

Sonic Politics: Music and Social Movements in the Americas, edited by Olaf Kaltmeier and Wilfried Raussert, Routledge, 2019.

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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-reflexivity 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 María De Los Ángeles 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 María 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 Stoeber, 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.

Works Cited

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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.