

Foreword: Why Music?**Benjamin Raphael Teitelbaum¹**

“Every revolutionary movement has its own music, lyrics, and poets. The music does not create organizations, nor do musicians necessarily lead the revolution. But revolutionary/protest music gives voice to the dreams, visions, and fantasies of the revolutionaries and the utopian society they hope to establish” (Löw 1998:126).

Music might seem a peripheral concern in the study of radical movements. Groups and individuals typically do not gain their status as political radicals—as agents pursuing “revolutionary alternatives to hegemonic social and political institutions” (Versluis and Larabee 2006:vii)—because of the songs they produce. Instead, radicalism often distinguishes itself through acts of violence, instances of large-scale vandalism, or efforts to secure appreciable power via democratic process. It is through these avenues that radicals seek to affect fundamental change in society. Music making, in contrast, might appear only a byproduct, a preamble, a reflection, or a gateway, but never the stuff of radicalism.

The following articles undermine such assumptions, and call into question scholarly paradigms that would relegate music to the role of mere accessory to radical activism. Combining the perspectives of multiple academic disciplines, the authors featured in this special issue apply diverse methodologies to an array of musical and radical phenomena. Their studies show how music provides, not only a means to expand community, but also a unique and vital arena to assimilate and manage political expressions.

Music’s vital function becomes apparent as scholars broaden their understanding of radical activism. Radicalism is not only an ideology, it is also a social identity—one that individual radicals construct, maintain, and shape through symbolic expression. In addition to acts of terrorism or social disobedience, radicals rely on expressive domains to project their identity. They may stylize their rejection of mainstream sensibilities by adopting

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eccentric dress, cultivating unorthodox linguistic practices, or developing parallel media and educational institutions. At times such efforts may strive towards aligning an individual with a larger community of radicals. Other times, they simply aim to disassociate from surrounding collectivities—to forge an anti-identity.

Music is an attractive expressive form for acts of social association and disassociation. Participatory music cultures not only represent and imagine, but also create relationships and social bonds. Shared musical experiences—such as those taking place at a jam session or while attending a concert—constitutes a group’s unity in ways often both visible and audible. As Turino remarks regarding music, “successful participatory performance *is* good social life” (2008:136; emphasis added). And while marking insiders to a community, musical practice can also serve to separate a group of actors from society at large. Musical sounds not only exoticize and particularize groups, performances often establish behaviors and knowledge obscure to outsiders.

Radicalism is not only a collective act, however. Researchers like Fraihi (2008), McCauley and Mosalenko (2009), and Dearey (2010) belong to an emerging trend in scholarship that seeks to understand radicalization as it manifests among individuals. It may be in the study of individual radicalization that music scholars have the greatest potential to provide insight.

There are intense personal challenges involved in being a radical. Depending on the content of their ideology, individual radicals may experience professional setbacks, social exclusion, and even violent attacks as a result of their activism. They may also feel psychologically wearied by their bracing revulsion towards the society they live in, or, alternately, by their self-imposed orthodoxy and imperative to resist the status quo in all ways and at all times.

Music is poised to mitigate these challenges. The art form frequently provides social actors a protected venue to articulate controversial values or embrace socially deviant identities. In music, individuals can say, do, or be things that they otherwise could not. This feature of musical experience can help radicals negotiate multiple obstacles in their daily lives. Political statements can be simultaneously more communicative and less abrasive

when draped in the “positive valence” (Rice 2008) of music. Further, just as music mediates and softens radicals’ expressions towards others, so too can it allow them to engage with culture, ideas, and identities outside of their declare sphere of political devotion. As Born and Hesmondhalgh, write, the art form enables listeners to pursue a degree of “psychic tourism” (2000), which, in the case of radicals, could include escaping the uncompromising standards they set for themselves to embrace expressions from the mainstream.

Musicologists Negus and Velazquez (2002) offer a suggestion as to why we turn to music when trafficking in social and political deviance. Unlike other art forms, music is temporally bounded. Any piece of music or act of music listening is all but guaranteed to come to an end. For that reason, listeners can trust that the identities they acquire in music will be temporary—fading as the sound and the event reach their inevitable conclusions, and thus removing any fear that one would be permanently linked to the identity and its socially compromising elements. It is because of features like this that music makes radicalism a more attainable and potent social identity.

The authors in this issue offer exciting insights into the various ways music and radicalism relate. Jonathan Pieslak explores the understudied role of music in radical vegan, straightedge, and other far-left causes. Claudia Dantschke investigates the role of anasheed chant in the rise of a “pop-Jihadist” youth subculture among Salafist Germans. The remaining articles study white power music culture. Ryan Shaffer describes how musical tributes to Rudolf Hess enabled imaginations of a trans-European neo-Nazi community. Gerda Maiwald examines music’s impact in the everyday lives of radical right-wing activists in Germany. Finally, Florian Pascal Bülow traces recent changes in the instrumental genres, lyrics, and images of radical right-wing music in Germany. Combined, these articles reveal music’s potential to forge activist groups, negotiate the daily challenges of being a radical, and convey otherwise unspeakable political messages.

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