprecision in this musician's representation of the Chilean experience does not necessarily indicate a lack of engagement with or inspiration in South American politics. As literary scholars Jennifer Hosek and Jamie Trnka argue, (East) German writing about South America was both an expression of First World desires and an attempt to learn *from* the Third World: unable to embrace their own national past, post-war Germans looked to the non-European world for inspiration. Recognition of the cultural and political provincialization of the post-war Germany in which Biermann came of age shines a more complex light on his acts of ventriloquism, should they be heard this way. As partial and inaccurate as this singer-songwriter's understanding of Chile may have been, he and his East German contemporaries were not necessarily intending

87 Elaine Kelly, 'Music for International Solidarity: Performance of Race and Otherness in the German Democratic Republic', *Twentieth-Century Music* 16/1 (2019).

88 See, for example, Toni Weis, 'The Politics Machine: On the Concept of "Solidarity" in East German Support for SWAPO', *Journal of South African Studies* 37/2 (2011); and Arlene A. Teraoka, *East, West, and Others: The Third World in Postwar German Literature* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

89 Quinn Slobodian, 'Corpse Polemics', in *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 135–69.

90 It is possible that Biermann was aware of this conflation. Should he have been, the frustration of the Tanquetazo by loyalist factions of the Chilean military could have been intended to reinforce the idea that armed violence was the only route to successful socialist revolution, as could the success of the subsequent coup on 11 September 1973, in which Allende found himself *without* meaningful military backing, state or otherwise.

to shape it into a European mould. Quite to the contrary, they (however naively) understood Allende's experiment in democratic socialism – and the Nueva Canción experiments in political music – as alternative models for German society. Seen in this way, Biermann's engagement with South America can be understood not only as a colonizing gesture, but also as an effort at recognition – and even emulation.⁹¹

Finally, despite the overtly political role that Biermann and his music played in twentieth-century German life, it is worth remembering that this singer-songwriter's work bears at least as much in common with popular song as it does 'critical solidarity'. In keeping with his outspoken persona, the political has generally been the outward-facing layer of Biermann's self-representation. Following the collapse of the East German state, the singer-songwriter has been fond of portraying himself as a kind of East German Daedalus,⁹² an ingenious escape artist who managed to fly away on artificial wings, living to witness the world after the plunge of the GDR into the sea of history. In the foreword to his 2011 book of translations and adaptations *Fliegen mit fremden Federn* (*Flying with Foreign Feathers*), however, the escape artist adds an additional dimension to his metaphor, suggesting that the feathers of his 'flying contraption' were songs glued together from across time and around the world (sections of the book are devoted to everything from Korean folk music to Shakespeare sonnets). A similar metaphor could be applied to the creative processes of other political and politicized singer-songwriters – Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan come immediately to mind. But the impulse to repurpose is also the province of the decidedly apolitical, the story of twentieth-century popular music and human creation in general. Indeed, in addition to the critical assessment above, it seems worth hearing 'Chile – Ballade vom Kameramann' as the product of creative – not just 'socialist' – ambition, a work pulled together from a selection of 'feathers' Biermann has used in a lifelong quest for artistic flight.

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91 Similar arguments could be voiced with regards to Nueva Canción musicians, who often took markedly essentialist – and not always particularly well informed – approaches to 'indigenous' genres. Viglietti's 'Canción del guerrillero heroico', which he labelled an indigenous 'aire de bagala [sic]' in his 1968 score, is a case in point. See Viglietti, 'Canción del guerrillero heroico'.

92 Earlier in his career, Biermann likened himself to a 'Prussian Icarus'.

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