



# ZAPRUDERworld

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL *for the* HISTORY OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

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## Music and social conflicts. Introduction

**T**he **6th issue of Zapruder World** was devoted to an exploration of cinema and its relationship with social conflicts. In the same vein, in this 7th issue we decided to focus on another artistic field – music – to show its connections with conflict and radical politics. This issue follows **«Zapruder» n. 12**, where music was framed as a document and a valuable source through which historians can narrate specific identities or cultural moments.

**W**hen we started developing this issue, we wanted to challenge a common-sense view of music as the “soundtrack” for social movements. A reading of music that strips the musical performance down to lyrics and rhythms, without giving much consideration to the context songs come from, to the different and conflictual means of music production, to the intricate connection between artists and listeners. When we think about the use of some specific songs during demonstrations, or the transformation of lyrics in “memes” (i.e. the repeated use of parts of lyrics out of

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context as conceptual passepartout) we can clearly see one form of relationship between music and collective protest. At the same time, we wanted to show the presence of deeper interconnections between music and social conflict, proposing a multifaceted and complex understanding of both. In editing this issue, we wanted to show how music has been a primary social and cultural tool through which conflicts have been able to emerge and become visible, and to stimulate a reflection on how they are – in the long run – documented as historical experiences. We have outlined a tripartite understanding of the relationship between music and conflict.

**F**irst of all, conflicts can be themes embedded *within* musical forms. This refers to musical representation of struggles which are produced outside the specific historical terrain in which those conflicts emerged. In this sense, we can speak of music as a form of conflict representation and narration. This shows the efforts to build collective memories by artists and communities. We refer in particular to the operation of telling stories that are sedimented in a collective archive, with the aim of tracing genealogies and analogies. To elaborate further, we can think of the process of mediation and symbolization that musicians enact when they refer to “distant” social conflicts. This often happens as an attempt to create a common ground, bridging history and action. This is the case of the article by Andrade, Madeira, and Castro, tracing the history of a song through the years. This thorough description helps in understanding how meanings are amenable to change and transform. Also in the case of Guatemalan metal band Tortura, developed here by Gonzalez Hernandez, Castañeda and Garcia, music – and its specific form – becomes a means to reflect the violent past through which the contemporary state has been formed.

second axis of analysis concerns music *born out of* social conflicts. This perspective addresses music as a

**A** specific cultural product, which carries with it the “weight” of its origins in a context of conflict, often linked to the class, race, gender structure from which it emerged. This approach assumes, of course, that these structures are not necessarily clearly articulated by artists, but can often be unconscious, offering in retrospect an exploration of the habitus and the social production of both art and social conflict. This can, in fact, be embedded in the social chains of interaction that bind musicians, listeners, and their communities, shedding light on the circulation and production of artistic forms. As Vivien Goldman notes, some musical forms are in themselves a threat to institutions: «In its purest form, it [punk] represents empowerment, enabling people without access to talk back to the dominant power structure and make their own statement with sound»<sup>1</sup>. In the same way, reggae and the Rasta movement are present in Pota’s article, tracing the connections between music, social unrest, black power.

**A** third perspective is that which sees music as an agent of conflict. As Inna Narodistkaya<sup>2</sup> has pointed out, the functions and characteristics of music are not only those of reproducing or accompanying the conflict; in some cases, such as the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia analyzed by Narodistkaya, music plays a central role in giving birth to the conflict. From this perspective, therefore, music is temporally placed in sync with the conflict and acts as an actor of it. This representation, and this is our third analytical point, can also be part of an explicit and conscious process of representing the struggles in which artists are involved. Music can be a useful tool for understanding conflict; we can understand conflict in terms of musical structure, practice, and context. Music can not only represent but also produce conflict. The «love born of hate» expressed in the neapolitan posse of the early 90s can be an

example of this process<sup>3</sup>. This is seen, for example, when thinking how brutal, violent, and extreme sounds become «not only aesthetic identifiers of metal, but also devices for social protest» (Varas Diez at alii in this issue). Here, the connection between music and rage is ineludible, testifying an expressive power of artistic forms. The same could be said about Banda Comunale's activities, as emerges in the article by Mueller: the construction of a polymorphous and transcultural musical genre is part of an ongoing process of boundary shattering.

**I**n this issue, we have also attempted a decentralization of music discourse, trying to highlight what happens outside the institutionalized markets of commercial music in the “west”, highlighting interconnections and lineages of reappropriation and reformulation of musical styles. This theme is directly addressed, for example, in Varas-Díaz, Nevárez Araújo, Morales, Rosales and Rosales. According to them, the «experiences of metal in the Global South [...] have been radically different and necessitate their own frames of thought and analysis», a sentence that could be easily extended to all musical forms.

**I**t is also important to highlight the contested relationship between radical politics and commercial success. An ambivalent relationship that is not easily dismissed highlighting the embeddedness of the musical field in a capitalist economy. If at times independent musical circuits and practices far away from the market are crucial to help diffusion and the creation of a militant base, at the same time, it is important to highlight how commercial success could help ideas diffuse as happened for hip-hop, whose connections with politics is well documented.

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“epresentations of structural violence through noise imaginaries on the violent context of the

Guatemalan region: A perspective from  
extreme metal music”, by José Omar González  
Hernández, Mario Castañeda, and Marco

García traces a connection between frequently used lyrical themes in metal music and decolonial practices of narrating the past. This allows us to show how, in the context of the Global south, some keywords of the most violent fringes of metal music are re-signified to show a deeper connection with a violent past. In another paper focused on metal music and its decolonizing power, “Heavy Metal Music as Decolonial Activism” by Nelson Varas-Díaz, Daniel Nevárez Araújo, Eric Morales, Juan Rosales and David Rosales, explore the connection between “making” music and direct action, challenging the common understanding of metal as apolitical scenes for white middle class people. In the paper by Francesco Pota, “How reggae could explain the victory of Micheal Manely in 1972 Jamaican general election”, is focused on the creation of a political community through musical imaginaries. In particular, the author tries to show how the electoral movement of Mancele «didn't exploit Rastafarianism, reggae or the symbols of the black masses», instead normalizing them, allowing them to become the foundation of a larger political community. “Grândola, Vila Morena: uses and meanings of a song throughout the years”, by João Madeira, Ricardo Andrade, and Hugo Castro, develops a diachronic understanding of a famous Portuguese song. This genealogy allows the authors to show how this song was re-signified through different periods, and interlace these developments with the musical structure of its original version. This shows a double nature of songs as both cultural practices and embodied activities, challenging the notion of authoriality. In “Transcultural Engagement in Protest Music as a Method of Scene”, Caroline Müller presents a novel understanding of the concept of “scene”, traditionally used to represent bounded groups of artists and publics connected by the use of common styles, to encompass the militant experience of resisting right-wing activities in south-eastern Germany. Through an ethnographic

presentation of the Banda Comunale, the author explains how transcultural music can become embodied in the acts of protest, resistance, and challenge to political climate, and how this breeds from the situated practices of political actors.

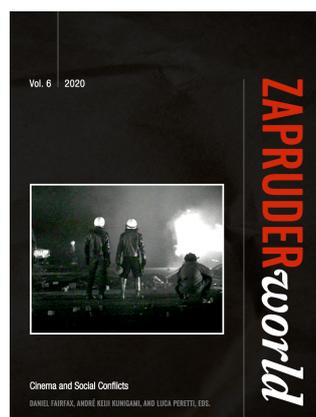
The papers in this special issue have been reviewed by us, a member of the Editorial board of Zapruderworld, and a non-anonymous external peer reviewer (Luca Benvenga, Gianluca Chelini, Amanda DiGioia, Alessia Masini), to them our warmest thanks.

1. Goldman, Vivien. *Revenge of the She-Punks: A Feminist Music History from Poly Styrene to Pussy Riot*. University of Texas Press, 2019. ↩
2. Naroditskaya, Inna, *Musical Enactment of Conflict and Compromise in Azerbaijan*, in O'Connell, John Morgan, Castelo-Branco, Salwa El-Shawan eds.), *Music and Conflict*, University of Illinois Press, 2010, pp. 46-64. ↩
3. Wright, Steve. "A Love Born of Hate' Autonomist Rap in Italy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 17.3 (2000): 117-135. ↩

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