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'People Have the Power': Songs of Resistance in Late Modernity

Guest Editors:

Paula Guerra, University of Porto, Portugal

Elizabeth Turner, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Carles Feixa, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain

Where there were deserts I saw fountains/ Like cream the waters rise/ And we strolled there together/ With none to laugh or criticize/ And the leopard and the lamb/ Lay together truly bound/ I was hoping in my hoping/ To recall what I had found/ (...) People have the power/ People have the power/ People have the power/ People have the power.

The power to dream, to rule/ To wrestle the world from fools/ It's decreed: the people rule/ It's decreed: the people rule/ Listen. I believe everything we dream/ Can come to pass through our union/ We can turn the world around/ We can turn the earth's revolution¹.

Schreiber (2019) sees music as energy becoming entertainment. **An expression of power, and not only sonic or emotional power. Music, especially when created in response to the world's social problems, becomes a unique force.** However, not every song addressing society's problems becomes a protest song. Let us consider the primal North American examples: songs written at times of great crisis, such as the American Civil War, like *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*² are not protest songs. It was not until 1870, with *Sometimes I feel like a motherless child*³, about the horrible mother-child separations in the slave plantations of the South, that the first protest songs emerged in the USA.

The aim of this proposed special issue is to examine the unique force of popular music in response to recent and contemporary social problems, and the changing concepts of resistance and protest in popular music. Taking as an example the Portuguese reality in a context of crisis, when the International Monetary Fund intervened in the country, Guerra (2019) illustrates the importance of this reflection and discussion. The author shows how artistic manifestations – in this case, music and protest songs – are themselves a means and an object of social intervention, demarcating a specific, defined space in the acknowledgement and revelation of social problems, and in the contestation, deconstruction and accusation of problems that deal with social reality. Protest songs instigate readings, narratives and deconstructions of reality, and they are simultaneously significant elements of a collective identity.

¹ Smith, P. (1988). People Have the Power. United States of America.

² Lambert, L. (1863). When Johnny comes marching home. United States of America.

³ Singers, F. J. (1870). Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. United States of America.

In this sense, we are interested in showcasing a recent research on subjects that have been opening up *important avenues* for further investigation and discussion.

First, we search for the role of popular music as a potentiator of political mobilization and as an important indicator of the profound changes and identity reconstructions of youngsters in late modernity (Guerra et al., 2019). Songs can constitute manifestations that not only seek to denounce but also to intervene/act, and sometimes provoke action. Songs such as Patti Smith's superlative hymn *People have the power*⁴ – which has been revived by Patti herself in her latest concerts – take on the role of producers of denunciation and protest, and creators of their own themes, by provoking and changing social life because of the perceptions of social reality they construct.

A second topic is the ways in which music creates and constructs shared experiences and the power of protest songs to bring people together and shape political subjectivities.

For example, rap and mahragan formed the soundtrack of the Tunisian and the Egyptian Revolutions and illustrate the classic power of protest songs. In a post-Revolution period, due to and with the political demobilization, these genres returned to their previous roles of crystallizers of youths' experience of their social contexts. Moreover, these cultural products enable young people becoming active political subjects, positioned as agents combatting marginalization. The case of Moroccan rap practiced by women in Casablanca is very interesting in this respect.

A third topic is the role of popular music in capturing political dynamics pointing towards the existence of new shapes of protest songs.

The primary question is: yes, but is that process *politics*? And if so, does the concept of protest song apply to those cases? To discuss this, we must put a broader view of politics into perspective. Bayat (2013) speaks of non-movements as social activism, meaning the collective action of non-organized and scattered actors, a different way of affirming their youth, identity, and objectives (Guerra, 2019). If we only focus on classic notions of politics, as demonstrations framed by party or union action, we disregard emerging features of social reality. For instance, artists like Pablo Vittar, Liniker, Linn da Quebrada and Johnny Hooker have produced artistic trajectories that embody strategies of political resistance permanently coupled with their sound and lyrical discourses. Through the different modulations of musical genres (soul, *brega*, funk), their performances are connected to the latent experiences and oppressions experienced by the LGBT community in Brazil. This reality has been arising all around the globe, pointing to the existence of new shapes of protest songs.

A fourth topic focuses on the new shapes of protest songs, social struggles and social movements. New aesthetic, lyrical and musical dimensions of the protest song.

These new forms of protest are not a result of a single concerted action, but rather a set of actions by scattered artists aiming for the same goal. We set out to examine a number of issues related to the new shapes of protest songs from all over the world which have been at the root of large social movements arising in the last decade in response to: environmental disaster, growing xenophobia and racism, recrudescing job instability and unemployment, religious fanaticism, gender inequality and LGBTQI+ discrimination, city gentrification and touristification, new human slavery, paedophilia, animal sacrifice, among others (Guerra & Silva, 2015). Similarly, we are invested in a clear global scope, seeking contributions that move away from a Eurocentric (essentially Anglo-Saxon) perspective that still dominates youth studies, also because only through multiple different analyses, in different historical contexts, can the state of the art move forward.

⁴ Smith, P., & Smith, F. (1988). *People have the power* [Performed by P. Smith]. United States of America.

For this **Special Issue of *CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios* (CITIES, Communities and Territories)** we invite all interested authors — from different disciplines (youth studies, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, urban studies, ethnomusicology, and history) — to submit proposals exploring the relevance of the songs and musical texts as producers and reproducers of specific identities and narratives in this late modernity. **More specifically, we welcome articles related to the following topics:**

- (i) Development of a greater understanding of the narratives and concerns of the younger generations' identity, gender, transsexuality, as well as all problems related to homophobia, transphobia, sexual harassment, etc.;
- (ii) The importance of songs in shaping the absence of professional achievements or employment and economic precariousness (job insecurity, high rates of youth unemployment, etc.);
- (iii) The new song of protest on the theme of migrations/diasporas/ethnicity (hybrid cultures, religion, xenophobia, racism, etc.), including refugees;
- (iv) The centrality of songs in the development of new social movements and political involvements in recent times and in processes of contemporary political reconfiguration;
- (v) The emphasis on lyrical expressiveness in problems of gender and cultural identity reconfiguration around the world, particularly in the articulation between local and global and its consequences for late modernity;
- (vi) The new contemporary protest songs as denunciation and intervention in the existing city and its development and sustainability problems (gentrification, tourism, real estate and land speculation, among others);
- (vii) The expressiveness of popular music in the management and exposure of environmental problems, climate collapse, but also animal rights and the claim for alternative lifestyles (alternative economies);
- (viii) The protest songs and their materiality and contexts of DIY creation, proposing – in their processes of creation and dissemination – alternatives to mainstream industrial music (and culture) and based on large speculative businesses (home studios, private recordings, small independent publishing houses, YouTube, etc.).

These subjects — topics and challenges — have been the main goal of the KISMIF project and are worth highlighting in the forthcoming KISMIF Conference 2021, which will take place between 6th and 10th of July 2021 (<https://www.kismifconference.com/en/>).

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