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“Jazz Embodies Human Rights”: The Politics of UNESCO’s International Jazz Day

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Abstract

This article explores the representation of jazz at UNESCO’s International Jazz Day, focusing in particular on the 2016 edition of the event hosted by former President Barack Obama at the White House. It locates Jazz Day in the history of US jazz diplomacy, demonstrating that the event results from strategies of the US government that emerged in the 1950s and sought to use jazz as an emblem of an American social order that was ethically superior to the Soviet Union. While Jazz Day – in the tradition of US jazz diplomacy programs – casts jazz as an embodiment of intercultural dialogue, diversity, and human rights, this article seeks to juxtapose this rhetoric with the event’s economics and politics. It argues that Jazz Day’s messages of diversity, intercultural dialogue, universal human rights, and peace, in their one-dimensional and non-intersectional form, ultimately serve to obfuscate the economic and political power interests that underlie the event. Contrary to its rhetoric, Jazz Day has so far failed to challenge the power structures that lie at the heart of a socially unequal global order built on the denial of basic human rights.

Keywords: UNESCO, International Jazz Day, Politics, Jazz, Diplomacy, International Relations

Introduction

Celebrating the fifth edition of UNESCO’s International Jazz Day on 30 April 2016, UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova explained why the organization had decided to embrace jazz by introducing an annual International Jazz Day:

What is most important for us is that we celebrate jazz as a dialogue among culture, as human rights, as quest for freedom, and for human dignity. Jazz was born in this country [the US], but now is travelling all around the world. It has helped shape the American spirit, and now it is owned by all the people all over the world. This [sic] is not only that jazz is a great music, it is because jazz carries strong values. Jazz is about freedom, about courage, renewing itself every time it is played, and we are seeing this with every single minute this evening. Jazz is about civil rights and civil dignity. It was the soundtrack of struggle in this country, and I would say beyond.

But jazz is also about diversity, drawing on roots in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and elsewhere. And through jazz we learned about discrimination, about racism, but we learned about pride and dignity. Through jazz we improvise with others, we live together better, in dialogue and respect. Jazz I believe touches our hearts and souls and influences the way we think and behave. And this is why UNESCO created the International Jazz Day. (United Nations)

Delivered as a contribution to Jazz Day’s main event, the so-called Global Concert, Bokova’s speech in many ways exemplifies the rhetoric that has framed UNESCO’s International Jazz Day since its inception in 2011. Accordingly, jazz is a carrier of “strong” but highly opaque “values,” including freedom, dignity, dialogue, and human rights. By thus framing jazz’s values, Bokova appropriates the music as an embodiment of UNESCO’s core mission. [1] At the 2017 Global Concert, Bokova would repeat verbatim parts
of the speech she gave in 2016, confirming that musical differences mattered less than jazz’s supposedly transhistorical essence as an embodiment of UNESCO’s ethical agenda.

This article explores the representation of jazz at UNESCO’s International Jazz Day. It locates Jazz Day in the history of US jazz diplomacy, demonstrating that the event results from strategies of the US government that emerged in the 1950s and sought to use jazz as an emblem of an American social order that was ethically superior to the Soviet Union (Eschen 1-26). While Jazz Day – in the tradition of US jazz diplomacy programs – casts jazz as an embodiment of intercultural dialogue, diversity, and human rights, this article seeks to juxtapose this rhetoric with the event’s economics and politics. Post-colonial feminist scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Jacqui Alexander, and Sara Ahmed have pointed to the way in which the language of diversity can be emptied and dissociated from the “points at which power relations meet” (Ahmed 14). As such, the language of diversity can “bypass power and history,” providing a façade that hides rather than exposes social inequality (Ahmed 14). The historian Samuel Moyn has similarly argued that the pervasive ethical concept of human rights can be little more than an “empty vessel” appropriated for non-humane political purposes in highly contradictory and inconsistent ways (Moyn 51). This article argues that Jazz Day’s messages of diversity, intercultural dialogue, universal human rights, and peace, in their one-dimensional and non-intersectional form, ultimately serve to obfuscate the economic and political power interests that underlie the event. Contrary to its rhetoric, Jazz Day thus fails to challenge the power structures that lie at the heart of a socially unequal global order built on the denial of such basic human rights as the “right to life.”

International Jazz Day as US Music Diplomacy

My analysis of International Jazz Day is informed by three main research areas. In addition to drawing on the work on diversity by postcolonial and feminist scholars on the one hand, and studies on the history of human rights, on the other, it is indebted to research on music and diplomacy by such scholars as Penny von Eschen, Danielle Fosler-Lussier, Lisa Davenport, Rebekah Ahrendt, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, and Martha Bayles. Exploring the functions of music in international relations, their works have helped to establish the study of music diplomacy as a significant academic field that is located between history, political science, and musicology. In her 2004 study *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, Penny von Eschen details the way in which the US government began to appropriate jazz music in the 1950s, demonstrating the extent to which jazz diplomacy was an integral part of US Cold War politics. Defined as an African-American musical genre, jazz became an emblem of diversity and democracy, countering the negative images of US culture that resulted from racist violence directed against the Civil Rights Movement (Eschen 1-26). In the course of two decades, the US State Department sent many of the most celebrated jazz musicians abroad, including Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Dave Brubeck, Benny Goodman, and Duke Ellington, among others. Following the success of US jazz diplomacy programs, jazz, in the early 1960s, became a more broadly Western instrument in the ideological antagonism of the Cold War as it was embraced by other Western cultural institutes and governments including West Germany (Dunkel, “Jazz – Made in Germany”).

While the scale of American jazz diplomacy programs started to decrease in the late 1970s (Eschen 251), jazz has remained an important diplomatic means for the US – despite the fact that the organization of jazz diplomacy programs has been handed over to Jazz at Lincoln Center (see Jankowsky 277) and the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. Significant jazz diplomatic missions since 2000 have included trips by US musicians to Vietnam, India, France, Morocco, and several other nations. In 2005, the Monk Institute sent a group of musicians to Vietnam “to mark the 10th anniversary of the US and Vietnam resuming diplomatic relations” (Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, About Us). Two years later, Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter accompanied a group of students to India as
a contribution to the celebrations of the Indian nonviolent movement’s 100th anniversary. The Monk Institute sought to reaffirm the association of jazz with nonviolent resistance in 2009 by sending Hancock, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Terri Lyne Carrington, George Duke, Chaka Khan, along with Martin Luther King III and a Congressional Delegation around John Lewis to India in order jointly commemorate the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King’s 1959 trip to India (ibid.).

This association of jazz with nonviolent resistance thematically prepared the inclusion of jazz into UNESCO’s International Day program. The close association of jazz with nonviolent resistance that the Monk Institute seeks to underscore is indeed rooted in US social history. Harking back to African American blues and gospel traditions, the jazz style known as hard bop was closely tied to the African American civil disobedience and cultural pride associated with the Civil Rights Movement (Saul; Monson; Dunkel, Charles Mingus). Building on this historical association of jazz with peaceful resistance and the struggle for social equality, UNESCO increasingly accepted jazz as a music that could help to promote the organization’s core values. From 2002 to 2004, UNESCO collaborated with the Monk Institute in staging UNESCO’s “International Philosophy Day,” to which the Institute sent both student and celebrity musicians, including Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and Dianne Reeves (Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, About Us). The creation of UNESCO’s International Jazz Day in 2011, then, was largely an expansion of these previous collaborations between UNESCO, the Monk Institute, and the US government.

The initiative for an International Jazz Day was first presented to UNESCO in July 2011 as a shared proposal by the US and seventeen other member states (UNESCO Executive Board). International Jazz Day was finally passed at the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in November 2011 (International Jazz Day, About). The first official International Jazz Day took place on 30 April 2012 in New Orleans and New York. Subsequently, Jazz Days have been hosted by Japan (Osaka 2013), Turkey (Istanbul 2014), France (Paris 2015), and Cuba (Havana 2017). The US is the only country that has hosted Jazz Day twice. After the shared 2012 inaugural concerts in New Orleans and New York, Barack Obama hosted Jazz Day at the White House in 2016, thus demonstrating that his administration considered jazz an integral part of its public diplomacy.

Public Diplomacy at UNESCO’s 2016 Global Concert

According to the organizers of Jazz Day, decentralization is one of the basic ideas behind the event. Jazz Day’s official website therefore accentuates that everyone is welcome to plan events on 30 April, register them on jazzday.com, and celebrate Jazz Day locally. As if to testify to the diversity and inclusivity of the event, the website lists all of the locations where jazz day events have taken place so far (International Jazz Day, 2017 Global Celebrations). This focus on decentralization can hardly obscure the fact that the so-called Global Concert – Jazz Day’s main concert of celebrity musicians from different countries that takes place in the respective host city – is Jazz Day’s main event. Consisting of speeches and performances by a select cast of celebrity jazz musicians, these shows are highly and widely mediatized events. Since 2012, all of the Global Concerts have been video recorded and distributed through various channels. The 2016 Global Concert at the White House was produced by Don Mischer Productions, broadcast by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), streamed by the United Nations and UNESCO, and made available on Youtube by the event’s organizers (International Jazz Day, Jazz Day 2016 Worldwide). In addition, Jazz Day’s official Youtube account, called “InternationalJazzDay,” cut performances of individual musicians and uploaded them to the online platform. A selection of celebrity musicians on the margins of the jazz genre (such as Sting), as well as speeches by politicians and celebrities (such as Barack Obama, Morgan Freeman, and Will Smith), served to guarantee the centrality of the Global Concert within the celebrations of International Jazz Day.
A closer look at the 2016 Global Concert illuminates the way in which Jazz Day provides a stage for both political and economic interests. As the initiator of International Jazz Day and the only country that has hosted Jazz Day twice, the US is particularly invested in the event. That the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz organizes the event additionally increases the influence of US actors on International Jazz Day; the Monk Institute has close ties to the US State Department with whom it has cooperated repeatedly in the past.

In line with previous celebrations of Jazz Day, the 2016 Global Concert sought to cast jazz as a diverse music. Performing in several rooms and the backyard of the White House, a young generation of musicians, represented by Esperanza Spalding, Robert Glasper, Christian McBride, and Jamie Cullum, among others, shared a stage with “jazz legends” and practitioners who have significantly impacted jazz since the 1960s, including Herbie Hancock, Al Jarreau, Chick Corea, and Wayne Shorter. Casting jazz as a trans-generational music, the organizers of the 2016 Global Concert, for instance, assembled a trio with Wayne Shorter, the young bassist Esperanza Spalding, and the 12-year old, Indonesian jazz prodigy Joey Alexander. Performing in the Blue Room of the White House, this band exemplified one of Jazz Day’s main tropes: Jazz connects generations, ethnicities, genders, and nations. Jazz, it is claimed, both embodies and transcends difference.

As if to underscore jazz’s boundary-crossing essence, the organizers of International Jazz Day employed an expansive, formal definition of jazz. At the White House, the jazz tradition included soul, blues, Latin, pop, and hip hop. Among the musicians invited to the White House concert were such artists as Sting, for instance, whose music would usually be considered rather irrelevant to the jazz tradition as it would have been defined by Marsalis. The adaptation of “Imagine” performed at Jazz Day is based on Herbie Hancock’s 2010 version of the song, which was recorded as part of his Imagine Project. As such, it also serves to center the jazz tradition around Hancock’s oeuvre.

Although the 2016 Global Concert thus sought to display a high level of generic inclusion and diversity, the event lacked diversity in other areas. Only six out of forty-nine musicians performing at the White House in 2016 were women – a remarkably small percentage considering the increased visibility of female jazz musicians in the jazz scene. In addition to being shaped by gender, the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion were regulated through institutional affiliation. The main cast of the 2016 Global Concert was recruited from a very select group of musicians affiliated with the Institute that is in charge of the production of International Jazz Day: the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. A Washington-based institute for jazz education and diplomacy, the Monk Institute refers to these musicians as the “Monk Institute Family.”

Many of them have performed repeatedly at Jazz Day’s main events. Nine out of sixteen Monk Institute Family members played at the 2016 Global Concert. The continuities in personnel from US State Department initiatives in jazz diplomacy and the cast of International Jazz Day are indeed striking, as musicians for both programs are selected by the Monk Institute. Accordingly, US jazz and international jazz are largely represented by the same musicians, among them Herbie Hancock, represented two oppositional views that still have not been reconciled: While Marsalis argued for a narrow definition of the jazz tradition as an African American artistic genre based on the blues, Hancock envisioned jazz as an absorptive, adaptable practice whose strength lies in its potential to blend with new forms of popular music (Zabor and Garbarini 52-64). By emphasizing the music’s malleability, Jazz Day draws on Hancock’s vision of jazz. Since 2013, all Global Concerts have ended with shared performances by the participating musicians of John Lennon’s “Imagine” – an emblem of utopianism and pacifism, but certainly not of the jazz tradition as it would have been defined by Marsalis.
Dee Dee Bridgewater, Wayne Shorter, and other members of the Monk Institute Family (Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, About Us).

In addition to privileging members of the “Monk Institute Family,” the 2016 Global Concert advantaged US citizens. Seventy-three percent of the musicians performing at the White House in 2016 were US citizens, followed by seven percent who were from England. Every other country was represented by one musician only. The overrepresentation of US musicians did not only have to do with the fact that the event took place in the US. In previous years, US artists had similarly dominated the Global Concerts. [5] In light of this overrepresentation of US musicians, the Cuban government demanded that for every international artist invited to the 2017 Global Concert in Havana, a Cuban musician had to be invited as well (Newman).

If instead of looking at the musicians’ native languages one considers the military alliances of their home countries, the dominance of NATO members at the 2016 Global Concert was similarly overwhelming. Eighty-eight percent of the musicians who performed at the White House came from countries that are either NATO members or official allies of the organization. NATO’s most powerful opponents, China and Russia, were not represented at the concert. The overwhelming dominance of musicians from countries that are NATO members testifies to the fact that jazz diplomacy has been and still is a predominantly Western practice (see Dunkel, “Jazz—Made in Germany”).

In order to better understand the Global Concert’s mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, one needs to consider the history and the economic anatomy of the event. The 2011 official proposal for an International Jazz Day by the US reveals the rhetoric that the US employed in establishing Jazz Day as an officially recognized UNESCO event:

Jazz developed in the United States in the very early part of the twentieth century and New Orleans played a key role in this development. The city’s population was more diverse than anywhere else in the country, and people of African, French, Caribbean, Italian, German, Mexican, and American Indian, as well as English descent interacted with one another. African American musical traditions mixed with others and gradually jazz emerged as a unique style of music […]. Interest quickly spread, and within a few decades, Americans of all ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic classes, ages and genders were listening to and playing jazz. […] During the course of the twentieth century, jazz proved to be a universal language spreading over all the continents, influencing and being influenced by other kinds of music, evolving as a merging cultural element for its supporters all around the world, with no distinction of race, religion, ethnic or national origin. (UNESCO, General Conference, Proclamation of International Jazz Day, 36 C/65)

For one, jazz is used as a transhistorical concept here. Its essence transcends the history of the twentieth century so that traditional New Orleans jazz and contemporary avant-garde jazz are treated as essentially the same. Second, this sketch of the history of jazz attempts to define jazz as a genre that both expresses and transcends cultural particularities. This contradiction is ingrained in narratives about jazz history (DeVeaux 530-1). But it is important to note that it is in fact a contradiction. For how can jazz be a universal language, understood by everybody in the same way, if it contains an array of cultural particularities from a very specific place in the early twentieth century?

Third, this sketch is based on the melting pot narrative. Accordingly, when cultures interact, they “blend” and “merge” into one syncretic whole. The application of the melting pot concept to the jazz tradition is closely tied to Marshall Stearns’s vision of jazz, which provided the conceptual framework for jazz diplomacy programs in the 1950s (Dunkel, “Marshall Winslow Stearns”; Dunkel, The Stories of Jazz 341-380). The concept’s disregard for sustained cultural difference facilitates claims about the seemingly universal essence of jazz. The proposal finally constructs jazz as a cipher that associates the US with UNESCO’s core mission and values. Jazz has always been intercultural, according to this proposal. But it was a US intercultural music
before becoming universal. As the intercultural “cradle of jazz,” the US thus also becomes the sonic birthplace of UNESCO’s core values, embodying human rights, peace, diversity, and intercultural dialogue.

This identification of the US with UNESCO’s ethical agenda, however, is complicated by International Jazz Day’s financial set-up. At its 36th General Conference, UNESCO made clear that International Jazz Day would rely entirely on extrabudgetary funds (UNESCO, *Records of the General Conference*, 48). The General Conference, however, did not address how exactly these funds would be raised. As a result, a large part of the annual budget has been channeled by the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, which, in turn, has relied on private and corporate donations. For the year 2012, the Monk Institute’s Form 990 indicates that the Institute spent $819,446 on the production of Jazz Day, amounting to twenty percent of the Institute’s operating budget for that year (Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, *Form 990 for the 2012 Calendar Year 2*). Between 2012 and 2015, the Institute likewise spent a large part of its budget on what it calls “international programs,” including on Jazz Day. [6] In April 2016, the list of the Institute’s most important donors, the “Major Benefactors,” according to the Institute’s website, was topped by the Northrop Grumman Corporation. The exact amount Northrop Grumman has paid to the Institute is unclear, but in April 2016, the corporation was listed as the Institute’s most important donor for 2015 (Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, *Support - Current Sponsors*). Interestingly, the Institute changed its list of donors significantly in May 2016, when it added Toyota as a “lead partner,” ranking above Northrop Grumman for the 2015 calendar year (Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, *Support - Current Sponsors*). It therefore remains unclear whether Toyota or Northrop Grumman was the Institute’s main donor in 2015. According to the two versions of the Institute’s website, however, both companies have contributed substantially to the Institute’s budget.

In its sponsorship guide, International Jazz Day lists several reasons why companies should invest in the event. Most importantly, Jazz Day gives sponsors an opportunity to link their brand “with the strong positive values of International Jazz Day, which include peace, intercultural dialogue and cooperation between nations” (UNESCO, *International Jazz Day Sponsorship*). The Thelonious Monk Institute’s website additionally seeks to attract sponsors by citing a *New York Times* article in which an advertising executive claims, “Bottom line, jazz has integrity. It’s never corny. It moves. And its percussive quality, its energy, liven up anything associated with it” (Gladstone). According to the Monk Institute, “Companies can tap into this energy by sponsoring the Institute’s programs” (Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, *Support - Sponsorship Opportunities*). While Toyota has not released statements on why they are funding International Jazz Day, the strategy to associate with a sonic emblem of energy and vitality might be appealing to a car manufacturer invested in branding increasingly automated machines. The company’s support for the event may also have to do with the fact that one of their greatest rivals made ample use of the jazz brand by naming one of their car series Honda Jazz.

Regardless of the exact reasons for Toyota’s investment, Northrop Grumman’s motivations behind sponsoring the event are far from self-explanatory. Northrop Grumman is one of the major manufacturers of military drones and military airplanes in the US. In October 2015, the company was selected by the US government to supply the US military with the next generation of the B2 stealth bomber (Cohen). Using jazz to sell products to the general public makes little sense for Northrop Grumman, since the company’s business model does not rely on a broad market. In 2014, 2015, and 2016, Northrop Grumman derived more than eighty-three percent of its sales from the US government alone (Northrop Grumman 6). In its 2016 Annual Business Report, Northrop Grumman in fact identifies its dependence on the US government as a major risk factor (Northrop Grumman 6).

Northrop Grumman’s investment in funding jazz therefore needs to be considered against the backdrop of the company’s reliance on the US government. In providing funds to the Monk Institute, Northrop Grumman has taken over a function that had previously been performed by the US State Department: the sponsorship of US
jazz diplomacy programs. Accordingly, Northrop Grumman’s sponsorship of the Monk Institute can be read as part of a gift-making strategy whose indirect beneficiary is the US government. Financially supporting International Jazz Day could give Northrop Grumman a competitive edge over fellow defense contractors Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Raytheon when it comes to securing government contracts. Possibly, the company may also have hoped to curry favor with Barack Obama himself, whose passion for African American music traditions is very well-known.

Complex funding structures as well as intersecting corporate and governmental interests are not unique to Jazz Day. As the political scientist Jan Melissen has noted, the practice of diplomacy has transformed significantly over the last 20 years, giving rise to what he calls a “new public diplomacy.” If governments used to fund and coordinate cultural diplomacy programs directly during the Cold War, the involvement of non-government actors in programs representing nations to foreign audiences has increased exponentially over the last two decades. Melissen describes this new public diplomacy in the following way:

The new public diplomacy is no longer confined to messaging, promotion campaigns, or even direct governmental contacts with foreign publics serving foreign policy purposes. It is also about building relationships with civil society actors in other countries and about facilitating networks between non-governmental parties at home and abroad. Tomorrow’s diplomats will become increasingly familiar with this kind of work, and in order to do it much better they will increasingly have to piggyback on non-governmental initiatives, collaborate with non-official agents and benefit from local expertise inside and outside the embassy. (Melissen 22)

Jazz Day exemplifies how this larger development has led to opaque funding structures.

The investment in the event of a military contractor such as Northrop Grumman raises obvious ethical questions. As drones and military aircrafts designed and manufactured by Northrop Grumman are used to violate human rights in various countries across the globe, [7] the Monk Institute’s enmeshment with Northrop Grumman seems ethically problematic, to say the least. The fact that the Institute uses a large part of its Northrop-Grumman-sponsored budget to finance UNESCO’s International Jazz Day foils Jazz Day’s central ethical claims, including the notion that the event seeks to uphold and promote human rights as a central universal value. As a military contractor, Northrop Grumman thrives when intercultural dialogue fails while global conflicts encourage the government to raise its military budget. In a utopian, peaceful world without borders – which the jazz musicians evoke when they sing John Lennon’s “Imagine” at the end of the Global Concerts – Northrop Grumman would be bankrupt and obsolete. In order to turn corporate financial investment into symbolic capital, International Jazz Day therefore relies on a façade of ethical integrity, captured by empty vessels of human rights and diversity. This façade crumbles as soon as one juxtaposes the event’s rhetoric with its economics.

Consequently, UNESCO’s role in the organization of Jazz Day seems questionable. The 2011 proposal for an International Jazz Day mentions several reasons why UNESCO would profit from such an event. It claims that International Jazz Day would help UNESCO to transport its values to “social areas that are not usually targeted by UNESCO’s message, in particular reaching younger generations” (UNESCO, General Conference, Proclamation of International Jazz Day, 36 C/65, 2). By giving Jazz Day into the hands of an institute that channels donations by a manufacturer of weapons used to violate human rights, UNESCO rather seems to provide a brand of ethical integrity to the Monk Institute’s sponsors and the US government. What is more, low sales indicate that jazz is actually quite unpopular with the majority of young people around the world (La Rosa). It seems surprising that an unpopular genre such as jazz would be selected in order to disseminate ethical values amongst young people who evidently tend not to listen to
jazz. The proposal additionally suggested that International Jazz Day “could have a beneficial influence on the promotion of music teaching,” which would, in turn, facilitate intercultural dialogue (UNESCO, General Conference, Proclamation of International Jazz Day, 36 C/65, 2). This may very well be true, but why not launch an International Music Day then?

As an ostensibly neutral association of member states, UNESCO has the power to “consecrate” cultural heritage, to put it with Pascale Casanova (Casanova 127-8). As such, the organization can bestow cultural artifacts with the symbolic capital of universal value – similar to the way in which an artistic circle that is considered authoritative on a global level can consecrate a work of art (Casanova makes this case for literary circles in early-twentieth-century Paris). By facilitating International Jazz Day, UNESCO frames jazz as an ethical tradition. It contributes to turning jazz into an officially recognized cultural artifact that embodies “values” and transcends cultural particularities. Defined as essentially American, jazz becomes an embodiment of what is universally moral.

As a highly visible event such as Jazz Day has the power to shape the global image of jazz, questions concerning its stakeholders are particularly significant. Does the choice of a pacifist piece such as “Imagine” as the event’s major theme song have to do with the fact that the organizing institute relies on funding from a major US weapons manufacturer? Is jazz cast as an emblem of peace and human rights because this helps to re-brand the US as benevolent, peaceful, and non-aggressive? Although it is impossible to answer these questions for certain, it is also important to note that the image of jazz that is forged at an event such as Jazz Day cannot be dissociated from the interests of the event’s stakeholders. Since Jazz Day is a highly visible event for the global representation of jazz, it also has the power to intervene in the branding of jazz, ultimately affecting the way in which jazz is practiced and received on a global scale.

### Conclusion

UNESCO's International Jazz Day, then, is not only a musical event that celebrates an African American musical tradition, but it is also a sugar-coated claim to morality: the cultural morality of the jazz tradition, the organizational morality of UNESCO, and the national morality of the US. By relying on an economic and political anatomy that involves the US military-industrial complex, however, International Jazz Day belies its professed messages of human rights, peace, diversity, and intercultural dialogue. What is more, Jazz Day’s façade tends to obscure its politico-economic reality. While articles covering Jazz Day point to the diversity of the event, there is literally no academic or public discourse on the questionable sponsorship of Jazz Day.

Besides thus obfuscating “the points at which power relations meet” (Ahmed 14), Jazz Day misrepresents cultural encounters. Rather than casting cultural change as a constant, inescapable reorientation characterized by both conflict and harmony, loss and gain, Jazz Day belittles the labors of cultural change and makes invisible the dynamics of power that drive cultural change in a globalized world. By choosing the melting pot concept for cultural change, according to which different cultures “blend” harmoniously into one rather homogeneous whole, Jazz Day promotes a universalist misconception based on the notion that, as everyone is basically the same, intercultural dialogue can come easily and without serious obstacles. This concept of culture and intercultural dialogue underlies free trade ideology and corresponds to the interests of the event’s organizers and investors.

International Jazz Day could avoid these kinds of contradictions only by fundamentally changing the way in which the event is funded. UNESCO would need to confront rather than rely on financing methods by which money is channeled from dubious sponsors via NGOs to UNESCO. This could be done by implementing regulations for NGOs involved in UNESCO events (by allowing them to accept donations only from sponsors that have been approved by UNESCO). It could also be achieved by giving more responsibility (and funding) to UNESCO in the organization of UNESCO events, thus
reducing the reliance on the politics and funding strategies of such NGOs as the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz.

Secondly, Jazz Day would need to reject the kind of universalistic rhetoric that frames the event, embracing a concept of jazz that takes cultural differences to be complex, variable, and subject to intersecting power interests. This concept would not necessarily undermine the idea of an International Jazz Day. For jazz has in fact taken many forms throughout the world and has been relevant to many people in radically different ways. Conceiving of jazz as a complex, variable, and pluralistic type of music would rather challenge the way in which Jazz Day is celebrated in the 21st century. If jazz is not a universal language, then it also needs to be celebrated as a much more inclusive concept that does not belong to any nation and can be represented by musicians regardless of their citizenship. Applying the lyrics of Jazz Day’s theme song, “Imagine there’s no countries,” to the jazz tradition would be a good starting point.

Endnotes


[2] All of these figures stem from my own evaluation of the names and biographies for the 2016 Global Concert listed on jazzday.com.


[4] Kris Bowers, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Aretha Franklin, Herbie Hancock, Lionel Loueke, Diane Reeves, Wayne Shorter, Bobby Watson, and Ben Williams.

[5] UNESCO’s official announcement of the 2015 concert in Paris demonstrates this. It gives the nationalities of non-US jazz artists in parentheses but fails to provide the nationality of musicians from the US, thus implying that a US citizenship is the norm for jazz musicians performing at the Global Concerts. (UNESCO, International Jazz Day 2015 - All-Star Global Concert in Paris). At the Global Concert in France, almost one half of the musicians (thirteen out of 27) were based in the US, while only two (Mino Cinépolis and Guillaume Peret) were French citizens. The line-ups for all Global Concerts can be viewed at jazzday.com.


[7] NGOs concerned with the protection of human rights such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have been campaigning against illegal targeted killings by the US government. See (Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch).

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2015.


**Author’s Biography**

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Abstract

This article addresses queer (-/and) feminist – i.e. queer, feminist and queer-feminist – Do-It-Yourself (DIY) practices as performed in punk since the 1970s, arguing that these practices helped to stimulate a “sexual turn” in human rights activism and discourse in the United States over the course of the subsequent decades. Punk opened up a new space for self-empowerment and self-expression in the 1970s when the sexual liberation movement of the previous decade started to lose its ground and, consequently, went partially back “underground.” It is argued here that punk – through its cultural DIY production and aesthetics as performed in music, performances, style and zines – created a counterpublic sphere allowing for an ongoing struggle for sexual rights led by (cis-)women and people with trans- and gender non-conforming identities. This took place in the context of the rise of neoconservative U.S. politics of the 1980s, which sought to repress those allegedly “amoral” rights claims. Influenced by both feminist and gay and lesbian movements, individuals expressed a plurality of complementary, overlapping and conflicting visions of sexuality and related rights. Against this backdrop, this article studies two “movements” in punk that were particularly interested in negotiating sexuality and gender identities: first, the queer- or homocore movement that began in the mid-1980s, and second, the feminist riot grrrl movement that emerged in the early 1990s. Even though punk was by no means the only space where these struggles took place, it delivers an interesting case study of changing social and sexual mores in the United States in the late twentieth century. Punk’s anti-assimilationist and anti-authoritarian tendencies, DIY practices, its unceasing attractiveness to youth (and older) generations, as well as the growing interplay with academic discourses, contributed to changes in the perception of sexuality and related rights claims not only in the U.S., but also on a transnational level.

Keywords: Academic Activism, Civil Rights, Counterpublic Sphere, Do-It-Yourself, Feminism, Gender Roles, Human Rights, Punk, Queercore, Queer-feminism, Riot Grrrl, Sexuality, Sexual Orientation, Sexual Rights, Sexual Turn, USA

1. Punk, Sexuality and Queer (-/and) Feminist Counterpublic Spheres

When punk emerged in the U.S. and U.K. in the 1970s, its anti-assimilationist, anti-authoritarian stances, combined with its Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach, opened up a new space for the self-empowerment and self-expression of marginalized people, including (cis-)women[1] and people with non-conforming sexual orientation and trans- and gender identities (Laing, “Interpreting Punk Rock”). While the sexual liberation movement of the previous decade started to lose its position and, consequently, went partially back “underground,” punk – through its cultural DIY production and aesthetics in music, performance, style and (fan)zines[2] – allowed for an ongoing struggle for sexual rights in the context of the rise of neoconservative U.S. politics in the 1980s, which sought to repress allegedly “amoral” rights claims. [3] Influenced by radical feminism as well as the gay and lesbian movements that had gained momentum in the late 1960s, punks expressed a variety of complementary, overlapping, and conflicting visions of sexuality and related rights claims. Even though punk was not the only site where these struggles took place, it nonetheless provides an interesting case study of the changing social and sexual mores in the United States.
States in the late twentieth century. Punk’s anti-assimilationist and anti-authoritarian tendencies, DIY practices, its unceasing attractiveness to youth (and older) generations, as well as the growing interplay with academic discourses contributed to changes in the perception of sexuality and related rights claims not only in the US, but also on a transnational level.

Against this backdrop, this article addresses queer (-/and) feminist – i.e. queer, feminist and queer-feminist – DIY practices as performed in U.S. punk in the 1980s and early 1990s, arguing that these practices helped to stimulate a “sexual turn” in (human) rights activism and discourse in the United States. It was not until the mid-1990s that sexual rights, i.e. claiming equality regardless of a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity, entered the public human rights discourse via debates at the United Nations on the inclusion of women’s and LGBT rights[4] into international human rights law (Miller 288). Beforehand, sexual rights claims had mostly been expressed on a national level in relation to civil rights and citizenship, while sexuality itself had primarily been perceived, despite the efforts of the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s, as belonging to the private rather than the public sphere (Richardson). However, as Seyla Benhabib has pointed out,

“all struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered private, nonpublic and nonpolitical issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, as sites of power which need discursive legitimation.” (Benhabib 100)

In this sense, punk provided queer (-/and) feminist counterpublic spheres, i.e. social discursive entities (Fraser) and collectives emerged “in the recognition [and articulation] of various exclusions from wider publics of potential participants, discourse topics, and speaking styles and the resolve that builds to overcome these exclusions” (Asen 438). Punk offered alternative ways to articulate and communicate a diversity of views and voices of subordinated groups and individuals on sexuality and related rights. In engaging (counter)publicity, punk sought a critical engagement with wider publics, affirming “a belief in the transformative power of discourse … [and] that the consequences of exclusion – suppression of identities, interests, and needs – can be overcome” (Asen 429).

By hyphenating the terms “queer”[5] and “feminist,” I refer to the intersection of both queer and feminist theories and practices, while the use of “and” connotes the additional, not necessarily intersected notion of both terms. This approach takes into account the polyphony of queer and feminist voices expressed in punk and the intricacy of their overlapping, parallel, complementary or conflicting visions of intimacy, sexuality, and related rights claims. The terminology of queer-feminist politics is inspired by queer-feminist activism and academic research of the last three decades which emphasizes the queer dimension of feminist – and feminist dimension of queer – theories and practices.[6] With regards to punk culture, queer (-/and) feminist theories have mainly served to address the queer- or homocore movement of punk that emerged in the mid-1980s in Canada and the United States (DeChaine; du Plessis and Chapman; Fenster; Nault; Rogers; Schwandt), the American riot grrrl movement of the early 1990s (Downes, “DIY Queer Feminist (Sub)Cultural Resistance”; Downes, “The Expansion of Punk Rock”; Nguyen, “Riot Grrrl, Race and Revival”; Nguyen, “Making Waves”; Wiedlack, “Rejection and Anger in Queer-Feminist Punk”; Wiedlack, “Free Pussy Riot! & Riot Grrrlsm”; Wilson); and more recent queer-feminist activism rooted in punk culture such as Girls Rock Camps, Ladyfests (Ommert; O’Shea) and archival work in academic and non-academic settings (Eichhorn, Archival Turn in Feminism; Eichhorn, “DIY Collectors, Archiving Scholars, and Activist Librarians”; Radway). Drawing from these accounts and a variety of primary source material, including lyrics, zines, published interviews, private correspondences, blogs and newspapers, this article explores the ways in which feminism and queerness were negotiated in punk, what the manifold visions of sexuality in punk were, and how punks engaged in sexual rights activism. Though music plays a central role in punk culture as a means for expressing political ideas, punk
rock music is not at the center of this analysis, which instead focuses on the activist practices of some members of punk culture including musicians, fans and “zinesters.” By retracing the queer (-/and) feminist counterpublic spheres punk created to negotiate individual sexual rights claims, supporting their shift from the private to the counterpublic sphere, this article contributes a bottom-up perspective to the well-established historiography of twentieth century human rights, which, although interested in the role of grassroots movements, individuals and activist groups (Eckel; Moyn), has only recently begun to address the influence of phenomena of popular culture on human rights discourse (Mihr and Gibney 413–551; Peddie; Street; Turbine).

Punk’s cultural production unveiled a variety of radical political views and non-conforming modes of sexual expression by constituting forms of popular pleasure through DIY practices that often functioned independently of commercial manufacture, marketing (Rowe) and the leisure industry (Laing, One Chord Wonders 7). Though countercultural and participatory political grassroots movements as well as rock music culture in the 1960s and 1970s also made use of DIY practices, many punk members declared it to be one of punk culture’s (self-)defining elements, which eventually became part of a certain “punk lifestyle.”[7] Serving as an important technique in punk’s creative expression, self-owned record labels, self-produced music and zines provided local, independent media through which signs, symbols and style could be appropriated and re-interpreted “for the purposes of shock and semiotic disruption;” DIY practices, moreover, facilitated an alternative, more isolated punk culture away from the commercialized culture industry, expressing a search for authenticity which became particularly relevant for increasingly politicized (hardcore) punk scenes in the U.S. since the early 1980s (Moore 307). Thus punk performance, attitude and style offered a twofold response to postmodern capitalist western society, providing a means to address (anew) repressed themes such as sexual matters (Langman) in a particularly open, provocative and controversial way. For instance, in 1978, Dave Laing – a British music journalist and contemporary of punk’s early inception in the U.K. and U.S. – highlighted the “social significance” of punk’s “bizarre sexuality in its songs and its styles of dress,” stating that:

“Punk is overwhelmingly concerned with the latter [the social significance of sexuality], in bringing it to the surface and, usually, mocking it. For these ‘deviations’ are not so much excluded from ordinary social and media discourse, but repressed by it. In this relationship of repression, the apparent opposites of the puritan sexual ethic and pornography reinforce each other through the fascination exerted on the former by the forbidden.” (Laing, “Interpreting Punk Rock” 126)

Early punk culture played with social tensions in a self-mocking way regarding sexuality, desire and intimacy. Punks used “shock-effects,” a term coined by Laing in reference to Walter Benjamin (Laing, “Interpreting Punk Rock” 126; Laing, One Chord Wonders 96 seqq.),[8] in order to raise public awareness of these tensions and challenge repressive sexual mores and ethic. Queer (-/and) feminist punks in the 1980s and 1990s borrowed from this tradition of counterpublicity in both the queer- or homocore and the riot grrrl movements. Queercore – also known as homocore – and punk-related queer activism was and still is relevant to punk not only in the U.S., but also on a global scale as a way to express queerness, non-heteronormativity, and subversive politics and pleasures (Nault 164 seqq.).[9] Similarly, queer (-/and) feminist riot grrrl activism remains a cultural phenomenon today, inspiring new zinesters, academic activists and female punk collectives such as Pussy Riot, which rebelled against Vladimir Putin and authoritarian, homophobic Russian politics. In the following, I will address these movements with regards to sexual rights claims by focusing on punk activists in New York City, Olympia, Washington and Washington, D.C., all of which played a significant role in creating and shaping queer (-/and) feminist counterpublic spheres of punk in the United States. The first part of this article explores two case studies of punk activists Allan Clear and Donny the Punk, who became involved in a lifelong struggle around HIV/AIDS activism, public health
issues, and prison rape. They both brought sensitive sexual matters to the attention of other activist groups and grassroots human rights organizations, which only began to tackle these issues in the mid-1990s. The second part of the article explores the way protagonists of the early 1990s riot grrrl movement initiated a new radical youth feminism that addressed issues such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, body politics, and reproductive rights. Local DIY practices of riot grrrls and riot grrrl-inspired activism in the 2000s and 2010s provided (and continue to provide) resources for young girls and women to engage in a conversation about social justice, human dignity, and equal rights. Based on a critical analysis of these cases, I conclude this article with a brief synthesis on punk, sexuality, and human rights.

2. Queering Punk: Queer-/Homocore and the Question of Rights

Since punk’s emergence in the 1970s, it showed a certain “connectivity” with queerness (Nault 49; Nyong’o) by partially sharing non-conforming lifestyles and places where people who expressed non-conformity would meet “underground.” These intersections “emerged within a context in which queer and punk affect were continuously and productively confused and conflated by both outsiders and participants” (Nyong’o 107). The homocore movement, subsequently called queercore[10], which Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones instigated in Toronto in the mid-1980s via personal writing in their zine J.D.s, stemmed from this tradition and gave a name to the phenomenon of coalescing queerness, hardcore punk, and DIY artist scenes (Nault; du Plessis and Chapman). In several issues of J.D.s and an article published in the San Francisco based punk zine Maximum Rocknroll, LaBruce and Jones criticized the then-contemporary punk and gay and lesbian cultures, notably hardcore punk’s homophobia and misogyny as well as the established bourgeois, exclusionary North American gay lifestyle of the time. Prior to their publications, zines such as Donna Dresch’s Chainsaw and Matt Wobensmith’s Outpunk which several years later also functioned as independent record labels, had already begun to address queerness in punk music and lifestyle and were starting to reach a broader audience (Dunn, Global Punk 44–5).

Queer zines provided a counterpublic sphere where people could – openly or anonymously – share personal experiences, memories, visions, fantasies, and opinions on non-conforming sexual identity and orientation, sexual desire, and intimacy. Beyond this personal dimension, queer ‘zines also addressed political issues, called for political organization, direct actions, and raising (counter)public awareness on both the local and trans-local level. For instance, AIDS became a prominent topic in zines in the late 1980s.[11] The disease’s prevalence in the gay community gave conservatives, the Religious Right, and the established media an argument to condemn homosexual intercourse and homosexuality in general. While researchers and the established press coined the term “gay plague” or “GRID” – gay-related immunodeficiency – in the early 1980s, the Reagan administration did not address the topic publicly as constituting an important health crisis until 1987, despite increasing death tolls within and beyond the gay community[12] In a speech he gave that year, Reagan barely offered solutions for how to address the deadly disease, but rather held the immoral gay lifestyle as responsible for its outbreak. In response, New York City based bisexual-identified LGBT(QIA) activist Donny the Punk published an article in the punk pamphlet Alternative Info, writing that “the U.S. Government, in its eagerness to return American sex to the repressive Puritan standards of the 17th Century (when only the ‘missionary position’ between a lifelong married heterosexual couple was approved), and prodded by the Falwells of the Religious Right, has made full use of the growing fear of AIDS to discourage young people from all forms of sexual life.”[13]

In his furiously opinionated piece, the author expressed his anger with U.S. conservative politics and the influence of the Religious Right on sex education under the Reagan administration,
referring to President Reagan’s statement on the necessity to teach sexual abstinence and morality – “the values of right and wrong” – in sex education (Boyd).

Counter-narratives like these were published and circulated via zines and stimulated the creation of a queer (counter)public sphere through which punks, as well as queer people not identifying as punk, who shared similar experiences of oppression and discrimination, built networks to disseminate alternative accounts and information. In this context, ‘zines and other independent publications were also used to organize direct actions and distribute information on the protest actions of other radical activists and organizations. For instance, many queer punks and allies[14], together with members of anarchist youth groups and the gay and lesbian liberation movement, joined the Stop the Church protest co-organized by New York City’s radical protest organizations Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP)[15] and Women’s Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM![16]. The demonstration took place at Manhattan’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral in December 1989, where nearly 5,000 people targeted John Cardinal O’Connor’s repressive positions on AIDS, homosexuality, and abortion. O’Connor, who was part of Reagan’s Presidential commission on AIDS, opposed the provision of condoms, clean needles, or contraception and forbade church-employed healthcare workers from providing related health care counsel (Carroll 20).

Based on DIY radical practices supported by punks and non-punk members of queer and heterosexual communities, this protest was perceived as a joint effort testifying to “the creative strength of a coalition built around sexual and reproductive freedom,” as WHAM! activist and journalist Esther Kaplan noted (Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives). Allan Clear, a former drug user and ACT UP activist in New York City who advocated harm reduction, needle exchange, and the rights of drug users – and who had grown up with punk in England – recalled applying the same creative DIY and anarchic, anti-authoritarian approach of punk culture in his public health activism:

“I left England with that approach. ... If you look at harm reduction, it’s a whole bunch of old punks. I think it was not only the anarchist thing to add input to the conversation. It’s not that you should disobey authority, but that authority really does not count. It has no legitimacy. And be there to challenge things.” (Shepard 148)

Stop the Church was Clear’s first direct action with ACT UP where he attended the first meeting for syringe exchange; “there was no history of harm reduction," he remembers, “and I think that’s what made it very liberating. You could actually do whatever you wanted because there were no rules” (Shepard 150). Countercultural[17] and punk DIY practices continued to be used by ACT UP activists throughout the 1990s. For instance, YELL Zine, short for Youth Education Life Line, was a zine put out by young ACT UP activists in 1994, including punks and other members, in order to articulate “in-your-face activism” fighting for the rights to comprehensive AIDS education, free condoms, dental dams, and clean needles in the New York City schools” (ACT UP YELL). DIY ethos, creativity, and relatively anarchic and anti-authoritarian practices were thus crucial for the advocacy of the rights of drug users who, in particular at the height of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in the mid-1980s, remained largely unprotected. ACT UP’s activism attracted a large amount of public interest via direct actions and self-published documentaries on the motivations and everyday experiences of its members and supporters living with AIDS and HIV (Hubbard and Schulman). The collective thus gained greater political leverage to improve public health initiatives such as syringe exchange. Despite a federal ban on funding of needle exchange programs and other approaches to HIV prevention, syringe exchange became an established praxis on the East and West Coasts and one which was later legalized (Shepard 147).

Clear also continued his work in harm reduction for drug users, notably through his involvement in the national advocacy organization Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC). Through HRC, he continued to seek out to those who were difficult
to reach and to raise public awareness on the issue. Remembering the efficiency and necessity of punk’s political DIY activism in advocating social justice issues, Clear compared punk’s DIY approach with that of harm reduction work at his closing remarks on the North American Syringe Exchange Network (NASEN) Conference in April 2001 (Harm Reduction Coalition). Though rooted in a tradition of radical grassroots activism, Clear also recognized that a broader, more public approach would be needed to advance his social justice concerns and to achieve judicial protection. Accordingly, in his public function as the director of HRC in New York City, Clear linked access to health care to civil and human rights discourses. In the context of the International HIV/AIDS Conference “25 Years of AIDS, Global Voices” in Toronto 2006, which was co-organized by the international, non-governmental human rights monitoring group Human Rights Watch, Clear bemoaned the poor results of harm reduction activism on a national level, and blamed the lack of governmental support: “We’ve had significant progress at local levels, but we’ve had no progress at the federal level” (Clear “AIDS Stories” 1:47-1:54). Insisting on the necessity of laws to produce social change and to integrate drug users into the legal system of public health care in the U.S. and abroad, Clear stated that “it’s not just about a single disease or a single virus, it’s about the way people live, it’s about access to human rights, to civil rights” (Clear “AIDS Stories” 4:49-4:57). According to Clear, a legal framework – allegedly universally valid for all citizens and human beings – was necessary to conceptualize and advance social justice concerns and equality with regards to public health issues. At the Toronto Conference, Clear acknowledged the efforts to have a continuous scientific dialogue on HIV and AIDS, but simultaneously pointed out that academic conferences might pacify communities rather than raise public awareness and stimulate action (Clear “AIDS Conference” 0:30-0:55). In this context, he highlighted the necessity of using the media to bring AIDS back to the attention of governments and officials, adding that he would “like to see governments stepping forward” to “remove the barriers to all kinds of HIV treatments, prevention and care” (Clear “AIDS Conference” 0:50-0:55, 1:31-1:34 and 1:40-1:44). Despite his criticism of the political and capitalist barriers operating at official institutions such as the United Nations (Clear “AIDS Conference” 1:44-2:10), Clear became, as of 2015, the New York State Director at the State’s Health Department AIDS Institute’s Office of Drug User Health, the first position of its kind in the United States.[18] According to Clear, the creation of this position can be interpreted as a local result of decades of harm reduction activism that was particularly successful in New York City. Perceiving HIV/AIDS and harm reduction as global issues in the twenty-first century, Clear placed them within a broader, transnational human rights discourse to increase public awareness and governmental support. Nevertheless, he participated in a more non-governmental approach to human rights advocacy by co-operating with Human Rights Watch and remained critical of more established institutions such as the United Nations. In this context, human rights served more as a conceptual framework to advocate social justice issues which linked them to legal questions on a transnational level.

The fight for the rights of marginalized and politically underrepresented individuals and groups was often at the core of radical activism rooted in, or at least linked to, punk’s DIY ethos and was mostly advanced by punks and allies who belonged to or self-identified with one or multiple of these marginalized groups. As it was with Clear, this was also the case with aforementioned bisexual(-identified) LGBT(QIA) and male rape victims’ rights activist “Donny the Punk,” a self-given pseudonym for Stephen Donaldson, born Robert A. Martin in 1946.[19] Donny immersed himself in New York City’s punk scene in 1977 “as a result of hearing Patti Smith’s song about a boy being raped.”[20] The song he referred to, was the song “Land” from Smith’s famous debut album *Horses* through which Smith insinuated, among other themes, rape experiences of the character Johnny who functioned as a reference to the protagonist of William S. Burrough’s homoerotic apocalyptic novel *The Wild Boys* (1971) (DeLano; Sante; Smith). Donny’s interest in the topic of male rape stemmed from his own brutal gang rape in a Washington D.C. jail in 1973, and from the
homosexual activities that had been part of his life since he was a 10-year-old child. In the late 1960s, after a troubled youth and adolescence characterized by sexual exploitation by older boys and men,[21] Donny spent a summer with J.D. Jones, a female friend with whom he enjoyed sexual intercourse without abandoning sexual relations with other men or women. This experience encouraged Donny to self-identify as bisexual, giving him “enough confidence to start the homophile student movement, as a bisexual”[22] at Columbia University in New York City in 1966 despite the hostility he experienced towards bisexuality by the gay liberation movement in the 1960s (and later on). [23] Donny was involved in many grassroots and academic efforts to advocate around and educate on bisexuality and related sexual rights.[24] Once a prominent figure in the early American bisexual liberation movement of the 1970s, Donny lost interest in the movement after 1976, stating that it “seemed to me to have ceased pioneering and could no longer compete for my time with newer interests: graduate school, Buddhism, punk rock, and prison rape, the chief among them.”[25] Even though Donny returned to writing and speaking publicly about bisexuality in the early 1990s, male prison rape – of which he was a victim on several occasions during incarcerations in 1973 and from 1980 to 1984[26] – and the rights of prison rape victims became the core focus of his political activism until his death from AIDS complications in 1996.

Stephen Donaldson used his pseudonym “Donny the Punk” in a two-fold way. The first dimension of the term “punk” alluded to his submissive position towards his rapist(s) in prison, while the second connoted his identification with punk culture. The term “punk,” for Donny, always implied both of these notions; it pointed not only to the deep, persisting trauma caused by his rape, but also to his continuous interest in and identification as punk. Donaldson’s co-editor of the Encyclopedia of Homosexuality (1990), Wayne R. Dynes, recalled that “the complicity … of the climate of the times,” the late 1960s and early 1970s, with “[r]ivers of psychedelic drugs, new styles of dress and deportment, and relentless attention to the counterculture in the media, … the Woodstock generation” radicalized Donaldson’s political views and actions (Dynes 269). Immersing himself in punk and non- and anti-racist skinhead culture,[27] Donaldson chose to stick with “the values and lifestyle choices of American counterculture,” which were, according to Dynes, “the one constant in Donny’s life” (Dynes 266). Punk rock and oi! music, non and anti-racist skinhead culture, anti-hierarchical anarchist beliefs, and the DIY ethos of punk culture became important parts of Donaldson’s life throughout the 1980s and 1990s, allowing him to express his personal and political views via “creative madness.”[28] Donny the Punk wrote extensively about skinhead and punk culture, including music reviews and band interviews, which he published in punk ‘zines such as Maximum Rocknroll, Under the Volcano, Flipside, and the Skinhead Times. He also authored several complaints to established media such as the New York Times, challenging one-sided reports on racism and neo-Nazism in American skinhead youth culture.[29] Via punk music and, as Donny framed it, a “totally uncensored media network, featuring university radio stations and many hundreds of non-commercial publications, PUNKZINES,”[30] punk culture was able to produce a counterpublic sphere through which people could express non-conformist views and be “… frankly sexual, frequently obscene, … welcoming bisexuals, gays, and sexual experimentation generally.”[31] As such, punk culture provided an authentic space for sexual exploration and experimentation that was less concerned with defining sexual orientation as identity practice. Rather, punk culture saw non-conforming sexuality and intimacy as acts and/or political issues. Accordingly, in a draft proposal initially written for the 1992 Sager Symposium on “Constructions of Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay Identities in the Popular Culture,”[32] Donny argued that

“[these] three media – radio, recordings (records and tapes), and ‘punkzines’ [sic] – have been the vehicles from the inception of punk to the present day for a dialogue over homosexuality and bisexuality which is exceptional for a non-gay subculture in its prominence and persistence. In keeping
with punk’s general contrarian stance and anarchistic ethos, the predominant image has been one of ‘polymorphous perversity’, the male punk teenager as ‘orgasm addict’ (title of a hit by the prototypical British band The Buzzcocks) seeking sexual adventure wherever he can find it, and thus encouraging bisexual experimentation. Homosexuality was viewed as an act or a tendency or a political issue rather than as a personal identity.”[33]

Here, Donny emphasized that punk was not a queer community per se (“a non-gay subculture”), but through its “general contrarian stance and anarchistic ethos” open to members of other countercultural movements such as the bisexual, gay, and lesbian movements. Against the backdrop of the primarily homophobic culture of the New York Hardcore Punk (NYHC) scene (Barrett 30 seq.) as well as an established bourgeois gay culture (Davidson 148 seq.), Donny stressed the importance of the punk homocore movement for queer punks:

“The most recent development in punk is the emergence of a ‘homocore’ element with its own publications and bands, which, while more willing to endorse a gay, bi, or lesbian classification, sees itself in opposition to the general homosexual subculture, with its followers’ identity remaining firmly ‘punk’ rather than one based on orientation.”[34]

Donny highlighted the importance of a certain punk identity for the movement, which he described as being more important than one based on sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the question of the identification with one’s sexual orientation was a complicated one for Donny the Punk; he was, his colleague Dynes suggests, ambivalent about his own identification as bisexual, which he thought might have served to disguise his preponderant homosexual and, in part, masochistic desires (Dynes 271). Dynes remembers that Donny’s

“... interest in the youth music scene, along with his sexual interests, brought much anguish, as the mainly straight youths he was attracted to were at best puzzled, at worst enraged by his interests. ... His efforts to gain acceptance as one of the boys in the punk scene, for which he gained a local media award as “best punk,” had its pathetic side” (Dynes 271).

These conflicting visions of Donny’s experiences of sexuality and punk culture, where most of the participants were younger than him, complicate the picture Donny drew of punk as a generally queer-friendly cultural phenomenon, and suggest that there were some personal homophobic experiences Donny had to face within the punk scene that he did not write about. And yet Donny held on to punk culture and, in particular, to the non and anti-racist skinhead scene in New York City, where he found a community among the “ultimate outcasts” insisting on their autonomy and considering “their crew [of skins] their real family ... where they invest their emotional energy.”[35]

Donny the Punk’s political activism did not originate in punk but was rooted in the countercultural movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s and in his personal experiences of sexual discrimination and male prison rape. However, punk culture, its music, DIY ethos, aggressive, relatively anarchic and anti-authoritarian approach provided a space where Donny could “go on” even after his suicide attempt in 1977,[36] helping him to address the trauma of his rape, as well as his struggles with his sexual orientation. Via a number of independent punk media, for instance, Donny shared his personal experience of male prison rape (Goad) and raised awareness for his fight for the rights of prisoners, which were neglected or willingly ignored by the commercial media (Weiss). In 1988, he became head of the non-profit organization Stop Prisoner Rape and intensified his public efforts against sexual assault in U.S. prisons and for AIDS prevention in prisons, culminating in legal proceedings (Donaldson “Affidavit”), TV shows, and documentaries on the topic.[37] George Marshall, famous among non-racist skinheads in the U.K. for his long-term zine Skinhead Times, acknowledged Donaldson’s courage for publicly debating male prison rape on TV. In the final chapter of his monograph Skinhead
Nation (1996), Marshall noted “… I don’t know a great deal about him [Donny the Punk], except that yesterday I saw him on a CBS 60 Minutes documentary doing the bravest thing I’ve ever seen a skinhead do.”[38] The office manager of Stop Prisoner Rape, Alexandra Gerber, who herself was “hanging out with skins since [she] was 13 years old,” and who witnessed Donny’s joy over this statement, thanked Marshall for his solidarity with Donny, stating that “it is so good to see that his community will back him and recognize his work.”[39] Beyond this positive response from the skinhead scene, Donny’s public work also attracted the attention of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Human Rights Watch. Based on his experiences with and belief in countercultural activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, he had continued to undertake counterpublic and public efforts to advance prisoners’ rights throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As a consequence of Donaldson’s outreach as an outspoken activist and journalist for both the alternative and more established press, the organization started to look into the sexual abuse of men in prison (Weiss) and declared the right to protection from sexual violence in prisons (and related infections with sexually transferred diseases such as AIDS) as a human right in the mid-1990s. The three-year research project that followed, summarized in the report No Escape. Male Rape in U.S. Prisons (1997), brought the issue to the attention of a broader audience and, together with continuous efforts of Stop Prisoner Rape (after Donaldson’s death in 1996), helped assure passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA), the first federal civil law addressing sexual violence in U.S. detention facilities (Kaiser and Stannow).

Even though punk culture cannot be understood (and should not be romanticized) as an inherently political social movement, its more politicized strands offered a set of – often fragmented and conflicting – perspectives and practices related to the social justice struggles of marginalized people. It was a space where participants could sharpen, extend and debate their arguments in a diverse and mostly open environment via tools of cultural production such as networks, zines, and other independent publications, music records, and performances as well as protest actions. People like Allan Clear and Stephen Donaldson could find niches for their political activism and personal lifestyles in punk culture whose DIY and anti-assimilationist ethos provided a creative space for radical activism on sensitive issues such as non-conforming sexual orientation and gender identities. Queerness, already been part of the early punk movement (Nault 47 seqq.), has again become important in American punk culture since the mid-1980s and was, for instance, addressed and negotiated by biracial, intersex born transgender performance artist Vaginal Davis from the mid-1970s to the present (Nault 138–140) and white queer musicians such as Pansy Division (1991-present) (DeChaine) and Against Me!, fronted by transgender singer Laura Jane Grace (1997-present) (Kelleher). However, the misogynist macho traits of a predominantly white, straight, and male punk culture have challenged – and continue to challenge – punk as a tolerant space for non-conforming sexual orientation and gender identities. As Laura Jane Grace stated in an interview regarding her coming out as transgender in 2012, “[p]unk was supposed to be so open and accepting, … [b]ut when it came down to it, it was still hard to be queer in any way and not face judgment for it” (Farber). [40] Similarly, Pansy Division’s members recall controversial reactions by a mostly straight male punk community when touring with famous pop-punk band Green Day in 1994 (Locker).

Both the disputed presence of queerness in punk and the fierce response of the queercore movement to homophobia within punk and beyond[41], as well as punk’s misogyny generally and the exclusion of girls and women in hardcore punk culture, inspired the queer (-/ and) feminist riot grrrl movement that emerged in the early 1990s in Olympia, Washington and Washington, D.C. While the initial motivation of bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile was to bring girls and young women back on stage and to the front of punk music gigs (Marcus), the riot grrrl movement quickly developed into a space for radical cultural and political “in-your-face” activism addressing issues such as gender equality, queerness, body politics, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and reproductive rights.
3. Riot Grrrl Activism, (Queer) Punk Feminism and the Question of Rights

Much has already been written and said about the riot grrrl movement of the early 1990s (Downes, “There’s A Riot Going On”; Marcus; Radway) and the radical queer (-/and) feminist activism it continues to inspire today (Downes, “DIY Queer Feminist (Sub)Cultural Resistance”; Driver; Ommert; Siegfried; Wiedlack, Queer-Feminist Punk; Wiedlack, “Rejection and Anger in Queer-Feminist Punk”). I do not intend here to re-tell the complete history of the riot grrrl movement, but rather to address how the early movement was involved in stimulating a discourse on equal rights for queer people, as well as for heterosexual women and girls, and if and how more recent riot grrrl-inspired punk activism[42] translated this discourse into social justice and civil and human rights advocacy.

The riot grrrl movement took off in Olympia, Washington when Kathleen Hanna and Tobi Vail formed the punk band Bikini Kill almost simultaneously with Allison Wolfe and Molly Neuman forming Bratmobile, taking the feminist themes of their DIY punk zine Girl Germs on stage. The mini-zine Riot Grrrl that Molly Neuman had started in 1991 soon became a cooperative publication of both bands and gave the riot grrrl movement its name (Marcus 146). The term “grrrl” implied the growl, the anger of girls who were initially protesting against the misogynist (hardcore) punk scene at the time and against the passive associations of the term “girls” (Rosenberg and Garofalo 809). Hanna, who had herself experienced domestic violence and had worked for a rape crisis center where mostly women talked about their experiences as victims of rape and sexual abuse, saw the urgent necessity for a new form of radical feminism which she answered by co-founding Bikini Kill and riot grrrl: “That is why we started a band because everybody was saying ‘feminism is dead’ – I just had found it” (Noisey 4:24-4:30). The riot grrrl movement sought to make a statement about sensitive issues that were often related to the abuse or discrimination of the female cis- or queer body or non-conforming sexual orientation and gender identities by writing, singing, and screaming about these issues publicly on stage and by discussing them in safe(r) spaces for women and girls (Nault 47-8; Rosenberg and Garofalo 810-1). Zines, music gigs, and riot grrrl gatherings became important counterpublic tools to raise awareness on these sensitive issues and to show how they affected individual’s everyday lives. Riot grrrl, to Kathleen Hanna and Allison Wolfe, who both attended the Evergreen State College in Olympia, was not only about making “punk ... more feminist,” but also about infusing a mainly academic discourse on feminism with punk ethics.[43] In recent years, dozens of queer (-/and) feminist riot grrrl and riot grrrl inspired collections have been made available online[44] and/or entered academic archival institutions – mostly as donations from riot grrrl members and allies – and are now studied in classrooms (often in queer, gender, and women’s studies) and made available to the broader public, thus reaching a publicity far beyond punk (Darms).[45]

Many ideas of the early riot grrrl movement were influenced by academic discourses on gender and women’s studies, as well as queer studies, which were part of the curriculum at the progressive Evergreen State College for public liberal arts and sciences in the early 1990s.[46] As Corin Tucker, lead singer of two influential (post)riot grrrl bands, Heavens to Betsy (1991-1994) and later Sleater-Kinney (1994-2006, 2014-present), remembers, “the Olympia music scene was certainly tied to Evergreen,”[47] which was mostly attended by white middle-class students including many of riot grrrl’s core musicians such as Hanna, Vail, Kathi Wilcox (Bikini Kill; Julie Ruin; etc.) Allison Wolfe (Bratmobile), Tucker, and Carrie Brownstein (Heavens to Betsy; Sleater-Kinney, etc.).[48] Moreover, Positive Force, an enduring Washington, D.C.-based punk activist collective co-founded by Mark Andersen in 1985 to turn the rhetoric of punk ideals into action,[49] served as an early hub of the riot grrrl movement. Inspired by the social community work, benefit concerts, marches, and political protests organized by Positive Force, Hanna and Wolfe decided to host their first public female-only workshop in 1991 at the Positive Force House, where riot grrrl meetings would continue to be held until the mid-1990s (Anderson). Acknowledging
the socio-political relevance of these feminist meetings, Andersen kept the files that had been left at the House and recently gave them to the Fales Library and Special Collections at New York University, where they became part of the Riot Grrrl Collection established by former riot grrrl turned archivist Lisa Darms (New York University; Darms, “Preserving Contraction”; Darms, *Riot Grrrl Collection*). To Andersen, the spirit of the self-empowering riot grrrl movement has not disappeared but is still alive in contemporary social projects such as the We Are Family Senior Outreach Network he cofounded to supply senior services in low-income communities in the American capital: “In its way, *We Are Family* continues the empowering punk-feminist outreach of Riot Grrrl, bringing services, advocacy and companionship into the homes of low-income seniors – most of whom are women of color – in Washington DC’s *sic* inner city” (NYU).

The efforts of Washington, D.C.’s and Olympia’s riot grrrl pioneers quickly developed into a broader DIY queer (-/and) feminist activism inspiring girls and young women – and a few men – to get actively involved in writing zines, creating bands, organizing and participating in workshops, rock camps, conferences, and festivals. Riot grrrls – band members, zinesters and inspired fans – were often politically outspoken and active. Some of them, for instance, participated in direct actions organized by ACT UP and fought for reproductive rights at multiple Rock for Choice benefit concerts in support of Planned Parenthood or participated in larger pro-LGBT(QIA) protests such as the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation in 1993.[50] The trajectories of the riot grrrl movement provided a local way of DIY resistance offering many girls and women “a set of resources to engage in … [a] conversation” with women’s and human rights issues, i.e. questions related to human dignity and equal rights (Dunn, “Punk Rock, Globalization, and Human Rights” 37). Girls and women were not only consumers anymore but became producers of culture and knowledge transposing their own queer (-/and) feminist message. Their DIY activism helped to broaden the riot grrrl movement, which quickly became a decentered phenomenon based on many local riot grrrl chapters developing all over the U.S. (and beyond) (Dunn and Farnsworth 139 seq.).

However, despite their claim of being part of a progressive, anti-racist, inclusive movement for all cis- and queer women (and allied men), some riot grrrls failed to live up to their ideals. In particular, women of color felt excluded by the predominantly white middle-class traits of the riot grrrl movement. For instance, riot grrrl’s aesthetics of individual access to cultural production, creative work, expertise, and knowledge emphasized the radical politics of public intimacy – such as performing shamelessness via body writing or sex work – which made the personal political again (Nguyen, “Riot Grrrl and Race”). The shameless embrace of sexuality by writing words such as SLUT over the white girls’ stomachs or by pursuing stripping and other types of sex work was used to reappropriate the norms of femininity and to reclaim sexual agency. But white, mostly middle-class riot grrrls failed to acknowledge that these aesthetics of transgressive gender politics and intimacy were not accessible to poor women or women of color whose bodies were already perceived as deviant and disreputable (Perry), thus reiterating power structures and reinforcing white middle-class privilege (Nguyen, “Riot Grrrl and Race” 174–5; Perry). Consequently, riot grrrls and punks of color started their own queer (-/and) feminist “race riot,” addressing white privilege, whiteness and racism in riot grrrl and punk culture at large.[51] Hence, only a few years after its emergence, the riot grrrl movement developed into a more fragmented movement. The critiques from within the movement, harsh critiques by the established media that did not take the political ambitions of riot grrrl seriously, and the commodification of riot grrrl’s claim of “girl power” through pop cultural acts such as the Spice Girls led to the demise of the riot grrrl movement in the mid-1990s (Dunn and Farnsworth; Schilt). Nevertheless, the riot grrrl movement had sparked a new radical queer (-/and) feminist approach through the DIY self-empowerment of young women and girls that was not lost after the movement’s demise.

In the early 2000s, riot grrrl inspired activism in different cities in the U.S. and abroad with
an extensive zine scene and queer-feminist grassroots gatherings at Ladyfests and Girls Rock Camps. Moreover, Riot grrrl’s outspoken feminism and long-lasting effect on DIY queer (-/and) feminist activism had brought the early, more queer- and female-friendly punk scene of the 1970s back to the attention of younger queer (-/and) feminist punks. Beyond nostalgic references to female punk icons of the 1970s such as Joan Jett (lead singer of The Runaways), Nicole Panter (former manager of The Germs), Exene Cervenka (lead singer of X) and Debbie Harry (lead singer of Blondie), riot grrrls, female punks of the 1970s, and riot grrrl inspired activists started to co-operate in Girls Rock Camps, public talks, and music recordings to get and keep radical DIY punk feminism going.[52]

The recent phenomenon of Pussy Riot and its perception in the U.S. punk scene, western grassroots organizations, and established western media provides an interesting case of such a cross-generational feminist punk “solidarity” bringing together counterpublic and public spheres. Members of the female Russian performance art collective were jailed in 2012 for criticizing the authoritarian, discriminatory politics of the Russian president Vladimir Putin via a performance of their pro-gay, pro-feminist song “Punk Prayer” (Rumen)[53] in Moscow’s Christ the Savior Cathedral. The joint efforts of queer (-/and) feminist punk activists (Ommert 387 seqq.) and transnational human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International[54] and Human Rights Watch (“Free Pussy Riot Members. One Year Behind Bars”) under the credo Free Pussy Riot were covered widely and sympathetically by western media.[55] After their release from prison, two Pussy Riot members, Maria “Masha” Alyokhina and Nadezhda “Nadia” Tolokonnikova, decided to continue their political activism on a broader scale. Among other public talks, they gave a speech about the poor conditions of the Russian prison system and homophobia in Russia, urging protest against Putin’s oppressive politics at the Bringing Human Rights Home! concert presented by Amnesty International at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn on the eve of the 2014 Sochi Olympics in Russia. In New York, Masha and Nadia stated: “We are happy to support Amnesty International’s work on behalf of human rights and political prisoners. We, more than anyone, understand how important Amnesty’s work is in connecting activists to prisoners.”[56] However, critical reactions to Pussy Riot’s explicit engagement with the human rights NGO also reveal the complicated relation between punk-related DIY, anti-establishment practices, and an institutionalized public discourse of human rights. Other members of the Pussy Riot collective harshly criticized Masha’s and Nadia’s participation in the Amnesty International show alongside Madonna, Blondie, Lauryn Hill and other famous artists. They concluded “that Masha and Nadia are no longer members of the group, and they will no longer take part in radical actions. Now they are engaged in a new project. They are now institutionalized advocates of prisoners’ rights.”[57] The music press likewise discussed whether punks lose their credibility by entering the stage of popular, commercial events (Zoldadz). Interestingly, CBGB Productions, a holdover of the former independent music club and center of punk rock shows in the East Village, New York, co-produced the event together with Amnesty International.

Through their radical pro-LGBT(QIA) and pro-feminist direct actions in Russia, Pussy Riot was re-interpreting and, via the new media and illegal performances outside of bars and clubs, transposing elements of the riot grrrl movement into a new radical form of political activism (Langston). The feminist collective deliberately chose punk’s radical DIY practices and brightly colored balaclavas as a “spectacular, ironic and provocative form” to “be as visible as possible” (Wiedlack, Queer-Feminist Punk 388). However, it was not before the incarceration of some of its members that their activism became famous in the Global North/West, despite other well publicized political performances of the group in Russia (Wiedlack, Queer-Feminist Punk 387). Shortly after their incarceration and during the Free Pussy Riot protests, human rights organizations, as well as many North American queer (-/and) feminist punk artists, expressed their support for Pussy Riot and their riot grrrl-inspired direct actions while addressing concerns over the lack of social justice and human rights, among them Bruce LaBruce (French and Neu
67), Nicole Panter (Vile), Patti Smith,[58] Exene Cervenka[59] as well as riot grrrls Johanna Fateman (2012), Kathleen Hanna (Pelly), and Allison Wolfe.[60] However, even though some members – Masha and Nadia – of the Pussy Riot collective decided to closely work together with western queer (-/and) feminist punk activists, the Russian performance art collective should not be interpreted as a revival or a Russian extension of western punk culture and of the riot grrrl movement. This would oversimplify the specific, non-western background of the collective and incorporate their art and activism in western queer (-/and) feminist punk movements and genres with their assigned values and belief systems (Wiedlack, “Pussy Riot & Riot Grrrlsm”). The strong and persistent solidarity actions expressed by American queer (-/and) feminist punks are rendering these differences between western punk and the Russian performance art collective rather invisible. Instead, these efforts of American queer (-/and) feminist punks to incorporate Pussy Riot's cultural and political activism into western narratives could be read as the quest for (and dream of) a trans-local, queer punk feminism engaging in social justice and human rights advocacy in the twenty-first century.

4. Conclusion

This article explored the ways sexuality, queerness, and feminism were negotiated by queer (-/and) feminist punks and how some punks became engaged in sexual rights activism in the 1980s and 1990s, becoming part of a “sexual turn” of the public human rights discourse since the mid-1990s. Punks produced “shock effects” via zines, performances, and political direct actions addressing sensitive issues related to sexuality such as non-conforming sexual orientation and identities, rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, abortion, and sexually transferred diseases like HIV/AIDS, raising awareness for these issues within and beyond punk culture. The queercore and the riot grrrl movements created queer (-/and) feminist counterpublic spheres that punks and allies could personally relate to and participate in.

The first part of this article traced how the political activism of Allan Clear and Stephen Donaldson (Donny the Punk) became infused and inspired by punk's DIY, relatively anarchic and anti-authoritarian ethic. In this context, Donny the Punk could rely on his experiences from the 1960s countercultural sexual liberation movements, which frequently applied DIY practices such as independent publishing and grassroots organizing, experiences he made use of when he immersed himself into New York City's punk scene. Both Clear and Donaldson became life-long activists for causes they could personally relate to – HIV/AIDS, harm reduction for drug users, and prisoner rape. Their activism for these causes was supported by other activists who worked for or with them and who were sometimes but not necessarily part of punk culture; nevertheless, their experiences in punk and counterculture provided them with some important tools for their political actions, and Clear’s and Dunn’s activism on harm reduction and prisoner rape preceded any established rhetoric of human rights at the time. Grassroots human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch only started to gain interest in these issues in the mid- and late 1990s and adopted them into their human rights agenda.

The second part of this article addressed the initiation of a new radical youth feminism by the riot grrrl movement in the early 1990s. Punk culture provided – again – a forum and counterpublic sphere where sensitive issues such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, body politics, and reproductive rights were negotiated. Local and covert DIY actions offered safer spaces for predominantly white, middle-class girls and women to support each other and, along with direct actions on the street, produced a certain knowledge and set of resources for young girls and women to engage in conversations about human dignity and equal rights. Kathleen Hanna and other riot grrrls of the early 1990s addressed and fought against issues many of them had experienced or observed themselves: sexism within and beyond punk, as well as sexual violence and misogynist, repressive social and sexual mores in U.S. society as a whole. Relating to and sometimes co-operating with members of the queercore movement, riot
grrrls brought a variety of radical queer (-/and) feminist views and non-conforming modes of sexual expression to the forefront of punk in the early 1990s. However, most white members of the riot grrrl movement failed to consider that the movement’s aesthetics of cultural production and radical politics often reproduced white middle-class privilege and reiterated racist power structures. Moreover, riot grrrl’s political message was not taken seriously by the established media at the time, and the movement became quickly commodified by popular culture in the mid-1990s. A few years later, former riot grrrls and riot grrrl-inspired queer (-/and) feminist activists revived the idea of providing a space for young women to express themselves via the production and performance of music or zine writing at events such as Girls Rock Camp or Ladyfest, which have been taking place on a global scale since the early 2000s. Marked by new communication forms such as social media (Harris) and an increasing academization, institutionalization, and media interest, at least in western countries (Buszek; Furness), queer (-/and) feminist punk activism reaches a broader audience today than in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but without necessarily overcoming its exclusionary tendencies. Nevertheless, the DIY practices and counter publicity of the riot grrrl movement and of riot grrrl-inspired activism provided a set of resources and material means of cultural production for heterosexual girls and women and queer people to address gender inequality and non-conformity as well as women’s and reproductive rights, all of which became related to a broader human rights activism based on gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation identities since the mid-1990s.

To conclude, the case studies presented in this article show that the originally radical struggles for drug user’s rights, syringe exchange, HIV/AIDS treatments, prisoners’ sexual rights, and women’s rights of the 1980s and early 1990s were no longer primarily fought in the streets. By the mid-1990s, queerness, riot grrrl activism, but also punk culture in general and its “shock effects” had once again become more commodified and socially normalized. In this context, sexual concerns expressed by punk activists, allies, and grassroots groups became increasingly incorporated into a more institutionalized activism using civil and human rights discourses as conceptual frameworks to advance social justice struggles.

Endnotes

[1] A cis-woman is a woman assigned female at birth. Her gender identity is identical with her sex assigned at birth. The term is often used to describe non-transgender women; I use it here to differentiate between cis-women and people with gender-non-conforming identities which include, for instance, transgender women.

[2] Zines are self-produced – i.e. self-written, copied and self-distributed – pamphlets, flyers or magazines functioning as alternative, independent media “speaking to and for an underground culture” in their quality as a “novel form of communication and creation,” see: Duncombe 2.


[4] LGBT rights is the common acronym in international legal discourses framing equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. In this article, however, I prefer the use of the extended acronym LGBT(QIA) or the use of the term “queer” as an umbrella term. However, neither are always embraced by all people with non-conforming sexual orientation and non-conforming trans- and gender identities.

[5] In this article I use the term “queerness” to describe sexual-related actions, emotions, identities and beliefs of “queer” people whose sexual orientation and gender identity is not exclusively heterosexual. Alternatively, I refer to terms such as “bisexual,” “gay” or “lesbian” if these are mentioned as such in my primary source material.

[6] Some accounts addressing the interplay between queer theory, gender studies, and feminism include: Berger; Halberstam; Jagose; Marinucci; Muñoz; Weed and Schor.

[7] See, for instance: Feldman-Barrett 1043; Lee 75-76. DIY aesthetics were important tools to oppose or at least challenge capitalist structures, established politics, the mass media, and the music industry. The DIY ethos became a central element of a punk “lifestyle” not only for many punk musicians and record producers, but also for punk music fans who contributed to punk culture via (fan) zines since the mid-1970s. See: Triggs. With regards to independent music production, however, punk was (and is) not the only genre to rely on DIY aesthetics: a variety of other music cultures such as jazz, folk or hip hop continues to apply a DIY approach as part of an “anti-consumerist consumerism” of small-scale independent producers. See, for instance: Bennett and Peterson; Strachan.

[8] As Walter Benjamin argues in his analysis of shock effects in films, the traumatized receiver – despite possibly resisting and rejecting such a “shock-effect” – may tune out the offending material, which “should be cushioned by
heightened presence of mind” and, thus, be integrated into the receiver’s experiences, leading to a heightened state of awareness. See: Benjamin; Nault 13-15.

[9] For recent phenomena stemming from 1980s’ and 1990s’ queercore culture (such as Tribe 8) or taking contemporary inspiration from it (such as zinester Osa Atoe), see: Nault, 164 seqq.

[10] Both terms, “homocore” and “queercore,” are often used interchangeably to describe punk’s queerness since the 1980s. Since the term “queercore” emphasizes a more inclusive non-heteronormative notion beyond homosexuality (highlighted linguistically in the term “homocore”) crossing sexual and gender boundaries, I prefer the use of “queercore” in this article.


[14] I use the term “ally” to describe people who did not (self-) identify as punk but became entangled with punk culture through sharing similar experiences, values, identities, and practices (such as (self-)identifying as “queer,” “mixed race,” embracing DIY ethic, anarchism, etc.).

[15] The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was founded in March 1987 at the Lesbian and Gay Community Center in New York City by a collective of queer and heterosexual people (with and without AIDS/HIV), using direct actions such as demonstrations and civil disobedience, regular meetings, and independent media outreach to call the attention of government officials, medical researchers, drug companies, other corporations, and the general public to the severity of the AIDS crisis and how it impacted the lives of individuals. See: Hubbard and Schulman.

[16] The Women’s Health Action and Mobilization! (WHAM!) was founded in New York City in 1989 to address reproductive rights and freedom via a radical, direct action approach targeting officials and institutions and co-operated with ACT UP in diverse marches, direct actions and demonstrations. See: Carroll.


[19] In this article, I mostly refer to the pseudonyms „Donny the Punk” or Stephen Donaldson in accordance with how Donaldson used the names himself. A more detailed account for his use of different names and pseudonyms can be found in an article written by his academic colleague, American art historian Wayne R. Dynes. See: Dynes 265-6.


[21] Stephen Donaldson, “Branded by the Boy Scouts.” Manuscript, January 1992, 6 pages. New York Public Library, Box 7, Folder 4 “Anthology of Writings by Bisexual Men,” accessed 1 August 2016. Essay written to be published in Times Change Press by Drew Lewis as part of a broader volume on personal narratives of bisexual men. In his memoirs, Donny describes that his first sexual encounter was performing oral sex on an older, twelve-year old boy during his time at the Boy Scouts of America. He started to like the attention and recognition he received in exchange for him performing oral sex which is why he continued to do so throughout high school and the time he served in the marines.


[24] For instance, Donaldson extensively published articles in the established and independent press on bi- and homosexuality, participated in the draft of the Ithaca Statement of Bisexuality at a workshop of the Friends of the Quakers, and later in his life, participated in conferences and co-edited an academic volume on homosexuality with Wayne Dynes; see: Donaldson, “Branded by the Boy Scouts,” 5; Dynes et al.


[26] While Donaldson’s first imprisonment of Donaldson was the result of a (peaceful) Quaker protest in Washington, D.C., his four-year prison term was the outcome of a “seemingly normal incident” at Veteran’s Hospital in the Bronx, where Donaldson was denied medical assistance for a sexually transmitted disease and decided to open fire with a gun. See: Dynes 270; Goad.

[27] I differentiate between a more passive non-racist and a more politically overt anti-racist approach of skinhead culture. While many skinheads claimed to be non-racist by dissociating themselves from Nazi Rock and related skinhead culture, there were also skins with a much more direct and overt anti-racist stance such as the collective Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP). On skinhead culture, its roots in black reggae and ska culture in the U.K. in the 1960s, Nazi Rock and racism, see: Brown.
Dynes describes Donaldson as a "person of exceptional dedication and imagination" whose "creative madness, if so it is to be termed, was triggered by the times. He came of age just as the twin rebellions of the antiwar movement and the counterculture were cresting." In his article, Dynes continues to describe in detail how ambivalent Donaldson's personality and (sexual) identity were, see: Dynes 272.


Donny the Punk, "A Punk Primer," 3.

The Sager Symposium is an annual conference at Swarthmore College which centers on different issues relevant to the LGBT(QIA) community, see: Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.


For a compilation of supportive views within the punk community, but also a controversial forum discussion on Grace’s feelings and her coming out as transgender see: Wisniewski.

In fact, there was much overlap of artists and participants between the riot grrrl movement and the queercore movement, even though riot grrrls also struggled with some sexism in the multi-gendered queercore movement, see: Nault 27 seqq.

I use the term of riot grrrl (inspired) activism to describe cultural and political activism of mostly girls and women who would not label themselves as riot grrrls, but consciously embrace the most relevant ethics of the riot grrrl movement such as a queer-feminist DIY approach.


Examples are the Queer Zine Archive Project and the POC (People of Color) Zine Project.


For instance, riot grrrl Tobi Vail of the band Bikini Kill wrote to Molly Neuman of the future band Bratmobile on 9 May 1990 on courses she took on psychology, sexuality, and feminism. She stated that “it’s exciting to study about sexism in school because it gives you a feeling of power just to actually be able to admit that things like oppression actually do exist and affect your life – which is something you have to deny a lot in real life.” Quoted in: Darms The Riot Grrrl Collection 28-29.

Corin Tucker in a recent interview with Allison Wolfe, see. Wolfe, “Riot Grrrls Raise Awareness.”

See the online list of “Famous The Evergreen State College Alumni.”

Andersen expressed this view in an interview with Jerad Walker, see: Walker.

For instance, Mimi Thi Ngyen was involved in activism regarding ACT UP and reproductive rights, see: Darms “Riot Grrrl, Collected.” Bikini Kill played at several benefit concerts for Planned Parenthood at Rock for Choice, a series which had been put up by punk and grunge band L7 in Los Angeles in 1991 (and which went on until 2001); see, for instance: Feminist Majority Foundation. “Rock for Choice.” Queer-feminist riot grrrl Mary Fondriest was documented – alongside a group of other riot grrrls – while participating at the March on Washington in 1993, carrying a banner stating ‘I am queer and proud and will beat you up when you say anything bad about me or any of my queer friends.’ Another banner showed the slogan: “D.C. Riot Grrrl Supports Gerl [sic] Love and Gay Rights.” See: Graham, “Riot Grrrl.”

The slogan “race riot” is taken from Mimi Thi Ngyen’s compilation zine “Evolution of a Race Riot” which studied racism and privilege in the largely white populations of activist, feminist, punk and zine communities, discussing isolation and homogeneity. Both issues are made available
See the timeline of protests and actions to see: Wiedlack, ‘‘Free Pussy Riot!’’ & Riot Grrrlsm. For a critical account, the translation of the song as a ‘‘punk prayer’’ may be misleading though and incorporate Pussy Riot into a western canon of punk ideologies. For a critical account, see: Aloud, ‘‘Queens of Noise.’’

The panel at the Los Angeles Central Library in January 2014, punk feminism for the punk movement and beyond on a venue set up by Amnesty International: Amnesty International UK, ‘‘Pussy Riot Freed.’’

Rachel Denber from Human Rights Watch, among others, reported only few days after the imprisonment of Pussy Riot on ‘‘Pussy Riot and Russia’s Surreal ‘Justice’’ in a statement given to the New York Times after their release, Pussy Riot stated that it was the broad attention of the West and western media which motivated Putin to set them free shortly before the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, see: Gladstone.

This statement of the Pussy Riot members appeared in advance in a press release of Amnesty International on the ‘‘Bringing Human Rights Home Concert’’ which took place on 5 February 2014 at Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York City. See: Monaghan.

See online article of the pro-Russian and often anti-western/anti-American online press Russia Today: ‘‘Pussy Riot ‘Principles Violated’’’; in another article, The Guardian translated a critical blog post of Pussy Riot members who disapproved of the commercial (and legal) venture of the Amnesty International Concert, which would counteract the spirit of Pussy Riot’s illegal performances in unexpected places, see: AFP, ‘‘Pussy Riot Members Attack Bandmates for Appearing at Amnesty Concert.’’

Patti Smith had met Masha and Nadia at the punk venue Riot Fest in Chicago in September 2014, see: Gordon.

Allison Wolfe, Evelyn McDonnell, and Exene Cervenka expressed their support towards Pussy Riot’s punk feminist activism during their panel discussion at Los Angeles Central Library in January 2014; see: Aloud, ‘‘Queens of Noise.’’

Allison Wolfe co-operated with Pussy Riot at a panel discussion on the American Presidential Election in 2016, see: Make America Smart Again / Spaceland.

**Works Cited**


For a critical account, see: Wiedlack, “Free Pussy Riot! & Riot Grrrlsm.”


Famous The Evergreen State College Alumni. Undated. Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, French, Jade, and Emily Neu, eds.


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Abstract

Popular music has had a relationship with the attainment of human rights in myriad ways which have been inclusive of: the right to demonstrate the individual will; the right to develop some measure of self-determination and; the right to encourage the citizenry to charge forward towards goals for social change. This paper explores the lyrics and the narrative web of Calypso Music through the discursive themes of Music as Identity and Music as Social Change as applied to issues of human rights. Undertaking a thematic analysis of the written texts of selected Calypsos, the Calypsos described in this paper and the lyrics analysed have expressed how music can be mediated in the public space which can in turn produce considerable complexity while highlighting the nexus among Popular Music, Identity, Social Change and Human Rights while simultaneously addressing the relationships and between musical meaning, social power and cultural value.

Keywords: Calypso, Human Rights, Social Change, Identity Politics

Popular Music

As posited by Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2), the term popular music has been used in reference to music which is mediated electronically and which comes to its listeners via the playback of audio and video recordings, or via the internet, or through performance on film or television, or in amplified love performance. However, as these two authors go on to posit, electronic technologies which are assumed to define popular music as a commodified form have also undermined the meaning of popular. Further they assert that technologies of recording and circulation have enabled a huge variety of sounds from other times and places to become popular, in the sense of widely experienced and/or enjoyed. Noting the conundrum in defining what is popular music, I agree with Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2) that there is a challenge in using such a reductionist explanation to express that which is popular about music. The lens through which I intend to delve into and discuss popular music in this article will be through the frame of unearthing what is popular about music outside of the spectacle of “mainstream” or “fringe”. Instead the popularity associated with music will
reject such superfluous descriptors as amplified technology and repeated programmed rotation and alternatively focus on music which creates a groundswell of public support for its ability to resonate with matters of human rights and social change. Popular music will then be revealed as music having popularity and resonance on the ground.

Music, Social Injustice and Human Rights

There are various genres of music which have served to protest against the perception and reality of social injustice. Research has revealed that (i) Songs of immigrants from myriad groups; (ii) Native American Music from conquest and removal to Indians in the twentieth century; (iii) African-American Music from songs from the Slave Trade to Rap; (iv) Women’s Lives and Songs, Feminism and the Women’s movement to the role of women in the music industry; (v) Political protest songs from across diasporas and (vi) Reggae music and Calypso music designed to effect social change in the English-speaking Caribbean. This list is not intended to be exhaustive but it provides a panoramic overview of the range and scope of the issues which inspire the connectivity between music and human rights.

Scholars such as Weissman (2010), Peddie (2006), Averill (1997), Morris (1986), Pring-Mill (1987) have opined on the links between popular music and resistance to domination and social and political activism and in doing so have interrogated widely across several genres. This study, though cognizant of the meaningfulness of genres will not place its focus on the styles of music but instead on the lyrics of songs. This approach is being undertaken as a thematic framework for analysis will be utilised in which songs used to channel human rights through the social change narrative via the artform of Calypso music will be the main focus of the study. Two main themes which will form the basis for analysis of the song narratives are music and identity and music as social change.

Identity, Trinidad’s Calypso Music and Human Rights

Extrapolating from the theme of Music as Identity, the obvious connections were between a moment of creation, as being representative of self and reflecting identity. Moreover, with the lens of the interpretive sociologist, it was envisioned that the role of the Calypsonian would be one which would channel the issues of national identity within his/her performance while simultaneously addressing the group, ethnic and individual identity of each listener.

Perspective of International scholars – Music as Identity


Music then is seen as one of these habits or markers of identity. Martin Stokes has emphasised that music is a significant contributor to identity formation because it “evokes and organises collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity.” (Stokes, Ethnicity, Identity and Music 3)

To Turino, music can represent and articulate identities through association and by extension showcase its ability to create or re-create iconic and indexical relationships. (Turino, “Introduction” 17)

In Trinidad, Calypso music has a history dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. Throughout the decades it has received primacy of place as the popular music in the island that gave life to the social and political commentary of the day.

Lott (162) put forward the perspectives that prosperity, war, depression, ethnic rivalries,
Gender relations, demographic shifts, and culture wars, for example, shape the course of genre histories. Indeed, in the wider Caribbean, and in Trinidad and Tobago, research has been shown by several scholars (Guilbault 11) that social and political movements are among the main catalysts for the emergence and subsequent development of musical genres.

In reviewing the literature on the artform of Calypso, it is necessary to explore the historical and cultural underpinnings which led to the development of the artform and also the ways in which the identity of the slave, the ex-slave, the colonial subject and the independent citizen realised their sense of identity through the narrative expression of the Calypso. According to Carole B. Davies in the 1985 article entitled “The Politics of African Identification in Trinidad Calypso,” “Calypso is said to be both a traditional popular song and a creative act in which the artist both expresses and shapes popular opinion.” (77). Later on in the text, Davies goes on to posit that “the earliest Calypso-type songs were sung in an African-based creole and explicitly espoused freedom.” (78). Gleaning from Davies’ argument, it is seen that Calypso music from its nascent beginnings was representative of the expression of identity. Slaves, cognisant of the present condition employed music to channel their existence away from the plantation. The identity of the slave and that of the former free man were at odds with each other. The calypso “Slave” by the King of Calypso, Mighty Sparrow, exemplifies this duality of identity in the slave especially in the words,

I’m a slave from a land so far
I was caught and I was brought here from Africa
Oh Lord. Lord, I want to be free

In Geoffrey Dunn’s and Michael Horne’s 2004 signature film on Calypso entitled Calypso Dreams, Calypsonian Chalkdust stated that, “Calypso music was created to accompany Carnival celebrations”. To him, Carnival would not exist without Calypso Music. Culling from the words of Chalkdust, I note that the creation of the popular music, Calypso is inextricably linked with identity of the space from which the music emanates as well, being inter-twined with its purpose which is one of political and social contestation. The people’s Carnival is a festival emerging out of protest and tumult in response to slavery and colonialism.

Dovetailing with Calypsonian Chalkdust, Davies attests that Calypsos are created and performed as an integral part of the annual Carnival festivities (Davies 1). This perspective of Davies marries closely to the viewpoint of Giuseppe Sofo in his 2014 article entitled “Carnival, Memory and Identity” in which he makes the linkages between the culture of Trinidad, the event of Carnival and identity of the people. To him, the Carnival of Trinidad is a performative ritual of cultural resistance and awakening, claiming a space and celebrating freedom from any kind of oppression. The history of this ritual is strictly connected to the process of cultural decolonisation and political independence of the Caribbean country from the mother land; it is in Carnival and for Carnival that Trinidadians have successfully fought colonialism to gain their freedom” (17).

For Sofo (2014) like Davies (1985) and Liverpool (2001), Carnival and its accompanying Calypso music are inextricably interwoven and are tied to the identity of the Trinidadian.

Giuseppe Sofo quoting Pat Bishop states that “every culture came to Trinidad, with some part of carnivalesque. Arima and Santa Rosa de Lima festival. Catholic Carnival. Amerindian celebrations. All of these played a role in building what we now call Trinidad Carnival. We are a festive country. All our festivals are part of the carnivalesque.” (17). In a 2013 article by Giuseppe Sofo entitled “Popular Music, Resistance and Identity,” it was stated that “music in Trinidad has in fact represented not only the expression for the thoughts of a nation, but something to fight for, a fundamental weapon for the fight against colonialism and for a new nation identity.” (24). In Lise Winer’s article entitled Socio-cultural change and the language of Calypso, she quotes Calypsonian The Mighty Chalkdust and his definition of the Calypso as an artform which “captures our whole lifestyle, history, social past. It’s a reflection in song of our way of life.” (Liverpool qtd. in Winer 113). Emerging from the accounts from Sofo
(“Carnival, Memory and Identity”), lyrics from several Calypsonians make the case that there are synergies which exist between Calypso music and its ability to express and reflect the identity of Trinidadians.

As stated by Raymond Quevedo (Calypsonian “Atilla The Hun”) in his seminal 1962 work “History of Calypso” in This Country of Ours: Independence Brochure of The Nation (81-97), the earliest Calypso-type songs were sung in an African-based creole and explicitly espoused the ideals of freedom. In fact, according to Errol Hill in his 1972 work “Trinidad Calypso: Form and Function,” he posited that a number of British historians and journal writers reported of the singing of songs which were largely unintelligible to Europeans given that they were sung in African languages or the patois of slaves. Further as posited by Quevedo, one of the earliest recorded songs, accepted as an antecedent to Calypso which expressed the definitive protest against the suppression of African culture was:

Ja Ja Romey Eh
Ja Ja Romey Shango
Ja Ja Romey Eh, Mete Beni
Ja Ja Romey Shango

The above excerpt was part of the complete Quevedo manuscript edited by Errol Hill and published in 1983 as Atilla’s Kaiso: A Short History of Trinidad Calypso (6).

In this example, it is clear that issues of identity and a commentary on human rights were encapsulated in the music of the slaves. Despite the slave-masters attempt to instil a vehement denial of African culture and identity, the slaves defied those ordinances and established albeit clandestine, expressions of their music and culture identity.

Moving on to the pre-emancipation era, it has been noted by several scholars and I quote here from one such scholar writing on Calypsos in that period. Davies stated that the “Calypsos in the pre-emancipation stage which were recorded show veiled social and political commentary, were infused with irony ad satire, possessed the devices of double entendre and subtlety”. (78).

In the main, the literature suggests that Calypsos of this period actively protested the condition and notion of slavery and sought to articulate freedom for African people. In this stage, as in the one prior, we see that music, identity and social change appear to be inextricably linked.

In reading J.D. Elder’s 1968 account in “From Congo Drum to Steelband”, this researcher realises that Calypsos of the immediate post-emancipation period (1838-1898) continued to place a focus on African and African-based themes as well being sung in African creole. Further Elder goes on to indicate that the presence of the Cannes Brulees (Canboulay) parades, the African freedom celebrations inclusive of the traditions of drumming and masking and the presence of the French creole Carnival, all allowed for the wedding of all these traditions to facilitate the continuing use of music to reflect the identity of the people. The African identity was still entrenched in the national psyche and as such, in true art imitating life fashion, the Calypsos displayed that reality. Errol Hill in his text The Trinidad Calypso: Form and Function (59) delineates how songs of derision on policemen and other “decent people” in the middle and upper classes continued to be reported which in turn led to the Canboulay Riots in 1881. The colonial administration’s response to such acts of “indecency” was the establishment of the Peace Preservation Act of 1885, the main intent of which was to outlaw songs, drumming and other cultural and religious observances of the Africans.

Moving from the use of African creole to English usage in the Calypso tradition at the beginning of the 1900s marked a change in the content. The themes of African and African-inspired traditions were gradually being replaced by songs showing allegiance to Great Britain, and not Africa, as the mother country. During this period while Calypsonians continued in the tradition and criticised social conditions, censorship of the singers and their lyrics sought to curtail continued widespread themes of contestation. This was the first response by the Calypsonian. The second was to adopt “sobriquets” to mask the voice, identity and perspective of the singer. As posited in Sophie Lamson’s 1951 M.A. Thesis entitled “Music and Culture in the Caribbean” (17), she explains that in the early colonial days, Calysonians used
sobriquets of royal affiliation like Lord and Lady, Prince and Duke. Gleaning from the literature, I posit that this act reflected the Calypsonians’ attempt to use the guise of both name and sobriquet to grant poetic license to be the buffer against any inflammatory lyrics which may have been attributed to the Calypsonian himself. In Geoffrey Dunn’s and Michael Horne’s 2004 film *Calypso Dreams*, Calypsonian Chalkdust attests in one of his interviews that the sobriquet can be likened to the wig of the English judge who uses the wig for the purposes of anonymity. Chalkdust says, in the case of the English Judge when the wig is in use, a man can be convicted of a crime, and it is clear that it is the Judge which is doing the convicting and not the man beneath the wig (*Calypso Dreams*). In this same way, Chalkdust likens the sobriquet of the Calypsonian to act as Judge and convict the political directorate of injustices against the populace, but it is not the Calypsonian himself who is the accuser.

With the onset of Garveyism, the African-themed Calypso began to gain in prominence given the milieu of the organisation of several UNIA branches, rallies and meetings in Trinidad. Additionally the propaganda reports against the Garvey movement via the Seditious Publications Ordinance (1920) which was aimed directly at the Negro World hastened the reaction of the African population to move to a call for arms and by extension the response of the Calypsonian, who is “the people’s newspaper” so said Calypsonian Brigo in his interview in the 2004 film *Calypso Dreams*.

Inspired by the “Back to Africa” activity of the 1920s, the Calypsos of the next decade possessed a more politically-conscious commentary based on world matters affecting the African continent.

A move back to the African-themed Calypsos focused on creating the link between the music and identity through song was seen during the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s and 70s. In particular two songs which I choose to highlight are “Slave” and “Congo Man” by the Mighty Sparrow. The classic Calypso “Slave” hearkens back to the slavery experience and the toil and tumult which was associated with it. It begins by stating,

*I’m a slave from a land so far
I was caught and I was brought here from Africa.*

It ends with a crescendo of African drummology and the poignant wail of

*Oh Lord, Lord, I want to be free*

The Calypso “Congo Man” in contrast to “Slave” is more complex. In “Congo Man”

*Two white women find themselves in the hands of cannibal head hunter*

Both speak to the identity of the African but at opposite ends of the spectrum. In “Slave” the African is in a state of powerlessness while in “Congo Man” the status of the African is seen as one in control, decisive and in a privileged position over two white women. However, these two Calypsos by Sparrow epitomize different aspects of the African identity emphasizing the duality of the identity of persons of African descent in Trinidad.

Continuing in the 1970s and onwards to the 1980s, there was a change in the topic focus of African-inspired songs as well as there was the emergence of a more politically and socially responsible new breed of Calypsonian who began to express in both lyrics and song the trajectory of African people in the Caribbean as opposed to on the African Continent. Interwoven into this new consciousness was the belief that there were apparent similarities of the plight of the African across the Caribbean and that these “stories” needed to be told. Here again we see the shaping of a new identity of the African and the manner in which it is delivered within the genre of Calypso. In the main the Black Power Movement of the 1970s in Trinidad and its accompanying national, political and social activity being spearheaded by the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) lay the groundwork for the shift in the rhetoric espoused by the new breed of Calypsonians during the period. As discussed by authors Tony Thomas and John Riddell in their 1971 book, Black Power in the Caribbean, NJAC was an active political
organization with an African socialist ideological orientation. The new breed of Calypsonians were those who had been already influenced by the Civil Rights/Black Power Movement in America had a predisposition to follow suit and identify with the Black Power discourse taking place in their own land. Calypsonian Brother Valentino (Emrold Phillip) was one such. In a 2011 book written by Zeno Obi Constance, The Man Behind the Music: The People’s Calypsonian, which chronicles the life and music of noted Calypsonian Emrold Phillip, author Zeno related how Brother Valentino openly credits NJAC with creating the climate and audience for the reception of the serious calypso. Further, The Mighty Duke, and Black Stalin were two other Calypsonians who like Brother Valentino were part of this new vanguard of Calypsonians.

“Caribbean Unity,” released by Black Stalin in 1979, highlights the change from the solely African-themed Calypsos to those with a specific focus on the Caribbean and the new sound Calypso which expressed a call to arms, the pledge for human rights and was the consciousness of social change for the new Caribbean citizen.

[Verse]
You try with a federation
De whole ting get in confusion
Caricom and then Carifta
But some how ah smelling disaster
Mister West Indian politician
I mean yuh went to big institution
And how come you cyah unite 7 million
When ah West Indian unity, I know is very easy
If you only rap to yuh people and tell dem like me, dem is...

[chorus]
One race (de Caribbean man)
From de same place (de Caribbean man)
Dat make de same trip (de Caribbean man)
On de same ship (de Caribbean man)
So we must push one common intention
Is for a better life in de region
For we woman, and we children
Dat must be de ambition of de Caribbean man

De Caribbean man, de Caribbean man
Another such Calypso was “Black is Beautiful” penned by The Mighty Duke.

Chorus
Black is beautiful
Look at the gloss
Black is beautiful
It’s the texture of course
Lift your head like me
You got to wear the colour with dignity
How it go now!
Black is beautiful
Ah say to sing it aloud
Black is beautiful
Say I’m black and proud
It’s high time that we get rid of that old slave mentality.
It’s quite important, simple though it seem
We have achieved what once was thought a dream
We have been imitating in the past
Now we have found our very own at last
No more hot combs to press we hair
And no more bleach creams to make us clear.
Proudly I say without pretext
No more inferiority complex
Because we know

Again in this Calypso we see the topic of African pride being highly prized as a feature to be loved. Through the lyrics and music, the Calypsonian has been able to reflect the times and help members of the society self-identify.

Both Calypsos by Black Stalin and The Mighty Duke reflect the themes of pan-African unity, African history and cultural Identification with Africa.

For the Calypso artform, the topics sung about by the Calypsonians focused on a theme of music and social change which arose out of issues related slavery, post-slavery, de-colonisation, Independence, post-independence period and beyond.
Social Change, Trinidad’s Calypso Music and Human Rights

Another theme which this work is focussing on is music as social change agents with the aim of demonstrating how human rights are advocated through the musical expression. Music as Social Change scholars who have written on the topic ranged among the following: Bennett (2002), Cohen (2002), Guilbault (2007), Hebdige (1979), Mengerink (2013), Thornton (1995), and Weismann (2010). The work of these theorists assisted this researcher in developing a relevant definition of music as social change. Using Guilbault (2007) as a frame of reference for this theme, the following is submitted:

…the trans-cultural and trans-national history of the Calypso artform is traced and it is demonstrated how “from the outset, Calypso’s sounds have been hybrid products enmeshed in colonial cultural politics. … musical tours, recordings, migration, new instrumental technologies and audiences from outside Trinidad have spurred the continual transformation of Calypso. (22)

The following Calypsos with the theme of Music as Social Change were chosen based on their lyrical content and their focus on the sub-themes which emerged analysis (i) music as social change – the performer as change agent, and (ii) music as social change – a call to arms.

The Calypsos chosen were “Progress” by King Austin (1980); “Appreciation” by Johnny King (1985); “Come Let Us Build a Nation Togedda” by Merchant (1982); “Trinidad is Nice” by Brother Valentino (1975); “We Can Make It If We Try” by Black Stalin (1988); “Die With My Dignity” by Singing Sandra (2009) and finally “Watch Out My Children” by Ras Shorty I (1997).

In each one of these songs, the Calypsonian implores the society in general, or members of the political directorate to ruminate on the state of Trinidad and make a change. As change agent, the Calypsonian’s role is not to actively make the change put be the conduit through which change can be made. The lyrics of the Calypsonian acts as the lobby. As the voice of the people, the Calypsonian was expressing the views of the masses.

“Progress” by King Austin (1980)

Today when I look around in the world what do I see
I see footprints that man have left on the sand while walking through time
I see fruits of our ambition, figments of our imagination
And I ask myself “when will it end, when will it end?”
It is plain to see universally this land is not bountiful as it was
Simply because in its quest for success nothing stands in man’s way
Old rivers run dry, soon the birds will no longer fly and the mountains no longer be high and when I think about it, I does wonder why, the price of progress is high real high

Where do we go from here?

This song clearly delivers a view of a progressive society as ill-conceived. The Calypsonian lists the injustices and provokes the listener to question whether a change, a social change is needed to right the wrong of the high price of progress.

“Appreciation” by Johnny King (1985)

All man strives to be happy
With endless self luxury
In search of peace and happiness
The human mind will not rest

A constant nag within we soul
Demanding respect from the world
We get the urge in different forms
But luxury is the norm

Money is very essential
But cyah buy peace of mind at all
We still like dogs without a bone
If we have the money alone

Because appreciation based on the human mind
Everyone needs some for happiness all the time
Because important if we are trying to live
Everyone’s on the hunt, Everyone ought to give
Generously

For this Calypsonian he paints the picture of man in torment with all of material wealth and calls for appreciation of wealth to be actualised in the re-look at society. Further he implores his listeners to be the social change agent by giving generously instead of clamouring for individual self-gain.

“Come Let Us Build a Nation Togedda” by Merchant (1982)

Now the election bacchanal die away
In short this is what I have to say
Let us forget spites and grudges and concentrate
Come let us sit and try to relay
Cause now more than ever we must show
Discipline Tolerance and Production
To build a strong and better nation
I say that is the main foundation
So…let us work hand in hand
Because this is our land
And Let us build a nation together

In the song above, the lyrics speak to nation-building and a call to social change via a collective responsibility of the members of society.

“Dis Place Nice” by Brother Valentino (1975)

You talk ‘bout a place
Where the people are carefree living
It is such a place
Of fun loving, spreeing and feting
Tis the land where people
Don’t care if Ash Wednesday fall on Good Friday
Man they love to struggle
In this happy, go-lucky way
It’s blockorama, feteorama
And just now is masorama
So the foreigner come for Carnival
And he telling heself after he had a ball

Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a paradise
Mr. Foreigner in La Trinity
The people have a Carnival mentality
Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a paradise
They are not serious, very few conscious
So I cannot agree with my own chorus
Trinidad is nice, Trinidad is a paradise
But I’ll hear some people talking about Revolution Day
Changes on the way

For this Calypsonian, he uses the language techniques of satire and sarcasm to deliver his scathing review of the people’s lack of desire to engage in social change. Albeit at the end of every chorus he uses reverse psychology to instruct his listeners to bring about change in their behaviour.

“We Could Make It If We Try” by Black Stalin (1988)

So the Treasury broke and they say that recession jamming
And so to foreign countries Trinis start migrating
They lose faith in their country, they say we gone down the drain
They say no more could we see happy times again
But the will to recover in my people I have confidence
Although many may seem to feel that I talking nonsense
But the majority of we decide we not going to run
Because now is the time to show we patriotism.

For we country facing its darkest hour
So our people need us today more than ever
But in our fight to recover, if ever you feel to surrender
It have one little thing that I want you always remember...

We could make it if we try just a little harder
If we just give one more try, life will be much sweeter.
The direct approach taken by this Calypsonian to hammer home the point of “we could make it we try” challenges the listener to become part of the collective and forge social change as a member of the society.

“Die With My Dignity” by Singing Sandra (2009)

You want to help to mind your family,
you want to help your man financially
But nowadays it really very hard to get a job
as a girl in Trinidad
You looking out to find something to do, you
meet a boss man who promise to help you
But when the man let down the condition,
nothing else but humiliation,
They want to see you whole anatomy, they
want to see what you doctor never see,
They want to do what you husband never do,
still you ain't know if these scamps will hire you,

Well if is all this humiliation to get a job these
days as a woman.
Brother they could keep their money, I go
keep my honey, and die with my dignity!!

From the female perspective, this Calypso touches on social issues between males and females. In addition, the performer uses the technique of story-telling followed by an instruction towards action as she plans to act to deliver social change within the society.

“Watch Out My Children” by Ras Shorty I (1997)

My sons and my daughter, to you I plead
Take just a minute and listen to me
I know you don’t to want no sermon
But my admonition is to guide you against all
the evils of life
That create strife and destroy life, oh
Walk cautiously, children be alert, oh
You have an enemy, that is roaming Jah earth
I know that you are young and restless
But you don't have to be careless

Sober thinking leads on to righteousness
And happiness, spiritual bless - so let me tell you this

Watch out my children, watch out my children
You have a fellow called Lucifer with a bag of
white powder
And he don’t want to powder your face
But to bring shame and disgrace to the human race

In this Calypso, a direct instruction is given to the youth to stay away from drugs given its detrimental effects. They are being implored to heed a warning to make change on a societal level.

In sum, the ensuing analysis has sought to explore and bring to the fore the impact and resonance of Trinidad's popular Calypso music. This study desired to expand the perspective of “popular” to be more than the media’s explanation of a commodified, capitalist pursuit of the latest musical fad. Instead, the “ground-swell popularity” of a music that has currency that critical mass support was used to demonstrate how a musical genre can express identity and inspire social change.

Conclusion

In the literature, popular music has shown a commitment to focusing on the politicisation of music to the extent that questions about social power have become part of the critical mass. Calypso music addresses both the political and the social in its lyrical content as well as in its impact on the politics and the society which it critiques. As posited by Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2), social power within popular music is bound up with questions of cultural value, about who has the authority to ascribe social and aesthetic worth and to what kinds of music and why.

Calypso music as popular music possesses much cultural value within the native spaces in which it was created, fuelled and honed. Trinidad is the mecca of Calypso music and such, the Calypso artform engages in a not-so-delicate call and response between the citizenry and the orator as the each demand a response from
each other to foretell of the everyday realities. The question about who is vested with the authority to ascribe social and aesthetic worth is easily answered with the Calypso artform as the citizens or the members of society have a vested interest in how valuable any particular song is for any Carnival season. Acting as a lobby against the purveyors of social and political injustices, the Calypso, gains social and aesthetic worth by all those in the society for whom unjust practices are not seen as part of the nation-building goals of former colonies. In societies like Trinidad in which the Gas Riots, Water Riots, The Black Power Revolution and the attempted coup were all a part of its history, the numbers of consenting supporters for the Calypso are numerous.

The Calypsos described in this study and the lyrics analysed have expressed how music can be mediated in the public space which can in turn produce considerable complexity while highlighting the nexus among Popular Music, Identity, Social Change and Human Rights while simultaneously addressing the relationships and between musical meaning, social power and cultural value.

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La Memoria institucional del Festival de Avándaro. Los documentos sobre el festival en el Archivo General de la Nación en México y el Informe Avándaro del gobierno del Estado de México

YOLANDA MINERVA CAMPOS GARCÍA (UNIVERSIDAD DE GUADALAJARA, MÉXICO)

Resumen

Los conciertos masivos de rock Monterrey Pop (1967) y Woodstock (1969) realizados en Estados Unidos a finales de los años sesenta tuvieron un alto impacto en las culturas juveniles en América Latina, prueba de ello son los festivales de Ancón (1970) en Colombia, el de Piedra Roja (1970) en Chile y el Festival de Rock y Ruedas de Avándaro (1971) en México. Avándaro fue un parteaguas en el consumo musical de los jóvenes jipitecas, (como fueron nombrados los hippies mexicanos), pues, si bien al principio se organizó por las vías normales, terminó siendo un festival desprestigiado por el Estado y algunas publicaciones periódicas. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar de manera contextualizada los documentos que se resguardan en el Archivo General de la Nación relativos al festival; y el Informe Avándaro, elaborado por la Oficina de Gobierno del Estado de México en el contexto en que se llevó a cabo. Con el objetivo de articular la memoria institucional y tratar de dilucidar con base a qué argumentos se creó la leyenda negra que terminó denostando el primer concierto masivo de rock en México, negando de esta manera el derecho de los jóvenes a manifestar su propia expresión cultural.

Palabras claves: Avándaro, Archivos Gubernamentales, Jóvenes, Concierto de Rock, Jipitecas

Introducción

Los Festivales musicales de Monterrey Pop (1967) y Woodstock (1969) llevados a cabo en Estados Unidos, tuvieron un alto impacto en la cultura juvenil de los años setenta en México. Sin duda, influyeron en la organización del mítico Festival de Rock y Ruedas de Avándaro, mejor conocido simplemente como Avándaro. El fin de semana del 11 y 12 de septiembre de 1971 se reunieron alrededor de 250 000 personas en la población de Valle de Bravo, Estado de México (a dos horas del Distrito Federal), para escuchar a grupos nacionales que comenzaban a manifestar un estilo propio, capaz de competir con la invasión de la llamada “Ola inglesa” que predominaba en las estaciones radiofónicas y algunos espacios televisivos nacionales.

El evento pasó por diferentes etapas. En un principio, se organizó con toda la normalidad e incluso medios de comunicación conservadores por tradición como TELEVISIÓN –en ese tiempo Telesistema Mexicano– invitan al evento, con la anuencia de las autoridades policíacas estatales y federales. En cuestión de horas, sin embargo, se tornó en un acontecimiento desprestigiado, rechazado por el Estado y los medios, principalmente por publicaciones periódicas y televisoras. Se inició una polémica entre los funcionarios, quienes intentaban deslindarse de su responsabilidad en la autorización del evento. Los jóvenes participantes se vieron nuevamente[1] estigmatizados, y la respuesta del Estado no sólo fue de rechazo y prohibición en relación a conciertos similares, sino que en los años siguientes se buscó borrar todo registro del evento.[2]
Los archivos gubernamentales son los instrumentos que resguardan la memoria institucional de una sociedad, a través de ellos se puede llegar a conocer el funcionamiento de sus estructuras de poder. Revelan las imbricaciones, acciones y el acontecer de un contexto determinado. Sin embargo, los documentos por sí solos no son historia: en acuerdo con Edward H. Carr (15), es labor de los historiadores formular las preguntas de investigación más adecuadas para darle una dirección y sentido a los documentos. Asimismo, los documentos por sí solos tampoco constituyen Memoria, según Marcela Valdata: “Un pasado que entra en acción necesita de alguna articulación para devenir en memoria; de él surgen variedad de interpretaciones: pasado como tiempo anterior, pasado como estructura de la verdad, pasado como experiencia traumática, son ejes que vertebran este concepto.” (citado en Szurmuk y Mckee 173)

Por lo tanto, el objetivo de este artículo es reconstruir e interpretar la percepción del Estado sobre el Festival de Avándaro, e inducir a una posible memoria con la acepción de “estructura de la verdad.” A partir de la lectura analítica de documentos que resguarda el Archivo General de la Nación respecto al festival y como una práctica de contraste de fuentes, tomaremos en cuenta también el Informe Avándaro[3] elaborado por diferentes dependencias del Gobierno de Estado de México en el contexto en que se celebró el evento. De esta manera, podremos cotejar visiones diferentes: una policial y federal y otra gubernamental y estatal; y lo que nos resulta más interesante, la percepción inmediata de los propios jóvenes que asistieron a Avándaro.

Nuestras indagaciones centrales son: ¿Por qué el Festival de Avándaro se construyó desde el Estado como un evento desprestigiado, denostado? ¿Por qué desde diferentes dependencias de gobierno se tejió la versión de una experiencia negativa que no podía volver a repetirse? y ¿Bajo qué argumentos “la experiencia Avándaro” dio la pauta para prohibir manifestaciones juveniles colectivas culturales y políticas?

Partimos de la premisa de que, indudablemente, Avándaro fue un parteaguas en la resignificación de los jóvenes como actores sociales. Asimismo, consideramos que, a la distancia, se puede ver que fue una lección para el gobierno federal y estatal, pues quienes asistieron al festival —jóvenes en su mayoría— habían dado una demostración de madurez al experimentar la apropiación de un espacio público, en una convivencia masiva, pacífica, liberadora y sin tutelas, haciendo latente una gran fuerza generacional que puso en jaque a las estructuras de la sociedad conservadora.

Frente a ello, el Estado desde su posición de poder desplegó la maquinaria institucional para frenar la fuerza de este sector que percibía amenazante y, cegado por un conservadurismo año, sólo pudo ver Avándaro como una experiencia negativa, que no debía volver a repetirse y de la cual, dicho sea de paso, se buscó borrar toda evidencia de lo acontecido.

**El Festival de Rock y Ruedas de Avándaro**

Desde años anteriores a 1971, cuando se llevó cabo el festival, se venía realizando la carrera de coches, Circuito Avándaro, en la población del mismo nombre, en el Estado de México. Para el año de 1971, se pensó en acompañar el evento automovilístico con un concierto de Rock, en el cual las bandas principales serían Javier Bátiz y su grupo, y La Revolución de Emiliano Zapata, quienes al final no asistieron.[4] Es por eso que al principio se le conoció como “Festival de Rock y Ruedas”. No obstante, en las semanas anteriores a su realización la parte musical empezó a crecer y la carrera de autos se canceló el día anterior a su realización. Según los organizadores, por razones de seguridad (Del Llano 110-120). La carrera se tornó inoperable porque los circuitos estaban atestados de coches que se quedaron en el camino para llegar al festival y no había manera de agilizar el tránsito.

En los albores de Avándaro, una variante del rock mexicano era conocida como la “Onda Chicana”, misma que Federico Rubli ubica en los inicios de la década de los setenta:

...La Onda Chicana se consolidó al iniciarse la década de los setenta con esta proliferación de grupos y bandas que
Eran parte de este movimiento los grupos que finalmente sí subieron al escenario de Avándaro: El Amor (Monterrey), Bandido (Guadalajara), Los Dug dugs (Durango), Epílogo (DF), Love Army (Tijuana), Peace and Love (Tijuana), El Ritual (Tijuana), Tequila (DF), Three Souls in my mind (DF), Tinta Blanca (DF), La Tribu (Monterrey), Los Yaki con Mayita (Tamaulipas) Toncho Pilatos (Guadalajara). Como puede verse, había materia prima para la realización de un festival de esta naturaleza. Algunas de estas bandas tocaban principalmente en sus localidades, pero también había movilidad hacia otros Estados, lo que demuestra que la asistencia a conciertos, antes de realizarse Avándaro, era hasta cierto punto una actividad normalizada.

Así, resulta incluso sintomático que –como lo revela uno de los organizadores, Luis del Llano Macedo– la parte musical del festival se derivó de la realización de una serie de programas que se llamaron “La onda Woodstock” (del Llano 111) en el programa dominical de Jacobo Zabludovsky, el periodista oficial de TELEVISIÓN, incondicional al gobierno. Para la mentalidad de la época, que Zabludovsky no sólo lo avalara, sino que desde su programa se invitara a acudir al concierto, era un indicio de que se preveía como un concierto dentro del establishment, aunque después se tornara en una experiencia denostada.

Ver Avándaro en retrospectiva nos lleva a evidenciar que el momento político, cultural y social que se vivía estaba profundamente marcado por los acontecimientos de 1968, cuando el Estado reprimió violentamente el movimiento estudiantil, y por el Halconazo de junio 1971, cuando un grupo paramilitar, entrenado por la Dirección Federal de Seguridad, reprimió con infiltrados una manifestación de los estudiantes del Instituto Politécnico.

Si bien en Avándaro no hubo represión física durante el evento, la campaña de desprestigio que vino después, orquestada por el Estado y los medios de comunicación, deja ver la incapacidad para comprender las necesidades y derechos de los jóvenes. Asimismo, evidencia cómo en cuestión de derechos humanos aún se vivía una etapa incipiente en México.

Ciertamente era un momento candente y el sector juvenil irrumpía con un protagonismo inusitado, propiciado en gran parte por los movimientos estudiantiles. En el aspecto cultural, el rock, la cultura pop y las manifestaciones contraculturales en diferentes latitudes finalmente tuvieron impacto en los jóvenes mexicanos. Si atendemos los estudios especializados en los jóvenes como actores sociales, un aspecto que Beatriz Sarlo señala como un cambio importante es que:

Indudablemente la cercanía con la cultura pop de Estados Unidos ejerció una influencia potente en algunos jóvenes mexicanos, quienes no desaprovecharon la oportunidad de acudir masivamente a Avándaro para emular la experiencia de los jóvenes norteamericanos en Woodstock y en Monterrey Pop. Los jipitecas, como fueron nombrados los hippies mexicanos (Marroquín 28), en su mayoría jóvenes de clase media y baja, se adaptaron a las circunstancias climáticas del mítico fin de semana y a las carencias en la alimentación, ya porque fueron insuficientes o porque acudieron con dos pesos en sus bolsillos a vivir su propia experiencia contracultural:

Lo que sí fue evidente para muchos jóvenes de nuestro país fue la necesidad de dar un sentido propio a las propuestas
provenientes de los países angloparlantes, a través de expresiones no sólo musicales, sino culturales, ideológicas y políticas. Ello sólo pudo ocurrir gracias a un complejo proceso de apropiación cultural en el que diversos referentes culturales se adecuaban a las formas propias de los jóvenes mexicanos, o al menos de los que se identificaban con este estilo de vida “moderna” ante una sociedad tradicional y moralmente represora, a fin de construir desde ahí sus identidades colectivas (Marcial 187).

En este sentido el Festival de Avándaro significó un parteaguas muy importante en las culturas juveniles y la Memoria que se ha construido alrededor de Avándaro, la leyenda negra de vivencias extremas que se configuró aún antes de concluir el festival, no ha invisibilizado por completo esa otra historia que recama ser contada a partir de las propias voces de los participantes.

Retomando a los documentos, queda claro que los mismos organizadores no tenían idea de que el Festival tomaría el rumbo que finalmente tuvo. Eduardo López Negrete, organizador general, promotor y corredor de eventos automovilísticos, sólo aludía a temas relacionados con las carreras de autos en los oficios para tramitar los permisos correspondientes. Dos semanas antes de que se llevara a cabo el evento, comenzó a promocionarse como Festival de Rock y Ruedas, iniciándose una campaña publicitaria en medios impresos y audiovisuales.

Al final, la concurrencia rebasó completamente las expectativas y asistieron alrededor de 250 000 personas, de las cuales 1000 eran soldados. Pero lo más interesante fue que llegaron jóvenes de diferentes partes de la república, de diversos sectores sociales.[6] Al final, el “Festival de Rock y Ruedas,” mejor conocido como Avándaro, terminó siendo el primer concierto masivo de música de Rock en México (Pérez Islas y Urteaga 70).

El plan original era que el concierto comenzara el sábado 11 de septiembre a las 8 de la noche y concluyera el domingo 12 a las 8 de la mañana. Serían 12 horas consecutivas de música y tres horas más tarde, a las 11 de la mañana del domingo 12, comenzarían las competencias automovilísticas. Sin embargo, debido a que los jóvenes comenzaron a llegar desde días anteriores, la noche del jueves algunos grupos musicales dieron un entremés al hacer la prueba de sonido y, de esta manera, comenzaron el concierto antes de lo planeado.

Los titulares de la prensa que cubrieron todo el evento muy pronto comenzaron a denostar el Festival, con algunos encabezados amarillistas. [7] Las autoridades locales comenzaron entonces a comprender la magnitud de lo que acontecía, pero no tuvieron más remedio que esperar a que concluyera, y la intervención federal se hizo enviando camiones para regresar a los asistentes. Conforme pasaron las horas subió el tono reprobatorio del festival. Las noticias que llegaban era que aquello era una orgía colectiva y que el consumo de drogas, mariguana y alucinógenos era general. Incluso existe la leyenda de que “la nube de humo” se veía en las poblaciones cercanas.

Entonces, cabe aquí preguntarnos por qué difiere tanto la versión de los jóvenes que asistieron a la de las autoridades. ¿Por qué el sentimiento de libertad que los jóvenes experimentaron es tan opuesto al de los informes que se resguardan institucionalmente? Obviamente las posturas son extremas, porque se construyeron de acuerdo a la posición de cada sector respecto al poder. Veamos con más detalle cuáles fueron algunos de los discursos institucionales.

El Archivo como resguardo de la memoria institucional

El Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) es un acervo que resguarda la documentación de las diferentes dependencias del gobierno. Fue creado en 1823 y empezó a funcionar en 1846 con el nombre de Archivo General de la Nueva España. A lo largo de los siglos tuvo diferentes sedes hasta llegar en 1977 a la actual, El Palacio de Lecumberri, el legendario edificio que albergó la cárcel de la Ciudad de México durante casi todo el siglo XX. Los documentos sobre Avándaro se resguardan en el acervo que contiene los reportes policiales, denominado Seguridad Nacional. En la primera consulta en el AGN...
(marzo 2016) nos indicaron que había algunos expedientes que estaban a la luz pública. No obstante, había otro archivo llamado “Versión pública” que aún no estaba autorizado para ser consultado, lo cual ocurriría un mes más tarde. Cuando volvimos nos proporcionaron un expediente que en la primera hoja decía: “Versión pública aprobada por el Comité de Transparencia del Archivo General de la Nación, mediante resolución emitida el día 28 de julio de 2015 (Festival de Rock y Ruedas Avándaro 1). En la primera hoja hay una relación que detalla las partes eliminadas del documento, es decir que fueron tachadas intencionalmente con un marcador.[8]

Los archivos judiciales son repositorios de documentos que revisten ciertas características, pues no permiten obviar que la elaboración de los documentos corresponde a una actividad de vigilancia normada por instituciones. Por lo tanto, no resulta extraño que la documentación sobre Avándaro fuera clasificada en el ramo de Seguridad Nacional, pues esto ya nos está indicando que el evento adquirió desde la percepción del Estado una dimensión mayor para ser considerado un asunto de seguridad, pero principalmente porque los informes que se resguardan son informes policiales realizados por un agente de la policía, adscrito a la Dirección Federal de Seguridad.

Nos parece pertinente hacer una somera clasificación del tipo de expedientes y documentos encontrados en el Archivo General de la Nación alusivos al Festival de Rock y Ruedas:

• Los oficios de los organizadores que demuestran que las autoridades estatales responsables de extender los permisos correspondientes estaban al tanto de la realización del evento. Ello contradice las declaraciones de los funcionarios que una vez pasado el evento, intentaron deslindarse de su responsabilidad al autorizarlo. Por el detalle de los productos que se pondrían a la venta, se demuestra que sí se esperaba que llegara una multitud, aunque no en las dimensiones en que finalmente sucedió.

• Los informes policiales, consistentes en reportes diarios que realizaban los servicios de inteligencia sobre la realización del evento, tenían el membrete de la Secretaría de Gobernación.

• Las fotografías. En el AGN se halla un nutrido acervo fotográfico, aunque muchas de las imágenes se encuentran tachadas.

• Recortes de prensa de diferentes periódicos y revistas que dieron seguimiento al evento antes, durante y después de su realización.

El material que se resguarda en el AGN sobre Avándaro, en primer lugar, es una evidencia de la forma operativa de los servicios de inteligencia respecto a un sector de la población: los jóvenes. Pero también es una muestra de la imbricación de:

las formas institucionales que la sociedad mexicana fue impulsando, desarrollando o creando para asignar normas de conducta, valores, espacios, roles e imágenes específicas a su juventud y definir en términos materiales y simbólicas las maneras de ser joven (Urteaga 35).

Quizá por ello, la experiencia de Avándaro, vista desde los documentos institucionales, deja ver que la forma de construir su apreciación se dio pautada por esas estructuras hegemónicas que no atinaron a ver a los jóvenes desde su posicionamiento generacional, ni repararon en el contexto internacional en el cual las culturas juveniles emergían con mucha potencia. Sin embargo, como mencionamos anteriormente, no podemos dejar de ver que la redacción de los informes se hizo como una actividad de vigilancia de los servicios de inteligencia adscritos a la Secretaría de Gobernación y esto lleva implícito un lenguaje y una narrativa que tiene como punto de referencia la normatividad del código civil.

Los servicios de inteligencia de la Dirección Federal de Seguridad estuvieron representados por el Capitán Luis de la Barreda Moreno[9], quien firmó varios de estos reportes. Como un reportero cubriendo su fuente, Barreda Moreno narró por varios días el desarrollo del festival desde su posición como agente de la policía, con...
una retórica castrense, permitiéndose opiniones con un marcado acento moral y recriminatorio, evidenciando un desconocimiento absoluto de la cultura juvenil. De esta manera, se demuestra que los derechos de los jóvenes a manifestarse y disfrutar de espacios alternativos, sin tutelas, no cabía en la mentalidad de la época.

El Informe Avándaro del Gobierno del Estado de México

El Informe Avándaro es una recopilación de documentos sobre el Festival de Rock y Ruedas formulados por diferentes dependencias e instituciones del Gobierno del Estado de México, bajo la administración de Carlos Hank González. La versión que consultamos son tres volúmenes empastados que contienen: los informes, las notas de prensa, y la transcripción de una entrevista realizada por el periódico Excélsior al gobernador Hank González. Además de ellos, el informe contiene lo que nos parece de mayor relevancia: la transcripción de una encuesta realizada a algunos de los jóvenes asistentes, en la cual narran sus primeras impresiones sobre la experiencia vivida en Avándaro.

El material en su conjunto es una recopilación de documentos de diferente tipo, y por lo mismo se pueden ver enfoques diversos sobre un mismo fenómeno. Es interesante la aclaración que los mismos autores hacen acerca de su estructura: “se presenta como fue recibida, sin pretender calificar el sistema empleado para recabar información, ni los resultados obtenidos, así como tampoco las evaluaciones que formularon los diversos grupos que intervinieron en esta ocasión” (Informe Avándaro, “Introducción”). Esto significa que los informes hasta ese momento no habían sido modificados por la línea institucional, y eran el resultado de la participación de un grupo que se había formado convocados por la oficina de la secretaría del Gobierno del Estado de México. Por todo ellos, podemos deducir que se crearon para uso interno.

Creemos que en ello radica su riqueza como documento, en primer lugar por su inmediatez, sobre todo en lo que toca a las impresiones que los propios jóvenes externaron en la encuesta. Pero también porque en una lectura general de los documentos, encontramos una diversidad de voces que intentan ponerse de acuerdo para rendir un informe final. Cada dependencia tiene su propia versión y aunque en algunos aspectos coinciden en su apreciación –como por ejemplo que no hubo ninguna situación de violencia que lamentar– en otros sí se externan posturas diferentes respecto a los jóvenes.

Nos interesa destacar dos informes principalmente, el de Gobernación y el del Equipo de trabajo AURIS. El primero, porque nos parece revelador la existencia de mecanismos institucionales que las fuerzas policiacas tenían para infiltrarse en manifestaciones públicas. En este caso, echando mano de jóvenes también. El segundo, porque los investigadores de AURIS le dieron a su informe un enfoque psico-social, mostrando mayor empatía con los jóvenes.

En el informe de la Dirección de Gobernación se hace constar que se organizó la vigilancia con una estructura operativa previa al festival y según el documento los organizadores estuvieron al tanto de ello. Se reunieron a 180 jóvenes de 18 a 25 años, estudiantes universitarios y maestros de grupo para vigilar. Es decir que, además de los 1000 soldados que estuvieron presentes en el Festival de Avándaro, estos 180 jóvenes estuvieron mezclados con el público asistente y su misión se definió de la siguiente manera:

- Confundirse con los asistentes al festival musical
- Detectar sus conductas y actividad
- Promover el encauzamiento de la conducta masiva en forma positiva
- Reportar a las fuerzas de seguridad la Comisión de conductas delictiva (Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dirección de Gobernación”)

Este informe, además de detallar la organización de los grupos de vigilancia, hizo un reporte de observaciones, en donde se hace referencia sobre todo al consumo de marihuana, la convivencia amistosa entre los grupos musicales y el público; la solidaridad y ayuda mutua entre los jóvenes; y el gran respeto a la individualidad de los demás por parte de los asistentes. Destaca también que el maestro de ceremonias fuera un elemento importante para la conservación del orden, aunque también “hacía
insinuaciones sobre el consumo de mariguana” (Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dirección de Gobernación” 6). Con respecto a los desnudos, “Los casos de nudismo fueron en lo general tomados con indiferencia.” (Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dirección de Gobernación” 6)

Al leer este informe, nos preguntamos cómo se llevó a cabo realmente este plan de vigilancia, pues, en primer lugar, los “jóvenes vigilantes” probablemente compartían algunas de las aficiones de los concurrentes como una forma de identificación generacional, o quizá se vieron rebasados por la situación, pues no se sabe de nadie que haya sido detenido por fumar mariguana, ni tampoco por desnudarse (a excepción de la “Encuerada de Avándaro”). Por lo tanto, podemos afirmar que el informe final de la Dirección de Gobernación se inclina a no alimentar la leyenda negra sobre Avándaro y su participación durante el festival fue más de contención.

La reunión de trabajo del Instituto Auris[14]  

Nos interesa particularmente aludir a la reunión de trabajo de los investigadores del Instituto Auris, un organismo descentralizado ubicado en Tlanepantla, cuya labor estaba enfocada a temas de vivienda y uso de suelo. Podemos suponer que fueron llamados para realizar el trabajo de campo sin necesariamente ser especialistas en los temas aludidos. Estuvieron presentes en el festival como testigos en directo, y una vez concluido, se hicieron pasar por periodistas para realizar una encuesta a 50 jóvenes que acudieron al Festival de Avándaro.[15]  

El equipo que realizó la encuesta evidentemente intentó darle un enfoque psico-social. Pese a que el documento no identifica las voces participantes, el texto en sí mismo es una narrativa muy rica para acercarnos a la experiencia de Avándaro, porque demuestra que al menos en este grupo de investigadores había una postura más empática con los jóvenes y algunos de ellos rescataban aspectos positivos de la experiencia vivida.

Las ideas más recurrentes que se discutieron, según la transcripción íntegra de la reunión de trabajo de este equipo, fueron las siguientes:

1. Expresan la sorpresa de que no hubiera peleas, ni agresiones y si alguien se salía de tono, los mismos jóvenes les conminaban a calmarse.
2. El respeto hacia las mujeres. Comentan que, aunque algunas de ellas fueron solas a disfrutar el festival, los jóvenes varones no intentaron propasarse.
3. Una de las conclusiones preliminares fue que en realidad lo que disfrutaron los jóvenes, más allá de la música, fue la experiencia de estar juntos, incluso el consumo de mariguana fue visto como una forma de experimentar la colectividad.
4. Pudieron darse cuenta de que los jóvenes tenían presentes las represiones estudiantiles de 1968 y del Halconazo del 10 de junio de 1971, pues algunos de ellos manifestaron estar temerosos de sufrir una emboscada del ejército. Aunque este último no se mezcló con ellos durante el festival, estuvo presente.
5. Las condiciones climáticas del lugar y sobre todo la lluvia fueron elementos que influyeron para la unión y cooperación entre ellos.

En aras de establecer categorías de análisis y darle un sentido a la diversidad de voces en los archivos, identificamos tres temas a los que hicieron alusión tanto los informes policiales que resguarda el AGN como las dependencias que realizaron el Informe Avándaro, incluyendo al equipo Auris: el consumo de estupefacientes; la desnudez y la práctica de libertad sexual, y las manifestaciones políticas.

El consumo de estupefacientes durante el festival de Avándaro  

Uno de los temas que se hizo recurrente, tanto en los informes policiales resguardados en el AGN como en el Informe Avándaro, fue el señalamiento del consumo de estupefacientes durante el Festival, principalmente de Mariguana. Es quizá en este tema que los enfoques de los diferentes actores sociales se vuelven un tanto extremos. Es cierto que se vivía una época
muy diferente a la actual, cuando el consumo de mariguana y otras sustancias no puede desligarse de la macroestructura económica del narcotráfico. Por lo tanto, es menester problematizar el tema enfocando la mirada hacia lo que esto significaba en la década de los setenta en el contexto de Avándaro.

El consumo de mariguana en México data desde mediados del siglo XIX cuando “fue traída por barcos de Filipinas que llegaban al puerto de Acapulco, para ser empleada como cáñamo” (Marroquín 32). El consumo se popularizó durante el conflicto revolucionario según las narrativas literarias y musicales.

Respecto a este punto, encontramos que tanto en los expedientes del AGN como en el Informe Avándaro se tiene un enfoque que Alfredo Nateras Domínguez llama el “discurso médico-psiquiátrico dominante,” que califica a los consumidores de estupefacientes como farmacodependientes:

El problema de la farmacodependencia es construido desde la modernidad y conlleva edificación de instituciones, discursividades, prácticas profesionales, normatividad del poder médico-psiquiátrico e imágenes sociales en relación con épocas, grupos etários, usuarios y espacios. (Nateras 120)

El mismo autor (130) destaca que las políticas nacionales sobre las drogas se inscriben en organismos internacionales como la Organización Mundial de la Salud y la Organización Panamericana de la Salud con una postura prohibicionista y de control social y no se considera en el diseño de las mismas a los usuarios.

Especialistas en el tema de jóvenes y el consumo de drogas, como el mismo Nateras, consideran que esta práctica puede verse también como una forma de construir identidades sociales, tanto en hombres como en mujeres; y como una práctica socio-cultural que ha existido siempre (Nateras 120). Por ello consideramos, a partir de los testimonios de los jóvenes, que el consumo de mariguana tuvo relevancia en Avándaro como una experiencia colectiva, en la cual “compartir el toque” adquirió otro significado porque fue una forma de sentirse parte de una colectividad. Y si bien en la encuesta una de las preguntas precisas fue si habían fumado mariguana y si la habían comprado ahí mismo, no todos respondieron haberla fumado, pero si se dieron cuenta que no hacía falta comprarla, pues fue algo que se compartía con facilidad.

Teniendo estos preceptos como marco referencial, encontramos que los informes denotan su adscripción al discurso hegemónico de prohibición y control social desde el diagnóstico médico psiquiátrico. Para los informes policiales, el consumo de la mariguana fue un acto de ilegalidad, sin tomar en cuenta que el uso de estupefacientes podía también interpretarse como una práctica cultural-social. De ahí que podemos contrastar los tres discursos, el policial, el médico y el de los propios jóvenes:

El Capitán Luis de la Barreda Moreno reportó:

“Siendo las 14 Hrs. Y hasta las 18:00 hrs. del día de la fecha, dio comienzo un acto musical no oficial con los conjuntos de nombre La Sociedad Anónima y La pared de enfrente la razón de este inicio se debió a que los organizadores se percataron de que el gran número de asistentes, que por tantas horas que llevaban de espera, así como por el consumo de drogas y estupefacientes, manifestaban su descontento. Al iniciar su actuación estos grupos, los asistentes se desbordaron en aplausos y más tarde propiciaron la euforia general, durante este lapso se observó que diferentes grupos de los asistentes, dado su estado de inconciencia, empezaron a desbordarse, a lo que los organizadores no causándose admiración los animaban y lo único que les pedían era que consumiesen sus propias drogas y que las repartieran entre sus hermanos (amigos) para que en esta forma se ayudaran unos a otros, haciendo hincapié en que “no armaran desmadres”, Ya que estaban en “una onda a toda madre” y que solamente así podían seguir en la onda, los organizadores pedían a los concurrentes que no fueran a comprar más drogas...” Se hace notar que, durante el desarrollo del Festival de Rock y Ruedas, se interpretaron canciones con títulos ofensivos y los integrantes
de los conjuntos musicales profirieron palabras soeces e incitaban al consumo de drogas (AGN, “Informe capitán Luis de la Barreda”)

En el Informe Avándaro se incluyó la evaluación que hizo el Dr. Antonio Gómez Bautista, quien pasó la noche del sábado 11 de septiembre en Avándaro “realizando trabajo de campo”. Además de hacer un diagnóstico del uso de los estupefacientes durante el festival, propuso algunas medidas preventivas al considerar que “la drogadicción debía ser considerada un problema de salud pública”:

“Fueron muy frecuentes las escenas de consumo de mariguana identificable por su olor, jóvenes con aspecto de drogados y escenas amorosas. No observé gente agresiva”

“En caso de la drogadicción que está plenamente comprobado que existe no sólo por este evento, sino que aún en las universidades se le debe considerar un problema de salud pública, en cuya solución debe intervenir toda la sociedad…” (Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dr. Antonio Gómez Bautista”)

Más adelante, se refirió a las medidas que debían tomarse a nivel familiar, ocupacionales, desde instituciones educativas y de ocio, pero principalmente médicas, en donde deja ver el enfoque médico-psiquiátrico hegemónico al recomendar diferentes tratamientos:

“CURACIÓN: de los identificados como drogadictos en centros especializados:
- Rehabilitación- rehabilitación de drogadictos
- Confinamiento- de los irrecuperables en granjas especializadas
Evitar el tráfico de Drogas, restringir la producción de psicofármacos y su venta liberal por las farmacias y a nivel de las academias de medicina delimitar sus usos estrictos” (Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dr. Antonio Gómez Bautista”)

Con respecto al tema del consumo de estupefacientes desde los propios jóvenes en la encuesta aludida líneas arriba (ver nota XV), éstas fueron las respuestas de uno de ellos, a quien nombramos H, esto responde al entrevistador[16]

¿Oye y ustedes llevaban mariguana?
Simón, bueno, pero, no en sí para nuestro consumo sino para dar, para rolarla maestro, para los carnales que necesitaran alivianarse y sobre todo las necesitaban mano, y al menos… y fijate que al ayudar recibías ayuda sin esperarla, fue lo máximo.
¿Ustedes la rolaron también?
Simón maestro, mira un detalle muy curioso, mi padre me prestaron un hacha y se las presté a unos batos que estaban al lado, y vieron nada más llega un carnal de ellos y nos dice, ¿ya tienen moto para alivianarse? Dijimos neel. Dice otra venga, fue al coche y no sé qué tanto desmadre hizo, el caso es que llegó al ratón y nos dijo ¿ya tienen la moto? No, no nos la han traído, bueno pues discúlpeme ahorita se las traigo, salió del coche y no sé qué tan desmadre hizo, el caso es que llegó al ratón y nos dijo ¿ya tienen la moto? No, no nos la han traído, bueno él se desesperaba al ver que no teníamos nosotros, al ayudarnos, permitéme maestro nada más, pero qué suave onda, todos prestando, pero fabuloso ahí no era la cosa. Aunque tú no llevas mariguana, se la prestabas a otros también, y se la prestabas a otros también, ya que nos la habían pasado, se dio cuenta de que se había descompuesto nuestra lámpara ¿no? De pilas la lámpara sorda que llevábamos y estábamos en un campo, pero si sabía de que se nos había descompuesto nuestra lámpara ¿no? De pilas la lámpara sorda que llevábamos y estábamos a oscuras ¿no? Y este se portó tan a la altura que fue a conseguir una vela y nos la llevó mano, digo que portándose increíblemente…
(Equipo AURIS, “Entrevistas grabadas”)
Cada uno de los testimonios presentados anteriormente corresponde a un sector y un posicionamiento respecto al tema del uso de estupefacientes durante el Festival de Avándaro. El policía denota extrañeza ante el propio lenguaje de los jóvenes (llamar hermanos a los otros jóvenes) y le parecen ofensivos los títulos de las canciones, además claro está enfoca su comentario a consignar el uso de estupefacientes, concretamente la marihuana.

El médico ve el consumo como un problema de salud pública que hay que atender y para el joven H compartir la marihuana era una señal de "alivianarse" unos a otros y estar en sintonía con el ambiente.

Sin embargo, también habría que tomar en cuenta el sector de la prensa, que pasó por alto algunas de estas versiones y, más acorde con un posicionamiento con el propio gobierno, alimentó la percepción negativa sobre el Festival de Avándaro, exagerando sobre todo lo referente a este tema.

Desnudez y Sexualidad en Avándaro

La desnudez y la sexualidad ejercida con libertad fue otro de los aprendizajes y estigmas de Avándaro. Algunos jóvenes sintieron que era un ambiente propicio para desnudarse y lo hicieron. Ya fuera para nadar en el lago o simplemente como un momento de libertad, como fue el caso de la famosa "Encuerada de Avándaro". La joven que hizo un strip-tease en el escenario y que desató una leyenda sobre su identidad, misma que ahora se recuerda como una de las grandes anécdotas del festival.

De acuerdo a Carlos Monsiváis:

El cuerpo se vuelve también trámite de relación personal [...] y en 1971 el festival de rock de Avándaro despliega a lo largo de tres días, y pese al machismo predominante, el gran anhelo: el trato más igualitario entre los sexos, aún distante de la democratización pero ya no reproduce el comportamiento de la generación anterior. (179)

A continuación, dos anécdotas pueden ser buenos ejemplos para demostrar este aspecto: en el momento que estaba en el escenario el grupo Los Dugs Dugs, una chica cercana al escenario se desmayó y la reacción en un primer momento de los jóvenes que estaban cerca a ella fue la de intentar propasarse. El vocalista Armando Nava se dio cuenta de la situación y por medio del micrófono los incitó a protegerla mientras se recuperaba, luego entonces la pasaron entre sus brazos para acercarla a la ambulancia.

En el testimonio de H se alude a esta situación:

... algo que estuvo pero increíble mano, se desmayó una muchacha, ahí abajo de donde estaban los conjuntos, ahí
estaba gruesísima la onda, ahí donde estaba puro increíble, a tal grado que ahí estaban haciendo el acto sexual, en, a la vista de todos, entonces una muchacha se desnuyó, no por eso ¿no?, sino por alguna otra causa, y entonces digamos, los muchachos que todavía no estaban preparados para este tipo de festivales llegaron a tal grado de que la querían desvestir, despojarla de su ropa, entonces el animador les dijo, oigan ¡es nuestra hermana no sean gandallas!, ¡cámera!, ¡aliviánense, déjenla!, y entonces la demás gente comprendió ¿no? Y entonces esos tipos dijeron ¿carnales qué pasó? Digo y todos comprendían así, y al contrario en vez de desnudarla y abusar de ella, la cargaron y la llevaron a la ambulancia, la dejaron al tiro maestro y la regresaron a su lugar, una cosa increíble todos los que llegaron ahí, una convivencia brutal mano, aquello estuvo fabuloso deveras (Equipo AURIS, “Entrevistas grabadas”).

La desnudez de los jóvenes no pasó desapercibida, fue uno de los aspectos más señalados por la prensa y los informes:

En el Lago de Avándaro existen varias personas que se están bañando completamente desnudas, principalmente del sexo masculino. (AGN Festival de Rock y Ruedas DFS 12-IX-71)

El informe de la Secretaría Educación informó al respecto:

El Trato directo con todo el grupo fue de respeto a las indicaciones que les daban y es importante señalar que a las mujeres asistentes al evento se les respetó salvo las que por su propia voluntad accedían a tener relaciones sexuales... Se llegó el caso extremo de que algunas personas de ambos sexos llegaron a de desnudarse completamente (Informe Avándaro, “Informe Grupo Educación” 4)

Los casos de nudismo fueron en general tomados con indiferencia (Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dirección de Gobernación” 6)

La encuerada de Avándaro

Una de las anécdotas más recordadas del Festival de Avándaro fue cuando una chica cercana al escenario se desnudó al ritmo de la música. Dicha joven fue bautizada como “La encuerada de Avándaro”, y en la foja 38[20] se menciona que fue detenida e interrogada; la forma en que está redactado el informe tiene un acento paternalista, moralista e incluso didáctico:

“Debido a que en el Festival Pop efectuado en Avándaro, Estado de México, el pasado 11 del mes en curso degeneró en actos indecorosos y gran tráfico de enervantes, procediendo una de las asistentes entre otras, a desnudarse públicamente al compás de la música moderna. La policía judicial federal procedió a la localización y detención de esta mujer quién resultó ser ----

Agentes de esta dirección intervinieron en el interrogatorio, con el objeto de saber si existen intereses ideológicos contrarios a nuestro sistema y avocados a degenerar nuestra juventud

La declarante manifestó ser hija única de ------ y ------ de 18 años de edad, originaria de Guadalajara, Jalisco en donde radican sus padres, en la Av. --- -- que su padre es propietario de varios negocios de abarrotes y que su madre se dedica a los quehaceres del hogar, ocupando la mayor parte del tiempo en relaciones sociales; que viven de forma desahogada y no profesan religión alguna ya que son apolíticos y únicamente les interesa acumular riqueza.

Que estudió en la Universidad de Guadalajara, Jal., habiendo realizado sus estudios preparatorianos y que desde que empezó a tener uso de razón nunca tuvo la oportunidad de platicar con sus padres porque estos no tenían tiempo ya que se encontraban totalmente dedicados a sus negocios; y sintiéndose sola buscaba compañía de diferentes personas de su sexo o sexo opuesto en su medio estudiantil; teniendo todas las libertades para asistir a cualquier sitio y poder llegar a su casa a la hora que quisiera... (AGN,
Festival de Rock y Ruedas DFS Caja 168, Legajo 1/1 foja 38)

Sobre este documento, llama la atención que la persona que redacta el informe intenta conducir la declaración de la chica hacia un discurso que señala a los padres como responsables del supuesto “devaneo” de la joven. La independencia y autonomía que ella demuestra se entiende como una forma de desorientación ocasionada por el descuido de los padres, que le permiten vivir con libertad. Todo ello era muy acorde con el discurso de la prensa, que creó una campaña que apelaba al “retorno de los valores familiares”.

El Movimiento de 1968 se extiende a Avándaro

Mucho se ha cuestionado si Avándaro fue una manifestación política. Al respecto, consideramos que en un sentido sí lo fue, porque ante todo fue una experiencia contracultural: los jóvenes reunidos en el evento asumieron posturas que contravenían al establishment conservador y autoritario que se respiraba en el contexto posterior a los movimientos estudiantiles de 1968 y el Halconazo ocurrido el 10 de junio de 1971, sólo tres meses antes de realizarse el festival. Sin embargo, no es posible ignorar el hecho de que la militancia política no fuera el leitmotiv general de quienes acudieron al festival, sino la oferta musical para algunos, y la carrera de coches para otro sector, pero sobretodo la vivencia generacional, en nuestra opinión.

No obstante, es necesario hacer algunos señalamientos para desmadejar el aspecto político de Avándaro. Aunque los organizadores tuvieron muy claro que no deseaban que ningún grupo político aprovechara la concentración masiva de los jóvenes para hacer algún tipo de proselitismo, si hubo algunos grupos que intentaron hacerlo, dado el contexto de la época: la reforma educativa estaba en la mesa de discusión y, en aquellos meses de 1971, habían sido liberados algunos de los líderes estudiantiles del Movimiento estudiantil de 1968, algunos de ellos presentes en Avándaro según los informes policiales.

La vigilancia de Avándaro por parte de los servicios de inteligencia del Estado empezó semanas anteriores al festival. Podíamos constatar que agentes infiltrados acudían a las asambleas estudiantiles que se realizaban en algunas facultades de la UNAM y en sus informes daban cuenta de la posible asistencia de grupos que aprovecharían para hacer propaganda política en Avándaro. Lo cual hace ver, en primer lugar, que la presencia de agentes disfrazados de paisanos era una práctica constante, quizá, posterior al 68. Asimismo, podemos inferir el estigma de amenaza que marcaba a las congregaciones estudiantiles, pues en dichos informes se aludía al temor de que el Festival de Avándaro se convirtiera en una gran manifestación política, como lo narra el Cap. Luis de la Barreda Moreno:

“Por lo que respecta a la UNAM en la Escuela Superior de Economía y en la Central de información se están controlando las inscripciones de los que desean asistir al acto de referencia y en el Partido estudiantil socialista de Economía -------- está desarrollando la misma actividad.

Se tiene conocimiento de que algunas brigadas políticas de las Facultades de Filosofía y Letras, Derecho y Ciencias Políticas y Sociales estarán presentes en el evento a fin de repartir propaganda relacionada con el movimiento estudiantil y si es posible efectuar algunas pláticas entre los asistentes. (AGN, Reporte Luis de la Barreda, 7 Jul. 1971)

Y ya durante el Festival, el agente de la Barreda Moreno informaba:

A las 1:30, en el depósito de alimentos ubicado a 900 metros de la parte posterior del templo, se realizó un mitín con asistencia de 80 personas aproximadamente en que un joven y una muchacha no identificados, se refirieron a los problemas que enfrenta el magisterio y también para indicar que están en contra de la Reforma educativa, pronunciándose por un aumento justo y equitativo para los maestros rurales. (AGN, Reporte Luis de la Barreda, 12 Sept. 1971 foja 22)
En un artículo de prensa, se menciona que estuvieron presentes participantes del 68:

“La policía descubrió por otra parte la presencia de agitadores profesionales, incluso algunos de los que apenas acaban de salir de la cárcel perdonados por los sucesos de 1968 quienes realizan una labor subversiva entre los diferentes, políticamente jóvenes que asisten a este festival” (Miranda 7)

“Se hace notar que uno de los organizadores de apellido Davis, ayudante de Luis del Llano Jr. manifestó al ser entrevistado, que elementos de la Dirección de Gobernación destacados en ese lugar le habían indicado que con objeto de calmar los ánimos de los ahí presentes le llevarían un líder político y que le permitieran hacer uso de la palabra, al darse cuenta de las intenciones de esta persona fue retirado de inmediato del micrófono” (AGN, Festival de Rock y Ruedas DFS Legajo 1 foja 22)

Con los documentos se puede constatar que no sólo algún sector de la comunidad universitaria pensó en aprovechar la concentración masiva para hacer algún tipo de proselitismo, sino también desde el propio Estado se pensó en utilizar la presencia de los jóvenes para tirar línea. Sin embargo, dichos intentos por despertar una conciencia política al parecer no tuvieron mucha respuesta.

Por otro lado, dentro de la iconografía de Avándaro existe una imagen que se consagró como “la imagen de Avándaro”: la de un joven ondeando la bandera mexicana en la que la insignia del escudo nacional –el águila devorando una serpiente posado en un nopal– fue sustituida por el símbolo de Paz y Amor. Esta imagen fue una de las más señaladas, para algunos podía entenderse como una postura generacional, mientras que otros la consideraron un “ultraje”.

Diversos sectores se sintieron ofendidos y lo expresaron en la reflexión posterior a Avándaro que se hizo en algunas facultades, por ejemplo en la de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales de la UNAM, en donde se manifestó:

Las protestas incluyeron repudio a la utilización de la bandera: “Nuestra bandera no necesita signos importados” “Juventud nueva repudia el ultraje a nuestra bandera” (AGN, Festival de Rock y Ruedas Legajo 1 foja 128)

Una vez pasado el evento, la reflexión que vino después lleva implícita una gran paradoja, pues la experiencia vivida por los jóvenes aquel fin de semana en Avándaro fue interpretada con posturas extremas en los sectores políticos en México. La izquierda fue incapaz de valorar la experiencia, la cual entendieron como una manifestación de la penetración cultural yanqui, considerando al Rock como una forma de colonización cultural (Zolov 214). Por su parte, la derecha conservadora no vio con buenos ojos que la congregación de jóvenes experimentara la apropiación de un espacio público y la convivencia libre de tutelas, apelando al discurso de autoculpa[21] y de retorno a “los valores familiares”. Así, se desconocía incluso a los jóvenes como “verdaderos representantes” de la juventud mexicana:

Los valores estéticos, culturales y políticos vigentes (tanto de la izquierda como la derecha) son puestos por ellos en litigio. El rockero como parte de una sociedad establece una ruptura radical con el ethos de la juventud mexicana: “menores de edad”, “hijos de familia”, buenos, dóciles y obedientes. En Avándaro emerge la juventud rockera, rebelde y contestataria, que cuestiona los valores vigentes y el autoritarismo familiar y estatal y se constituye en un modo de subjetivación política que no era identificable como tal antes de ese momento. (Peza 40)

Sin proponérselo, los jóvenes que participaron en Avándaro, en sintonía con el territorio de libertad recién adquirido, llevaron a la práctica rupturas que a la postre se tradujeron en libertades sociales y subjetividades cuya trascendencia se llevó a otros ámbitos culturales y políticos.

A manera de cierre

A cuarenta y ocho años de distancia,
consideramos que la celebración del Festival de Rock y Ruedas Avándaro fue una manifestación contracultural que sucedió de manera espontánea. En ella, un sector de la juventud se hizo presente para experimentar durante un fin de semana la apropiación de un espacio público para transformarlo en un territorio de libertad y convivencia pacífica, gozosa y solidaria. La trascendencia que tuvo Avándaro adquirió a la distancia nuevos significados desde la cultura, la estética, la política y los medios que apelan al reconocimiento de una pertenencia generacional.

La lectura contextualizada de los documentos gubernamentales, elaborados en la inmediatex del festival, permite ver la ceguera voluntaria del Estado que no atinó a comprender las necesidades de sus jóvenes. En los documentos identificamos diversidad de voces, que oscilan entre intentar comprender el fenómeno social que les había tocado presenciar de cerca, hasta aquellos que, desde una posición de poder, articularon una narrativa negativa, exagerada, con la cual se perfiló la leyenda negra de Avándaro. Una narrativa que fue alimentada por gruesos sectores de la prensa de la época, que no dudaron en respaldar la versión oficial sobre lo acontecido aquel fin de semana.

No obstante, consideramos que la Memoria sobre Avándaro desde los propios participantes –los jóvenes– es una asignatura pendiente. Visto a la distancia, el festival ha cobrado mucha relevancia y los juvenólogos lo han definido como un parteaguas en las culturas juveniles mexicanas. Si en su momento fue denostado como asignatura pendiente el estudio que de voz a los asistentes, para conocer la narrativa de los concurrentes.

Aunque el festival se llevó a cabo bajo estricta vigilancia policiaca federal y estatal, los jóvenes reunidos en la localidad de Valle de Bravo encontraron en la experiencia colectiva el escenario propicio para vivir una experiencia de libertad pacífica, gozosa sin tutelas, en la cual lo más importante fue la identificación generacional, la compañía y la ayuda mutua.

Notas


[2] Como un ejemplo de ello fue que el material que filmó Telesistema Mexicano sobre el Festival de Avándaro desapareció y los expedientes que resguarda el AGN estuvieron ocultos al público que quisiera consultarlos. Sólo hasta años recientes fue posible tener acceso a algunos de los expedientes en una “Versión Pública”.


[4] Según narra Armando Molina, quien fue el encargado de contratar a los grupos musicales, Javier Bátiz pedía la cantidad de dinero que se tenía contemplado para la totalidad de las bandas y “La Revo” tenía otros compromisos pactados con anterioridad. Aunque al final Bátiz sí fue a Avándaro pero se quedó varado en la carretera como muchos de los asistentes (Molina en entrevista con Catana).


[6] El tema de Avándaro ha sido analizado por antropólogos y sociólogos desde diferentes perspectivas: musical, generacional y/o socio-cultural, sin embargo aún queda como asignatura pendiente el estudio que de voz a los asistentes, para conocer la narrativa de los concurrentes.


[8] El funcionario que me atendió amablemente me explicó que cuando un documento dice testado, significa que se ha tachado intencionalmente toda aquella información que identifique a una persona, con base al artículo 18 fracción 11 de la Ley de Transparencia y acceso a la información pública gubernamental, que tiene como objetivo resguardar la intimidad de las personas involucradas.

[9] El Capitán Luis de la Barreda Moreno fue titular la Dirección Federal de Seguridad, y al parecer su historial
dentro de esta extinta dependencia fue variada: “El ex fiscal Ignacio Carrillo Prieto, de la desaparecida Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado (Femospp), en siete ocasiones le imputó cargos penales distintos a De la Barreda Moreno, relacionados con la matanza del 2 de octubre de 1968, con diversas desapariciones forzadas cometidas durante la llamada guerra sucia y con la muerte de un ex guerrillero de la Liga Comunista 23 de Septiembre” Véase el artículo por Alfredo Méndez publicado en La Jornada el 10 de junio de 2008.

[10] El Informe Avándaro lo componen los documentos elaborados por: Servicios especiales de información de la Secretaría particular del C. Gobernador; El informe de participación de la Delegación de Gobernación; El Informe de la Dirección de Educación Pública- Departamento de Control Técnico; El Informe que rinden los Coordinadores responsables del grupo Educación; el de la Policía Judicial del Estado; de los Servicios Coordinados de Salud Pública en el Estado de México, Departamento de Medicina Preventiva y los Servicios de Ambulancia de Avándaro. Por lo cual al citar el documento vamos a añadir la sección, pues cada documento tiene una paginación propia o ninguna paginación.

[11] La encuesta la realizaron personal de diferentes dependencias del Estado de México: del Departamento de Difusión Cultural de la Casa de la Cultura, el Instituto de Acción Urbana e Integración Social (AURIS) y Servicios Especiales de Información de la Secretaría Particular del C. Gobernador del Estado de México.

[12] “Como resultado de un recorrido realizado conjuntamente con los miembros del comité organizador del Festival de Rock y Ruedas y del Director de Seguridad Pública y Tránsito del Estado, Tte. Coronel Félix Fernández Jaimes, se planteó la necesidad de crear un mecanismo de seguridad dentro del área en que sería efectuado el festival musical, atendiendo a las circunstancias de que se había dispuesto que ahí no hubiera personas de Fuerzas de Seguridad uniformadas. Proponiéndose la intervención de elementos que pudieran estar presentes sin suscitar recelo, recibiendo el visto bueno del director de Seguridad de los de tránsito, recibiendo el visto bueno del director de Seguridad Pública” (El Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dirección de Gobernación” 1)

[13] Los jóvenes provenían de: la Dirección de Educación Pública (40 elementos); de la Dirección de Seguridad Pública (15 elementos); de la Dirección de Gobernación (15 elementos); de la Dirección juvenil del P.R.I. Municipio de Toluca (20 elementos) y de la Escuela de Ciencias y Humanidades de la UNAM de Naucalpan (70 elementos) (El Informe Avándaro, “Informe Dirección de Gobernación” 2)


[16] En la transcripción de la encuesta no se revelan los nombres de los entrevistadores.

[17] Una de las anécdotas del festival en este sentido fue cuando el grupo Peace and Love entonó la canción titulada Mariguana, con el beneplácito del público (Rubli 23).


[19] En el número 8 de la revista Piedra Rodante se publicó una larga entrevista de José Luis Benítez el Bunker a la supuesta chica que se le bautizó como “La encuerada de Avándaro”, tanto Carlos Monsiváis en su texto “La república de Avándaro” que incluye en su libro Amor perdido como José Agustín en La Contracultura en México, dieron por verídica la entrevista. Sin embargo, en los documentos del AGN se revela la verdadera identidad de la chica, originaria de Guadalajara. El periodista Oscar Sarquis, antiguo colaborador de Piedra Rodante enfrentó una polémica con el director de la revista Manuel Aceves, pues aseguró que fue una entrevista inventada (La Jornada, 18 de septiembre de 2011).

[20] Es importante hacer notar que, cuando consultamos el expediente, la información que identifica a las personas que se mencionan en el expediente de “la encuerada de Avándaro” estaban borrados con marcador. Decidimos respetar la intimidad de las personas.


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Persistent Resistance: The Demand for Collective and Individual Human Rights Action in the Music of Rebel Diaz

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Abstract

From the 19th to the 21st centuries, and through folk, blues, jazz, punk, and hip-hop, activists have relied on music to engage people in the fight for human rights. When it comes to conscious hip-hop and activism in the United States today, few artists compare to Rebel Diaz. A bilingual English-Spanish duo triangulated between the South Bronx, Chicago, and Chile, the group consists of brothers Rodrigo (RodStarz) and Gonzalo (G1) Venegas, UK-born/US-educated children of Chilean dissidents who fled the Pinochet regime in the 1970s. From labor rights (“Work Like Chavez”) and immigration (“I’m an Alien”) to police malfeasance (“Stop! Stop and Frisk!”) and corrupt elected officials (“#Crook”), the issues Rebel Diaz takes up resonate locally and globally. Concentrating on aesthetics, this article examines how the group marshals their music to demand justice. Close readings of “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” and “#Crook” detail how Rebel Diaz’s lyrical, musical, and visualization strategies cohere to create rich, semiotic texts that entertain, educate, and encourage audiences to confront police misconduct—specifically, the harassment and murder of people of color in America’s urban communities. In closing, this article considers how the Venegas brothers utilize independent media to further the human rights agenda outlined in their music.

Keywords: Hip-hop, Activism, Police Misconduct, Aesthetics, Independent Media

A Thumbnail Sketch of Music’s Role in the Fight for Human Rights

From organizing labor to exposing racial violence, music has long had an active role in the fight for human rights in the United States. E.R. Place’s “A Song of Eight Hours,” which emerged from Chicago’s mid-nineteenth century labor movement to demand an end to twelve and fourteen-hour work days (Jentz; Foner and Roediger 85-86), has been reprised by many artists, including Pete Seeger and, more recently, the Chicago raptivist Rhymefest (“Rhymefest”). As “armed company deputies roamed the countryside” in Harlan County, Kentucky, “terrorizing the mining communities, looking for union leaders to beat, jail, or kill,” Florence Reece, wife of union leader Sam Reece, penned the lyrics for “Which Side Are You On?” (1931) to rally support for striking miners (Boal). Woody Guthrie’s *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940) articulated the experiences of farmers and their families who, driven westward, suffered immense hardship as a result of the US government’s failed, monocultural agriculture policies of the 1930s. Based on a poem by Abel Meeropol, a white Jewish schoolteacher from New York (Margolick 11), Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” (1939) sought to shed light on the lynching of African Americans by southern whites who escaped prosecution for murders committed openly. Each of these examples illustrates the power music has to rally people so that they might work toward achieving justice and equality.

As the federal government began implementing desegregation policies in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), musicians responded to the South’s belligerent reluctance to integrate. Incensed by segregationist Arkansas governor Orval E. Faubus, jazz bassist and bandleader Charles Mingus penned “Original Faubus Fables” (1959/60) to challenge the fascist, white supremacist status quo (Monson 183). Working from the African American blues, spiritual, and gospel traditions, folk singer
Odetta Holmes, widely considered the voice of the Civil Rights Movement, “performed the song ‘O Freedom’ at the March on Washington” in 1963 ("Legendary Folk Singer"). As white-on-black violence across the South culminated in the brutal murder of voting rights activist Medgar Evers, Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddam” (1964) voiced the exasperation many in the Civil Rights Movement felt towards white, middle class liberals who advocated for a “go slow” approach to social reform (Simone). That same year, topical singer Phil Ochs contributed his scathingly critical “Here’s to the State of Mississippi,” in which he called on residents who committed, or were indifferent to, racial violence to “find yourself another country to be part of” (Ochs). Alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Pete Seeger united the civil rights and anti-war movements while bringing visibility to protest singers Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. Near the end of the decade, R&B funk maestro James Brown, who worked with civil rights activists, released “Say It Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968) to immortalize the Black pride movement. Though a small sample of ‘hits,’ these songs nevertheless demonstrate the impact of music on the cause of social, economic, and racial justice.

One might also argue that the malaise of the 1970s that resulted from a nation weary with social and political upheaval eventually spawned punk music. By the early 1980s second-wave punk had become starkly politicized to address social problems with urgency. Nearly every track on the full-length debut albums of the Dead Kennedys (Fresh Fruit For Rotting Vegetables, 1980), Black Flag (Damaged, 1981), and Bad Religion (How Could Hell Be Any Worse?, 1982) deals with political themes. Disgruntled, disillusioned, and disaffected as the country began embarking on what would become the project of neoliberalism, punk artists shined light on subjects in an unabashed, caustically effrontery manner. As the go-to form for cathartic expressions of disgust, anger, and distrust, high-profile post-punk songwriters such as Ani DiFranco and ex-Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello continue that form today. Protest music in America, which is an extension of the jeremiad, i.e. the “rhetoric of indignation [that] express[es] deep dissatisfaction and urgently challeng[es] the nation to reform” (Nordquist), appears in a number of musical genres, the most recent being conscious rap, which commonly deals with questions of human rights.

Hip-hop, as Andrea Clay (2012) astutely notes, is where many young people today become politically aware and engaged. Hip-hop emerged as a new set of cultural practices, and community activism has been a component since the beginning. Breakdance stood in as a replacement for gang violence, and Afrika Bambaataa, one of hip-hop’s original deejays, founded the Universal Zulu Nation to mitigate the turf wars among rival gangs in New York City. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s “The Message” (1982), a song that continues to inspire artists around the world, was the first attempt in recorded rap to address the deteriorating conditions in New York’s predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods. By the late 1980s the South Bronx-based crew Boogie Down Productions, headed by rapper KRS-One, founded the Stop the Violence movement to convince artists and audiences to cease the glorification of violence. With the politically-charged lyrics of Public Enemy’s It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back (1988) and Fear of a Black Planet (1990) distilling Black pride, Black power, and Black nationalism into an aesthetic quintessence, N.W.A’s “Fuck tha Police” (1988) and Body Count’s “Cop Killer” (1992) remain two of the most notorious instances of hip-hop social commentary, especially with regard to police misconduct in communities of color. While high-profile artists such as Beyoncé (“Formation”) and Kendrick Lamar (“Alright”) shine light on injustices today, the work of equally compelling but lesser known artists deserves consideration.

This essay will consider the culture work of Rebel Diaz, a South Bronx-based hip-hop outfit founded by two brothers, Rodrigo (RodStarz) and Gonzalo (G1) Venegas. Born in England to expatriated Chilean dissidents on the run from Chile’s brutal, US-backed Augusto Pinochet regime, the Venegas brothers were raised and educated in Chicago. Two songs, “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” (2012) and “#Crook” (2015), are of particular interest. By providing a litany of grievances, both songs can be understood
as modern-day jeremiads. Addressing how law enforcement disproportionately targets people of color, each song demonstrates how Rebel Diaz aestheticizes real-world events to call for individual and collective action in the cause of social justice. To understand the potential for these works to motivate listeners to actively work for human rights, I apply Winfried Fluck’s work in reception aesthetics. Where sound, word, and image create an engrossing “body-centered, corporeal form of aesthetic experience” (348) that activates our bodies, emotions, imaginations, and intellects, in how far might these songs trigger audiences to work for human rights? What aesthetic strategies do Rebel Diaz deploy, and how do these strategies cohere to motivate individuals to demand restitution not only for gross transgressions, but to do the important community work needed to prevent similar occurrences? After closely analyzing these songs to show how they function on the aesthetic level of sound and word, I will contextualize Rebel Diaz’s ancillary media work to ask in how far the aestheticization of real-world crime to attain human rights is an ethical artistic pursuit.

Rapping to End Racial Profiling: “Stop! Stop and Frisk!”

“Stop! Stop and Frisk!” (2012) demonstrates Rebel Diaz’s commitment to confronting, contesting, and overturning the controversial police practice known as stop and frisk. Criticized for its reliance on racial profiling to justify searches without sufficient probable cause, the policy represents a potential violation of the Fourth Amendment, which protects citizens from unreasonable searches. According to the Civil Liberties Union of New York, 87% of the 685,724 frisks conducted in New York City at the height of the practice in 2011 were carried out primarily against African Americans and Latinos. Tellingly, the ACLU found that 88% of all those stopped were found not guilty of any wrongdoing (“Stop-and-Frisk Data”). While the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments abolished slavery and established citizenship and voting rights for African American men, respectively, one might ask in how far these legal measures are worthwhile if fourth-amendment protections are not honored. It is in that spirit that racial profiling and stop and frisk are resisted. To that end, what strategies does Rebel Diaz deploy to motivate listeners to demand an end to this controversial practice?

Released through Rebel Diaz’s Bandcamp page on February 18, 2012 [1], the artwork for the single (Fig. 1) incorporates the non-linguistic symbol for prohibition (a red circle with a red line through it) designated by the International Organization for Standardization in Geneva, Switzerland (“ISO 3864-1:2011”). [2] In that sense, the call for cessation iterated in the title is communicated visually through a globally recognized symbol. Drawing upon an independent, non-governmental agency situated outside the United States, Rebel Diaz calls upon an authority to return constitutionality to policing and uphold codified human rights. Furthermore, the artwork’s red and yellow color scheme harbors considerable symbolic emotional potential. Where red signifies high alert, rage, or, through its association with vehicular traffic, the imperative stop, the use of dark yellow suggests jaundice—that is to say, the state of being afflicted with bitterness and resentment. These strategies distill the song’s message down to a succinct visual language. Without even hearing the song or considering its lyrics, people who visit Rebel Diaz’s Bandcamp page are subtly conditioned to support overturning stop and frisk.

Musically, the song’s driving, hard-edged
4/4-rock rhythms and distorted, punk rock-style guitars propel its tempo and impel listeners to actualize the goal. As the song opens, two male voices sing “O! mama I’m in fear for my life from the law, the law,” an a cappella re-rendering, or allosonic quotation (Williams 208), of American rock band Styx’s “Renegade” (1979), a song that tells the story of an outlaw on the run. But where the Styx line concludes with “the long arm of the law” to bestow moral rightness on the authorities to apprehend a criminal (Styx), Rebel Diaz’s deliberate omission of these words suggests that even though stop and frisk is a codified police tactic, its disproportionate application to people of color is unjust. To underscore this point, the manner in which the line is performed imparts a solemn tone evocative of the blues, spiritual, or gospel tradition, and perhaps even the type of group chanting heard at candle-light vigils for victims of police malfeasance. As the modified line from “Renegade” is repeated a second time, a flourish of orchestral strings builds tension, and the simulated cocking of a firearm and the sound effect of a gun blast immediately precede the chorus. Delivered double time, the chorus “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” is heard nearly thirty times throughout the song. In this way, listeners are psychologically conditioned through the power of suggestion to support overturning the policy. Other non-musical effects such as sirens, walkie-talkie static, and the indiscernible mumbling of officers combine to create a tense, dramatic atmosphere to aurally cast the listener into the position of someone being chased by the police, an effect that can titillate, create exhilaration, fear, or trepidation, but also—and perhaps especially—empathy. While listeners stand to become motivated and take action, the song sustains the efforts to end stop and frisk already underway. Much like E.R. Place’s song, which emerged from a committed group of labor activists in Chicago, “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” is part of an existing movement.

Lyrical ly, the song takes a defiant stance. Riffing on the opening line to N.W.A’s “Fuck tha Police” (“Fuck tha police, yeah I said it, fuck’em”), lead emcee RodStarz voices solidarity with the west coast rappers who infamously criticized police misconduct in South Central Los Angeles. [3] In doing so, RodStarz declares allegiance across hip-hop’s proverbial coastal divide. As the song progresses, he delivers shout-outs to the families of individuals who have borne the brunt of police transgression. When RodStarz raps “the system accuse you of the same crimes they do to you/call it excusable. Sean Bell’s killer, acquitted, Troy Davis, lynched,” he memorializes Sean Bell, a 22-year-old African American shot and killed in Queens, New York by the NYPD on November 25, 2006, the morning of Bell’s wedding (“Hundreds to Attend Sean Bell Funeral”), but also Troy Davis, a Savannah, Georgia-native executed on September 21, 2011 for the alleged murder of police officer Mark MacPhail after a long, grassroots-effort that had sought a stay for Davis failed (“Over 500,000 Sign Petition”). While juxtaposing these two incidents exposes the hypocrisy of a system that protects murderous officers (yet hands down death sentences to those found guilty under questionable convictions), this strategy seeks to build an imagined community that stretches from New York and Georgia to Los Angeles and California. Exposing hypocrisy and a system that protects murder among those whose duty is to uphold the law (the police), Rebel Diaz argue for human rights. By uniting individuals and communities across the country, the group strives to bridge geographic and demographic divides—an important component for any significant, long term change.

Exposing Complicity at the Highest Level: #Crook

Where “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” stands to activate listeners and unite communities across the nation, “#Crook” (2015) sheds light on Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke’s shooting and murder of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald on October 20, 2014. Released on December 2, 2015, [4] just one week after city officials finally released dashcam video footage that had been withheld from the public for 400 days, “#Crook” is much more than a politically-conscious rap song. It is part of a campaign calling for the ouster of Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel for his role in covering up Laquan’s murder.

Rebel Diaz brazenly uses Rahm Emanuel’s official portrait for the single’s artwork (Fig. 2).
With the title emblazoned across his eyes, the cover shot visually suggests that the mayor has been blinded by his own corruption. Enhancing this effect, Emanuel’s smirk creates a disturbing contrast to suggest that he is comfortable with his own crooked behavior—indeed, that dishonesty and corruption are part of his very nature. To facilitate demonstrations via social media, the hash tags “#JusticeForLaquan” and “#ResignRahm” are embedded in the artwork, thereby anchoring the song in efforts to attain justice for his family.

By incorporating the group’s Twitter handles “@RodStarz” and “@RebelDiaz,” the group invites people to contact them so that they can assist in organizing activities. Thus, the artwork for “#Crook,” more than mere aesthetic, contains functional elements to assist in ousting the mayor, and thereby begin dismantling the systemic structures that protect murderous officers. At the song’s outset, RodStarz issues simple, declarative shout-outs: “for Education” (i.e. setting the record straight about Laquan murder and its cover-up), “for Reparations” (compensation for his family), “Justice for Laquan” (a call for human rights), and, in a call for unity, “north side, South side.” [5] The ambiguity of north and south includes Chicago, the U.S., and, by extension, global audiences (global north and south) due to how the police murder people of color globally. In the opening lines, RodStarz raps, “A crook mayor with an attitude named Rahm/Who needs to resign now so I’m about to drop this bomb.” He then discloses key details about the case: “Officer Van Dyke shot a young black teen/Laquan way too young he was only 17/He was walkin away but he caught 16” [bullets]. Further still, RodStarz declares his belief that Chicago police are “killin us For sport,” thus illustrating an attempt to prevent future incidents by exposing an ulterior, morally bankrupt modus operandi.

Taking aim at the mayor’s deception, RodStarz declares “a clear cover up,” then issues questions as demands: “Where’s the audio and the sound?/Where’s the footage from the BK [Burger King] that’s no longer around?” Further, he accuses the mayor of cynically suppressing the video as a reelection strategy: “a Month after Ferguson—the whole nation heated/If this video came out Rahm you would’ve been defeated!!” Rapping “I know that you was lying when you said you hadn’t seen it/The other day you said it was graphic —so which one eeease it?,” RodStarz highlights the blatant hypocrisy underpinning Emanuel’s deception. Moreover, the intentional mispronunciation of is (“eease”) captures the sliminess of the mayor’s behavior. Pressing his case further, RodStarz postulates that Laquan’s family received an out-of-court settlement because Rahm had “seen that video! that’s why the city wrote that check.” Calling out officials such as Cook County State Attorney Anita Alvarez and Superintendent of the Police Garry McCarthy (whose respective electoral loss and dismissal seem to retroactively prove a cover-up) by name, RodStarz unmasks complicity at the highest level.

RodStarz’s performed outrage—for example, his voice rises with palpable indignation when he raps “I AM Rekia Boyd”—may potentially trigger the type of anger needed to create and sustain prolonged community action to obtain justice. By invoking the memory of Boyd, a 22-year-old Chicago-native who was murdered by off-duty Chicago police officer Dante Servin on March 21, 2012, RodStarz leverages power and agency in her memory. Channeling Boyd through performance, RodStarz conjures the slain woman’s spirit so that listeners might become her revenant. In this way, listeners may be convinced to become foot soldiers to attain justice for Boyd, her family, or other victims of police malfeasance. In that sense, “#Crook” harbors significant inspirational potential, and listeners are poised to become part of a long term, grassroots resistance effort comprised of
multiple and diverse communities.

Although the song’s musical composition is sparse, elements add aesthetic punch to underscore an overt social justice agenda to reinstate fundamental human rights under the law. A cleverly deployed deejay scratch on the word “crook” in the chorus becomes a persistent, repetitive accusation. Shuffling, ambulatory drums propel the song to suggest continued, forward momentum for the cause. Building on the rhythm track, a stuttering bass guitar lick insinuates a stammering, guilty mayor at the base of the cover-up. A keyboard riff that oscillates between two minor keys creates a “crooked” intonation to subtly suggest the sound of a whistle. These sonic aesthetic devices point towards one conclusion: Rebel Diaz is blowing the whistle on Rahm. “#Crook” thus illustrates that music holds immense power to ferret out corrupt officials who try to shield institutional perpetrators of murder from prosecution. Thus, the song demonstrably calls for an adherence to basic human rights.

Activism, Outreach, and The Ethics of Aestheticization

These examples of Rebel Diaz’s musical output position them squarely in the Black Lives Matter movement. Founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi after George Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges on July 13, 2013 for the murder of Trayvon Martin (Alvarez and Buckley), Black Lives Matters constitutes “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise” (“Guiding Principles”). High-profile cases that led to the movement’s national rise include the choking death of 43-year-old Eric Garner in Staten Island by the NYPD on July 17, 2014 (Goldstein and Schweber), the shooting death of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri just three weeks later (August 9) by officer Darren Wilson (Thorsen), and the killing of Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio (November 22, 2014), a 12-year-old whose guilt amounted to playing with a toy gun in a public park (Danylko).

As if those tragic deaths were not enough, Crenshaw et al have shown that “2014 also marked the unjust police killings of a number of Black women, including Gabriella Nevarez, Aura Rosser, Michelle Cusseaux, and Tanisha Anderson,” noting further that “[t]he body count of Black women killed by the police continued to rise in 2015 with the killings of Alexia Christian, Meagan Hockaday, Mya Hall, Janisha Fonville, and Natasha McKenna” (3). These deaths led to the foundation of the Say Her Name movement in February 2015 to shed “light on Black women’s experiences of police violence in an effort to support a gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally” (ibid. 4). This type of organizing has come to be known as hashtag activism, a term inspired by the Occupy Wall Street protests in Zuccotti Park in the Fall of 2011 and Egypt’s Tahrir Square uprising of January 2011 (Augenbraun). Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name reflect not only a sense of desperation and urgency following the uptick in deaths at the hands of police, they remind us that people of color in the United States continue to unduly bear the brunt of institutional violence. By seeking to obtain justice for men, women, and transgendered people of color, this form of activism is more than an online fad. In many ways it envisages the ideals of civic participation the U.S. was founded upon through the redress of grievances. While nativist, far-right political movements may also draw upon such online tools to advance their agenda, activists do so to draw communities together to contest wanton murder—a transgressive act that resonates across the political spectrum.

Rebel Diaz is very much a part of these movements. Releasing “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” at the height of its practice, the group carried out a real-time, coast-to-coast intervention to question its constitutionally. Viewership stats for an accompanying music video uploaded to the group’s YouTube account on February 18, 2012 stand at 11,687. [6] As an independent hip-hop group that records and releases its own material, these figures, though small, underscore the potential for telecommunications technologies to link people up to cooperate on activist campaigns. Other outreach efforts include a performance of the song at “CARRY IT FORWARD: Celebrate the Children of Resistance,” an event held on June 16, 2013 by the Rosenberg Fund for
Children in honor of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg on the sixtieth-anniversary of their execution under dubious charges of espionage (Meeropol). Given that the event sought to help children of slain parents, Rebel Diaz works to elevate and activate communities to improve the lives of those left behind, even if under dissimilar circumstances.

Similarly, Rebel Diaz took their accusations of Rahm Emanuel’s misdeeds to another level. Alongside Rebel Diaz Radio, a weekly show on 99.5 FM WBAI Pacifica (New York) where a variety of community-oriented issues are discussed on air, Rodrigo and Gonzalo produce the short-form topical events program Ñ Don’t Stop for TeleSur English. In an episode from early April 2016, the two brothers come by chance upon Rahm Emanuel, who was booked on the same flight to New York. Armed with a camera and a microphone, they chase Emanuel down in the arrival hall to ask him how he feels about “having the blood of Laquan McDonald” on his hands. The mayor demurs by stating that he is with his family, to which Rodrigo replies, “Laquan McDonald had a family, too,” repeating it many times. He then asks the mayor about mass mobilizations taking place in Chicago to protest the cover-up. Reluctant to answer, Emanuel and his family flee (“Ñ Don’t Stop – Rahm Emanuel and Bernie in the Bronx.”). The incident reflects a rare opportunity to candidly interrogate a public official and speak truth to power. While the video at present only has approximately 2,000 views on YouTube, it nevertheless shows Rebel Diaz’s commitment to activist-oriented media outreach. That the incident happened by chance suggests that coincidence works on their behalf.

But are there any ethical concerns, especially regarding the aestheticization of real-world crime and tragedy? Only available as free digital downloads, Rebel Diaz does not receive financial compensation for “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” or “#Crook.” (By contrast, Beyoncé’s much-lauded “Formation” remains for sale.) Further, these songs are cathartic, inspirational, and motivational. In terms of catharsis, they vocalize frustration and disaffection to allow for a healthy discharge of negative feelings and emotions. Transforming tragedy into music, Rebel Diaz converts indignation and outrage into political, cultural capital in hopes of initiating social change. Where these songs play in the communities that endure such tragedies, or find their way into others dealing with similar instances of police brutality, a feedback loop emerges. This production chain—criminal transgression, outrage, aestheticization, free dissemination, and activist organizing—represents a deep level of ethical social engagement. If the music of Rebel Diaz actually does recruit people to join movements and become activists themselves, their culture work for human rights will have been successful. They embrace the D.I.Y. attitudes that lie at the heart of punk and hip-hop, and their work very much represents a continuation of the tradition of protest music in America through the voicing of grievances.

Conclusions

From guitar-strummed folksongs and jazz to punk and beat-driven hip-hop, music has long been a part of human rights struggles in the United States. Although the instruments have changed, the intent remains the same: by drawing upon the combined power of music, voice, lyrics, and images, artists make emotional and rational appeals to audiences. Hip-hop, arguably one of most important pop cultural forms today, has become the de rigueur social protest form in music. Rap artists do more than any other to raise awareness and call upon people to become politically active and engaged. In that sense, this musical activist work, especially when it contains a litany of complaints and demands change, is rooted in the tradition of the jeremiad.

Of the many hip-hop artists involved in human rights struggles, Rebel Diaz stands at the fore. Their work encourages listeners to rise up, collectively take action, and demand justice through persistent resistance. “Stop! Stop and Frisk!” makes a convincing case for ending the ethically questionable police practice of the same name. With 23,000 frisks in New York in 2015 under the de Blasio administration (as opposed to the nearly 686,000 in 2011 under Mayor Bloomberg), the practice, though in decline, continues (“Stop-and-Frisk Data”). “#Crook,” on the other hand, aestheticizes the murder of Laquan McDonald to expose a cover-
up by the administration of Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel. Although many of the families that have lost loved ones to police misconduct have received financial compensation, officers often face no charges. When they do, they are typically acquitted. In Laquan’s case, the McDonald family was remunerated for their loss, but Mayor Emanuel remains in office, and Jason Van Dyke still awaits trial.* In addition to their musical output, the media outreach efforts of the Venegas brothers on Pacifica Radio and TeleSur English reflect two more instances of how Rodrigo and Gonzalo invite, and even demand, listeners to stand up and get involved.

Tempting though it may be to suggest that the aestheticization of real-world events decontextualizes, and thus severs, them from their historical, social, or cultural specificity (and possibly even their humanity), Rebel Diaz, especially in the two songs analyzed here, has been able to draw significant sociopolitical power from tragedy. If such music gets people involved in actively working for human rights, then we might call the combined aural and visual impact of such material the aesthetic experience of activist art. With musical groups like Rebel Diaz carrying out the redress of grievances in song, and the Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name campaigns demanding recognition for the victims of police crime, it is clear that efforts to overcome institutionally protected racialized violence in the United States rages on. The fight for fundamental human rights continues.

*Editor’s Note: Officer Van Dyke was found guilty of second-degree murder on October 2018 and awaits sentencing.

**Endnotes**


[2] Permission to reproduce the cover art for both singles was granted by the group via Twitter. See @RebelDiaz.

[3] Since a transcript does not appear on Rebel Diaz’s Bandcamp page, Genius.com, or any other popular lyrics website, I've transcribed the lyrics myself. Any errors are my own.


[5] In retaining the spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the lyrics as they appear on the site, I refrain from using “[sic]” mainly to avoid disrupting the flow of the lyrics.


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Author’s Biography

Terence Kumpf holds a PhD in American Studies from the RuhrCenter of American Studies (TU Dortmund University). His dissertation Towards A New Transaesthetics: Rap Music in Germany and the United States (2019) is the first comparative book-length study of bi- and multilingual rap in both countries in English. His research interests include transculturation, bi- and multilingualism, aesthetic experience, activism, and new media.
Bomba y plena, música afropuertorriqueña y rebeldía social y estética

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Resumen

En este texto se presenta el resultado de la reelaboración de dos ponencias presentadas en el congreso “Black Power: Movements, Cultures, and Resistance in the Black Americas”, correspondiente a la segunda conferencia internacional de la Red de las Américas Negras que tuvo lugar del 17 al 19 de octubre del 2018 en el Centro de Estudios InterAmericanos de la Universidad de Bielefeld. El primer ensayo, sobre el activismo sociocultural llevado a cabo por Restauración Cultural por medio de la bomba puertorriqueña, fue escrito por el historiador Pablo Luis Rivera. El segundo, redactado por el filósofo Juan José Vélez, analiza el otro estilo musical afroboricua –la plena– como forma de resistencia política, epistemológica y estética.

Palabras claves: Bomba, Plena, Activismo Sociocultural, Identidad Afropuertorriqueña, Resistencia Estética

Restauración Cultural: Bomba como estilo musical de activismo en Puerto Rico y en la diáspora

Introducción

La bomba es un género musical panamericano que se desarrolla a partir del siglo XVI, con una estructura vinculada a los entornos sociales, culturales, musicales y étnicos en los que nace. Está claramente influenciada por las distintas migraciones de personas oriundas del continente africano y la península ibérica hacia las Américas. Además de las aportaciones de migraciones y contactos “intercaribeños” [1], se adapta a realidades particulares dadas en los diferentes lugares donde se desarrolla, dependiendo de los influjos y elementos vinculados al sitio donde se practica. Este género surgió a raíz del contacto con grupos y etnias africanas que llegaron de diversas formas a Puerto Rico, para luego nutrirse con las realidades caribeñas, tanto oriundas como criollas.

Esta expresión musical recogía situaciones diversas que se daban en la sociedad, que utilizaba este recurso para liberarse de los horrores de la esclavitud; también podía ser un medio para confraternizar en los espacios otorgados a los cimarrones provenientes de otras tierras que se asentaban en el país, o se manifestaba en las esferas donde confraternizaban libres, libertos o cuartados, o la comunidad en general. La abolición de la esclavitud en Puerto Rico se dio en el siglo XIX y antes de este proceso notamos distintas circunstancias donde aparecía la bomba.

Ya para el siglo XVIII, en 1797, el científico francés André Pierre Ledrú realizó una visita oficial a Puerto Rico para documentar la fauna y la geografía de la isla, además de las costumbres y la cultura de los habitantes. Se debe destacar que, por lo general, la historia la escribe el opresor y no el oprimido, por lo que no se han encontrado hasta ahora escritos que documenten la bomba en Puerto Rico desde la perspectiva de sus practicantes antes de este hecho. En una visita al que deducimos debió ser el pueblo de Loíza, Ledrú fue invitado a un baile de tambor.  En esta fiesta, los negros, pardos y otras personas tocaban un tambor que él llamó ‘bamboula’. [2] En sus propias palabras, anotó Ledrú: “nommé vulgairement bamboula”. En la posterior traducción al español, sesenta
y seis años después, el escritor puertorriqueño Julio Vizcarrondo sustituyó la palabra original bamboula por la palabra española bomba; término también usado comúnmente en Puerto Rico para describir el mismo tambor. Desde entonces, muchos de los que han escrito sobre el uso de la palabra bomba han cometido el error involuntario de citar la traducción de Vizcarrondo, pensando que fue la misma palabra usada por Ledrú y –quizás– presumiendo que se utilizaba la palabra comúnmente en la época.

Es cierto que el surgimiento de los ritmos y los bailes de bomba es anterior a la fecha de este documento y que el uso de la palabra bomba en Puerto Rico es muy antiguo. Sin embargo, no podemos dejar de citar la obra de Ledrú como evidencia esencial de nuestra historia que apoya la documentación del origen del término en discusión. El trabajo original de Ledrú, que documenta el uso de la palabra bamboula por los loiceños, es muy significativo.

Respecto al origen de la bomba y sus denominaciones, Manuel Álvarez Nazario (1974) plantea que:

La denominación de baile de bomba se deriva evidentemente del nombre del tambor que provee el acompañamiento musical para el mismo. Equivale así a la de baile de tambor que se daba antiguamente entre los negros cubanos y persiste hoy día entre los de Venezuela, Colombia y Ecuador (en este último país, además donde bomba es también, como en Puerto Rico, nombre de cierto tambor de los negros, la misma palabra denomina igualmente, por extensión, a determinado género musical, cantable y bailable … (Álvarez Nazario 304-305)


Restauración Cultural

Restaurar es poner una cosa en el estado o estimación que antes se tenía. Ante la falta de educación oficial en el sistema educativo puertorriqueño y la escasez de conocimiento histórico por parte de muchos ejecutantes de la bomba, se creó la organización Restauración Cultural. Esta organización, fundada por Felipe Febres Rivera y el autor del presente ensayo, Pablo Luis Rivera Rivera, se instituyó en 1998 con la misión de resaltar los valores étnicos afroboricuas a través de presentaciones, talleres, conferencias, difusión de material didáctico y apoyo a grupos comprometidos con el legado de la raíz africana a la cultura puertorriqueña y caribeña. Todo esto motivado por la falta de enseñanza de nuestros géneros tradicionales en el currículo escolar y universitario. Un ejemplo del trabajo de la agrupación lo constituyen los talleres de acercamiento étnico-cultural. En estos, se comparte con la audiencia acerca de la historia del componente negro en nuestra formación como pueblo y cómo la música y el baile han sido un factor determinante; especialmente la bomba puertorriqueña. Por lo general, estos talleres se ofrecen en grupos, ya sea universitarios o comunales, y tienen un impacto significativo porque generan un entusiasmo que provoca la búsqueda más profunda y el deseo de aprender. Se enseña la historia de la bomba, los diferentes ritmos que caracterizan a este género musical, según se representan en las distintas regiones de la isla; el baile, los instrumentos y sus formas de toque, se discuten influencias de otras raíces culturales y cómo hay géneros similares en otras partes de América. El trabajo y la autogestión son motores indispensables en este proceso que busca impactar directamente a la gente, con iniciativas que tienen repercusiones reales en el país.

A continuación, mencionaré algunos de los proyectos más destacados y actividades educativas sobresalientes en los que Restauración Cultural ha participado, y cómo estas impactan a la comunidad y a la sociedad. [7]

Con el proyecto “Vive las artes en la educación” ofrecimos talleres a maestros y maestras de escuelas intermedias públicas con el fin de
integrar estos conocimientos al currículo escolar. Este proyecto nos ha permitido participar en actividades artísticas con jóvenes, además de añadir estos conocimientos y experiencias al currículo vigente.

A nivel de la comunidad, hemos trabajado un proyecto denominado “Vida plena” dirigido a personas de edad avanzada, impartiendo a través de toda la Isla talleres, conferencias y presentaciones. De igual forma, hemos trabajado con estudiantes de educación especial. Hemos ofrecido talleres en municipios, escuelas privadas, programas de nivel universitario y con estudiantes del nivel preescolar.

Otra iniciativa que queremos resaltar es el “Proyecto Unión”. Mediante el mismo, se busca integrar a puertorriqueños en la diáspora y a aquellos países de los cuales hemos recibido migración, realizando intercambios culturales y educativos, compartiendo con exponentes de la cultura afrocubana, de la bomba y otros géneros de raíz africana, en particular con otras organizaciones y grupos en Estados Unidos y el Caribe. En párrafos posteriores, explicaremos este proyecto en mayor detalle.

Restauración Cultural, como organización, se dedica a fomentar y diseminar la cultura a través de conciertos, conferencias, presentaciones, talleres, distribución de material didáctico, creación de programas educativos y todos los medios que alcancen una mejor proyección y ejecución de nuestra cultura. Dentro de los programas que ha creado, o en los que ha participado la organización, se encuentran: “Bomba de oro” para personas de edad avanzada, “Los gigantes de la bomba” para público general, “Bomba en el sur” con proyectos de enseñanza en Guayama y Salinas, y “Vive las artes en la educación” para el sistema educativo del país.

Trayectoria del Proyecto Unión

Tras diálogos previos y ante la preocupación mostrada en viajes realizados por los integrantes de Restauración Cultural a lugares como Ecuador, Canadá, Cuba, Argentina, Estados Unidos, República Dominicana, Saint Croix y Perú, se ha estado organizando un movimiento cultural sumamente innovativo denominado “Proyecto Unión.” El proyecto existe desde enero de 2009, bajo el liderato de Rafael Maya Álvarez y el Dr. Pablo Luis Rivera. Tiene como objetivo contribuir el desarrollo cultural de las comunidades puertorriqueñas, comenzando en la diáspora y el Caribe y terminado en Puerto Rico. Su impacto no solo se percibe en dicha comunidad, sino que alcanza a otras que se interesan por la cultura. Busca, en primera instancia, solidificar, a través de talleres, el conocimiento histórico, reconocer a los precursores y defensores de nuestra cultura, mejorar la calidad de los productos culturales que se están desarrollando, establecer lazos de hermandad y solidaridad, crear unidad y apoyo mutuo entre los grupos y fomentar el respeto y cooperativismo entre la gran comunidad cultural que existe en el mundo. Además, con este proyecto, se busca lograr presentaciones, grabaciones y productos que solidifiquen el mercado cultural puertorriqueño, muy en especial el de la bomba, para evitar que se pierda y para fomentar la tradición oral. Es así que hemos realizado intercambios con grupos de Nueva York, Chicago, California, Colorado, Florida y del estado de Washington en Estados Unidos, así como con grupos de Guadalupe, Martinica, Trinidad, Cuba y República Dominicana. Los trabajadores culturales que están radicados fuera de Puerto Rico necesitan tener contacto con los exponentes que están manteniendo viva la tradición en la Isla. Para que continúe creciendo el legado cultural de Puerto Rico, hace falta enlace y cohesión con la diáspora y los hermanos caribeños. Siguiendo este objetivo, se ha realizado este proyecto para unir a los artistas y gestores culturales, sirviendo de enlace para ampliar los horizontes y fomentar el crecimiento cultural de los mismos.

Desde diciembre de 2011, el Proyecto Unión está grabando su primer disco. Hasta el momento ha contado con la participación de cantantes de Zona de Bomba, (Florida), Bomba Liberté y Las Bomberas de la Bahía (ambos de California), La Raíz (Mayagüez), Buya (Chicago), además del grupo fijo de grabación.
Proyecto AFROlegado

Recientemente hemos estructurado la enseñanza y la rama pedagógica a través del programa AFROlegado, que se encarga de todos los proyectos educativos. El programa, a cargo de Yadilka Rodríguez, busca darle estructura a las clases, talleres, homenajes y conferencias que realiza Restauración Cultural, creando alianzas con otras instituciones. Actualmente existen alianzas con universidades, atendiendo a la comunidad universitaria y al público que se interesa en profundizar el conocimiento relacionado a las tradiciones puertorriqueñas. AFROlegado se ha dado a la tarea de conseguir los recursos más idóneos para este proceso educativo. Cuenta con un programa radial, “Repicando,” transmitido por “Bonita Radio”, una emisora en internet.

La diáspora puertorriqueña

Juan Cartagena nos informó que a pesar de que la bomba fue el primer género que se formalizó cronológicamente en Puerto Rico, fue el último en llegar a la diáspora. Llegó durante las décadas de los 50 y 60 (siglo XX). Se atribuye a Rafael Cortijo e Ismael Rivera el que la plena y la bomba hayan llegado a Nueva York con fuerza por primera vez. Esta experiencia neoyorquina sigue ganando adeptos en otros lugares como Chicago, donde varios grupos se destacan, Filadelfia y otros focos migratorios (Cartagena 56-62).

Activismo sociocultural

La música posee un poder invaluables en nuestra sociedad. Es capaz de adaptarse a las situaciones, cambiar estados de ánimo, crear tranquilidad o reafirmar la identidad. También puede servir de foco de resistencia ante los problemas sociales que nos aquejan, tales como el racismo y otros males. Por mucho tiempo la bomba, además de ser un vehículo para socializar, devino en lugar donde se planeaban rebeliones. Así, hasta el siglo XIX se conspiraba bajo pretexto de estar participando de los llamados “bailes de bomba”. Guillermo Baralt define lo que representaba para una persona esclavizada este género: “El baile y el tambor creaban un sentido de cohesión en la población esclava. Sin embargo, solo era un disfraz para encubrir los fines subversivos de los esclavos” (66). Ya a principios del siglo XX, personas de escasos recursos económicos se podían refugiar en la bomba y tener una manera de diversión al alcance de sus medios. Sin embargo, la bomba tuvo que enfrentarse a prohibiciones y a la represión (Baralt 66). Según Ivonne Acosta Lespier, en 1906 se aprobó una ley municipal en San Juan que buscaba establecer unas regulaciones como parte del orden público. En referencia a la bomba, menciona:

Se prohíbe tocar bomba u otro instrumento semejante y cantar y bailar al compás de dicho instrumento en plazas, paseos o cualquier otro paraje público de la municipalidad (Acosta Lespier 26).

Es ampliamente conocido que los grupos afroamericanos han sufrido la más severa represión y prohibiciones. Aun así, la bomba sobrevivió estas adversidades. Se llegó a “romper” o finalizar un baile y golpear a los ejecutantes, como nos relató Alex Lasalle que le pasó a su abuelo. Fue tal la paliza que le dio la policía, que decidió no tocar bomba jamás. [8]

En la década de 1950, el género musical se incorporó a los ballets, tanto folclóricos como clásicos. Se empezó a generalizar el reconocimiento del baile de bomba como arte y algunas familias, que lo practicaban como parte de su tradición y su cotidianidad, se constituyeron en grupos para ejecutarla en espectáculos. Incluso, se desarrollaron conceptos orquestados que denotaban un cambio trascendental en la forma de ejecución. Antes de este período existieron grupos organizados, pero desde entonces comenzó un proceso estructurado, organizado e incluso patrocinado por entidades públicas y privadas.

En los años cincuenta del siglo veinte Puerto Rico pasó por una gran transformación política. En 1948, el pueblo eligió al primer gobernador puertorriqueño por voto directo en las urnas. En 1949 se fundó la división de Educación a la Comunidad. En 1952 se ratificó la Constitución del Estado Libre Asociado y en 1955 se fundó el Instituto de Cultura. Esta trasformación se dio como secuela de las discusiones que desde la
generación de 1930 venían cuestionando el tema de la puertorriqueñidad, los debates acerca de la cultura y el apogeo del nacionalismo boricua.

La música de afropuertorriqueños fue afectada por ese proceso. Fue impregnada por los cambios de la época. De solo tocarse en esquinas, casas y negocios particulares, comenzó a ser tocada en las tarimas públicas y, más adelante, llegó a la televisión. Entre los primeros exponentes se encuentra al grupo de la Familia Cepeda, el cual más adelante varió en su estructura y cambió su nombre. Siguen la tradición que los integrantes de esta familia denominan “de San Mateo de Cangrejos” o Santurce. Otro grupo pionero fue el de los Hermanos Ayala, que en un inicio se llamaba Bomberos de Loíza. [9] Se nutrían de la tradición de bomba proveniente del noreste de la isla.

A estas familias ‘folklóricas’ bombeadoras se unieron otros grupos constituidos por bailadores, músicos y ejecutantes interesados en rescatar, aprender, desarrollar y difundir el arte de la bomba. Integraron en las ofertas artísticas que se daban hasta ese momento un elemento novedoso que consistía en practicarla en lugares específicos donde se destacaban los bateyes, los solares y el soberao. Ya para finales de los años ochenta se comenzó a sentir el fruto del esfuerzo de los precursores del género. Cónsono con este surgimiento se presentó quizás uno de los exponentes que más gloria le dio a la bomba: Rafael Cortijo Verdejo. Este gran músico cangrejero llevó la música tradicional a un sitio inimaginado. La grabó, orquestó, difundió y la transformó, no solo añadiéndole la orquestación –combinación que, sin duda, se puede considerar como un preámbulo a la salsa–, sino que le introdujo un innovador estilo tipo jazz en su disco La máquina del tiempo, además de lograr que su música viajara por todo el mundo. Autores como Mayda Grano de Oro describen la música de Cortijo como una parte esencial de la cultura puertorriqueña, y lo atribuyen a la influencia que tuvo esta música en otras manifestaciones musicales como la salsa (521). Luego de este fenómeno que representó Rafael Cortijo, otros grupos comenzaron a experimentar con esta música.

Estos procesos se sumaron a la creación de distintos grupos que empezaron a presentarse para llevar al público una estampa que buscaba recrear la ejecución del baile de bomba, por supuesto, pensando en los elementos que consideraban importantes para trasmitir a la audiencia. La bomba se mantuvo viva gracias al interés de distintos grupos y personas. La música orquestada mantuvo viva la tradición, llegando a todos los rincones de Puerto Rico y a lugares internacionales.

Durante la última década del siglo XX aumentó la práctica y ejecución del género de la bomba. Sobre el particular, el músico Ricardo Pons menciona lo siguiente:

Hoy día se toca más bomba que hace un par de generaciones. Esto se debe en gran medida, a que la generación de los 90’s se apoderó de la tradición, se acercaron a aprender, hicieron suya la misión de la bomba. Se desbancaron los gurúes de la tradición como únicos proponentes del género y se ha hecho accesible a cualquiera que demuestre interés. El lado negativo de esta proliferación de la bomba en la actualidad es que se está homogenizando; las sutilezas que marcan los regionalismos están desapareciendo poco a poco. (Pons de Jesús 40)

En los noventas, artistas como William Cepeda [10] comenzaron a fusionar la bomba con el jazz. Aunque esa mezcla ya se había dado, su propuesta creó una diferencia con respecto a lo que había sucedido antes, ya que utilizó la fusión y la mezcla con el jazz como bandera de su estilo y ejecución. De esta forma, redondeó sonoramente esta historia musical.

La bomba ha logrado diseminarse y está más generalizada en Puerto Rico que nunca antes en su historia. La enorme mayoría de los puertorriqueños reconocen su valor artístico-cultural, y cada día más jóvenes están aprendiendo a bailarla y a tocarla, apoderándose de espacios culturales antes ocupados por otras corrientes. Existen diversos programas en muchos de los pueblos de la isla con este propósito difusivo y educativo. De hecho, el surgimiento de las escuelas constituye un fenómeno que transformó la bomba y la llevó a otra etapa significativa. Históricamente, el aprendizaje de la bomba por lo general se
valía de distintas maneras de difusión que no necesariamente enfocaban la instrucción directa. Hasta años recientes, la enseñanza de la bomba y otros géneros usualmente se sustentó en la tradición oral, muy especialmente en la observación por parte de quien la quería ejecutar. La manera más común de aprender era hacerse parte de los grupos que ejecutaban el género.

De ahí la gran importancia de la primera escuela formal, fundada en el 1973 en Villa Palmeras, San Juan, supliendo así una gran necesidad de aprender. Sin embargo, muchos no podían asistir a este lugar o preferían a otros maestros. Esto contribuyó a que, con el correr del tiempo, comenzaran a surgir otros lugares para la enseñanza de la bomba. En consecuencia, el género recibió un incentivo adicional al crearse espacios nuevos para poder practicarla. En la actualidad, la diáspora puertorriqueña ha ido más allá de las fronteras de la Gran Manzana y nuestra investigación corrobora que hoy en día se han creado organizaciones culturales boricuas que promueven y defienden nuestra identidad cultural musical a través de la bomba. En diferentes estados de la unión americana. Los puertorriqueños nacidos en Estados Unidos, a pesar de haber sido transculturados y de haber asumido ciertas características de las familias norteamericanas, han continuado cantando y bailando nuestra música y la bomba en específico.

La adaptación cultural es interpretada frecuentemente como señal de movilidad social y adelanto socioeconómico, pero esto no quiere decir que los puertorriqueños de segunda y tercera generación no se hayan enfrentado y continúen enfrentándose a problemas similares a aquellos de sus familiares nacidos en la Isla. De acuerdo a los datos del censo de los Estados Unidos, existen aproximadamente más de cuatro millones de puertorriqueños en tierras norteamericanas. Sin embargo, se ha constatado a través de los años que la emigración no ha sido impedimento para que los boricuas conserven sus lazos culturales.

Así, observamos cómo siguen creándose movimientos, eventos y grupos que constituyen un cimiento sólido para afianzar nuestra identidad nacional. Es importante que continúen llegando nuevas personas al ambiente de la cultura. Sin embargo, es necesario que reconozcan que hay que conocer los fundamentos para poder crear nuevos conceptos o reforzar los ya existentes. La bomba demuestra ser una alternativa no solo económica, desarrollando nuevas ideas de autogestión, sino que también refuerza el aspecto relacionado a la identidad de los puertorriqueños.

Por otro lado, la música tiene un efecto amplio en nuestra sociedad. Puede ser utilizada como instrumento de manipulación, pero también producir en los oyentes otras consecuencias. Sociológicamente, se da una constante resignificación de la música y una reestructuración del componente social. [11] También es posible que la música, como mercancía, modifique en alguna medida la infraestructura social. Puede influenciar conductas y por instalación de valores, contribuir a multiplicar las diversas posturas de la opinión pública.

Los bailes de ritmos de herencia africana han evolucionado y contribuido a la felicidad y al desarrollo sociocultural de los puertorriqueños dentro y fuera de la Isla. Las instituciones musicales puertorriqueñas presentadas en este estudio han contribuido en el desarrollo de nuestra cultura, a través de sus presentaciones folclóricas y populares. La iniciativa de escuelas para la enseñanza de la bomba ha sido un factor crucial para el crecimiento y difusión continua del género. Las escuelas no se limitan a las que se han ido desarrollando en Puerto Rico, sino también fuera del país.

Es necesario darle mayor participación a los exponentes y grupos de bomba en actividades culturales y promover el desarrollo de proyectos que estimulen mantener viva nuestra raíz afropuertorriqueña y nuestra identidad. Conocer mejor nuestra cultura nos ayudaría a sentir más amor por nuestra patria y estimularía el intercambio necesario con nuestras raíces caribeñas. Sin duda, los exponentes aquí mencionados han contribuido a dar más espacio a los afropuertorriqueños, no solo en los medios masivos y a nivel internacional. Pero es evidente que todavía falta que ese reconocimiento a esta gesta sea entendido más colectivamente.

Otro elemento resaltado en esta investigación es la comunidad puertorriqueña en la diáspora.
Esta juega un papel vital en el crecimiento y desarrollo internacional del género de la bomba. Existe no solo el deseo de muchos puertorriqueños radicados fuera de Puerto Rico que quieren continuar cultivando una tradición viva. Además, muchos hermanos latinoamericanos se han unido al conocer esta dinámica cultural. Anglosajones y gentes de otros lugares han visto la importancia de practicar y involucrarse en el desarrollo de este género. La bomba continúa ampliando horizontes. Una participación sumamente activa, la existencia de grupos en varios estados de Estados Unidos, así como la de grupos de otros lugares – como España, Suiza y Japón – demuestran que la bomba está cada vez más viva y con mucha fuerza. La bomba es, sin duda, un vehículo de activismo social.

Notas

[1] La bomba es una forma musical de tambor que se nutre de la migración africana y de las migraciones continentales americanas y caribeñas. Existen géneros muy similares en todo el continente.

[2] Fernando Ortiz describe el bambulá o babulá como el nombre de tambor unimenbranófono y abierto que antaño fue muy popular, principalmente entre los negros de las Antillas francesas y de la Luisiana (Ortiz 26).


[5] El nombre de cuembé deriva por lo visto de ‘cumbé’, denominación de origen africano que en las Antillas se registra en Cuba, emparentada además con otras designaciones de bailes negroides en España e Indias: paracumbé, caracumbé, maracumbí, cucalambé, etc., y también en Colombia y en Panamá, cumbia, baile de igual origen africano. La palabra cumbé surge de ‘nkumbá’, variante denominativa del tambor que deja en Cuba las formas cumba y cumbi que se aplican, junto a cumbé, a ciertos tambores de origen congo.

[6] El batey era la zona ocupada como plaza, rodeada por las viviendas y otras edificaciones en los ingenios azucareros del Caribe. Originalmente la palabra fue utilizada por los aborígenes tainos para denominar el lugar donde celebraban sus ceremonias. También se le conocía como ‘batú’.

[7] Restauración Cultural, Inc. tiene dirección postal en P.O. Box 800 Saint Just Station, P.R. 00978. Su dirección cibernética es RestauracionCultutal/FB y el correo electrónico es xiorro@gmail.com

[8] Entrevista personal a Alex Lasalle, realizada el 11 de Julio de 2011.

[9] Los hermanos Ayala, al ser repetidamente confundidos con los bomberos que apagan fuegos, dejaron de utilizar el nombre Bomberos de Loíza. (Conferencia curso Proceso Histórico de Puerto Rico por Pablo Luis Rivera, Programa AHORA, Universidad del Este, 2013).

[10] Hay que reconocer la aportación de este exponente en su fase artística y de rescate de la tradición, en virtud de su producción de discos relacionados a la raíz de la bomba y otros géneros como la plena grabando a exponentes tales como: Félix Alduen y Ángel Luis Torruellas de Mayagüez, Los Hermanos Ayala de Loíza, Isabel Albizu de Ponce. A William Cepeda, oriundo de Loíza, en marzo 2013 se le dedicó el Heineken Jazz Fest. Además, la prestigiosa Universidad de Berkley le otorgó un Doctorado Honoris Causa.

La plena puertorriqueña, rebelión y transnacionalismo afroboricua; una historia menos contada

Introducción

“los pasos puertorriqueños por territorios históricos son golpes acompasados sobre panderos políticos”
(López, Los bembeteos 19)

La plena es considerada por muchos puertorriqueños como uno de los símbolos más preciados de su identidad colectiva. Su origen y pertenencia a la clase obrera encuentra su expresión más viva en el hecho de que en Puerto Rico las manifestaciones de protesta son siempre acompañadas por pleneros. En sus canciones se tematiza la vida de los negros y mulatos en los barrios pobres. La historia de sus repercusiones sociopolíticas apenas ha sido analizada a cabalidad. Su rearticulación en Nueva York con otros elementos socioculturales transnacionales condujo a su reformulación. Allí traspasó las fronteras de la llamada música “folclórica” y se deslizó fuera del entorno obrero en el que había sido desarrollada.

Este texto consta de tres partes principales: la primera titulada “Orígenes interculturales e intercaribeños”, la segunda “Plena y rebelión afrocaribeña” y – a modo de conclusión – la tercera “El plebeyismo ‘parejero’ y el bembeteo: desobediencia epistémico-estética de la plena”.

Orígenes interculturales intercaribeños


El texto de la canción “Cimarrón,” de Los Pleneros de la 23 Abajo ofrece una breve y metaforizada genealogía de la plena. Tematiza las tres raíces reconocidas como conformadoras de la cultura boricua en general, así como de la plena en particular: la herencia africana, la taína y la campesina, en Puerto Rico llamada jíbara (González 11 - 42). En la canción se le adjudica al cimarrón un papel central al indicar: “Se fugó el cimarrón / se escondió en la montaña / ¡Se fugó el cimarrón / y nació la plena!” (Pleneros de la 23 Abajo) Según sugiere la canción, es mediante la resistencia y autoliberación del cimarrón, al escaparse a la montaña, que surge la plena.

En realidad, el surgimiento de la plena no se dio en las áreas rurales montañosas del centro de la isla; ni los cimarrones estuvieron directamente vinculados a sus orígenes. Sin embargo, el papel determinante que asumieron sus descendientes, los obreros de
la caña – afropuertorriqueños e inmigrantes de otras islas – en su surgimiento, es un hecho histórico verificable. La solidaridad vivida en las comunidades de aquellos descendientes directos de cimarrones o negros libres, y su activa resistencia contra el incipiente sistema monopolista de explotación de las plantaciones norteamericanas a finales del siglo XIX y comienzos del XX, le imprimieron su ineludible sello obrero a la cultura plenera.

Los orígenes de la plena se ubican en Ponce, ciudad costera en el sur de la isla, hasta entonces capital alterna (López, *Los bembeteos* 141; ver Quintero Rivera, *Ponce, la Capital Alterna*) y principal región en la producción de la caña de azúcar a finales del siglo XIX. El arrabal Joya del Castillo es considerado como el centro donde mayormente tocaban los pleneros pioneros. Muchos de sus habitantes eran inmigrantes provenientes de las Antillas Menores, ya establecidos en la isla desde mucho antes (Stone 939).

El antropólogo, plenero y artesano Ramón López enfatiza en sus análisis la centralidad del cuerpo del obrero negro de los cañaverales de Ponce, motor que encendió una de las respuestas más contundentes del pueblo puertorriqueño frente a la invasión norteamericana:

Los cuerpos de los pleneros y la gente plenera como puntos de encuentro y contestación de las relaciones de poder que estas situaciones implican constituyen la localización histórica de la plena como género musical que se originó tras la invasión norteamericana y que en sus primeros tiempos fue placar amistoso para los desposeídos y basura peligrosa para los poderosos. (López, “El cuento pleneao” 1) [17]

El cuerpo negro bailando es percibido por los grupos dominantes como amenaza al orden establecido. López utiliza como referencia informaciones obtenidas del libro de Félix Echevarría (1984) sobre los pioneros de la plena y el lugar donde surgió, para describir detalladamente la realidad comunitaria de la Joya del Castillo. Concretiza su descripción indicando nombres [18] y profesiones [19] de los habitantes del arrabal. Esto lo hace para desmontar imágenes cliché empleadas con frecuencia en discursos sobre los orígenes de la plena. Muchos de ellos reproducen las perspectivas prepotentes y racistas de los blancos de la época (López, “De la mortal importancia”). Se empeñan en criminalizar, desde una “atraviesa curiosidad morbosa”, a los sectores desposeídos viviendo en comunidades en resistencia; barriadas, cuya vida comunitaria no solo estaba marcada por la penuria y los males que esta consigo acarrea, sino – también – por una “generalizada disposición a la caridad, socorro, ayuda, respaldo y pertenencia que compartía la gente más despreciada de la ciudad”. (López, “De la mortal importancia”) De ahí que insista que:

La plena no fue el soundtrack de la degeneración moral. Fue el punto de encuentro de la totalidad vivencial barrial y sobre todo fue una diversión que aseguraba el predominio de la alegría como recurso de supervivencia y socialización. (López, “De la mortal importancia”)

Al final concluye:

La plena fue ante todo una diversión compartida que articuló la dedicación de músicos obreros de las comunidades de Ponce en encuentros festivos que confirmaban la solidaridad andariega y aglutinadora que dio consistencia y resistencia a los vecindarios más abusados por los poderes coloniales de su tiempo. (López, “De la mortal importancia”)

La historia de la plena está marcada por el desplazamiento masivo de gente humilde, la mezcla creativa y el intercambio de saberes provenientes de sus diversas culturas – bien lograda interculturalidad. Los violentos cambios económicos, causados por el paso del colonialismo español –mayormente basado en las haciendas de café – hacia el norteamericano en 1898, con sus grandes plantaciones de caña en vías de monopolización, ocasionaron un éxodo rural masivo de campesinos del interior de la isla a las zonas costeras en busca de trabajo. Estos pequeños agricultores trajeron
consigo su música tradicional de herencia española: entre otros, el seis [20] y la copla. [21] A ese fenómeno de migración endógena se sumó la acumulación de artesanos, necesarios para realizar trabajos en los cañaverales o en los centros urbanos emergentes, así como las interacciones socioculturales de trabajadores provenientes de otras islas. Esa amalgama constituye la base social de la plena, que fue influenciada tanto por elementos rurales como urbanos. Sus orígenes están marcados por la interculturación, es decir, la interacción y el intercambio de saberes y sentires provenientes de culturas africanas, [28] de los nativos, [29] así como de España [30] e incluso de elementos culturales que llegaron de las colonias de habla inglesa. Muchos trabajadores que venían de estas islas llegaron en aquel entonces a Puerto Rico y se establecieron en los alrededores de la ciudad de Ponce, donde las empresas norteamericanas fueron construyendo enormes plantaciones de caña de azúcar. [31]

3 Desarrollo y formas actuales

En el ensayo “Bumbún and the Beginnings of Plena Music,” el analista cultural Juan Flores divide la historia de la plena durante la primera mitad del siglo XX en tres períodos en los que se dieron grandes transformaciones en la organización capitalista del trabajo en Puerto Rico.

El primero se extiende desde los comienzos del siglo XX hasta el 1926. Lo caracteriza como el período de surgimiento y consolidación de la forma particular que distingue la plena y su expansión por la isla.

El segundo va desde el 1926 hasta el 1950. Según Flores, está acuñado por el éxito de músicos tales como Canario y Cesar Concepción. Estos llevaron la plena a los salones de baile en los que bailaban las clases dominantes.

El tercer periodo cubre los años de la década de 1950 hasta llegar a la de los 1960. Esta etapa es caracterizada como el regreso a las raíces proletarias y subproletarias, en cuyo entorno de vida había surgido la plena. Fue iniciada por las grabaciones de Mon Rivera y la banda de Cortijo y su Combo. (citado en Flores, From Bomba to Hip Hop 86-87)

Flores, en su periodización, traza una historia circular que parte del surgimiento proletario de la plena, pasando por su comercialización y final regreso a sus raíces. [32] Según Paulina Guerrero, el analista neoyorquino recalca en su ensayo el papel formador del entorno obrero en su historia y describe cómo ese mismo grupo social ha logrado mantenerla viva hasta el presente, independientemente de haber o no haber tenido éxito económico. (Guerrero 165-178)

Una de las más importantes contribuciones de Cortijo y su Combo al desarrollo de la bomba y la plena fue haber logrado participar regularmente de un programa televisivo [33] con un grupo de músicos negros y mulatos. Así les abrieron las puertas a otros para, por ese medio, exponer su música ante un público fuera de las fronteras del barrio. De esa forma, prepararon el terreno para la aceptación y popularización de otras expresiones musicales provenientes del mismo medio sociocultural.

4 Instrumentación

La plena originalmente se tocaba con panderos, acordeón y guitarra, acompañando el canto y el coro. Los dos tambores de mayor tamaño –el más grande se llama seguidor o bajo, y el mediano se llama punteador o llamador– establecen el ritmo que sirve de base, mientras que el más pequeño –requinto o marcador– elabora sobre esa base diferentes contrarritmos y figuras ornamentales, llamados golpes o piquetes. Más tarde se sustituyó el acordeón por el piano y se le añadió el güiro, las congas y los trombones, que reemplazaron a las trompetas, preferidas por los conjuntos de son. El sonido de los trombones, más crudo que el producido por las trompetas en la música dominante precedente caribeña, anticipó el estilo agresivo urbano que luego caracterizaría la nueva música de finales de los 1960, la salsa. No fue casualidad que muchas de las primeras orquestas salseras usaran trombones en su sección de vientos, práctica que continúa hasta el día de hoy. Algunos grupos actuales de plena también utilizan el cuatro, el instrumento insignia de la música tradicional jíbara -campesina-.
Consta de 5 cuerdas metálicas dobles y es más pequeño que una guitarra. La forma de su caja de resonancia es parecida a la del violín.

5 Plena y rebelión afrocaribeña

**Tintorera del mar**

Coro: Tintorera del mar,
tintorera del mar
tintorera del mar que se ha comido
a un americano.
pregón: Y aquél era un abogado, miren,
de la Guánica Central
a quién su vida ha tronchado
la tintorera del mar.
(estrofa de la versión de Gumersindo Mangual)

Esta pieza musical es atribuida a Gumersindo Mangual, aunque algunos entienden que es de la autoría de Joselín Bumbún Oppenheimer, un trabajador de la caña, pionero del género y, en su tiempo, considerado por muchos como el rey de la plena (López, “Tintorera del mar”). En la canción se recuenta la historia de un abogado de la Central Guánica. En la década de 1920, representó a la empresa en un pleito judicial contra una huelga de obreros. El representante legal de la central se fue de paseo a San Juan y mientras se bañaba en la playa del Condado se convirtió en presa fácil de los tiburones (López, “Tintorera del mar”).

Según Ramón López:

„**Tintorera del mar** es la imagen ancestral actual inmortal de una gente y un país cuyo fundamento sociocultural durante más de un siglo ha sido la explotación colonial por parte de Estados Unidos“ (López, “Tintorera del mar”)

La canción sirve de metáfora que ilustra la lucha sindical de los trabajadores afropuertorriqueños de los cañaverales monopolizados por los norteamericanos y, consecuentemente, ejerce una abierta crítica al colonialismo.

„**Aló, ¿quién ñama?**

¿Qué será? ¿Qué pasará que el taller de Mamery pide gente pa’ trabajar? Aló... ¿Quién ñama?
María Luisa Arcelay negociando con don Vidal:
dicen las bordadoras que si no hay plata no van pa’ llá.
¡Empezó la huelga!
¡Dios mío, que barbaridad!
¡Ay! Las trabajadoras empezaron a bembetear:
„Que si cuchicú“, „Ay, que si cuchicá“, Petra, apaga esa plancha:
¡No trabajemos ná!
¿qué se cree esta gente?
¡No nos tienen piedad!
¡La lana que aquí nos pagan ay, no nos dá pa’ ná!
(extracto de la canción)

La canción fue inspirada por una huelga de trabajadoras (costureras) de la industria textil en Mayagüez, una ciudad en la costa oeste de la isla. Durante la misma el propietario de la fábrica, el industrial libanés William Mamary, había contratado trabajadores de reemplazo, o sea, rompehuelgas. Don Mon Rivera escribió „**Aló, ¿Quién ñama**“ (Hola, ¿quién llama?) como descripción musical del conflicto. Dado que la huelga había sido organizada por el líder sindical local John Vidal y apoyada por la asambleísta María Luisa Arcelay, son mencionados en la canción. En ella, las costureras expresan su preocupación sobre los miserables salarios que recibían. Casi al final, Don Mon se sirve de un estilo muy particular; el trabalenguas. Ese estilo de canto, tal vez emparentado al scat [34], es usado para insinuar algunas de las sílabas en una especie de balbuceo nasal.

Ramón López tal vez coincidiría con nosotros cuando insinuamos que se trata del *performance* metaforizante del bembeteo típico de la plena. De hecho, resulta de provecho contrastar ese balbuceo, esa musicalización del bembeteo barrial en protesta, presente en los textos pleneros, con las canciones del movimiento de la llamada nueva trova. Indudablemente, la
inmediatez y accesibilidad de su lenguaje popular son las características discursivas principales de la plena. No precisa de ideologías foráneas para expresar su resistencia a la explotación e injusticia. Más tarde, esta misma actitud fue asumida por figuras principales de la salsa, tales como don Tite Curet Alonso y Rubén Blades, dos de los más importantes y prolíficos compositores del género. Las canciones de la nueva trova, por su parte, fueron elaboradas en su mayoría con un lenguaje culto, inaccesible y lejano a las masas populares. Probablemente sea ese uno de los motivos que explican el muy limitado efecto proselitista del movimiento de la nueva trova en la isla. Su visión política estuvo largo tiempo permeada por formas teórico-ideológicas provistas por el marxismo. Y sus adeptos, hasta el día de hoy, pertenecen mayormente a los estratos sociales con formación universitaria. En Puerto Rico, la nueva trova, salvo contadas excepciones [35], no logró alcanzar al pueblo.

6 El plebeyismo parejero y el bembeteo: desobediencia epistémico-estética de la plena

La plena es un fenómeno sociocultural que transgrede los patrones epistémicos y estéticos dominantes. Investigadores contemporáneos boricuas nos ofrecen conceptos que ayudan a entender este aspecto de la plena. Ángel Quintero Rivera, en su más reciente y premiado libro [36], propone usar el concepto plebeyismo de José Luis González (González 85 – 98), al analizar la música tropical afrocaribeña, para entender los modelos contrahegemónicos allí vigentes. Vincula a este concepto el suyo: la parejería. Esta noción es usada para describir una actitud particular de los trabajadores diestros, es decir, de los artesanos urbanos puertorriqueños de principios del siglo XX. [37] Según su análisis, estos se valían de la misma como estrategia contrahegemónica en la lucha contra el racismo y a favor de mejores condiciones de vida. (Quintero, ¡Saoco salsero! 20, 109 – 112, 115,117, 123, 125, 128 y 133)

Un pasaje en particular reproduce claramente su posición:

José Luis González distingue el plebeyismo del popularismo porque en el primero lo popular „no es (meramente) tema ni motivo, sino esencia que no requiere mediación para imponerse como creación estética válida en sí y para sí. “ (González 101) Lo distingue también del primitivismo porque se trata de formas que llevan tras sí un proceso de desarrollo cultural o estilización, "lo que no excluye que aprovechase tal o cual elemento usado por la clase “dirigente”, pero sometiéndolo a una remodelación según su propio estilo." (González 93) Primitivismo sería espontaneísmo poco desarrollado (que por tanto no amenaza a los modelos establecidos); y popularismo, selección desde arriba de formas ‘de abajo’ que no aspiran a ser modelos. Plebeyismo (por el contrario) es la creación de modelos desde abajo y su imposición hacia arriba (González 99). (Quintero Rivera, ¡Saoco salsero! 110)

Por otro lado, la noción bembeteo [38] del antropólogo Ramón López también resulta muy útil para desarrollar preceptos perceptivos alternativos, que nos permitan entender mejor nuestras realidades socioculturales. En su ensayo El bembeteo musicalizado, cuestiona uno de los clichés más repetidos por investigadores y la prensa en general, según el cual la plena es el periódico del pueblo. En relación a ello, López hace una diferenciación importantísima. Si bien las plenas comentan el diario vivir de los barrios, su estructura y maneras de expresarse no tienen nada que ver con el riguroso lenguaje periodístico. El plenero no es reportero, ni está interesado en ofrecer datos confirmados; es bembetero. Según su propia descripción del cantante o compositor de plenas:

Su modelo de transmisión de información no fue el reportaje, ni el artículo, ni el editorial, ni la columna. Su propósito no era establecer la veracidad de los hechos publicados sino expresar las divergentes percepciones de la gente en cuanto a lo que, tras suceder, se consideraba digno de conservar en la memoria. La plena de aquella gente pudo ser veraz pero a la vez fue ambigua, confusa y contradictoria, lo
mismo que los híbridos recuerdos que se instalan en la cambiante memoria de la gente subalterna. (López, Los bembeteos 26)

Por otro lado, según López, la imagen del periódico cantado es un intento consciente del Estado por regular y controlar una música que le era incómoda. [39] De ahí que claramente vincule el intento de ordenar la plena, según los códigos academicistas que rigen el periodismo, con una voluntad de poder que quiere imponer orden a un supuesto desorden. Sin embargo, si bien el fenómeno sociocultural podría ser señalado como caótico, es —sobre todo— contestatario. Ni el éxito mercantil ni el folclorismo nostálgico, ubicaciones socioculturales articuladas por la colonialidad del poder y del saber, han logrado neutralizar la plena. Es más bien la “cotidianidad puertorriqueña” que “expresa la memoria comunitaria que enlaza la historia y la actualidad”, la que posibilitó su surgimiento y continúa nutriendo su desarrollo (López, Los bembeteos 11-12). El tipo de temporalidad que estructura el rumbo y los designios de la plena se distingue por una simultánea asunción del recuerdo de vivencias pasadas y de antiguas tradiciones y su vinculación con la refrescante actualidad de musicalidades coexistentes.

Siguiendo la línea de pensamiento de López, se hace claro que muchos discursos institucionales de identidad colectiva intentan reappropriarse de la plena para presentarla como expresión armoniosa de “carácter pacífico y amistoso”, lejos de lo radical o militante (López, Los bembeteos 16). Según esa forma sublimada de simbolización nacional, asumida tanto por convicciones “coloniales, aspiraciones independentistas y anexionismos autóctonos”, la plena se convierte en periódico del pueblo para formar parte de la “poderosa ideología del consenso social como salvación colectiva ... defensivo patrimonio y glorificado valor” (López, Los bembeteos 16-17). Sin embargo, esta expresión del pueblo trabajador afroboricua ha logrado mantener sus vínculos con las raíces originarias que nutrieron su nacimiento y desarrollo. Hasta el día de hoy, la plena continúa resistiendo.

**Notas**

[12] La salsa surgió de pre-textos, es decir, patrones musicales que sirvieron de pretexto o excusa para crear una música cuyo dispositivo claramente se diferencia del de sus pre-textos.

[13] Otros estilos musicales puertorriqueños que también jugaron un papel muy importante, durante el surgimiento de la salsa, son la bomba y la llamada música jíbara. A menudo estos son ignorados por discursos etnocéntricos que insisten en presentar la salsa como hija natural de un género supuestamente nacional y puro: el son. Para una crítica de esta limitante concepción de la cultura musical caribeña consultar Vélez (2011), especialmente la segunda parte.

[14] Aparte de un par de colecciones de ensayos de diversos autores sobre la plena, actualmente solo existen tres libros, cuyo contenido se ocupa de investigar de forma más o menos sistemática dicho fenómeno sociocultural.

[15] Además de los estilos mencionados, se reconocen otras formas de hacer música, provenientes del Caribe o de los EEUU, como parte del foco genealógico de la salsa. Entre estos se encuentran los siguientes: el complejo o dispositivo rizomático del son caribeño, el seis, el swing y otros. Ver Vélez (2012)

[16] La fundación en 1956 de Cortijo y su Combo marca el punto al cual nos referimos. El grupo estaba formado por negros y mulatos de los barrios populares de Santurce. Utilizaba el formato de banda del son caribeño y participaba regularmente de un programa de televisión, exponiendo así la bomba y la plena a un público más amplio. Entre los máximos exponentes de la versión “folclórica” de la plena se encuentra los miembros de la conocida familia Ayala y de Los pleneros de la 23 Abajo. En Nueva York, el panderetista de Santurce, Marcial Reyes, jugó un papel central en el establecimiento de la plena, tanto como educador o músico. (Flores, From Bomba to Hip Hop 67-68)

[17] La falta de las comas (,) en los más recientes textos de López es deliberada. Según el plenero, estas estorban el ritmo de sus composiciones textuales (Entrevista personal con López, Marzo 2019).


[19] Músico de bomba y plena, dueño de tienda, mecánico dental, peón, sirvientas en casas particulares, labrador de finca de caña, vendedor ambulante de frutas, acordeonista, agricultor, militar, costurera y prostituta. (López, “De la mortal importancia”)

[20] Estilo musical tocado con cuatro, instrumento de cuerda parecido a la guitarra, maracas y bongó.

[21] Composición poética que por lo general consta de cuatro versos. Es la métrica preferida por los compositores de canciones de plena.
[28] Los tambores utilizados en la plena, los llamados panderos (panderetas sin chapas de metal en sus costados), provienen del norte de África. Fueron llevados a España por los moros. Los llamados negros ladinos, traidos directamente de España, los llevaron a la isla. Sin embargo, los toques de los panderos son de influencia africano-occidental. Su estructura rítmica básica sugiere que provienen de uno de los ritmos de la bomba: el holandés. Además, el baile, la estructura corresponsal de llamada y respuesta de las canciones y el importante papel de la improvisación, son elementos también provenientes de la misma región.

[29] Del patrimonio cultural de los nativos —los tainos— proviene el güiro. Instrumento musical de percusión hecho de una calabaza cilíndrica y ahuecada. Se toca rascando con un palo o rastrillo las estrías horizontales que lleva en su superficie externa.

[30] Ya mencionamos el seis y la copla; una de las formas métricas, provenientes de España, preferidas por compositores de canciones de plena en la isla. Además, en el estilo de plena jíbara se usa el cuatro. Un instrumento de cuerdas, oriundo de la isla, emparentado con el laud español.

[31] Este fenómeno de interculturación, es decir, de interacción entre e intercambio de elementos socioculturales provenientes de diversas isla de la región caribeña en la constitución de las formas de expresión artística ‘nacionales’ es tematizado por Juan Flores en su libro Divided Borders Essays on Puerto Rican Identity (85-91). Allí analiza el surgimiento e historia de la plena puertorriqueña y muestra la influencia, de parte de la música de otras islas, a ésta durante su proceso de gestación. Aunque Ramón López reconoce la influencia y contribuciones de caribeños provenientes de otras islas angloparlantes, cuya llegada a la zona sur de la isla fue fomentada por la ocupación norteamericana, cuestiona versiones que fundamentan el origen de la plena otorgándole un papel protagónico a los bembeteos. Una pareja que, según Echevarría y otras versiones que provienen de uno de los ritmos de la bomba: el pandero, no tuvieron grandes repercusiones (López, Los bembeteos 76).


[33] Rodríguez Juliá, recordando su infancia, menciona "La Taberna India de Reguerete y Floripondia": un programa de televisión que se transmitía a diario de siete a siete y media, en el que tocaban Cortijo y su Combo (Rodríguez Juliá 30).

[34] El scat es una forma especial de cantar utilizada en la música gisópel afronorteamericana y en el jazz. Se trata de un estilo de canto improvisado que consta de series de sílabas con una concatenación rítmica y melódica particular, sin utilizar palabras con un significado concreto y sin sentido coherente alguno. Con las sílabas y fragmentos de palabras se imitan, por recurso a la onomatopeya, frases instrumentales, semejantes a los sonidos de los instrumentos de los músicos circundantes. La forma exacta y el sonido de las secuencias de sílabas es, en gran parte, improvisado espontáneamente por el músico. La voz no se utiliza para la transmisión de contenidos de sentido, sino sólo como un instrumento.

[35] Ramón López en la sección "Plena armada con pandero" del capítulo "Breve y ajorata historia de la plena en proyección" (Los bembeteos 56 – 83) de su libro, le dedica unas 3 páginas (76 – 78) a lo que llama “afortunadas incursiones” (Los bembeteos 76) de la Nueva Trova a la plena. Allí menciona el nombre de unos grupos y artistas provenientes de ese estilo que, si bien grabaron canciones en ritmo de plena, no tuvieron grandes repercusiones (López, Los bembeteos 76).

[36] Lo propone en el capítulo “Los Cangrejeros y el plebeyismo ‘parejero’” del libro ¡Saoco salsero! o el swing del Sonero Mayor Sociología urbana de la memoria del ritmo (2017).

[37] En “La proletarización del artesanado en Puerto Rico. Cultura obrera y organización sindical.” Quintero-Rivera define lo que llama la tradición de la pareja entre “la irrevocabilidad a la jerarquía social y el colocarse en el terreno de la interacción social en niveles asignados por la cultura dominante para estratos sociales ‘superiores’” (121).

[38] Según el diccionario de la RAE, se trata de una expresión coloquial utilizada en Cuba y Puerto Rico para chisporreear, es decir, hablar con indiscreción o malicia de alguien o de sus asuntos. Ramón López le da otra connotación a este término. El bembeteo (‘meneo de las bembas -los labios-’) barrial de las comunidades afroboricuas lo describe como “palabreo de los que tienen labia, es decir, aquellos que son de hábil conversación”, pues gozan de virtuosidad persuasiva y gracia en el hablar (López, Los bembeteos 21).

[39] Estos intentos de reapropiación de la plena por parte del Estado incluyeron documentales, grabados, murales escenográficos y grabaciones de discos. Fueron realizados por la División de Educación a la Comunidad y el Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña. Comenzaron a mediados de la década del 50, como parte de una serie de medidas institucionales para “oficializar la negritud como parte del mestizaje biológico-cultural puertorriqueño”. López describe esos intentos como una “gestión condescendiente y ambigua pero fundamental y pionera …Todos estos proyectos fueron montajes intencionales realizados con mucha dedicación y celo profesional” (López, “Tintorera del mar”).

Obras citadas


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**Biografía de los Autores**

Pablo Luis Rivera posee un doctorado en Historia de Puerto Rico y el Caribe además de una maestría y un bachillerato en Administración de Empresas. Es profesor universitario e investigador docente en diversas instituciones universitarias en Puerto Rico, donde se destacan: La Universidad de Puerto Rico, la Universidad Ana G. Méndez y la Universidad Interamericana a nivel de bachillerato y graduado, además de ofrecer cursos en ambientes virtuales. Se destaca en los Departamentos de Historia, Humanidades, Administración de Empresas y Ciencias Sociales. También es director de la organización Restauración Cultural con la que ha impactado a miles de personas. Durante más de tres décadas ha desarrollado proyectos educativos (Bomba de Oro, Proyecto Unión, Gigantes de la Bomba y AFROlegado, entre otros), a realizando residencias académicas, conferencias, talleres y presentaciones artísticas relacionadas con la bomba y la afrodescendencia.

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Nahua Reggae and Metal: A Comparative Case between LA and Mexico City.

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to compare two music groups: Xipe Vitan J’ai, a metal band from Mexico City, and Quinto Sol, a reggae band from LA. Both groups mix lyrics in English, Spanish, Nahuatl and other indigenous languages of Mexico and use a variety of ‘pre-Hispanic’ instruments. Members of Quinto Sol identify as Chicanos, while members of Xipe Vitan J’ai identify as Mexican mestizos and Native Mexicans of the (falsely labelled) Otomí tribe. This article explores these lyrical and musical identity practice phenomena by questioning how Mexicans (mestizos or Natives) and Chicanos create new, syncretic identities in their struggle to find a sense of belonging that resists the simple acceptance of hegemonic identity narratives and asserts their individuality.

Keywords: Nahuatl, Reggae, Metal, Mexican Mestizos, Native Mexicans

In Mexico, there are currently still 68 indigenous languages being spoken. According to INEGI’s population census in 2015, 7,382,785 people 6.5% of the population reported speaking an indigenous language in Mexico. Of these languages, Nahuatl is the most widely spoken, with 1,376,026 native speakers [1]. But many indigenous people find the need to integrate into mestizo society for access to upward social mobility, leaving behind their languages, ways of life, traditions, communities, etc. They are, in a way, forced to learn Spanish, the ‘official’ language [2], oftentimes English, to have access to what seems to be a better life from a socio-economic standpoint, instead of fighting to preserve their traditions and languages. In the short term, they seem improve their position in Mexican society by not being Indians anymore, but currently, many indigenous groups have realised that they have merely managed to become poor Mexicans or dark mestizos, deprived of both their indigenous dignity and their rich, original traditions. Many in the second or third generations are unaware of their indigenous history. They do not know who they are now or who they used to be.

In the 90s various musicians -Nahuatl natives, Mexican mestizos and Chicanos- began to blend ‘modern music’ with traditional ‘pre-Hispanic music.’ Through songs written in Spanish, English and Nahuatl they seek to convey contemporary social problems by portraying either their reality or that of the ancient Mexican indigenous cultures which endured the arrival of the Spanish conquerors. All of them seem to have a need to talk about who they really are: to express what it means to be part of a minority group, to live among a mix of traditions and to have been born out of a violent conquest.

In this article I will compare two specific musical groups that follow this sonic tradition, Xipe Vitan J’ai, a metal band, and Quinto Sol, a reggae band. Both groups sing in English, Spanish, Nahuatl and other indigenous languages of Mexico while mixing a variety of ‘pre-Hispanic’ instruments. Quinto Sol is from LA and its members are Chicanos [3]. Xipe Vitan J’ai is from Mexico City and, while some of its members simply consider themselves Mexican mestizos, others claim to be Native Mexicans of the (falsely labelled) Otomí tribe. This article will explore why these bands decided to mix a ‘modern’ music genre with Nahua culture if indigenous cultures in the Americas are, according to the Euro-American narrative, heading toward extinction. Why choose to sing or talk about a culture with ‘no
future’? Which rights are they claiming?

I claim this phenomenon is due to the fact that both Mexicans (mestizo or indigenous) and Chicanos create new, syncretic identities in their struggle to find a sense of belonging that resists the simple acceptance of hegemonic identity narratives and assert their individuality. In this way, such groups may define who they are and where they come from using their own agency. They resist simply accepting an identity built by the state hegemon; an identity built by the ones in power who aim to develop strong and homogeneous nations, where Native peoples and other minority groups are very often regarded as a menace and a danger to the state. They have been told who they are by erasing their roots and cultural indigenous origins and by having a new identity created for them: the identity of the impoverished, the pariah, the undesirable, the Chicano or the ‘mestizo’. They are expected to fit in and integrate into the dominant culture forgetting their diversity. This reality has pushed them into a search for their roots, one that may lie in the mixture of the ancient Nahua, which they consider as their mother culture, and other modern cultures of their present. Through this process, they contribute to the preservation and revitalization of their indigenous cultures, and more importantly, to raise peoples’ awareness about the modern realities of native existence.

First, this article also provides general information about both bands. In order to understand the band members’ motivations to create these genres of music, I will look into: the socio-historical context of the social group they belong to; the philosophies behind the ‘modern’ music genre in which they chose to perform; and the aspects of old and ‘modern’ Nahua culture they have adopted as part of their band’s concept or message. The music genres addressed are Reggae and Black Metal with consideration for the social movements and the contexts in which they unfold: Chicanismo, Indigenismo, and New Age. In the second section the article analyses and addresses interviews and images related to these concepts, before presenting the results. A comparison of the results of data analysis of both bands follows perceiving them within their historical and sociocultural context as to understand their motivations from their reality.

Finally, I present some conclusions comparing the differences and similarities in the case of these two bands.

**Quinto Sol**

Quinto Sol, or ‘Fifth Sun’ is a reggae band that emerged from the artist/activist community of East Los Angeles in 1994. Quinto Sol is roots-reggae with Latin rhythms such as cumbia, rumba, and son. This collective of artists uses music as a tool to build awareness about socio-political and economic issues facing their community. Their lyrics talk about their own urban realities in everyday life and the struggles of indigenous communities around the world. In 2003, Quinto Sol released their second independent album and first national release, *Barrio Roots*. Produced and arranged by the Quinto Sol band, and engineered by Johnny Alvarez and Mizraim Leal, the band’s lead vocalist and guitar player respectively. *Barrio Roots* documents music from a period that helped shape what is known today as the East L.A. art “scene”; a contemporary Chicano-inspired arts movement.

Quinto Sol is dedicated to planting the seed that may let their audience know where they come from and where they are headed. The band members believe that by getting to know their roots, their people will achieve a stronger, independent identity and freedom. [4] The main members of Quinto Sol are Mizraim Leal (lead vocals and rhythm guitar), Martin Perez (bass guitar) and Tezozomoc (Tony Sandoval, Nahuatl poet and professor).

**Reggae Music**

According to Anderson (206) reggae music has its most significant antecedent in the American soul music of the 50s and 60s with influences of calypso and the Jamaican folk music called mento. The off-beat rhythmic pattern of soul music and rock’ n’ roll would find a strange and unique expression in Jamaica with reggae music during the late 60s and early 70s. The resulting rhythm was complex for the Western popular music of the time and irresistibly danceable. The sound evolved from Ska, to Rock steady, to reggae, as did the lyrics that went from songs
about the earthy and the sacred, to songs with a focus on spiritual and political matters. During the 70s, a period known as ‘roots and culture’, reggae music lyrics were dominated by the Rastafarian worldview (208).

The Rastafarian doctrine is a biblical and millenarian religion based on the teachings of Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey and on idiosyncratic interpretations of certain key passages of Old Testament scripture supporting the belief that the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie (born Ras Tafari Makonnen) was the second incarnation of Jesus Christ. Rastafarianism is not a creedal religion, but a compound and diverse variety of different philosophies. Some of the core doctrines are African nationalism, political and social separation from Babylon (European culture and its influences), and the divinity of Haile Selassie. Rastafarianism combines the strict dietary laws of Levitical Judaism with a Nazarene approach to personal grooming (resulting in the hairstyle known as ‘dreadlocks’) and a belief in the use of marijuana as a religious sacrament and tool for meditation. The central themes of Rastafarian doctrine are represented and developed in hundreds of songs of the period by many artists, Bob Marley being the most famous. Rastafarianism gave the philosophical foundation for most of the best works in the reggae canon (208-209).

Chicanismo

The term Chicano comes from the word Mexica (with the ‘x’ pronounced like ‘sh’ in English), and it is a term used to name Mexican Americans born in the United States. Chicano population in the USA increased from approximately three million in 1940 to more than twenty million in 2000. Before the Chicano Movement, the label Chicano was mostly used pejoratively and not well accepted by Mexican Americans because it was used to discriminate against them. [5]

The Chicano Movement was a social activist effort in the United States that ranged from the 60s to the 70s. At this time, a large number of organisations and individuals appeared in Mexican American communities nationally, agitating for economic and political change, and promoting a militant version of self-help and racial solidarity (Garcia 9). Garcia synthesizes the Chicano Movement in four stages. During the first phase, Mexican American intellectuals, politicians, students, and artists realized that the liberal agenda was morally corrupt and a failure. It had failed to end poverty, segregation, racism, and had done a poor job integrating Mexican Americans into the mainstream. Mexican Americans at this time were largely absent in politics, the media, and the academy. Until then, they had tried to be part of the mainstream by developing patriotic organizations, serving in the armed forces and trying to adopt American ideals in order to de-emphasize their national origins. Yet, most Chicanos felt isolated from the mainstream, were discriminated against or simply ignored. This rejection of Chicanos from the liberal agenda led them to search for new solutions. These new solutions were oriented towards separatism (31).

In the second phase, Mexican American activists saw a need to re-interpret the past (32). They knew that to build an identity, Mexican Americans needed to see themselves as a historical people with heroes, legends, triumphs and legacies. Chicano historians identified ancient heroes and reinterpreted old events through a new nationalist framework that made Mexican Americans active participants in history. This reinterpretation led Mexican Americans to discard the stereotypes of the lazy, passive, mañana-oriented Mexicano, and replaced this perception with a proud, historically rich Chicano. Scholars, writers, dramatists, poets and essayists found new protagonists in the forgotten history.

During the third phase, Chicano activists, intellectuals, and artists affirmed a rediscovered pride in their racial and class status (33). They emphasized and glorified their indigenous past and the ancient civilizations of Mexico and South America. This connection to racial origins gave them historicity. By accentuating their class status, they were able to legitimize and sometimes romanticize the lives of people living in the barrios. Mexican Americans, particularly the youth, did not have to be embarrassed by their music, their food, their traditional medicine or their home-grown philosophies. This affirmation of race and class created a sense
of solidarity with Third World movements for liberation, and united Chicanos in a world-wide revolution against oppression. It also brought a renaissance of Chicano literature, theatre and art. Artists and writers took the barrio now as the setting for their work, and the working people or their indigenous ancestors as the protagonists.

The final phase of the movement is called “the politics of Aztlan”, it tried to operationalize the essence of the three previous ones (34). Chicano activists developed platforms, manifestos, and strategies that best represented the new ideas coming from the rhetoric of the new leaders. Chicanismo was the by-product of a community in struggle. Chicanos rejected the mainstream American Society and stuck to the idea of Aztlan, a social, political, economic and cultural utopia free of liberal politicians, welfare programs, police brutality, discrimination, poverty and identity crises.

Xipe Vitan J’ai

Xipe Vitan Jā’i, previously called Xipe Totek Kalpul, is a metal band that sings in native languages of Mexico. They appeared in 2006 singing covers of Black Metal bands such as Immortal, Dark Funeral and Numen. In 2008, the band decided to start playing their own music and they recorded their first demo called Yohualahuannanzij (the nocturnal drinker) inspired by Nahua culture. In 2009, they released their first album called Xoxopantla (green period) with which they came to public attention in Mexico and some other countries. As a result, they had the opportunity to perform in several events in Mexico City, Oaxaca, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, etc. and festivals such as Metal in the Forest and Metal Fest on the Street in Tlahuac. They also gave radio and internet interviews.

In 2010, they participated in the French documentary L’art du Mythe, Xipe Totek du Mexique (The Art of the Myth, Xipe Totek of Mexico), about the sculpture of the god Xipe Totec at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. In 2012, they released their first studio album Uitsnaatlampaj (in the place surrounded by prickles). The LP contains thirteen tracks in four indigenous languages of Mexico and Central America: Nahuatl, Hñähñu, Triqui and Quechua; and features several ‘pre-Hispanic’ instruments: ueuetl (traditional drum), tlapitsalsin (clay and reed flutes), ayoyomej (rattles) and quena (traditional Incan flute). In 2014, they performed in the World Festival of the Resistance and Rebellion organized by the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation). Xipe has also participated in colloquia, and other forums to discuss the current and general situation of First Nations in Mexico. According to the band, their purpose is not only to make music. Its members also contribute in a critical, respectful, objective and tangible way to the dissemination, acknowledgement, conservation and legitimization of the cultural, linguistic, territorial, social, and political diversity of the indigenous peoples of Mexico by creating projects that are intended to transform the social reality in which all Mexicans live. [6]

The members of the band are: Thubini (lead vocals and flutes), Trece-Muerte (guitar), Una Tatyi Tuun (prehispanic instruments), Jahir Morales (guitar), Pablo Ramírez (bass guitar), Eduardo Munguía (guitar) and Marco Nafate (drums). [7]

Black Metal and Neofolk Music

According to Granholm, heavy metal was conceived in the late 60s early 70s by British bands such as Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. These bands were influenced by blues-based hard rock and psychedelic rock as well as the 60s counterculture with its tendency toward rebelliousness. The music was made more extreme and the Hippie message of love and peace was changed into a grimmer worldview. The “New Wave of British Heavy Metal” in the mid-70s presented heavier, faster, more complex and melodic forms of metal. The term Black Metal based on the title of Venom’s second album from 1982 started to be applied to extreme metal bands that incorporated more overtly anti-Christian and ‘satanic’ themes in their lyrics and image. However, it was not until the Norwegian “second wave” in the early 90s that the term black metal is mentioned as a genre (525-526).
From its inception, metal has embraced esoteric and occult notions. Although most subgenres of extreme metal include occult themes, none did so as much as black metal. The “second wave” or Norwegian black metal is often considered overtly satanic. However, lyrics rarely refer directly to Satan; they show, on the contrary, a heathen influence with references to Old Norse, pre-Christian myths, religion and culture. Early Norwegian black metal could be more aptly labelled as ‘pagan’ or ‘heathen’ since the label ‘Satanic’ does not sufficiently describe its particularities. The identification of this particular black metal as ‘satanic’ can be attributed to the influence of mass media (527-529).

From the early 80s the post-industrial style of most relevance was the neofolk. Black metal and neofolk have much in common. Thematically, they are both strongly devoted to the themes of romanticism and old Germanic and Scandinavian mythology and culture; but musically, neofolk focuses on traditional European and acoustic instruments. Many black metal bands combine both styles. It is important to note that black metal and neofolk are not only musical styles, but complex cultural systems, providing specific sets of ideologies, meaning, practice and traditions. While both mostly function simply as musical styles for most listeners, and even many of their musicians Granholm argues that this function is secondary (534-535).

The discourse present in black metal and neofolk bears strong similarities to Radical Traditionalism, whose key characteristic is the rejection of dominant Western culture. Instead, attention is focused on what is considered more ‘authentic’ culture and uncorrupted expressions of eternal wisdom. The turn to a pre-Christian Germanic and Scandinavian past satisfied several needs: an ‘esoteric appeal of the exotic,’ as these ancient cultures represented a reality far removed from the present dominant cultural and societal trends, norms, and values. It satisfied the rebelliousness of rock discourse and provided legitimacy both by being outside the mainstream, as well as part of a perceived “authentic native culture” (537-538).

Pre-Hispanic Nahua Culture or Aztec Civilization [8]

All the information given in this section about Aztec Civilization was taken from online Ancient History Encyclopedia, because this article is not about analysing Aztec Civilization per se, but what people know about this culture and what they do with this information that they learned mostly in primary school.

The Aztec Empire flourished between c. 1345 and 1521 CE and it covered most of northern Mesoamerica. Tenochtitlan on the western shore of Lake Texcoco today’s Mexico City with its 200,000 inhabitants by the early 16th century CE, was the largest city in the Pre-Columbian Americas. Tenochtitlan was a huge trading center, and the political and religious capital of the empire. Aztecs were highly accomplished in agriculture, trade, art and architecture. This civilization is the most well documented of Mesoamerica.

The ‘myth’ says that the original Aztecs came from a place called Aztlan (literally land of white herons and origin of the Aztec name) in the far northwest. They were nomads and were looking for a place to finally settle down. Huitzilopochtli, their war and sun god, told them to travel south and found Tenochtitlan where they found an eagle sitting on a cactus while eating a snake. The god also gave these people their name, the Mexica, who along with other ethnic groups, who similarly spoke Nahuatl, collectively made up the peoples now generally known as the Aztecs.

Their two main gods were Huitzilopochtli (the war and sun god) and Tlaloc (the rain god). Other important gods were Quetzalcoatl (the feathered-serpent god common to many Mesoamerican cultures), Tezcatlipoca (supreme god at Texcoco), Xipe Totec (god of spring and agriculture), Ometeotl (the creator god), Mictlantecuhtli (god of the dead) and Coatlicue (the earth-mother goddess). The gods were honoured with festivals, banquets, music, dancing, decoration of statues, burning of incense, the ritual burial of precious goods, penances such as blood-letting and animal sacrifices. Humans, both adults and less often children, were also frequently sacrificed to metaphorically feed the gods and keep them
happy lest they become angry and make life
difficult for humans by sending storms, droughts
etc. or even just to keep the sun appearing every
day. Victims were usually taken from the losing
side in wars.

The sun had great significance for the Aztecs.
They believed that the world went through a
series of cosmic ages. Each had its own sun but
finally each world was destroyed and replaced
by another until the fifth and final age was
reached the present day for the Aztecs. This
cosmic progression, which also crops up in
many other places, was wonderfully represented
in the famous Sun Stone. At the center of the
stone is a representation of a main god, which
may be Tonatiuh (the Day Sun), Yohualtonatiuh
(the Night Sun) or the primordial earth monster,
Tlaltecuhtli, in each case representing the final
destruction of the world when the 5th sun fell to
earth, the nahuí ollin (4 – Movement). Around
the central face at four points are the previous
four suns, known by the day name when their
final destruction occurred.

In 1521 CE, Hernán Cortés, a Spanish
Conqueror, laid siege to Tenochtitlan. Lacking
food and ravaged by disease, the Aztecs finally
collapsed on the fateful day of 13th of August
1521 CE. Tenochtitlan was sacked and its
monuments destroyed. From the ashes rose the
new capital of the colony of New Spain.

Indigenismo and Mezitaje Polities in Mexico

The Colony of New Spain (1521-1810) dislocated the previous social indigenous
order and structured a new hierarchical order that depended on the exploitation of the newly
invented sector: the Indian. [9] The category of Indian denotes, then, the condition of colonized
and makes necessary reference to the colonial relation. The colonizer gradually takes over
the lands he requires; submits, organizes and exploits the workforce of the Indians. The colonial
domain modifies the social organization and cultural systems of the dominated peoples (Bonfil
1972 110-112). The colony reduced indigenous peoples to rural communities, dedicated to
servitude, and less prestigious occupations in cities. The loss of communal lands eroded the
basis of traditional Indian culture, and many
Indians were forced to sell their labor to the
‘Haciendas’ as peasants (Fernández).

With time, there was a need for another social
category, the mestizo. This social category has
to do more with social relationships and wealth
than with biological race per se. The Ibero-
American colonial regime demanded a social
layer capable of carrying out a series of tasks
(administrative, service, mediation) that the
colonizing population- that is, Peninsulares and
Criollos [10] -were not enough to cover. In this
group an intense acculturation was exerted
that resulted in its uprooting from the colonized
sector. The mestizos can be seen as a sector of
colonized origin that the colonial apparatus co-
opted to incorporate into the colonizing society,
but assigning them a subordinate position within
it (Bonfil 1972 113).

Once independence was obtained from
Spain in 1821 and Mexico stood as a new
country, the administrations failed to conform
a culturally homogenous nation in accordance
with the admired European model of Nation-
State, but rather prolonged a situation of internal
colonialism where the old social categories still
co-exist: Indian, mestizo and colonizer. To try
to homogenize the Mexican State, Indigenismo
was born. Indigenismo, according to its critics,
is an instrument at the service of national states
to destroy the identity of Indigenous people and
integrate them into a homogeneous national
culture (Fernández).

The presence of two different civilizations
(indigenous peoples, and Peninsulares or
Criollos) implies the existence of different
historical projects that postulate equally
different hierarchies of values and aspirations.
Nevertheless, the new Mexican nation was
conceived as culturally homogeneous, following
a Western model, where indigenous culture
should be eliminated and European culture
generalized. The rationale to this perception
lies within the (European) ideals of the time: a
strong Nation-State ‘should be’ integrated by
people who have the same culture and the same
language, as the product of a common history. In
addition, the new leaders of the Mexican nation
were the minority group that had inherited the
orientations of Western civilization, but these
Criollos did not want to be directly related to
Spain anymore. Therefore, the Criollo identity gave way to the ideology of mestizo Mexico, where every individual was Mexican and every Mexican was a mestizo (Bonfil 1990 102-104).

The role of Indigenismo at this stage was to exalt indigenous cultures as the proud origin of Mexican nationality, but as cultures from the past, cultures already dead. In order to fulfil this mission, the state used its control over the work of anthropologists, archaeologists, national historiographers and artists, as well as over the institutions responsible for Indian policy, the ideological discourse of public education and the speech of state officials. One Mexican philosopher who promoted the mestizo ideologies of homogeneity was José Vasconscelos, who in 1925 wrote *La Raza Cósmica* (Cosmic Race), where he describes how a mestizo race is better than a pure one. As the Secretario de Educación Pública (Secretary of Public Education), he launched cultural projects to promote a culturally rich indigenous past and a mestizo present. This constituted the ‘Mexican image’, where indigenous people do not exist. In 1940 the First Inter-American Indian Congress was held. From this congress, indigenismo became a common continental strategy and a widespread movement.

All these projects failed to achieve their main objective, the disappearance of the ‘Indian’ and the consequent transformation of indigenous peoples into the archetypal Peruvian, Mexican, Bolivian, etc. The fact is that Indians exist today as poor, marginalized and as differentiated as ever. The difference is that, at present, Indians are increasingly assuming their ethnic status and intending to conduct their own destiny by ending internal colonialism (Fernández).

**New-Age Culture**

According to Sebald, the sociocultural dynamics of late 20th century America involves the interaction of three social movements: the Moral Majority, secular humanism, and New-Age. The three movements propose divergent philosophies and incompatible lifestyles. The New-Age movement, envisions an alternative lifestyle that fits neither into the narrow Christian heritage of the Moral Majority, nor into the rationalistic and empirical philosophy of humanism. The counter-culture of the 1960s and early ‘70s was a rejection of a destructive and demystifying industrialism, which seemed to be pushing the world toward nuclear annihilation. Increasing numbers of people saw science as the servant of a war machine. At the end of the Vietnam War, the movement changed into gentler New Age Romanticism. New Age philosophy is, before the eyes of humanists, full with romanticism and supernatural beliefs. Romanticism is a peculiar way of looking at the world that takes place within the childlike, hedonistic, picturesque, bizarre, unknown and mystical. Romanticism embraces nostalgia for the past, melancholy for the impossible, the desire for the unreal and persistent pursuit of mysticism (Sebald 106-108).

New Age is a social movement in a loose sense. It has no tight structure or organization, no definite leadership, or any clearly promulgated dogma. There are, however, a number of characteristics that allow New Age to be considered a movement (Sebald 109).

1) **A Sense of belonging.** Most of its adherents live in small groups, communes or small communities. 2) **Common values.** They promote a ‘consciousness’ of life forces within and around us. This consciousness, according to New-Agers, is not achieved by the superficial and destructive approach of empirical science. “Conscious” people reject modern medicine and psychiatry and prefer faith healing, meditation and Om-circle; they reject synthetic chemicals and prefer herbal medicine and ‘organic’ foods; they reject psychological analysis and prefer explanation by reincarnation or astrology; they follow dietary principles such as vegetarianism; they encourage a ‘return to nature’. 3) **A goal.** New Agers aspire to a lifestyle that significantly differs from that of the mainstream American materialistic and capitalistic philosophy. They want to return to a simpler, more natural, more loving and caring existence. Factories and impersonal industry would be replaced by a more natural way of life, greater self-sufficiency, and higher reliance on friendly trade rather than on impersonal and competitive commerce. 4) **Common style.** The anti-materialistic style signifies itself in simplicity in dress, diet, housing, transportation, and other necessities of life. 5)
Jargon. Possibly the most important bonding mechanism of the New-Age movement is the vocabulary shared by its members, which reflects a common belief, attitude, emotion and lifestyle. Some examples of the New-Agers’ jargons are concepts such as: consciousness, reincarnation, karma, etc. 6) Mass communication. There is no one single organ of communication but several newsletters emanating from numerous groups that identify themselves as New-Agers.

New-Age people adopt elements of Oriental religions, alternative views of interpersonal relations, and beliefs in various utopian visions, sharply deviating from the ‘straight’ road of Western science and rationalism, while simultaneously opposing established political, economic and religious institutions (Sebald 110). New Age emerged from a syncretism of astrology, theosophy, Hindu philosophy, Zen Buddhism and the perception of mystical forces that transcend space and time. The universal forces are believed to be capable of manifesting themselves as ‘entities’ (spirits); a belief that opened the door to medieval attitudes, including the belief in magic, witchcraft, and Castanedean hoaxes (Sebald 114). Maybe one of the most significant characteristics of the New-Age movement is its obsession with the occult. New-Age Romanticism must be understood as a symptom of social unrest and discontent; as a surge toward ideas and a lifestyle that recreates meaning, adds colour, and fascinates with a new mystique (Sebald 125).

Analysis

This section examines some short interviews, as well as at some publicity pictures and logos from Quinto Sol and Xipec Vitan J’ai in order to analyse and understand their musical concept and motivations.

Selection of information from the interview made by FNX Native Television in 2013 to the band Quinto Sol. [11]

FNX: “We learned about... and their indigenous heritage.”
Band: “We all have something in common and that’s our indigenous blood. A tree without roots can easily be knocked over. It empowers you because you know who you are and you have this indigenous consciousness. That’s who I am and nobody can tell me who I am but myself. Our lives changed when we came across Bob Marley and we actually got all rasted out before we went back into the indigenous culture. It’s not a typical reggae it’s got a mix of some cumbias, some sons, some salsa, some jazz, a lot of Latino flavour, Latino rhythms. We are a bunch of Chicanos influenced by Latino music trying to play reggae. Nahuatl is one of our indigenous languages. We wanted not only to do music in Spanish and English but in our original language.”

We see in this interview that the members of the band Quinto Sol claim to be Chicanos, and also to have an indigenous legacy, which gives them strong foundations and power; but only when they are aware of it, when they know their origins. If they ignore their history, the colonizer as ‘Other’ is able to invent an identity for them, which they will have to believe and accept. This is why they decided to play reggae not only in Spanish or English, but also in Nahuatl.

Selection of information from an interview made by Panquetzani in 2007 to the band Quinto Sol [12]

Band: “Originally we were punkers. We were aware in the sense of anarchism. We came across Bob Marley. We wanted to do what they were doing for the black people we wanted to do it for the brown people. Speak conscious stuff for a better tomorrow. We wanted to do that for our people. And now we are rastecas, this whole movement. The reggae rhythm represents this walking movement of the Azteca warrior always moving, always marching forward. It is about people opening their mind and accepting and knowing. You are indigenous, just live it”.

For the band members the type of music they play is not as important as the message they want to send. They want to bring awareness to their community, the Chicanos. That’s why they chose reggae music, a music genre born
to create awareness among black people. Quinto Sol chose to adopt this style to build consciousness among brown people, the Latinos or Chicanos. They call themselves rastas, which is a socio-cultural movement product of the mixture of Rastafarian and Aztec philosophy. They consider themselves and all Chicanos Aztec warriors, always marching forward. It is therefore important for Quinto Sol that the rest of the Chicanos learn this and accept themselves as indigenous people. According to the band, knowing this would give Chicanos their identity and power back, then they would understand that they are not what they were told they are; a bunch of pariahs.

**Logo of the band Quinto Sol**

![Quinto Sol Logo](image1)

The name and logo of the band Quinto Sol in picture 1 was taken from the Aztec myth of the suns or ages, which is represented in the Sun Stone or Aztec Calendar. It is the fifth sun, the *nahui ollin* (four movement) in picture 2 which is the centre of the stone. Still, instead of using the original colours that appear in Codex Borbonicus, they incorporated the colours of the Rastafarian movement (red, yellow and green). Another symbol that appears in the logo of the band is the *hunab ku* seen in picture 3 which a lot of people believe to be part of pre-Hispanic Maya culture. The name *Hunab ku* is in the Maya language and apparently means ‘The One God’, suggesting the Maya people were monotheists and believed in a single god. The earliest information found about this ‘god’ is from the 16th century. It seems that this god was invented by Spanish friars to facilitate the evangelization of the Maya people (Damián 405-406). The name was popularized by the anthropologist Domingo Martínez Parédez in his book *Hunabku: Síntesis del Pensamiento Filosófico Maya* (*Hunabku: Synthesis of Maya Philosophical Thought*), published in 1964. But in this book Martínez Parédez only showed circles and squares as a representation of Hunab-ku. It was José Argüelles (1987), an American artist and New Age author, who apparently made up the symbol today known as Hunab ku. He published it on the cover of his book *El Factor Maya* (*The Mayan Factor*). It is believed that Argüelles took the symbol from the Magliabechiano Codex, a Mexica Codex, and styled it to make it look like a yin-yang or a spiral galaxy. [13] Hunab ku is then a symbolic product of New Age culture. Finally, *Barrio Roots*, the name of their second album, also appears at the bottom of their logo.

**Publicity pictures of the band Quinto Sol**

In pictures 4-7, taken from their Facebook page, we see four of the most popular publicity pictures of the band Quinto Sol. Two of them pictures 4 and 5, were clearly taken in Mexico City. Picture 4 was taken at the archaeological zone Templo Mayor, displaying remains of Tenochtitlan, the great Mexico city. Picture 5 was taken in the Zocalo, Mexico City's down-town civic square, a few steps from Templo Mayor. Behind them, the Government Palace with the Mexican flag is clearly visible. The band members are dressed rather conservatively, only the main members of the band, Mizraim Leal and
Martin Pérez have a more dramatic look. We see some elements of the Latino-Chicano look, like the tattoos, the Padlock beard, the tank top t-shirt and the hat or bonnet. Some elements of reggae look are also quite typical, such as long hair with dreadlocks, the bandana worn on the head and the bright colours of the t-shirt. Finally, we see some elements of indigenous cultures: the motives of the tattoos, and of the orange t-shirt; the necklaces, bracelets and earrings; and the braids.

Selection of information of an interview published by Grupo NVI Noticias to the leader of the band Xipe Vitan Ja’i. [14]

“Thubini Mästöhö, the leader of the band was known as Arturo García García, youth who studied landscape architecture and spoke only Spanish. Today he speaks Nahuatl, Hñähñu and Tu’un savi, best known as Otomí and Mixteco. He works as a teacher and researcher of Native languages of Mexico. His contact with Hñähñu gave him not only a way to communicate but also an identity. He chose his new name after learning the language and living in a community in El Valle del Mezquital, in Hidalgo, Mexico for two years. His life has changed so much that today he states that he is not Mexican, but Hñähñu”.

“Thubini was born and grew up in Mexico City. During his life he had no special contact with indigenous cultures until at age one 20 his mother told him that his grandmother spoke Hñátho, a variant of Hñähñu. The generation from Thubini’s mother did not learn the language anymore. In 2008, he started learning Nahuatl and in 2011 Hñähñu. Since then, he is a new person. When he lived in El Valle del Mezquital, he learned that the reality of indigenous people is different from what the books and the official history tell.”

Thubini grew up as a Mexican mestizo and, like most Mexicans, ignored the reality of indigenous people. Getting to know his ancestry and the reality of indigenous people today gave
him an identity. For him, to be Mexican is to accept an identity imposition that comes from the ‘Other’, the one telling the official history where indigenous people do not exist anymore, and are identified and stamped as poor peasants, Mexican mestizos. He therefore changed his life completely, and today all his work is dedicated to help indigenous groups with the preservation of their languages and cultures.

**Logo and publicity pictures of the band Xipe Vitan Ja’i**

![Picture 8](image)

*Picture 8*

![Picture 9](image)

*Picture 9*

![Picture 10](image)

*Picture 10*

The first name of the Band was Xipe Totec, the name of an Aztec God, ‘our lord the flayed one.’ The most recent name of the band was Xipe Vitan J’ai, meaning people of today, people of change. Xipe is Nahuatl and means ‘change’; Vitan is T’un savi or Mixteco and means ‘today’; J’ai is Hñahñu or Otomí and means ‘people’.

Their logo is a bull’s skull, which is a typical element of black metal bands. In album covers and publicity pictures, they use a lot of cacti as a representative element of the indigenous cultures of Mexico. European black metal bands present publicity pictures and album covers showing Nordic landscapes. Xipe follows this tradition but presenting Mexican cactus landscapes.

The look of the members of the band when they have a performance is shown in pictures 9 and 10. Most of them wear textiles made by indigenous people of Mexico from various cultures, though none in particular. They also paint their faces, not following a tradition from any particular culture. Each of the members creates their own make up with a personal meaning. They took the idea of painting their faces from indigenous cultures, because indigenous warriors apparently used to paint their faces when they had to go to war [15]; and they also claimed the idea from black metal, for their own because black metal bands paint their faces, too, but they mostly use black and white to resemble human skulls.

**Discussion**

*Quinto Sol*

The members of the band Quinto Sol are Mexican Americans and call themselves Chicanos, embracing a term originally used by Euro-Americans with a pejorative connotation that saw Chicanos as second-class citizens. As a musical group, their main goal is to create a new consciousness among Chicanos. They think Chicanos should know both who they are and what their roots are in order to have an identity of their own, instead of accepting the identity created by the colonizing ‘Other.’ They should also be able to see the way they are oppressed and manipulated. Therefore, the lyrics of their songs - in Spanish, English and Nahuatl - are very direct, easy to understand; and about the socio-political and economic situation of Chicanos in the USA. Their look is not highly sophisticated, as not to differentiate themselves from other Chicanos. The mix between reggae and Latino music results in lively and catchy rhythms that attract Chicanos’ attention.

The band Quinto Sol intertwines its musical
concept together with the main ideals of Chicano movement, reggae and Rastafarian philosophy, the New Age movement and Aztec culture. Some things that all these movements have in common: their stance against mainstream Western culture, industry, and capitalism; they preach to return to nature, ancient cultures, and roots; they have a common struggle against the oppression exerted by the dominant, Western culture against minority groups. All these movements were born from unrest and discontent among minority groups. In addition, many Chicanos claim Aztec ancestry due to their Mexican origin and/or because they are descendants of the indigenous people of Aztlan, the Aztecs’ original homeland, which has been identified with today’s south-western United States.

**Xipe Vitan J’ai**

The members of the band Xipe Vitan J’ai are Mexican born and from a racial point of view all of them are mestizos. However, the leader and vocalist of the band (Thubini) rejects being called Mexican and designates himself as Hñahñu (Otomí), even when it took him 20 years to figure out that his grandmother was an indigenous woman and that there are still a lot of indigenous people living in small towns in Mexico speaking their languages and living according to their ‘ancient culture.’

Indigenismo and mestizaje policies succeeded in hiding indigenous cultures from mestizos and create the need among indigenous people to blend in as mestizos to avoid discrimination and lack of job opportunities. This way, Mexico should be a land of darker and lighter, poorer and richer mestizos with same religion, same language, same history and same interests. When Thubini and other members of the band realized that the real situation and history of indigenous cultures in Mexico was far away from what Mexicans learn in school, they wanted to do something about it.

They chose the name of the Nahua god Xipe Totec for the band blending black metal and neofolk traditions. They started singing, like many other bands, about ancient Aztec culture and the arrival of Spaniards in Nahuatl language and only for the pleasure of making music. Little by little, their motivations changed towards socio-political purposes; though not by all the members of the band. The band’s main goal according to what they say is, on the one hand, to create consciousness about indigenous people among mestizos and, on the other, to contribute to the decolonization of indigenous people. They want to develop criticism and reflexion of the socio-political situation of indigenous people of Mexico among their audience and provide them with alternatives of identity. Mexicans should be able to see that mestizo identity is a creation and an imposition of the Mexican Nation State developed in order to eliminate indigenous cultures. At the same time, while showing mestizos that indigenous people exist and have rich and interesting cultures, the band also shows indigenous people that their cultures are nothing to be ashamed of, but give them a stronger identity than that of the poor peasant.

In their latest phase as a band, Xipe sang in three different indigenous languages of Mexico highlighting everyday objects or traditions regarding indigenous peoples’ lives of Mexico. The lyrics are very poetic, recreating the metaphorical way of the ‘writing’ of ancient Nahuas, but are difficult to understand by audiences due to, both their use of the indigenous language and of growling, the traditional singing style of many metal bands. The only way to understand what they are singing about is to read the lyrics with the translation into Spanish; yet the message is encrypted in the poem. Their look is very dramatic, following black metal tradition; but with original twists at the same time. This style could be used intentionally by the group to intrigue their audience so that they want to know more about the band and the origins of their look. Nevertheless, the look is neither a common black metal band look, nor the look of indigenous people of any particular culture. The mix of metal intensity with pre-Hispanic instruments makes their music original and interesting. However, someone who does not like metal music is not likely to listen to them even if he/she is interested in indigenous cultures.

The band Xipe Vitan J’ai builds its musical concept together with the main ideals of black metal and neofolk musical movements along with the new age movement and Indigenous
cultures. Black metal and neofolk as well as the new age movement reject mainstream Western culture, and preach a return to the beliefs ancient cultures', many times wrongly called mythologies. All these movements have an interest in esotericism and exoticism, as opposite to western mainstream culture. Black metal, as many people know, also rejects Catholicism, since it was the Church that tried to bury ancient cultures in Europe and America. Xipe Vitan J’ai was at first only inspired by ancient Aztec culture. As Indigenismo and the theory of the Raza Cósmica (Cosmic Race) planned it; mestizos really adopted this ‘mystic’ past as their identity, believing all indigenous people simply disappeared after the Spaniards’ conquest. Mexico City is one of the places with more presence of indigenous cultures in Mexico. There are Nahua names everywhere, archaeological zones, museums about ancient cultures, statues of Aztec emperors or warriors, people dressed up as ancient Aztecs dancing and asking for money etc.; but more importantly, if we pay attention, we see there are people from many different indigenous cultures living in the city, speaking their languages, trying to sell their arts and crafts to survive. These are the people and the reality that Xipe tries to portray in its music.

Conclusion

Both bands fight against the oppression of a minority group (Chicanos and Indigenous people) by the dominant group. They both built a musical concept following social and musical movements that are also against dominant mainstream Western culture, and look for a return to nature, to ancient cultures and philosophies. They both want to create the consciousness in their audience that allows them to develop an identity of their own. They both claim to have indigenous roots and have been influenced a great deal by Aztec culture. They both talk about indigenous groups of today, although Quinto Sol does not mention any particular name other than Mexico.

One of the biggest differences between both bands is that Quinto Sol are Chicanos fighting against Chicano oppression. Xipe are mostly mestizos fighting against indigenous people’s oppression. Although Thubini, the vocalist of the band, considers himself Hñahñu, he did not grow up in an indigenous reality; that gives him a different background and identity. The rest of the members of the band are apparently not so interested in being something else than Mexican mestizos. However, that does not mean that the cause of Xipe Vitan J’ai is not genuine. Another difference is the kind of music genre they perform. Reggae is a lively, peaceful, tropical music with an easy-going audience; but strong rebellious clear lyrics. Metal is a loud, saturated, aggressive music with an uneasy young audience and romantic encrypted lyrics.

In the case of both bands, we have to be careful and observe if they are not simply using indigenous cultures in search of an exotic novelty that sells well. Especially in the case of Xipe Vitan J’ai the dramatically, strong performance that all metal bands normally do. We should not forget that, first of all, they are both music bands trying to attract more audience, to be original, and to sell their albums -and exoticism sells. That is one of the problems with new age culture: they create information and then they sell this information as coming from an ancient culture. We mentioned before the case of Hunabku, a new age creation sold as part of ancient Maya culture.

Endnotes


[7] The band officially split up last year 2017 before this article was finished. The reason for their dissolution will not be discussed in this article.


[9] Indian was the term that Spaniard conquerors used to refer to indigenous people of the New World. The term had and still has a racist connotation.

[10] According to Spanish colonial caste system, a Peninsular was a Spanish-born Spaniard residing in the New World, making reference to Peninsular Spain. A Criollo was a Spaniard (of Spanish ancestry) born in the New World.


Works Cited


Author’s Biography

Paloma Coaticlue Rodriguez Villarruel graduated from Guadalajara University in Mexico with a BA in French teaching, an MA in Applied Linguistics and an MA in Studies of English Languages and Cultures. She is currently in the fourth year of the PhD in Inter-American Studies at Bielefeld University in Germany with the thesis project: “Constructing Alterities: Nahua Language and Culture in Contemporary Youth Cultures (metal, rock, reggae)”, advised by Prof. Dr. Wilfried Raussert. In the last 9 years she has been interested in researching Nahua culture and language from different perspectives such as: sociolinguistics, theoretical linguistics and cultural studies.
Book Review

Anne Lappert (Bielefeld University, Germany)

Sonic Politics: Music and Social Movements in the Americas, edited by Olaf Kaltmeier and Wilfried Raussert, is an homage to the power of music to transform social realities and to conceptualize alternatives to existing narratives of the nation and beyond. With examples of social movements and their use of music and songs, this volume offers a collection of twelve essays that discuss concrete moments in history, arguing that music is more than just the background melody to 20th century social change, but in fact part of its active construction. In 245 pages, including five new approaches to the social that were refined in quantitative studies, Sonic Politics: Music and Social Movements in the Americas reasons that music is far more than a consequence of the “social” and the “political,” and that it is strongly involved in their active creation and narration. Based on the hypothesis that “history-based narratives reconstitute, reflect, and help to transform the social” (Kaltmeier and Raussert 5), Sonic Politics: Music and Social Movements in the Americas maintains that the social and the political are not narrated just by images and words, but that music as an active and self-reflexive part of the narrative process offers alternatives to existing narrations/narratives of the nation. Staying true to its own argument, the songs and sounds referred to in Sonic Politics are provided on a webpage to listen to, thereby allowing the music discussed to speak for itself.

The volume suggests that music serves more than one function: while it can be commodified, music can also serve political transformational purposes. Offering just enough fluency and flexibility to adjust to a variety of cultural and social environments, music spreads potentially transformative ideas across the boundaries of different cultures, languages and geographies. It has, according to the authors, the ability to diffuse the classic distinctions between “high” and “low” culture, as well as between the artist and the public. It is suggested that sounds and songs help to unmask and reflect narrative processes involved in constructing the social because of the self-reflexivity of music. Self-reflectivity allows for “a playful examination of the politics of representation” (Kaltmeier and Raussert 8) and questions the narratives and narrative forms it produces by testing them in new environments and contexts. Examining three heuristic fields (social movements and the production of both culture and knowledge), the volume takes an actor-oriented perspective to the analysis of the narratives of the social. Influenced by Foucault’s approach to power and knowledge and supported by a Butlerian twist on performatives, the volume works from a constructivist premise. The social is not looked at as a product that is finished, done and ready to be dissected, but as an ongoing process in transition, much in the sense of a “becoming” (a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Every essay in the edited volume is devoted to a specific music genre or acoustic landscape and consequently has a voice of its own. At the same time, however, the many voices in the individual chapters and essays form a coherent chorus that advances its core argument: music is able to unite voices across and despite boundaries. This argument is supported by the structure of the edited volume, which is divided into and yet connected by the individual essays. After the introduction by Olaf Kaltmeier and Wilfried Raussert, Helen Cordes and Eric Selbin set the stage with their essay “Singing resistance, rebellion, and revolution into being: collective political action and song.” Cordes and Selbin argue for the power of music to transform, to create new social realities, and to connect people. While this first essay draws on global
examples, the volume then zooms in on the Americas, starting with Ulfried Reichardt’s essay “African American music in the Americas: slavery, sounds, and forms of ‘knowledge.’” Reichardt examines neo-African music with its roots in African rhythm and its characteristic use of drums in communicative patterns. “‘Only a Pawn in their game?’ Civil rights sounding signatures in the summer of 1963” by Frank Mehring discusses the music that shaped the March on Washington in 1963 as a media spectacle able to unite protesters via music and help them appear as a community in which musicians proclaimed what was considered true. “Inter-public-agenda-setting effect through political activism: the role of hip-hop music in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election” by Maria De Los Angeles Flores, Carol L. Adams-Means, and Maxwell E. McCombs analyses in a quantitative study the influence of the Hip Hop Summit Action Network on the 2004 U.S. election by means of music and lyrics. In his essay “‘Calling out around the world’: how soul music transnationalized the African American freedom struggle in the black power era (1965 – 1975),” Matti Steinitz explains that the commodification of political protest in music and song (here especially in soul music) was a motor for international recognition, interest, and investment in the political cause of African Americans and their struggle for freedom.

With “‘Si Una Vez’: Chicana sensibilities and Xicanista soundscapes” by Miriam Strube, the volume then turns to the Chicana feminist movement and their use of music, identifying the reasons behind their absence from both feminist and postmodernist discourses. This is followed by a return to Hip Hop in “Hip-hop in Ciudad Juarez: a form of political participation” by Maria Del Carmen De La Peza C. Hip Hop music, she argues, has become a mouthpiece and a form of political participation for a young generation subdued by Mexican state power. Wilfried Raussert’s essay, “The Fandango Sin Fronteras movement and sonic migration: performing community across borders”, focuses on how the social can be reestablished via musical practices such as the Fandango. Looking at Nicaraguan music, “The search for a new collective epic in Nicaraguan post-revolutionary music” by Luis E. Duarte examines the ways social movements and musical movements go hand in hand. Olaf Kaltmeier’s “Rockin’ for Pachamama: political struggle and the narration of history in Ecuadorian rock music” establishes links between moments of social change and historical narratives in Ecuadorian rock music and argues that the production of historical narratives needs to be a co-construction of many different voices offering various perspectives on the past. In his essay “Punk is dead. Or is it? Strategies of subcultural positioning in the (re)making of the punk movement,” Martin Butler points out the self-reflexivity of Punk music. Finally, “Political pie-throwing: Dead Kennedys and the Yippie-Punk continuum” by Michael Stewart Foley ends the volume by outlining the potential for music to redefine itself in the face of political struggle and thereby foregrounds the interrelation between music, politics, and the social.

Sonic Politics: Music and Social Movements in the Americas joins the rich conversations initiated in existing research such as The Sonic Color line: Race and The Cultural Politics of Listening by Jennifer Lynn Stoever, which focuses on how white voices and black voices are heard and perceived differently, or Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance by Brandon LaBelle, where the focus is on the potential for resistance in terms of what it means to listen and to be heard. Providing a fresh view on this scholarship, Sonic Politics asks how sound and different musical genres play an active part in narrating the social and in creating alternatives to existing narratives of the nation. While taking into consideration the global scale of its own research subject, and hence underlining its main argument – that music crosses boundaries – the volume manages to maintain a clear focus on the Americas. In sum, Sonic Politics makes a valid and strong case for music not as an effect or a consequence of how the social is narrated, but as a key factor in the negotiation of its narrative process. This volume is of great value to researchers interested in the intersection of music and the social and offers exciting new perspectives on the relation between the narrative power of music and social change.
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Author’s Biography

Anne Lappert is completing a master’s degree in British and American Studies at Bielefeld University. Her research draws on poststructuralism and queer theory to examine the text body as an abstract concept with a concrete physicality. She is further interested in music, postmodernism, narratology and the transformative powers of narratives.